

ALL WRAPPED UP

THE MANY TASKS OF MUMMYMAKERS



Ancient Egyptians believed that after a person died, he or she lived on in spiritual form for eternity. To help the spirit reconnect with the body in the afterlife, the body had to be preserved. Mummification was a way to prepare the body for the spirit's return.

You probably know that mummies are preserved dead bodies wrapped in strips of cloth. But you might not know how much work and how many different people were involved in making mummies.

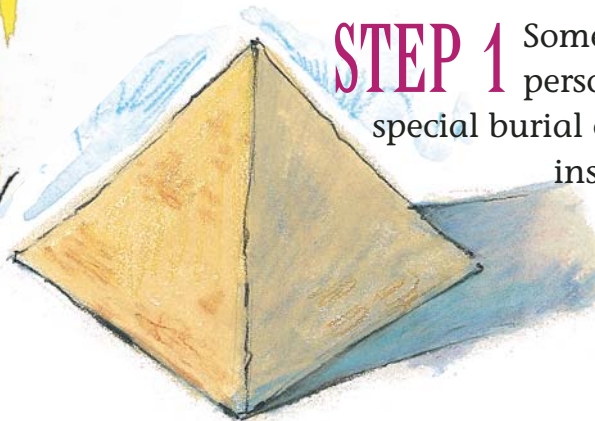
The three main processes in mummifying a body were:

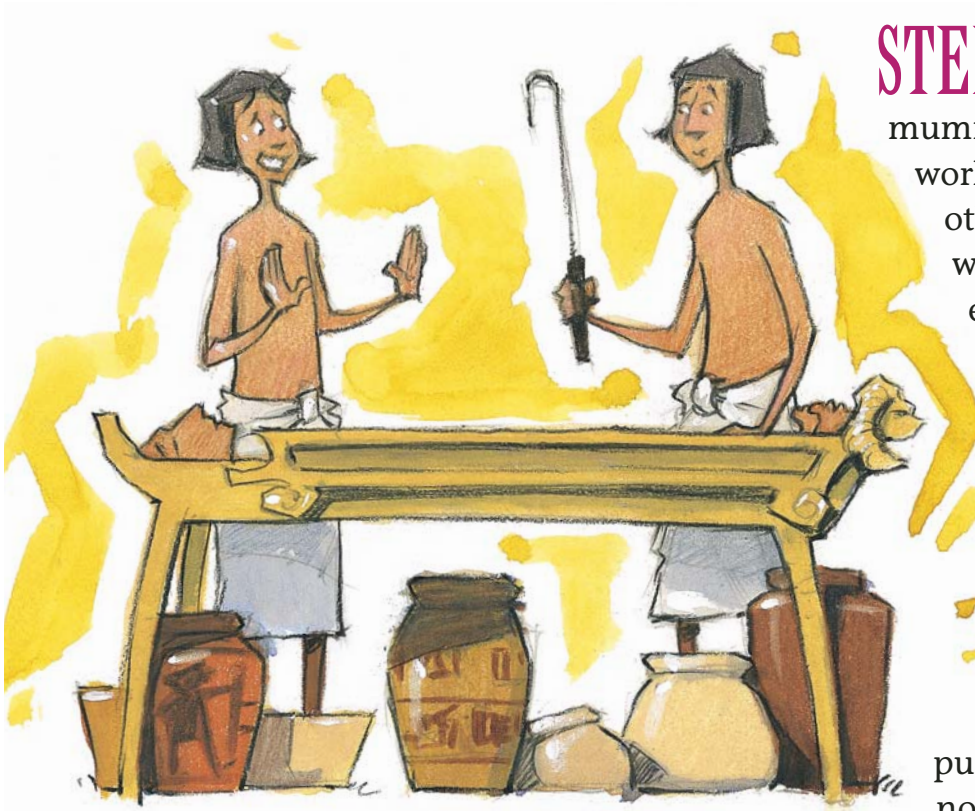


- ✓ removing the internal organs
- ✓ drying the body
- ✓ protecting the remains

It took about 70 days to make a mummy, with many different people doing different jobs. Let's take a step-by-step look at making a mummy and find out who was involved in the work. (Count the words in boldface to find out how many different jobs were involved, and remember, there were probably many more we don't know about.)

STEP 1 Someone died. If the dead person was a pharaoh, a special burial chamber—perhaps inside a pyramid—had been built while he or she was alive.

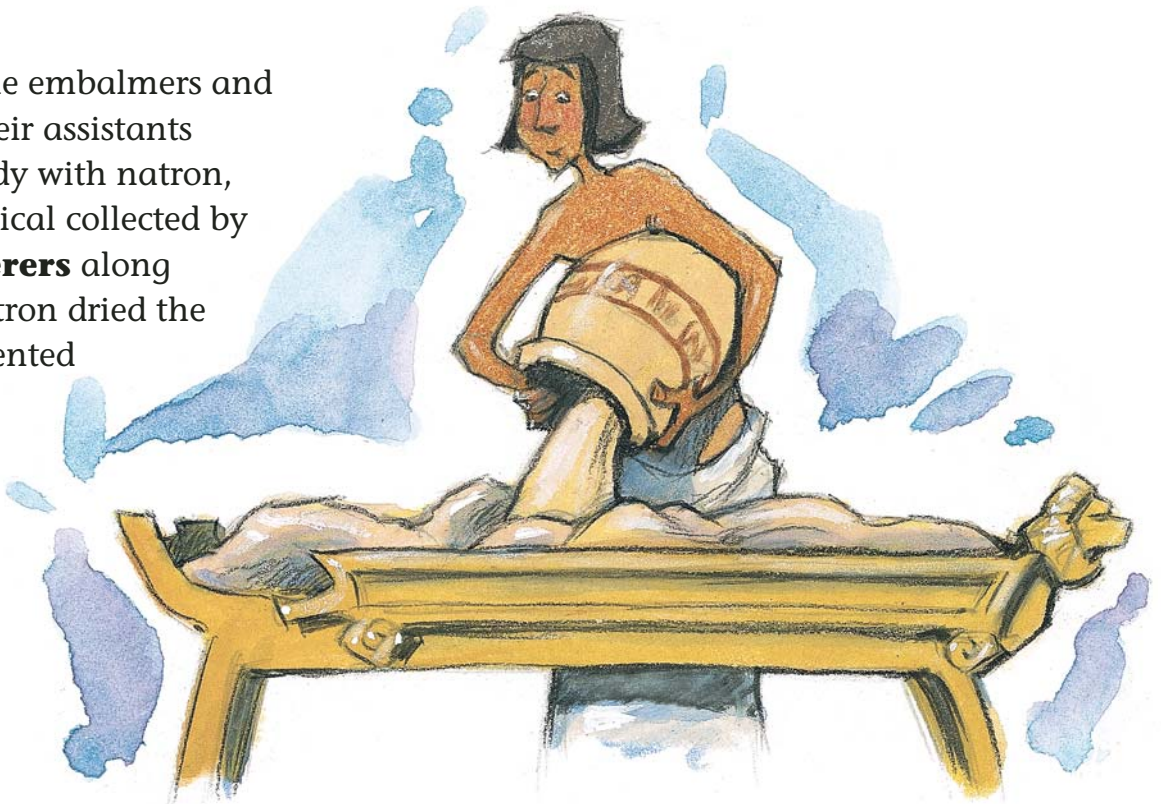




Potters made vases called canopic jars, named after a god. The embalmer placed the mummified organs into four jars. Each jar was decorated with images of a god and prayers were written on the outside to protect the contents.

STEP 2 **Embalmers** did the main work of making mummies. Some embalmers worked in special buildings; others worked in tents. After washing the body, the embalmer placed it onto a wooden table. Then he made a long cut on the left side of the body, below the ribs. Through this cut, he removed the liver, lungs, stomach, and intestines. (These were mummified separately.) He used a metal hook to pull the brain out through the nose. The heart was usually left in the body. During this process, **priests** chanted prayers to protect the mummy.

STEP 3 The embalmers and their assistants covered the body with natron, a saltlike chemical collected by **natron gatherers** along lakeshores. Natron dried the body and prevented bacteria from decaying the body. It could take as long as 40 days for the body to dry completely.

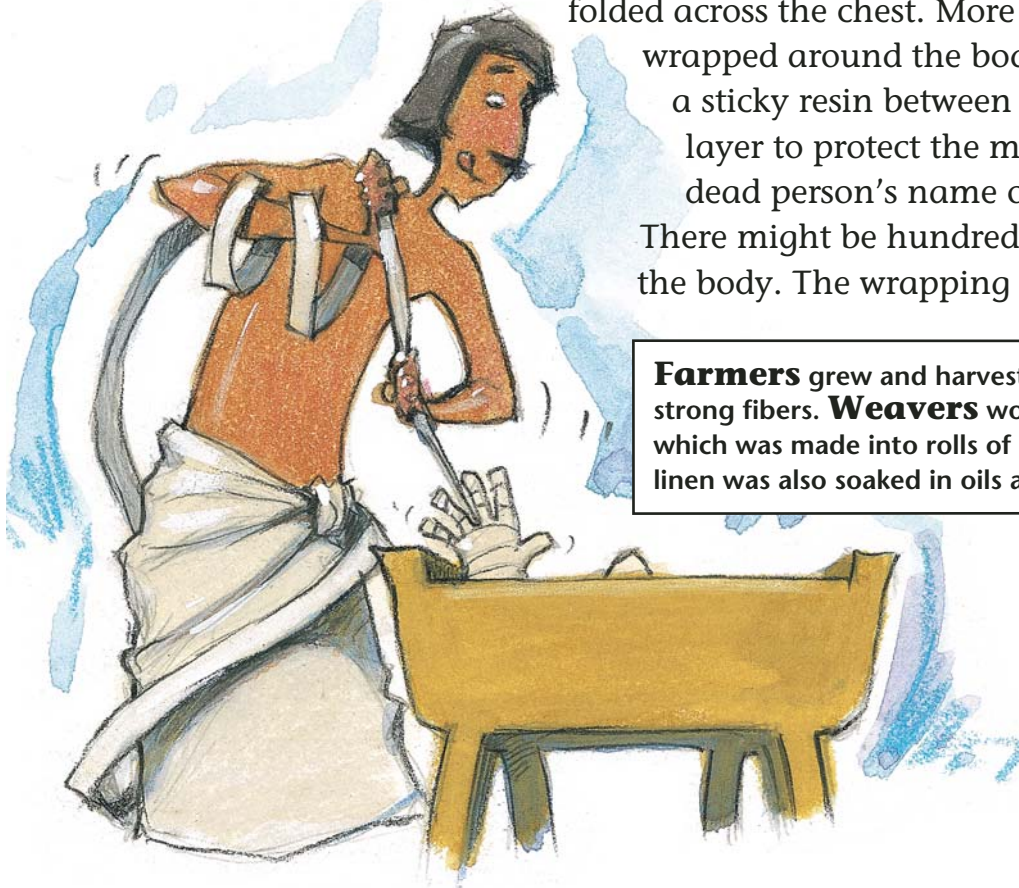


STEP 4 Once the body was dried, it was cleaned and coated with oils, resins, and perfumes to purify it. Sometimes sawdust or linen pads were put inside the body to fill out the shape. Then the embalmer sewed up the cut and placed jewelry and amulets on the body. (Amulets are objects intended to protect against evil.)



Herbalists made and gathered oils, perfumes, resins, and spices from plants growing along the Nile. The embalmers used some of these substances to clean, dry, and perfume the body, and used others to preserve and wrap the skin. **Jewelers** made amulets, necklaces, bracelets, and rings.

STEP 5 Using strips of linen, the embalmers wrapped the fingers, toes, arms, and legs individually. Often the arms were folded across the chest. More layers of linen were wrapped around the body. The embalmer painted a sticky resin between the layers as a waterproof layer to protect the mummy. A scribe wrote the dead person's name on one of the bindings. There might be hundreds of yards of linen covering the body. The wrapping process took about 15 days.



Farmers grew and harvested flax plants for their long, strong fibers. **Weavers** wove these fibers into linen cloth, which was made into rolls of bandages and other cloths. Some linen was also soaked in oils and resins and placed inside the body. **Papermakers** collected wild reeds, or papyrus, growing along the river and made paperlike scrolls. **Scribes** wrote spells from the *Book of the Dead* onto these scrolls.

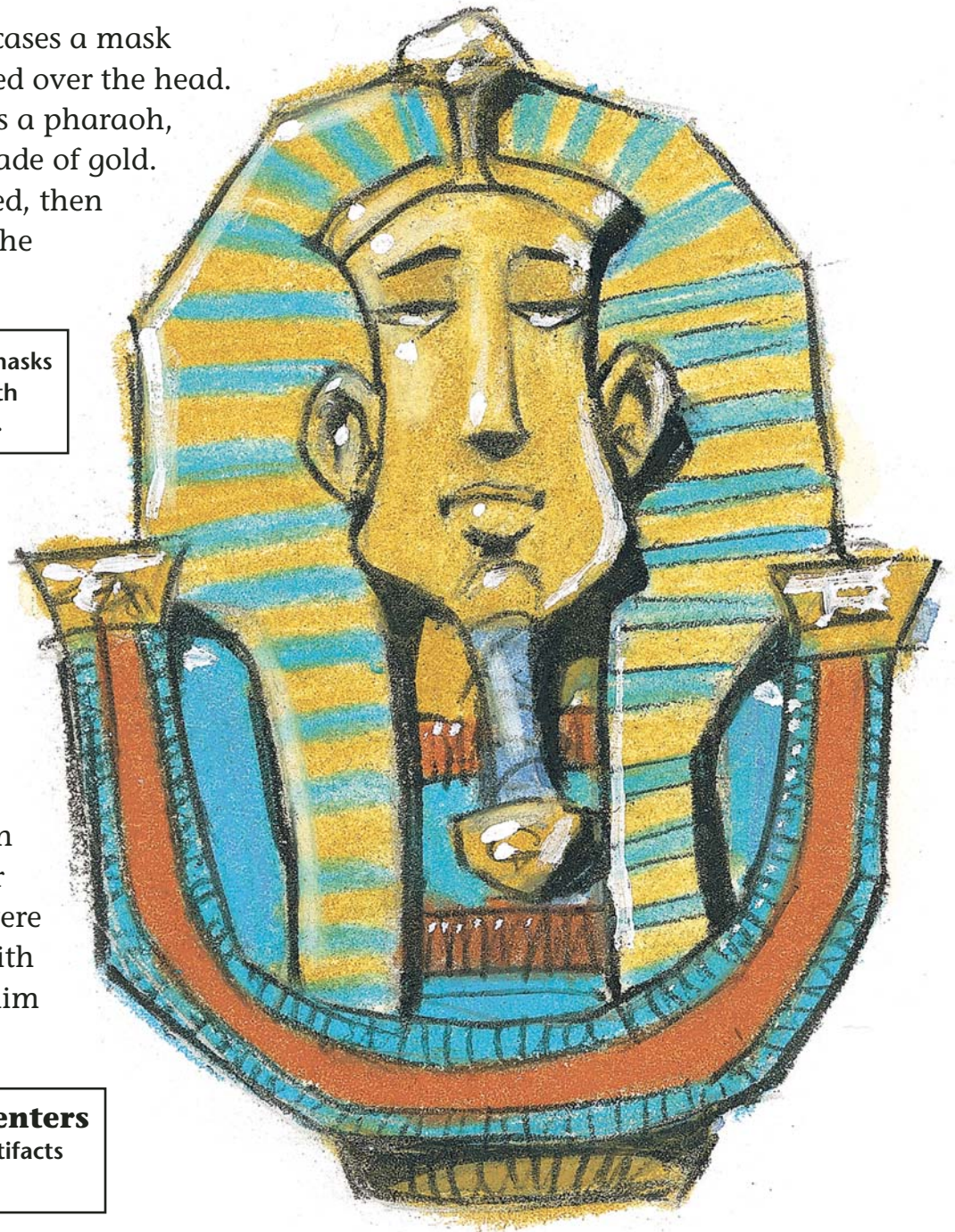


STEP 6 In some cases a mask was placed over the head. If the dead person was a pharaoh, the mask might be made of gold. The mask was wrapped, then a final cloth covered the entire mummy.

Artists made portrait masks and painted the coffin with images and hieroglyphics.

STEP 7 The mummy was placed into a coffin. Sometimes several coffins were nested inside each other, especially if the person was very important or wealthy. The scrolls were placed in the coffin with the mummy to help him or her in the afterlife.

Sculptors and **carpenters** made coffins as well as artifacts and furniture.



STEP 8 The coffin was brought to the person's home. There, the funeral procession began as family and friends took the coffin to the tomb where the funeral took place. The funeral procession included family, friends, servants, and sometimes professional **mourners** who cried for the dead.

Adapted from an article by Damian Fagan
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