

# Lecture 11 Egyptian Culture



HIST 213

Spring 2012

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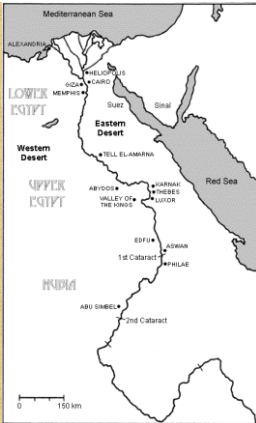
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Egypt was protected from outside influences, which allowed it to evolve in its own unique way.

Bounded on the south, east and west by an impenetrable desert, and on the north by the sea

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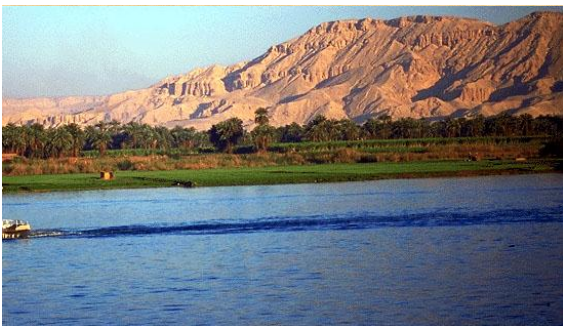
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The Nile River is the longest river in the world (6,650 kilometers) and flows north from the heart of Africa to the Mediterranean Sea. Its flood plain was a magnet for life -- human, plant and animal. Humans were drawn there because they could grow crops and settle into permanent villages.

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The Nile River was the highway that joined the country together. Up until the nineteenth century, travel by land was virtually unknown.

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For centuries, the Nile River flooded the valley floor, enriching the land with a thick layer of alluvial soil. Flooding occurred from July to September as the result of the tropical rains in the Ethiopian tableland. The river attained its highest level in October, then began to recede to its lowest point sometime between April and June.

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### Egyptian Calendar 365 days

- First calendars were lunar
- Then in the Early Dynastic, Egypt used a solar calendar with three seasons of four thirty day months
  - each divided into three "decades" (sets of ten days).
- The two calendars ran concurrently and were used for different functions

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|  | <p><b>Akhet</b><br/>time of the year that the Nile flooded. The name 'Akhet' literally means inundation.<br/><b>120 days</b></p>  | <p><b>normally between July and December</b></p>        |
|  | <p><b>Proyet</b><br/>time of the year when the Nile receded. Temperatures were much cooler than other times of the year this was the perfect time for the farmers to sow their crops.<br/><b>120 days</b></p> | <p>normally from December to March.</p>                 |
|  | <p><b>Shumo</b><br/>was a dry time when the crops were harvested and was often one of the busiest times of the year. Time when the tax collectors showed up for the Pharaoh's share<br/><b>120 days</b></p>   | <p>Lasting from March to July<br/><b>= 360 days</b></p> |

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Where did the 5 extra days come from ?

Goddess of Night Nut was thought to be the mother of five children on the five extra days of the Egyptian calendar

- known as the "epagomenal days of the year"

- Ra became annoyed because Geb and Nut were locked in a perpetual embrace so he asked Shu to separate them.
  - decreed that Nut should not bear children on any day in the calendar
- But Thoth won the five "epagomenal" days from the moon and Nut had five children:
  - Osiris
  - Horus the Elder
  - Set
  - Isis
  - Nephthys

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## Society and Government

At the end of the Old Kingdom tension between the royal court and the local provinces intensified. The provincial nobility occupied a crucial position the Crown and the local groups. A typical example of the new type of local ruler is Anktifi, a nomarch of the Upper Egyptian 2nd and 3rd nome.

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## Ankhtifi (early Herakleopolitan period)

I gave bread to the hungry and clothing to the naked; I anointed those who had no cosmetic oil; I gave sandals to the barefooted; I gave a wife to him who had no wife. I took care of the towns of Hefat [i.e. el-Mo'alla] and Hor-mer in every [situation of crisis, when] the sky was clouded and the earth [was parched (?) and when everybody died] of hunger on this sandbank of Apophis. The south came with its people and the north with its children; they brought finest oil in exchange for the barley which was given to them. My barley went upstream until it reached Lower Nubia and downstream until it reached the Abydene nome. All of Upper Egypt was dying of hunger and people were eating their children, but I did not allow anybody to die of hunger in this nome . . . I cared for the house of Elephantine and for the town of Iat-negen in these years after Hefat and Hor-mer had been satisfied. . . . I was like a (sheltering) mountain for Hefat and like a cool shadow for Hor-mer.' Ankhtifi said: 'The whole country has become like locusts going upstream and downstream (in search of food); but never did I allow anybody in need to go from this nome to another one. I am the hero without equal.'

The crisis depicted in Ankhtifi's tomb inscription is not confirmed by archaeological observations.

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## First Intermediate Period (2160 BCE)

- civil war led by various *nomarchs*
- central authority in Memphis collapses
  - north-Herakleopolis
  - south-Thebes
- wealth diffused throughout society
- Mentuhotep II (2055 BCE)
  - makes Thebes capital of unified state




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## Struggle for Control

The Theban kings of the 11th Dynasty fought the Herakleopolitan kings for the control of the strategically crucial Abydos area.

The most important military stronghold of the Herakleopolitan rulers was **Asyut**, north of Thebes. There is very little textual evidence of the actual developments.

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## Theban Ascendancy

- During the Old Kingdom, **Thebes**, was a third rate provincial town but became a major power center from the 11th Dynasty onwards.
- From the extensive cemetery of el-Tarif on the West Bank of Thebes a series of funerary stelae attest a line of Theban officials eventually ending with the nomarch called Intef I/Mentuhotep I.
- Intef, also called “the ancestor” founded the Theban 11th Dynasty.

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## Shift in Afterlife Awareness 1st Intermediate Period

The weakening of royal power and authority slowed fecundity of the land

People questioned royal maintenance of the Ma’at

- led people to believe that there is **ba** (and **akh**) not just for the kings but for everyone
- “**democratization of the afterlife**”
  - every deceased person must go through the Weighing of the Heart Ceremony.

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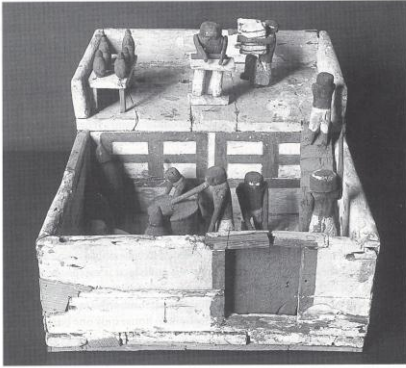
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The private tombs of the First Intermediate Period began to include types of objects that were made specifically for funerary use, such as models of offering bearers and sometimes entire workshop scenes. This wooden granary is a typical example of such 'funerary models'.

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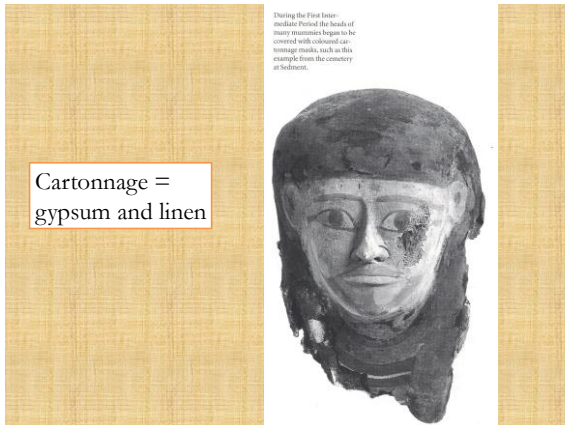
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During the First Intermediate Period the heads of many mummies began to be covered with colored cartonnage masks, such as this example from the cemetery at Bedouet.

Cartonnage = gypsum and linen

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Marked loss of artistic quality



Translation: An offering that the king gives (to) Anubis, the one upon his mountain, the one in his mummy wrappings, lord of the sacred land, in all his good and pure Places, a voice offering to the revered...

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### Funerary Deities



Anubis

- god of embalming
- head of a jackal
- body of a man
- watches over the dead



Osiris

- god of the dead
- father of Horus
- judges souls

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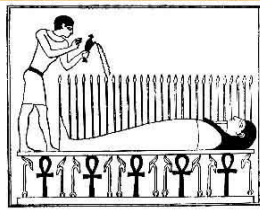
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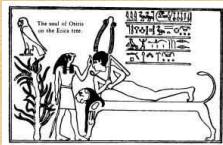
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### Resurrection of Osiris



Osiris-Neptra, with wheat growing from his body. From a bas-relief at Philae.

The sprouting of grain implied resurrection



Osiris "The God Of The Resurrection" rising from his funeral bier.

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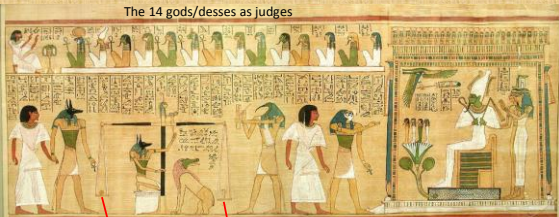
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Judgment scene from the *Book of the Dead*, British Museum (19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty)

The 14 gods/desses as judges



Hunefer Anubis Ammut Thoth Horus with ankh Osiris Isis and Nephthys  
 heart father of Ma'at

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▼ The King of Abnemet (Maat) is an Egyptian goddess holding a scale of justice and a scepter.



Translation: -> Maat, daughter of Re, mistress, lady of the land (realm) of the dead.



▲ The goddess Maat, the divine personification of truth, order and justice, wore an ostrich feather on her head. 19th Dynasty.

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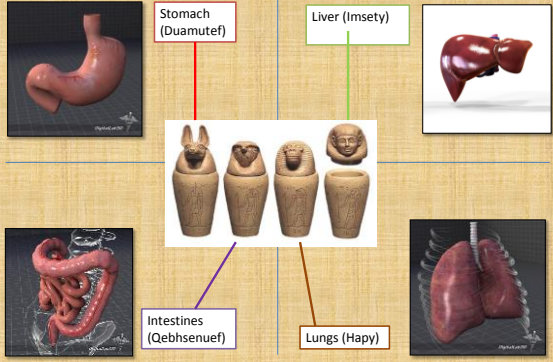
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### Mummification Process



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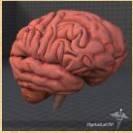
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### Unimportant Organs



considered the source of all mucus.  
removed through the nose with a long hook-needle

### Important Organs



considered the center of thinking and emotions  
embalmed separately and returned to the body

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### Body Preparation

- Palm Wine -to clean the body cavity
- Natron -packed in/out to dry body
- Eye Sockets -packed with linen (fake eyes)
- Beeswax -sealed nostrils and incisions
- Linen/Onions -packed inside the body cavity
- Resin -coated the entire body
- Linen -body wrapped
- Amulets -tucked inside wrapping for good luck

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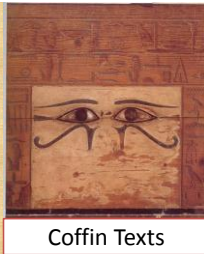
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Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts found their way to the walls of the coffins of the nobility and became called **Coffin Texts**

- magical and liturgical spells inscribed on the sides of wooden coffins
- To ensure a successful test and to avoid Ammut's teeth



Coffin Texts




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The following is from Chapter 6 of the Book of the Dead; similar inscriptions can be found on shabti figures:



*"Spell for making a shawabti do works in the necropolis. Recitation... Oh, this shawabti! If Osiris N is allotted to do any works that are done in the necropolis... to plant fields, to flood the banks (of the river and irrigation canals), to transport sand for the west or for the east, 'I will do (it): Here I am!', you shall say."*

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## Sarcophagus



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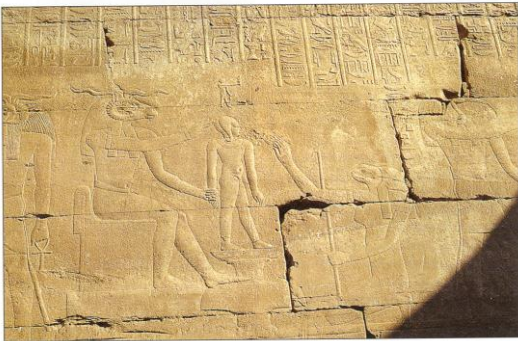
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▼ The ram was a symbol of fertility and male virility. It was used to represent the creator god Khnum, who fashioned the universe out of clay.



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## Art in Ancient Egypt

*How Art Made the World* (BBC, 2008)

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJbkxns8kvg>

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As its title suggests "*Dispute of a Man with His Ba*" is a rather pessimistic dispute of a man and his ba whether life is worth living. It starts by the man telling his ba that he wishes to commit suicide. His ba threatens to leave him which, of course, would mean his total annihilation. In a sequence of four poems the man reverses his wish and at the end his ba promises that it will stay with him.

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The motto of the *Instruction* is that *Ma'at* eventually prevails against all evil and the gods will grant eternity for those who act according to the rules of Maat.

The *Instruction* is the first known written document that contains the Egyptian final judgment predating by 1500 years the Judaic and Christian concepts.

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