

A chance of neglecting the excess of years of physiological senescence owing to the modern embalming Art

Lorenzo Martini^{1,2}

¹University of Siena, Department of Pharmaceutical Biotechnologies, Via A. Moro 2, 53100 Siena, Italy, ²C.R.I.S.M.A. Inter University Centre for Researched Advanced Medical Systems, Via A. Moro 2, 53100 Siena, Italy

Corresponding author: Prof. Lorenzo Martini, M.Sc, E-mail: lorenzo.martini@unisi.it

Sir,

The embalming process (or philosophically speaking: “method” or technologically speaking “technique” may be reputed the Art of letting a corpse remain safe and uncorrupted for the futurity.

The original process forecasted the draining of the blood from the corpse and the refilling of the vascular system by phormaldeyde and some preservatives.

The ancient Greeks, who demanded endurance of their heroes in death as in life, expected the bodies of their dead to last without artificial aid during the days of mourning that preceded the final rites. Other societies, less demanding of their greats, developed a wide variety of preservatives and methods to stave off decay or minimize its effects. Corpses have been pickled in vinegar, wine, and stronger spirits: the body of the British admiral Lord Nelson was returned from Trafalgar to England in a cask of brandy. Even the Greeks sometimes made concessions: the body of Alexander the Great, for example, was returned from Babylon to Macedonia in a container of honey. The application of spices and perfumed unguents to minimize putrefaction was so common a practice that the English word embalming had as its original meaning “to put on balm.” Generally, however, the word is used to describe a less superficial procedure, the introduction of agents into the body to ensure preservation [1].

The beginnings of the art and techniques of embalming are associated principally with ancient

Egypt, where, as in parts of Asia and South America, a dry soil and climate encouraged its development. The early practice of wrapping the dead in cloth and burying them in charcoal and sand beyond the reach of the Nile waters preserved the corpses, which retained form and features for a long period. Those naturally preserved mummies are believed to have influenced the religious doctrines because they seemed to prove that the individual existed after his death. A belief in immortality and physical resurrection was central to Egyptian religion, both to the sun worship of early periods and to the later cult of Osiris. Central to the latter was the belief that when all of the elements that were present in life—soul, name, shadow, heart, and body—were reunited, the person would be resurrected, as the god Osiris was after his brother killed and dismembered him [2].

Since the body had to be attractive enough to lure back the soul and other elements, the highly skilled and trained embalmers took exquisite care to preserve it. Although it is held that embalming skill reached a peak during the New Kingdom period between 1738 and 1102 BCE, the most detailed description of the various methods was given by the 5th-century-BCE Greek historian Herodotus. The body was spread with powder of myrrh and other aromatic resins and perfumes. The incisions were stitched, and the body was covered in natron (hydrated sodium carbonate), after which it was lightly washed, wrapped in cotton bandages, dipped in a gummy substance. In a less expensive procedure, oil of cedar was spread onto the body, which was then placed in nitre for 70 days. A number of other early

How to cite this article: Martini L. A chance of neglecting the excess of years of physiological senescence owing to the modern embalming Art. *Our Dermatology Online*. 2022;13(e):e36.

Submission: 02.05.2022; **Acceptance:** 08.06.2022

DOI: 10.7241/ourd.2021e.36

peoples also practiced embalming of a sophisticated nature. Archaeologists have found evidence of a high degree of embalming skill in the burial chambers of the prehistoric Paraca Indians of Peru. The Guanches, aborigines of the Canary Islands, used methods much like those of the Egyptians, spreading the epidermis with salt and vegetable powders. The ancient Babylonians, Sumerians, and Greeks seldom practiced any but the most superficial kind of embalming, anointing the body with unguents, perfumes, and spices. Nor did the Jews employ embalming procedures, with the notable exception of Joseph, who ordered embalming for himself. Consequently, some Christians were embalmed, a notable example being Charlemagne, whose embalmed and richly dressed corpse was placed in a sitting position in his tomb at Aachen after his death in 814. The body of the 11th-century Spanish epic hero El Cid, which remained seated on an ivory chair in the monastery of San Pedro de Cardena for a decade before burial, is also presumed to have been embalmed [2,3].

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance a modest amount of embalming was done by specialists who employed the elaborate Egyptian method. For its return from France to England, the body of the 12th-century English king Henry I was embalmed by the aids of medicinal herbs. But during the Middle Ages, embalming was such an expensive procedure that even most royal personages could not afford it; involving, as it did, the use of costly spices, unguents, wax, and wrappings in addition to the prices charged by skilled embalmers. Moreover, religious opposition was so strong and skill so limited that few would consider it. Instead, cerecloths, strips of fabric impregnated with wax and wrapped snugly around the body to exclude air, were used. This method of preservation was so prevalent that cerement became a synonym for grave clothes. The great interest in anatomy and surgery during the Renaissance stimulated experiments with other embalming methods [4].

The demand for embalming grew in England and particularly in the United States, where it was promoted by a newly emerging group of undertaker-businessmen as superior to the customary but awkward and often unsatisfactory method of preserving bodies for transportation or for viewing by packing them in ice or laying them on "cooling boards," with a concave, ice-filled box fitted over the torso and head. Some of the more enterprising entrepreneurs exhibited well-preserved "cases" in the windows of shops, or took them

on tour so that persons in rural areas and small towns could see the latest development [5].

Here, in this Letter to the Editor I would like to propose a sort of semi-embalming for elder, who yearn to remain young for many years respect to the physiological destiny (it is clear that cosmetics help to maintain mat the skin but are not really rejuvenating at all!).

A face mask is heralded as follows:

The lady (or even the gentleman) who wants to slow the progression of time are suggested to prepare a mixture of honey, (from acacia, clover, buckweat, eucalyptus or fireweed), eau de vie (Akavit, Bouza, Bombergeist, Tequila, Mezcal, Zotol, Magji Kawn, Cocuj, Kislav, Davu, Cachiri, Aive, Arika, Akara, depending strictly from the country or continent and from the fruits employed: for instance the kislav from watermelon in Estonia) and to cover the viscous jelly by bandages impregnated in melted carnauba wax or montan wax and essential oils of nutmeg, myhr, thyme, cedar rose or lavender and they are prayed to sleep almost 9 hours pro night wearing this cosmetic item.

The duration depends on the age and the moisture degree (from 0 to 99) using a simplest moisture meter.

To obtain the number of nights necessary to have a beautiful and renovated look it is sufficient to resolve this equation:

$\ln(\text{years} \times \text{moisture degree}) = \text{number of nights one need to acquire a younger aspect.}$

For example a lady 80 y. old with a moisture degree of 77 will sleep almost 28 nights covered and bandaged with the mixture.

The age shall be multiplied by 100

Infact:

$\ln(\sqrt{80 \times 100} \times 77) = 28.28427124$ nights necessary to appear younger.

No formula exists to obtain the years one may cancel from the entire number of real years of his/her own age.

Statement of Human and Animal Rights

All the procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation

(institutional and national) and with the 2008 revision of the Declaration of Helsinki of 1975.

Statement of Informed Consent

Informed consent for participation in this study was obtained from all patients.

REFERENCES

1. Myers E. The Champion Text Book on Embalming. Springfield, Ohio, 1897,Champion Chemical CO. pp. 102.
2. Thiel W. Ergänzung für die konservierung ganzer leichen nach W. Thiel. Ann Anat. 2002;184:267–9.

3. Ottone NE, Vargas CA, Fuentes R, del Sol M. Walter thiel's embalming method. review of solutions and applications in different fields of biomedical research. Int J Morphol. 2016; 34:1442–54.
4. Marinozzi S. [Bodies, mummies and texts for an history of embalming in Italy]. Med Secoli. 2013;25:167-204.
5. Ghosh SK. The evolution of epistemological methodologies in anatomy: From antiquity to modern times. Anat Rec (Hoboken). 2022;305:803-17.

Copyright by Lorenzo Martini. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Source of Support: Nil, Conflict of Interest: None declared.