

Ancient Egypt



Museum cares for ancient artefacts

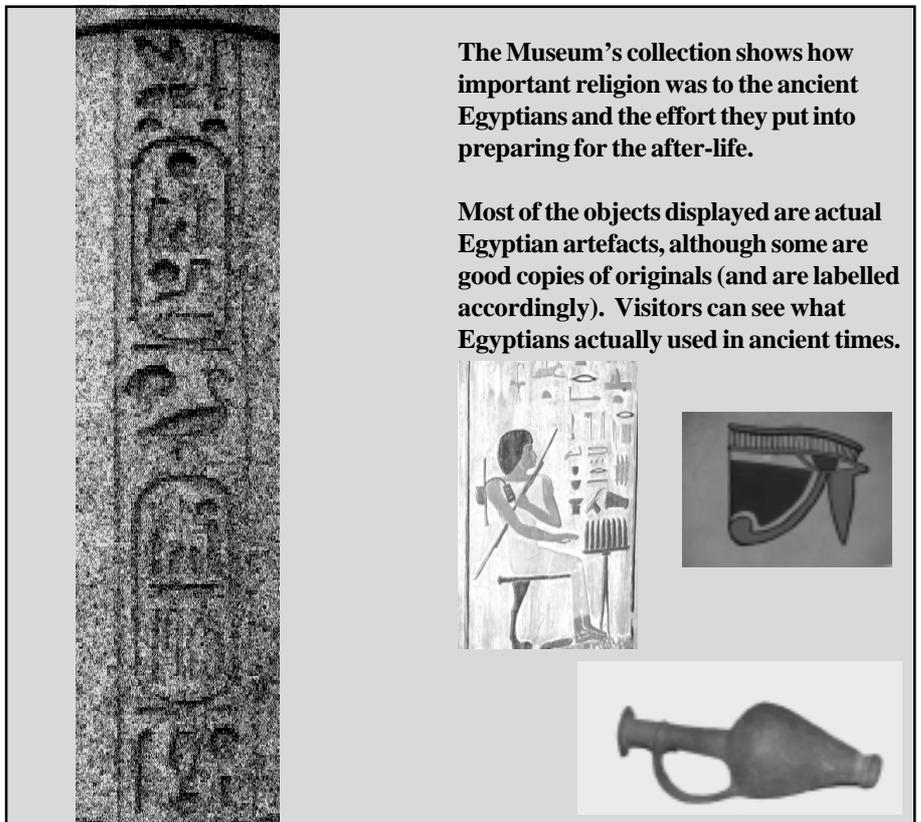
Valuable jewellery, statues and even bodies of ancient Egyptians who thought they would come back to life are stored at the South Australian Museum. The items have come from a range of sources, including real objects from archaeological collections as well as copies from other museums. Some items come from private donations. Not all the items in the museum's collections are on display.

Egyptian column in Adelaide

The Egyptian column that stands near the front doors was lifted into the museum foyer by crane, before the new glass entrance was built.

Thousands of years ago artists carved on the column pictures honouring the ram-headed god Harshefi (or Herishef) and the pharaoh Rameses II. The temple was demolished, but the its columns were used in another temple by Merneptah. Eventually this temple too collapsed, and was slowly buried in the desert sand. Some of its stone was used in other buildings, but most of the columns lay in the ruins until archaeologists moved them to musuems. One column was brought to the South Australian Museum.

The top of the museum's column (capital) was missing, so a copy was made using matching column from the same site as a model. (If you look carefully you can see the difference in the colour of the stone of the capital.)



The Museum's collection shows how important religion was to the ancient Egyptians and the effort they put into preparing for the after-life.

Most of the objects displayed are actual Egyptian artefacts, although some are good copies of originals (and are labelled accordingly). Visitors can see what Egyptians actually used in ancient times.

Ancient

Unwrapped
mummies

Egypt

Unwrapping a mummy ruins it, so museum scientists will not unwrap the mummies they are protecting. However in the museum you can see some parts of mummies that other people have unwrapped. (Unfortunately, if a mummy is unwrapped, it tends to fall to pieces.) You can see mummified feet and hands and even see someone's mummified head! The head is quite black, because of the preservative oils that have been applied to it. (Check out what happens when eyes are dried out.)

Ancient gods

Ancient Egyptians worshipped a large number of gods - some 2000 are recorded. Many of these were of minor importance but the better known gods were often 'state' gods. Some of these are shown in the paintings and statues in the exhibition.



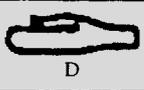
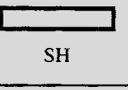
Medical scanners allow us to look inside wrapped mummies.



A legend of the creation of the sky can be seen at the museum.

No scrap paper?

Good writing material was expensive in ancient Egypt, so pottery fragments, (called shards), were used for unimportant notes. Some of these shards are on display. Visitors to the museum can also see writing on other objects – some painted on wood or plaster, some carved into stone. The museum even has a copy of the famous Rosetta Stone, which has three different kinds of writing on it. Did you know that this stone was the key to understanding the forgotten language of the ancient Egyptians. (Do you know why?)

 A	 B	 D	 F	 G
 H	 I	 K	 M	 N
 P	 Q	 R	 S	 T
 W	 Y	 CH	 DJ	 SH
 TJ	 King of upper & lower Egypt	 The good god	 Sun, day	 Daylight

Hieroglyphs are pictures that can represent words, letters or combinations of letters. These are some common sign combinations.

Stores for the dead

Most ancient Egyptians believed they would live again after death. When they ‘woke up’ they would need food, tools and entertainment so these were left in their tomb—if they could afford one. The museum has all sorts of things that Egyptians set aside for their next life, including pots, bowls, jewellery, weapons and even things to use for pillows. (They are very different from our pillows!)

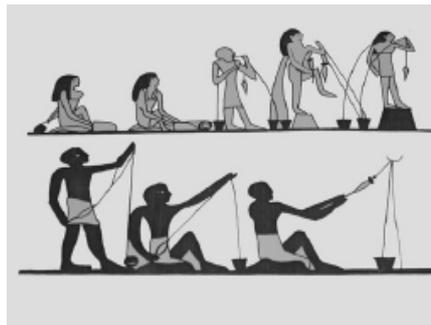
Remembering the dead

Ancient Egyptians thought it was important to remember the dead. Many Egyptians used to place food near the tombs of departed relatives to ensure they had good things to eat in their next life. They believed that speaking a person’s name gave their spirit extra strength. In the Museum’s Egyptian Gallery visitors can see a stone slab that was carved to show Smen-taui’s journey through life and death. It is called a stela, and helped people remember him after his death.



Robots for the dead

Statues like this are called shabtis. They were supposed to magically turn into real workers for the dead person in their next life.



Pictures of spinning thread

Pictures come to life

The wonderful pictures that were painted on ancient Egyptian tomb walls were not mere decoration. Many people in those ancient times believed the pictures could magically come to life and help the dead when they needed it. Pictures of food production, entertainment and other activities were popular.

Living in the old days

It is the work of archaeologists to find out how people lived in the past. The Egyptians left many clues. We can read their writing and look at their art, as well as study the tools and other artefacts they left behind. Archaeologists have discovered that, over the ages, Egyptians learnt new skills and changed the ways things were done.

For example, early Egyptian clothing was made from linen, a material woven from flax plant fibres but later Egyptians included wool in their materials. Using this information you can work out which of the materials on display in the museum are from the later times of the Egyptian empire.

Making a Mummy

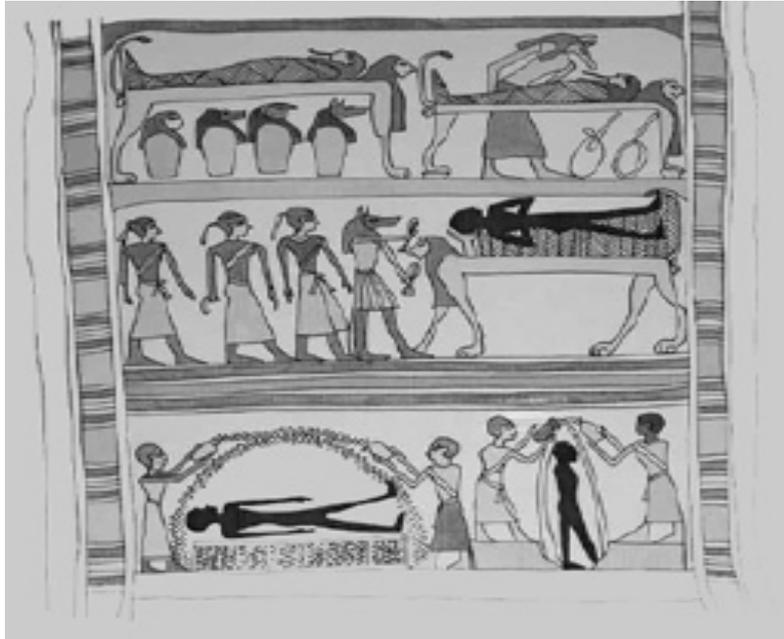
One important belief in ancient Egypt was that a dead person's spirit would need a body that it could return to after death.

Ancient Egyptians stopped bodies rotting by making them into mummies.

Various methods were used over the years, but they all depended on drying the body and using preservatives.

Often the viscera (insides) were removed, and sometimes dried, wrapped and placed in Canopic jars. Sometimes the viscera were returned to the body, and sometimes they were thrown away!

A Canopic jar might have the head of a protective god carved on its lid. Copies of Canopic jars can be seen in the museum



Mummies that were not human.

In ancient times, Egyptians mummified animals as well as humans. Sometimes they did this because they wanted their pets to be with them in the next life.

Other animals were mummified because Egyptians thought they were special to the gods. Gods were often drawn with animal heads or even with whole animal bodies. By making animal mummies, people honoured those gods.



Rich and poor

Obviously richer people could afford better mummification. Poor people were not mummified, but simply buried in the sand where the heat could dry them naturally.

The two mummies displayed in the museum show obvious differences in wealth. The red, male mummy from Nubia was not particularly rich, and came from an area where bodies were often buried together. The other mummy, of Renpit Nefert, has an expensive painted wooden coffin. She was also found with many items of clothing.