Mummies and Death in Ancient Egypt

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The primary author is the individual who drafted the first version of this section; a section that could have been modified since it was originally published.

The History of Mummies

While many believe that mummies are strictly bound to Egypt's history, it is important to remember that the history of mummies can also be seen in other areas of Africa, China, South and North America, and Europe. Each culture does not treat mummies and the process of mummification in the exact same way, but they are all used in regards to death and trying to better preserve the body after the individual has passes.

Depending on the country, or the intent of those mummifying, mummies can be classified into two categories; anthropogenic (bodies intentionally mummified) or spontaneous (Unintentionally created by natural forces). Most of the mummification in countries such as China, Europe, and the Americas were known for spontaneous burial of mummies, which is why they are not as recognized for their mummification history.

Today, mummies from the time of Ancient Egypt are remembered for their religious and technological impact and are considered the most crucial part of the history of mummies.

The Importance of Mummies in Ancient Egypt

Mummies in Egypt are mostly importantly recognized for portraying the distinct use of religion and the purpose of preparing the body for the afterlife. Many have the preconceived notion that Egyptians were obsessed with the idea of death, when in fact; they were fantasied by the idea of life and life after death. The use of mummies in Egypt showed that all mummies were not accidental, that mummies were created with a purpose in mind.

Egyptians were by far the most advanced in their mummification processes, creating embalming, removing organs, creation of tombs, and even burying the bodies of the dead with items that they could take with them in the afterlife. Throughout the three kingdoms most distinctly recognized during this time period, many advancements were made, not only in the way of actual mummification process, but religiously as well.
Today, Egypt is thought to be a shining example of how death is influenced by many other factors rather than just simply passing away. Religion had come to play such a prominent role, displaying how Egyptians used mummies in more ways that just one.

**The Old Kingdom and Mummies**

The Old Kingdom was the first of the kingdoms in Ancient Egypt. In the times of the Old Kingdom, any attempts to save the body of a mummy were evident, but did not yield any conclusive results. One of the most important discoveries of this time is that the Egyptians realized the importance of the desiccation process, which helped to delay decay of the body being buried. Mummies were fully wrapped in gauze type bandages, with imprints made around the face. It was during this period that mummies began to be wrapped with their arms alongside their body, hands placed against the outside of the thighs.

As far as actual burial sites were concerned, stone construction became much more prevalent, and funerary architecture developed greatly during the old kingdom. These burial grounds did not contain decorations, but were buried in pyramids to help transport the sarcophagus to the tombs. Burial places of ordinary people did not reach the same standards of those higher up, seeing that most of the commoners were buried in pits in the ground covered by bricks.

**The Middle Kingdom and Mummies**

The Middle Kingdom was the second kingdom that evolved after the Old Kingdom. Like the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom shows that the Egyptians still had not found a very efficient way to use the mummification process but did show some improvements that helped to improve body preservation.

The Egyptians created a chemical mixture that simply caused them to lose the fat on their body rather than other vital parts of the body. Another similarity between the kingdoms was the lack of furnishings within the burial sites. The burial sites, however, began to contain paintings mainly regarding pilgrimage to Abydos, where the tomb of Osiris was said to be located.

Of course, all individuals who were buried were not treated equally; those who were lower on the social status level did not receive the same embalming treatment as those of more prominent social status. It was during this period that there began to be a regular use of funerary masks and canopic vases, which held human organs, protected by the heads of the four sons of Horus.

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Photo Caption: Mummy on display at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences
photographed by Smallbones
The New Kingdom and Mummies

The New Kingdom was the last of the kingdoms in Ancient Egypt, considered to be the most developed in regards to mummies. The New Kingdom was thought to be the most elaborate of the Kingdoms; many of the tombs have said to be found with fine artwork, vases, and other well-decorated relics. The coffins of this kingdom varied in decoration, some at the beginning of this time frame only having simple decorations and stripes, later era ones containing intricate scenes, texts, and decorative motifs.

During the 1920's, "The Valley of Kings" was discovered, a valley filled with mummies of pharos specifically from the New Kingdom. The most important mummy found from this time period was Tutankhamun. He gave archeologists the most insight into how royal mummies were dealt with in the New Kingdom. Royal mummies often contained objects funerary in nature such as food, sculptures of animals, and model boats meant to represent the voyage into the afterlife. The New Kingdom also emphasized the importance of Osiris, god of the dead.

The Impact of Mummies Today

Today, mummies can give us extremely important insight as to how past cultures and societies functioned. From how well mummies were buried, where they were buried, and what they were burred with, it has greatly helped archeologists uncover some of the great mysteries of the past. It can also give a clue as to the religion of a culture, and how that religion affected death, and the process associated with it. Today we view Ancient Egypt as one of the most prominent places to study mummies due to their rich history into the cultures and civilizations of the day.

Annotated Bibliography


I chose this book because I was very interested in the construction of the pyramids. How they were built, the labor involved, and the mysteries behind them.


This website talks about the evolution from the time of the Old Kingdom and how it influenced the Middle Kingdom.

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Photo Caption: Mummy on display at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences photographed by Smallbones

I chose this book because I wanted to know how the daily lives of the Egyptians were impacted by their society, culture, and traditions.


I liked this website because it gave pictures of many of the items that the Egyptians often used in burial. It explained why they used some of the items they did, and the impact it had on the afterlife.


This website talked about the use of canopic jars during burial practices and rituals used during the death of mummies.


I used this book because after reading through it I determined I wanted this topic to be the central focus of my research. I found it very interesting how the Egyptians handled death, and how religion influenced the process.


This website talked a lot about the influence of Pharos during this kingdom, and how it was by far the most advanced of the previous two kingdoms.


I liked this website because it went into a lot of depth about the ceremonies that went along with burials/funerals. It was very interesting to see all the different rituals.

This website took me through the dynasties in Egypt and the importance they had to the development of the civilization.


This website talks about the impact of the Old Kingdom and some of the rituals and traditions involved with the kingdom.


I chose this website because it defined mummies and their origin along with their functions and how they were important to Egyptian culture.


I liked this eBook because it talked more about the process of embalming and death preparation of mummies. It also talked about bodily preparation before the individuals were prepared for mummification.


I chose this book because I was also interested in the types of art introduced and produced in this era. I wanted to see how the art reflected the Egyptians process of thinking.


This website talked about the Middle Kingdom and how it was influenced by the Old Kingdom and how it impacted the New Kingdom.


This website talked about the old kingdom in Egypt and what influence it had on the development of the country.

Talks about the New Kingdom and how it was influenced by the two previous kingdoms.


I decided to use research from this book because I wanted to see how Egypt developed over time, and what factors influenced its development as a whole on its society and culture.


I chose this academic journal because it gave insight into a specific figure’s information and what they found in the tomb that reflected who he was as a person.


This article talked about how different mummy tombs contained different items in regards to their status and items that were meant to be most meaningful to them.


I liked this source because it gave an interesting story about trying to depict the DNA from mummies to see if there were any dominant genes or traits that allowed people to live longer.


I chose this set of books because I gave a good insight as to how Egypt developed and grew as a civilization, and how it was influenced by the growth of other cultures during the same time period.


I used this website because it gave me some information about where current mummies and artifacts are kept today, and a brief overview of mummies in ancient Egypt.

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Photo Caption: Mummy on display at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences photographed by [Smallbones](http://www.collegehistory.info/ancient/manuscripts/05-mummies.html)

This site gave an inside look as to how mummies were preserved and the embalming process they used to keep mummies lasting longer.


I liked this website because it gave a virtual tour of the tombs and the process that mummies went through before they were placed and buried.


I used this site to explore the impacts of the Old Kingdom in Ancient Egypt. It gave information about how the Old Kingdom was run and the importance of it.


I used this eBook to read about the history behind mummies in ancient Egypt, the meaning behind them, and what impact they had on Egypt.


This website talked about the use of tombs in Ancient Egypt and the use of tombs in other societies.


I picked this text because I wanted to get a general idea of all aspects of Egyptian culture. It gave me more insight into civilizations, history, religion, death, and some of the many Egyptian gods.