

Journey Through The Afterlife: Ancient Egyptian Book Of The Dead

ITM magazine

Collections of magic spells to help the deceased on their journey through the Netherworld inhabited by Gods and monsters are featured in the British Museum's major Autumn exhibition supported by BP.



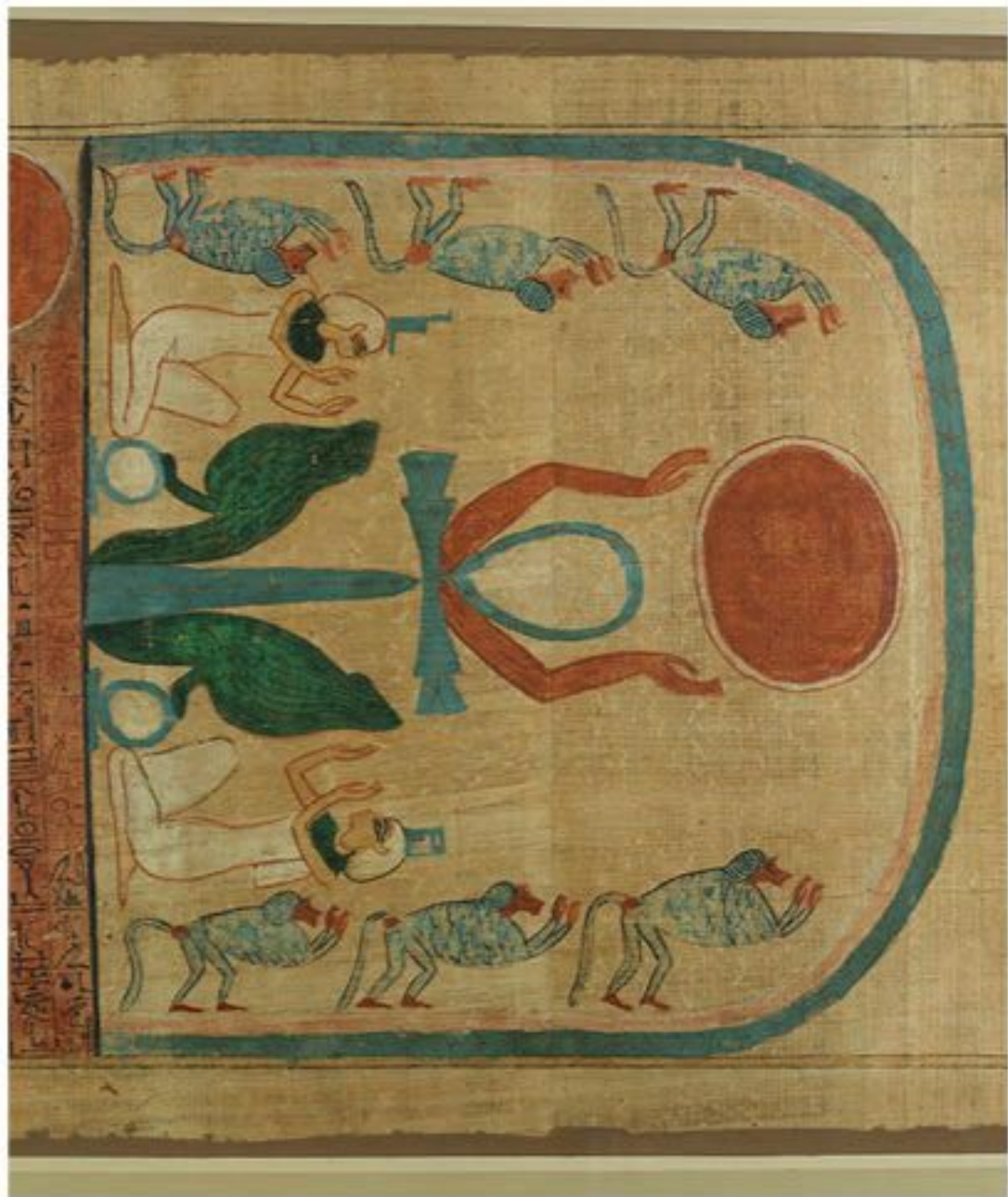
'Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the dead' is a collection of the Book of the Dead papyri used for over 1500 years between c. 1600 BC and 100 AD. It is not a single text, but a compilation of spells thought to equip the dead with knowledge and power which

would guide them safely through the dangers of the hereafter and ultimately ensure eternal life. Ancient Egyptians lived on average for 35 years and their obsession with the afterlife was a response to this reality

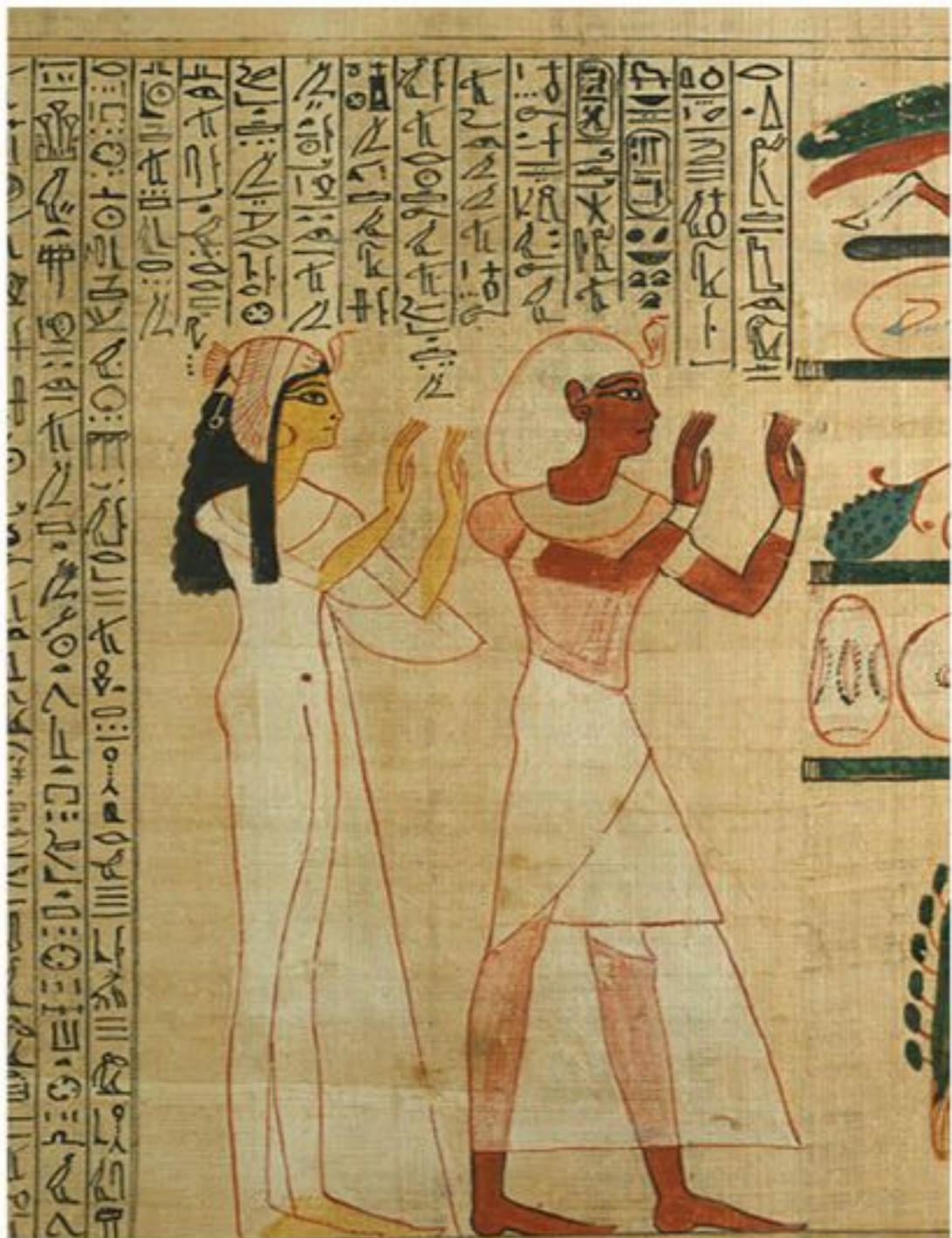
The British Museum has one of

the most comprehensive collections of 'Book of the Dead' manuscripts on papyrus in the world, and this exhibition is the first opportunity to see so many examples displayed together. Due to the fragility of the papyri and their sensitivity to light it is extremely rare for any of these





manuscripts to ever be displayed. The exhibition's curators seem to believe that the best should be



Book of the dead



saved till last. At the end of a dazzling array of painted coffins, gilded masks, amulets, jewellery, tomb figurines and mummy trappings is the world's longest Book of the dead, the Greenfield Papyrus whose 37 meters of 96 plates are displayed in their entirety for the first time.

Also on display are the famous paintings from the papyri of Anhai together with selected masterpieces on loan from major

international collections. Anhai was a woman from a powerful priestly family in the Egyptian New Kingdom who died about 1100BC. Her book was not only filled with spells written by scribes but illuminated with crisp paintings that show crucial scenes and deities. Anhai's paintings portray her as tall and slender with braided black hair, being led by the falcon-headed god Horous who grasps her wrist towards the gates of the dead.



Papyri of Anhai

While the papyri look magnificent the exhibition makes it clear that quite a few of the documents are upmarket bits of pro forma stationery adapted to specific clients to provide them with a post

humus travel guide and a spiritual insurance policy.

The 'Book of the Dead' exhibition creates a penetrating flash of insight into the complex belief



Exhibition video

British
MUSEUM
Museum's book
published in
conjunction with
the exhibition

Journey through the afterlife
**ANCIENT
EGYPTIAN
BOOK
OF THE
DEAD**
Edited by
MARTIN GARDNER



systems of the ancient Egyptians where death and afterlife were a central focus. Beautifully coloured illustrations graphically show the fields and rivers of the Netherworld, the gods and demons whom the deceased would meet, and the critical 'weighing of the heart' ritual - the judgement which would determine whether the soul was admitted into the afterlife or condemned to destruction at the hands of the monstrous

'Devourer'. Although the earliest texts appeared on the mummy shrouds of royal families and high officials, papyrus became the texts' main medium and remained so for more than 1,000 years.

The British Museum has one of the most comprehensive collections of Book of the Dead. "There are some, still, that we would love to put on show but they have pigments that are so sensitive that exposure for a couple of months would damage them. The colour would fade", the curator John Taylor explained.

The Ancient Egyptians are covered in Key Stage 2 at schools so this

**Container
of Papyri of
Anhai**



Greenfield papyrus



exhibition is particularly relevant for this age group and is open exclusively for school visits at certain times. There is an introductory film for families and schools at the entrance. A family

trail has been created to allow young visitors to get the most out of their visit and for the first time at the museum, a separate family multi-media exhibition guide has been especially produced in

Scene from the Book of the Dead Hunter, Egypt c.1280BC



Weighing the heart of the dead



in addition to the adult guide.

- 'Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the dead' 4 November 2010 – 6 March 2011, British Museum, Reading Room.

