



**Mumia Vera Aegyptiaca:  
Remedies in Occidental Apothecaries - Exhibits in a Materia Medica Collection**

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Whenever a collection on the history of pharmacology has a Materia Medica section, special interest is usually attracted by vessels with the inscription “MUMIA”.

Our initial association with this term – a dead body preserved from decay by a complicated process of conservation – forms part of strange and remote advanced civilizations. Throughout the ages any study of the practice has been marked by amazement and aversion, a yearning for more profound wisdom, fascination and indeed an urge to make sense of such an exotic world. We now find it difficult to grasp that anyone should have wanted to use this “substance” for curative purposes. Getting close to it involved coming to terms with death, and death produced a substance that was believed to contain the power to combat it. Researching this phenomenon may well have correlated with a quest for the spectacular – something which apparently had to be countered with an urgent pursuit of scientific rigor.

A large number of studies are available, providing interpretative paradigms for the use of this remedy. Virtually no publication fails to point out that the drug continued to be traded in 1924, quoting a price list from E. Merck Darmstadt. Considering that Merck had such a major position on the research scene, why did it have this substance in its product range?

This study is based on material from the Merck archives. They include a glass case entitled “Mumia Vera Aegyptiaca” with heads, feet and other body parts. By determining the age of the finds, the mummified parts were dated 263 BC. Computer-tomographic studies proved that they are Egyptian skulls.

Do the parts contain remainders of a basic pharmaceutical substance? Were they taken for study purposes? This article reports on the comparative research that has so far been conducted.