

# Mummification

by

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a chapter excerpted from *Kultur und Kunst Agyptens Ein Isisgeheimnis*

translated

by

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Background reading material for fifth and tenth grade history.



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3911 Bannister Road  
Fair Oaks, CA 95628

Title: *Mummification*

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Translator: Rudolf Cople

German title: *Kultur und Kunst Agyptens Ein Isisgeheimnis*  
Chapter XII

German Publisher: Philosophisch - Anthroposophischen Verlag  
Dornach, Schweiz, 1955

## Mummification

The mummification of corpses with the ritual that is connected with it, belongs, without any doubt, to the most amazing and most mysterious manifestations of Egyptian culture. After the mummified corpses had lain in the necropolises of Egypt for about 3000 years, they received, with the founding of Egyptology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and with the ongoing excavations, new homes in museums around the world. There they are now revealed to human eyes, against the intentions of those who introduced mummification, according to which the embalmed corpse was never again to be seen. However, as a direct result of this accessibility came the opportunity to approach these mysterious realities of mummification from many new perspectives. The mummy provokes questions because consciously or unconsciously, the riddle of death is placed before us.

The first seeds of the mummification process are already found among the Thissites. It was then further developed in later times to attain the extent which we now see in the elaborate ritual of mummification.

The decision to take such extensive and world-significant measures must have been made for particular reasons and then elaborated into the practical details. This decision, not only the fact in itself, is a question which rises up anew when one beholds a mummy. We must acknowledge the fact that the Egyptians, from a certain time on, felt the necessity to maintain the earthly human form in an artificial way. To understand the deeper reasons for this, one must look at the Egyptian world-conception and at the particular relation which the Egyptian had to the earth as a living organism, which was consid-



A cartoon depicting the process of mummification which allowed the deceased's spiritual and physical elements to be reunited intact, after death.

ered to include the earthly human form on one hand and the particular conditions of the soul being on the other. The earth was, for the Egyptian, the house of Osiris. This is proved through numerous hieroglyphic texts. Out of the body of Osiris flowers and plants sprout and the wheat grows. In an inscription the dead says of himself: I live, I die, I am Osiris . . . I live, I grow as wheat. Geb has concealed me. I live, I die, I am barley, I do not pass away.” As regards their soul being they felt that they descended from a pre-earthly state of being to the earth in order to incarnate in an earthly body. However, the Egyptians experienced in their waking consciousness as earthly beings not their true being, but found that being in the intermediate states between waking and sleeping, in fluctuating, surging dream images. In the spiritual world which then stood open, they saw the forces which had created their body, those spiritual forces were held to be more important than the daytime consciousness that lights up at birth like a flame and is extinguished at death. For the Egyptian the true life was the life after death. For him the earth was the home of Osiris and the human earthly form the work of the gods, created out of forces which lie beyond the threshold of death. Therefore this earthly form, created by the gods, should be maintained.

This interpretation of Egyptian soul-life given by Rudolf Steiner embraces a survey of innumerable inscriptions about life and death, and in this gives a motive for the maintaining of the earthly form. A further question arises, alongside the previous general point of view, concerning the particular causes which led to this decision.

From the point of view of historical development, the process of mummification began soon after the transition from the rulership of the gods to that of Pharaohs had begun. That was the time in which the initiates of the Egyptian mysteries perceived the beginning of a new world age with all the measures for the guidance of the culture which were now called for. One such measure was the establishment of the Pharaohs with their dynasties, and the transmission of the divine powers to the human personality of the Pharaoh. The divine was thus transposed into the human realm and thus became subject to error and the wish for power.



The “ba” or spiritual element was thought to leave the body and move about freely.

It belonged to the life conditions and mystery-practices of ancient humanity, that its leading representatives entered into a relationship to the gods by cultic practices, through sacrificial rituals they entered into relationship with particular cosmic beings to seek their advice. These relationships took on various forms in the course of time, according to the cultural epochs, and the positions of the stars and in relation to the sun.

From the Greek mysteries, about which the ancient writers reported out of their knowledge, an important fact is generally known, that the Greeks, when they needed to make an important decision which would affect the destiny of the people or an individual would ask advice from the Delphic oracle, through his initiates. The consulting of the gods was a central motif in all ancient historical or mythical forms of ancient humanity. The Egyptian initiates also sought such consultation at the beginning of the Pharaonic period. Through the coming of the Age of Darkness, with its consequences, this counsel with the gods could no longer be maintained in the manner which up to that time had been possible, and a new way therefore had to be found. The Egyptian initiates accomplished this in a manner which is unique in the history of ancient civilizations—they found their way to the process of mummification.

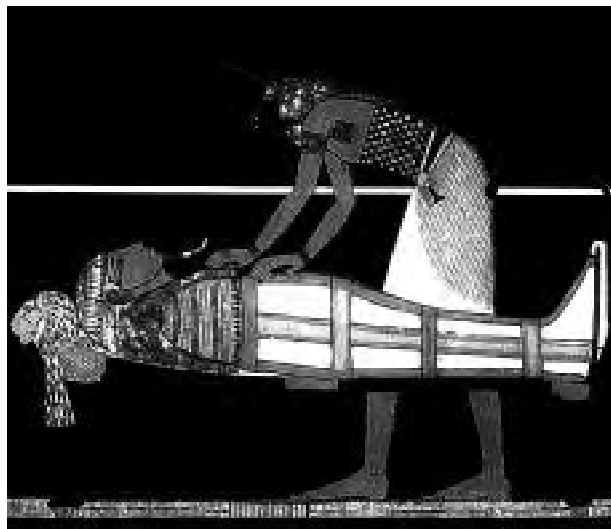
The world picture of the Osirianic temple legend arose out of a knowledge which concerns essentially the processes of the Lemurian epoch of the Earth evolution. The knowledge of the initiates of the pre-dynastic time who turned toward the cosmic intelligences for counsel came from the Moon evolution, were Moon gods. These Moon gods were also “fathers,” “fathers” for the reason that from them issue the archetypal revelations of world wisdom which were considered sacred but later fell into decay or were misunderstood. In the sacred books of Thoth, the revelation received from the “fathers” was preserved and transmitted. Therefore Thoth was also venerated as a Moon god. The Moon was, for the entire knowledge of the ancient East (Orient), not just for the Egyptians, the cosmos of Wisdom, because it received the light of the Sun and shone it back, through the wisdom of the Moon beings. The old oriental knowledge saw in the Moons reflected rays the wisdom of the Sun being. To the wisdom-bearers of pre-dynastic Egypt, when they turned toward the cosmic intelligences of the Moon to the “fathers,” human soul forces stood at their disposal, which allowed the soul, in an intermediate condition between sleeping and waking, to behold a world in which they had lived before birth and into which they would enter again after death. This intermediate state of wakeful dreaming was connected with a particular rhythm of the breath organism—a predominance of the in-breathing organism over the out-breathing. Among the books of Thoth was found one about the in-breathing, which told of the spiritual relationship existing between the prevailing in-breathing process and higher knowledge that was known in prehistoric times, in the old Orient and in Egypt as well—just as today we know that higher altitude air and exercise have a beneficial effect on the breathing organism. The old Indian yoga schooling was based on a conscious, voluntary ordering of the in-breathing as a means of attaining higher knowledge. The Yogi needed for this goal that the body be in a precise position of balance in order to connect himself with the rhythm of the cosmos. Through this willed predominance of the in-breathing,

he was able to enter his pre-earthly state. The Yogi could thus pass across the boundary of ordinary consciousness which is normal for the human being between birth and death. Thus could be attained knowledge given by the beings of the Moon. In earlier times the Moon beings descended into those souls open to their world. The souls living on the earth became the stage upon which the initiates received their knowledge, their counsel, from the “fathers.” Now it became necessary for the “fathers” to make their home in the mummies. The mummies, no longer the living souls, became the earthly abode of the Moon gods.

In other cultures of the same period, for example, the Chaldaic-Babylonian culture, the way out of the new Age of Darkness was found through astrology and the questioning of the cosmic intelligences, described through the means of knowledge of the ordering and placement of the stars and of their sidereal movements, of which the Chaldaic moon-year, with its corresponding leap-month and the moon ephemeris (*Mondephemeridon*) are an example. While at the same time the spiritual leaders of the Egyptians had chosen the process of mummification as their path.

Together with the decision for mummification there arose a danger in the research into the spiritual realms, for with it the seed was laid for the decline and fall of Egyptian mysteries, As contradictory as this might appear, the grandeur, the power and the richness of forms had arisen at a time when the prehistoric mystery knowledge was achieving its fulfillment and making its transition into historical times and, through mummification, was approaching its decline. In spite of all this, the beings of the Mysteries let stream their creative powers into the mighty forms of the historical culture of Egypt.

Herodotus has described the preparation for the process of embalming. There existed, at that time, three different methods. The most distinguished kind, Herodotus described as that “of the Gods,” and the two lesser ones were for those who did not have the means for the first one. Herodotus does not speak about the cultic side of mummification, which is that “of the Gods,” because he was bound by an oath of silence.



Anubis, the jackal-headed god, was the embalmer of Osiris who became the patron of all embalmers. He introduced the departed to the other world and watched over their tombs.

The ritual of embalming is preserved in two specimens on papyrus. The one comes from Thebes about 100 B.C. and the other from the Greco-Latin times, of which the following are samples. The cultic embalming was guided by a college of priests, whose highest leader was a representative of the jackal-headed god Anubis and therefore wore a jackal mask. According to the ritual, the head of the dead was preserved first and was anointed with oil of myrrh while calling on the god Ra, then the body was anointed. The inner organs, heart, lung, liver, kidneys were removed and placed in four urns. These urns with their contents stood under the protection of the four sons of the ancient Horus: Amset, Hapi, Duamutef, and Kebehsenuf, who were invoked as protective spirits in the ritual. The urns bore, from the 18th Dynasty on, covers in the forms of their protective spirits: for Amset, a human head; for Hapi, that of Pavians; Duametuf, that of a dog; and Kebehsenuf, the head of a falcon. There then followed the anointing of the backbone with the ritual words, "O Osiris, take this oil, take this ointment. Take what comes from the gods, the emanation of Ra, the outflow of Schu, the perspiration of Geb, the body which originates from Ra. To thee comes the ointment which is to anoint your body. To thee comes the garment of Sobh of Schedel. To bury your body as it was done with the body of Nun. Make this garment thy holy binding. Ra will clothe thee with his life garment. They will give thee thy legs for the sacred environment of the underworld, they sanctify your walking in the halls of Geb. . . ."



In these Canopic jars the stomach, intestines, liver, and lungs were preserved and stored.

With further ritual words the mummy was again turned on its back. "Then turn," it was said, "thy face to the heavens, as it has been before." There then followed corresponding parts of the ritual and the gilding of the fingernails and toes.

After this preparatory part of the mummification ritual had taken place there followed the most important part of the ceremonial process, the wrapping of the mummy with Byssus cloth. The Anubis priest in ceremonial garment and jackal mask sat down at the head of the mummy, which lay upon a bier. The head, the face, the back of the head were then anointed with oil, by the assistant-priest, and then wrapped with cloth. The following ritual words then sounded, "Wrap him in the cloth of Ra-Harachte, from the city of Hebt, and in the cloth of Nechbet of El-Kab, which will be wrapped around on his forehead, and the cloth of Hathor, the mistress of Denderah, which is to be wrapped over his face, and the cloth of Thoth, who judged the two warriors (Horus and Seth), which will be laid over his ears, and the cloth of Nebt-Hoptep, which on his forehead will be laid."

The binding of the head was continued through many further wrappings, specifically determined by number and location, The ears, the opening of the nose, the cheeks, the mouth, the chin, the neck were all wrapped. Twenty-one cloth wrappings were needed according to the ritual, “right and left of its face to the ears were wrapped.

Four wrappings on his mouth, two outside and two inside. At the chin two wrappings, on the neck four large wrappings, and so on.” All this was accompanied by the following ritual words: “O thou formidable and revered Goddess of the West, Princess of the East (Hathor is meant), come and breathe thy breath into the head of Osiris, in the Duat. Let her see with thy eyes, hear with thy ears, breathe with thy nose, speak with thy mouth and rest with its tongue in the Duat.” After these words the head was once again anointed with oil of myrrh, with ritual words, among which are: “Thy name is respected by the embalmers and you have a name with the transfigured and the revered. The inhabitants of the Duat kiss the earth before your body, the inhabitants of the heavens receive thy soul, the inhabitants of the Earth offer reverence, the inhabitants of the valleys purify thy body, Anubis and Horus watch over with care your embalming, Thoth makes thy body whole through the magic power of his pronouncement.”

There then followed the embalming and wrapping of the body, the arms, the hands, the fingers, the legs, and the feet, all in a similar way, and accompanied with the corresponding ritual words.

According to traditional procedures, the embalming took place in thirty-six parts because there were thirty-six gods who accompanied the soul of the dead, who has become Osiris, to heaven, and there are thirty-six districts regions, given in which the form of Osiris is revealed.

The festive and lengthy ritual of embalming took place in a rising cloud of incense into which were spoken the ritual words, with a magically powerful quality of speech. The ritual ended with the magical words of protection: “*The one who approaches my body will find death.*”

The text in which the traditional ceremony of embalming is described in its main features is that of which Herodotus (Greek historian) says that it comes from the God whose name, for good reason, he keeps secret (for it would be a sin to name him) because for all these proceedings there belongs the strongest responsibility to secrecy.

The magical effect of the ritual of embalming made the mummy into a vessel into which the Moon gods could descend and be consulted. Whereas before, these gods had been present in the waking-dream states of the human soul, and the initiates could enter along this path into relation with them, now through the magic of the ritual the mummy became the place of encounter.



According to the procedure of embalming, each organ was to be treated in its particular ceremonial way; the head and its organs, the instruments of the senses and speech, were to be treated with particular care. For in the head were supposed to live the Moon gods, the counsel-giving "fathers."

The embalming was at the same time a course of instruction through which new worlds of insight were opened. Before the advent of mummification, there did not yet exist a true knowledge of Nature in Egypt. It was only through the advent of the process of mummification that there could develop an awakening of the knowledge of the organs. Thus, through the mummification process a training was developed which first awakened the beginnings of natural science. As a result, there developed a far-reaching knowledge of substances developed through the various materials, oils, ointments, essences, resins, and also metals which were used for embalming. Plutarch, among others, describes the composition of the smoke-generating substance, Kephî, which was composed of sixteen different plant and animal substances, which were used as incense on the birthday of Horus in the morning, at midday, and at evening and, taken in a liquid form, produced a sort of drunken higher soul condition. But, above all, there arose from the art of embalming a highly developed Egyptian knowledge of medicines of which the famous "Medical" papyrus, in particular the Ebers papyrus, informs us. In this famous papyrus, in particular parts, the different illnesses of the organs are described, such as those of the liver, stomach, the skin, and the eyes. There are further passages which describe the diagnostic methods and prescriptions. Herodotus mentions that Egypt was full of doctors, and that for each illness there was a specialist.

Two striking images, one out of old Egypt, the other out of the present, when compared with each other lead to the impression that, with the process of mummification, there did indeed arise the first seeds of the development of medicine and of natural science. In Egypt a group of competent people, under the leadership of the Anubis priest, carried the responsibility for the ceremonial rite of embalming. In the present time, such an event occurs when corpses are dissected in the anatomy classroom under the guidance of a physician. The first dissections performed in Italian universities were also accompanied by a ceremonial act, that is with the offering of the Mass.

The development of the process of mummification became, in its effect, not an Egyptian affair but a world affair. For Egypt, it served as the foundation for the death cult and the tomb buildings, for the civilization of the present, it confronts us with the riddle of death, which arises in the soul of the beholder in the contemplation of an Egyptian mummy.