

## **EDITORIAL REVIEW**

### **“A PHAROAHS FAREWELL: THE MAKING OF A MUMMY”**

Ulmer, D.: Titford, M.  
University of South Alabama, Mobile Alabama

This article appeared in The National Funeral Directors Association Journal. In it the author describes an experiment conducted by Robert Brier of Long Island University and Ronald Wade of The University of Maryland to copy exactly the mummification process perfected by the Egyptians over 2,000 years ago. Bronze and stone tools were prepared, exact replicas Egyptians used for embalming. Oils, spices, linen, and hundreds of pounds of natron, the salt used to preserve the body was purchased in Egypt.

The body was eviscerated by removing the brain through the nose and the internal organs through a four inch abdominal incision. The body was washed with Palm wine and myrr and packed with natron for 35 days. The organs were packed separately. Linen was then wrapped around the body using tree resin as an adhesive. The experiment was a success, although the mummy appears different to those of antiquity from Egypt. Tissue samples will be taken periodically to evaluate the mummification process.

While this process is not true plastination, it is however a forerunner to the now popular process that we as Plastinators now use. From time to time, I believe it is good to examine and see the yester years.

### **“A PHARAOH’S FAREWELL: THE MAKING OF A MUMMY”**

Korbeck, Sharon

As early as 2500 B.C., Egyptians used mummification to preserve kings, commoners and even animals.

Today, two East Coast scholars have recreated the ancient craft in hopes of capturing the mystery and magic of mummies.

Robert Brier, chairman of the philosophy department at Long Island University, and Ronald Wade, director of the Anatomical Service Division at The University of Maryland Medical School, began making a mummy last spring - a process they believe hasn't been replicated in more than 2,000 years.

“Egyptians were the first to use artificial means of preservation, and we wanted to gain some understanding of an ancient process by recreating its steps exactly,” says Wade.

Brier, who initiated the project, likens it to a murder mystery in which clues must be recreated to solve the puzzle. His school funded much of the project, and Wade's laboratory donated the space, manpower and the ultimate necessity-a body.

Wade had not known Brier previously, and the need for a body was what brought Wade on board. “In Maryland, people really believe in body donation,” he says. Their subject was a 76 year-old Baltimore man who had died of a heart attack.

The facilities at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, where Wade is located, were ideal for the project. Wade is a licensed funeral director, and his anatomical expertise was also required.

Brier had previously traveled to Egypt gathering oils, spices, linen and hundreds of pounds of natron, the salt used to preserve the body. Using handmade bronze or stone replicas of ancient Egyptian tools, the team began its work in May.

The body was first eviscerated, which Wade calls the most challenging portion of the project. In keeping with the Egyptian process, they removed the brain through the nose. Then, through a five-inch incision in the abdomen, internal organs were removed with each organ intact, treated and placed in canopic jars. As per tradition, only the heart remained in the body.

Brier and Wade swabbed the internal cavities with palm wine and myrrh and filled them with linen-wrapped natron packets. Then the body was ready for the long drying process.

The body was covered head to foot with natron and left to cure in a 105-110°F room. “We tried to get the environment most like Egypt,” Wade says.

After 35 days, the body was ready to be uncovered. “I was amazed that the natron removed about 100 pounds of water from the body”, Wade recalls. The body was then wrapped in linen, using tree resin as adhesive, and kept in the heated room.

Wade took tissue samples from the body prior to final wrapping. The samples allow him to study the degree of preservation and dessication to gauge the project's success. The mummy will be stored in a Ziegler case, and Wade will study tissue samples every 6-12 months.

National Geographic filmed the project's progress for its “Explorer” television program, which aired August 28.

With the mummy only several months old, Wade calls the project a success. “The mummy looks a bit different than those in Egypt, but it is very well preserved.”

How long will the mummy stay preserved? Wade believes it could be for several thousand years. But learning about the ancient craft will continue.

“If one or two years from now there is decay, we will know that we missed something that was key to the process.”

“The Egyptians were involved in magic. There were secrets, things that were never written down. If this doesn't work, we may never know how they really did it.”

**“Reprinted with the permission of the National Funeral Directors Association, The Director, NFDA Publications, Inc. LXVI, November 1994.”**