

Mummification Worksheet

Mummification in ancient Egypt was a very long and expensive process. From start to finish, it took about seventy days to embalm a body. Since the Egyptians believed that mummification was essential for passage to the afterlife, people were mummified and buried as well as they could possibly afford. High-ranking officials, priests and other nobles who had served the pharaoh and his queen had fairly elaborate burials. The pharaohs, who were believed to become gods when they died, had the most magnificent burials of all. In the case of a royal or noble burial, the embalmers set up workshops near the tomb of the mummy.

The art of Egyptian mummification consisted of many steps. First, the body was washed and ritually purified. The next step was to remove the deceased person's inner organs. A slit was cut into the left side of the body so that the embalmers could remove the intestines, the liver, the stomach and the lungs. Each of these organs was embalmed using **natron**, which served to dry out the organs and discourage bacteria from decaying the tissues.

The organs were then individually wrapped using long strips of linen and placed in **canopic** jars. The lids of these jars were fashioned after the four sons of Horus, who were each entrusted with protecting a particular organ.



Qebehsenuef, the falcon head – intestines
Duamutef, the jackal head -- stomach
Hapy, the baboon head -- lungs
Imsety, the human head – liver

After the removal of the inner organs, the body cavity was stuffed with natron. The brain was then removed through the nose using long hooks. Since the ancient Egyptians considered the brain unimportant, it was probably thrown away.

The body was then placed on a slanted embalming table and completely covered with natron. This allowed fluids to drip away as the body slowly dried out. This part of the process took about forty days, after which the natron was removed, inside and out, to reveal a dried, shrunken body. After another cleaning, the body was rubbed with unguents to aid in preserving the mummy's skin. The head and body cavity were stuffed with packing.

The mummy was then prepared for bandaging. First, the embalming cut in the side of the body was sewn up and covered with a patching depicting the protective eye of Horus. The body was adorned with gold, jewels and protective amulets. Fingers and toes were covered with protective gold caps and individually wrapped with long, narrow strips of linen. Arms and legs were also wrapped, then the entire body was wrapped to a depth of about twenty layers. The embalmers used resin to glue the layers of wrappings together. The wrapped head was covered with a mummy mask. Finally, the last layer of bandages went on and was given one last coating of resin. The mummy was the ready for burial.

Once the mummy was finally prepared, it was time for the funeral. The mummy and its canopic jars were transported by sled from the embalming tent to the tomb. People were hired to demonstrate their grief by crying and throwing dust on their hair. At the site of the tomb, religious ceremonies were held to prepare the dead for the afterlife. In particular, the Opening of the Mouth ceremony was believed to allow the mummy to see, hear, eat and drink in the spirit world.

1. About how many days did the process of mummification take?
2. What kind of burial do you think the farmers had?
3. What was the purpose of natron?
4. Why do you think they preserved some organs?
5. Why was the brain discarded?
6. What were the canopic jars?
7. What did they wrap the body with?
8. How did Egyptians mourn the dead?