

# Letter to the Editor



## MUMMY STORIES

At FRONTIER we love to hear your comments and views on the research articles we publish, we especially enjoy facilitating cross-college conversation about different research projects. To encourage further conversation I have allowed the author to issue a response to the letter I have received. For all future Letter to Editor submissions email [FRONTIER@le.ac.uk](mailto:FRONTIER@le.ac.uk) or send us a Tweet @FrontierPhDMag. I look forward to receiving your letters!

Felicity Easton, FRONTIER Editor-in-Chief

### Response to: **Think you know mummies? Think again: mummy stories**

(FRONTIER Issue #3 pg.4 by Angela Stienne).

It is almost inarguable that “*everyone loves mummies*”, from the splendour of their tombs to the almost unimaginable lives of the individuals. I feel, however, compelled to register the omitted view that many have reservations regarding one of the key methods used in gaining these insights. This being the questionable morality behind the growing trend to exhume and then examine the departed.

The fascination and intrigue around all civilisations and cultures stems predominantly from the denominator that simultaneously both binds and differentiates humanity, the beliefs held on what happens after death. To ancient and modern civilisations alike the subject of death is very rightly revered and respected. In spite of this, modern humans have developed a tendency to forsake the wishes of many ancient and extinct civilisations. There is no finer example of this than the attitude towards “mummies” (a.k.a deceased humans), to whom both the manner and location of burial was highly sacred. Yet as this spectacular and mysterious civilisation has faded, it appears the cultural and social belief of its inhabitants have lost their right to be sacrosanct. This I find most intriguing, as the manner and place of internment is a sacrosanctity that I would argue many modern societies and faiths would be willing to fight to uphold.

I would hope that readers of this letter would spare a moment to consider whether we have the right to hear the entirety of some of these admittedly wonderful stories, or conversely in future we should respect the dying wishes of their owners, and leave some of the finer details beyond the metaphorical veil?

Jonathan Decker

*Mummy Stories*’ aim is to create a global conversation with contrasting views, and therefore a response is very welcome. However, there are two points I would like to clarify.

First, *Mummy Stories* was created *precisely* to welcome a diversity of opinions, one that isn’t necessarily acknowledged in museums. *Think you know mummies? Think again: Mummy Stories* pointed out the unique effort of this project to welcome each and every one to the debate. The website ([www.mummystories.com](http://www.mummystories.com)) currently hosts a number of stories that discuss the ethical problems of mummies being both excavated and displayed – therefore, such a view isn’t “omitted”, it is at the very core of this project.

Secondly, the “questionable morality behind the *growing* trend to exhume and then examine the departed” is inaccurate. Openings (or looting) of Egyptian tombs are not a growing trend, as they occurred throughout history, and that includes ancient Egyptian history. For example, the tomb of Inumin in Teti Cemetery at Saqqara had no sign of a body when it was excavated, and the burial chamber and shaft were re-used no later than c.2000 BC. Another example is the royal mummy caches at Deir el-Bahri and the Valley of the Kings where necropolis priests cached various New Kingdom mummies from looted tombs. A final, famous, example is the tomb of Tutankhamun, which was opened a few times before it was “lost”; we have the sealings of necropolis officials from the re-selling of the tomb. Opening of tombs where bodies were buried is therefore not a modern attitude to ancient tombs – of course, personal feelings about such practice vary and should be welcomed in discussions. That’s what *Mummy Stories* is for.

Angela Stienne.