

Mysteries of Egypt

Grandpa (Omar Sharif):

No land on Earth possesses more wonders than Egypt... wonders long hidden, but revealed occasionally in a glint of gold... or a curious tale...

OUR story begins with a death -- the death of an unusual boy.

Worshipped as the son of RE, the Sun god, he was a pharaoh of Egypt 3,000 year ago.

We don't know how he died, only that his death was sudden and mysterious. His body was preserved in the manner of other pharaohs, and priests anointed his coffin to prepare him for his final journey -- into the world of the dead.

The rituals had to be finished before his father, the Sun, descended into darkness.

So this young Pharaoh was secured in his tomb -- surrounded by kingly treasures -- and his seal was pressed into its entrance. From that time on, it was to be a place of peace -- hidden and undisturbed throughout eternity. This young King's name was Tutankhamun.

For 3,000 year, King Tut and his tomb in the valley of Kings remained concealed beneath shifting sands.

Other tombs were discovered and completely pillaged, but not his.

Believing he could find it, an Englishman named Howard Carter mounted five arduous expeditions, but they yielded nothing. In 1922, he returned to Egypt for a sixth attempt.

(Exchange in Egyptian)

That year he brought a beautiful canary to brighten his spirits. (Egyptian exchange)

The workmen called it the Golden Bird and told Carter it would bring them good luck.

But as work began, success seemed a remote prospect... and time was running out.

Carter's benefactor, Lord Canarvon, was an English earl fascinated by Egypt, but even he was losing faith... and he threatened to cut off the money. Yet Carter persisted, knowing that, if found intact, the tomb would be filled with amazing artifacts that would help us peer through the shadows of time... to glimpse a world of human splendor long lost... to glimpse our very beginnings.

(TITLES)

Anna (Kate Maberly):

That's a great story Grandpa but I want to know more. You live here and I know you can tell me the real story.

Grandpa:

About?

Anna:

Well, my friends want me to ask about the “curse” -- how anyone who entered King Tut’s tomb...

Grandpa:

Will have some terrible things happen to them. Yes, yes, I know.

Anna:

I don’t know if I believe it... but will you tell me about it?

Grandpa:

So, the Pharaohs, the tombs, the monuments, the great civilization who built them you are not interested in? But the Mummy’s curse you find...

Anna:

Exciting!

Grandpa:

Yes, I can see that. All right then. You shall hear all about it. But first we must take a trip together.

Anna:

Where will we start then?

Grandpa:

At the source, of course...

(Music)

Grandpa:

... The source of the Nile

(Map shots)

It’s the longest river on Earth, the greatest river in Africa -- crossing nearly half the continent. It is born of two rivers -- the White Nile, which rises near Lake Victoria and heads north through Uganda -- and the Blue Nile, which descends from the highlands of Ethiopia. They meet in the desert of Sudan, forming the main trunk of the Nile. By the time it drains into the Mediterranean Sea, its waters have journeyed more than 4,000 miles.

(Shots after maps:)

To the outside world, the source of the great river was an enduring mystery. But to the ancient Egyptians, the source was clear: the Nile flowed from the realm of the gods.

Anna:

But what has the Nile to do with mummies and curses?

Grandpa:

Everything. There would be no mummies, no ancient Egypt -- in fact, no Egypt at all without her.

You see, Egypt without the Nile is a desert... suitable for camels and scorpions, but not great civilizations. It's only here, along the flood plain of the Nile, that the desert's heat is softened... and arid sand is turned to rich farmland. Nourished and irrigated by the Nile, Egypt became the longest-lived of all the great early civilizations.

In ancient times, so much water raced down from the lush valleys of Central Africa that the Nile overflowed its banks in seasonal floods.

Mineral-rich silt was carried towards the desert of Egypt from lands upstream, where wildlife flourished...

(Music)

Grandpa:

Rich lands made possible a vast farming culture and a stable civilization able to turn from daily survival to works of the mind:

Science, mathematics, engineering and astronomy... they studied the heavens and the seasons, gave us the 24-hour day and the 365-day calendar.

Egypt, an old saying goes, was the Gift of the Nile. But the Egyptians believed there was one thing even mightier than the Nile: the sun -- the God they called Re, the God who created everything.

Each morning with its rising, the Sun God would be born. Each night in setting, he would die.

But, the next morning he would rise again never failing. He was eternal.

When a king died, it was believed that he became one with Re. His son, the new Pharaoh became Horus, the falcon, the living God on earth.

And so the Egyptians accorded their ruler absolute power... which they used to build an extraordinary empire.

An empire of buildings so enormous and art so exquisite we are still trying to understand how such wonders were created... how stones from desert were turned into timeless monuments...

Some of the oldest buildings on Earth are here, preserved by the desert air and the skill of their creators. Some are so old that they had already stood a thousand years when Tutankhamun was born.

The enormous obelisks of Karnak were carved from single blocks of granite, moved hundreds of miles by boat, rolled on logs, and perhaps levered up with huge timbers.

Giant statues of Ramses the Great carved at Abu Simbel are still some of the largest figures ever sculpted from solid stone.

We don't know how they did it, but we do know why -- to honor the Pharaohs, both in life and after death.

Anna:

Honor the pharaohs after death? Does that have anything to do with mummies?

Grandpa:

Yes. Look at Tutankhamun for example. When the young king died, the priests sought to create a magical new body for him. For 70 days they labored, drying and preserving the royal body with salts and ointments, then wrapping it in hundreds of feet of linen laden with protective jewels, charms, and amulets.

.. and finally crowning the mummy with an exquisite golden death mask.

Tutankhamun was ready for the afterlife...

Had the boy king lived and died a thousand years earlier, he would have been buried like pharaohs long before him in a monument of colossal proportions... the man-made mountain of stone called a pyramid.

Grandpa:

They probably saw the pyramid's shape as a mystical link between earth and sky, providing the pharaoh's soul with a stairway to the heavens.

Of the fabled Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, only the Pyramids of Giza remain -- built more than 4,000 years ago.

Nearly 500 feet tall, they contained some of the largest pieces of stone ever moved by humans, as much as 50 tons or more. Yet this was accomplished without wheels or pulleys, or even iron tools.

Anna:

How in the world did they do it without modern machinery? The gods certainly didn't do it.

Grandpa:

They used their minds. Knowledge built these great, great structures. Highly sophisticated knowledge. Look.

All of the Giza pyramids are built in perfect alignment with certain stars. That takes knowledge of astronomy.

The pyramids' foundations are laid out in perfect angles and dimensions, precisely correct for the height they wanted to reach. Now that takes knowledge of geometry and mathematics. And finally, you must get these big stones from down here to up there and you must make them all fit perfectly. Now that takes knowledge. An incredible knowledge of engineering and organization.

Anna:

Organization?

Grandpa:

Absolutely. You just said yourself. It wasn't the gods who built these great monuments, it was people. Thousands and thousands of people.

Imagine being one of these people living in a tiny village more than 4,000 years ago. Life would be pretty much the same day in and day out -- farming, herding cattle, fishing in the Nile. Then one day, you're selected to journey by boat down the Nile. You are now part of the great national project to build the Pharaoh's tomb. but you have no idea what kind of a tomb! And then you see -- a monument to the sun, to life eternal.

Anna:

but how DID they move such heavy stones to such great heights?

Grandpa:

There are many theories, but they probably pulled the blocks up mud-slickened ramps -- raising the ramps as the pyramid grew. Masons then set the stones with such precision a postcard couldn't fit between them.

To create the Great Pyramid of Khufu, it took over twenty years... more than two million stone blocks... and some 20,000 people.

And they might have been slaves, but now we think they were mostly peasant farmers recruited to work here part of the year.

With their help, the early Pharaohs built more than a hundred pyramids -- eighty of which survive today.

Anna:

but what about the kings who came later? You told me King Tutankhamun wasn't buried in a pyramid.

Grandpa:

No, he wasn't. They stopped building them. And for good reason.

There were robbers who cared far more about heaps of gold than an eternal journey. The pyramids, to these thieves, were like enormous billboards saying "We've buried the king in here and all his treasure with him."

At any rate, a new plan had to be devised. That's why 500 years after the last pyramids were built, a new era of kings decided that instead of building tombs which everyone could see, why not build tombs which no one could see.

Three hundred miles south of the great Pyramids, across the Nile from the modern city of Luxor, is the barren maze of valleys in the shadow of a natural pyramid.

Here no thief could find the royal tombs. Here the kings and queens of Egypt would remain immortal. Or so they thought.

But greed, breeds ingenuity. Cleverly hiding their devious enterprises, robbers scoured the Valley of the Kings.

over time, each of the valley tombs was found, broken into, and completely plundered -- except one.

Anna:

Except for the tomb of Tutankhamun.

Grandpa:

That, at least, is what Howard Carter believed. And if he was right, it would be the greatest archeological discover of modern times. But after five years, he still hadn't found it, and the situation was becoming desperate.

Then, on the morning of November 4th, 1922, a waterboy trying to secure his jug hit an unusual rock.

(Music)

Carter sent a telegram to Lord Canarvon in England to come quickly and went to Cairo to meet his benefactor.

But while he was away, something very strange happened.

-- The Golden Bird that had brought them luck was killed by a cobra.

Well now the cobra, was the protector of the Pharaoh. And the canary represents those who had entered the tomb.

Anna:

So the cobra ate the canary because of the mummy's curse.

Grandpa:

More likely he ate it because he was hungry.

Anna:

I like the curse idea better!

Grandpa:

Well certainly the workman believed it was the curse. The death of the Golden Bird was a bad omen to them. It meant that someone close to the project would die within the year.

Rumors of a curse mattered little to Carter. he hoped his dig would uncover a tomb like this one -- the tomb of a pharaoh named Ramses the 6th, who ruled long after King Tut. Carter wanted to find treasure... but if not, something just as precious...

Pictures... hieroglyphs that would reveal priceless knowledge of how the ancients lived and what they believed. these images are from the Egyptian Books of the Dead, passports to eternity which were buried with a mummy.

To help a dead king reach the afterlife, they supplied answers to questions he would be asked, spells to deflect dangers along the way.

But preparation for the afterlife began long before death. In grand temples once supported by these pillars -- among the largest places of worship ever built -- the living pharaohs gave offerings as a way of communicating with the god in the world beyond... and courting their favor.

Both immense and colorful, temples like the great structure called Medinet Habu were the settings for magnificent rituals that proclaimed to all not only the pharaoh's power and wealth, but his devotion to the god he would one day join on a journey through eternity.

Anna:

They sure seemed preoccupied with life after death...

Grandpa:

Yes, and probably because no ancient people enjoyed life as much as they did. there are picture stories of invention and adventure... of board games and ball games, of dance and music... of acrobats and mechanical toys... of the affection between husbands and wives... and of family unity and love.

It was the most advanced civilization of its time... and it went on for 3,000 years. But the empire they amassed attracted invaders. Among the stories on temple walls are accounts of battles against outsiders who tried to conquer the kingdom of the pharaohs.

Grandpa:

But, the invading empires became more powerful, even more determined, and so gradually, inevitably, the kingdom of Egypt began to crumble.

Anna:

Well, how could a place as powerful as Egypt just collapse?

Grandpa:

Actually, many things happened... but mostly it was the weakening of the pharaohs' power through civil turmoil, making Egypt vulnerable to invaders.

Little by little, much of the Pharaohs' great empire -- along with its secrets -- was reclaimed by the desert.

(Music over dunes)

But even as the monuments of Egypt crumble, the stories are rediscovered by modern archeologists deciphering the distant past.

Scholars and artists are preserving the Great Sphinx for all humanity.

Research within the Giza pyramids has revealed the brilliance of ancient architects whose sophisticated designs prevented the collapse of these inner chambers and passageways. DNA analysis is helping to identify ties of the royal mummies... and to give us clues about how they lived and died.

New excavations are uncovering the support system of settlements and facilities for the workers who built the Giza Pyramids.

These new discoveries -- and many more -- owe themselves, at least in part, to one discover - - not quite as modern -- of the tomb of a teenage pharaoh.

(Match ignites)

On November 26, 1922, Howard Carter reached the wall outside the first chamber of Tutankhamun's tomb.

Voice:

What can you see?

Voice

Carter, please can you see anything?

Carter:

Yes.

Yes.

Wonderful things. Wonderful things.

Grandpa:

And they WERE wonderful things... kept hidden for over 3,000 years in four chambers carved from solid rock...

They entered to find the only intact king's tomb ever discovered in modern times.

And in the burial chamber, four golden shrines. Inside the fourth shrine: three golden coffins, one inside the other, and at the center... the mummy of the boy-king Tutankhamun.

This was the greatest treasure ever found in Egypt -- well over 2,000 objects of gold, alabaster, lapis and precious jewels made thousands of years ago by master craftsman.

They gave us a personal glimpse of a royal life in ancient Egypt -- and fueled our drive to continue searching, to continue learning.

So through discoveries like Howard Carter's and those of modern archeologists, the ruins of ancient Egypt mean something to us.

(Music)

The stone creations that still loom up from the desert are mute testaments of humanity's great stride forward from hunters and gathers... to builders of majestic structures, to dreamers of grand dreams. These stone wonders are the shape of our beginnings... towering symbols of our rise to become thinkers, artists, poets... and builders.

These great monuments keep us humble, too. After all, they managed to survive for nearly 5,000 years. How long has our modern civilization been around in comparison?

Anna:

Not very long.

Grandpa:

(Laughter) Not very long.

Now, as to the matter of the -- the curse. Lord Canarvon died from an infected mosquito bite five months after King Tut's tomb was opened.

Anna:

So it is true, after all

Grandpa:

Well, Lord Canarvon did die an untimely death, but Howard Carter lived to be 65, and the little waterboy -- who was one of the first into the tomb because of his size -- lived to a ripe old age, as did most of the workers. Clearly, there was no curse of death.

But beyond all of that, a curse you see, flies in the face of everything the Egyptians believed in.

Anna:

You mean life.

Grandpa:

Yes, life.

Death, for them, wasn't an end, it was the beginning of a great journey through eternity, where their gods and kings sailed the morning ship across a lake of flames in the sky, rising in new life each day with the sun.

(Music)

End