EGYPTIAN MUMMIES AND MODERN SCIENCE

Egyptian mummies have always aroused popular and scientific interest; however, most modern studies, although significantly increased in number and range, have been published in specialist journals. Now, this unique book, written by a long-established team of scientists based at the University of Manchester (England), brings this exciting, cross-disciplinary area of research to a wider readership. Its main aim is to show how this team’s multidisciplinary, investigative methods and the unique resource of the Egyptian Mummy Tissue Bank are being used for new major international investigations of disease evolution and ancient Egyptian pharmacy and pharmacology. It also assesses the current status of palaeopathology and ancient DNA research and the treatments available for conserving mummified remains. Descriptions of the historical development of Egyptian mummifications and medicine and detailed references to previous scientific investigations provide the context for firsthand accounts of cutting-edge research by prominent specialists in this field, demonstrating how these techniques can contribute to a new perspective on Egyptology.

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Egyptian Mummies and Modern Science

Edited by

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Acknowledgments

The diverse and complex nature of the research we undertake is only made possible by the generous support we have received over the past four decades from many individuals and organisations. Although it is not possible to thank them all here, we wish particularly to acknowledge those who have provided the opportunities and facilities for our most recent studies.

First, we are indebted to the support we receive from ‘KNH’ whose generosity enabled a unique centre (which carries her initials) to be set up in 2003 at the University of Manchester, and to the two Deans, Professor Alan North, FRS (Dean and Vice-President, Faculty of Life Sciences, 2004–present), and Professor Maynard Case (Dean, School of Biological Sciences, 2001–2004), who have both played crucial roles in the centre’s establishment and development.

We wish to record our gratitude to The Leverhulme Trust (UK) for its support of the interdisciplinary, international projects we undertake. The Leverhulme Trust has provided significant funding towards our research in the form of two Research Grants. The first (1996–1999) facilitated the establishment of the International Ancient Egyptian Mummy Tissue Bank, and the current grant (2006–2009) was awarded for the Pharmacy in Ancient Egypt Project.

We should also like to express our gratitude to Dr Keith Hall, the founder and Managing Director of Hall Analytical Laboratories, Manchester (UK), one of the premier organic mass spectrometry facilities in the United Kingdom, which is involved in both analysis and development. Dr Hall has played a key role in providing additional, essential facilities for our work, and he and his colleagues have been actively involved in the research and interpretation associated with many of the archaeological projects undertaken at the KNH Centre.
At the University of Manchester, we are grateful to many departments for giving us access to their facilities. In particular, we should like to thank Dr Paul Taylor, Clinical Director of Radiology, Central Manchester and Manchester Royal Children’s University Hospitals NHS Trust (CMMC) for permitting the use of the radiographic equipment and computed tomography scanner for imaging of the mummies; the radiographers (Simone Brooke and Nicola Moran) who performed the imaging; and the CMMC Research Endowment for funding the out-of-hours imaging that has been undertaken. We are indebted to Professor Mark W. J. Ferguson for his support in allowing Dr Patricia Rutherford the use of his laboratories for her research. We are grateful to all the depositors to the International Ancient Egyptian Mummy Tissue Bank, and would like to record here that the substantial loans of material made by Professor A. C. Aufderheide, Professor D. Van Gerven, the Manchester Museum and the Leicester Museum have provided significant resources for many of the current projects discussed in this book.

Indeed, many institutions have made their collections, facilities and expertise available to the Manchester team. In particular, we would like to record our gratitude to staff and colleagues at the following: the Agricultural Museum, Cairo, Egypt; the British Museum, London; the Chelsea Physic Garden, London; the Duckworth Collection, University of Cambridge; the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt; the Forensic Science Laboratory, Exton Hall, Chorley, Lancashire (UK); the Georges-Labit Museum, Toulouse, France; the Glyptotek Museum, Copenhagen; the Groningen Museum, the Netherlands; the Leicester Museum, Leicester, UK; Manchester Royal Infirmary, Manchester; the Medical Toxicology Laboratory at Guy’s and St. Thomas’ Hospital, London; the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art, New York; the National Museums of Scotland; the National Research Centre, Cairo, Egypt; the Natural History Museum, London; the Manchester Museum, University of Manchester; PDR, Cardiff (UK); the Polish Centre for Archaeology, Cairo, Egypt; the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (UK); the South Sinai Environmental Agency, Egypt (United Nations Development Programme); Stapeley Water Gardens, Staffordshire (UK); VAC-SERA (the Egyptian Organisation for Vaccine and Biological Production, Cairo, Egypt); and the Vivi Tackholme Herbarium, University of Cairo, Egypt.

We should also like to express our gratitude to the following individuals for supporting and making various contributions to our work: Frank Barnett; Dr Jenefer Cockitt; Professor M. Doenhoff, University of Bangor, Wales (UK); Professor K. H. El-Batanony, National Scientific Advisor to the
Acknowledgments

Egyptian Government; Professor M. El-Demerdash, Director, South Sinai Environmental Agency; Dr W. El-Saddick, Director, Egyptian Museum, Cairo; Dr Azza el-Sarry; Dr B. Harer; Dr N. Hepper; Professor Faiza Hamouda; Professor N. M. Hassan; Professor Fawzia Helmi Hussien; Emeritus Professor M. Kassas; Professor E. Rabino Massa, University of Turin, Italy; Professor A. J. Mills; Professor Moushira Erfan; Caroline Needham; Richard Neave; Dr P. T. Nicholson; Chris Rynn; Denise Smyth; and Dr J. Taylor.

It has been a pleasure to work with the staff at Cambridge University Press, and we are particularly grateful to Publications Director Beatrice Rehl and Senior Editor Simon Whitmore, for their advice and support during the commissioning and production of this book.

To my husband, Antony E. David, I give my personal thanks, for his academic input and significant practical contribution towards preparing this manuscript for publication, and for providing constant support and encouragement for my work.

Finally, we should like to acknowledge the contribution made by our students, whose enthusiasm and interest in this field continually inspire us to pursue new goals and developments.

Rosalie David
Manchester, December 2006
Preface

Rosalie David

The main aims of this book are to show how biomedical and scientific techniques have led to a new understanding of some aspects of ancient Egyptian society, and to demonstrate how the focused, multidisciplinary research of one team, working continuously in this area for more than thirty years, has been able to contribute to this field.

There has been a remarkable and significant increase in the number and range of scientific studies undertaken on mummies over the past couple of decades, and people are now aware of the information that can be derived from such investigations, in terms of explaining the cultural context of human remains and in adding to knowledge of how disease has evolved and developed from ancient to modern times. Much of this work, however, is published in scientific journals or conference papers, and is not readily accessible to the reader who has a general interest in the field.

The Manchester Egyptian Mummy Research Project, established at the University of Manchester in 1973, has conducted pioneering research on the methodology of using scientific techniques to investigate ancient Egyptian mummified remains. It has run the longest continuous research programme in the field of biomedical Egyptology, and this has led to the establishment (in 2003) of a university specialisation and a dedicated facility – the KNH Centre for Biomedical Egyptology in the Faculty of Life Sciences at the University of Manchester (UK).

The earliest phase of this project was published in A. R. David (ed.), The Manchester Museum Mummy Project (1979). The team has made major advances since then, and mummy studies in general have progressed and taken advantage of the many new techniques that can contribute to this field. This book provides the first opportunity to present the complete picture of the Manchester team’s more recent studies. The contributors have not adopted a uniform approach: some chapters provide detailed descriptions
of techniques, others concentrate on the significance of results, and some assess the current role and status of the various fields of interest. Taken as a whole, we hope this book will demonstrate how scientific studies on mummies can provide new insight into the ancient Egyptians’ attitudes to life and death.

The book is divided into five parts. The first, *An introduction to the scientific study of mummies*, considers the aims, methods and development of the Manchester Mummy Project within the wider context of scientific studies on Egyptian mummies; it also provides a brief introduction to the prehistory and history of ancient Egypt and a summary of why and how Egyptian mummies were produced.

The second part, *Diet, disease and death in ancient Egypt: diagnostic and investigative techniques*, describes the Manchester studies on human and animal remains, with particular reference to disease, and demonstrates how a wide range of scientific techniques can be developed and used as diagnostic tools in this research.

The third section, *The treatment of disease in ancient Egypt*, uses information derived from the Manchester studies to explore the ancient Egyptian medical system and the role of medical practitioners, and to assess the extent to which these analytical studies can confirm the ancient literary evidence. It also considers the ancient Egyptian use of narcotics and pain relief in religious, medical and social contexts, and presents the latest research on the scope and possible therapeutic efficacy of their pharmaceutical treatments.

The fourth part, *Resources for studying mummies*, describes the establishment and role of the International Ancient Egyptian Mummy Tissue Bank, and surveys the conservation methods available for the treatment of Egyptian mummified remains. The final section, *The future of biomedical and scientific studies in Egyptology*, provides a summary of the contributions that biomedical and scientific techniques can make to the study of ancient Egypt, and considers some of the directions that this field of research might take in the future.

Each chapter is written by an expert in the relevant field, scientists at the cutting edge of this research who, working together as members of the Manchester Mummy Project, have conducted this original work themselves. Although this is primarily a firsthand account of the group’s own research and results, the investigations are described within the wider context of mummy studies, and an extensive list of references to other work in this field is included.
Preface

Much of the research undertaken at Manchester in recent years has involved the application of new techniques. To provide sufficient space in the book for explanation and discussion of these new techniques, we have decided to omit techniques (such as serology and finger-printing) described in our earlier publications that are no longer part of mainstream mummy research.