

Resource 3

Ancient Egypt - The afterlife

Excavations of Ancient Egyptian burial sites reveal their belief in life after death. The earliest burial sites show people were buried in shallow, oval graves at the edge of the desert. The hot dry sand quickly absorbed any moisture so that bodies did not decompose.

As the Egyptians became more prosperous grander burial rites developed and people were buried in coffins and tombs. These sites were not as dry as the desert sand and so the bodies would decompose. The practise of mummification was developed, where the body was bound in linen. This kept the body intact for the afterlife.

The Ancient Egyptians believed that the journey to the afterlife was full of challenges. In the process of mummification charms were wrapped and buried with the body to help with this journey. The most important of these would be a scarab, which would be placed over the heart to protect it.

They also buried the body with *The Book of the Dead* (or *The Book of Going Forth by Day*) which was a guide to help the person in the afterlife. Each book was specially written for the deceased and buried with them.

If the *ka*, or spirit, of the person was successful in its journey through the afterlife the final test would be to have their heart weighed against an ostrich feather by Osiris. If the heart was as light as the feather, then the deceased could pass through to the Field of Reeds and eternal life.

Everyday objects were left with the dead person because it was thought that they would need these for eternal life - food, drink, furniture, clothes, games, cosmetics.

Around 2500 BCE the great pyramids were constructed, the most elaborate of all Egyptian tombs. Later tombs were built in tunnels underground in The Valley of the Kings, probably because they would be easier to protect against tomb robbers, who deprived the deceased of the items needed in the afterlife.

The tomb of Kha and Merit, excavated in 1906, was full of objects for their afterlife. You can search for images of the tomb, showing the food and objects that were buried with them.

More information from BBC Teach:

[Ancient Egypt with Rhys Stephenson](#)

[The afterlife in Ancient Egypt](#)

[Song - 'So many gods and goddesses'](#)

Online images:

[The Book of the Dead](#) - showing Osiris weighing the heart against a feather

[A scarab](#) - a beetle amulet placed over the heart of the deceased



A detail from the Book of the Dead, showing the weighing of the heart by Osiris.

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A scarab - a type of amulet - placed over the heart of the deceased.

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