In ancient Egypt, the deliberate mummifications of bodies became a way in which individuals, especially wealthy nobles or pharaohs, were prepared for the afterlife. This informational text outlines the steps required to successfully mummify a body and how one's soul would be judged in the afterlife. As you read the first half of the article, identify the views that ancient Egyptians had on the afterlife. Then, identify the customs that they developed as a response.

A dead noble stands trembling in the Hall of Truth. Behind the noble, Horus, the half-falcon, half-man ruler of Earth, unleashes a piercing stare at the quivering man. Thoth, the sharp-beaked, ibis-headed deity of scribes, sharpens his quill — poised to record a verdict of divine judgment.

Seated before the noble on a golden throne is Osiris, the king of the dead. Upon his head rests a glittering crown with a gorgeous white feather plume on either side. Behind Osiris stands Isis, the revered goddess of nature, who is responsible for bringing the dead earth back to life each year. She holds an ankh, a cross with a loop above the bar. An ankh guarantees that a dead person will live forever.

The noble wonders if he will live forever. Or will he be fed to the hideous crocodile-like god called the Eater of the Dead and forever cease to exist. (How can the noble wonder about all this if he's already dead? The noble is actually in limbo, a place where the souls of dead people go while being judged.)

Osiris begins the process of judging the noble's life. On one side of a scale, Osiris places the heart of the noble, which bares the secrets of the soul. Had the soul lied, cheated, or lived an evil life? The soul defends itself before a variety of interrogating gods.

The noble thinks about his second self, called the ka. The ka lives within every human being. When the physical body expires, the ka goes on to enjoy eternal life, where it can hunt, fish, live with its family, be entertained, and eat favorite foods.

1. The “Hall of Truth” refers to where the judgement of the dead was performed in the afterlife.
2. Quiver (verb): to shake because of fear, cold, nervousness, etc.
3. a type of bird with a down-curved bill
4. god or goddess
5. Revere (verb): feel deep respect or admiration for something or someone
6. Interrogate (verb): to ask (someone) questions in a thorough and often forceful way
Now Osiris holds up the sacred feather, the emblem of truth, and places it on the other side of the scale. If the scales balance, eternal life awaits. If not, the Eater of the Dead has his favorite food for lunch: noble.

“My heart, my mother! My heart whereby I came into being! May nought stand up to oppose me at [my] judgment, may there be no opposition to me in the presence of the Chiefs; may there be no parting of thee from me in the presence of him that keepeth the Balance! Thou art my ka, which dwelleth in my body; the god Khnemu who knitteth together and strengtheneth my limbs. Mayest thou come forth into the place of happiness whither we go. May the Sheniu officials, who make the conditions of the lives of men, not cause my name to stink, and may no lies be spoken against me in the presence of the God.” -“Prayer of Ani,” from the Book of the Dead (1,700 B.C.)

**Mummification**

Before being judged by Osiris, the noble's soul had undertaken a journey that lasted over two months. When the noble died he was brought to the Beautiful House, where an embalmer (often a priest with knowledge of rituals, wrapping, and anatomy) prepared the body to cross to the afterlife.

Egyptians believed that the afterlife would be much like life on Earth and that the soul would want use of its body in eternity. That's why Egyptians made an art out of mummification, or the preservation of the dead.

The process of embalming took great skill and required many steps. What follows is a crash course on Egyptian embalming technique.

1. **Removal of the Brain:** With long hooks, the brain is extracted through the nasal passage. The Egyptians didn't think that the brain had any special use.

2. **Organ Removal (Evisceration):** A cut is made on the left side of the body, and the liver, lungs, and other organs are removed, dried out, and stored in sacred vessels called canopic jars. The heart is left in the body, because it will be needed to be weighed in judgment by Osiris.

3. **Dehydration with Natron Crystals:** Now the body must be dehydrated (have the liquids removed) to stop decay. A type of salt called natron is used. Natron crystals are packed around the body. The crystals absorb body fat and fluids and keep the body from decaying. After being treated for about 40 days, the corpse is washed and dried.

4. **Stuffing:** Because the body has lost much of its mass, resin-stained clothes or bits of sawdust are used to pack the corpse, which by now has also lost its eyeballs. Pieces of cloth are stuffed in the eye sockets and painted black. At this point, the corpse's lips and cheeks are painted.

5. **Oiling the Body:** This elaborate process includes massaging, perfuming, and anointing (blessing with oil) the corpse.

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7. one of the earliest Egyptian deities, originally the god of the source of the Nile River
8. an ancient Egyptian funerary text
9. **Decay (verb):** to be slowly broken down by the natural processes that destroy a dead plant or body
10. **Corpse (noun):** a dead body
11. “Resin” is a sticky substance that is exuded by some trees and other plants.
12. **Elaborate (adjective):** made or done with great care or with much detail
6. **Coloring:** After the nose and mouth are filled with cloth scraps to restore the shape of the face, the body is colored. Men are colored red; women are colored yellow. After the coloring, resin is poured into body cavities.\(^1\)

7. **Arrangement of the Body:** Depending on which period of Egyptian history the deceased lived in, the arms are either placed to the side of the corpse, folded on its chest, or placed with hands on shoulders.

8. **Wrapping:** The body is wrapped in several layers of fine linen; and various body parts receive particular attention. This process takes two weeks, after which a resin is added to the bandages.

9. **Funerary Mask:** A mask, sometimes made entirely of gold, is fitted to the mummy’s body. Symbols of gods often adorned\(^1\) masks.

10. **Burial of Waste:** All materials used to prepare the corpse (such as natron and bloody linen) are placed in a jar and buried away from the mummy’s tomb.

\(^{[10]}\) Finally, the time has come to entomb\(^1\) the mummy. Jewelry, games, furniture, food, clothing, and cosmetics might be entombed with the corpse. These things would be used in the afterlife. The Book of the Dead, a collection of hymns and prayers, might also be included in the tomb to protect the body on its journey to the realm of the dead.

So how did the noble fare before the great Osiris? Ask his mummy.

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\(^{13}\) “Cavity” refers to an empty space within a solid object.

\(^{14}\) **Adorn (verb):** to make more beautiful or attractive

\(^{15}\) to place a dead body in a tomb
Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement identifies the central idea of the text? [RI.2]
   A. It was unlikely for nobles to pass judgement and be granted eternal life by the gods.
   B. The judgement one received in the afterlife was contingent on the wealth one possessed.
   C. Mummification was a process in which citizens were able to show respect for their nobles.
   D. The process of preparing a noble for the afterlife was extensive, important to ancient Egyptians and could not be performed by just anyone.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
   A. “Had the soul lied, cheated, or lived an evil life? The soul defends itself before a variety of interrogating gods.” (Paragraph 4)
   B. “Before being judged by Osiris, the noble's soul had undertaken a journey that lasted over two months.” (Paragraph 7)
   C. “Egyptians believed that the afterlife would be much like life on Earth and that the soul would want use of its body in eternity.” (Paragraph 8)
   D. “Jewelry, games, furniture, food, clothing, and cosmetics might be entombed with the corpse. These things would be used in the afterlife.” (Paragraph 10)

3. PART A: How is Osiris portrayed in the text? [RI.3]
   A. strict
   B. proud
   C. generous
   D. hateful

4. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
   A. “Upon his head rests a glittering crown with a gorgeous white feather plume on either side.” (Paragraph 2)
   B. “Osiris begins the process of judging the noble's life. On one side of a scale, Osiris places the heart of the noble, which bares the secrets of the soul.” (Paragraph 4)
   C. “When the physical body expires, the ka goes on to enjoy eternal life.” (Paragraph 5)
   D. “Before being judged by Osiris, the noble's soul had undertaken a journey that lasted over two months.” (Paragraph 7)
5. What elements contribute to why one corpse might be prepared differently than another?
Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the context of the text, how do people face death? How might this burial process have affected those the deceased was leaving behind? How does this compare to how present cultures mourn their dead through ritual? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

2. In the context of the text, can we control our fate? Egyptian culture practiced mummification because people believed they could control their afterlife through this process. What rituals do other cultures practice in hopes of controlling their afterlife?

3. In your opinion, why did Egyptians spend so much time on the physical presentation of the body when a noble was ultimately judged on the contents of their heart?