

Navigator



ANCIENT EGYPT

RIVER OF LIFE

The River Nile brought life to the desert lands of Egypt. On its banks, the ancient Egyptians built an extraordinary civilization that lasted for more than 3,000 years. They used the river to transport goods and armies, raised crops on its floodplains and built great cities on its banks.



Black and red

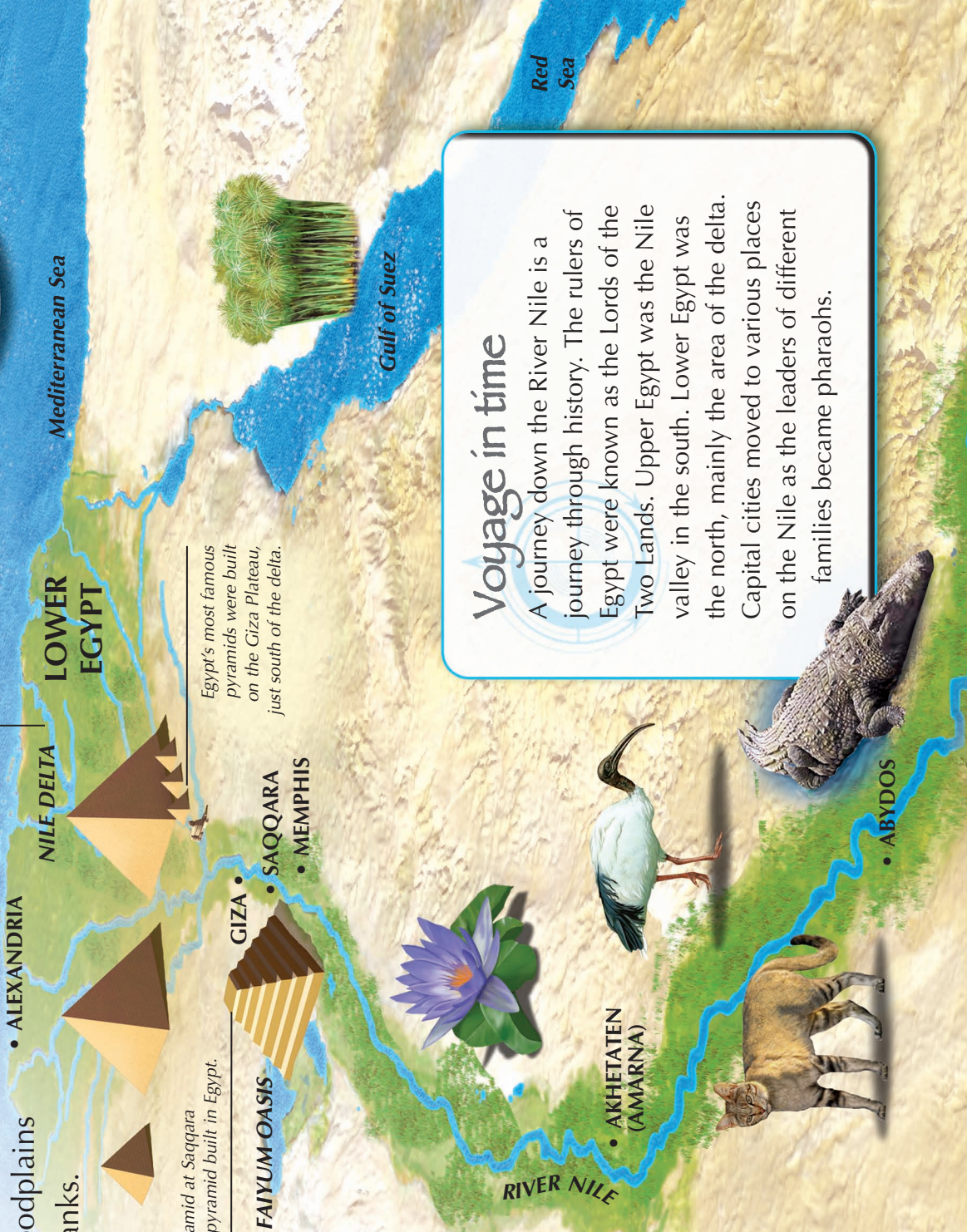
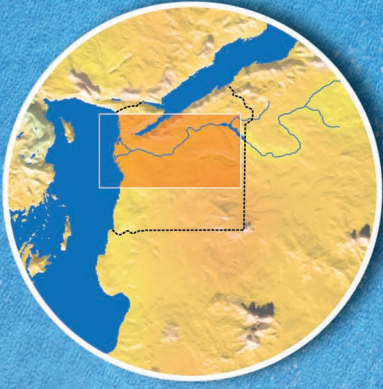
The ancient Egyptians called the fertile strip near the River Nile *Kemet*, which means 'the black land'. They associated the colour black with life rather than death because it was the colour of their soil. Their word for the harsh, desert regions that covered most of Egypt was *Deshret*, which means 'the red land'.

“The Nile, forever new and old,
Among the living and the dead,
Its mighty, mystic stream, has rolled.”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
from *The Golden Legend*

In the north, the river separates into different branches, creating the triangular marshlands of the delta.

The black border shows the boundaries of modern-day Egypt. The highlighted section is the area of ancient Egypt shown on these two pages.



• ALEXANDRIA

NILE DELTA

LOWER EGYPT

Mediterranean Sea

The Step Pyramid at Saqqara was the first pyramid built in Egypt.

FAIYUM OASIS

• GIZA

• SAQQARA

• MEMPHIS

Egypt's most famous pyramids were built on the Giza Plateau, just south of the delta.

Gulf of Suez

RIVER NILE

• AKHETATEN (AMARNA)

• ABYDOS

Red Sea

Voyage in time

A journey down the River Nile is a journey through history. The rulers of Egypt were known as the Lords of the Two Lands. Upper Egypt was the Nile valley in the south. Lower Egypt was the north, mainly the area of the delta. Capital cities moved to various places on the Nile as the leaders of different families became pharaohs.



THE INUNDATION

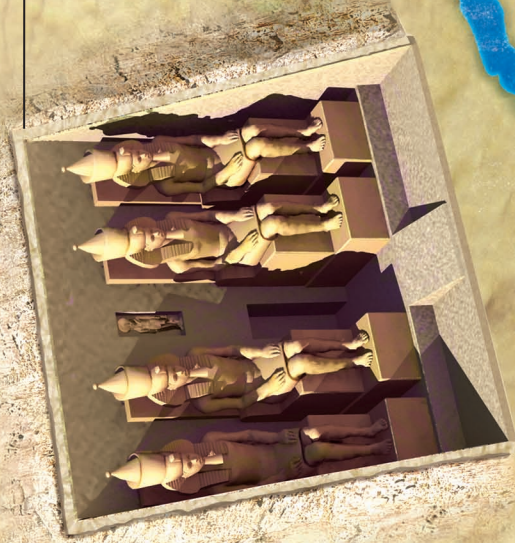
Every year, the River Nile flooded, depositing a rich layer of black silt either side of the banks. This was called the inundation. The crops grown in the enriched soil included barley, emmer wheat, lentils, figs, flax, grapes, pomegranates and cucumbers. The shaduf (right) that the Egyptians invented to lift water from the river for irrigation is still used today.



Valley transport

Wooden sailing boats have sailed down the protected waters of the Nile for more than 5,000 years. The river is the longest in the world, but through the narrow Nile valley it is never more than 19km across.

Rameses II's temples at Abu Simbel marked the southern part of the Egyptian empire, where the land bordered Nubia (today's Sudan).



• ABU SIMBEL

VALLEY OF THE KINGS

VALLEY OF THE QUEENS

• KARNAK
• LUXOR
(THEBES)

For 500 years, tombs were built for pharaohs and powerful nobles in the Valley of the Kings.

The temple of Amun was built near the great trading city of Thebes, on the east bank of the river.

RIVER NILE



EDFU

WESTERN DESERT

UPPER EGYPT



• ASWAN

• PHILAE

God of the flood

Hapy was the god of the annual inundation. The Egyptians made offerings to him to make sure that there would be just the right level of flooding for their crops. He was said to be the husband of both the vulture-goddess Nekhbet, protector of Upper Egypt, and the cobra-goddess Wadjet, protector of Lower Egypt.



> Even today, 90 per cent of Egypt is desert and more than 95 per cent of the population live in the Nile valley.





PHARAOH GOD

▼ HIERARCHY - government by a system of people ranked one above another

As ruler of the nation, the pharaoh represented the gods – about 1,500 of them. Both the pharaoh and the ordinary people worshipped these gods and gave them gifts. This ensured that the annual flood took place and order was upheld. When the pharaoh died, he became protector of the dead and helped their rebirth into a new life.

Abu Simbel

Ramesses II was worshipped as a living god. He ordered two temples to be carved in sandstone cliffs at Abu Simbel in Nubia. This one has giant carvings of the gods, including Ramesses himself.



Gifts to the gods

Discovered in a tomb near Medinet Habu, the extraordinary Great Harris Papyrus, written during the reign of Ramesses IV, celebrates Ramesses III. It shows the pharaoh making offerings to different groups of gods, including the ones shown below. The three gods on the left are the triad of Memphis, and the next three the triad of Thebes.

Ptah was a creator god and the god of craftsmen.



Sekhmet was Ptah's wife and the goddess of war.



Nefertem was Ptah and Sekhmet's son, and was god of the lotus flower.



Khons was the moon god, and son of Amun and Mut.



>The word 'pharaoh' means 'the Great House' and symbolized the royal palaces in which the pharaoh lived.



Life and death

On Earth, the sun-god in his various guises over the centuries as Ra, Ra-Harakhty, Amun and Amun-Ra was the dominant deity. In the afterlife, the lord of the dead, Osiris, and the god of mummification, the jackal-headed Anubis (left), ruled supreme.

RULING THE KINGDOM

The pharaoh had absolute power over his subjects. However, in practice he had to rule through a hierarchy of officials. The chief adviser was the vizier, or first minister, followed by other high officials, diplomats and the priests, who helped govern the different parts of Egypt. Scribes were in charge of keeping all records and issuing rules of law.

sculpture of an Egyptian scribe



Mut was Amun's wife, daughter of the sun god Ra and the mother goddess.



The roles of gods changed over time and many gods took multiple forms.

Amun was the king of gods and a creator god.



Ramesses III gave 309,950 sacks of grain, metals and semi-precious gems to the Theban triad alone.





PALACE LIFE

> MENAGERIE - a collection of wild or exotic animals, kept for exhibition

A pharaoh owned several palaces, and moved with his household from one to the other by royal barge on the River Nile. He also had several wives, one of whom was his chief wife and queen. Egyptian nobles who were in favour would be invited to send their children to court where they could live and study alongside the royal children.

A royal banquet

Egyptians enjoyed entertaining, and feasts at the palace were elaborate affairs. The pharaoh, his chief wife and honoured guests watched from a raised dais. The remaining guests were seated at tables around the room. They wore garlands and offered flowers to each other as they ate. Servants carried in roast game, fish, vegetables and fruit, while musicians, dancers and acrobats entertained them.

Women's tunics could cover one or both shoulders, or were worn with shoulder straps.

Men usually wore linen kilts, wrapped around the waist.



> The toilet in an Egyptian palace was a low, wooden stool with a hole cut in the seat.



Hieroglyphs were used to decorate the palace pillars.



Artistic licence

This picture shows women at a feast. In their hands are bunches of lotus flowers, the symbol of rebirth and renewal. On their heads are 'perfume cones'. These cones are thought to be a device used by the artist to indicate that the women are wearing perfume.

Singers and musicians entertained the palace guests.

Exotic animals

Some pharaohs kept menageries. Many of the animals were given to them by foreign kings, but others were collected when the pharaoh waged war. Ramesses II had a pet lion that accompanied him into battle. Tuthmosis III kept antelopes, leopards, ostriches, elephants, rhinoceroses and chickens in his botanical gardens (left).

JEWELLERY AND MAKE-UP

Wealthy Egyptians took great care with their appearance for feasts. Both men and women painted heavy black lines in kohl around the eyes, and women rubbed rouge into their cheeks. Anklets and rings were worn for their beauty and as a protection from evil.



gold ring from the 18th Dynasty



ornate collar from c. 1345BCE

PYRAMID BUILDER

Workers' graffiti

The workers were organized into crews by their supervisors, to develop a competitive team spirit. A crew would be of about 2,000 men, split into large gangs that were then subdivided and given specific tasks. Graffiti shows that the crews at Giza gave themselves names such as 'Friends of Khufu' and 'Drunkards of Menkaure'.

It took about 20 years and the labour of thousands of men to build one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza. Around 5,000 of the workers were full-time employees of the pharaoh, while 20,000 were farm workers, conscripted for a few months of each year when the River Nile flooded the fields.

Village of the workers

Purpose-built villages supported the daily lives of the pyramid workers. The villages were fully functioning, with streets, houses, shops and a cemetery. The workers and their families were cared for by a dentist and physician. This is known because archaeologists have found remains of pyramid workers at Giza that show that the Egyptians knew how to realign broken bones.


CONSCRIPTS - people who are compulsorily enrolled for service

fishmongers

butchers

bakers

physician

 Farm labourers had daily rations of ten loaves and a measure of beer.

a Giza team name: 'The White Crown of Khufu is Powerful'

The Great Pyramid is made of some 2.3 million blocks of stone, weighing 2.25 to 13.5 tonnes each.

Up to 30,000 workers built the three pyramids at Giza over a period of 80 years.

MASTER BUILDERS

The pyramid builders dragged the large blocks of stone for the Great Pyramid 300m across the desert from the quarry and up ramps to each level as the pyramid grew. They fitted them into place with tools that were not unlike those in use today. Special blocks of white limestone, trimmed to make a smooth surface, covered the outside of the pyramid, and the top was covered in metal to glint in the sunlight.



blacksmith

copper works

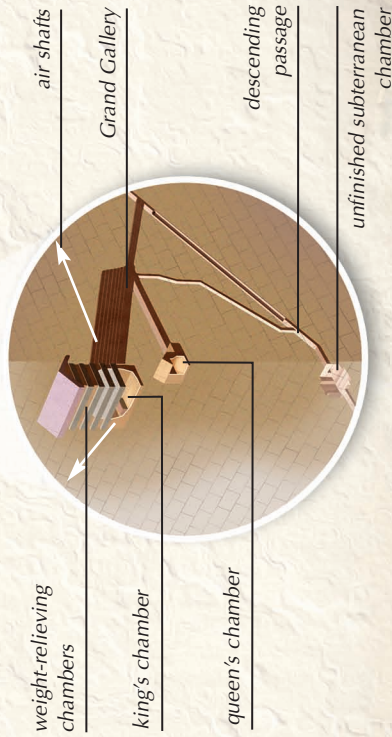


TOMB RAIDER

Tombs and pyramids in ancient Egypt were often raided for their riches. Tomb raiders were sometimes the men who had built the tomb. If they were caught, they died impaled on wooden stakes. However, it was not uncommon for pharaohs to recycle tomb goods. For example, some of the objects buried with Tutankhamun, including his second inner coffin and the golden bands around his mummy, were taken from the grave goods of Smenkhkare I, who probably ruled for a short time before him.

➤ **SARCOPHAGUS** - a stone coffin, often inscribed with texts and decorated with images

inside the Great Pyramid of Giza



Robbers looked for precious metals that could be melted down easily.

Perishable goods, such as expensive oils, spices, wines and linens, were favourites to steal.

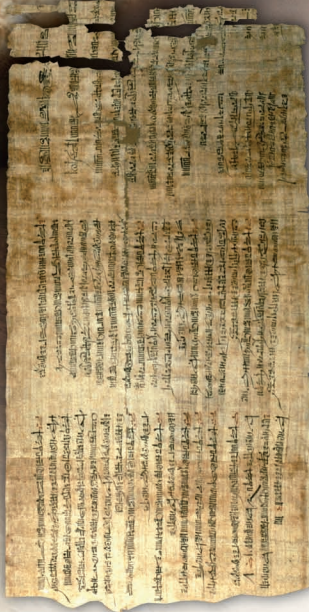
The caliph's men

In 820CE, a caliph (Islamic leader) called Abdullah Al-Mamun had his men break into the Great Pyramid of Giza to look for astronomical charts, maps and treasures. They heated the limestone blocks and doused them in cold vinegar, creating cracks that allowed them to break through. They found only an empty sarcophagus in the king's chamber.



gilded box from the queen's chamber





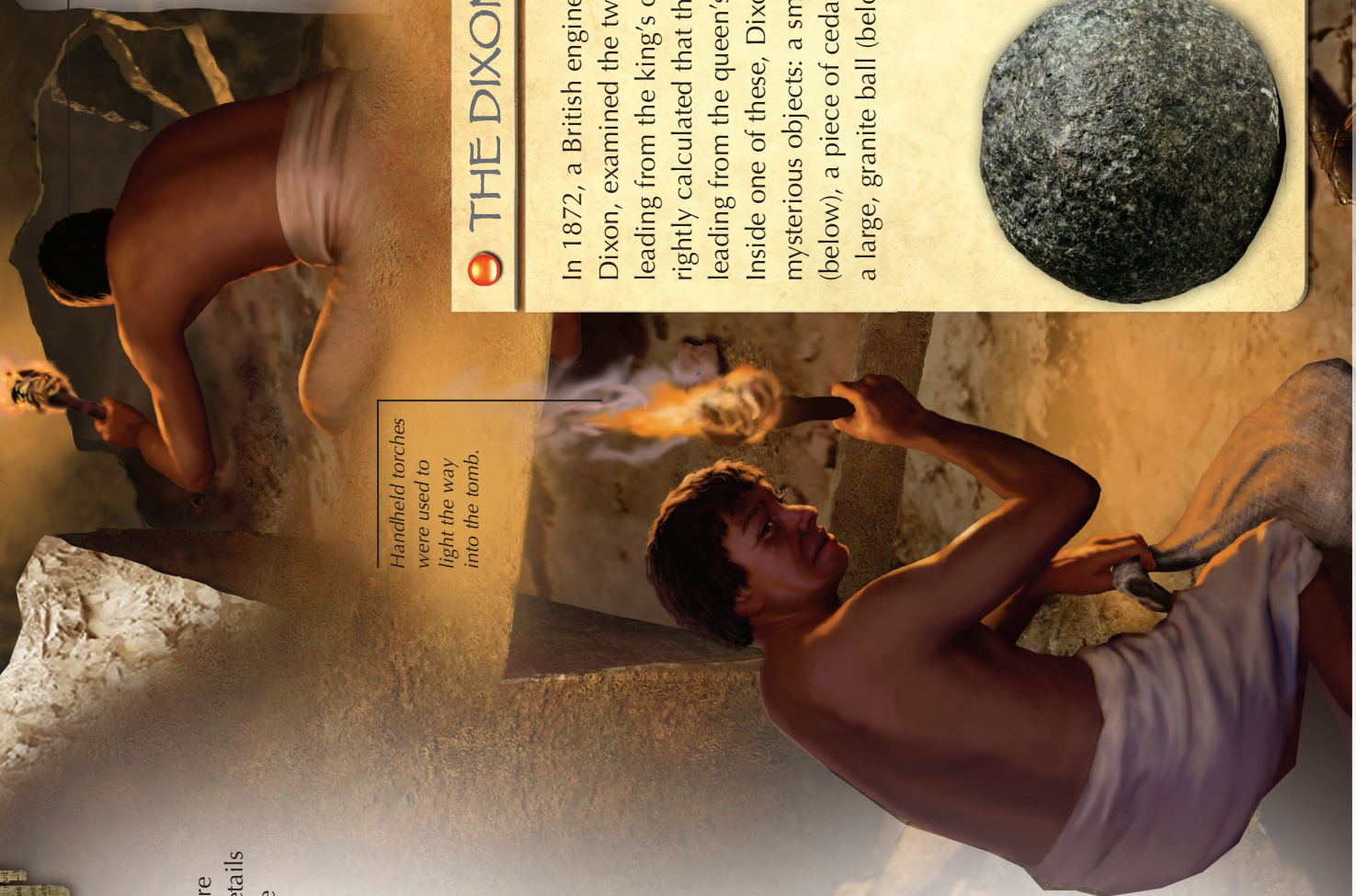
The Abbott Papyrus

In about 1100BCE, there were reports that royal tombs in the Theban necropolis were being raided. This papyrus records the details of an investigation, including the possible corruption of the mayor. It describes the robbery of the tomb of 17th-Dynasty pharaoh Sobekemsaf II, and the trial of the robbers after they were beaten to make them confess.



Robot Rover

Inside the Great Pyramid are four air shafts, and there has been a lot of speculation about whether they are really 'air shafts' or 'passages to heaven' for the deceased pharaoh. These air shafts have been explored using robots, including Rover in 2002.



Handheld torches were used to light the way into the tomb.

False passages and doors of heavy stone did not always deter robbers.

THE DIXON RELICS

In 1872, a British engineer, Wayman Dixon, examined the two air shafts leading from the king's chamber, and rightly calculated that there were two leading from the queen's chamber. Inside one of these, Dixon found three mysterious objects: a small, bronze hook (below), a piece of cedar-like wood and a large, granite ball (below).

two of the Dixon relics



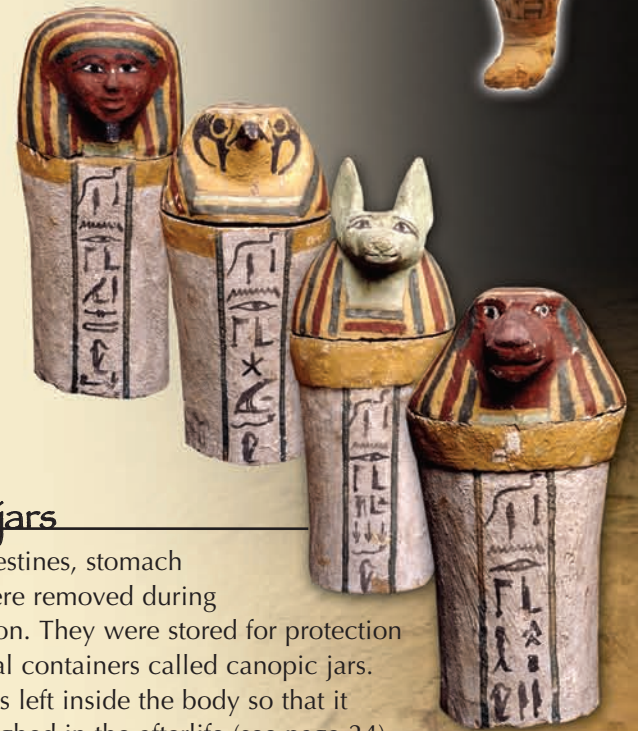
> Some tombs in the Valley of the Kings were built high in the cliffside to hide them from robbers.



MUMMIFICATION

When an ancient Egyptian died, it was essential that their body was preserved as a resting-place for their spirit. The deceased was taken to the *per nefer*, or 'perfect house', where embalmers carried out a mummification process that took up to 70 days. This was intended to ensure the survival of the dead person for all eternity. Statues were also commissioned and could stand in for the body if it was somehow destroyed.

Animals, such as cats, monkeys and crocodiles, were mummified for their preservation as pets, sacred animals or gifts for the gods.



Canopic jars

The liver, intestines, stomach and lungs were removed during mummification. They were stored for protection in four special containers called canopic jars. The heart was left inside the body so that it could be weighed in the afterlife (see page 24). The stoppers of these jars represent the four Sons of Horus, the canopic deities.

OPENING OF THE MOUTH

When the mummy was ready to be placed in the coffin, a ritual called the 'Opening of the Mouth' was performed by the dead person's son or heir wearing the mask of Anubis, god of mummification. The ceremony was vital because it meant that the dead person could eat, drink and move around in the afterlife.



Ay, Tutankhamun's successor, stands before Osiris holding the ceremonial *setep*, or *adze*.

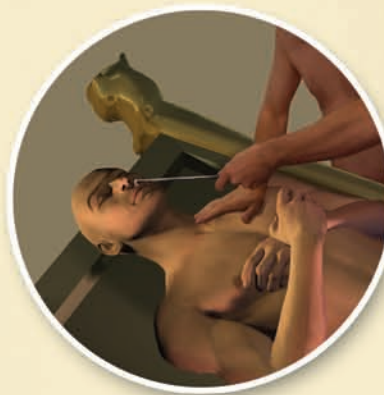
EMBALMING - treating a dead body in order to preserve it



In the *ibu*, the place of purification, the embalmers first wash the body with palm wine and then rinse it with water taken from the River Nile.



Here, the stomach is being removed, before being washed, packed with natron and placed in the canopic jar representing the jackal-headed god Duamutef.



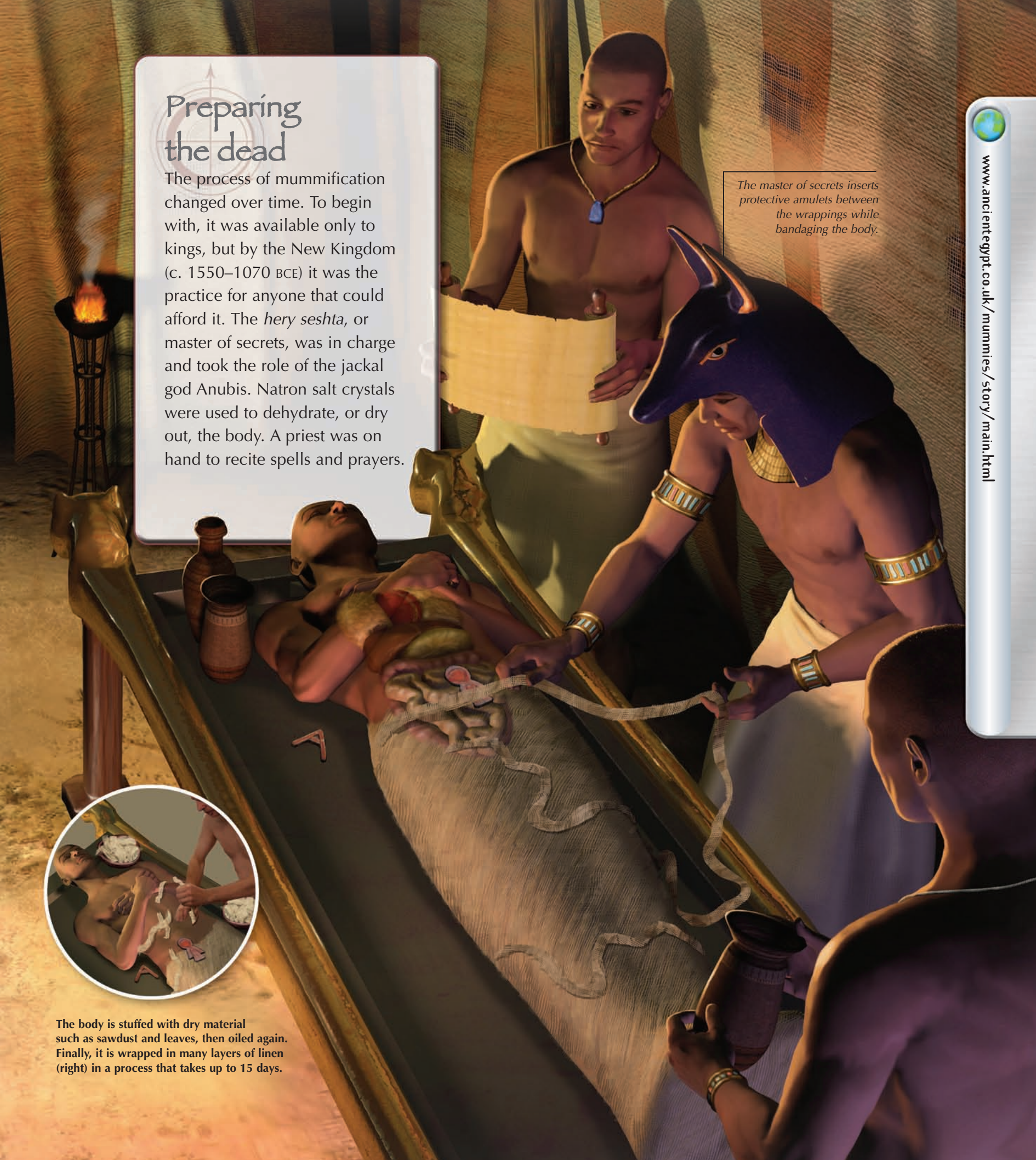
The embalmers use a long hook to smash the brain, and pull it out through the nostrils. Then the whole body is stuffed with and covered in natron.



After 40 days, the body is washed out with Nile water, oiled and perfumed. The brain cavity is filled with resin or linen and artificial eyes are added.



> A scarab beetle amulet was placed over the heart to ensure it was not separated from the body.



Preparing the dead

The process of mummification changed over time. To begin with, it was available only to kings, but by the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1070 BCE) it was the practice for anyone that could afford it. The *hery seshta*, or master of secrets, was in charge and took the role of the jackal god Anubis. Natron salt crystals were used to dehydrate, or dry out, the body. A priest was on hand to recite spells and prayers.

The master of secrets inserts protective amulets between the wrappings while bandaging the body.



The body is stuffed with dry material such as sawdust and leaves, then oiled again. Finally, it is wrapped in many layers of linen (right) in a process that takes up to 15 days.





THE FINAL JOURNEY

The coffin was carried inside the tomb, together with goods for the deceased to use in the afterlife. Egyptians believed that during their journey through the underworld, they had to win their place in the afterlife. They were judged on their behaviour during their lifetime at a ceremony called the 'Weighing of the Heart'.

"May I walk every day on the banks of the water, may my soul rest on the branches of the trees which I planted, may I refresh myself under the shadow of my sycamore."

Egyptian tomb description

c. 1400BCE

Ancestor gods

When a pharaoh died, many personal items were placed with them in the coffin. Ahhotep I was a powerful queen during the 17th Dynasty. This is her funerary bracelet, made of gold and lapis lazuli. It shows the ancestor souls of the cities of Pe and Nekhen. They are lifting their hands in jubilation to wish the pharaoh 'all life and sovereignty'.

The underworld

The Egyptians believed that the path to the underworld was full of dangers, such as snakes and crocodiles. Armed with spells, some written on coffins and others on scrolls of papyrus called 'Books of the Dead', the deceased would be able to overcome all the dangers and reach the afterlife.





Heavy heart

Jackal-headed god Anubis weighed the heart of the deceased against the feather of Maat, goddess of truth and justice. If the heart was too heavy, it would be eaten by crocodile-headed Ammut, the eater of the dead. The deceased would then die a second death and cease to exist.



the goddess Ammut

Anubis, god of the dead

Painted coffins

Coffins depicted the person as they would like to look for eternity. They were covered in spells to protect the deceased and preserve their spirit. Early coffins were made of wood and were usually rectangular. Later, body-shaped inner coffins (right) made of wood or metal were placed inside outer coffins (far right).

FUNERARY GOODS

Male and female shabti (figures made in the image of servants) were buried with the dead. They were inscribed with a special formula that enabled the servants to carry out manual work on behalf of the dead person. They were normally made of faience or wood.

Painted wooden shabti figures of the Theban priestess Henutmehyt



VOYAGE TO PUNT

One spectacular foreign voyage is recorded on the walls of Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri. The great expedition to the Land of Punt was not the first journey there, but it is the best recorded. It was a trading mission under the command of a senior official, the Nubian general Nehsi, and involved a journey down the River Nile, followed by an extraordinary trek across the Eastern Desert and a long journey across the Red Sea.

It is believed, though not confirmed, that the Land of Punt was today's Eritrea.



*route to
Land of Punt*

The long, slender hulls were taken apart after the ships had sailed down the Nile.


In the Land of Punt

Queen Ati (left) accompanied her husband Parehu, ruler of Punt, when he greeted the voyagers with offerings. Carvings show the cone-shaped huts perched on stilts in the villages of these people. They also show tropical fauna and flora, including giraffes and palm trees. The Egyptians sometimes called the Land of Punt 'god's land' because of the incense produced in the area that was used in the temples.

It has been suggested that Queen Ati suffered from curvature of the spinal column.

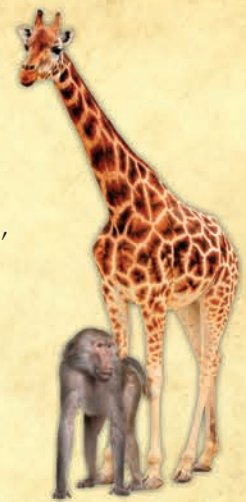
Across the desert

The expedition sent by Hatshepsut must have taken many months. There were 210 men travelling in five ships, each 21m long and rowed by 30 men. The ships had to be dismantled and carried across the Eastern Desert before being reassembled to continue their journey. The 200-km journey across the Eastern Desert and Red Sea hills took about two months.

 The trade with the Land of Punt continued until the beginning of the 20th Dynasty.

RETURN TO EGYPT

It is recorded that on their return, 'the ships were laden with the costly products of the Land of Punt and with its many valuable woods'. The treasures included giraffes, baboons, gold, ebony, spices, incense, elephant ivory, 30 frankincense and myrrh trees, throwing sticks and panther skins.



Giraffes and baboons were brought back for the pharaoh's menagerie (animal collection).



Living myrrh trees with root balls were planted at Deir el-Bahri.

Donkeys were used to carry the supplies and goods.

Loads included strings of beads, axes and weapons for the people of Punt.

The crew carried the heavy, dismantled boats during a long, hot and dusty journey.





VALLEY OF THE KINGS

In the 18th Dynasty, the pharaohs abandoned pyramid building because these structures were out in the open and difficult to defend against tomb raiders. Instead, they began to build rock-cut tombs in the hills near the west bank of the River Nile, opposite Thebes. The Valley of the Kings, surrounded by easily defended cliffs, remained in use until the end of the 20th Dynasty. At least 63 tombs have been excavated there.

Find of the century

On 4 November 1922, a team led by English Egyptologist Howard Carter uncovered the first of 16 descending steps into the Valley of the Kings. They had discovered the entrance to the tomb of the boy pharaoh Tutankhamun (reigned 1336–1327 BCE), containing many of the possessions originally placed in there for the pharaoh to use in the afterlife.

Ransacked by robbers, the annex contained empty containers and artefacts.



annex

The red sandstone sarcophagus of Tutankhamun contained three coffins nesting inside one another.



burial chamber



antechamber

▼ SHRINE - a container for the statue of a god or the remains of a dead person



treasury



Boats, gilded figures and a superb canopic chest were among the treasures found here.



One of the four miniature gold coffins, decorated with coloured glass and semi-precious stones, that contained viscera (internal body organs).

PAINTED LEGACY

One of the largest tombs in the Valley of the Kings is that of Seti I (reigned 1294–1279BCE). It is more than 120m long, and dug deep into a hillside. Discovered in 1817 by an Italian explorer, Giovanni Battista Belzoni, it has remarkable wall-paintings. The ceiling in the crypt is vaulted and painted with stars.



the astronomical ceiling in the crypt

Historic discovery

Howard Carter (kneeling) peers through the open doors of the four gilded shrines nesting inside one another in the Burial Chamber. The tomb had been broken into by tomb raiders on at least two occasions, but resealed by the necropolis guards.



passage

staircase



> The fingerprints of one of the men who robbed Tutankhamun's tomb are still visible inside a jar of ointment.

