



Unwrap the Mummy

The earliest ancient Egyptians buried their dead in small pits in the desert. The heat and dryness of the sand dehydrated the bodies quickly, creating life-like and natural 'mummies'.

Later, the ancient Egyptians began burying their dead in coffins to protect them from wild animals in the desert. However, they realised that bodies placed in coffins decayed when they were not exposed to the hot, dry sand of the desert.

Over many centuries, the ancient Egyptians developed a method of preserving bodies so they would remain lifelike. The process included embalming the bodies and wrapping them in strips of linen and today we all this process mummification.

First, his body is taken to the tent known as 'ibu' or the 'place of purification'. The body is washed with good-smelling palm wine and rinsed with water from the Nile. A cut is made in the left side of the body to remove the liver, lungs, stomach and intestines. This is important as these organs are the first part of the body to decompose. They are washed and packed in *natron* to dry them out (much as the hot desert sand would do). The heart is left in the body because it is the centre of intelligence and feeling and will be needed in the afterlife.

A long hook is used to smash the brain and pull it out through the nose. The body is covered and stuffed with natron to dry out. All of the fluids, and rags from the embalming process will be saved and buried along with the body.

After forty days the body is washed again with water from the Nile. Then it is covered with oils to help the skin stay elastic. The dehydrated internal organs are wrapped in linen and returned to the body. The body is stuffed with dry materials such as sawdust, leaves and linen so that it looks lifelike. Finally the body is covered again with good-smelling oils. It is now ready to be wrapped in linen.

In the past, when the internal organs were removed from a body they were placed in hollow canopic jars. Over many years the embalming practices changed and embalmers began returning internal organs to bodies after the organs had been dried in natron. However, solid wood or stone canopic jars were still buried with the mummy to symbolically protect the internal organs.

A priest reads incantations out loud while the mummy is being wrapped. Between the layers of wrapping, the embalmers place amulets (lucky charms) to protect the body in its journey through the underworld. These spells will help ward off evil spirits and help the deceased make the journey to the afterlife. The arms and legs are tied together. A papyrus scroll with spells from the Book of the Dead is placed between the wrapped hands. More linen strips are wrapped around the body. At every layer, the bandages are painted with liquid resin that helps to glue the bandages together. A cloth is wrapped around the body and a picture of the god Osiris is painted on its surface. Finally, a large cloth is wrapped around the entire mummy. It is attached with strips of linen that run from the top to the bottom of the mummy, and around its middle.

A board of painted wood is placed on top of the mummy before the mummy is lowered into its coffin. The first coffin is then put inside a second coffin. The funeral is held for the deceased and his family mourns his death. A ritual called the 'Opening of the Mouth' is performed, allowing the deceased to eat and drink again.

Finally, the body and its coffins are placed inside a large stone sarcophagus in the tomb. Furniture, clothing, valuable objects, food and drink are arranged in the tomb for the deceased. Now his body is ready for its journey through the underworld.

