

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

# ELECTRONIC ANTIQUITY

**Mummies From The British Museum  
Opens April 17, 2005 at Bowers Museum**



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*Mummies: Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt features the largest collection of mummies and coffins to ever leave British Museum and illustrates the fascinating story of how Egyptians prepared and sent the dead into the afterlife.*

(SANTA ANA, CALIF. – DEC. 14, 2004) -- Among the peoples of the ancient world, the Egyptians occupy a unique position with their approach to death and the possibility of resurrection, particularly since so much of the evidence that has survived over thousands of years comes from a funerary context.

The largest and most comprehensive collection of ancient Egyptian funerary material outside of Cairo is housed at The British Museum. As part of its joint venture with the British Museum, the Bowers Museum has drawn upon this world-famous collection of mummies and funerary objects to present *Mummies: Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt...Treasures from the British Museum*, opening April 17, 2005.

The extensive exhibition features 140 objects, including 14 mummies and/or coffins, and is the largest exhibition of its kind to be shown by the British Museum outside of Britain. The exhibition will run through April 15, 2007.

*Mummies: Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* focuses on embalming, coffins, sarcophagi, shabti figures, magic and ritual, amulets, papyri, as well as the process of mummification. The exhibition illustrates in depth the story of the fascinating Egyptian ritual of preparing and sending the dead to the afterlife, complete with furnishings created specifically for an individual's coffin, such as spectacular gold jewelry and a wooden boat to transport the dead into the underworld.

According to one of the exhibition curators, Assistant Keeper of Antiquities at the British Museum Dr. John Taylor, the Egyptian mummies and coffins in this exhibition are of the highest quality and

have not been exhibited for many years. “This exhibition will provide the ultimate look into the world of mummification,” Dr. Taylor said.



*“We speak of death as one of the great rites of passage of human existence. Whether we believe that life continues beyond death, or ends at that moment, or whether we admit that we do not know, death is a door through which we must all pass.”*

*-- Curator Dr. John Taylor*

#### 4 Electronic Antiquity 8.2

*Mummies: Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* is divided into seven sections:

\_ *The Gods* features life size statues and stone busts of the gods of the afterlife, including Sekhmet and Osiris.

\_ *Beliefs about the Afterlife* focuses on the papyrus texts and other inscriptions regarding the afterlife.

\_ *Mummification* is the heart of the exhibition with mummies, coffins, and canopic jars for the internal organs. Mummies are one of the most characteristic aspects of ancient Egyptian culture. The preservation of the body was an essential part of the Egyptian funerary belief and practice. *Mummification* features two of the exhibition's most spectacular pieces: a child mummy from the Greco Roman period with a lifelike portrait, and a gilded cartonnage mummy mask dating from the Greco-Roman Period (late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC-early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD).

\_ *Trappings of the Mummies* features clothing, jewelry, amulets of various sorts, and a papyrus scepter – items that are necessary to prepare the dead for the afterlife. The amulets are predominantly gold with red juniper and a blue glaze known as Faience.

\_ *Cult of the Dead* features offering tables and statues, including an inscribed alabaster tablet for sacred oils.

\_ *Furnishing of the Tomb* includes all objects that would be placed in an Egyptian tomb to accompany the dead into the afterlife, including spectacular gold jewelry, a wooden boat to transport the dead into the underworld, bowls, jars, a glass vase, and a headrest.

\_ *Shabtis: Servants for the Afterlife*. Shabti figures were developed from the servant figures common in tombs of the Middle Kingdom. They are shown mummified like the deceased, with their own coffin, and were inscribed with a spell to provide food for their master or mistress in the afterlife.

“This exhibition is particularly exciting because it has never been displayed before,” Dr. Taylor said.

All the objects in the exhibition will be published in the Bowers Museum's lavishly illustrated 256-page catalogue that will accompany the exhibition.

\_ High resolution 300 DPI images and captions from *Mummies: Death and The Afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, are available to the media on the CD in the press kit or by contacting Rick Weinberg at 714-567-3642 or at [rweinberg@bowers.org](mailto:rweinberg@bowers.org).

- \_ Interviews are available with Bowers Museum President Peter Keller; Curators Dr. John Taylor and Nigel Strudwick of The British Museum; and Director of Exhibit Design Paul Johnson. Contact: Rick Weinberg at 714-567-3642 or at [rweinberg@bowers.org](mailto:rweinberg@bowers.org).
- \_ A lecture and film series will accompany the exhibition. For more details, please contact Manager of Museum Programs Megan Shockro at 714.567.3679 or [mshockro@bowers.org](mailto:mshockro@bowers.org).

For further information on the catalogue and exhibition, please contact Rick Weinberg at 714- 567-3642 or [rweinberg@bowers.org](mailto:rweinberg@bowers.org). The Bowers' web site is [www.bowers.org](http://www.bowers.org).