



0. Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor - Story Preface

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Legends from ancient China tell us that the First Emperor became afraid of death later in life. As a result, he searched for the "elixir of life" - an immortal medicine which would help him to live forever. ** Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

...As much of the brain as possible is extracted through the nostrils with an iron hook and what the hook cannot reach is dissolved with drugs.

Herodotus, Greek Historian
On making Egyptian mummies
The Histories 2.86-89

When Herodotus visited Egypt, around 450 B.C., priests in that country told him how they made mummies. His review of the process, the earliest-known description of mummification, continues:

Next, the flank is slit open with sharp Ethiopian stone [probably a flake of obsidian] and the entire contents of the abdomen are removed. The cavity is then thoroughly cleansed and washed out, first with palm wine and again with a solution of pounded spices. Then it is filled with pure crushed myrrh, cassia, and all other aromatic substances, except frankincense. The opening is sewn up, and then the body is placed in natron, covered entirely for 70 days, never longer.

What, exactly, *is* a mummy? It is a preserved dead body which has retained some of its soft tissue. It may still have skin (or muscle tissue or organs) which, upon further study, tell us something about who the person once was.

Mummies have fascinated us for centuries. They can develop, naturally, when a body is buried (or left) in extremely cold or very hot, arid conditions. They can be created (like they were in ancient Egypt) when experts follow an elaborate embalming process. Turning dead bodies into mummies (follow the link to virtually create one yourself) was so popular in Egypt that scholars believe about seventy million were created there over a 3,000-year period.

In this story, we will take a virtual trip to meet someone who might have been a mummy (the first emperor of China), examine his famous tomb (which has been partially excavated) and explore beautiful mountains (the Himalayas) south of the country (China) which he unified in 221 BC.

** To help him locate the elusive elixir, the First Emperor sent a courtier named Xu Fu on a voyage to Mount Penglai (the legendary home of the immortals) to obtain the immortal medicine and deliver it to the First Emperor. This illustration - created between 1839-1841 - depicts one of Xu Fu's voyages, circa 219 BC, as imagined by the 19th-century artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861). All efforts to locate the elixir were unsuccessful, of course, and the First Emperor died in 210 BC.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Mummy-Tomb-of-the-Dragon-Emperor)

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Iron Hook

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor

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