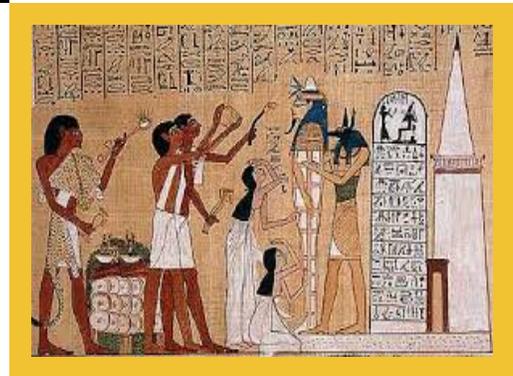


Mummy Essay

By McLean Burke #7



Mummification is Not Monstrous!

By McLean Burke #7

Toilet paper trails, skinny, crossed arms, laying there, still... stiff. No movement in the cold, dead body. But is it really dead? Is it gone? Forever? What are these creatures? Simply, an old Halloween decoration left in the basement or... a person? Mummies are a mystery. Until now. For years, kids have grown up believing mummies are



mythical figures, that they don't *truly* exist. And I too am guilty of thinking mummies were only in the movies. But, we were wrong. Mummies are real. No, they don't eat your brains and kill you (you should see what they have to go through!), but they do exist. But why? And, how? I had a lot of questions, too, and they will all be answered in good time. In the meantime, kick back, relax, and enjoy the myth of the very first EVER mummy... Osiris!

Osiris was the King of Lower Egypt. He was loved by all because of his great teachings in the ways of farming and proper civilization. Osiris had an extremely jealous brother named Set. Set hated his guts! In fact, Set despised Osiris so much, that he devised a devious plan to get rid of him once and for all! Set's strategy was to deceive Osiris with an offer no man could resist...a party! Osiris and his wife, Isis, lived lives of luxury and prestige! They were a wealthy wed couple with much taken for granted.



Including, their safety. On one hot, summer day, while Isis and Osiris were carelessly lounging by the pool, the doorbell rang and there stood the mail carrier, armed and loaded with envelopes up the wazoo! Little did they know that one of these sealed letters could end the life of Osiris...



"Osiris, honey! The mail's here," Isis called.

"Anything for me? I'm expecting a bonus from the Gods Ahoy store down the Nile!" answered Osiris.

"No bonus check, but, there is an invitation from... Oh! Nevermind, it's just junk mail!" Isis said suspiciously.

"An invitation from whom? Please tell me," Osiris pleaded.

"Well, it's an invitation from your brother," Isis replied hastily.

"Set? What am I invited to? I hope it's not another wedding! That man has been through too many wives!" complained Osiris.

"It says here that it's just a large banquet for friends and family, and Set feels bad about not inviting you to the last one." stated Isis.

"Alright. I'll go. But I won't enjoy it!" Osiris exclaimed.

"Honey, please be careful. You DO know what happened at the last party of Set's, don't you?" Isis cooed in a cautious voice.

"Yes, yes, dear. I promise I won't eat another pharaoh's heart without their permission!" Osiris assured.

"Good. Now go get ready!" said Isis, clearly satisfied.

Meanwhile, Set was getting ready for his party. He set out food, drinks, goat bladder balloons, streamers, and of course, a large, wooden box, made especially for Osiris. In the background, Set had The Journey playlist blasting that he had downloaded just for this occasion.

"Osiris won't suspect A THING! He will walk in, get comfortable, have a drink or two, and then BAM! Into the the box he goes! And from there? Straight down the Nile! Osiris will be gone once and for all, and then I will be the favorite! Muah hahaha!" Set crowed despicably.

Ding-Dong!

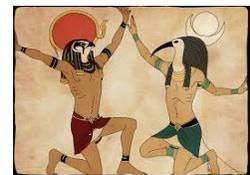
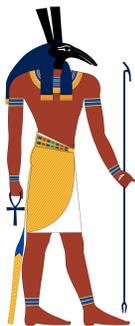
"Ha! My first guests have arrived! I invited all of the gods and goddesses, so who could it be?" Set pondered.

Set opened the door, and there stood Ra and Thoth. Set welcomed them in, and one by one, more people began showing up. Soon, there

were so many people, Set thought he might need a bigger house! It was almost halfway through the party and Osiris STILL hadn't made his presence known. The visitors were getting restless, and Set was fretting like a turkey on Thanksgiving! Finally, Osiris knocked on the door, and joined the prestigious party.

"Welcome, brother! I am so glad you came! Gods and Goddesses, this is my brother, Osiris, as you may know, and he is here at last!" Set shouted above all the noise.

As Osiris looked around, he noticed that none of HIS friends were attending the party. *Odd*, he thought, *but it does seem like a nice party. Oh, guacamole!* Osiris was certain this was just a friendly gathering to socialize with fellow people of importance. And as he



made his way over to the guacamole, he began to chat and mingle with many of the attendees.

"Let the games... **BEGIN!!**" bellowed Set at the top of his lungs.

All of the gods and goddesses clustered around Set like they were puppies, and he was a chew toy. Osiris stood back, not wanting to insert himself and ruin the fun. But what Set said next really confused Osiris.

"See this large, wooden box? Covered with the finest jewels and tricked out with the latest gadgets?" asked Set as the party guests oohed and aahed like children on Christmas morning.

"We will have a contest! Each of you will take turns laying in the box, and whoever fits the best, wins the box! Let's see... hmm... Ah! Osiris, you will go first!" demanded Set.

"Oh, no! I couldn't! Let one of them go before me!" Osiris insisted.

Nephthys, being the most popular and the "queen bee" of the group, pushed to the front of the small crowd and voluntarily "offered" (she practically shoved Set over to get near the box!) to go first. And, quite frankly, that was alright with Osiris. He didn't especially enjoy the spotlight as much as others might. But, much to her dismay, the box was just a wee too small for Nephthys. The gods and goddesses began to form a line, waiting restlessly for their turn. And, one by one, all failed. Nobody seemed to fit! Set became very impatient and finally put his foot down.



"That's it, everyone! It is now time for Osiris to take a crack at the box. He has been waiting long enough, and, let's face it; if the past twenty of you haven't fit, what are the chances the other five of you will? Come on, bro! Step in!" Set said enthusiastically.

Osiris hastily replied, "Um, okay, I guess. No harm in trying, right?"
Wrong.

As soon as Osiris was comfortably stretched out in the box (which, by the way, was a perfect fit.), Set laughed an evil laugh and **SLAMMED** the lid closed. He quickly fastened the locks so there was no way of escaping for Osiris. Set had two burly men hoist the box onto their shoulders and carry it down to the banks of the Nile River, conveniently located just outside of Set's house. All the while, Osiris could be heard, screaming for help. Osiris was thrown into the raging river with ease,



and swiftly carried down, bobbing above and below the surface rapidly. Set watched as the box disappeared down the Nile.

"Success! My plan is complete! Osiris is gone, and now Egypt will look to me for support!" Set said under his breath.

News soon reached Isis, not long after the "accident", and she was truly devastated. Her husband was surely dead, and it was all Set's fault! She immediately went in search of Osiris, searching the banks of the Nile until, finally, she found him tangled in a tree on the shores of Asia. Isis was so relieved to find her beloved. She carried Osiris with her back to Egypt, but Set got his hands on the body AGAIN! This time, there was no mercy! Set chopped Osiris's body into fourteen pieces and scattered them across Egypt.



"Aha! This ought to do the trick! There is no way Isis will be able to retrieve all fourteen pieces AND put him back together!" Set shouted into the clouded sky.

Unfortunately, Set was right. Isis couldn't achieve a task like that *alone*, but with some help, it was very probable. With the assistance of her sister, Nephthys, Isis was able to find all of the pieces. Isis wept during the process- I mean, wouldn't you? So, some believe that Isis's tears are the reason the Nile River floods every year.

When the sun god, Re, saw Isis crying, he took pity on her and sent down Anubis to help her revive Osiris. Anubis had the head of a jackal and the body of a human. First, Isis and Anubis fitted the fourteen pieces together. Then, they wrapped the body with fine linen cloths. After



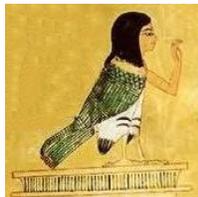
that, Isis and Anubis prayed over the body of Osiris and magically, the body became whole! When Osiris rose from the dead, he immediately became the god of the Underworld. It was believed that when a pharaoh died, they would join Osiris. Egyptians also accepted that if they were treated the same way Osiris was, they too would be able to live on after physical death.

In several wall paintings and murals, Osiris can be shown as a mummy, his legs bandaged together, and wearing a false beard of kingship. Fortunately, although he physically did not seek revenge on his despicable brother, the job was done for Osiris. Isis and Osiris conceived a son named Horus, and when he grew up, he



killed his uncle Set in a traumatic battle, where Horus actually lost his left eye. Now, his eye is a common symbol known as the Eye of Horus. The Eye of Horus is often put on pharaoh's sarcophaguses to allow the dead to "see again." Now you know the truth! Mummies didn't just appear from a horror movie. There was a reason for them, that was believed to be beneficial to many Egyptians. I guess you could say Osiris was the "founding father" of mummification!

Now that you know how the whole mummy thing started, it's important you know more about why they were made. Mummies were made because of the Egyptians' very strong belief in the magical powers of image. People in Ancient Egypt believed each person had a soul or spirit that lived on after that person perished. This spirit could eat, drink, and move around. It was thought to have been able to enjoy the same things as when the deceased was still alive. But, if the body was destroyed, the soul might have died. So, the dead must have a recognizable body in order to go to the afterlife. One's soul would take two forms; the Ba, and the Ka. The Ba and Ka were vital for the person to go to the afterlife, so you can imagine what kind of pressure was put on the Ba and Ka!



The Ka was the double, unseen twin of a dead Egyptian. Ka was created by the great god, Khnum. Khnum had the head of a ram but the body of a human. The Ka lived inside of a body until it died. The Ka needed to be an exact and precise image of the previous body it had occupied. The Ka would usually take form in a statue, or better yet, a mummy. In fact, the Ka was very similar to a human, in the ways of needing food and water to survive. So, when a person died, Egyptians would leave jars of water and grain in the grave, just in case the Ka was in a snacky mood! As you can see, the Ka was very high maintenance!

The Ba was the second spirit. Unlike the Ka, the Ba was able to leave the tomb. And, guess what? The Ba had a super power: shapeshifting! The Ba could take any shape or form at any given time! How cool is that? Even though the Ba had that special ability, it is usually shown as a bird with a human head of the deceased it is representing. The Ba could also pass through walls, along with shapeshifting! Although the Ba was allowed to leave the tomb, it had to return at night, bearing a candle as



its source of light. The Ba had to be able to find and recognize its correct human body, just like the Ka. If there was no mummy, however, there was no opportunity of afterlife for that person. If you did not pass the 'test', there was no going back. You were either in or out. All deaths were final. Without the Ba and Ka, there was no afterlife. And, without the afterlife, there was NO hope for a future life.

But how did Egyptians make mummies? Honestly, the answer is quite gruesome. Are you sure you're ready? Okay... but I'm warning you! First of all, Egyptians had to overcome some problems, or, work out the kinks. One of their dilemmas was the moist insides of a body.

The damp organs would cause decay of the body, therefore leaving nothing but a pile of rot. How did they solve this? When the organs were removed from the deceased, they were placed in canopic jars. Canopic comes from the city of Canopus, and the tops of the containers were the heads of gods, such as Duamutef, Qebsenuet, Imseti, and Hapi. The organs were preserved, and the body did not decay. Now that you know why the Egyptians



removed the organs, I think it's time you know how. But please, keep your lunch inside your stomach at ALL times!

When a pharaoh died and was ready to be mummified, the body cavity would be opened using an obsidian rock or a sharp shard of glass. Then, (remember, they didn't have latex gloves back then!) they would reach inside the body and remove the contents. This included, the stomach, intestines, livers, and lungs. All of these were put in Canopic jars, and were NOT thrown away.

Egyptians rarely removed the kidneys, and only sometimes extracted the heart. Why? The heart was considered the center of intelligence! In some New Kingdoms, the heart was taken out and mummified, just like the body! In its place, a carved Scarab Beetle was positioned where the heart was. Other times, the heart was dried out and placed back in the body. If the mummy and organs were preserved correctly, and did not decay, they would be reunited in the afterlife and live on like Osiris. But, if the heart did not pass the Weighing of the Heart ceremony, then the pharaoh would not have the pleasure of frolicking in the sunshine in the afterlife.



The Weighing of the Heart ceremony was very important. When someone died, the heart was taken out and placed on a scale. On one side of the scale, there was a feather. On the other side was the heart. Logically speaking, the heart would typically weigh more than a feather. But, in Ancient Egyptian times, more often than not, the heart would weigh less, therefore guaranteeing a passage to the afterlife. The god who oversaw the whole process was Ammut. The god who actually weighed the heart was Anubis, and Thoth recorded the results.



The first royal mummy with their organs removed was Queen Hetepheres. Hetepheres was the mother of Khufu, the builder of the Great Pyramid. Although Hetepheres's mummy is missing, her organs were well preserved and survived in alabaster chest.

Grossed out, yet? If you aren't, you are about to be! The next thing that happened after the organ removal, was the brain removal. The brain was commonly removed in the New Kingdom. However, they were rarely taken out in the Old and Middle Kingdoms. When the brain was dried out naturally, the hardened bits could be heard rattling if the body was shaken. But if the Egyptians decided NOT to let the brain dry on its own, they would use a long, sharp tool to break the nasal cavity. Then, a lengthy rod would be inserted to pick out the brain, piece by piece. (WARNING!!! Please be sure you are near a trashcan/barf bag before reading on!) Sometimes, Egyptians would stir the contents of the brain until it was "slushified" and poured out the skull. Some of you may be wondering how come they didn't mummify the brain, as they occasionally did with the heart. This was because the brain could not be removed in one piece without damaging the head. The brain was considered the master organ. Hopefully, the burrito you ate earlier stayed where it was supposed to stay!



Next came drying out the body. This was a very lengthy process, lasting from about thirty-five to forty days! First, the body was thickly coated on the inside and out with a powdery white salt called natron. Natron has the ability to soak up water from the skin and tissue. In Egyptian times, natron could be found in the oasis of Wadi Natrun, about forty miles west of Cairo. The water would boil to the surface, evaporate, and leave behind natron. The organs that had previously been removed were dried out with natron as well.

When a body was being dried out, it would be placed on the "Bed of Mummification." This was a slanted board that had channels for the body's moisture to drip through. When the body shrinks, the skin becomes wrinkled and and rough, like leather. Now, as you can imagine, this process did not smell like a flower shop! In fact, the odor was SO bad that the deceased pharaoh was cleaned before AND after with spices, palm wine, and sweet smelling gums.



After the "fragrance fiesta," the dried body was filled with natron and fresh linen. The incisions in the body were sealed up with resin, a sticky, natural, glue-like substance, and sewn. Then the nostrils were plugged up, and the entire body was rubbed with oils and coated with melted resin to waterproof it. You know, just in case it rained inside a cave!

The next step in mummification was wrapping. I'm sure you all know what I'm talking about! You've seen a mummy, with the white cloth hanging limply from the arms, but tight and taut across the abdomen.



Right? Well, this actually did happen in Ancient Egyptian times. Combinations of large and narrow strips of linen and cloth were used to wrap a mummy. If you were a king or noble, often you'd be wrapped with sixteen to twenty layers of cloth. Sometimes, they would be wrapped with up to eighty layers! Imagine all of that cloth! When the body was wrapped, jewels and fine possessions were placed in between layers, along with charms such as, the Scarab Beetle, Eye of Horus and Ankh! Can you believe that ALL of this took about seventy days? To make a mummy?! It's crazy! In their defense, a dead guy has got to do, what a dead guy has got to do!

But, how did they identify the mummy if it was all wrapped up and... uh... dead? Simple! Just like when you go to camp and your mom puts your name on all of your underwear, the Egyptians would do the same, but on the linen cloths, not underwear! As the layers of bandages were placed on the mummy, resin was poured over each one, kind of like papier-mache! The resin darkened the body, and could be dysfunctional if not used correctly. The purpose of resin was to keep the moisture from entering the body. Unfortunately for King Tutankhamen, or King Tut, too many oils were used and a chemical reaction



caused his body to wind up in a black, sticky mess. Luckily, most of the mummies from King Tut's time were well preserved due to the hard work and determination of the Egyptians. So, as time passed, they learned to make better, more efficient mummies!

In the twenty-first Dynasty, Egyptians really "stepped up their game" when it came to mummification! The mummies were given modern-day face lifts, artificial eyelashes and eyes, and later, the organs were added back into the body. How do we know all of this information? Well, send your thanks to the Greek Historian, Herodotus, the brains behind mummification! Without him, we would know close to nothing about mummies! Including, that the Egyptians mummified animals...

Nearly every god or goddess was associated with an animal.



Baboons and ibises were linked with Ra, the sun god, dogs and jackals were sacred to Thoth, the god of writing, and cats, fish, crocodiles, rodents, snakes, and insects were important to Anubis. Animals were sacred in Egypt, which is why they got special treatment when it came to death. Just like humans, some were often mummified and buried in a temple or tomb, dedicated

to various gods and goddesses. Occasionally, animals were sacrificed, such as the falcon. The largest animal was the bull, Apis, Osiris's animal. Apis was believed to have been the son of Isis and was treated just like a human. It's like Californians and their dogs!

Do you believe me now? Are you one hundred percent **CONVINCED** that mummies are real? I hope so, otherwise, I just spent nine pages of my time and yours in a completely useless way! You liked it? Really? Thanks! I'm glad I was able to share my vast knowledge of mummies with you. Now that you know who mummies really are, does it change your perspective? Because mummies were humans at **SOME** point, just like you and me! While they might be a bit scary on October 31st, they are a key part of Ancient Egyptian history and a very important scientific study. With new modern-day technology, scientists are using ancient mummies to help find cures to present diseases! So, when Halloween rolls around this year, just remember, that mummy in your basement, could someday be you...