



Egyptian Funeral Customs and Beliefs from B.C. 6000 to A.D. 100.

AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE EGYPTIAN COLLECTION
IN THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM AT OXFORD.

By Agnes G. Weld (former F.A.I.).

THE Ladies' Brass-Rubbing Society of Oxford, before whom I delivered, on December 1st, 1900, a lecture on the above subject, suggested to me that an epitome of the main points of my lecture would be appreciated by the readers of the *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological Journal*, so in the following lines I am acting on that suggestion, though I am unable to reproduce in this Journal my private photographs of the Egyptian objects in the Ashmolean with which my subject was illustrated.

Concerning the aboriginal palæolithic population which has left such abundant traces of itself in stone implements at various localities of the land of Egypt we knew nothing, and when the curtain lifts we find in possession of the country a branch of the Neolithic race of Europe, a fair race akin to the ancient Libyans and Amorites, and to the modern Kabyles of Algeria, mingled with the remnants of an earlier stock of Hottentot affinities. Professor Flinders Petrie has greatly enriched the Ashmolean Museum with objects pertaining to this Neolithic people—the pre-historic race as it is usually called. There may be seen the games they played, and there, too, their hand-made vases of alabaster, porphyry and syenite, as well as the jars of pottery on which they painted quaint devices of boats with deck cabins, of ostriches and of antelopes; and the flint knives in the manufacture of which they had attained absolute perfection, and which they used to slaughter the domestic animals, with whose heads they adorned their houses, and their tombs. They buried their dead unshrouded and uncoffined, in a contracted position, with the knees and arms sharply bent up and the hands joined together before the face, in front of which lay the slate palette shaped like an animal or bird on which the deceased used to grind

the malachite with which he painted a green ring round each of his eyes.

With the interments of the rich were found the large vases ornamented with a wavy pattern which, in the earlier graves, were full of aromatic unguent preserved by a little stopper of clay which, as time went on, was made to fill more and more of the jar, till at last the poor ghost was cheated of his aromatic unguent altogether.

The pre-historic race frequently dismembered their dead, and appear to have occasionally made ceremonial meals of their flesh and marrow; but they never slew the living to bear the departed company in another world, as we have certain proofs that some at least of the race to whom the Pharaohs belonged did. One of the latest of these proofs is furnished to us by the discovery in 1898 of the tomb of Amenhotep II. (who reigned some fifteen centuries before Christ), containing no less than four human victims cruelly slaughtered to keep the defunct monarch supplied with servants after death. About seven thousand years before the Christian era the peaceful possession of Egypt by the pre-historic race was disturbed by the incursion of a vastly more powerful people coming from the regions about Babylonia, and who being armed with metal weapons so completely got the upper hand that when we speak of the ancient Egyptians it is always this Pharaonic race that is present to our minds. The Ashmolean Museum is most exceptionally rich in the art treasures of the earliest monarchs of this race; and very wonderful they are, especially the lifelike terracotta figure of a lion, and the richly carved palettes whereon may be seen the dodo, giraffe and other animals most truthfully rendered side by side with more fabulous monsters. Exquisitely delicate is the carving of the mace-head representing the King going forth to superintend the tillage of the fields, and of the cylinders fashioned according to the pattern these invaders brought with them from Babylonia.

The art collection in the Ashmolean enables us to realize with utter amazement the high level of civilisation reached by the Egyptians under monarchs whose very names were unknown to us a few years ago, for they precede Menes in whose person some five thousand years before Christ we first come upon historical ground familiar to us by his achievement of diverting the course of the Nile to make a site for Memphis his new capital of the whole of Egypt that he had united for the first time under his sceptre.

For more than ten centuries Oxford has possessed a bas-relief that is quite unique, belonging to the reign of one of the later

successors of Menes, when the smaller and older pyramids were being erected in Memphis that were soon to be eclipsed as royal tombs by the fame of the three great pyramids of Gizah from whose summits one can look upon the great necropolis stretching along the desert for twenty miles, where the early worshippers of Osiris lie buried, all having died in the full faith that the good were united with this great god in the other world. It has always seemed to me that the reason why so little is said about life after death in the Old Testament is because the Israelites had learned this truth during their long sojourn in Egypt ; and to the Egyptians themselves there was much that was ennobling in the worship of the good god Osiris who had passed through death in order to show mortals that it was but the gate of life immortal.

When a poor man died his body was only preserved by a brief bath of natron or bitumen and a single shroud took the place of the thousand yards of bandages used for the rich after forty to seventy days of embalming, but there were three things indispensable to all, a ring, the statuettes of farm labourers (whose use we shall refer to presently) and a copy of the book of the dead, the only sure guide through the toilsome and perilous journey to heaven. We have traced back its origin to remote antiquity, and from its pages we learn much of the ideas of the Egyptians concerning the life after death. They believed that man consisted of several parts, only one of which the Khaibit, or black shadow, was severed from him finally by death. The chief parts are the Khat, or body ; the Khu, or Divine Intelligence ; the spiritualised heart, or life ; the Ba, or soul, and the Ka, or double. The latter is a most difficult conception to define, but it is somewhat akin to that held by those who believe in the story of the Scotchwoman seen lying on her death-bed, while simultaneously through the window is seen apparently the very same woman gathering flowers in the garden, which latter figure puts on a more and more lifelike appearance as the life of the sick woman gradually ebbs away. But while the Egyptian held that the mummy appeared lifeless while the Ka was living apart from it, he was very far from holding that the existence of the Ka depended on the weak state of the body, with which it was intimately connected on both sides of the grave. Rather did he hold that the renewed full life of his body in another world, and reunion with it, as well as with the heart and soul, was essential to the Ka's perfect well-being, and hence his inordinate care to preserve the bodily frame.

Just as in the story of the dying Scotchwoman, we are told that

the double was apparently arrayed in the clothes of the former, so the Egyptians believed that not only gods and goddesses, men, animals, and trees had doubles, but that each inanimate thing had likewise its Ka or double, which was convenient for the human Ka because it could pass as easily through the imitation of a doorway (such as that on the tomb bas-relief at the Ashmolean) as through a real door, and it could feed on the Kas of the carved or painted models of eatables as well as on real food. And, moreover, it could become reunited with the Ka of a well-executed portrait-image of the deceased in lieu of his own body should the latter become accidentally destroyed, therefore a rich man took care to have his tomb provided with many of these portrait statues of himself.

To summarize the beliefs mainly held during the two or three milleniums preceding the Christian era as to what took place after death, it was held that the Ka left the mummy in the tomb and taking with him the Ka or double of the Book of the Dead proceeded to follow carefully its directions which saved him from the countless awful perils he had to encounter before reaching the mountains that encircle the world, and the sacred waters across which he would voyage in a magic, sailless and oarless bark, or be transported on the wings of the ibis, the emblem of the god of wisdom, or the back of the bull or cow, emblems of Osiris and his wife Isis or Hathor, to the shores of Paradise, where stand all the gods and goddesses forming the court of Osiris, into whose august presence (familiar to us by the images of him at the Ashmolean) they introduce the Ka, who enters the Hall of Judgment holding the actual heart (which is the life of the deceased) in his hand. Humbly saluting the monarch of the dead and the 42 judges, he protests the innocence of the whole man of which he and the heart are parts, of lying or cruelty or any other grievous sin. The Ka then delivers up the heart to be weighed against the image of truth to see if he has spoken truly. This is the momentous crisis which is to decide whether all the parts which go to make the perfect man are "to be or not to be" for all eternity. Thoth the god of wisdom watches the balance, and if its verdict be favourable declares aloud "Thus saith Thoth, lord of divine discourse, to his father Osiris, lord of eternity. Behold the deceased, Zet-tahuti-af-ankh (or whatever his name may be), in this Hall of the Double Truth, his heart has been weighed in the balance and been found true. No trace of earthly impunity hath been found in his heart. Now that he leaveth the tribunal, true of voice, his heart is restored to him." This res-

toration of the heart is the gift of life eternal to the whole man, and it carries with it the power of the reunion of the double and the heart with the body, soul, and spirit, and gives to the now perfect and immortal personality of the deceased immediate entrance into the inheritance of the justified.

Fields of amazing fertility form a large part of the ancient Egyptian heaven, but to a person of the upper classes the idea of having to till them was anything but a blissful one. We have seen that living men were sometimes put to death to act as labourers for their dead master, but from at least as early an epoch as the XII. Dynasty, the little figures of the Ushabti or "Respondents" (of which we have such splendid examples in the Ashmolean) were usually buried with him instead to "respond" for him when he should be called to do his part in the celestial tillage, at which time the sculptured or moulded pick and basket they carry would grow to as actual reality as the wooden and earthenware figures themselves, being animated by doubles of agricultural labourers and their implements.

Sometimes the more ethereal parts of the justified man chose to be for long ages in the highest heaven with the god to whom he was now united, that Osiris, or Amon who sailed in the bark of the sun as Ka the god of the midday, and Tum the god of the sunset and of midnight, and as Horus the god of the sunrise, one with his father Osiris in the Egyptian trinity. Generally, however, the glorified preferred eventually to quit the heavenly bark, and rejoining his body to live with it on earth a life of greater happiness than he had ever known before.

For the wicked whose hearts showed false in the balance, a terrible fate was in store. They underwent ages of torment and degradation, part of them sometimes passed in the bodies of animals, till at last the sinner's heart was crushed under the divine foot on the steps of the Hall of Judgment, and his life was thereby swallowed up in utter annihilation.

I gave an account of the various processes of embalming, and of the customs attending deaths and funerals from the XVIII. Dynasty to the Christian era, but it is too long to epitomise, and needs the photographs of the mummy of Zet-tahuti-af-ankh and his funeral appointments with which it was illustrated to make it clear; as does my account of the sacred animals specially connected with the dead.