

Mummies: Unraveling History's Mysteries

To many school children and their families, the Penn Museum is known as the “Mummy Museum.” Although visitors are fascinated with objects from the galleries, the mummies are something they always remember. Several years ago, we sat down with anthropology grad student Paul Mitchell and Egyptologist Dr. Steve Phillips to discuss an issue of *Expedition* devoted exclusively to mummies. We wanted to cover mummies found in various conditions of preservation and from every region of the world. In the end, we had so much thought-provoking content, we decided to create two special issues. The first, the Fall 2016 issue, is about mummies of the world. The second issue, to be published in the next few years, will focus on Egyptian mummies with articles by Penn Museum scholars and Egyptian archaeologists.

Why do mummies captivate us? Of course, there is the macabre aspect of seeing a dead body. But their state of preservation clearly maintains a semblance of life. Mummies can be a safe way for us to contemplate our own mortality as they connect us with the past. And because skin and hair is preserved, they are a far less grim symbol of death than a skeleton. With recent advances in science, we are also able to learn a substantial amount about how these individuals lived and died.

We are excited to present this issue, with nine articles on mummies from the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Several of the pieces provide alternative views on what led to the mummification of these individuals. In each case, authors present their theories as well as conventional wisdom on the discoveries. We hope you enjoy reading this special issue and, in the process, develop a greater understanding of mummies beyond the grave.



ABOVE: Editor Jane Hickman worked with Page Selinsky (center), Janet Monge (right), and Paul Mitchell (in the field at the time of this photo) on this special issue. Shown here is a Peruvian mummy donated to the Penn Museum by the Philadelphia Commercial Museum.

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