



from the

## BOOK OF THE DEAD

THE CHAPTER OF NOT LETTING THE BODY PERISH

## ADORATION OF THE DISK

KING AKHENATEN and PRINCESS NEFERTITI

## NEW KINGDOM POETRY

I'M GOING DOWNSTREAM ON KINGSWATER CANAL

WHENEVER I LEAVE YOU, I GO OUT OF BREATH

### Build Background

**Egyptian Culture** The selections you are about to read reflect three important features of ancient Egyptian culture:

- concern about the afterlife
- worship of a sun god
- delight in everyday life

As different as these features might seem to be, they are interrelated. The Egyptians believed that in the afterlife people would have the same interests and experience the same pleasures as in earthly life. They saw the sun god as the giver of life to all of nature.

**Book of the Dead** The Book of the Dead is based upon the most important myth in Egyptian culture—the myth of Osiris. Osiris was a benevolent god who taught human beings agriculture and other arts of civilization. His younger brother Set became jealous and killed him for the throne. Isis, the sister of Osiris, found her brother's body and brought it back to life. Osiris then became lord of the otherworld.

Throughout their history, the Egyptians based many of their burial practices on this myth. In the Old Kingdom, they believed that when a pharaoh died, he rose, like Osiris, from the dead. In fact, they believed

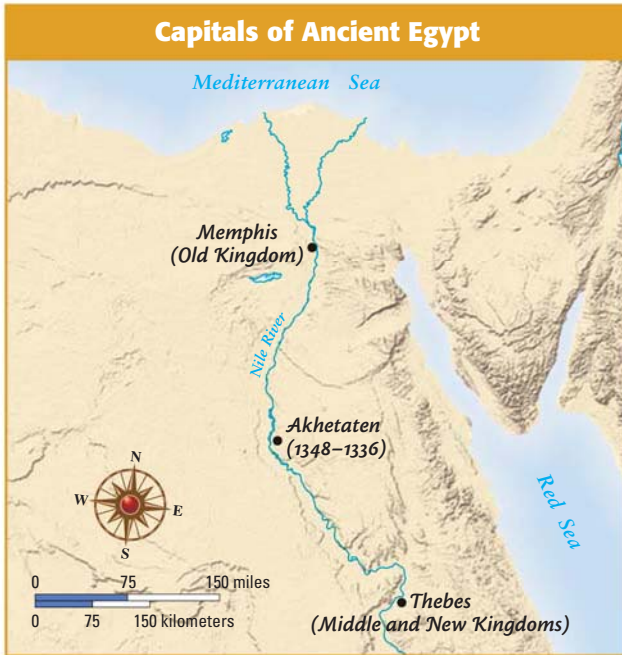
that the king became Osiris himself. To celebrate this event, the king's followers recited hymns and prayers based on the Osiris story and carved them permanently into the walls of the pyramids where the kings were buried. Such "pyramid texts" are the earliest works of Egyptian literature that have survived.

By the time of the Middle Kingdom, the privilege of becoming Osiris had been extended to all the nobility. This trend was taken a step further in the New Kingdom. They believed that a glorious afterlife as Osiris was available to anyone who had lived a good life and for whom the proper prayers were said. These prayers, based once again on the myth of Osiris, were written on papyrus scrolls and buried along with the dead. The Egyptians called these burial scrolls the Chapters of Coming Forth by Day, a name that shows their positive expectations for the afterlife.

The selection on pages 52–53 is taken from the burial papyrus of a man named Nu, who worked as a steward or property manager.

For a humanities activity, click on:





**Adoration of the Disk** The second example of ancient Egyptian literature was written by the pharaoh Akhenaten, who ruled Egypt about 1353–1336 B.C. Akhenaten rejected the traditional worship of many gods and goddesses. Instead, he declared that the sun god Aten was the only true god and built a new capital city in his honor. Akhenaten also wrote in Aten’s honor the poem you will read on page 54.

**New Kingdom Poetry** The ancient Egyptians were obviously fascinated with death and the afterlife. This fact has led to a popular image of their culture as being as dried up and lifeless as one of their mummies. The truth is that the ancient Egyptians were a people who knew how to enjoy life immensely. This was especially true during the period of the New Kingdom, a time of unparalleled prosperity and cultural enrichment—the result of political expansion and international commerce.

The New Kingdom produced a body of excellent lyric poetry that reflects the Egyptians’ joy in life. Like much poetry throughout the ages, many of these poems celebrate one of the great vital forces of human life—romantic love. On pages 57–58, you will find two examples of New Kingdom love poems.

## Connect to Your Life

Each of these selections reveals something about what the ancient Egyptians valued. What do you think is most greatly valued in your own culture? Share your ideas with your classmates.


## Focus Your Reading

### LITERARY ANALYSIS: SPEAKER

In a work of literature, the **speaker** is the voice that speaks the ideas presented. The speaker is not necessarily the writer; he or she may be a creation of the writer, much like a character in a play. As you read these four works, try to form an impression of the person speaking based on what he or she says.

### ACTIVE READING: IDENTIFYING CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

In order to understand a culture different from your own, you need to consider the culture’s values, its philosophical and religious beliefs, the stories its people tell, and the images they use.

 **READER’S NOTEBOOK** As you read these Egyptian selections, look for clues that help you identify **cultural characteristics** of the ancient Egyptians. Keep track of the clues you find by recording them in a chart like the one started here.

Selection	Clue	What It Reveals About the Egyptians
<i>Book of the Dead</i>	<i>"Grant that I may descend into the Land of Eternity"</i>	<i>They wanted to live forever.</i>

# from the Book of the Dead

Translated by Joseph Kaster

## THE CHAPTER OF NOT LETTING THE BODY PERISH

Words spoken by the Osiris Nu:

Hail to thee, O my Divine Father Osiris! I came to heal thee! Do thou heal me, that I may be complete, and that I may be, indeed, like unto my divine father Khepri,<sup>1</sup> the divine type of him who never corrupted. Come, then, make powerful my breath, O Lord of Breath, who exalts those divine beings who are like him! Come, make me endure, and fashion me, O thou Lord of the Sarcophagus!<sup>2</sup>

Grant that I may descend into the Land of Eternity, according as that which was done to thee together with thy father Atum,<sup>3</sup> whose body did not see corruption, nor did he himself see decay.

I have never done that which thou hatest, but have acclaimed<sup>4</sup> thee among those who love thy Divine Essence. Let me not putrefy, as you do unto every god and every goddess, every animal and every reptile, when they perish, when their animating spirits go forth after their death.

Hail to thee, O my father Osiris! Thou livest with thy members. Thou didst not decay, thou didst not become worms, thou didst not wither, thou didst not putrefy. I am Khepri, and my limbs shall have eternity! I shall not decay, I shall not rot, I shall not putrefy, I shall not become worms, I shall not see corruption before the eye of Shu!<sup>5</sup> I shall exist! I shall exist! I shall live! I shall live! I shall flourish! I shall flourish!

I shall wake up in contentment; I shall not putrefy; my intestines shall not perish; I shall not suffer injury. My eye



1. **Khepri** (kěp'rē): the god Ra in the form of the rising sun.

2. **sarcophagus** (sär-kōf'ə-gəs): a stone coffin.

3. **Atum** (ä'təm): Ra in the form of the setting sun and creator of the world.

4. **acclaimed**: praised highly.

5. **Shu** (shōō): the god of the air.



shall not decay; the form of my face shall not disappear; my ear shall not become deaf. My head shall not be separated from my neck. My tongue shall not be removed, my hair shall not be cut off. My eyebrows shall not be shaved away, and no evil defect shall befall me.

My body shall be enduring, it shall not perish. It shall not be destroyed, nor shall it be turned back whence it entered into this Land of Eternity!



Papyrus from the *Book of the Dead* of Nakht (18th Dynasty, 1350–1300 B.C.).  
Photograph copyright © The British Museum.

**HUMANITIES CONNECTION** The *Book of the Dead* consists of papyrus scrolls that were found in the tombs of important individuals of the New Kingdom period. This scroll shows a nobleman and his wife making an offering to Osiris in order to win his blessing in the next world.

# Adoration of the Disk

## King Akhenaten and Princess Nefertiti

*Translated by Robert Hillyer*

Thy dawn, O Ra, opens the new horizon,  
And every realm that thou hast made to live  
Is conquered by thy love, as joyous Day  
Follows thy footsteps in delightful peace.

5 And when thou settest, all the world is bleak;  
Houses are tombs where blind men lie in death;  
Only the lion and the serpent move  
Through the black oven of the sightless night.

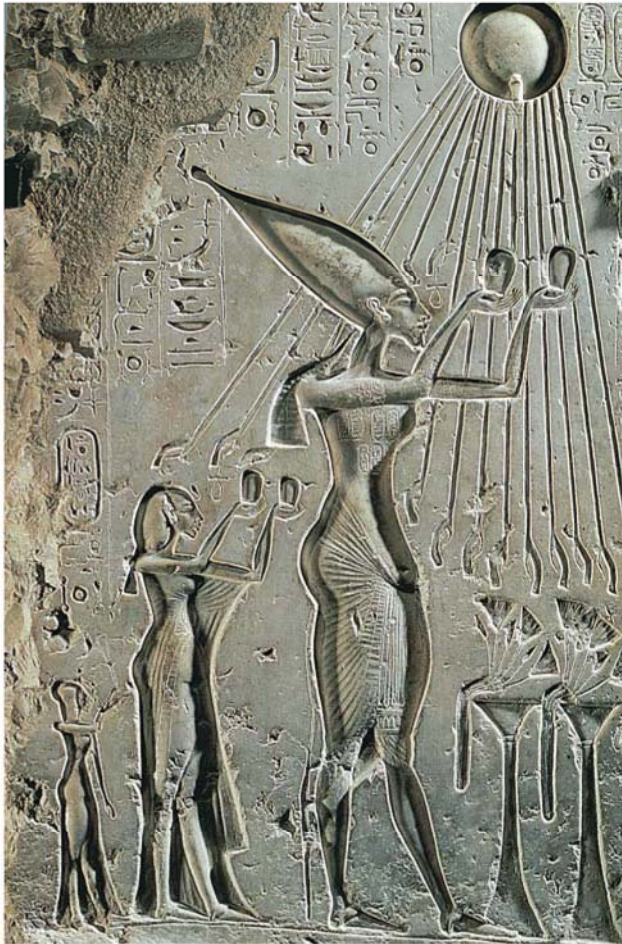
Dawn in the East again! the lands awake,  
10 And men leap from their slumber with a song;  
They bathe their bodies, clothe them with fresh garments,  
And lift their hands in happy adoration.

The cattle roam again across the fields;  
Birds flutter in the marsh, and lift their wings  
15 Also in adoration, and the flocks  
Run with delight through all the pleasant meadows.

Both north and south along the dazzling river  
Ships raise their sails and take their course before thee;  
And in the ocean, all the deep-sea fish  
20 Swim to the surface to drink in thy light.

For thou art all that lives, the seed of men,  
The son within his mother's womb who knows  
The comfort of thy presence near, the babe  
To whom thou givest words and growing wisdom;

25 The chick within the egg, whose breath is thine,  
Who runneth from its shell, chirping its joy,  
And dancing on its small, unsteady legs  
To greet the splendor of the rising sun.



Akhenaten offers a sacrifice to Aten, the sun god (c. 1350 B.C.). Relief from Amarna, Egypt. Archaeological Museum, Cairo. Photograph copyright © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.

**HUMANITIES CONNECTION** Here, Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and their eldest daughter worship the sun god Aten. The royal couple hold up libations, or ritual offerings of drink. The rays coming from the sun's disk end in hands for extending blessings and receiving the libations. This relief carving is from Akhenaten's palace.

Thy heart created all, this teeming earth,  
30 Its people, herds, creatures that go afoot,  
Creatures that fly in air, both land and sea,  
Thou didst create them all within thy heart.

Men and their fates are thine, in all their stations,  
Their many languages, their many colors,  
35 All thine, and we who from the midst of peoples,  
Thou madest different, Master of the Choice.

And lo, I find thee also in my heart,  
I, Akhenaten, find thee and adore.  
O thou, whose dawn is life, whose setting, death,  
40 In the great dawn, then lift up me, thy son.

# I'm going downstream on Kingswater Canal

*Translated by John L. Foster*

I'm going downstream on Kingswater Canal,  
with leave to attend Sun Festival;  
I want to wander there where the tents  
are pitched at the far end of Mertiu Lagoon.  
5 I'll hurry along—I can hardly keep silent—  
thinking of God's holy Day,  
For maybe I'll see my truelove go by  
bound for the Houses of Offering.

I'll stand there with you at the mouth of the Mertiu  
10 (heart, are you with me or back in Ra's city?),  
Then we'll turn back to Offeringhouse Orchard,  
where I'll steal from the grove by the chapels  
A branch for a festival fan.  
There I can watch the whole celebration.

15 With my eyes upturned toward the holy garden,  
and my arms full of flowering branches,  
And my hair heavy with sweetsmelling unguents,  
what a splendid Lady I'll be!—  
Dressed fine like a princess, for Ra,  
20 Lord of Two Lands, on His feast day.

Fine like a bride, love,  
I'll stand there (waiting) beside you.

**17 unguents** (ũng'gwents):  
ointments.



