

fallen off might be used to stuff the stomach, while the missing limb was replaced with a makeshift one of cloth. Some unfortunate mummies ended up consisting of nothing but a skull and some **RAGS MOUNTED ON A BUNDLE OF REEDS**.

Bandaging took about fifteen days, and was very complex. Linen was used. **FINGERS AND TOES WERE WRAPPED** separately. Many linen tampons, each marked with the name of a god, were bound to the head. The “Overseer of Mysteries” chose the various pieces of material and the embalmer placed amulets between the layers of cloth. The bandages were impregnated with resin. **NOTHING THAT TOUCHED** the deceased’s flesh could be thrown away. Every scrap of linen stained with blood, all natron wadding which absorbed fats, used sawdust, greasy stuffing, every rag had to be saved, even the embalming chamber was swept, **THE CONTENTS PUT INTO SACKS**, and buried near the main tomb.

Around the time of Christ, mummification, which had developed into an exquisite art form and science, returned to the simple process with which it had begun. Bodies were no longer cut open but simply covered with a layer of salt, dressed in ordinary clothing, and **BURIED IN THE SAND**, much the way they had been three thousand years before.

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance in Europe, **MUMMY FLESH** was thought to have medicinal properties. It was prescribed for practically every ailment. Either fragments of a body or a thick, pasty oil from burned mummies was applied, **OR INGESTED**. The demand for mummy flesh became so great that mummies were concocted by enterprising individuals. There were laboratories in France that obtained their supplies from the bodies of executed criminals or unclaimed corpses from hospitals.

In the 1860’s, **THREE-HUNDRED-THOUSAND CATS** were disinterred, sent to England, and converted to fertilizer. In the 1890’s, Augustus Stanwood, owner of a paper mill in the U.S., used linen from mummies to make **BROWN WRAPPING PAPER** sold to food retailers. Business went well until a cholera epidemic was traced to his mill. A mummy belonging to an English Lord sank with the Titanic.

— MICHAEL SUMNER

from *Another Room Magazine* 3, no. 5 (1984)



No.7 IN THE BURNING BOOKS SALVO SERIES OF EDUCATIONAL PAMPHLETS
PO BOX 2638 SANTA FE NM 87504 • BURNINGBOOKS.ORG • 2003

MUMMIES



FIVE-HUNDRED-MILLION MUMMIES

Life is an unfathomable confusion of sensory experiences, a few of which get stuck in the **ADHESIVE OF MEMORY**. Death is **THE LAST OBSERVABLE ACT** the body and mind take part in together . . . there is much disagreement about what occurs after that. Is there something that goes beyond the machine after it is vacated by “life” and loses its heat? What leaves? How was it fastened to the **MUSCLE**?

Most cultures have had beliefs involving a spirit or soul that is eternal and somehow capable of separating itself from the body. The ancient Egyptians, among other peoples, believed the human to be of three distinct parts: **THE BODY**, **THE KA**, and **THE BA**. The **KA** is a **FRAGMENT OF DIVINE ESSENCE** from the universal spirit that gives life to all matter. The body and the **KA** are born out of **THE CHAOS OF THE WORLD**. It is the source of the personality, it is a person’s double, **IT IS THE LIFE FORCE**. The **BA** is created at the moment the **KA** and the body are united. It is the true soul, it is a person’s moral sense or conscience, and it is responsible for behavior. At death, the **KA** and **BA** separate from the corpus, the **BA** flies away to the boat of the sun-god. The **BA** will not survive unless it unites again with the immortal **KA**. The body must be available and ready for the **KA** to recognize its face and re-enter it after death, so . . . the body was seen as essential for **SURVIVAL IN THE AFTERLIFE**, therefore it must be preserved. This is the belief behind the development of mummification in ancient Egypt.

The earliest Egyptians, around 2,700 B.C., were buried in the **HOT DRY SAND** and became naturally dehydrated and preserved. When closed chambers began being used, to protect the buried from **THIEVES** and **THE ELEMENTS**, decay was a problem, so special techniques were developed to help with preservation, eventually developing into an **ELABORATE RITUAL PROCESS** lasting seventy days.

At first only the royalty were mummified. **THE PHARAOH ALONE**, having the divine nature of Osiris, could authorize a few high dignitaries for mummification; this spread to the entire wealthy classes, and eventually every peasant could be **MUMMIFIED, FOR A PRICE**, to insure eternal life. The high point of embalming occurred around 1000 B.C. when about **500,000,000 HUMAN BODIES** were embalmed as well as millions of bulls, crocodiles, ibises, cats, reptiles, and other animals. At least forty species at this time were the center of particular religious cults. Finally everything degenerated so much, cats were being commercially bred so they could be mummified and then offered to the cat-goddess, Bastet. Even beetles were being embalmed.

To the Egyptian, **THE BRAIN HAD NO SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE**. It was usually removed in small pieces through the nasal passage with long bronze needles having spirals or hooks on the end. (Some embalmers preferred to pull the brain out through an eye socket, or to decapitate the individual and remove the brain through the neck and then **REATTACH THE HEAD**.) Next, the entrails were removed, through a five-inch incision made with a flint knife between the ribs and pelvis or along the **FOLD OF THE GROIN**. First the intestines, then the stomach, liver, spleen, peritoneum, kidneys, and lungs. The bladder was usually left

alone, and the heart was carefully kept in place. The words, “Put my head on my neck . . . keep my limbs together . . . and **LET NOT MY HEART BE CUT OUT**,” are inscribed on one sarcophagus. The heart was believed to contain the intellect, the emotions, a person’s character, and to be the center of all physical life. It was essential for eternal life as well.

There were three grades of mummification. Embalmers showed their clients realistic, painted wooden models. They explained that the very expensive highest grade included evisceration through an incision in the side; the middle grade avoided great expense by giving the corpse an **ENEMA OF OIL OF CEDAR** to dissolve the organs (after the required number of days, a wax plug was removed, the oil was released, and the liquidated entrails would flow out); and the third and poorest method was simply to wash the body out with plain water.

When the organs are removed by surgery, they are then washed in **PALM WINE AND SPICES** and put into natron (hydrated sodium carbonate found naturally in Egypt) for **FORTY DAYS**. When dry, they are coated with hot gum resin, wrapped in four separate linen packets and put into four urns, each with a lid **IN THE LIKENESS OF THE CHILDREN OF HORUS** . . . small intestines were covered with the head of a dog-faced baboon, “Hapi”; the liver topped with a falcon, “Qebehseuf”; the stomach with the head of a man, “Amset”; and the lungs under the jackal, “Duamutef.” These were sealed with plaster and placed in a chest near the sarcophagus. Later, however, the practice of replacing the dried entrails in the body or between the legs became popular. The internal female organs were always removed, and the external male organs almost always left in place. The **NAILS** of fingers and toes were **TIED ON WITH A THREAD**. The corpse was covered with dry natron for forty days after the packets of natron had been placed inside.

The body was washed again inside and out, then dried. The empty skull was **STUFFED THROUGH THE NOSE** with linen packets soaked with resin and spices, and the nose was then sealed with beeswax. If embalmed viscera were not replaced, the body was filled with linen packets containing dry natron, myrrh, and cinnamon. Other packets may have been soaked with resin and filled with **SAWDUST AND AN ONION** (thought to have magical properties). Linen pads were placed in the eye sockets. (Note: the eyes were not removed but dehydrated so severely during these processes, the sockets appeared empty. Later, when modern scientists discovered a way to rehydrate mummies, they were surprised to find the mummies **SUDDENLY HAD EYES**.) The body was then elaborately rubbed with precious ointments to make it supple. The head was massaged with olibanum oil. The rest of the body was rubbed **OVER AND OVER WITH CUMIN OIL**, cedar oil, incense, and other fragrant ointments. Hot resin was poured through the inside of the body, the incision was then closed with a paste of resin and beeswax, or sewn with thread. A royal corpse’s wound was sealed with a gold plate engraved with the eye of Horus. A patch of gold decorated with the royal cartouche “Sunsflesh” might be placed on **THE TONGUE OF ROYALTY**. The men were dyed red and the women saffron.

Honey was sometimes used as a preservative. Once, a sealed jar of honey was found containing the well-preserved tiny corpse of a child, fully clothed and adorned with amulets.

Embalmers were sometimes careless and had to do makeshift repairs that would go unnoticed beneath the layers of linen. **FRAGMENTS OF A DECAYED LIMB** which had