

# **ANCIENT EGYPT**

## **THE ECONOMIC AND GEOGRAPHIC SUPERPOWER**

by Group *Mummia*

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# **ANCIENT EGYPT THE ECONOMIC AND GEOGRAPHIC SUPERPOWER**

Although there were many strong cultures that emerged around 3150 BC, there is one that completely dominated its region and even persuaded others to follow its belief system: Egypt. The afterlife in the Ancient Egyptian world influenced everything from the behavior of an individual to the way the body was prepared after physical death. The Ancient Egyptians believed in many gods and goddesses which they believed governed everything in their daily lives. These gods' and goddesses' responsibilities ranged from flooding the Nile River, to funeral rituals, to walking next to the common people in the form of a Pharaoh and his family lineage. The afterlife in Egyptian culture is referred to as the *Duat* and this was the single most influential factor of Egyptian life. It was the goal of every Egyptian individual to reach this realm and be reunited with his or her lost loved ones. It was believed that the existence in the *Duat* would be very similar to the existence of the deceased lived on Earth. Entry into the Afterlife was not simply expected by individuals because in order to reach the *Duat* individuals had to work for their salvation, meaning the actions conducted on Earth determined if he or she was worthy to reach the afterlife. While the actions of the individual were important in reaching the underworld, the preservation and placement of the body was equally if not more important. The Ancient Egyptians believed the body was needed in the afterlife. Without a body, an individual would not be able to "live" properly. Because of the importance of the body, priests took great care in preparation for the burial and body preservation, even as going as far to place statues next to deceased nobility so their spirits knew where to return to their body. With the goal of a new existence in mind and through many trials and errors, the Egyptian civilization gave rise to the creation of mummification. Mummification helped to solidify the Ancient Egyptian civilization as a dominant force during the ancient world. This paper will demonstrate how the Ancient Egyptian civilization created the process of mummification in order to attain the afterlife, which propelled Ancient Egypt into an economic and geographical superpower. First, this paper will detail the epistemic background of the process of mummification. Second, the ritualistic procedure of mummification will be explained; starting with the obsession of reaching the afterlife and ending with the completely mummified body. Third, this paper will look at the cultural significance of mummification as an aspect of religion which in turn lead to a business. And fourth, this paper will end with the most important aspect of mummification: the economic boom and internal wealth this ritual created for the Ancient Egyptian civilization. The Ancient Egyptian civilization became a dominant economic and geographical superpower through the creation of mummification, which was used as a way to secure entry into the afterlife.

## **THE EPISTEMIC BACKGROUND OF MUMMIFICATION**

### **CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY**

The creation of mummification was due to the geographic area of Ancient Egypt. Egypt is located northeast of Africa with an unusually hot, sunny and dry climate. The majority of Egypt's

landscape is desert, with a few oases scattered about. The deserts are also prone to strong winds that can produce sandstorms. Due to these circumstances, the Egyptian people struggled to find a reliable way to bury the dead. The majority of the land in Egypt is desert which means the land is predominantly covered in sand. The strong winds are constantly carrying and shifting the sand. Anything buried beneath it would quickly be uncovered and exposed to the elements. The Egyptians realized this problem but also discovered the solution at the same time. At the time, the dead were buried in small pits in the desert. The bodies that were being uncovered were also well preserved. Even if the bodies were buried months before, there was minimal rotting and decay on the body besides the dehydration of the skin and organs. This was due to Egypt's high concentration of natron found in the sand and soil. Natron helps preserve the bodies by absorbing all the moisture found within the body. Egyptians employed the natural soda found in Egypt (natron) with the burial and preservation of their dead (Lucas 1914). With this discovery, the Egyptians used this resource and created the process known as mummification and incorporated closed off burial sites to combat the sand and wind.

## **MASTABAS, PYRAMIDS, AND THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS**

The Egyptians began to adopt methods of placing the bodies of the dead in containers such as coffins called sarcophagi. Sarcophagi evolved into something more prestigious called a *mastaba* which is a rectangular building with a flat roof and sloping sides (Wilkinson, 2001). This was made for the king and the social elite. It was not until during "The Old Kingdom" (2700-2184 BCE) period did the Egyptians create the first pyramid. These pyramids were built for only Kings and were a symbol of their greatness and also their gateway to the afterlife. They ensured that the king would get to the next world to continue his work of maintaining Ma'at to ensure Egypt's cosmic, political, and economic prosperity. The first stone pyramid (The Step Pyramid) was built by using a series of six *mastabas*, made of limestone blocks and desert clay, built on top of each other. The Step Pyramid gets its name from its staircase design of the sides. Smooth sidewalls were first introduced with the creation of The Red Pyramid. Many pyramids made after The Red Pyramid adopted the flat-sided design while having varying heights. Another notable set of pyramids is The Pyramids of Giza which were built for King Khufu (2552-2475 BC), his son, and his grandson. Mummification allowed people and kings to enter the afterlife with their bodies. Problems occurred when grave robbers began to desecrate the bodies of the dead and steal the riches within tombs and pyramids. To combat this, Thutmoses I (about 1504-1492 BC) was buried in a valley which would be later called "The Valley of the Kings" (Siliotti, 1996). These tombs would be built underground so that graverobbers would be thwarted away. Many Pharaohs, including their wives and children, were buried there. Even with the tombs being built beneath the earth, graverobbers were still running rampant. Ironically, most of the graverobbers were workers who helped build "The Valley of the Kings". The Egyptians attempt to keep the Pharaohs' bodies protected failed.

## **THE RITUALISTIC PROCESS OF MUMMIFICATION**

### **MUST BE BURIED IN EGYPT**

## **PRELIMINARY ACTIONS**

In Egypt, there was a process established that would allow the Egyptians to get into the afterlife. The Egyptians' had an obsession with getting into the afterlife as well as the outlined mummification process. "Indeed, they went to the most extraordinary lengths to ensure the physical survival of the body after death and this is how the practice of mummification arose," (Sluglett 1990). Total annihilation basically means complete destruction. The Egyptians were immensely fearful of what would happen to their spiritual beings if they were not buried in Egypt. They believed that if they were not buried in Egypt that they would face total annihilation. In Egypt, the use of total annihilation is applied to understand that if Egyptians were not buried in Egypt that their spiritual beings would be completely destroyed. This was the absolute worst thing that could happen to an Egyptian, which is what fed into the Egyptians' obsession with getting into the afterlife. Once an Egyptian had died, he/she would be taken to the "Tent of Purification", which was also called the "House of Beauty". In this tent, the body would be washed in natron solution. "The ancient Egyptians employed the natural soda found in Egypt, which is known as natron, in connection with the burial and preservation of their dead," (Lucas 1914). This natron solution was made up of a hydrated sodium carbonate salt that with direct contact to wet objects would result in a white and colorless drying agent. Also, natron could be found in the salt lakes of Natron Valley that were located in Egypt, but more specifically in the salt lakes' reserves. There were seven people that were present in the mummification process of the body. These people included the overseer of the mysteries, the seal bearer of the god, a lector priest, and four bandagers. The four bandagers were priests directly involved in mummifying and bandaging the body. The first bandager would draw a five-inch line from an orange substance on the dead person's left side of the body. The next bandager would use an obsidian knife to make an incision that traced the orange line on the dead body's left side. As soon as they were done making the incision, this second bandager would put down the knife and run away out of the tent while the other three bandagers threw rocks at him. The reason for this occurrence was because the Egyptians were penalized by stoning for hurting or killing another Egyptian even if they were dead. Therefore, the three bandagers would use small pebbles to symbolically stone the second bandager without actually killing them.

## **THE ACTUAL PROCESS**

After the stoning was completed, the three bandagers would return to the tent to remove the internal organs from the dead body. The reason they did this was because they would place the lungs, liver, stomach, and intestines into four canopic jars. These four canopic jars each had a specific son of Horus that it was adorned with. The four sons included Hapy who was the baboon-headed god, Imsety who was the human-headed god, Duamutef who was the jackal-headed god, and Qebehsenuf who was the falcon-headed god. The jar of Hapy had the lungs placed inside, the jar of Imsety had the liver placed inside, the jar of Duamutef had the stomach placed inside, and the jar of Qebehsenuf had the intestines placed inside. Lastly, the heart would be left inside of the dead body. Packing the cavity with linen was the next step that came after removing the internal organs. The remaining three embalmers would use a long thin instrument that had a hooked end to insert into the nostril after breaking the Ethmoid bone inside of the nose. The hook was used to stir the brain so that it could be pulled out in pieces. The brain was actually given no significance and would just be discarded so that the brain cavity could be

packed with linen. The priests would then wrap each finger and toe individually before moving on to wrap the whole body. They would insert amulets as they would wrap the body in order to protect the dead body. “As they believed in an afterlife, it seemed logical to provide all those necessities and luxuries which had been enjoyed in life on earth, such as food, clothing, furniture, servants and a good deal of personal jewelry, always a status symbol in any society,” (Sluglett 1990). Finally, the last step involved pouring natron over the entire body so that it would be fully covered. The mummy would be available once the natron was removed over the entire body after seventy days.

## **THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MUMMIFICATION**

In the early days of Egypt, the dead were all buried in pit graves in the sand without regard to social status. Through the centuries of the long-lived Egyptian civilization, the methods of burial would evolve significantly - not only with regard to the process itself, but to its implications for a citizen's place both in society and the afterlife. In the spirit of cultural significance, the following describes a duality between the evolution of literal burial practices along with the change in Egyptian thinking from the *Pyramid Texts*, the *Coffin Texts*, and finally to the *Book of the Dead*.

### **CULTURAL STATUS**

The evolution from burial in the sand to mummification and the preservation of the physical body was in some ways motivated by the conservation properties of the sand and arid environment of Egypt. In that time, before c.a. 3000 BC, not only was the burial process uniform amongst all social classes, but there was also not a clear distinction between classes that would exist in *Duat*, as well. This preceding uniformization was a remarkable discovery that was notably learned by historians and archaeologists after their discovery of the more recent Egyptian past in which there was no such uniformization, i.e. their history was uncovered in reverse order, chronologically. In fact, for the more recent Egyptian epoch, the distinction of social classes was markedly different for both the literal burial process (that had become very sophisticated from the time of sand burials) and for what waits for citizens in *Duat*. The process of burial in the sand has widely been believed to be common practice in the early pre-dynasty days of Egypt (before c.a. 3000 BC) and to have been distinct from the linen wrappings of mummification; however, there has been recent evidence that the transition from sand burials to (some perhaps limited form of) linen wrapping of the dead did have some cross-over in as early as 4500-3300 BC in pit graves that suggest some form of early mummification was in practice that we have yet to learn more about (Jones, 2014). As the mummification process became more sophisticated, so did the developments of tombs - from the development of the Great Pyramids in the Old Kingdom to Hatshepu's construction of the necropolis in c.a. 1450 BC. The process of burial became a distinguishing factor of social class that has helped modern historians infer new developments around the time of the Pharaoh Hatshepsut (c.a. 1533 - 1483 BC). The infamous “Prince's lock”, a lock of hair worn specifically on the right side, was one such marker of social standing worn by the first-born of a ruler who would be in line to become the next Pharaoh. Archaeologists notably discovered that Pharaoh Amenhotep II's son, Webensenu, had such a lock when his tomb was discovered.

## RELIGION

The evolution of burial processes in Egypt in particular was heavily influenced by the evolution of religion in the region. While the previous discussion of the famous *Pyramid Texts*, *Coffin Texts*, and *Book of the Dead* lends some insight into the evolution of religion, a deeper understanding specifically the correlation with mummification and their dual developments in Egypt, while noting that the growth of both was quite substantial. One instance involves three important ideas regarding the Egyptian concept of a soul - these are the “ka” (the double of the person), the “akh” (the spirit of the dead person), and the “ba”, which allowed access to the celestial realms. From the predynastic age (c.a. 3000 BC) of Egypt up until the Old Kingdom (Dynasties III-VI, c.a. 2600-2150 BC), the “ba” was exclusively available to the noble class. It was later hypothesized that not only did they have access to the “ba”, but also to a physical path laid out from their place of rest to what the Egyptians may have believed to be *Duat*, itself.

“Pick up any text on the subject (Egyptology) and you will encounter the same statement, that the pyramids functioned as royal tombs. But why, when a simple hole in the ground would have sufficed, should the Egyptians have built tombs up to 147 metres high?” (Bauval).

This theory is remarkable in establishing the significance of the burials of nobles in the Old Kingdom of Egypt in the time of the *Pyramid Texts*. Following the *Coffin Texts* after the Old Kingdom came the New Kingdom (Dynasties XVIII-XX, c. a. 1500-1000 BC) and the writing of the *Book of the Dead*. By this time, all citizens were afforded access to the “ba”, the “akh”, and the “ka” and burial in this time would not change much from its practiced traditions. Then, as the sophistication of Egyptian burial processes evolved, so did the religion, and both of their consequences on the Egyptian citizens. The consequences of these beliefs had massive consequences on other religions and cultures, for better or for worse.

## HOW THE AFTERLIFE LAUNCHED ANCIENT EGYPT INTO THE ECONOMIC SUPERPOWER IT BECAME

### BUILDING OF THE PYRAMIDS

The building of the pyramids themselves had a great impact on the economy of Ancient Egypt. The Kings were seen as gods, and thus needed grand pyramids built to show their godliness. As previously mentioned, the pyramids were not the original burial method. Some historians accredit the construction of the pyramids to Imhotep, the “chief of sculptors.” The pyramids were fabricated in a very precise manner, ensuring a safe transition into *Duat* and in hopes of the grave not being robbed. This took an immense amount of planning in the engineering and construction of these structures. Other important aspects of the pyramids included papyrus scrolls, jewelry, and hieroglyphic paintings on the walls, showing the wealth of the individual (Scheutte, 2018). These required specialists to be commissioned to create these tomb possessions, thus supporting local businesses. The people who built the pyramids were not slaves, but rather residents of Egypt. They worked, not for monetary pay, but to have their taxes and dues excused (Schuette,

2018). Working for one month out of the year would excuse their taxes for the entire year. The invention of hieroglyphs was also huge development for the pyramids. Hieroglyphs were essential inside the tomb to guide the spirit of the dead back to their physical body on the way to *Duat*. This also created a whole writing system for those in Egypt. As Scheutte wrote, “this particular invention ‘formed a seminal part of the creation and maintenance of the state’” (2018). The author is explaining how, even though hieroglyphs were invented for the tombs of the dead in the pyramids, it also expanded into the business of Egypt. This is one reason why the economy took off in Egypt at the time, since everyone had the same writing system. The building of the pyramids, from the construction to the extra little nuances and possessions that were kept inside the tomb, had a great impact on the economy of Ancient Egypt.

## **COST OF REQUIRED MUMMIFICATION MATERIALS**

The process of mummification had a vast impact on the economy of Ancient Egypt. One of the essential materials used in mummification was natron. It had to be mined from the Nile Delta, thus employing the miners and the people who transported it from the Nile to wherever needed it. A lot of natron was needed for each mummification (about ten times the body volume), and since everyone had to be mummified to go to the afterlife, this was a huge business. Natron was sometimes reused from one body to another, but this generally made the drying out of the second body slower, so it was not done often (Abdel-Maksoud and El-Amin, 2011). Another important material in the mummification process was the use of resins and sawdust to stabilize the body tissues and wrappings. These are thought to have come from coniferous trees, likely from the juniper shrub or cedar tree specifically. These trees could only be harvested during certain times of the year, such as summer and autumn for the juniper shrub. Some of these plants were also not found in Egypt, but rather other countries like Lebanon for the cedar trees. This required Egyptians to harvest them at the given time of year and come back to Egypt with their product (Abdel-Maksoud and El-Amin, 2011). It was an extensive, strenuous process, which likely required great financial compensation. As Abdel-Maksoud and El-Amin wrote, “Ancient Egyptian civilization was distinguished by a clearly defined belief in human existence which continued after death, but this individual mortality was considered to be dependent in part on the preservation of the body in as lifelike a form as possible” (Abdel-Maksoud and El-Amin, 2011). This proves that not only was mummification in general extremely important, but also the specific process and materials needed are just as important to ensure the body is preserved as best it can be. Since the Ancient Egyptians believed that everyone had to be mummified, not just the Kings/Pharaohs or wealthy people, mummification became a big business itself. They even mummified their animals so that they could be in the afterlife with them. There were different levels of mummification, depending on how wealthy the deceased person’s family was. In general, the more money you had, the more care was taken into removing all the organs and embalming them separately. The least wealthy people just had the intestines cleaned out in a purge, while the wealthy people had everything, including the brain, carefully drawn out and treated with spices. How wealthy you were also depended on what type of sarcophagus you got. The wealthy got very elaborate and decorated sarcophagi, while the lower class received a mainstream, plain coffin. As Joseph Sluglett says, “There is no doubt that, in Ancient Egypt, mummification was a highly organized and flourishing business...” (Sluggest, 1990). From this quote, one can tell how the business of mummification was huge in Egypt at the time. He states

how impactful the process of everyone being mummified was to the economy of Ancient Egypt and acknowledges how it launched Ancient Egypt into the superpower it became.

## CONCLUSION

As demonstrated throughout this paper, the art of mummification developed from a standardized body in the ground approach, to *mastabas*, to pyramids, to the Valley of the Kings and with this burial development, the intricacy of the Ancient Egyptian religion grew with it. The progression of burial tactics developed as a way to counteract the elements of nature that would disturb the body. With these developments, the burial practices morphed the religious aspects of the society. The Ancient Egyptians obsession with reaching the afterlife was centered around the fear of annihilation. The Ancient Egyptians believed if their bodies were not buried in Egyptian soil, they would not reach the afterlife. Mummification developed as a way to ensure the body would still be able to function in the afterlife. Mummification involved removing the internal organs, dehydrating the body with natron, and then repacking the body with linens and amulets and protective spells to ensure a rapid entrance into the afterlife. This process became such an enterprise that soon everyone was getting mummified when he or she died; even pets. The need to be mummified made Egypt extremely rich internally as people were needed to collect the supplies (some of which was collected from different countries), perform the burial rituals, and build the vast tombs for pharaohs. This paper has highlighted the key factors that contributed to the economic rise of the Ancient Egyptian Culture. First, the necessary epistemic process of mummification was detailed. Second, the ritualistic procedure of mummification was described. Third, this paper demonstrated the cultural significance of the rituals as part of a complex religion. And fourth, this paper revealed the influence mummification had on the internal economic boom that turned Ancient Egypt into a superpower. Through these four progressions throughout history, which was used in order to attain the afterlife, turned the Ancient Egyptian civilization into an economic and geographic superpower.



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Ptolemaic Egypt rapidly established itself as an economic powerhouse of the ancient world at the end of the 4th century BCE. The wealth of Egypt was owed in...Â From the 3rd century BCE onwards, social and economic inequality caused uprisings and civil unrest, which further strained the Egyptian economy. The largest uprising occurred between 205 BCE and 185 BCE when Upper Egypt temporarily seceded from the Ptolemaic Kingdom with Nubian support. Upper Egypt was reconquered during the reign of Ptolemy V (204 BCE â€“ c. 180 BCE), but the effects of this insurrection rocked Egypt and prompted the Ptolemaic dynasty to reform many aspects of its rule. Landowners & Labourers. Egypt is considered by many historians to be one of the first great civilizations, and modern Egyptians can trace a national heritage that stretches back thousands of years. At its prime, Egypt was a true ancient superpower and a center of art, culture, and education. Many of its ancient monuments still rise up from the desert sands, and the pyramids are considered some of the oldest, and grandest, human structures still standing. The tombs of its long-dead pharaohs continue to mystify us with the allure of untold riches and priceless artifacts buried under the shifting sands, and the curses t