

# MUMMIFICATION IN ANCIENT EGYPT

## Video "I was mummified"

1. How long does it take for a body to start decomposing?
2. Is there any written formula? How was it transmitted?
3. Why was the process of mummification considered necessary for the well-being of Egypt?
4. What is a mummy?

## Mummification and the *Book of the Dead*

The *Book of the Dead* speaks highly of mummification. Many of the ancient Egyptians followed the *Book of the Dead*, therefore mummification was necessary when someone passed away to go on to the next world.

Preserving one's body was needed and was basic funeral practice in ancient Egypt. If the body was not reserved, then the *ka* (vital essence) would not be able to return to the body and find sustenance. If the body had taken normal process and decayed it would become unrecognizable, therefore the *ka* would starve and the afterlife of the one who died would be in jeopardy. This means the ancient Egyptians used mummification in order to prevent the body from decaying.

Many look at mummification as just being a technical process in order to fill the body, but the truth is that it was also a ritual process. They were always looking into recreating Osiris, whom was the first original mummy. The "hery seshta" was the individual who was in charge of doing the mummification; this is the one who took part of Anubis who is the jackal god. The assistant of the mummification process is the "hetemw netjer." The individual who reading the magic spells during the mummification process was known as the "hery heb." The one who did the actual removal of the internal organs along with bandaging up the body was called the "wetyw."

When someone died, he would be taken to the place of purification. This is where he would be washed in natron, which is a solution of carbonate and sodium bicarbonate. After this, he would be taken to the "per nefer" which means the 'house of beauty', where the mummification process would be performed. The internal organs of the dead person were taken out, dried, rinsed and then bandaged. The internal organs were put in jars, which would be placed next to the body in the tomb. They would decorate the jars with the "four sons of Horus." Hapy is the god that had a baboon head and he protected the lungs, Imety protected the liver and he was the human headed god, Duamutef was a jackal headed god and he protected the stomach and Qebhsenuff was a falcon headed god that protected the intestines. Hapy would be pointing North, Imsety pointed South, and Duamutef pointed East and Qebhsenuf pointed to the West.

After the organs were removed and preserved, the natron would be moulded around the corpse and maybe even inserted into the body cavity. During mummification the body was left for about forty days to dehydrate. When the body dried, the stuffing would be removed and the body would be packed with bandages that had been soaked in resin along with other sweet smelling perfumes. After this process, they bandaged up the body, which created the mummy, as we know it today.

(From Egyptian Diamond: <http://www.egyptiandiamond.com/ancient-egyptian-mummification.php>)