

The Underworld

When somebody died, the Ancient Egyptians believed they went on a journey to the Afterlife. First, however, they had to travel through the Underworld.

Many tombs show scenes from the Underworld, told as a combination of pictures and hieroglyphs, rather like cartoon strips, and some coffins have maps to help the dead on their journey. The maps show that there were two ways through the Underworld, either by land or by water. Both routes were highly dangerous.

The dead person went down into the earth, taking spells on scrolls from the Book of the Dead with them, which were placed between their hands before they were put into their coffins. The scrolls were written using hieroglyphs on rolls of papyrus. They were extremely important, as the Egyptians believed that the spells would be necessary to protect the dead traveller from evil.

Egyptians believed that the Sun God, Ra, travelled through the Underworld each night, before returning to the world above each morning. Because of this, the Underworld was divided into twelve different caverns, one for each hour of the night. Demons stood guarding the entrance of each cavern. Hopefully, if the spells were successful, the traveller would pass through the twelve caverns and reach the next stage of the journey, the Judgement Hall.