

How Did Ancient Egyptians Decorate a Sarcophagus for Pharaohs?

By Kristine Tucker



Decorations on a sarcophagus were designed to offer physical and spiritual protection.

Ancient Egyptians buried their dead in a decorative coffin, known as a sarcophagus. Some buried their loved ones in multiple sarcophagi that were nested one inside the other with the smallest, innermost coffin housing the mummified body. The Egyptians were deeply interested in spiritual matters, so the mummification process, funeral processions and the afterlife were important parts of their customs and culture. A decorated sarcophagus provided a means of helping the dead stay connected to the living in the afterlife. Pharaohs typically had several sarcophagi that were ornately decorated with spiritual symbols.

Afterlife Themes

A pharaoh's sarcophagus was often decorated with symbols etched onto its hard stone surface. Themes about life after death chiseled onto the sarcophagus were meant to aid the pharaoh in his journey to the supernatural world in the afterlife. For example, the decorations on Merneptah's sarcophagus -- a pharaoh who ruled Egypt around 1200 B.C. -- displayed books about the sun god's journeys, broken into 12 sections. The sections were repeated on the box and lids of Merneptah's four sarcophagi.

Royal Seal

Each Egyptian pharaoh had a royal seal, known as a cartouche that signified his identity. The cartouche included both the ruler's signature and a series of hieroglyphs about his life. He would mark his belongings with the cartouche so he could account for his wealth and many possessions. For

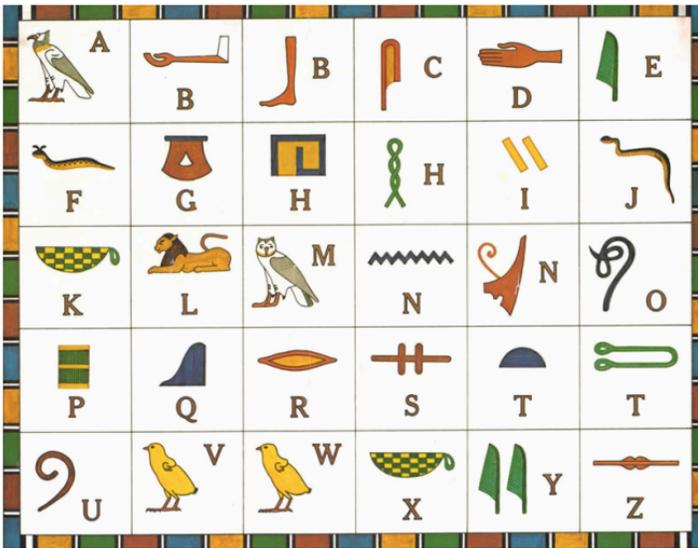
example, archaeologists studied the cartouche on the sarcophagus of Psusennes -- a pharaoh who ruled Egypt around 900 B.C. -- and discovered how he accumulated his wealth. They also used the seal to identify Psusennes as both a pharaoh and a high priest.

Previous Ruler's Cartouche

The outermost sarcophagus was often handed down from generation to generation, or from ruler to ruler, to solidify the family's position as Egyptian rulers. As a result, a former pharaoh's cartouche was often imprinted on the coffin. Merneptah's seal, for example, was also imprinted on Psusennes' sarcophagus, even though he died 150 years before Psusennes inherited his position of power.

Elaborate Paintings

Ancient Egyptians typically painted pharaohs' sarcophagi with detailed ornate paintings and hieroglyphs that offered spiritual protection. They believed the artwork came to life in the afterworld and helped the deceased in the journey from one place to another. They used brightly colored, cheerful paints to adorn the coffins. Most sarcophagi included paintings of large human eyes that provided a window, so the dead could see out of the coffin into the afterlife. Scenes from mythology, battles between the gods, supernatural creatures, images of the gods, sacred animals, trees, water and geographical locations were frequently painted on a pharaoh's sarcophagus.



1. Decorate the Cartouche's border with little hieroglyphics or drawings.
2. ADDING YOUR HIEROGLYPHIC NAME TO THE CARTOUCHE
3. Hieroglyphs are word pictures that represent the sounds of the Ancient Egyptian language.
4. In this cartouche the hieroglyphs that spell out the sounds of the name 'Hartmann' are enclosed.
5. Note that although there are eight letters in the name 'Hartmann', there are only six basic sounds 'H - A - R - T - M - N'. Therefore you only need to use the hieroglyphs that represent those sounds.
6. Hieroglyphs should be arranged to create interesting designs instead of the straight lines that we use to arrange our letters and sentences.
7. Once the cartouche and hieroglyphs are drawn, you are ready to apply color.
8. Try to achieve a sharp clean look that Ancient Egyptian paintings would have had when they were first painted.