What’s up with this dog headed guy? And what is he doing with that Mummy?

How and why did the Egyptians make Mummies anyhow?

And what about those Pyramids? How could they possibly have built them and why would they want to?

Discover the answers to these questions and explore the mysterious realm of ancient Egyptian Religion, with its massive temples, multitude of gods and goddesses and fascinating funeral rites. Perform actual Egyptian temple and funeral rituals, and a 2500 year old play “The Triumph of Horus”!

This course will investigate ancient Egyptian religious beliefs and practices, their origin, and development. The great mythic Solar Cycle of creation and Osirian Cycle of betrayal and revenge, death and rebirth are discussed, as well as the place of the myriad local and minor Gods and Goddesses within Egyptian mythology. The dynamics behind the monotheistic “Revolution” of Pharaoh Akhenaton are investigated, and the connections of Atenism with Moses, Israelite Monotheism and the Bible explored. The interaction of sacred and secular in Egyptian society is considered through the nature of divine kingship, large temple institutions, and funerary foundations. The relationship between the state cults and private worship by noble and commoner is explored, and the nature and potency of ancient Egyptian magic and curses investigated. The nature and development of Egyptian funerary beliefs are also detailed, including the history and significance of pyramids and tombs, mummification, and the process of ‘democratization’ of the afterlife, as individuals gradually took hold of their own destinies after death at the expense of the Pharaohs.

Instructor: Stuart Tyson Smith. Office & Contact: 1003 HSSB, 893-7887, stsmith@anth.ucsb.edu. Office Hours: Tu 3-5.

Time & Place: Tuesday, Thursday, 9:30-10:45 am, Girvetz 1004.

Web Site: http://www.anth.ucsb.edu/faculty/stsmith/courses/176TS.html
Course Requirements

The course will have a midterm (25%) and final exam (50%). Participation in the re-created ceremonies and play, or a short paper as a make-up, will also be required (25%). Each exam will consist of a pictorial identification section (20%), a set of short description identifications of important deities, individuals, places, and concepts (40%), and an essay question (40%). For each section there will be some choice of what to answer (e.g., identify 10 of 15 places/names/items listed, one of two essay questions, etc.). Study questions will be handed out at least two meetings before each exam and gone over in class. Make up exams can be scheduled if there is any difficulty in attending on an exam day. If possible, arrange this before the exam is given, otherwise a penalty may be assessed (a valid excuse such as illness will never be penalized). Cheating will not be tolerated and will result in a grade of F for that exam.

Readings will be assigned from the following (see Course Schedule for specific assignments):


Web Site: http://www.anth.ucsb.edu/faculty/stsmith/courses/176TS.html
Course Schedule

Sept. 23.  Introduction:  Brief review of Egyptian history, nature of the sources, Overview of Egyptian Religion.


△ Say a 3500 year old ancient Egyptian prayer in ancient Egyptian!


Web Site:  http://www.anth.ucsb.edu/faculty/stsmith/courses/176TS.html


△ Perform a 5000 year old Egyptian funerary ritual to feed the dead!

Nov. 2, 4. Origins and development of Egyptian funerary beliefs. Ka, Akh, and Ba: The Egyptian Soul & the ‘democratization of the afterlife.’ Private burial and tombs in the Old Kingdom through the Middle Kingdom.


Nov. 9. The origins and development of Pyramids as a royal and private funerary monument. Pious funerary foundations. Nubian (Sudanese) Pyramids, Egyptian influences on Nubian religion.

Taylor, pp. 112-243; Wilkinson, Nubian Deities: Dedwen, Apademak, Anuket, Mandulus, Arsenuphis.

△ Recite a passage from the Pyramid Texts (featured in The Mummy Returns)

Note: Veteran’s Day Holiday November 11.

Nov. 16, 18. Private and Royal Burial in the Second Intermediate Period through the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period.

Smith, They did take it with them (on reserve).

Nov. 23 Hellenism, burial and religion in the Greco-Roman Period.


Simpson pp. 392-398, 443-529; Taylor pp. 244-263.

Note: Thanksgiving Holiday November 25.

Nov. 30, Dec. 2. The Legacy of Egyptian Religion. Egypt’s place in world religious history.

Egyptian religion & pop culture.

△ December 2 - Group Performances: Temple Ritual.

△ The “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony to bring Mummies back to life!

△ “The Triumph of Horus” - a 2200 year old play!

Final Exam, Wednesday, December 8, 8-11am in Girvetz 1004.