Mummification

Over many centuries, the ancient Egyptians developed a method of preserving bodies so they would remain lifelike. This was due to their belief in life after death. The process included embalming the bodies and wrapping them in strips of linen. Today we call this process mummification.

Ancient Egyptians believed that everyone had a soul which they referred to by two names, the ba and the ka. The ba was depicted as a bird with a human head; the ka was the twin of each person.

Both the ba and the ka, they believed, were released from the body at the time of death. From then on they did not stay peacefully in one place. The ancient Egyptians believed that when someone died, their soul left their body. The soul would then return and be reunited with the body after it was buried. However, the soul needed to be able to find and recognize the body in order to live forever.

In other words, the Egyptians believed for the person to live after death, the body had to be preserved in some way and the best way they knew was that of mummification.

After death the bodies of poor and ordinary people were put in the hot dry sand of the desert which preserved them naturally. The poor ancient Egyptians were buried in small pits in the desert. The heat and dryness of the sand dehydrated the bodies quickly, creating lifelike and natural 'mummies'.

The bodies of pharaohs and nobles were mummified to further insure preservation, for the Egyptians believed that the pharaohs became gods after death and that their bodies through mummification would last for all eternity.

The mummification process began with a ceremony conducted by four priests, with one of the priests dressed as the jackal-headed god, Anubis.

One of the embalmer's men makes a cut in the left side of the body and removes many of the internal organs. It is important to remove these because they are the first part of the body to decompose.
The organs which were taken from the body were placed in special jars called canopic jars. Natron, a special type of salt, was added to the jars for preservation of the organs.

The liver, lungs, stomach and intestines are washed and packed in natron which will dry them out. The heart is not taken out of the body because it is the centre of intelligence and feeling and the man will need it in the afterlife. A long hook is used to smash the brain and pull it out through the nose.

Linen cloth and natron were used as packing to fill the spaces left when organs were removed.

The body was then ready to be covered with natron and placed on a tilted slab. The natron dried the body of its fluids which drained onto the tilted slab. The body was allowed to dry for at least forty days.

The liver, lungs, stomach and intestines are preserved in special jars called canopic jars. The lids of these jars represented gods called the 'four sons of Horus'. These gods protected the internal organs.

**Duamutef** the jackal-headed god looks after the stomach. **Hapy** the baboon-headed god looks after the lungs. **Imsety** the human-headed god looks after the liver. **Qebehsenuef** the falcon-headed god looks after the intestines.

This is the 'Isis knot' amulet which will protect the body. This is the 'Plummet' amulet which will keep the person balanced in the next life.
the body in its journey through the underworld. Heart scarabs were placed in the wrappings with the mummy. They had spells carved on them to protect the deceased person’s heart from being lost or separated from the body in the underworld.

The heart was especially important to the ancient Egyptians because they believed that it was the centre of feeling and intelligence.

The arms and legs are tied together. A papyrus scroll with spells from the Book of the Dead is placed between the wrapped hands.

More linen strips are wrapped around the body. At every layer, the bandages are painted with liquid resin that helps to glue the bandages together.

The face of the mummy was now ready to be covered with a mask on which the dead person’s face was painted. This mask was considered to be very important as it allowed the ba and the ka to easily recognize the mummy in their travels to and from the body.

A board of painted wood is placed on top of the mummy before the mummy is lowered into its coffin. The first coffin is then put inside a second coffin.

The funeral is held for the deceased and his family mourns his death. A ritual called the ‘Opening of the Mouth’ is performed, allowing the deceased to eat and drink again.

Finally, the body and its coffins are placed inside a large stone sarcophagus in the tomb. Furniture, clothing, valuable objects, food and drink are arranged in the tomb for the deceased.

The whole process of mummification took about seventy days. Now the body is ready for its journey through the underworld. There his heart will be judged by his good deeds on earth. If his heart is found to be pure he will be sent to live for all eternity in the beautiful ‘Field of Reeds’

The ancient Egyptians believed that before a person could get to the afterlife, that they had to pass through the underworld. The ancient Egyptians chose spells to take with them on their journey. The spells were chosen from a group of spells known as the Book of the Dead. The spells were then written on a papyrus scroll which was buried with them in their tombs.