

Auckland Museum

Mysteries of Ancient Egypt
EGYPT

e d u c a t i o n k i t

Tamaki Paenga Hira



BACKGROUND NOTES

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE:

Ancient Egypt is a fascinating subject which is extensively written about. This leaflet is designed to summarise the key points and to mention some information that is less readily available in books. For further reading, the National library and most public libraries have large collections on Ancient Egypt.

BOOKING INFORMATION:

All school visits to the museum must be booked. We advise booking 2–3 months in advance.

Numbers:

Adult child ratio:

Y 1–4 1:6

Y 5–6 1:7

Y 7–8 1:10

Booking:

Contact the Museum School Bookings Officer at:

Private Bag 92018 Auckland

Phone: (09) 306 7040

Fax: (09) 306 7075

There is a small charge for Hands-on sessions.

Ask about charges when making your booking.

Classes may choose to combine a classroom session with a visit to another part of the museum.

www.aucklandmuseum.com

Adult/child interaction is important to maximise your museum experience. Group leaders need to have some background knowledge of what the students are expected to cover and they are advised to participate in the introduction on arrival.

background Notes

Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egypt was one of the earliest great civilisations. They were advanced for their time in many areas of learning. They wrote the first known surgical text, were great mathematicians and astronomers, worked out the number of days in a year and were the first to divide the day into twenty-four hours. However, the ancient Egyptians are most remembered for their elaborate religious beliefs and burial practices.

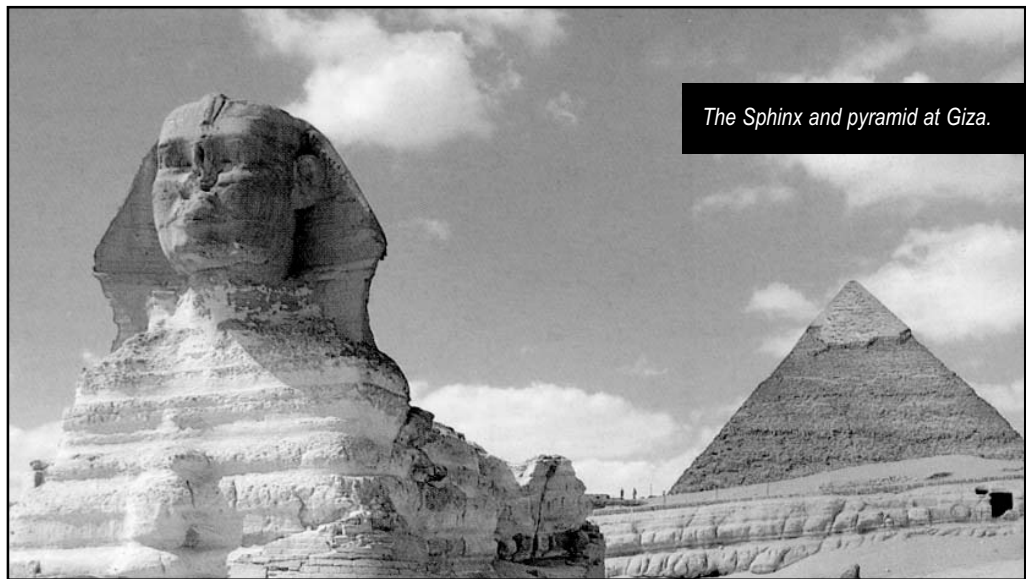
PYRAMIDS

Each pyramid was built to house the body of a pharaoh (king) of Egypt. The largest of the pyramids is made up of more than two thousand stone blocks, each of them twice the weight of a car. It

remains a mystery as to how exactly they were built and even if they had access to cranes and bulldozers, it would have been quite a feat. It is thought that the quarried blocks were raised with levers onto a huge wooden sledge and pulled by a team of men. The sledge runners were probably lubricated with water or animal fat to make pulling easier. It is thought that a sloping earth ramp was built to drag the blocks onto each layer of the pyramid.

SPHINX

A sphinx is a creature with the head of one animal and the body of another. Little is certain about the famous sphinx at Giza. The head is thought to be that of one of the early pharaohs, and it is believed to be a guardian of the pyramids. As with other ancient Egyptian statues, it was once brightly painted. Traces of red and yellow paint can still be found on the sphinx's head.



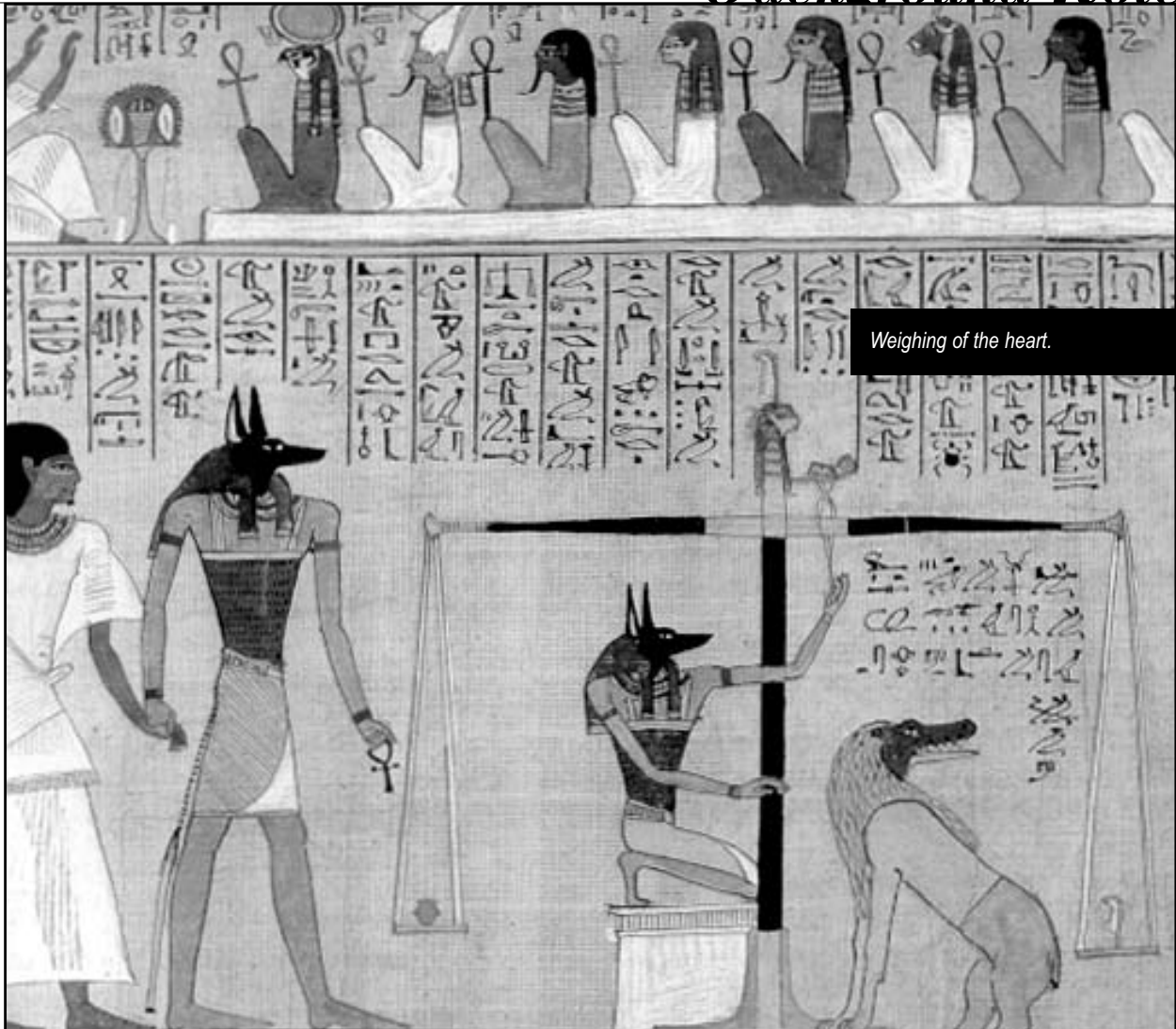
The Sphinx and pyramid at Giza.

MUMMIES

Ancient Egyptians believed that once a person died, they would continue to live in the 'underworld'. To make this possible, they believed that the body must survive. This is why they preserved their dead as mummies. Mummification began with the removal of the organs. They were placed in special pottery jars to protect them from evil spells. The body was washed with palm wine and spices and then covered with salts for seventy days to dry out. Next, the body was packed with linen and spices. Finally the whole body was coated in resin and then bandaged.

OPENING OF THE MOUTH CEREMONY

This ritual took place before the mummy was placed in the tomb. A priest would wear a mask of Anubis (the Jackal god, protector of the dead) and touch the mouth of the mummy case with ritual instruments. This was to ensure that the deceased could breathe, eat, talk and move again in the underworld.



Weighing of the heart.

BOOK OF THE DEAD

The Book of the Dead was placed near the body of the deceased. It included magic spells that enabled the person to overcome fierce serpents that guarded the gates to the underworld.

WEIGHING OF THE HEART

It was thought that a person would only live forever if they had been a good person in this life. Once in the underworld, it was believed that the deceased would have to undergo a test to determine if they were worthy of eternal life. Their heart was weighed against the feather of truth. If their heart was lighter, the person could live forever. If their heart was heavier, they were eaten by a monster called the devourer of the dead.

RA (RE)

Ra, the sun god, usually has a falcon's head and is crowned with a disc representing the sun. It was believed that at the end of every day, Ra died in the Western sky and descended into the underworld. All of Egypt would pray for his return and in the morning he would reappear. Most people lived on the east bank of the Nile and were buried on the west bank, reflecting Ra's journey across the sky and into the underworld.

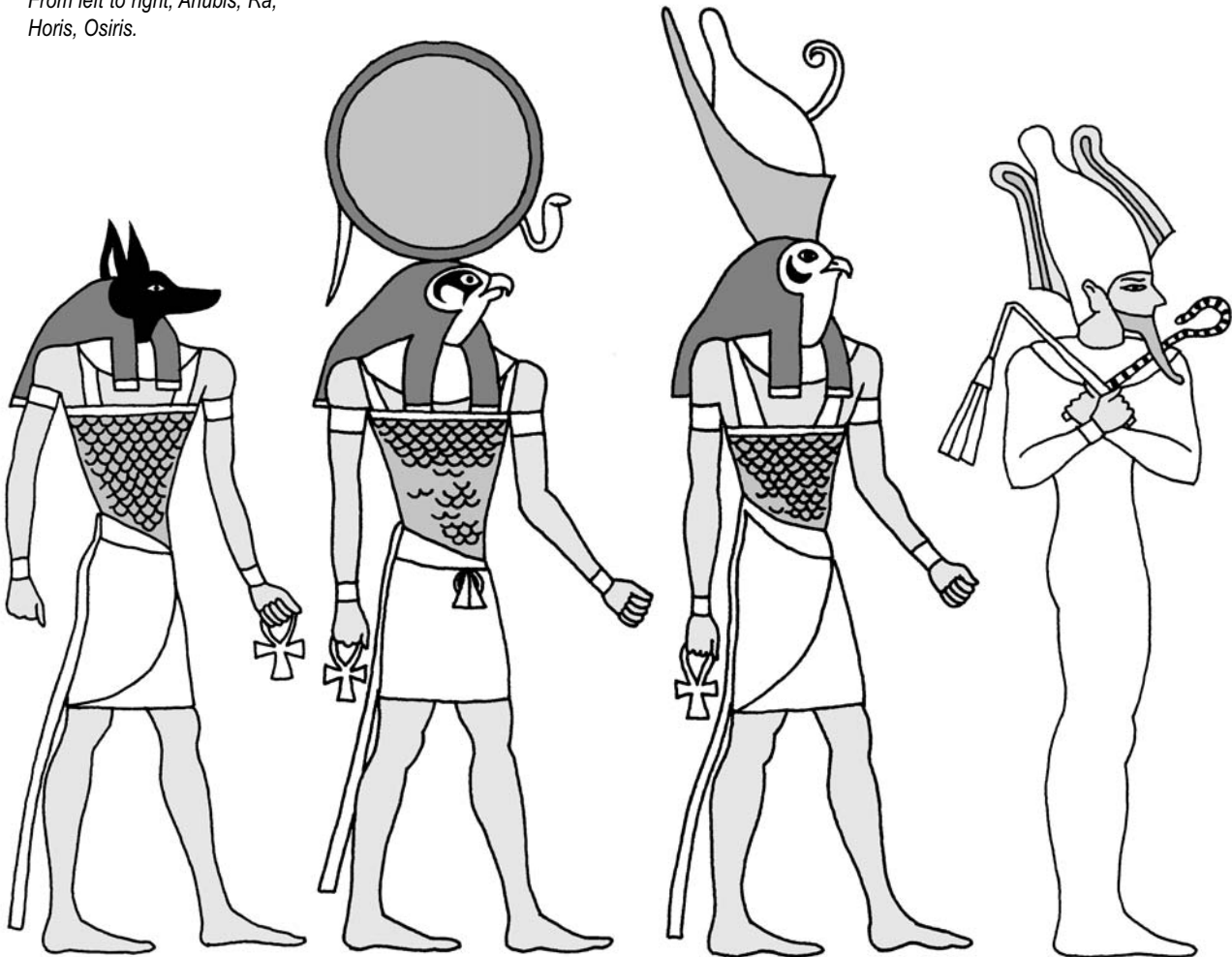
BASTET

The cat goddess Bastet was the daughter of Ra. She represented the power of the sun to ripen crops and was the goddess of happiness, music, dancing and the protector of the land. All cats were treated as sacred in honour of Bastet, and

background Notes

Ancient Egypt

From left to right; Anubis, Ra,
Horus, Osiris.



a person could be sentenced to death if they killed a cat. Cats often wore a gold ring to show that they were sacred and were often mummified.

OSIRIS

Osiris was the god of the underworld. Legend has it that he was once a noble king of Egypt who was killed by his jealous brother Seth. Seth chopped Osiris's body up and scattered the pieces throughout Egypt. Osiris's wife Isis, found all his body parts and bandaged them together, bringing him back to life to reign over the underworld.

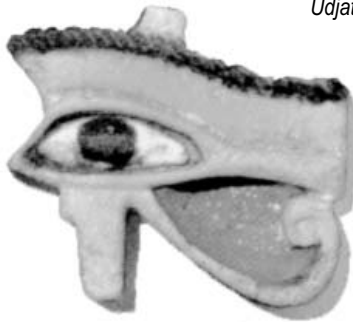


The cat goddess Bastet.

background Notes

UDJAT EYE

Once Osiris had been brought back to life, his son Horus killed Seth. During the battle Horus lost an eye which was later restored by the moon god. The udjat eye represents Horus's eye and became a symbol of healing.



Udjat eye.

SCARAB BEETLE

The scarab beetle is a symbol of intelligence, rebirth and eternal life.



Scarab.

ANKH

The ankh was believed to possess the power to give or take life from people. Only kings, queens and gods were allowed to possess it.



Ankh.

FALSE BEARD

People of power often wore false beards to show their status. It was made from plaited rope and was held in place by string that looped around the ears. In artwork, a straight beard represents the person when they were alive, a bent beard signifies that they have died and are in the underworld when the artwork was begun.

TUTANKHAMUN

Tutankhamun was a boy king who died aged about eighteen after being on the throne for nine years. Little is known about his reign and it remains a mystery as to how he died. It is his lavish tomb that was filled with great treasures that he is most famed for. Unlike other royal tombs, his escaped major looting in antiquity and was discovered virtually intact. It was filled with goods for his afterlife: food, clothing, weapons, jewels and gold coated furniture and chariots. He had three coffins, one inside the other, the innermost of solid gold and weighing 110Kg. His famous gold mask was placed over his mummy.



Funerary mask of Tutankhamun.

RIVER NILE

Ancient Egypt has been described as 'the gift of the Nile'. Without this river, life would not have existed in this otherwise arid country. Once a year the Nile flooded, bringing with it black fertile soil that supported bountiful crops. The colours black (from the rich mud) and green (from plants) were symbols of life.

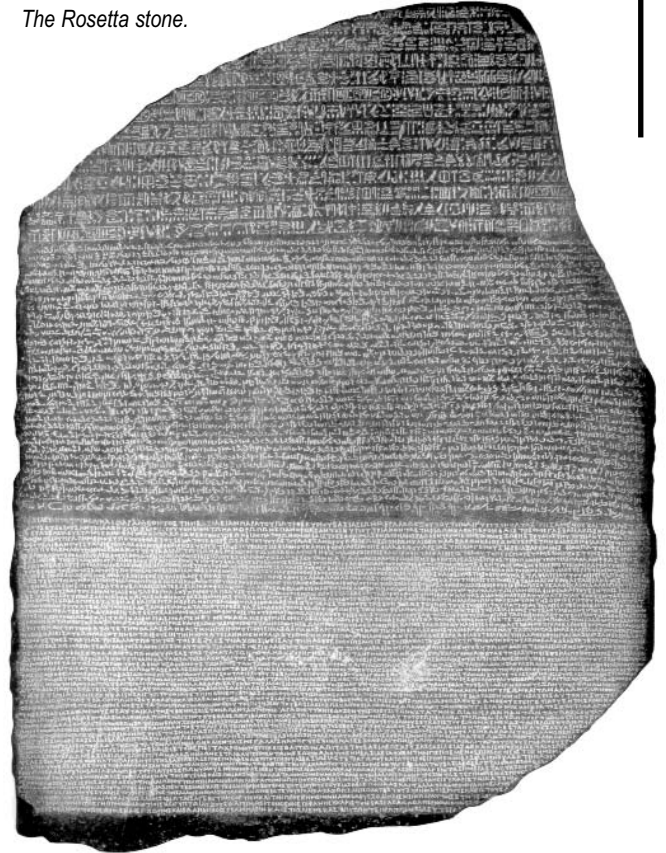
background Notes

Ancient Egypt

ROSETTA STONE


For many centuries, hieroglyphs, the language of the ancient Egyptians, had been forgotten. The discovery of the Rosetta stone was a breakthrough in the translating the language as it had the same information written in both hieroglyphs and ancient Greek.

The Rosetta stone.

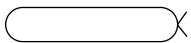























HIEROGLYPHS

The ancient Egyptian alphabet contained only consonants and no vowels. The vowels shown in the alphabet below are actually ancient Egyptian consonants that do not exist in English. They are given a sound like a vowel to make pronouncing words easier.

Not only did the Egyptians have an alphabet, but they also had other symbols that represented one word. For example:  is pyramid. In total there were about 700 different signs.

The name of an important person such as a king or a god were written inside a cartouche:



						
A	B	C	D	E	F	G
						
H	I	J	K	L	M	N
						
O	P	Q	R	S	T	Z

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