

## BOOK REVIEW

Douglas H. Ubelaker,<sup>1</sup> Ph.D.

### Review of: *The Scientific Study of Mummies*

---

**REFERENCE:** Aufderheide AC. *The scientific study of mummies*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2003, 608 pp.

Occasionally, forensic scientists are requested to examine mummified remains. Even relatively recent remains can become mummified under certain conditions. Preserved soft tissue of great antiquity from archeological contexts also can become the subject of forensic analysis. Such cases can prove challenging for the forensic scientist because many different factors can lead to unusual soft tissue preservation and human curiosity and travel can disperse such materials continents away from their original sources. Analysis of such cases requires not only specialized techniques and knowledge associated with preserved soft tissue but also awareness of the geographical and temporal range of cultural practices that can result in such preservation. This new book provides an overview of the relevant issues and a unique summary of the information needed to properly interpret mummified remains.

This richly illustrated major volume of 10 chapters and 608 pages takes the forensic scientist through many levels of information regarding the analysis of mummified soft tissue. Major attention is devoted to history of mummy analysis, cultural factors contributing to mummification, mechanisms of mummification, a unique world-

wide survey of documented mummies, sophisticated discussion of soft tissue taphonomy with an emphasis on chemistry, the methodology of mummy analysis, non-human animal mummification, and the use and abuse of mummies (an interesting discussion of the varied attention mummies have received throughout history).

The extensive experience and travel of the author of this valuable text are manifest throughout with detailed coverage of so many aspects of mummy analysis. Although all areas are soundly presented, I was especially impressed with the sections on soft tissue taphonomy and pathology. Understanding discussion in these chapters requires some prior exposure to chemistry and pathology; however, the information presented is unique and reflective of the author's training and experience.

The author notes in the introductory materials that the world-wide scope and information breadth of this volume forced him to treat some areas more lightly than would otherwise be possible. Thus there are some examples of mummies around the world that are not included here and some specialized research is not included. My overall impression though is that the author has done a remarkable job of bringing together the most important aspects of mummy analysis in this single volume. Anyone attempting the examination of mummified soft tissue will find this book to be a valuable new resource.

<sup>1</sup> Curator, Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.