

# YAC attack!

## Mummies

Mummies are the preserved bodies of dead people and animals. Sometimes mummification happens naturally when bodies are preserved in ice, bogs or very dry environments but as early as 5000 BC, people began to copy the process deliberately. Mummies have been found all over the world but it is the ancient Egyptians, devoted to the idea of preparing the dead for an afterlife, who are most well known for their mummy



Matt in the museum  
© Matt Hart

making. Matt Hart is 15 and has been volunteering for a year at the Egypt Centre; an Egyptology museum based at Swansea University in South Wales. The museum is unusual in that it has a child volunteer programme with volunteers from 11 years upwards. Whilst Matt has been at the Centre he has seen all sorts of

amazing artefacts and learnt a great deal about ancient Egypt and so who better to explain the matter of mummies...

The first step in the long procedure of making a mummy (70 days in total!) was to remove the internal organs from the body. The liver, stomach, lungs and intestines were placed in canopic jars. There were four jars in total, each corresponding to a son of the god Horus. The liver was kept in the jar of the human headed god called Imsety; the stomach went in the jar with the head of a jackal called Duamutef; the lungs were put in the jar with the head of a baboon called Hapy and finally, the intestines were put in a jar with the head of a falcon called Qebehsenuf. The heart was wrapped in bandages and put back inside the body as it was thought to be the most important organ. The brain was removed with a large hook through the nose and then thrown away as the ancient Egyptians thought that it was useless!

Once the organs had been removed, the lengthy process of drying out the body began. It was first cleansed with water and date wine and then packed with bags of natron. This substance is made mainly of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate and is very effective at soaking up moisture. After around 40

Canopic jars



days the body darkened, withered and weighed much less than before. The natron was removed (although not thrown away because it was considered to now be part of the person) and was

An unwrapped mummy

replaced with linen and sawdust. The body was then rubbed with perfumes and oils and then coated in resin to protect it.

Next the body was then completely wrapped in linen bandages. Amongst these bandages were charms or amulets believed to protect the dead in the journey through the underworld and into the afterlife. Today mummies can be x-rayed to find out where the amulets are placed under the wrappings. In total there are about 270 different types of amulets, the most powerful being the 'Wedjat Eye' or the 'Eye of Horus'. This amulet and also the Ankh (Life) amulet are still worn by Egyptians today.

The wrapped body was then put in a coffin which was thought to be the home for the person's ka or life force. The coffins were usually elaborately decorated with symbols, spells and even a map to show the way to the afterlife. The rich were sometimes given extra layers of protection and would be put inside two or more coffins and finally a stone sarcophagus. Once in the coffin(s) the mummy was buried in a tomb along with the canopic jars, bags of natron and items for the person to use in the afterlife.

The rich were also buried with shabtis, small statues which were believed work for their dead owners in the afterlife. There were worker shabtis and their overseers ('boss' shabtis). The workers were shown as mummies and the overseers were depicted wearing skirts or kilts and often holding a whip or baton. Pharaohs would have had 401 shabtis in their tombs – one worker shabti for every day of the year (365) plus 36 overseer shabtis (1 for every 10 workers). The shabtis often had magic spells written on them in hieroglyphs to tell them how to do their work, and sometimes also had the name of the tomb owner and so we know who they belonged to.

Now you know how it's done you can make your very own mummy (no humans or animals though!). Check out the activity on the next page.

Above: Probe used to remove the brain  
Right: Coffin of Hor



## About the Egypt Centre

Most of the museum's artefacts came from the collection originally owned by Sir Henry Wellcome. The museum was first opened to the public in 1998, and for the last ten years has been home to more than 4,000 Ancient Egyptian artefacts, and has attracted about 20,000 visitors per year. The Egypt Centre is open to the public throughout the year, visit [www.swan.ac.uk/egypt](http://www.swan.ac.uk/egypt) for details.

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## Make your own Mummy!

### Things you will need...

- An orange
- Enough cooking salt to fill 1/2 of your orange
- Enough bicarbonate of soda to fill 1/2 of your orange
- A small roll of crepe bandage
- A knife and teaspoon



- Cloves
- Ground cinnamon
- Two bowls
- Kitchen paper or toilet roll

### Method:

1. Make a slit in the skin of your orange, from the top to the bottom. You may want to ask an adult to help.



2. With your teaspoon, scoop out the inside of the orange.



Do this over your bowl – it can get a bit messy!

3. When you have removed all of the orange's insides, stuff it with kitchen paper to absorb any left over juice.



Do this until the inside of your orange is dry and then remove the paper.

4. Next, sprinkle a spoonful of cinnamon and a few cloves into your orange.



5. In another bowl mix the salt and bicarbonate of soda together.



Spoon this mixture into the orange until it is full up.

6. Now it's time to wrap your mummy! Make sure the slit is pushed together and then start to wrap the bandage around the orange.



7. When your orange is completely covered with bandages, cut the bandage leaving enough spare to make a knot to secure it. If this is too tricky you can use a safety pin to keep the end of the bandage in place.



8. Your mummy needs to be kept in a warm, dry place, such as an airing cupboard. It can take some time for mummification to work and so it may be a while before you see any results. Check your orange every few weeks to see what it looks like. You will notice that it shrinks and the skin will become a darker colour – just like a real mummy!



Prince Normanoteb the mummified orange here at YAC HQ, has been down in its tomb (next to the boiler in the basement!) for over a month and this is what it looks like! Keep us updated with your mummy's progress!



### Top Tip

As you will have read on the last page, amulets would be hidden amongst the bandages. Why not make your own amulets to hide between your mummy's bandages – visit our website [www.britarch.ac.uk/yac/yac\\_attack.html](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/yac/yac_attack.html) for ideas! You can also find out how to make a coffin for your mummy! If you don't have access to the internet just send your name and address to YAC Attack, St Mary's House, 66 Bootham, York, YO30 7BZ and we'll send you more details.