

= Guanche mummies =

Guanche mummies are the intentionally desiccated remains of members of the indigenous Guanche people of the Canary Islands . The majority of Guanche mummies were made during the eras prior to Spanish settlement of the area in the 15th century . The methods of embalming are similar to those that were used by the Ancient Egyptians , though fewer mummies remain from the Guanche due to looting and desecration .

= = Archaeological record = =

Mummification on the Canaries remained confined to the islands of Tenerife , Gran Canaria , La Gomera , and El Hierro . The most well @-@ preserved , and therefore the most thoroughly @-@ studied , mummies were found on Tenerife .

In 1933 , the Guanche necropolis of Uchova was discovered in the municipality of San Miguel de Abona in southern Tenerife . It is estimated that it contained between 60 @-@ 74 mummies before the cemetery was almost completely looted .

Physical examination of the Guanche mummies of Tenerife found that they were quite tall . On average , the males stood 1 @.@ 70 m and the females were 1 @.@ 57 m in height . They were also generally of robust constitution .

= = Historical record = =

Medieval Spanish explorers arriving in the islands during the 14th Century reported the Guanche buried individuals of low social status in sandy graves , while upper class members were mummified and laid to rest in secluded caves . One of these mortuary caves may have held up to 1 @,@ 000 mummies , however , many of these have disappeared with only 20 complete mummies left on the islands . The loss of such a large amount of mummies is generally attributed to the popularity of mummia , a pharmaceutical substance created out of pulverized mummies .

The Guanche had groups of males and females , working as mummification specialists , who would carry out the process according to the gender of the decedent . The Guanche culture considered these individuals unclean due to the nature of their work .

= = Mummification process = =

While early explorers reported various traditions associated with Guanche mummification , there are three methods identified in modern times through scientific analysis : evisceration , preservation , and stuffing . These methods have been used in various different combinations depending on the era in which the mummy was created .

In 1876 , Dr. Don Gregorio Chil y Naranjo discovered several incisions in some mummies that he speculated may have been used to remove the internal organs . Don Brothwell 's work in 1969 confirmed that evisceration was a method used by the Guanche . Along with a team of other scientists , Brothwell conducted a pathological examination of a Guanche mummy . The examination revealed that the body had been eviscerated , then the abdominal and thoracic cavities had been packed with a mud @-@ like substance that contained the bark of a pine tree . Some sort of packing was also applied subcutaneously , but the exact make @-@ up of this particular embalming substance is unknown .

An examination conducted by Patrick Horne in 1991 of a mummy held at the Redpath Museum at McGill University in Montreal , Canada revealed moss had been used to stuff the empty abdominal cavity . In addition to the moss , there were several other types of local plant that had been preserved inside the body as packing .

Preservation of the outer parts of the body was normally achieved through a combination of resins and animal skin wrappings . The resins were prepared with a mixture of minerals , plants , and fats . These were spread across the body prior to allowing it to dry , either in the sun or through smoking .

Finally , the decedent was wrapped in animal skins and laid to rest . The number of animal skins used in wrapping corresponded with the individual ' s social status , with kings being wrapped with up to 15 skins .