

From Death to Burial in Graeco-Roman Egypt

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Abstract:

Françoise Perpillou-Thomas has systematically collected papyrological references to festivals and rituals in Graeco-Roman Egypt. Among the rituals associated with the processing of the corpse from death to burial are the peristolē and kēdeia, often translated as burial and funeral.¹ Based solely on Greek papyri, Dominic Montserrat reconstructed prosperous funerals in the Fayum during the Roman period.² Surprisingly, he paid little attention to Egyptian material and classical literature on burial and funeral practices in Egypt.³ Moreover, the relationship of the house with the different steps of the journey of the corpse from the house to the tomb (ekphora, peristolē, kēdeia, and apostolē) has not been highlighted. Integrating papyrological, literary, and archaeological evidence, this article aims to reconstruct the rituals of the passage of the corpse from the moment of death to the interment in the necropolis, highlighting the role of the house in each stage.

Keywords: Death; Burial; Funeral; House; Tomb; Graeco-Roman Egypt.

Introduction: The Osirian Myth and Burial Rituals

Writing in the first century BC, Diodorus Siculus states:

For the inhabitants of Egypt consider the period of this life to be of no account whatever, but place the greatest value on the time after death when they will be remembered for their virtue. While they give the name of "lodgings" to the houses, thus intimating that we dwell in them but a brief time, they call the tombs of the dead "eternal homes", since the dead spend endless eternity in Hades. Consequently, they give less thought to the furnishings of their houses, but on the manner of their burials, they do not forgo an excess of zeal.⁴

¹ Perpillou-Thomas 1993, 19-22.

² Montserrat 1997.

³ Dawson collected references to mummification in classical literature (Dawson 1928).

⁴ Dio. Sic. 1.51.2. Cf. Prince Hordjedef, the son of Khufu, advised: 'Beautify your house in the necropolis since death is bitter and exalted for us, the house of death should be for life (Wente 1982, 18).

Diodorus's visit to Alexandria between 60-56 BC gives credibility to his testimony as an eyewitness. Egyptian tombs and temples were built of stone because they were intended to last for eternity, whereas houses were constructed of perishable materials such as mud-brick and wood because they were regarded as replaceable.⁵ Because of the durability of the materials used in their construction, archaeology has revealed much more about tombs and temples than about houses.⁶ There was no contradiction between the function of the house and that of the tomb. By contrast, the relationship between the house and the tomb is complementary. While the former provided a temporary residence for the living body, the latter offered it an everlasting abode. The Egyptians believed that when they died their body would exist in an afterlife similar to their life on earth. Since the dead required many articles for use in the eschatological life, they consequently equipped their tombs with a variety of burial goods.

Since the Pharaonic period, the legend of Osiris has left its impact on almost every aspect of Egyptian rituals of the burial and funeral.⁷ While Osiris left his Egyptian kingdom to subdue the world by the arts of peace, Isis governed in his absence. On his return, Seth and his seventy-two fellow conspirators imprisoned him by craft in a chest, which was flung into the Nile.⁸ There are two versions regarding the timing of the death of Osiris. One version suggests that the death of Osiris occurred in harvest time, when 'an offering of the first fruits was brought, whilst the men beat their breasts, lamenting and invoking Isis'.⁹ On the other hand, Plutarch states that the ancient Egyptians commemorate the mourning for Osiris by Isis when the Nile started to rise in summer, when the inundation was caused by the tears of Isis. Very well-known is his description of the procession to the Nile in the night of 19th Athyr; the priests scooped water from the Nile in a precious pitcher and those present proclaimed loudly: 'Osiris has been found'.¹⁰

On hearing of the murder of Osiris, Isis cut off a lock of her hair and wore mourning clothes. Together, Isis and Nephthys mourned for the lost Osiris for four days (17-20 Athyr) before the chest containing his body was found by Isis near the mouths of the Nile.¹¹ Here it was buried for a

⁵ Husselman 1979.

⁶ David 2007, 51.

⁷ Assmann 1977.

⁸ Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 13.

⁹ Dio. Sic. 1.45.

¹⁰ Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 39.

¹¹ Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 39.

while; but Seth, while hunting by night, discovered it and cut the body inside into fourteen or twenty-six pieces, which he scattered to the winds.¹² Then Isis took boat and searched for the pieces, until she had recovered them all save one, the privates.¹³ Isis and Nephthys carefully put the pieces together. Anubis then embalmed the whole body and made the first mummy in the ancient world.¹⁴ The rejoining of the limbs of Osiris became the prototype for the overcoming of death and furnished the mythical precedent for mummification.¹⁵ Isis placed coffins of Osiris beneath the earth in several places, but only one of them, and that unknown to all, contained the body of Osiris. She did this because she wished to hide the body from Seth, fearing that he might find it and cast it out of its tomb.¹⁶

Following the death of Osiris, an eighty-two year dispute over the inheritance of Osiris broke out between Horus, the son of Osiris, and his uncle Seth, the archenemy of Osiris and the icon of chaos. Finally, the tribunal of the god at Heliopolis ordered the throne to Horus. This tribunal set the setting for the so-called negative confession, when the dead man turned to forty-two assessors and pleaded that he was innocent of forty-two sins. Not only ancient Egyptian funerary literature always connects the dead with Osiris,¹⁷ but also Osirian eschatological imagery dominates tombs and coffins in Graeco-Roman Egypt.¹⁸ The Osirian myth indicated that the physical and spiritual aspects of the dead, *ka* and *ba*, would be reunited with the body in the hereafter.¹⁹ This is why the Egyptians were concerned to preserve the dead bodies. A Demotic funerary composition of the first/second century AD has the opening phrase as 'May the *ba* live' formulae, stressing the centrality of the soul to the post-mortem existence of the corpse and its transition into the following of Osiris.²⁰ As in the Pharaonic period, funerary texts of Graeco-Roman Egypt empower the postmortem individual through liturgical recitation by lector priests or mourners.²¹

¹² Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 87; Dio. Sic. 1.21.2.

¹³ Dio. Sic. 1.22.6.

¹⁴ Sayce 1903, 142.

¹⁵ Assmann 1989, 138.

¹⁶ Strabo 17.1.23.

¹⁷ Smith 2009a.

¹⁸ Edgar 1905.

¹⁹ Lohmann 1998.

²⁰ Scalf 2014.

²¹ Smith 2009a; Scalf 2014.

The official cult never explains how the *Ba* and the mummy were united. In the so-called Hermetic books, which endeavoured to translate the theology of Egypt into Greek thought, the *ka* is equated with the intelligence (*nous*), of which the *ba* or soul (*psychē*) was the envelope. The soul is imprisoned in the earthly tabernacle of the body, the intelligence is deprived of the robe of fire in which it should be clothed and its brightness is dimmed. The death of the body releases it from its prison-house; it once more soars to heaven and becomes a spirit (*daimon*), while the soul is carried to the hall of judgment to be awarded punishment or happiness according to the deeds it did on earth.²²

Burial as Necessity and Obligation

The ancient Egyptians spent a considerable amount of time and money preparing for their death. The custom of Pharaonic kings granting the deserving persons assistance in founding and providing funerary equipment for their graves ceased by the Graeco-Roman period.²³ It is now the family's responsibility to commission the tomb and cover burial and funeral costs. Greek papyri and elaborate mummies in the necropoleis show the will of the dead and their families to allocate excessive expenditures on the funeral and burial. Roman-period wills from the Fayum and Oxyrhynchus make clear the concerns of living testators about their funerals. In the second century AD, the joint will of a married couple at Oxyrhynchus states that whichever of the partners survives has the power to sell all or any of the slaves they owned mutually to 'defray the expense of the funeral and carrying-out of the body'.²⁴ Tamystha similarly stipulated that her daughter Taoresenouhpis would inherit her property on condition that she shall provide a fitting *kēdeia* and *peristolē* for her mother at Tebtunis.²⁵ In the second century AD, a woman in the Arsinoite bequeathed a room without rent in her house to her unmarried daughter on condition that she shall take care for the funeral and embalming of her mother's body.²⁶ A woman called Soueris, who made her will at Tebtunis in AD 125, stipulated that her

²² Sayce 1903, 59-60. For modern Egyptians, death similarly has two inseparable meanings related to the two components of a person, the body and the soul/spirit. The first meaning is related to the condition of a person's body when his/her soul/spirit departs from it. The second meaning refers to death as the transition of the soul/spirit of a person from this life to another life or from one house to another (El-Aswad 1987, 211).

²³ Erman 1907, 124.

²⁴ *P.Oxy.* III.493.5.

²⁵ *SB* VIII.9642.12.

²⁶ *BGU* III.896.7.

heirs Onnophris and Tephersais should be responsible for her interment and laying-out 'as seem appropriate to them'.²⁷ In the third century AD, one Besas stipulates that his son should to arrange for the burial of his body (kēdeia) in Kysis, the Great-Ōásis.²⁸ Here, family members had full responsibility for the arrangement for the funeral and burial of their late relatives.

The inability of presumptive heirs to prepare the burial for the dead person may lead to the exclusion from inheritance. Early in the New Kingdom, one Meniupu dies as a fugitive and without heirs; a woman buries him at the instance of her husband who says, 'bury him and act as an heir towards him'.²⁹ Also, lines 10-11 recto of P.Bulaq X, which dates back to the late 19th or early 20th dynasties, states 'let the possessions (*sc.* of the deceased) be given to him who buries, says the law of Pharaoh'.³⁰ This text records a dispute over inheritance. When Tgemy died, she left some children and an inheritance. Since Huy, one of her sons, took care of her burial without the assistance of his brothers and sisters, the whole inheritance passed to him in accordance with the law of Pharaoh. At this point, the other children of Tgemy came forward and claimed a part of their mother's inheritance as being her heirs, claiming that Huy did not bury her alone.

The extraordinary care that heirs gave to burial and funeral arrangements of their testators suggests that this law probably survived into the Graeco-Roman period. In late second century AD Oxyrhynchus, Helen wrote rebuking her brother Petechons: 'You did not act properly by failing to come on account of your brother; you have allowed his funeral to be neglected. I think you should know that a woman from somewhere else has been made his heir'.³¹ In all probability, the deceased left no children to care for the burial and inherit his possessions. The only case in which a strange woman would inherit his possessions is when she solely takes care of his burial and funeral. The papyrus does not mention whether Helen participated in the burial. The tone of anger and blame inherent in the letter suggests that she was unable to take care for the burial of her dead brother; possibly, she could not afford it. By not burying the dead, the heirs forfeit their rights to a share of the inheritance, while the one who undertakes the burial gets everything.

²⁷ SB VIII.9642.3.13.

²⁸ SB I.4651.10.

²⁹ Gardiner and Sethe 1928, 26-7.

³⁰ Janseen and Pestman 1968, 140.

³¹ P.Oxy. VII.1067.

Individuals often leave precise instructions in their wills about how they wished to be buried.³² At Oxyrhynchus, Sintheus, daughter of Diogenes, specified that 'I wish for my son and heir to make an equal outlay on my funeral and the treatment of my body in the Egyptian fashion (aiguptia taphē)'.³³ In a second century AD will from Tebtunis, an unknown man similarly writes 'Let my wife organise my funeral and the treatment of my body in the Egyptian fashion'.³⁴ A famous exception to this custom is the will of the son of Epimachos, who refused the Egyptian mode of burial for cremation, indicating the diversity of mortuary options at this time.³⁵ In an Egyptian context, the word taphē encompasses a spectrum of meanings ranging from the burial,³⁶ the burial-place,³⁷ the burial-fee,³⁸ the mummy,³⁹ or even the sarcophagus.⁴⁰ Yet the 'Egyptian mode of burial' definitely included, among other things, the peristolē and the kēdeia.⁴¹

In the Egyptian mode of burial, the dead had to pass a journey of stages to face the final judgment before they would access the afterlife. If successful, they were required to provide eternal sustenance for their spirit. These things could be achieved if proper preparations were made during the person's lifetime and after death as well. Such arrangements could be made by purchasing small funerary goods for placement in the tomb, including amulets and funeral equipment; commissioning a coffin; and by constructing a tomb. From the moment of death to burial, other necessary preparations should be guaranteed for the dead body, which has to pass through successive and/or simultaneous rites of passage: The ekphora; the peristolē; the kēdeia; and the apostolē. The aim of these rites was the preparation of the deceased for a successful postmortem transition from this life to the next.

The Ekphora:

Death and funeral rituals start immediately after the death of a person. When people died away from home, their bodies were brought back to their place of origin to be buried. Numerous letters mention mummies

³² Montserrat 2004, 475.

³³ PSI XII.1263.6-8 (AD 166-167) = SB V.7816.

³⁴ CPR VI.1.14.

³⁵ SB V.7871.

³⁶ OGI 90.32.

³⁷ SB 6028.2.

³⁸ P.enteux 32.6.

³⁹ P.Oxy. 736.13.

⁴⁰ P.Giss. 68.7.

⁴¹ PSI XII.1263 = SB V.7816.

being transported for this reason. As there is a passionate liaison between the body and the house, whenever a person dies out of his/her house, the body was taken to the house to be prepared for necessary burial and funeral rites.⁴² In Rome, it was crucial to have the corpse rested in the house before the performance of burial and funeral rituals. The father of a Roman citizen who killed his sister for blaming him for murdering his cousins, including her lover:

Neither permit his daughter's body to be brought into the house nor allow her to be buried in the tomb of her ancestors or given any funeral or burial robe or other customary rites. But as she lay there where she had been cast, in the place where she was slain, the passers-by, bringing stones and earth, buried her like any corpse which had none to give it proper burial.⁴³

Immediately after a death, relatives and friends sent letters of condolence to the bereaved. In late third or early fourth century AD, Eudaemon, an officer in the Roman army, sent a letter of condolence to Hermodorus, the exegetes of Alexandria, for the death of his daughter.⁴⁴ Such letters never refer to the recently dead people whose bodies are not already in the hands of the embalmers by name.⁴⁵ Instead, they use euphemisms such as *eumoiros*, 'the fortunate one',⁴⁶ or later on *makarios*, 'the blessed one'.⁴⁷ During the first three days after death, the corpse was presumably washed and shrouded in cloth at home. The corpse might also have been treated with substances thought to retard decomposition, as was the case in rural Egypt in the 1930s⁴⁸ or in Chinese death rites. The latter is characterised with the placement of a blackly shining pearl in the deceased's mouth to retard decomposition so that the soul might find an intact body for revival.⁴⁹ At home, the body was first wrapped with linen cloth. At the embalmers' workshop, however, the cadaver was subject to what the papyri call the 'second wrapping' (*deutera taphē*).⁵⁰

⁴² Game 1995, 202.

⁴³ Dionysus of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 3.21.8. Translation: Cary 1961, 85.

⁴⁴ Rea 1986. Cf. *P.Oxy.* I.115; *P.Princ.* II.102; *PSI* XII.1248.

⁴⁵ Montserrat 1997, 33.

⁴⁶ *P.Haun.* II.17.

⁴⁷ *CPR* VI.81.

⁴⁸ Gamal 1937, 159-67.

⁴⁹ Griebler 1991, 12.

⁵⁰ Montserrat 1997, 36.

Immediately after a death, the ancient Egyptians went through a mourning period and observed dietary and grooming prohibitions. In the fifth century BC, Herodotus writes:

Whenever a man of some standing departs from his house by death, all the womenfolk of the house daub their heads or even their faces with mud. Then they leave the corpse lying in the house while they and all their female relatives wander here and there in the city lamenting, with their garments girt around them and their breasts exposed. The men too lament in their place, with garment girt likewise. After this phase of mourning, they take the corpse to be mummified.⁵¹

In the first century BC, Diodorus Siculus similarly gives a detailed description of mourning rituals in ancient Egypt in two passages:

For whenever anyone dies among them, all his relatives and friends, plastering their heads with mud, roam about the city lamenting, until the body receives burial. Nay more, during that time they indulge in neither baths, nor wine, nor in any other food worth mentioning, not do they put on bright clothing.⁵²

The inhabitants of Egypt mourn for seventy-two days. They plaster their heads with mud and wrap strips of linen cloth below their breasts. Women as well as men went about in groups of two or three hundreds, and twice each day, recite the dirge in a rhythmic chant, they sang the praises of the deceased, recalling his virtues. Nor would they eat the flesh of any living thing or food prepared from wheat. They also abstained from wine and luxury of any sort. In addition, no one would ever have seen fit to make use of baths or unguents or soft bedding, nay more, would not even have dared to indulge in sexual pleasures, but every Egyptian grieved and mourned during those seventy-two days.⁵³

For Diodorus, the Egyptian mourning period was seventy-two days. Yet this was not, as many scholars think, the ideal time that the deceased should spend from death to burial. Rather, Egyptian and classical

⁵¹ Hdt. 2.85.

⁵² Dio. Sic. 1.91.1.

⁵³ Dio. Sic. 1.72.2-5.

evidence confirm that the mummification process took seventy days. A passage in the Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of Djehuti reads 'A good burial comes in peace, when the seventy days are completed in the mortuary workshop'.⁵⁴ Herodotus similarly writes, 'When a dead body is brought to the embalming place, the embalmers conceal the body for seventy days, embalmed in saltpetre, no longer time is allowed for the embalming'.⁵⁵

There is agreement in classical literature over the embalming period. For Herodotus, the Egyptians had observed a number of mourning rituals before they took the corpse to the embalming place, where it was concealed and embalmed for seventy days. Since Diodorus reports that the Egyptians mourn for seventy-two days, it is a reasonable suggestion that family members performed certain mourning activities for at least two days before the cadaver was carried forth to the mummification place. There are different interpretations for this seventy or seventy-two day embalming period. Scholars often connect the seventy-day period with the movement of the Dog Star Sirius.⁵⁶ The rising of Sirius marked the Egyptian New Year in the beginning of the inundation season. The time when Sirius disappeared in the sky until the time it returned was 70 days. The Egyptians perhaps equated this astronomical phenomenon with the time needed from death in the physical world to rebirth into the afterlife. However, the seventy-two day period surprisingly coincided with the number of the fellow conspirators of Seth, who participated in the assassination of Osiris. Possibly, it was thought essential to mourn and keep the body away from the followers of Seth for seventy-two days.⁵⁷ In a society where rituals were always tempered with symbolic meanings, the latter interpretation cannot be totally disregarded.

In all cases, the existence of the paterfamilias provided a sense of protection for the household. As death meant the departure of the patron, it represented a threat to the integrity of the household. Ancient Egyptian lamentations clearly reflect this notion. In a Theban tomb one reads the following lamentation, 'My home has been wrecked in an instance'.⁵⁸ In the opening passage of the Ptolemaic Songs of Isis and Nephthys, one reads 'O fair stripling, come to your house ... O fair sistrum-player come

⁵⁴ Wilson 1944, 201-3.

⁵⁵ Hdt. 2.86.

⁵⁶ Smith 2009b.

⁵⁷ Cf. Hdt. 2.86.

⁵⁸ Bleeker 1958, 2.

to you house'.⁵⁹ Destruction of the house does not literally mean the demolition of the physical structure, but it signifies that the deceased's wife and children have now lost the patron and protector of their house. Undoubtedly, the departure of the deceased was a gruesome occurrence that may bring about the disintegration of the household.

The shrouded corpse remained in the home for several days, while people took time off their jobs to observe the time of mourning. The sender of a letter in AD 118 writes 'Because of the death of his daughter, your steward has stopped work until his period of mourning is over'.⁶⁰ The first stage of mourning rituals took up the first three or four days after death. Thus, the dead bodies 'are not given over to the embalmers, but only after they have been dead for three or four days'.⁶¹ The four-days mourning period must have been borrowed from the mourning period for Osiris.⁶² The exact significance of the three days is uncertain. Yet, it has been suggested that it takes the soul three days to get where it is going.⁶³ In the tomb of Tutankhamen, three ritual couches (hippopotamus, lion, and cow) served to keep the mummy of the king overnight in the course of a four days'/three nights' ritual to prepare him for the new life in the netherworld.⁶⁴

Death ritual, in particular, was a means to prevent disorder after the death of a family member had struck the hierarchical order of the family. In the performance of the death rites, the family structure was maintained and the position of each living member defined.⁶⁵ Many studies have revealed that the extended family (families who have common blood ties but live in separate houses) was a characteristic feature of the Egyptian society in

⁵⁹ Faulkner 1936, 123. This can be paralleled with modern Egypt, where female relatives of the deceased utter piercing shrieks saying '*ya kharab baiti*', which means 'O destruction of my house' (El-Aswad 1987, 216).

⁶⁰ *P.Brem.* 40. Three days seem to have been standard on different occasions. In the 18th dynasty at Deir el-Medina, a workman named Kasa took three days off work to be at home during the birth of his child (Meskell 2000, 426).

⁶¹ Hdt. 2.89.

⁶² Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 39. In modern Egypt, the family of the deceased set up a pavilion for three days after death, where they receive relatives, neighbours, and friends who come to offer condolence. This practice has nothing to do with Islam. In modern Greece, a dish of *kolyva* (a dry, crumbly sweet made of grains of wheat, almonds, sugar, and cinnamon) is similarly taken to the tomb for three days after death (Cadbury 1990, 418).

⁶³ Cadbury 1990, 418.

⁶⁴ Beinlich 2006.

⁶⁵ Grießler 1991, 11.

the Graeco-Roman period, particularly in villages.⁶⁶ Members of an extended family were expected to participate in social occasions of other members of their family, such as wedding celebrations and death ceremonies.

Mourning rituals seem to have been determined by gender to some extent. During this mourning period, female relatives of the deceased were expected to show the utmost feelings of lamentation. They performed a repertoire of conventional nonverbal practices of grief, such as beating breasts, tearing clothes, and throwing dirt on heads within and outside the house.⁶⁷ It was apparently acceptable for women to mourn excessively, but not for men to do so. Judging from their frequency on Pharaonic tomb walls and mortuary vignettes, the exposure of breasts has been recognised as a 'typical' gesture of female mourning in contrast with other 'spontaneous' gestures like pouring dust or dirt onto the face.⁶⁸

As a sign of mourning, men would shave the entire body, but others are expected to let their hair and bread grow.⁶⁹ A shaven head and body guaranteed cleanliness and was associated with ritual purity.⁷⁰ Herodotus writes that 'the priests shave the whole body every other day, that no lice or aught else that is foul may infest them in the service of the gods'.⁷¹ The two virgin girls who were selected to represent Isis and Nephthys and recited the lamentations for the departed Osiris in the Khoiak mysteries were obliged to remove the hair of their body.⁷² Many bodies were buried shaven and hairless, as in the 18th Dynasty tombs nos. 1370, 1379, and 1388 at Deir el-Medina.⁷³ Equally, hair growing seems to have been associated with Osiris: 'When all his preparations had been completed, Osiris made a vow to the gods that he would let his hair grow until his return to Egypt and then made his way through Ethiopia. This is the reason why this custom with regard to hair was observed among the Egyptians until recent times', writes Diodorus.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Alston 1997; Hobson 1985.

⁶⁷ Hdt. 2.85.

⁶⁸ Millward 2013.

⁶⁹ Hdt. 2.36.

⁷⁰ Robins 1999.

⁷¹ Hdt. 2.37.

⁷² Faulkner 1936, 122.

⁷³ Meskell 1999, 193.

⁷⁴ Dio. Sic. 1.18.3.

Apart from the preliminary wrapping of the body and the mourning rituals, the ekphora seems to have encompassed the viewing of the corpse by relatives and friends and the arrangements for supplying the embalming.⁷⁵ During this period, family members notified the death of their relative to the royal scribe or the village scribe.⁷⁶ Before the transportation of the body to the embalmer's workshop, the corpse remained within the house to be visited by relatives and friends.⁷⁷ This seems to be the situation behind the first century AD letter of Thaubas to her father Pompeius: 'On receiving my letter, please be so good as to come home promptly, because your poor daughter Herennia has died. She had already come safely through a miscarriage on 9th Phaophi. For she gave birth to a still-born child in the eight month, but herself survived four days; and only after that did she die. Now she has received from us and her husband the proper funeral preparations (*peristolē*) and has been placed in Alabanthis, so if you come and you so wish, you can see her'.⁷⁸ The father had the chance to see his daughter while her body was still at home before the ekphora. If he is absent, he still could see her when the embalmers returned her mummy.

The primary mourning period ends up with what Greek papyri call the ekphora, which refers to the carrying forth of the corpse to the embalming workshop on the third/fourth day after death.⁷⁹ Before the body was delivered to the embalmers, the heirs and family would provide the necessary embalming commodities to the mummification workshop.⁸⁰ Together with the corpse, these were probably carried forth from the house to the embalming workshop in the ekphora-procession.⁸¹ The two moments preceding the coming out of the corpse from the house for mummification (ekphora) or burial (*apostolē*) are extremely distressing, where close female relatives, specifically the mother, sisters, daughters, and wife of the deceased, smite their breasts with both hands, tear their clothes, and smear dust on their heads.⁸² There is no textual or pictorial description of the funeral procession to the embalming workshop in Graeco-Roman Egypt. Yet the procession of deities carrying

⁷⁵ Montserrat 1997, 38.

⁷⁶ Youtie 1976. See also *P.Oxy.* XXXVIII.2837; *P.Oxy.* XLI 2957; *P.Oxy.* XLIII.3104; *P.Oxy.* XLIII.3141;

⁷⁷ Hdt. 2.85.

⁷⁸ *P.Fuad* 75. The letter is dated 18 Phaophi.

⁷⁹ Montserrat 2004, 475.

⁸⁰ *P.Mich.Inv.* 3724.6-12 = *SB XVIII.13613*.

⁸¹ Montserrat 1997, 38.

⁸² Cf. Dionysus of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 3.21.4.

linen and ointments for the mummification of the dead in the first century AD tomb of Petosiris in the Dakhla oasis probably invokes the ekphora-procession to the embalmers' workshop rather than the apostolē-procession to the necropolis.⁸³ Starting from the house, the body was presumably carried on a bier on the shoulders of family members, relatives, and friends to the mummification workshop. The procession must have been accompanied with female weepers and carriers of the embalming commodities. In that sense, the ekphora 'could be an effective means of exhibiting the prestige of the deceased and their family'.⁸⁴ The ekphora encompassed all forms of mourning rituals from the moment of death to sending-off the corpse to the morticians' workshop.

The Peristolē:

The next stage of the burial process, the peristolē, began with the transportation of the corpse to the mummification workshop. The Greek term peristolē literally means the 'wrapping up' or 'laying out' of a corpse.⁸⁵ This indicates the wrapping of the mummy with linen bandages or the use of other wrappings in case the body was not embalmed.⁸⁶ In an Egyptian context, the peristolē refers to the embalming, wrapping, and adorning the body before it was delivered to the family.⁸⁷ It also constitutes the funerary rituals and recitations accompanying the mummification process. It was an important step in the processing of the deceased and the preparation of the body for the funeral. Greek documents suggest that the peristolē began when the body was taken to the embalmers on the third/fourth day after death.⁸⁸ The Demotic stela of Amenher similarly mentions that his mummification started four days after death on 1 May 73 BC.⁸⁹ Here it would be worked on for seventy or seventy-two days and then returned to the family. No mummification workshop has archaeologically been identified in Egypt. However, literary evidence suggests that embalming workshops at Alexandria were located within the necropolis together with graves and gardens.⁹⁰

⁸³ Osing et al 1982.

⁸⁴ Montserrat 1997, 38.

⁸⁵ *BGU* III.896.7.

⁸⁶ Cf. Dionysus Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 3.21.8.

⁸⁷ Montserrat 2004, 475.

⁸⁸ Hdt. 2.89; Montserrat 1997.

⁸⁹ Sauneron 1952, XV note 4; Shore 1992, 229-32.

⁹⁰ Strabo 17.1.10.

As elsewhere, inhabitants in Graeco-Roman Egypt did not adhere to a strict mortuary code, for their funerary practices display a variety of interment techniques.⁹¹ Direct inhumation, cremation, and mummification were possibilities of the disposal of the body.⁹² Mummification, however, remained the typical and ideal treatment of the body from the Pharaonic and down to the Roman period.⁹³ Lucian speaks of burning as the Greek custom, as contrasted with the burial of the Persians, the eating of the dead by the Scythians, and the embalming of the Egyptians.⁹⁴ The family was closely involved in every stage of processing the corpse to the necropolis, including the provision of some of the commodities needed for mummification. A third century AD letter requests various items needed for embalming: 'Because of the matter about which I wrote to you previously concerning the mourning of all of us necessitated by the death of my overseer Hermesion, come out and bring me resin and bitumen for the work and the basket about which I spoke to you'.⁹⁵

Herodotus describes three classes of prearranged mummification based on cost. The cheapest method involved the injection of an unspecified liquid via the rectum, followed by treatment with natron (a mixture of sodium carbonate and bicarbonate with some natural impurities). The second method (the one also used for animals) was similar, and included injection of cedar oil via the rectum and treatment with natron. The most expensive method involved the most complicated procedures. First, the viscera and abdominal contents were removed through an incision made in the flank. The heart was left *in situ* because it was the location of a person's intellect and emotions; also, the kidneys were not removed, but no religious explanation is given for this. Next, the body was cleansed and washed, the cavities were packed with bandages, herbs and spices, and the incision was closed. Both the viscera and the body were packed with natron to dehydrate the tissues.⁹⁶

The mummification process lasted for seventy days from the arrival of the body at the embalmers' workshop to its eventual return to the family

⁹¹ Nabatea: Perry 2002. Rome: Counts 1996. Although cremation was the dominant rite in early imperial Rome, Poppaea, Nero's wife, was embalmed in the Egyptian style (Tac. *Ann.* 16.6.).

⁹² Cartwright, Spaabaek, and Svoboda 2011.

⁹³ The Roman world: Nock 1932. Pharaonic Egypt: Smith 1906. Roman Egypt: Aufderheide et al 1999.

⁹⁴ Lucian, *On Mourning* 21.

⁹⁵ *P.Mich.Inv.* 3724.6-12 = *SB XVIII.13613*.

⁹⁶ Hdt. 2.85-90.

for burial.⁹⁷ Yet this seventy-day period was divided into two steps; the first step lasted for forty days; the second took up thirty days. Diodorus describes the first stage of the *peristolē* or the drying process of mummification:

When they have gathered to treat the body after it has been slit open, one of them thrusts his hand through the opening in the corpse into the trunk and extracts everything but the kidneys and heart, and another one cleanses each of the viscera, washing them in palm wine and spices. And in general, they carefully dress the whole body for over thirty days, first with cedar oil and certain other preparations, and then with myrrh, cinnamon, and such spices as have the faculty not only of preserving it for a long time but also of giving it a fragrant odour.⁹⁸

Diodorus's narrative of Egyptian funeral procedures has been confirmed in modern times by papyrological evidence.⁹⁹ This stage of the *peristolē* involved washing and anointing the corpse, evisceration, dehydrating the body by means of dry crystals of natron, and packing its abdominal cavity with linen, sawdust, and other materials.

While the body was in the hands of the morticians, the relatives and friends went into mourning for forty days. They could visit the embalming workshop while the bodies of loved ones were being mummified.¹⁰⁰ The forty-day mourning period seems to have been associated with the god Osiris. Following the death of the Apis bull at Memphis, the people did not cease their mourning for forty days.¹⁰¹ One has to remember that the Apis was thought to be the soul of Osiris. The corpse is believed to decompose after forty days.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Hdt. 2.86; Wilson 1944, 201-3; David 2007, 96.

⁹⁸ Dio. Sic. 1.91.6.

⁹⁹ Merkelbach 1993.

¹⁰⁰ De Cenival 1972, 189.

¹⁰¹ Dio. Sic. 1.85.1-3.

¹⁰² Dio. Sic. 1.85.1-4; Strabo 17.1.31. In modern Egypt, the family, relatives, and friends of the deceased would gather on the fortieth day after death to commemorate his/her departure. This gathering is called *al-Arbaien*, which means the fortieth. For forty days after death, families refrain from participating in wedding ceremonies and other entertaining events and women keep wearing black clothes (El-Aswad 1987, 207). Apparently, this forty-day mourning period was borrowed from ancient Egyptian funeral traditions, as it has nothing to do with Islam.¹⁰² In modern Greece, candles are similarly illuminated for forty days in the house after the death of a family member.

After forty days, when the dehydration process was complete, the body was ready for the second step of the peristolē, which included the final application of resins and oils and swathing the body in linen bandages. The oil, ointment, and linen mentioned in Greek papyri related to funeral costs were almost certainly used in the mummification process. Since the religious upheavals of the Amarna period, the overall treatment of the body was more intricate, where the corpse was invested with time-consuming embalming procedures. In line with this was the shift in the burial goods that focus on life and the lived experience of individuals to a more visible focus on death-oriented and mortuary paraphernalia.¹⁰³ This is why family burials in the Roman period reveal a variety of expensive funerary equipment such as coffins, masks, and mummy shrouds.¹⁰⁴

The preservation of the body meant that the deceased would enjoy another life in the hereafter. Mummification guaranteed that the dead body would continue to receive offerings. Thus, a dead child's prayer to Osiris in the Ptolemaic period asks, 'Give me bread and beer and incense and water, which are offered on your table'.¹⁰⁵ The physical transformation of the corpse into a mummy mirrored the spiritual transformation of the dead human into an empowered being.¹⁰⁶ For contemporaries and later generations, the mummy represented the personality of the dead person. Thus, Ptolemy I Soter used the mummy of Alexander the Great both as a physical presence and as memory in order to appear special in the eyes of his soldiers and subjects.¹⁰⁷ Augustus similarly visited the mummy of the Macedonian hero and gave him honours by placing a golden crown on the mummy and scattering flowers on it.¹⁰⁸

Embalming the dead was the most important part of the peristolē stage. The mummification process was also accompanied with ritualistic and magical spells. A further consequence of the rites of mummification was the awakening or animating of the *ba* of the deceased,¹⁰⁹ which is

After forty days, there is a short and less attended memorial service than was the funeral (Cadbury 1990, 418).

¹⁰³ Meskell 1999.

¹⁰⁴ Riggs 2005, 182-217.

¹⁰⁵ Erman 1915, 107.

¹⁰⁶ Hornung 1983.

¹⁰⁷ Erskine 2002. On the embalment of the body of Alexander by Chaldean and Egyptian specialists: Curt.10.10.9-13.

¹⁰⁸ Suet. *Aug.* 18.

¹⁰⁹ Smith 2009a, 4.

referred to as eidolon on Greek mummy labels.¹¹⁰ The so-called Ritual of Embalming, which is preserved in two Theban Hieratic and Demotic papyri (P.Boulaq III and P.Louvre 5.158) of the first century AD, constitutes eleven operations to be performed on the corpse at the embalmers' workshop.¹¹¹ These operations included anointing and wrapping various parts of the corpse, where prayers and apotropaic formulae were recited in conjunction with the ritual acts. These rituals were recited by the master of secrets, the lector priest, the seal-bearer, and the embalmers, who represented the gods who anointed the body of Osiris and wrapped him in linen bandages, to assist the passage of the deceased into the netherworld.¹¹² The funerary lamentations and glorifications texts (*sakhw*) were also performed on the mummy in the Graeco-Roman period. In lamentation texts, weeping women representing Isis and Nephthys mourn and praise the deceased, while glorification texts enable successful transition of the dead person to a transfigured state of being.¹¹³

The embalming process is conceived not just as a preservation of the corpse, but rather as its transfiguration to a new body. The Egyptian word for mummy, *skh*, also means 'nobility' and 'dignity', denoting the elevated sphere of existence to which the deceased has been transferred and initiated in the course of the process of embalment.¹¹⁴ Since human access to the hereafter came through Osiris, prayers were repeated over the deceased to help bring about his/her gradual union with Osiris. For the same purpose, the body was decorated with a gold leaf to transform the desiccated skin into the golden flesh of a god. The decoration of the body's external wrappings also emphasised the identification of the deceased with Osiris. Images reproduced on mummy coverings often included the celestial boat of Osiris, which carried the dead across the heavens.¹¹⁵ After death, the dead person was given the appellation of an Osiris, indicating that the deceased was going through the same triumphant reassertion of self as the dead king.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Quaegebeur 1978, 253-4.

¹¹¹ Mariette 1871; Sauneron 1952; Smith 2009a, 215-44.

¹¹² Riggs 2010, 2. In a similar way, modern Egyptians recite verses from the Quran on the corpse to help the soul of the deceased leave the house in which the person died (El-Aswad 1987, 217).

¹¹³ Faulkner 1936; Bleeker 1958; Riggs 2010, 2.

¹¹⁴ Assmann 1989, 137-8.

¹¹⁵ Montserrat 2004, 475.

¹¹⁶ Griffith 1909, 16, 55; Otto 1905, 98.

Death is profane inasmuch as it is related to the earthly mortal body of a dead person. Death is also sacred as far as it is associated with the immortal soul. The house also had this double symbolic connotation. The front door of the house, for example, was a private and semi-public space. It is a transitional physical and spatial element of the house, but also an indispensable part of the street structure.¹¹⁷ The ekphora and apostolē processions started from the house. The profane and sacred meanings of the house and death should not be conceived as two oppositions. By contrast, they complement each other. The dead body moves from one house, the temporary abode of the living, to another though everlasting house, the tomb.¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, nothing is recorded about the role of the house of the living while the body was kept at the embalming workshop. Presumably, it continued to serve as a mourning arena for visiting relatives and friends, wishing to offer condolence to the bereaved family. Close-kin relatives were expected to observe the same taboos on dress, food, and means of luxury and entertainment during the peristolē.

The Kēdeia:

The kēdeia came after the body was embalmed for seventy days and was returned home.¹¹⁹ Although the word kēdeia often comes before the term peristolē in Greek papyri,¹²⁰ it probably encompassed all the rituals that followed the mummification process, including those performed at the house or in the necropolis. That is, the kēdeia seems to describe what happened to the mummified body after it received its peristolē and was returned to the relatives. It is usually translated as ‘funeral’, though this has slightly wrong connotations. It may cover the whole package of ritual obsequies: the viewing of the mummy by friends and relatives, mourning rituals, the domestic cult of the dead, the despatch of the body to the necropolis, and the funerary banquet.¹²¹ A fully prepared mummy being despatched for burial is described as kekēdeumenos.¹²²

¹¹⁷ Abdelwahed 2015, 83-91.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Dio. Sic. 1.51. Modern Egyptians call this earthly life *Dar El-Fana* or ‘the house of evanescence’. As opposed to this life, there are two *Dars* or houses. There is *Dar El-Maut*, which means ‘the house of the dead’, in reference to the tomb in which dead people wait until the day of resurrection. Secondly, there is *Dar El-Akhira* or ‘the otherworldly house’, which is also described as *Dar El-Baqa* or ‘the everlasting house’ (El-Aswad 1987, 209-10).

¹¹⁹ Dio. Sic. 1.91.6.

¹²⁰ *Stud.Pal.* XXII.56.1; *P.Oxy.* IX.1218.7.

¹²¹ Montserrat 1997, 34.

¹²² *P.Paris* 18.2.234.

After the mummification process, the embalmers directly handed over mummies to families.¹²³ The mummy was brought back to the house of the living so that family members, relatives, and friends could see the deceased before his/her final departure to the necropolis. Papyri and mummy labels confirm long delay between death and burial.¹²⁴ The absence of family members could be a reason for such a delay. In such case, the embalmed bodies were kept at home in the care of relatives or friends until their associates could come and arrange their funerals. In the second or third century AD, Besas, a goldsmith, writes to his friend Eidos to 'fetch the body of my father and keep it safe until, god willing, I am able to sail up for his despatch. You will make a gift in friendly fashion. You are not again neglectful of the property. The body would be given a funeral another time'.¹²⁵ Similarly, the mummy label of Takhenmet daughter of Petarsomtheus records that she died in year 9, month 3 of spring, day 10 of an unnamed emperor; she was not buried at Thebes until year 11, month 1 of inundation, day 19, that is, a year and four months after her death.¹²⁶ The mummy of Takhenmet probably remained in the possession of the family at home.

Some mummies were kept unburied for a time while they received a domestic cult from their relatives. Houses were dwelling places not only for living members of the family and their consecrated animals,¹²⁷ but also for family members who had passed away. This practice is confirmed by textual sources and apparently also by archaeological finds. Mummies were kept in houses for some time before their interment in the necropolis. Several classical writers affirm that the Egyptians kept their embalmed dead in their houses. Cicero states that 'the Egyptians embalm their dead and keep them in the house'.¹²⁸ Sextus Empiricus also confirms this custom, 'the Egyptians take out their entrails and embalm them and keep them above ground with themselves'.¹²⁹ Pomponius Mela equally reports that the Egyptians 'act in a very different way from the rest of the people of this land. They lament the dead with mud; they neither burn nor bury the dead, but embalm them and place them between

¹²³ Dio. Sic. 1.91.6.

¹²⁴ Although Tutankhamen died in the late summer, it is clear from botanical evidence found in his tomb that the burial took place in spring (Bryce 1990).

¹²⁵ *P.Princ.* III.166.

¹²⁶ D'Aura et al 1988, 229.

¹²⁷ Hdt. 2.36.

¹²⁸ Cic. *Tusc.* 1.45.108.

¹²⁹ Sext. Emp. *Pyr* 3.226.

the chambers', apparently somewhere in houses.¹³⁰ Herodotus similarly affirms the Egyptian practice of keeping mummies in houses: 'They [the embalmers] give back the dead man to his friends. These make a hollow wooden figure like a man, in which they enclose the corpse, shut it up, and preserve it safe in a coffin-chamber, placed erect against a wall'.¹³¹ Diodorus similarly writes, 'Those who have private tombs lay the body in a box [coffin] reserved for it [in the tomb], but those who possess none construct a new chamber in their own house and stand the coffin upright against the firmest wall'.¹³²

Diodorus attributes this practice to financial reasons alone. Well-off Egyptians, in his view, would have the means to construct private tombs due to their financial abilities, whereas the poor built a chamber in their house to receive the dead. It is, however, misleading to follow Diodorus and think that only the houses of the poor served a mortuary role as temporary sepulchres. To Greek and Roman writers writing from an outsider's perspective, this alien practice is an expression of the cultural distinctiveness of the Egyptians. Yet Roman citizens in Egypt identified by their *tria nomina* were embalmed and buried in an Egyptian manner.¹³³ Diodorus's explanation that the dead were kept in houses for financial reasons alone is mistaken for several reasons. First, even the construction of a new room to receive the deceased would require a significant financial outlay. Second, the provision of a coffin, set 'upright in the firmest wall', could also be expensive. Third, it is clear that what would be placed in the coffin is the mummy. It is known that mummification was a costly practice.¹³⁴ Any person who could afford the construction of a chamber in his/her house, the provision of a coffin for the deceased, and the embalming of his/her dead relative must have been wealthy enough to offer at least a small private tomb. Equally, wealthy Egyptians in Roman Thebes, who held important priestly titles and presumably could afford a private tomb, consciously avoided new tomb construction in favour of reusing earlier Pharaonic graves and pits.¹³⁵

In the light of all these indications, a different reason for preserving mummies within houses should be sought. Since keeping mummies in houses was an Egyptian practice, the reason for its emergence needs to be

¹³⁰ Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia* 1.48.

¹³¹ Hdt. 2.68.

¹³² Dio. Sic. 1.92.6.

¹³³ Riggs 2005, 21-2.

¹³⁴ On the costs of funerals: Montserrat 1997, 40-41.

¹³⁵ For wealthy Egyptian priests buried in earlier structures: Montserrat and Meskell 1997.

looked for within ancient Egyptian religion. For Barbara Borg, the practice of keeping mummies in houses was derived from ancient Egyptian ancestral cult as part of the domestic cult of the dead. Although the Romans did have cult associated with their ancestors, there is no evidence in Greek and Roman cultures for a domestic cult of the dead.¹³⁶ In contrast, a domestic cult for the deceased in the house of the relatives already existed in Pharaonic Egypt. The so-called *ḥt ḫkr n R^c* stelae (fig. 1) indicate that a domestic cult of the dead was known in the Pharaonic period at least since the Eighteenth and Twentieth Dynasties. These stelae came mainly from Deir el-Medina, Abydos, and Thebes. Those uncovered in Deir el-Medina were all found in the living quarters of the town in different rooms of houses. The inscriptions on the stelae often state that they were dedicated to the deceased by his/her family members.¹³⁷ Such stelae were a suitable means whereby the relatives could engage with the dead and offer them sacrifices.¹³⁸

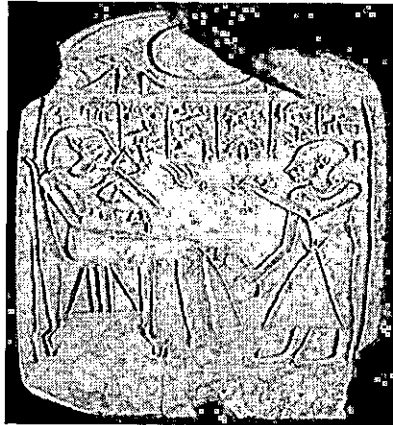


Fig. 1. An *ḥt ḫkr n R^c* stela; UC 14228 (Borg 1997, pl. 26.1)

Equally important is a group of anthropomorphic busts belonging to a domestic cult of the dead (fig. 2). These busts represent images of dead persons to whom the living paid honour and offered sacrifices.¹³⁹ A domestic cult of the dead is also confirmed by a group of stelae uncovered from Abydos, showing individuals involved in worshipping ancestral busts (fig. 3).¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Borg 1997, 28-9. On ancestral cult in Roman culture: Toynbee 1971.

¹³⁷ Demarée 1983.

¹³⁸ Borg 1997, 28.

¹³⁹ Kaizer 1990, 269-85.

¹⁴⁰ Borg 1997, 29.

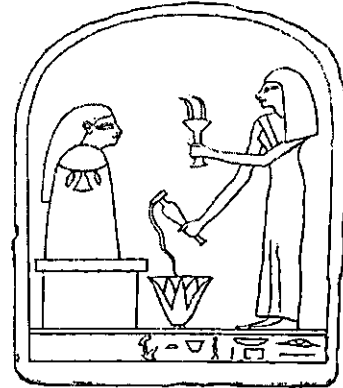


Fig. 2 (left). An anthropomorphic bust belonging to a domestic cult of the dead, British Museum EA 61083 (Borg 1997, pl. 26.2).

Fig. 3 (right). A stela from Abydos showing a woman involved in worshipping an ancestral bust (Borg 1997, 29, fig. 1).

Ancestral cult continued as an important feature of ancient Egyptian religion under Roman times.¹⁴¹ By contrast, Roman ancestor masks (*imagines*) of family members who held high offices, which were kept in houses and were indeed a vital part of Roman culture, were not used for a domestic cult of the dead. The Roman *imagines* were not related to beliefs about life after death, though they were used in funerary processions.¹⁴² Since the Egyptians used to honour their parents and ancestors after their death, it follows that mummies were kept in houses as part of an ancestral cult.¹⁴³ This practice allowed the deceased to participate in family life and even in the meals of the living. Some literary statements affirm that the Egyptians used to dine in the presence of the dead. Herodotus states that wooden images of corpses placed in coffins were brought out at banquets.¹⁴⁴ Silius Italicus affirms the same custom: 'The Egyptians enclose their dead after the funeral, standing in an upright position, in a coffin of stone, and worship it; and they admit a bloodless specter to their banquets'.¹⁴⁵ The heavy weight of mummies, sometimes over a hundred kilograms,¹⁴⁶ necessitated that comparatively light wooden images of the dead were made and brought into symposia.

¹⁴¹ Fitzentreiter 1994.

¹⁴² Flower 1996, 209-11. On the use of *imagines* in funerary processions of Roman office-holders: Flower 1996, 91-106.

¹⁴³ Dio. Sic. 1.93.1.

¹⁴⁴ Hdt. 2.78.

¹⁴⁵ Silius Italicus, *Punica* 13.474-6.

¹⁴⁶ Petrie 1911, 16.

In addition to literary sources, archaeology supports the existence of mummies in houses in Graeco-Roman Egypt. The practice of keeping the corpse at home for some time before burial explains the poor state of coffins, mummies, and mummy portraits, which Petrie observed at Hawara:

Many of them had been much injured by exposure during a long period before burial. The gilt-bust mummies had often been knocked about, the stucco chipped off, sometimes the nose bashed in by a fall, the gilding dirtied, fly-marked, caked with dust which was bound on by rain. The portraits show the same exposure...on the feet of one mummy the wrapping had been used by children, who scribbled caricature upon it...thus every sign shows that the mummies, both with and without portraits, has stood exposed for a long time before burial.¹⁴⁷

In addition to rain, women cleaning houses and sprinkling water might have been a reason for dirtying coffins standing upright. Many mummies at Hawara had vertical piles of bird droppings on their shoulders, showing that they had once been placed upright,¹⁴⁸ the same position confirmed by Herodotus, Diodorus, and Silius Italicus.¹⁴⁹ Equally, the discovery of framed panel portraits at Hawara¹⁵⁰ and at Karanis in a domestic context¹⁵¹ confirms that mummy portraits were hung in houses.¹⁵²

The presence of the so-called mummy cupboards, inside which mummies were kept, offers archaeological support for the theory of keeping mummies in the house before burial. Numerous examples of these wooden cupboards have come to light from Abusir el-Melek, near the Fayum, like that of Padikhons of the first century AD (fig. 4).¹⁵³ It is likely that mummy cupboards were kept in houses; however, their exact location within houses remains obscure. Diodorus's statement that the Egyptians used to 'stand the coffin upright in the firmest wall' of their houses suggests that mummy cupboards were probably placed against the

¹⁴⁷ Petrie 1911, 2.

¹⁴⁸ Montserrat 1997, 38.

¹⁴⁹ Hdt. 2.86; Dio. Sic. 1.92.6; Silius Italicus, *Punica* 13.474-6.

¹⁵⁰ Petrie 1889, 10 and pl. 12.

¹⁵¹ Root 1980, 7.

¹⁵² Corcoran 1997, 48.

¹⁵³ Willeitner 2004, 319. The mummy cupboard of Padikhons is in the Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, 17039.

strongest and thickest wall of the house, possibly one of those shared with neighbours. Given the heavy weight of mummies, mummy cupboards were probably positioned against the strongest wall of the house to bear the heavy weight of the cupboard and its content.



Fig. 4. The first century AD mummy-cupboard of Padikhons from Abusir el-Melek, Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, 17039 (Willeitner 2004, 319) Mummy cupboards have double doors, which could be easily opened whenever grieving relatives or friends wanted to see the mummy kept in its cupboard. Taken together, the dead received a domestic cult in the house before its final despatch to the necropolis, the *apostolē*.

The *Apostolē* and Beyond:

At the end of the *kēdeia* period, the relatives and friends gathered once again to arrange for the final dispatch of the body from the house to the

necropolis.¹⁵⁴ The day of burial marked the transition of the deceased from the world of the living to that of the dead. The carrying forth of the mummy in a spectacular procession to the necropolis is called in Greek papyri the *apostolē* or sending-off.¹⁵⁵ The starting point for the funeral procession from the realm of the living to the necropolis was the house of the deceased. In the Old Kingdom tomb of Ankhma-Hor at Saqqara, the funeral procession is described as 'Going out from the house of the estate to the beautiful west'.¹⁵⁶ Depending on the location of the tomb, the *apostolē* might have involved a voyage across the Nile on funeral barges.¹⁵⁷ Like the ekphora-procession, women are expected to show the utmost distress of mourning gestures during the *apostolē*-procession.

The funeral procession to the necropolis was probably used as a marker of social status. Entries in household accounts of the first century AD from Oxyrhynchus record four obols spent on incense for the sending-off of the daughter of Phna, and one drachma on incense at the funeral of the daughter of Pasis.¹⁵⁸ The torches, masks, mourners, garlands, and fare of the donkey on boat, which are mentioned in an account of funeral expenses, were almost certainly associated with the funeral procession to the necropolis.¹⁵⁹ For members of the elite, the route and activities of the funeral procession in the Roman Forum was similarly used to display their importance in the society.¹⁶⁰ Polybius specifically cited the wearing of ancestral masks and giving eulogies at funeral processions as evidence of Roman elite superiority.¹⁶¹

Greek and Demotic rules governing guilds, whether trade or religious, specify the behaviour of their members at this part of the funeral ritual. The Tiberian examples lay down that whichever of the guild members 'has taken no part in the funeral and has not placed a wreath on the tomb shall be fined four drachmas'.¹⁶² The colleagues of the deceased were also obliged to throw dust, presumably on their heads, in the funeral and lay a wreath at the tomb.¹⁶³ While 12 obols were spent on the wreaths,¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁴ *P.Oxy.* IX.1218; *P.Princ.* III.166.6.

¹⁵⁵ Montserrat 1997, 40.

¹⁵⁶ Wilson 1944, 203.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Dio. Sic. 1.92.1.

¹⁵⁸ *P.Oxy.* IV.736-13-14, 84.

¹⁵⁹ *Stud.Pal.* XXII.56.

¹⁶⁰ Favro and Johanson 2010.

¹⁶¹ Polybius 6.52-54.

¹⁶² Greek: *P.Mich.Inv.* 243. Demotic: de Cenival 1972, 7-10, 47-8, 75-6.

¹⁶³ *P.Mich.* V.243.9; *P.Mich.* V.244.6-18.

¹⁶⁴ *P.Fay.* 103.4.

the expenses for the wreaths sometimes amounted to 16 obols.¹⁶⁵ In some guilds there was a funeral allowance (taphikon) paid to the family of the dead colleague.¹⁶⁶

Since the Old Kingdom, the chief celebrants of the funeral procession are the seal-bearer of the god and chief embalmer, the lector priest, the embalmer of Anubis, and finally the weeping women.¹⁶⁷ Together funeral processions on tomb walls of the Graeco-Roman period and Greek papyri indicate a remarkable continuity of this earlier funerary custom. The funeral processions in the fourth century BC tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel and the nearby first century AD tomb of Ta-shery[...] represent *sem*-priests and lector priests.¹⁶⁸ In the Dakhla oasis, the first century AD tomb of Petubastis depicts an extensive burial procession, where an array of deities carrying funerary goods.¹⁶⁹ Papyri similarly affirm that the embalmer wearing the mask of Anubis participated in the funeral procession to the necropolis. In *Stud.Pal.* XXII.56, the eight drachmas 'for the dog' probably refers to the embalmer of Anubis, who, since the New Kingdom, wore the mask of the god.¹⁷⁰ In *P.Ashm* I.17 the embalmer who was designated 'the man of Anubis' perhaps participated in the funeral procession to the necropolis.¹⁷¹ The 'dog-headed one' associated with the public procession of the god Serapis at Oxyrhynchus¹⁷² was 'the official who took the part of Anubis in the festival'.¹⁷³

The participation of female weepers (thrēnētriai) in the funeral procession is a continuation of an earlier Egyptian custom confirmed in Pharaonic tomb paintings.¹⁷⁴ However, men (thrēnētai) could fill this office by the second century AD.¹⁷⁵ Female mourners were hired to perform lamentations during the funerary procession. The wailing women presumably occupied a fixed place in the funerary procession, in front of and behind the coffin, and were identified as Isis and Nephthys,

¹⁶⁵ *Stud.Pal.* XXII.56.25.

¹⁶⁶ *P.Enteux.* 20, 21.

¹⁶⁷ Wilson 1944, 203-5.

¹⁶⁸ Petosiris: Lefebvre 1924; House No. 21: Gabra 1941, 39-50; Riggs 2005, 129-39.

¹⁶⁹ Fakhry and Osing 1982, 70-81.

¹⁷⁰ *Stud.Pal.* XXII.56.22.

¹⁷¹ *P.Ashm* I.17.1.

¹⁷² *SB* IV.7336.42.

¹⁷³ Wormald 1929, 242.

¹⁷⁴ *SEG* VIII.621.17-18; Wilson 1944.

¹⁷⁵ *Stud.Pal.* XXII.56.27; *BGU* I.34.ii.20, iv.4.

the most famous female weepers of ancient Egyptian religion.¹⁷⁶ Isis and Nephthys often stand at both ends of the funerary bier or beside the head of the deceased, both in the texts and in the monuments.¹⁷⁷ They were the two chief mourners (*djerty*), first of Osiris, and then of gods associated with him. Later on, they became mourners of all the dead, who were identified and honoured as Osiris. They had certain lamentations and incantations to perform during the funeral.¹⁷⁸ Two early Ptolemaic papyri with litanies from the cult of Osiris have been published under the titles: 'The Songs of Isis and Nephthys' (The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus, British Museum No. 10188) and 'The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys' (P.Berlin 3008).¹⁷⁹ As the two women assume the role of Isis and Nephthys and recite the hymns in the Osirian mysteries of Khoiak, the human representatives of the two goddesses similarly intone laments for the departed person at the funeral procession.

The Tribunal:

When the mummy is ready to be buried 'the family announces the day of interment to the judges and to the relatives and friends of the deceased, and solemnly affirms that he who had just passed away –giving his name- is about to cross the lake'.¹⁸⁰ Once the funeral procession reach the necropolis, the coffin containing the body was placed outside the tomb and, as customs prescribed, a tribunal was held to judge his/her deeds on the earth.¹⁸¹ The forty-two juries symbolised the judges of Egyptian nomes, who appear with Osiris in the Hall of the Two Truths. Since the First Intermediate Period, the judgment of the dead was crucial to the possibility of an Osirian afterlife beyond the tomb for all individuals.¹⁸²

In search for justification, and in the presence of Osiris and the nome judges in the judgement hall, the deceased advocates his/her innocence by uttering the Negative Confession, swearing not to have committed forty-two sins.¹⁸³ For Diodorus, those who had accusations brought against them or their bodies have been made security for a loan 'are forbidden burial and their bodies were kept in their own homes as a punishment. If sometimes happens that their sons' sons have become

¹⁷⁶ Bleeker 1958.

¹⁷⁷ Texts: Smith 2009a. Tombs: Venit 2002; Riggs 2005.

¹⁷⁸ D'Aura et al 1988, 97.

¹⁷⁹ Faulkner 1933, 1936.

¹⁸⁰ Dio. Sic. 1.92.1.

¹⁸¹ Dio. Sic. 1.72.2-5.

¹⁸² O'Neill 2015.

¹⁸³ Budge 1967.

prosperous and paid off the debt or cleared them of the charges, give them later a magnificent funeral'.¹⁸⁴ Although Herodotus equally mentioned that the Egyptians pawn the mummies of their fathers, this extraordinary custom is not confirmed in Greek papyri.¹⁸⁵ Yet there is evidence that the choachytes, the pourer of water, who took care of the dead in the Theban necropolis on behalf of the family, could borrow money on dead bodies in the Graeco-Roman period.¹⁸⁶

The Opening of the Mouth Ritual:

Having been declared innocent by the tribunal, other ceremonies were performed at the preparation of the mummy and the provisioning of the deceased: the Opening of the Mouth Ritual and the Funerary Banquet. One section of a late Ptolemaic papyrus in Demotic (P.BM 10507) is entitled, 'The book which was made in exact accordance with his desire for Hor, the son of Petemin, to cause it to be recited as an Opening of the Mouth document in his presence on the night of his burial feast'.¹⁸⁷ This text indicates the continuity of the Pharaonic Opening of the Mouth ritual performed on the mummy on the day of burial. Tomb walls indicate that this ritual is always performed by the *sem*-priest outside the tomb. Female weepers are sometimes shown mourning before the mummy, which is supported by a man wearing the mask of Anubis (fig. 5).¹⁸⁸ This visualises the female weepers and the man of Anubis who appear in papyri.



Fig. 5. The Opening of the Mouth ritual on the papyrus of Nesitanebisheru, the daughter of Pinedjem II, who died around 930 BC (Taylor 2010, 8).

¹⁸⁴ Dio. Sic. 1.92.6.

¹⁸⁵ Hdt. 2.136.

¹⁸⁶ UPZ II.157.34; P.Lond. I.1.1; Vleeming 1995.

¹⁸⁷ Smith 1987.

¹⁸⁸ Taylor 2010, 8.

The Opening of the Mouth ceremony was performed to symbolically bring the dead back to life so that it could reunite with the soul, the *ba*.¹⁸⁹ A Demotic text, Papyrus Harkness of the first century AD, includes a section headed, 'The chapters of awakening the *ba* which they will recite on the night of burial', suggesting the time and place of the ritual performance.¹⁹⁰ The 'awakening the *ba*' is another function ascribed to funerary rituals like the glorification texts.¹⁹¹ Once the Opening of the Mouth ritual has been finished, the mummy was finally placed in its resting place. In Papyrus Harkness, one also reads, 'It is the great gods of your town who have freed your brick', presumably a reference to the mud brick placed under the head of the deceased.¹⁹² This position reminds of the Greek term used to describe the burial place as *koimētērion*, which means the 'sleeping-room'.¹⁹³

The Funerary Banquet:

The interment of the body was also marked with a funerary banquet, which was held on the day of burial and on other feast days. As in Rome, visits to the dead usually took place on the birthday of the deceased or the anniversary of death when offerings were made.¹⁹⁴ Early Christians similarly refer to the day of one's death as the day of one's birth (*natus*) or birthday (*dies natalis*).¹⁹⁵ Thus, Tertullian writes, 'on the anniversary of their death we make ritual offerings to the dead in celebration of their birth'.¹⁹⁶ The funeral feast is frequently depicted in New Kingdom tombs, where the relatives and friends wear holiday garb, eat and drink, watch the dancing women, and listen to the song of the harper.¹⁹⁷ Banqueting and sacrifices in the company of the dead occurred in the offering place of the tomb accessible to living visitors.¹⁹⁸ As a time-honoured part of Egyptian funerary practices, dining with the dead in the tomb or necropolis survived into the Graeco-Roman period.¹⁹⁹ The

¹⁸⁹ Lichtheim 1976.

¹⁹⁰ Smith 2005.

¹⁹¹ Riggs 2010, 3.

¹⁹² Smith 2009a, 278.

¹⁹³ *IG* III.2545; *IG* VII.235.43. In modern Egypt, the undertakers used to put a mud brick under the corpse's head to elevate it in such a way that the deceased seems as if he/she were sleeping (El-Aswad 1987, 221).

¹⁹⁴ Rome: *CIL* VI.10248; Hopkins 1983, 226-34; Carroll 2006, 180-6. Egypt: *P.Oxy.* III.494.22-5 (AD 165).

¹⁹⁵ Shaw 1996.

¹⁹⁶ Tertullian, *De Corona* 3.

¹⁹⁷ Erman 1907, 138.

¹⁹⁸ Wentz 1982, 18.

¹⁹⁹ Montserrat 2004, 475

sacrifice for the deceased was integral to the sustenance of his/her body and soul.²⁰⁰ In an account of funeral costs, 12 obols were spent on the grain porridge, probably for the funerary banquet.²⁰¹ Numerous papyri refer to this funerary custom, apparently called the 'banquet of Anubis'. The kline of Anubis at Oxyrhynchus was probably a funerary feast 'in the *oikos* of the Serapeum' in the presence of a statue of the god.²⁰²

Professional guilds stipulate that living members should contribute to the burial and funeral feast of their dead colleagues. One such agreement specifies that the association will sponsor 'two days of drinking at the *pr-nfr*',²⁰³ perhaps a funerary chapel with associated dining area near the tomb,²⁰⁴ like those excavated at Deir el-Medina or Marina el-Alamein.²⁰⁵ The triclinium at Kom el-Shouqafa is an archaeological evidence for banqueting with the dead in Roman Alexandria.²⁰⁶ In the chora, the relatives and friends of the deceased could dine near the tomb in the necropolis, as in Tune el-Gebel.²⁰⁷ The offerings presented to the dead included garlands and hair. Garlands frequently appear in papyri in association with the funeral.²⁰⁸ The excavations of the necropolis of Doush in the Kharga oasis have yielded hair or shaving hair among the offerings deposited in the tombs.²⁰⁹ As previously mentioned, hair was closely associated with Osiris and Isis. The Egyptians also make vows to certain gods on behalf of their children who have been delivered from an illness, in which case they shave off their hair and weigh it against silver or gold, and then give the money to the attendants of sacred animals.²¹⁰

Conclusion:

The journey of the dead from the house, the earthly dwelling, to the tomb, the everlasting abode, encompassed different stages of rituals: the ekphora; the peristolē; the kēdeia, and the apostolē and beyond. These ritual processes mirror different episodes and symbolic acts, which found their root in the Osirian myth of death (dismemberment) and rebirth (mummification and ritual recitations). The primary mourning four-day

²⁰⁰ Meskell 1999.

²⁰¹ *Stud.Pal.* XXII.56.29.

²⁰² *SB* XX.14503; Montserrat 1992.

²⁰³ *P.Berlin* 3115 = de Cenival 1972, 189. Also, Smith 1987, 22-4.

²⁰⁴ Frandsen 1992.

²⁰⁵ Meskell 1999; Daszewski 1997, 2008.

²⁰⁶ Venit 2002, 124-45.

²⁰⁷ Montserrat 1992, 304. Cf. *P.Oxy.* III.494.24.

²⁰⁸ *Stud.Pal.* XXII.56.26; *P.Mich.Inv.* 243.

²⁰⁹ Wagner et al 1985, 188.

²¹⁰ *Dio. Sic.* 1.83.2. Cf. *Hdt.* 2.65.

period of the ekphora imitates the mourning period for Osiris, culminating with the discovery of the god's corpse ready then for embalmment by Anubis. The carrying forth of the corpse to the embalming workshop introduced the peristolē or mummification process, which normally lasted for seventy days, corresponding with the movement of the Dog Star Sirius. Sometimes it took up to seventy-two days, corresponding with the fellow conspirators of Seth who murdered Osiris. Through mummification, the peristolē was physically meant to preserve the corpse in an imitation of the first mummy of Osiris. Moreover, the lamentation and glorification texts recited over the departed body were originally designed for the benefit of Osiris. Once embalmed, mummies were kept in houses for some time before burial as part of a domestic cult of the dead during the kēdeia. In addition to the funerary procession, the apostolē is marked with the tribunal, the Opening of the Mouth ritual, and the funerary banquet. Only three domestic and funerary structures are involved in the processing of the dead: the house, the embalming workshop, and the tomb. The house was the bridge through which the embalming workshop and the grave were connected. From the house began the ekphora-procession of the corpse to the mummification workshop. Again, the house was the starting point for the apostolē-procession to the sepulchre. The house therefore served as the node of the different steps of the post-mortem journey of the deceased to the necropolis.

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