



An Analysis on the Role of Ancient Egyptian Religion, Dynasties, and Mummification in Egypt.

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Abstract

Ancient Egyptian religion held great significance over mummification and burial practices. As time advanced, we see a shift in different dynasties and religion. With these changes in dynasties and religion, the techniques of mummification became more advanced. Researchers have examined ancient Egyptian mummification processes in order to improve our understanding of their religion, beliefs, and daily lives. This research examines the changes in mummification within the changes of dynasties and religion. Understanding the significance of religion and mummification can provide an understanding on their technological advancements, such as medicine.

Introduction

The art of mummification has been embedded in western popular culture for as long as I can remember. Ever since Howard Carter came across the untouched tomb of Tutankhamun, there has been a fascination with the ancient Egyptians way of life and the art of mummification. The famous words of Lord Carnarvon, "Can you see anything?" and the famous words of Howard Carter "Yes, wonderful things!" Sparked an interest in people's minds about ancient Egypt and the hidden "treasure" of Egypt. The tomb of Tutankhamun was considered the best preserved and most intact pharaonic tomb ever found in the Valley of the Kings. King Tutankhamun was mummified according to Egyptian religious tradition, which held that royal bodies should be preserved and provisioned for the afterlife. The findings of this particular tomb have led to fascination and obsession in western popular culture. Although, mummification allows researchers and archeologists to fully understand the ancient Egyptian culture and it broadens our understanding of these people. Mummification also enables the reconstruction of a more complete picture of the ancient Egyptian embalmer's art and techniques.

Ancient Egyptian religion was complex and consisted of many gods, origin stories, and myths. The ancient Egyptians devised a number of differing but complementary mythological accounts of the cosmos and society and the beginning of life (Manuelian 2014). The Egyptians had several creator gods including Ptah and Re-Atum. The gods of Heliopolitan myth represented earth, the sky, and nature. Central to the religious beliefs of ancient Egyptians was the story of Isis and Osiris, from which all the crucial elements of Egyptian funerary practices were derived. Osiris brought civilization to ancient Egypt and left to bring civilization to the rest of the world. His brother Seth, set a plot against him and wanted to get him killed. Seth created a wooden chest to fit Osiris's body into it, once Osiris was in the chest he threw bolts into the chest and poured molten lead over it. Seth then threw Osiris's coffin into the river. Isis learned about what happened to her husband and searched for her husband's body. Once she found each piece, she brought him back to life using magic. Almost all beliefs of the ancient Egyptian funerary cult are linked to this myth. The chest that Osiris was put into reflects back to the coffins that the Egyptians used during mummification. The importance of proper burial practices is linked back to how Isis went and searched for Osiris's body. The fact that Osiris resurrects, is the most important and crucial aspect. This allowed for mummification to become essential to immortality; the body must be preserved and protected for the afterlife. For the Egyptians, death was a passage to a continuation of life. The experience of death was at the core of Egyptian religion. (Assman and Lorton 2005).

Ancient Egyptians found impressive ways to conquer death and decay magically by preserving the human form. Mummification had a great effect on Egyptian culture and became a part of their religion, and it evolved over time. In ancient Egyptian history, dynasties are a series of rulers sharing a common origin. They are traditionally divided into 31 dynasties. The concept of dynasties first began with Manetho, an Egyptian priest from the third century BCE. History further separates all pharaohs into 31 dynasties or ruling houses. Egyptologists further arrange dynasties under periods such as, Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, which are interrupted by "intermediate periods" and followed by the Late Period. With these changes in pharaohs and changes in dynasties, the mummification process evolved and became more elaborate.

Purpose

The object of study examines the differences of religion and dynasties in terms of mummification. As time advanced, we see a shift in different dynasties and religion. With these changes in dynasties and religion, techniques of mummification became more advanced. This research focuses on how religion changed burial and mummification processes throughout the dynasties. The main focus of this research will examine whether or not religion had an impact on the mummification in order to fully understand their technological advancements, such as medicine. Looking at ancient Egyptian culture, I will consider the significance of religion and the changes that took place to answer the following question: Did changes in religion change the techniques of mummification? And did changes in dynasties change the techniques of mummification?

Ancient Egyptian mummification has been an area of study that has held much importance around the world. This research provides a better understanding of Egyptian dynasties and the importance they held with technological advancements, such as medicine. This research will also provide a better understanding of why religion held such importance on ancient Egyptians lives and ideologies of death. The data collected in the study allows for a more complete study on ancient Egyptian mummification. The individual examination of each period and dynasty allows for more complete picture of the ancient Egyptian religion and the the different techniques used by embalmers

Methodology

To better understand the process of mummification in ancient Egypt and their religion, this research involves an extensive literature review on ancient Egypt. Aside from looking at mummification, a study was conducted on the importance of religion and the different dynasties and periods associated with ancient Egypt. A complete study of ancient Egypt was conducted by analyzing and reading scholarly articles and books on mummification, dynasties, and religion. In order to completely answer the research question, I focused on the dynasties that showed the most change in religion and mummification and compared them with one another. In order to get my data across accurately, charts and tables were made off of the Old, Middle, New Kingdoms and dynasties within them.

Predynastic period (prehistory)		New Kingdom	
4000	Tasos-Badarian period	1550-1295	18th Dynasty
3700	Naqada I (Amratian) period	1295-1186	19th Dynasty
3500-3000	Naqada II (Gerzean) period	1186-1069	20th Dynasty
Archaic period (protodynastic)		Late period i: 3rd Intermediate	
3000-2840	1st Dynasty	1069-945	21st Dynasty
2840-2700	2nd Dynasty	945-715	22nd Dynasty (Libyan)
Old Kingdom		818-715	23rd Dynasty (Libyan)
2700-2600	3rd Dynasty	727-715	24th Dynasty (Libyan)
2600-2500	4th Dynasty	780-656	25th Dynasty (Kushite)
2500-2350	5th Dynasty	Late period ii: Saite/Persian	
2350-2190	6th Dynasty	664-525	26th Dynasty
2190-2160	7th-8th Dynasties	525-404	27th Dynasty (Persian Empire)
1st Intermediate period		404-399	28th Dynasty
2160-2106	9th Dynasty	399-380	29th Dynasty
2106-2010	10th Dynasty	380-343	30th Dynasty
Middle Kingdom		343-332	31st Dynasty (Persian Empire)
2106-1963	11th Dynasty	Graeco-Roman period	
1963-1786	12th Dynasty	332-323	Alexander the Great
2nd Intermediate period		323-30	Ptolemaic Dynasty
1786-1633	13th Dynasty	30-AD 641	Roman and Byzantine age
1786-1602	14th Dynasty (W. Delta)	AD 641	Arab conquest
1648-1540	15th Dynasty (main Hyksos)		
17th cent.	16th Dynasty (local Hyksos)		
1633-1550	17th Dynasty (Thebes)		

Results

Mummification in Egypt was practiced for nearly 3,000 years, there were improvements and regressions in the methods employed. The changes witnessed in mummification changed with the historical period. The art of mummification first resulted from sand burials during the prehistoric period, this process was called natural mummification. Thus, in the beginning, there was no need for a formal burial or mummification process. Sand burials in the prehistoric period led to natural mummification. The oldest attempt at mummification is of a king of the first dynasty, which was discovered by Flinders Petrie. The bodies exhumed during this period were buried in a fetal position and that efforts of preservation were limited. During the Old Kingdom, burials were used to make the deceased look like a living person than to preserve the body. There was little attempt to dehydrate body fluids during the Old Kingdom, which resulted in the decay of the corpses. During the Middle Kingdom, we see massive changes in mummification. The brain was not removed during the Middle Kingdom. Occasionally, the internal organs were removed by an incision on the left side of the abdomen and placed in canopic jars. Some bodies were packed with straw, linen, or sawdust to give the body a more "lifelike" appearance. The final resting position of a body in the Middle Kingdom was with the hands stretched alongside or covering the pubic area. The New Kingdom was a time of expansion and building (Brier 1994). During the New Kingdom, the brain was removed through the nose with a medical instrument. During this period, the use of resin on wrappings was constantly used in burials. In order to make the body more "lifelike", eye sockets were packed. The final resting position of mummies during the New Kingdom was lain stretched out with hands on the side; in the case of royalty, hands are crossed over the breast.

Scoring system for mummification within the Old, Middle, and New Kingdom dynasties:

Old Kingdom: Dynasties 3-6	Present	Absent	Middle Kingdom Dynasties 11-12	Present	Absent	New Kingdom Dynasties 18-20	Present	Absent
Purification of Body	Present		Purification of Body	Present		Purification of Body	Present	
Ritualistic/Religion approach	Present		Ritualistic/Religion approach	Present		Ritualistic/Religion approach	Present	
Artificial Eyes		Absent	Artificial Eyes		Absent	Artificial Eyes	Present	
Cosmetic	Present		Cosmetic	Present		Cosmetic	Present	
Preservation	Present		Preservation	Present		Preservation	Present	
Brain Removal		Absent	Brain Removal		Absent	Brain Removal	Present	
Body Wrapping	Present (as time progressed)		Body Wrapping	Present (as time progressed)		Body Wrapping	Present	
Incisions	Present		Incisions	Present		Incisions	Present	
Organ Removal	Present		Organ Removal	Present		Organ Removal	Present	
Body Stuffing	Present		Body Stuffing	Present		Body Stuffing	Present	
Canopic Jars	Present		Canopic Jars	Present		Canopic Jars	Present	
Medical Tools		Absent	Medical Tools	Present (to what extent is unknown)		Medical Tools	Present	
Body Position (body positioned during mummification)		Absent	Body Position (body positioned during mummification)		Absent	Body Position (body positioned during mummification)	Present	

Conclusion and Further Work

The changes witnessed in mummification changed with the historical period and rule. As we see a major shift in Kingship, we a major change in religious beliefs. With the examination of the major dynasties and periods of Ancient Egypt, we are able to identify the changes that took place in regards to their religion and mummification techniques. Employed techniques of mummification were heavily centered around the geographic area, time, body part, social status. Researching mummification will show us the differences across social status, it also shows us who received more advanced funerary practices. As ancient Egypt became more advanced in religion, society, architecture, and beliefs; we see a shift in the mummification process. The ancient Egyptians believed people existed just once, but their earthly bodies reanimate in the afterworld. Religion played a key role in how they viewed death and mummification. Egyptian religion reflected on the connection to the natural world, knowledge of the needs of the community, and hierarchy. Surviving the transition to the afterlife involved the preservation of the body and the soul. Mummification provides us with a wealth of information about early civilizations. Examining the process of mummification in ancient Egypt provides us with a better understanding of why religion changed burial and mummification processes throughout the dynasties.

Further analysis is needed within the dynasties to differentiate the methods of mummification and changes in religion. In particular, the research of each individual dynasty can lead to more solid information on the art of embalming and mummification. Furthermore, research related to the Protodynastic and Early Dynastic Periods can broaden our views of mummification, early burial rites, and religion.



New Kingdom, Dynasty 19 (Mummy of Ramses II)

Practical Implications

My research is centered on an analysis on the role of ancient Egyptian religion, dynasties, and mummification in Egypt. Therefore, many individuals can benefit from my study. This study will benefit those who wish to broaden their understanding on ancient Egyptian mummification, burial rites, embalming techniques, medicine, religion and ideologies. For example, this area of study shows us "how religion manifests itself in a society and hierarchy", "how religion held importance over the lives of people", "how mummification was associated with religion" and "technological advancements that came with changes of ancient Egypt. Whether it's future or current classmates, scholars, anthropologist, archeologists or those who wish to understand the preservation of the deceased and how the techniques evolved over time, this area of study can be understood by an interdisciplinary audience.

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