

BOOK REVIEW

Jane E. Buikstra,¹ Ph.D.

Review of: *Mummies and Death in Egypt*

REFERENCE: Dunand F, Lichtenberg R. *Mummies and death in Egypt*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006, 256 pp.

Originally published in France as *Les momies et la mort en Egypte* (1998, Editions Errance, Paris), this volume has been translated by David Lorton, an Egyptologist, whose skills ensure that this English version maintains an engaging, scholarly tone. It is divided into two sections. Part One, which includes nine chapters, has been written by Françoise Dunand, Professor of the History of Religion, Marc Bloch University, Strasbourg, France. Her research expertise is described in the Foreword by Jean Yoyotte (Professor Emeritus, College of France) as papyrology with a special focus upon religious life in Egypt between the fourth century B.C. and the fourth century A.D.

The first six chapters briefly review historical contexts and then describe funerary practices for chronologically ordered cultural units, emphasizing mummification procedures, tomb architecture, and burial offerings. This information is lodged within extensive discussions of religious practices and textual references. The six temporal segments thus treated include (i) Prehistory and the First Two Dynasties, (ii) The Old Kingdom, (iii) The Middle Kingdom, (iv) The New Kingdom, (v) The Later Stages of Pharaonic History, and (vi) The Graeco-Roman Period. The seventh chapter, "The Passage of this Life to the Next," focuses upon mummification procedures and funerals in the context of Egyptian religious beliefs. In her eighth chapter, Dunand considers mummification practices for nonhuman animals and their significance in Egyptian belief systems, with special emphasis upon bulls, crocodiles, cats, birds, and rams. The closing chapter of Part One, *The Last Mummies* (Chapter 9), describes the gradual advance of Christianity in Egypt during the first centuries A.D., as Christians first adopted mummification procedures and then supplanted them with funerary practices distinct from those of their "pagan" predecessors.

Part Two, *Mummification and Science*, includes five chapters written by Roger Lichtenberg, a radiologist who has conducted intensive field studies of mummies from the el-Kharga Oasis, Dier el-Medina, Saqqara, and other sites, frequently working as one member of a multi-disciplinary team. Lichtenberg argues compellingly that while there is information to be gained through the study of mummies currently lodged in museum settings, these frequently lack the contextual specificity inherent in contemporary field excavations. He also emphasizes that under normal conditions, noninvasive methods are to be preferred to destructive autopsies.

The first chapter in Part two is an extensive historical overview of mummy studies of ancient Egyptian remains. Missing, however,

are the keenly important contributions that have occurred in the course of six World Congresses on Mummies, which have been held during recent years in diverse venues including the Canary Islands, Chile, Colombia, Greenland, and Italy. Here mummy science has been advanced on a global scale, with Egyptian examples anchoring many investigations.

In Chapter 11, *Methods of Studying Mummies*, Lichtenberg opines, "The protocol for studying a mummy is related to what would be followed by a practitioner of forensic medicine doubling as a historian" (p. 143). While it is true that certain imaging and other methods are shared by forensic and mummy science, Lichtenberg's emphasis upon noninvasive imaging techniques (endoscopy, radiography, C-T, MRI) belies this statement. Additional methods, some medical and others more anthropological, including hair analysis, aDNA, and C-14 dating, are also briefly reviewed here. Some of the information presented in this chapter is not accurate, as it now appears that MRI can be used in imaging mummies (contra Lichtenberg, p. 145), and AMS C-14 dating is not so "imprecise" as suggested (p. 147). Molecular studies of ancient pathogens should also be added to the list of procedures reviewed here.

The next two chapters review case studies of mummies in museums (Chapter 12) and mummies in excavation sites (Chapter 13). In Chapter 12, emphasis is placed upon either large-scale studies or isolated individual studies via multiple lines of evidence. Studies of royal mummies and research conducted by Aidan Cockburn and his team receive detailed treatment, along with that of the Manchester (U.K.) group. While other contexts are mentioned, e.g., the Dakhla Oasis, Antinoe, Chapter 13 focuses primarily upon field investigations conducted by the author.

Chapter 14, "What We Learn From Mummies" closes the volume by considering four additional areas of study: anthropology, paleodemography, paleopathology (including odontology), and mummification. For the British, the first three would be united in the archaeological field known as "osteoarchoeology," familiar to North Americans as the anthropological specialty "bioarchoeology." In this context, Lichtenberg blurs important distinctions between ethnicity and genetic heritage. Significant limitations to paleodemographic study, ranging from sampling issues to methodological imprecision in estimating age, sex, and population parameters are not considered. Similarly, the review of paleopathology, including Harris Lines, is cursory, without reference to major contributions by such contributors to paleopathology and mummy science as Arthur Aufderheide, Conrado Rodriguez-Martin, and Donald Ortner.

In sum, this volume provides a good overview of funerary practices and the history of mummy studies in ancient Egypt. It is less satisfying in its presentation of mummy science as practiced today.

¹Center for Bioarchaeological Research, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.