Name: _____

Date: _____

MUMMIES

According to Egyptian legend, Isis reassembled Osiris' body so he could live in the afterlife. The Egyptians believed their pharaohs could also live after death, so they developed an elaborate embalming process called mummification to ensure the ruler's body remained intact.

The Egyptians observed that the nearby desert sand preserved bodies by removing moisture, but they also saw that the bodies were vulnerable to scavenging animals such as jackals. Over time, they developed a process called mummification to better preserve the bodies of their rulers. Many Egyptians arranged for family members to be mummified if they could afford it, but mummifying a pharaoh was part of an elaborate sacred process that could take as long as seventy days.

How to Make a Mummy

To mummify a body, embalmers first removed the intestines, liver, stomach, and lungs. They wrapped the organs in linen and stored them in four sacred Canopic jars. The Egyptians believed different gods would protect the organs in the afterlife, so the lids of the jars depicted the animal associated with each guardian god. There was no jar for the heart. The Egyptians believed the heart held the soul, so it was left inside the body.

Canopic jar

The Egyptians did not understand the importance of the brain, so priests removed it, often by inserting a special hook through the nostrils. The hook was swished around, allowing the embalmers to remove the brain through the nose.

Wrapping and Burial

When a pharaoh was mummified, embalmers followed a series of sacred rituals. They washed and purified the pharaoh's body. It was then dried for about forty days using natron, a natural salt that removes moisture. When the drying was complete, the body was very dry and smaller than in life. The embalmers then stuffed the body with packing. As a final step, they wrapped the pharaoh in about twenty layers of linen, each coated with resin to help preserve the body. Resin is a sticky substance from trees; it helped hold the linen in place. The pharaoh was then buried in a series of nested mummy cases and elaborate stone coffins called sarcophagi, which protected the body and reflected the ruler's importance.

Grave Robbers and Lost Mummies

Many sarcophagi were broken open by grave robbers searching for the treasures buried with the mummies. In the Middle Ages, however, the mummies themselves were sometimes ground up to make medicine. Though there was no medical benefit, many Europeans believed the ancient bodies had healing powers, so the powder was sold as "mumia." From the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, countless Egyptian mummies were destroyed.

Answer in complete sentences

1. What is mummification? Why did the ancient Egyptians mummify their rulers?

*2. Why do you think the ancient Egyptians valued the heart more than the brain?

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

© Mike Dowling, www.mrdowling.com. All rights reserved.