

S. J. Wolfe with Robert Singerman. *Mummies in Nineteenth-Century America: Ancient Egyptians as Artifacts*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2009. xii, 292 pp. Photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. Paper: \$35.00. ISBN 978-0-7864-3941-6

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Published in the *Journal of Mormon History* 36 (Fall 2010):259-61.

Mummies in Nineteenth-Century America is a detailed history of the arrival of Egyptian mummies in America and their various usages by S. J. Wolfe, a senior cataloger and serials specialist at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, and Robert Singerman, the emeritus Jewish bibliographer at the University of Florida Libraries, Gainesville. The book contains seven chapters and cites hard-to-find newspaper articles, broadsides, and catalogues to trace the movement and exhibition of these exotic human remains across the United States. Wolfe and Singerman date the introduction of mummies to the United States to 1767 when Benjamin West “presented to the Library Company of Philadelphia” a mummified hand and arm (7; photograph, p. 8).

This book is certainly a labor of love, tracing each of the individuals known to have been associated with the transportation and exhibition of these mysterious mummified bodies to paying viewers. Exhibitors began their activities with incomplete mummies. At Boston in 1818, Ward Nicholas Boylston imported the first complete adult mummy from Europe (9). By 1822 the Western Museum of Cincinnati mentioned a number of papyri associated with the head of a mummy (12). Other period articles mention mummies and their sarcophagi (coffins).

Information new in *Mummies in Nineteenth-Century America* includes the fact that mummies (real or imitation) were displayed in clothing stores to attract business (89–91).

Although I had earlier reviewed the pre-publication chapter dealing with Egyptian mummies in the Mormon world, I still found the description of their history a moving experience. As Wolfe and Singerman point out, the mummies associated with Antonio Lebolo (died 1830) were “the largest collection of mummies to have as yet [been] exhibited in America, all at one place, at the same time” (101). These artifacts still have mysteries, such as where in Egypt they came from and when Michael Chandler first exhibited them before reaching Cleveland in 1835. The book does not, however, shed much new light on the intriguing papyrus scrolls purchased with the four mummies. The transporting of these mummies from Kirtland, to northern Missouri, and then to Nauvoo is fairly well documented. At Nauvoo, Joseph Smith and his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, kept and exhibited the Egyptian mummies.

Lucy kept them until her death in 1856; then the mummies and papyri were sold to Abel Combs. Combs sold two mummies and some pieces of papyri to the St. Louis Museum, but what became of the other two mummies is not known. To date, researchers have failed to locate them. They may no longer exist, or, at least, may not exist as complete mummies.

Though several pieces of the papyri were preserved at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, Latter-day Saints are most intrigued by them in terms of Joseph Smith's interest in them. He considered that one scroll told about Joseph of Egypt and another dealt with the patriarch Abraham. He briefly worked on part of the papyri from which he created the sacred writings of Abraham and the Egyptian Alphabet. The book does not discuss the papyrus used for the Book of Abraham. It is important to point out that the funerary papyrus used for the Abraham text has been translated and is the oldest of its type, a "book of breathing" attributed to the goddess Isis.¹

Wolfe and Singerman's narrative includes many interesting anecdotes related to the actual unwrapping of mummies. One embarrassing incident occurred in 1850 in Boston when George Robins Gliddon, a lecturer of Egyptian archeology, told his paying audience that he would unwrap a female mummy—in fact, a princess, before their very eyes; but when the mummy was finally released from its many wrapping, it turned out to be male (143–60). A wag promptly commemorated the event in verse:

When Gliddon from the mummy case
The wrappings did untwine
No priestess was revealed, but la!
The manly form divine.
Ah! said a wit, who'd paid to see
A priestess there unrolled,
"He keeps his word, this surely is
A dam-sel, for I'm sold." (159)

The book does not shy away from the controversial topic of plundering tombs for mummies and valuables. Chapter 6, which deals with the commercial exploitation of mummies in Victorian America, comments: "From the time of the first Pharaohs to the present day, the burial places of the rich and famous (and often as not, the poor and not-so-famous) had been exploited for their treasures. There was a continuous ready market for the gold and jewels, the aromatics and spices, and other items which could be procured from the resting places of deceased Egyptians" (173–74).

The use of mummies in the nineteenth century included medicine ("mummy power") and paint known as "Mummy brown." Mummy wrapping was also used for making paper (178–97). The *Daily Standard* of Syracuse, New York, boasted in 1856, that the newspaper was made "from rags imported directly from the land of the Pharaohs" (186). Some mummies were ground up for use as fertilizer (194).

I noticed some typographical errors. For example, Adam "Chase" (39) is actually Adam "Clarke" (identified correctly on p. 56). A book on the history of the Mormon mummies is H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism*, but in the chapter notes and Appendix 2, his first name is misspelled "Donal" (238–39, 249).

¹Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 21, 23, 25, 27–28.

I found *Mummies in Nineteenth-Century America* very interesting. For those who enjoy learning something new about the culture of the nineteenth century and its deep fascination with ancient Egypt, this book will be a worthwhile addition.