

RELIGION: *STUDIES OF RELIGION*

Explain the Significance of funerary customs and rituals in this period.

Funerary customs and rituals in Old Kingdom Egypt provide modern historians with insight into the essence of Egyptian religious beliefs. Source H depicts the pyramid texts in the pyramid of Unas. These texts were magical spells or incantations that were believed to assist the deceased on their journey through the afterlife. This is significant as it reinforces the idea that the Egyptians actually believed in an afterlife. One such text describes human-killing female apes and the spell was used to evade them.

The highly decorative interior of Egyptian tombs reveals that the Egyptians believed that the afterlife would be very much similar to life on Earth, as it required a body, furniture and food. Thus, bodies were preserved through a process of mummification. The reliefs found in Nefer's tomb depicts the agricultural processes of harvesting and Kagemeni's tomb depicts the papyrus marshes. This indicates that the Egyptians believed that the images would magically come to life. Therefore, prosperous scenes of everyday life were depicted so that the life they had would be replicated in the afterlife. The inscription above the entrance of Kagemeni's tomb; "Thousands of loaves, thousands of sweets, thousands of jars of beer" was expected to be recited by people passing so that the deceased would have food in the afterlife.

Noble's mastabas had a superstructure that contained niches and a place to provide offerings so that the deceased could survive by consuming the 'life force' of the offerings. The substructure contained the serdab, which enclosed the ka statue. This was used by the deceased's ka or spirit, should anything befall the person's physical body. The false door, such as the spectacular false door of Idu, was used by the ka to move into and out of the serdab.

Many of the funerary customs can be explained using the Osiris Myth. This myth describes the murder of Osiris by his jealous brother Seth, who cut his body into many pieces. Osiris' wife, Isis, with the help of Nephthys and Anubis, performed incantations and wrapped his body in linen to magically bring him to life. Osiris became the God of the Underworld and their son Horus became the ruler above. This explains where the ritual of mummification evolved as well as why the pharaoh was associated with Horus while alive and Osiris when dead. The four main visceral organs were removed and placed in canopic jars to be guarded over by the Four Gods of Horus.

The funeral rituals following the death of a pharaoh revealed his power and influence and is significant in demonstrating his role as a high priest and intercession between the people and the gods as he was considered the 'son of Re' and a god made human. Rituals often involved priests and professional mourners who are portrayed in relief at the tomb of Idu. The use of professional mourners implies that Egyptians grieved for their dead and the number of people in attendance was often related to the deceased's prestige and influence. After the funerary procession down the River Nile, the body was placed inside the Valley Temple, a space believed to be used only once for initial burial rites and emblaming. This was connected to a covered causeway and the Mortuary Temple. In the Mortuary Temple, high priests were responsible for the maintenance of the pharaoh's cult and that sufficient offerings were left for the pharaoh's ka. This reveals the importance of the pharaoh as well as the Egyptian belief in the need for an ongoing relationship with deceased pharaoh's who, by relationship with the gods, would bring good fortune into Egypt.

The change from Djoser's Step Pyramid at Saqqara to smooth sided pyramids such as the pyramid of Khufu demonstrates the growing influence of the Solar Cult of Re at Heliopolis. The pharaoh was believed to have many options to travel to the afterlife. He could join the gods in the 'imperishable stars', travel by boat, as evident in the boat pits found alongside pyramids, or he could travel up the sunrays of the pyramid to the gods. A mutual need between the upper, middle and lower strata's, enabled the belief that all people would enjoy an afterlife as scribes, such as those depicted in the

tomb of Ti, and agricultural workers were depicted. This ensured that all people of Egypt could enjoy an afterlife.

These traditions and practices are therefore significant sources of information as they reveal how ancient Egyptians dealt with enduring questions of human existence.