

# The Horizon of Eternity: Living and Dying in Ancient Egypt

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## Transcript:

Their culture survived for well over three thousand years and one of the reasons it was able to develop peacefully for so long was that Egypt is naturally protected by these features I have just been pointing out to you; the deserts, and the sea at the top [*Image of a map of the river Nile*]. Even in Nubia there is a very arid, a very rocky landscape, quite difficult to maintain settlement in. So for the first couple of thousand years the Egyptians were pretty much undisturbed by invasion or major population change. This was one of the factors which allowed their culture to become so strong and so self contained. And of course the river Nile itself is the lifeblood of Egypt. Not only does it provide the main means of communication and source of water, but it is also the basis for agriculture. The Egyptian economy was founded on agriculture. Typical scene there at the bottom from a tomb of about 1250 BC, showing agricultural activities [*Image of tomb illustration*]. And of course the key to this was the fact that every year the flooding of the Nile brought fertile silt into Egypt and this spread over the fields on either side of the river providing natural fertilization, renewal of the fertilization of the soil. So for most of their three thousand years the Egyptians never had problems with hunger, they could rise above a subsistence economy to produce all the amazing monuments that we can see today. And they considered their lands to be the gift of the gods.

To them it was really a kind of paradise an earthly paradise and they saw divine influence in everything around them and you can see this in all of their arts and writings. An Egyptologist recently said about ancient Egypt: "All observable phenomena are potential expressions of the divine". And there's a lot of truth in this. Everything that they saw around them was connected in some way with gods and goddesses. Let's just have a closer look [*Image of the stela of Taperet showing the sun-god Re-Horakhty and an image of the constellation of the night sky from the tomb of Sety I, c. 1280 BC*]. So the sun of course was the most important god of all. The sun god Ra was the creator of all life. On this painted wooden tablet you see him in the form of a man with a Falcon's head and the solar disk on top as a headdress. And there you've got a woman named Taperet raising her hands in adoration before the god and you'll notice that from the solar disk you have these rays in the form of flowers coming down to the woman's face and this is an artist's convention for the idea of the life giving rays of the sun bathing the human individual. So the sun god is the most important of all the deities. And then we have the stars of course. The Egyptians were actually some of the earliest Astronomers.

And the other illustration here is a painting from the tomb of King Sety the first, 1280BC. And on the ceiling of his tomb you have this graphic depiction of the night sky. Now at first glance it looks like a kind of menagerie of typical Egyptian creatures, you know hippopotamus, crocodile and so on. But, if you notice these reddish brown marks here, some of these are actually constellations of stars. If you look here, I don't know if you can spot this, but we have Ursa Major, the plow. These are the four main stars and the other ones over here. The Egyptians

actually defined this constellation but they didn't call it the plow or the great bear they called it the bull. And there you see the bull walking along with a man driving it behind. So some stars, the moon, are all divinities. And of course the river Nile itself was regarded as divine. It was identified with a god called Hapi. There you see two images of him [*Image of a carving on stone*]. He's always shown as a rather kind of androgynous figure. He is male but he has almost female breasts and rather pendulous stomach. And this is to show his connection with fertility, the fertility of the land.

Now all of these phenomena; the movement of the sun and the stars and the flooding of the Nile, these are cyclical. These are things which repeat themselves. The Nile flooding every year of course, the sun passing across the sky every day. Not surprisingly the Egyptians connected this idea of cycles with human life as well. Now most of them had fairly short lives. If you got to be thirty-five in ancient Egypt then you'd done very well. So they would observe the progress of human life, from birth to death, within a fairly short period of time. I think this helped to give this idea that this was going to be an endless repetition of human existence. So death was not the end it was regarded more as a threshold, a passage from one existence to another one, a crossing of boundaries. And often death is conceived in the form of a door or a gateway that you pass through but you don't die you carry on living.

Here is an image from the papyrus of the scribe Ali, showing him actually moving through a door [*Image of an illustration on papyrus*]. You see also his spirit in bird form, which we'll come back to in a few minutes. Now the divine powers were eternal and they dwelt in parts of the universe that were not accessible to mortals. The aim of every ancient Egyptian at death was to cross the boundary into these divine realms. And in order to do that, they had to carry out a lot of ritual activity to get across that, to get over that boundary. They saw this aim of trying to live forever as something which they could achieve within their own concept of the universe. And really we need to understand a little bit more about how they imagined the universe to work. They had a concept called *maat*, which really means the cosmic order. We could translate it as right or truth or justice, the way things are meant to be. As long as *maat* was maintained everything would be well for Egypt. She's often personified as a goddess. You can see this image of her here on the left, a winged figure [*Image shown of maat and an image of the king Sety*]. She is actually the daughter of the sun god, Ra.

The Egyptians imagined Egypt as the center of the world, the place most favoured by the gods. And the king of Egypt, the pharaoh, was responsible for keeping this principle of *maat* in place, making sure that it wasn't overturned so that chaos might ensue. And the king was himself semi-divine. He was the son of the gods. There on the right you see an image of king Sety the first of 1280 BC and he is holding up a little image of *maat* as a small goddess figure. This emphasizes that the king's role is to be the champion of *maat*, to make sure that order is always kept. There are various ways in which the king makes this possible. One of them is his role as military leader, to protect Egypt from invasion. And this is why you often see on the temple walls images like this one. The king is a gigantic superhero crushing the heads of great crowds of enemy captives [*Image of Tuthmosis the third in 'ritual smiting' pose, temple of Karnak c.1450 BC*]. And these people that he is defeating are usually shown as Syrians, Palestinians, Nubians, Libyans, in other words the peoples who lived in the areas around Egypt and who might be considered a threat to Egyptian security. The king has to prevent any kind of influx of these people into Egypt.

But perhaps more important than that, is the king's relationship with the gods. In order for the principle of *maat* to survive the gods must be kept happy, they have to be kept content. And of

course there are thousands of gods; every town and city in Egypt had its own gods. There are gods of the sun and the moon and so on. So that is quite a lot of gods to keep happy. And really the way that you keep them happy is by making them comfortable in human terms. Giving them food and drink and clothing and generally keeping them content in that way. The king is the person who has to look after this particular need. In return for that, the gods will bestow life on humanity. Not only the king, but all other individuals living and dead. So it's a reciprocal arrangement and you see here how that's depicted in art [*Image of the cosmic order, an ankh symbol and the king making offerings*]. On the left you have the king pouring wine in front of the god Amun-ra<sup>1</sup> and the god presents life back to the king. In the middle there we have an amulet, which you can see in the exhibition, which represents this sign of life the ankh, the hieroglyphic sign denoting life. In the other image you can see the god actually presenting this sign of life to the king's face. Almost as if he is giving him the breath of life to his nostrils. This is that relationship depicted graphically.

In practice how this worked was that in every temple there would be, at the core, a sanctuary, holy of holies, and in there would be the statue of the god. Quite small, made of precious metal, gold or silver and it was believed that the spirit of the god could dwell in the statue. So he would be present within the temple. The temple was not a place for congregations to worship it was the god's house and normally only the king or priests would be allowed to go inside. So there you can see an image of Amun-ra king of the gods [*Images of the temple of Karnak, and a statuette of Amun-re*]. And that could well have originally been located in the sanctuary in the temple of Karnak that we are seeing here. The sanctuary is this area here and of course it is surrounded by many columned halls and amazing colossal gateways. But this is the place where the cult of the gods was performed.

Now of course the king, although he was effectively chief priest, could not be present in every temple all the time. These rituals had to be carried out every day. So in practice it was the priests who deputized for him. And there you can see a row of priests walking along holding their ritual vessels to purify the god's food [*Images of vessels, priests in the tomb of Inherkha c. 1180 BC*]. Their heads are shaved; they had to be pure, ritually pure. And that meant shaving off all bodily hair. And there you see also a couple of the types of vases that they would use in the temple ritual and these are in the exhibition. The exhibition of course focuses on the life of one of these priests Nesperennub. And in the 3D film you will see reconstructions of him and his colleagues carrying out exactly these types of ritual.

So the king is a very important figure in this process of keeping *maat* and keeping order running. It is very important that the passing on of kingship from one generation to the next should be uninterrupted. Because if there is any break in the succession of the king then chaos could overcome *maat* and there could be disasters of all kinds; famine or invasion anything could happen. So it's very important that kingship is passed smoothly from one office holder to the next, ideally from father to son. You can get this idea with continuity from the kings' list on the left [*Image of the List of Kings, temple of Ramesses II, Abydos and an image of King Ay and the mummy of Tutankhamun*]. All of these oval shapes containing hieroglyphs are names of kings, each one the successor of the one before. And a very important part of passing kingship on was the burial of the dead king. So when one king died he had to be buried in a very formal manner, mummification, rituals, put into the tomb. And the next king, his successor, was in charge of that. If the old king's burial rituals were not properly carried out the new king was not

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<sup>1</sup> Amun-re is denoted in the spoken text as Amun-ra as it reflects Dr. Taylor's pronunciation of the name and the more traditional version of pronouncing this word.

legitimate. And so you get an image like this one from the tomb of Tutankhamun where the dead king is this figure on the left, in mummy shape, and his successor is the other figure there, King Ay, performing the rituals which would get Tutankhamun safely into the afterlife. And once that had been done then king Ay was the legitimate pharaoh of Egypt.

So of course the burial of the king was very important for the whole of Egypt. All Egyptians had a stake in making sure that the king was laid to rest properly. And the king's tomb was a very important public work. The pyramids where the kings were buried were not built by slaves, as popular belief has it, but by free members of the Egyptian society working in rotation. We can say really that the king's tomb was a kind of machine and one to make sure that kingship continued. Just as the temple was a sort of machine for perpetuating the universe.

What would happen to the dead king is that he would go to the sky to join the gods from whom he had descended. And you can get a strong reflection of this aim from the form of the royal tomb. The early ones of course are pyramids and the shape of the pyramid is highly symbolic. The step pyramid, the earliest one, is the kind of stairway to heaven. Or you could view it as the mound of creation. According to mythology the creator god first appeared on a mound of earth and then he created all of mankind. So this idea of a shaped mound is very important, it symbolizes the place where life is renewed. And that's a very good place to put the king to make sure that he is reborn.

The later pyramids of course are the smooth sided ones. And these also have a strong symbolic meaning. They are connected with the sun god. The aim is that the king would actually go up to heaven and join the sun god after death. And the shape of the pyramid actually is connected to that of a sacred stone that was kept in the chief temple of the sun god. This stone was called the Ben Ben and it is the same shape that you see at the top of the obelisks. These tall stone columns that you often find outside Egyptian temples [Images of obelisk, pyramids and boat]. This little section at the top is effectively a small pyramid. So the king is being placed within the sacred emblem of the sun god. The god to whom he's going after death. And this means of course that the king will be travelling across the sky with the gods and he therefore needs the typical method of transport that gods use which is a boat. And at the Pyramid of Cheops at Giza a number of wooden boats were actually dismantled and buried next to the pyramid for the use of the dead king. One of them famously was reconstructed and you can visit that when you go to Giza, it's in a special museum next to the pyramid.

Now the pyramids were mainly being used between about 2650 BC and about 1600 BC. Now in the later periods of Egyptian history they stopped using them as the king's tomb and instead the king would be buried in a rock cut tomb, a series of passages and chambers hewn into the cliffs along the Nile valley. And these were located in the Valley of the Kings. And here's a view of it [*Images of the Valley of the Kings, Set-maat: 'The Place of Truth'*]. However there still was a kind of collective natural pyramid because looking over the valley is this pointed peak here. And I think it's no accident that this was the location they chose for the collective burials of the kings. There is still this strong solar symbolism watching over the king's resting place.

Inside the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings, and these are astonishing structures; you have passage and chamber after passage leading into the hillside, all cut in the rock and covered with these amazing paintings and carvings, religious texts and images [*Images of the tombs of Sety I and Amenhotep II*]. And what these relate to is what would happen to the king once he joined the sun god. Because he crosses the sky by day, by night he goes beneath the earth. And underneath the earth was imagined as a series of caverns. So the god journeys by boat

through these caverns, which these chambers actually represent. And here's an image of the sun god this time with the head of a ram instead of a falcon [*Image of the nocturnal journey of the sun god*]. And often the king is shown travelling in this boat with the god. During the night the sun god himself is rejuvenated so he can renew life every morning and the king goes with him so that he also never dies.

So as the sun is such an important source of life to the ancient Egyptians, the horizon becomes a highly significant symbol as well. The horizon, of course the place where the sun sets and rises and for the Egyptians, it came to represent the point of transition between worlds, between the world of the living and the world of the dead. In hieroglyphic writing the horizon is shown like this, as a kind of valley with the sun disk rising above it [*Images of the horizon in hieroglyphic script and a photo of a temple gateway*]. And sometimes you get a more elaborate version like this where the sun is actually being shown raised up on the arms of a god. Now the temples nearly always have great towering pylon gateways, two towers with a narrow passage in between. And they are nearly always located on an east-west axis. And what that means is that every dawn when the sun rises in the east, if you're standing in the position of the photographer on this view of the temple, you would see the sun coming right up here between the two towers of the gateway. And what they're doing here is creating an enormous hieroglyph in stone; they're creating this motif in stone. And emphasizing the point: that the temple is the home of the god and the home of all life and creation. So nothing is ever random in Egyptian architecture or art, there are always layers of hidden meaning, symbolic meaning in everything you see.

Now of course the ordinary Egyptian could not expect to be buried in the same grand fashion as the king. It would have been an enormously expensive process, but they could at least hope to have some version of the king's burial chamber, a slightly less elaborate one. The idea is that in their tombs the dead would still follow the path of the sun. This means that most tombs were located on the west bank of the Nile, the place where the sun set. As the sun went down the idea was that the dead followed the sun god into the underworld. And so here we have examples of tombs made for officials, still quite grand [*Images of tombs and painting of a tomb*]. At the top there a columned hall in a tomb of about 1900 BC. At the bottom a whole complex of tombs laid out in streets around one of the pyramids at Giza. And what's happening here is effectively the king is taking his courtiers with him into the afterlife. They are not being killed but when they die then they are being put into these tombs all ready made and laid out in streets. So you could have probably walked along these streets during your life knowing that eventually you were going to finish up lying beneath the ground under one of these structures. And the tomb is often called the horizon of eternity. Again this very important horizon concept. The western horizon is the place where the gods welcome you into new life. And the image at the bottom there shows a little tomb with a pyramid on top on the western slopes of the mountains. And looking out from those mountains you see the cow head of the goddess Hathor who protects the dead.

So once the ordinary Egyptian had passed below the earth after the sunset, they enter the kingdom of another very important god Osiris. Osiris in many ways is the archetype of the concept of triumphing over death. According to mythology he was a king of Egypt in the distant past, who was murdered by his jealous brother, but he was restored to life again. His body was mummified, wrapped up in linen bandages and by means of rituals he was reanimated and then he became the king of the realm of the dead. So he is normally shown like this in mummy bandages. His skin is often coloured green, because green for the Egyptians symbolized fertility and new life [*Images of Osiris*]. And the idea of all Egyptians was that they would hope

to become like Osiris after death to share his resurrection.

Here's a few images [*Images of Osiris, Isis and Horus*]. At the top left you can see Osiris lying on a kind of bed but he's waking up from the sleep of death. He's looking up, his eyes are open, he's awake. On the far side you see a painted tablet where the dead woman, the owner of the object, is worshiping Osiris, this figure, and the sun is still shown very prominently here. The sun god Ra and Osiris actually are like counterparts, they're almost like two halves of one important deity. The sun god is giving life to people during the day in the sky and Osiris under the earth in his realm brings life to the dead. So they are really opposites and counterparts. Osiris also is connected with the idea of kingship passing from one generation to the next. He had a son, the god Horus, who's often shown like this, as a little child on his mother's lap. And Horus becomes the legitimate king after Osiris is killed. So this is the kind of an ideal situation that they wanted to keep repeating throughout eternity.

So how would an Egyptian hope to make this transition between life and death? Certain important practices had to be followed to make this possible. And the first thing that had to be done is that the dead body had to undergo special treatment. If possible it must not to be destroyed. The very early graves from Egypt, like this one at the top, don't involve mummification [*Image of burial and a royal tomb painting from the Valley of the Kings*]. The body would just be placed into a pit in the ground, usually in a crouched, hunched up position and it was covered over with sand. Often the natural drying effect of the sand preserved the skin and the hair quite well as you can see from this illustration. Two things to point out though here, the position of the body looks rather like the embryonic posture of a child in the mother's womb. So there may be symbolism here about the renewal of life. But also I think there's symbolism connected with the idea of sleep because the Egyptians often used to sleep in exactly this hunched up position. And death is frequently referred to as a sleep from which you awake.

Interesting, look at this bottom picture from one of the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings [*Images of Ba illustrations and statuettes*]. And here you've got some images of a number of people who are dead and they are also represented in this position, lying face down with the arms and legs close to the body. But they are waking up from this sleep of death. You can see over here some of them are actually getting up off beds, stretching their limbs, standing up, entering a new life. Even in this very early grave and this dates to about five and a half thousand years ago, there was probably this idea that you would wake up from this sleep of death.

Now as we move on in time we begin to get written evidence that tells us about more complex beliefs. And this is where we discover that a human being is thought to consist of many different aspects. The body was the most important one but there were also spirits; two very significant ones called the *Ka* and the *Ba*. Now the *Ka* was something like the vital force, it was the thing that made you alive. The *Ba* was a little bit more like the personality. It was what made you an individual. And the *Ba* very importantly was thought to be able to leave the body. So it could fly away and it is often shown as a bird with a human head. After death the *Ba* could leave the body and join the realm of the gods but at the end of every day it had to come back into the tomb, into the body to rest. That's the key reason why the dead body had to be preserved through mummification, because if it rotted away then the *Ba* had no home to come back to and it would perish. So this really is the key to whole mystery why they put so much effort into preserving dead bodies. It's to keep this spirit alive. And you can see here this is the *Ba* spirit flying down to the mummy, ready to join it again. And on this little statue in the

exhibition, the *Ba* is on the man's breast, spreading its wings around him, embracing him, joining him at the end of the day.

So mummification was absolutely crucial to entering the afterlife and it's something of course that we're fascinated by how they did it. We don't get much information from Egyptian records about this. They didn't write down descriptions of it and even their illustrations don't really go into the gruesome details and probably because this was something that was not fit to be seen. It was regarded as a taboo. We weren't really meant to know what happened. So what they normally show you is just the end of the process with the complete mummy lying on its bed and the embalmer god Anubis, with his jackal head, performing rituals to wake up the mummy, to reanimate it [*Images of the final stages of the mummification process*]. And the only exception to this is this rather crude painting from a late coffin about three hundred BC. Where we do seem to actually see the dead bodies, this kind of silhouette here, undergoing embalming procedures, being washed and coated with some kind of fluid. So this is a very, very rare exception to this reluctance to illustrate what actually happens in the embalming workshop.

But from looking at mummies, from studying mummies, particularly in the way we've done in the exhibition, it's been possible to reconstruct most of the procedures that they went through. The diagrams at the top show the main stages [*Images of the mummification process*]. The body first of all was washed and then all the internal organs would be taken out. The brain of course was removed through the nose with a metal hook and they cut into the abdomen to take out all of the organs of the body. Except the heart, the heart would be left inside and I'll explain why in a moment. And after this the body was coated in a special salt called natron, which would be left on there for about forty days. And this salt extracted all the fluid content from the corps, left it completely dry. And this meant that no bacteria could thrive to destroy the skin, the bones, the hair, the muscles. And after that the body would be coated with oils and resins to leave it sweat smelling and wrapped up in layers of linen. And eventually given trappings such as a gilded mask and various amulets to protect the dead person. The whole process lasted seventy days and it would be expensive to achieve so only the richest people would have this very elaborate procedure.

The organs which were taken out of the body, four of them, were deliberately preserved; liver, lung, stomach and intestine. They were the ones that they thought would be most essential and they would be also mummified and placed in a set of jars like this, canopic jars [*Image of four canopic jars 664-525 BC*]. You can see this group in the exhibition. The jars would go into the tomb next to the coffin. And even though the organs aren't back in the body they are still present. And the idea is that you can still use them so the body is being transformed into something rather different. It's an eternal body and that means you don't have to have all the original parts back in position. As long as they're actually present in the tomb they still do their job.

After the seventy days of embalming comes the funeral, the day of burial [*Image of the papyrus of Ani, c. 1275 BC*]. And here you've got an image from the papyrus of Ani, twelve seventy five BC, showing this great procession to the tomb with the mummy being dragged along. The widow of the dead man is there lamenting, weeping, casting dust on her head as a sign of mourning, and this would be a great public event. If you were a rich person you wanted people to see your funeral because the number of mourners and all the goods going into the tomb were a status symbol that would show how important you were. At the top there's a quotation from a famous Egyptian story, the tale of Sinuhe, in which there is a description of the ideal funeral: 'A procession shall be made for you on the day of burial, with a mummy-case of gold, a mask of

Lapis Lazuli... and chantresses before you...' [*Image of a procession to the tomb. From the papyrus of Anis, c. 1275 BC*]. The chantresses would be singing songs of lamentation. So this is what the Egyptians hoped would happen at the end of their lives.

And when they got to the tomb then there would be rituals. And this is a stone tablet in the exhibition [*Image of a stone tablet depicting rituals at the tomb*]. And you see at the top here the important ritual called 'opening the mouth'. This was just before the mummy was put into the tomb. It was placed upright and priests and relatives carried out a ritual. Touching the face of the mummy with various implements. And what they are doing is symbolically reanimating the body, giving it back the faculties to see and hear and breathe. And this way the *Ba* spirit, which I just talked about, comes back and can start its new existence, its new relationship with the body.

All Egyptian tombs, even the simple ones, contain two main parts: the burial chamber under ground where the body would rest forever, and a chapel, which would be open. And that's where the relatives would go periodically to make offerings to the spirits of the dead. And these offerings were very similar to what was given to the gods in the temples. Basically it's food and drink. So this idea of nourishing the spirit is always there. And so you get images like this painting [*Images of offerings at the tomb, statue*] on the left here, with the son of the dead man and wife bringing food offerings to them. So this is the man and the wife who're buried in the tomb. There would be an offering table like that made of stone for you to lay your food and drink on. And the dead people would be represented by a statue like this, which would be actually in the open chapel. So you stand in front of the statue and you present the offerings. The idea is that the *ka* spirit, the other one of the two main spirits, can leave the body in the burial chamber and pass into the chapel and enter the statue. So that while you are there, making your offerings to your deceased relatives, they are actually there with you as well in spirit. And this statue in the middle represents the *ka* of a deceased king. On the top of his head you see these two upraised arms. That's the hieroglyphic sign for the word *ka*, denoting this kind of spirit.

And rather touchingly the Egyptians believed that they could still communicate with their dead relatives. When they went to the tomb chapel, or even perhaps in their own homes, they could speak to the dead. One of the ways they did this was through one of these sculptured busts, ancestral busts [*Image of a letter to a dead woman and an ancestral bust*], this one is in the exhibition. And this represents dead ancestors with whom you can communicate. So what would happen is; you've made your offering so you know the spirit of the dead person is there with you, and then you tell them what's on your mind. Maybe you've got a problem, perhaps you have an illness and you want to be cured. You ask them, will they, in the world of the gods where they are, will they try to sort this out for you? Perhaps get the gods to help you. And sometimes they even wrote letters and left them in front of the statue for the dead person to read. So this drawing at the top is an inscription written inside a food bowl. And this was put on the offering table filled with food. The idea is that the spirit ate the food and then noticed there was a message as well. And the quote at the bottom is one of these messages. And as you can see, this is a man writing to his deceased wife and he's obviously got some problems and he seems to be thinking that his wife might be responsible. He's got an illness and he's complaining to her saying that he wants her to fight for him, to intercede for his name, in other words to talk to the gods and get him cured. You notice he says "I have not garbled a spell before you, while making your name to live upon earth". What he's referring to here is performing the ritual for his dead wife. He's saying "look, I didn't muck it up, you know I haven't got the words wrong or done anything that would make your spirit unhappy so why am I now



sick? I want you to sort this out”.

Getting into the next world would be quite a hazardous business. Once the relatives had left you in your tomb then you have to make your own journey. You need a lot of protection it's going to be rather a tricky passage. Some of that protection is in the form of the trappings of the mummy, like the gold mask over the head or little amulets of stone and precious metal placed on the body [*Images of funerary amulet, scan of Nesperennub and a gold mask*]. In the middle this is the mummy of Nesperennub, which you see in the exhibition. And you see there lots of these little amulets placed on him to give him protection. But you can also take a roll of papyrus with inscriptions on it, The Book of the Dead. And these are magical spells, which give you power and knowledge and the means to make a safe journey into the afterlife. A lot of them are to do with keeping safe from dangerous creatures like crocodiles, even nasty insects like beetles and cockroaches might eat the body [*Images from The book of the dead*]. Here's a man escaping from a fishing net in which the gods are trying to trap him to stop him getting safely through. And here are some of the demons that you might meet on the journey [*Images from The book of the dead*]. There's a lot of having to prove yourself as you make your way. You have to convince all these gods and demons that you really do deserve eternal life. But The Book of the Dead is your guide. It tells you who you'll meet, what they're gonna to say, and what you have to say to them to avoid being killed. So this character here is a monster with a huge knife ready to chop you to pieces if you don't say the right words. But in the hieroglyphic text it tells you exactly what you need to say so this is a pretty useful book to have with you.

The biggest test of all comes when you enter the hall of Osiris in the underworld. And this is where the heart is weighed in a balance. I mentioned that the heart was kept inside the body and the reason was that the Egyptians thought the heart was the location of the mind and the memory. It kept a record of all your deeds in life and the gods would now scrutinize it to see if you'd lived a good life or not. And the way they decided was by weighing your heart on a balance against a feather [*Images of the weighing of the heart after death, a scarab amulet and a monster*]. And the feather actually is the image of maat, that concept of order and justice that we were looking at earlier. This is the heart on this side and what you wanted was a perfect balance. If the heart sank down then you'd lived a bad life, your heart was heavy with sin. And what then would happen is this monster here, part crocodile, part lion, part hippo, jumps up and swallows your heart and that's the end of you, you're gone, you don't have any afterlife at all. So this is the greatest test of all.

But the Egyptians were very practical people and they had a way round this as well. If you paid to have an amulet like this in the shape of a scarab beetle, you could have carved on it a special spell, which cheated your way through the judgments. Basically what this spell says is it tells the heart to keep quiet. It says “Whatever you know about my life on earth, do not reveal it at the weigh in” [Sounds of laughter from the audience]. It looks like cheating but perhaps they didn't see it quite in that light.

So let's imagine that you got safely through. What afterlife do you then expect? You can spend your time travelling with the sun god in his boat, or worshipping Osiris in his underworld kingdom. But this image here is what I think most Egyptians were really hoping for [*Images of 'The Field of Reeds' and Shabti statue*]. They wanted to go to a place called 'The Field of Reeds'. *Sekhet lalu* in Egyptian. Very interestingly this word *lalu*, by which they mean reeds, seems to be connected with the Greek word *Elysium*. If you think of the Elysian Fields of Greek mythology, the paradise, the peaceful land where the dead dwell. The Egyptians actually were the forerunners of that concept. And their *Elysium* looked like this. With waterways and waving

corn, lots of crops to provide you with food to eat and even servants to do the hard work for you. These little statues called shabtis would be your servants to take all the hard labour away from you in the afterlife. So really at the end of the journey what they want, is to come back home. Which is, I think, quite a poignant way of looking at things.

So just to conclude another quotation from that story I mentioned earlier The Tale of Sinuhe. In that story this man Sinuhe is an Egyptian who leaves his native land and he goes to live in Palestine. And when he's grown old the king of Egypt sends him a letter saying, "You should come back to Egypt now, it's time to come home because you should end your life in Egypt where you were born". And Sinuhe replies to the king that he will do that. And he says, "What matters more than that I should be buried in the land where I was born" [*Images of Egyptian ruins and landscape*]. And I think this very neatly sums up the whole idea of the Egyptian's ideal afterlife. It's coming back home. It's really continuing the life that they've already had and enjoyed on earth. Thank you.

Now I'll take questions in a moment but in view of the recent events, which you might of heard about in the media we thought it might be nice just to give you a little quick glimpse of this discovery that's been made this week here in the Queensland Museum. You might have seen this in the papers today or on television. I talked about the Book of the Dead just now. When I came here last Sunday the curators here in the Queensland Museum offered to show me the Egyptian collection here. And I was very keen to have a look at it. And we were having a look at some of the display cases, which are just outside the lecture theatre here. And inside there, there were four small pieces of Egyptian papyrus, looking like this [*Images of papyrus fragments from The Book of the Dead, Chief Builder of the temple of Amun, Amenhotep, Queensland Museum collection*]. And I had a look at these and one of them struck me as being very interesting because it had on it part of a name, the name of the owner of this particular papyrus. Also the style of hieroglyphic script looked quite early, it looked like one of the very earliest examples of The Book of the Dead. But the fragments on display didn't convey the complete name of the owner.

So the next thing was that we went into the conservation lab here and I was shown over a hundred other fragments of this piece of papyrus, which has been in the museum here for about a hundred years. This proved to be extremely interesting because on some of these fragments we have the complete name of the owner of the document together with his title. And it's written actually here, going from top to bottom, this line says "The Chief Builder Amenhotep". And in other parts of the papyrus the title gives the temple that he worked in, the temple of Amun. Well basically this means the temple of Karnak, which I was showing you in one of the earlier slides. And actually The Chief Builder Amenhotep is somebody that we know quite well in the world of Egyptology because he is the owner of quite a famous Book of the Dead papyrus, which was found in the eighteen nineties, but split up into different sections, which are in museums all over the world. And this particular papyrus of Amenhotep can be recognized because it has a border of stars running along the top and the bottom and on the back it has one line of very large hieroglyphs. So when I saw these I think you can see where this was leading. And sure enough, here's another couple of fragments, fairly typical [*Images of more sections of the Queensland Museum Papyrus collection*]. Some of it is just text like this Book of the Dead spells, some contains illustrations of gods, so here you've got Osiris.

And we were able to get onto the British Museum website, because I recognised that the papyrus of Amenhotep was one that has been in the British Museum for about a hundred years. And here is an image of the end of the papyrus showing Amenhotep and his wife with their son,

making offerings to them [*Image of The Book of the Dead, Chief Builder of the temple of Amun, Amenhotep, British Museum collection*]. To cut the story short, briefly, the fragments here in the Queensland Museum come from the same document. And they've been missing for at least a hundred years. The end of the papyrus is in London. The beginning is in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. There are a few other pieces in other museums around the world. But until now the whole document could not be reconstructed. And it's beginning to look as though, if we're lucky, we might now have enough pieces left to put the whole document back together. And that would be tremendously interesting because this is a very important Book of the Dead papyrus. Amenhotep was basically the man in charge of building temples at Karnak. We know when he lived. He lived in the reign of king Amenhotep the second. That's about fourteen twenty BC. And so he was one of the most significant figures at the time of Egypt's greatest prosperity. His Book of the Dead is unusual for having the stard border and the long text on the back. So it's tremendously exciting to now be in a position to possibly put all of this back together.

Very intriguingly the British Museum part ends with a jagged edge that you can see here [*Image of the end of The Book of the Dead, Chief Builder of the temple of Amun, Amenhotep, British Museum collection*] So we're already looking at the fragments here in Brisbane to see whether there might possibly be any joins we can make with this section here. And this is what the fragments look like. This is the scene a couple of days ago [*Images of Dr. John Taylor with the fragments of The Book of the Dead, Chief Builder of the temple of Amun, Amenhotep, Queensland Museum collection*]. Ever since the exhibition opened I've spent most of my waking hours in the conservation lab here with the other curators pouring over these fragments. But it's a fascinating jigsaw puzzle. What we hope might be possible is for all of these fragments to be photographically documented and then maybe a digital reconstruction could be achieved. They're very fragile so it's very difficult to sort of physically manipulate them into position. But with digital photography this should become much easier.

So that's what's been happening. That's what you may have glimpsed on the news. We're at the beginning of a very interesting project here and hopefully there will be further news in the months to come. Thank you [Applause from the audience].