

Ancient Egypt – Mummification

Mummification was a highly sophisticated process developed by the Ancient Egyptians, rooted in their religious belief that the soul — known as the *ka* and *ba* — needed to recognise and return to the body after death. Without a preserved body, the soul could not achieve eternal life in the Field of Reeds, the Egyptian vision of paradise.

The process was performed by specialist embalmer priests. It began with the ritual washing of the body using Nile water and palm wine. The internal organs — lungs, liver, stomach, and intestines — were carefully removed, treated with natron, and stored in canopic jars. These jars were sealed with stoppers shaped as the heads of the four Sons of Horus, each god responsible for protecting a specific organ. The heart was deliberately left in the body, as it was believed to be weighed against a feather in the Hall of Two Truths to judge whether the person had lived virtuously.

The brain, regarded as worthless, was extracted through the nasal passage using a metal hook. The body was then submerged in natron for approximately seventy days to remove all moisture. Afterwards, it was wrapped in layers of fine linen, with amulets such as the scarab beetle placed strategically for spiritual protection.

The completed mummy was enclosed in decorated inner and outer coffins, and sometimes a stone sarcophagus. The whole process reflected how central the belief in the Afterlife was to Egyptian culture and society.



Questions

1. What were the two parts of the soul called in Ancient Egyptian belief?
2. What did the Egyptians call their vision of paradise?
3. Who performed the mummification process?
4. What two liquids were used in the ritual washing of the body?
5. Where were the removed organs stored, and who protected them?
6. Why was the heart left inside the body?
7. How was the brain removed, and why was this done?
8. How long was the body left in natron, and what was the purpose of this?
9. Name one type of amulet placed within the bandages and explain its significance.
10. What does the elaborate and expensive process of mummification tell us about how important the Afterlife was to the Ancient Egyptians?

