How and Why the Egyptians Made Their Mummies

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A dead noble stands trembling in the Hall of Truth. Behind the noble, Horus, the half-falcon, half-man ruler of Earth, stares at the quivering man. Thoth, the sharp-beaked scribe, sharpens his quill — poised to record a verdict of divine judgment.

Seated before the noble on a golden throne is Osiris, the king of the dead. Upon his head rests a glittering crown with gorgeous white feather plumes. Behind Osiris stands Isis, the revered goddess of nature. She holds an ankh, a cross with a loop above the bar, which guarantees that a dead person will live forever.

The noble wonders if he will live forever. Or will he be fed to the hideous crocodile-like god called the Eater of the Dead. The noble is currently in limbo, a place where the souls of dead people go while being judged.
Osiris begins the process of judging the noble's life. On one side of a scale, Osiris places the heart of the noble, which bares the secrets of the soul. Had the soul lied, cheated, or lived an evil life? The soul defends itself before a variety of interrogating gods.

The noble thinks about his second self, called the ka. The ka lives within every human being. When the physical body expires, the ka goes on to enjoy eternal life, where it can hunt, fish, live with its family, be entertained, and eat favorite foods.

Now Osiris holds up the sacred feather, the emblem of truth, and places it on the other side of the scale. If the scales balance, eternal life awaits. If not, the Eater of the Dead has his favorite food for lunch: noble.

**Mummification**

Before being judged by Osiris, the noble's soul had undertaken a journey that lasted more than two months. When the noble died he was brought to the Beautiful House, where an embalmer prepared the body to cross to the afterlife. The embalmers were often priests.

Egyptians believed that the afterlife would be much like life on Earth, so the soul would want use of its body in eternity. That's why Egyptians made an art out of mummification, or the preservation of the dead.

The process of embalming took great skill and required many steps. What follows is a crash course on Egyptian embalming.

1. **Removal of the brain**

With long hooks, the brain is extracted through the nasal passage – the Egyptians didn't think that the brain had any special use.

2. **Organ removal**

A cut is made on the left side of the body, and the liver, lungs, and other organs are removed, dried out, and stored in sacred vessels. The heart is left in the body, because it will be needed to be weighed by Osiris.

3. **Dehydration with natron crystals**

Now the body must have the liquids removed to stop decay. A type of salt called natron is used, and crystals are packed around the body for 40 days, after which the corpse is washed and dried.

4. **Stuffing**
Resin-stained clothes or bits of sawdust are used to pack the corpse. Pieces of cloth are stuffed in the eye sockets and painted black, and the corpse's lips and cheeks are painted.

5. Oiling the body

This elaborate process includes, massaging, perfuming, and anointing (blessing with oil) the corpse.

6. Coloring

After the nose and mouth are filled with cloth scraps to restore the shape of the face, the body is colored. Men are colored red; women are colored yellow. After the coloring, resin is poured into body cavities.

7. Arrangement of the body

Depending on which period of Egyptian history the dead lived in, the arms are either placed to the side of the corpse, folded on its chest, or placed with hands on shoulders.

8. Wrapping

The body is wrapped in several layers of fine linen; and various body parts receive particular attention. This process takes two weeks, after which a resin is added to the bandages.

9. Funerary mask

A mask, sometimes made entirely of gold, is fitted to the mummy's body. Symbols of gods often adorned masks.

10. Burial of waste

All materials used to prepare the corpse (such as natron and bloody linen) are placed in a jar and buried away from the mummy's tomb.

Finally, the time has come to put mummy in its coffin. Jewelry, games, furniture, food, clothing, and cosmetics might be put in the coffin with the corpse. These things would be used in the afterlife. The Book of the Dead, a collection of hymns and prayers, might also be included in the tomb to protect the body on its journey to the realm of the dead.

So how did the noble fare before the great Osiris? Ask his mummy.