Ancient Egyptian civilization lasted for several thousand years. It spanned from 3,000 B.C. until 30 B.C., when Egypt was taken over by the Roman Empire. That was about 5,000 to about 2,000 years ago.

Many of the discoveries and objects of ancient Egypt survived in the Nile River Valley. They hold many clues about this mysterious and artistic ancient civilization.

The Egyptians were one of the first civilizations to believe in the afterlife. They believed that after a noble person died, the person journeyed into the Hall of Truth. There he would be judged by Osiris, the king of the dead. Osiris would decide if the noble should have eternal life, or die forever. To make this decision, Osiris judged the noble's life on Earth. Had the man lied, cheated or been evil in his lifetime? The man's soul, or ka, would answer Osiris's questions and try to defend itself.

**Nobles Who Had Led A Good Life Enjoyed Eternal Life**
If the noble had led a good enough life, his or her ka would be allowed to enjoy eternal life. It could hunt and fish. It could live with its family, be entertained and eat its favorite foods.

The Egyptians believed that the ka had to take a long journey to reach Osiris. When a noble person died, the body was brought to a place called the Beautiful House. There, the body would be prepared to cross to the afterlife.

**Mummification Performed By Priests**

Egyptians believed that the afterlife would be much like life on Earth. They thought the soul would want to use its body in eternity. That's why Egyptians made an art out of mummification, the preserving of dead bodies so they don't decay, or break down.

The process took great skill and required many steps. It was usually done by a priest who had a strong knowledge of religious rituals and anatomy.

The first step was the removal of the brain. Using long hooks, the brain was extracted through the nose. The Egyptians didn't think that the brain had any special purpose.

Next was organ removal. To remove a person's organs, a cut would be made on the left side of the body. The liver, lungs and other organs were removed and stored in sacred vessels, called canopic jars. The heart would be left in the body, though. The Egyptians believed it would be weighed by Osiris.

Then the body had to be dehydrated, or dried out, to stop it from decaying. The Egyptians used a type of salt called natron for this. They packed the natron crystals around the body to dry out the body fat and fluids. The body was treated this way for about 40 days before being washed and dried.

The next steps in mummification were stuffing and oiling the body. Clothes or bits of sawdust were used to stuff the body. Its lips and cheeks were painted, and the body was then massaged, perfumed and and blessed with oil.

Now the body was ready to be wrapped. The arms were either placed to the side of the corpse, folded on its chest or placed with hands on shoulders. Then the body was wrapped in several layers of linen.

**Final Touch Was A Funerary Mask**

The final touch was a funerary mask. The mask, which was sometimes made entirely of gold, would be placed on the mummy's face.
When all of these steps were completed, it was time to put the mummy in its tomb. Jewelry, games, furniture, food, clothing and makeup might be placed with it. Egyptians believed these things would be used by the mummy in the afterlife. The Book of the Dead might also be placed in the tomb to protect the body on its journey. This book is a collection of religious songs and prayers.