

A Matter of Life and Death



I am Ako, a beer brewer from outside of the city of Thebes. I learned my craft as a young man and, while it has not made me rich, it served to put food on the table for my wife and six children. Now that I have lived through thirty circles of the seasons and my sons have made their way into this world, I feel an urgent need to prepare for the next.

Though I am old, I can tell you that I do not fear death. Life has been hard, and I know that the next world will be far better. I have been saving for many years to buy a place for my burial. I will travel to my

next life in a tomb of mud bricks called a “mastaba,” which is all that most poor people can afford. Even though it is not grand, it will be placed on the West Bank of the Nile, so that is very good for me. Since the sun rises or is born in the east and sets in the west, it is better to have a tomb on the side that brings us closer to the next world.

My only worry about death is that all of the parts of my body should come back together. The “ba” or soul, the “ka” or spirit, and the “akh” or supernatural abilities are torn apart by death and can only rejoin in the afterlife. The “akh,” in fact, leaves the body altogether. It goes to the Hall of Judgment, where the god Anubis measures its heart against the Feather of Ma’at, Goddess of Goodness and Order. If the heart weighs less than the feather, Anubis knows the person has lived a good and pure life, and they can live in the wonderful place we call “the land of the Two Fields” with the god Osiris. If not, the akh is eaten by the monster Ammit, which is part crocodile, part lion, and part hippopotamus. I truly do not fear judgment, though. I know that I have lived a good life and worked hard to care for my family.

My fears rise from the fact that the “ba” and “ka” remain in the body while the “akh” is judged. Therefore, it is most important that the body to be kept whole until the akh can return. The problem is that if I were a rich man, I could afford to have my body preserved as a mummy. But the process is very costly, and only a few people can have this done. Since I cannot, I can only prepare my tomb in the best way possible and hope my body will last.

My body will be placed in my tomb in a wooden casket. My wife, if she is still in this world, will prepare foods, and I have already made enough beer. We do not have much, but a few pieces of furniture, plates and cups, and other items will also be placed with my coffin in the tomb. I can only pray that all will go well, so I can live a peaceful and happy afterlife!

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My name is Remmao and as my name means, I am a rich man. Our family owns much farmland near Memphis. Of course, I have never tended the land myself; I have servants and field hands. My tasks are to oversee that the work was well-done and carefully timed, and to pray and give offerings to Hapi. As the goddess of the Nile, she can bless the land and bring us rich harvests, which she has done.

Now though, I have seen "the going up of the goddess Sothis" for forty years so I am very old. My sons now care for our worldly treasure, as I prepare for my next life. My life on earth has been good, yet I know my next life will be better still. I have been a good provider for my family and have been fair in business. I pray Anubis will find my heart to be worthy of entry into "the land of the Two Fields" to dwell with the god Osiris.

The plans for my funeral and burial are well under way. Like many wealthy men in Kemet, I shall be buried in a rock tomb cut into the side of a hill on the west side of the Nile. Of course my tomb will not be as grand as those in the Valley of the Kings, but my wealth does allow for quite a fine burial place for myself and my wife, when she joins me.

We have already begun to prepare the tomb with all we will need in our next life. We have beds and chairs, chests for storage of our clothing, make-up, oils, and other needs. We have games to play and much to read. The walls are inscribed with tales of the gods and events in my own life. We have even hired sculptors to carve models of the cart we drive so we can move easily from place to place in the next world.

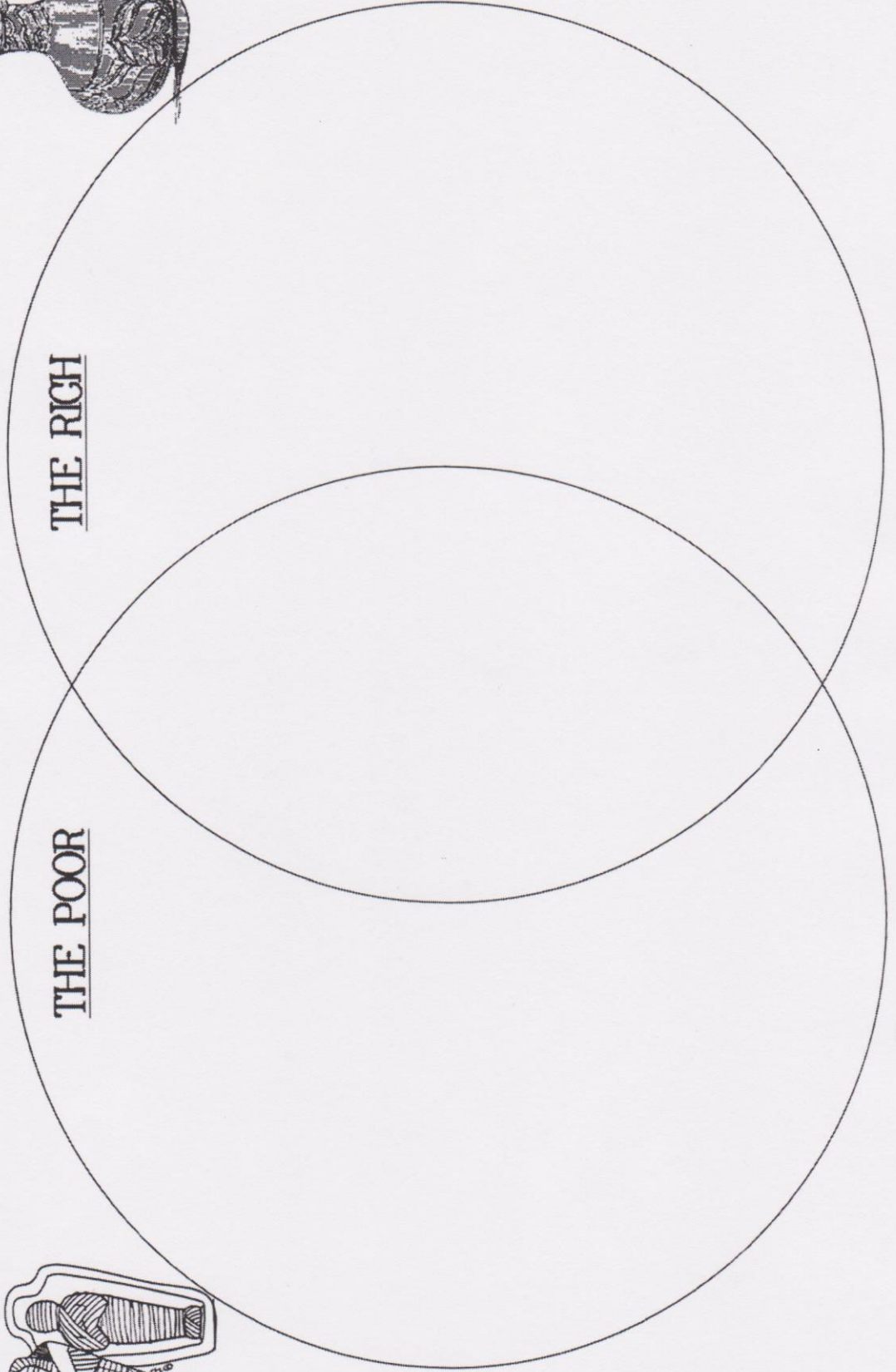
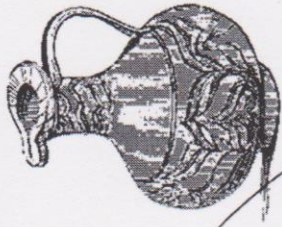
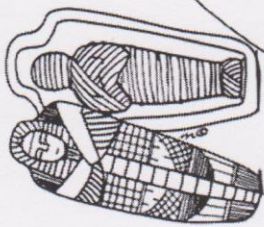
It is left without saying that the preparation of my body shall occur shortly after my death. After the women of my household show their grief to all, my body shall be taken to be prepared for burial. When my mummy is complete, it will be placed in the sarcophagus which has already been made and it, along with the other parts of my body, will be placed in the tomb to be preserved and wait for the "akh" to return. Fresh food and drink will also be placed in the tomb at that time. Then, if all is as I pray, I shall begin my journey to the next life.

While my life here on earth has been all I could have hoped for, I look forward to the day when I shall live with Osiris and meet the other gods and goddesses. Above all else, this is what everyone in Kemet wishes for. To live in "the land of the Two Fields" is truly the goal of all: rich or poor, servant or king.



Rich and Poor Alike -- and Different

DIRECTIONS: Use what you learned in the lesson about Ancient Egyptian religion and burial to compare and contrast the beliefs and practices of the rich and poor.



Use the information you have gathered. In a complete RARE response paragraph, answer the following question:

How were the beliefs and burial practices of the rich and poor Egyptians similar? How were they different?