Mummies and Kids
A NEW MUSEOGRAPHIC STRATEGY

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Abstract. Museos Tenerife Naturaleza y Arqueología (MUNA) holds in its collection guanches mummies that exercise a power of attraction in everyone who visits it. This shows that the human remains have the ability to excite, educate, and evoke wonder and curiosity. For this reason, this institution decided to conduct a study focused on special visitors, the children, encouraging them to ask themselves all kinds of questions about the exhibition of human remains of past cultures in order to understand human history. This paper illustrates the results of this study, realized on a number of kids in school age – between 6 and 19 years old – belonging to different schools in the Island of Tenerife who visited the exhibition, and especially focuses on the reactions concerning the room containing human remains.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the results of a field study carried out in the Museos Tenerife Naturaleza y Arqueología (MUNA) during the exhibition Athanatos\textsuperscript{1}. The Museum, in its role of educator, has decided to conduct this field study in order to listen to the voice of the youngest visitors: kids.

A number of 1074 kids in school age between 9 and 19 years old, belonging to 31 schools in the Island of Tenerife (Fig. 1) have been interviewed during their visit to the exhibition Athanatos\textsuperscript{2}.

RESEARCH AIM

The aims of this study were the following: understand what kids knew about mummies, test their interest in the subject, analyze which kind of feelings they had face to face with the mummies, and finally, and most interesting, listen to their opinions and needs in order to create a new strategy for a museography with mummies.

METHODOLOGY

To reach these aims, the following methodology has been carried out:
1. A list of questions was produced together with schoolteachers in order to formulate the inquiries in the best possible way for kids;
2. The kids were given the sets of questions before and after the visit;
3. The results were entered in a database and analyzed;
4. Bar-charts of the results have been created.

\textsuperscript{1} Extraordinary World Congress on Mummy Studies. Tenerife, May 21-25 2018.
\textsuperscript{2} The schools are: 1- CEO Guajara, 2- Colegio Ramiro de Maetzu, 3- IES Los Cardones, 4- IES Profesor Martin Miranda, 5- IES Anaga, 6- Las Dominicas Vistabella, 7- IES Los Realejos, 8- Colegio Luther King, 9- SIES Arona, 10- Colegio La Salle, 11- IES Adeje, 12- IES Augustin de Bethancourt, 13- IES Cruz Santa, 14- IES Alcalde Bernabé Rodríguez, 15- IES La Matanza, 16- IES Barranco de las lajas, 17- CEIP La Luz, 18- CEIP Aguere, 19- CEIP Charco del Pino, 20- Colegio Luther King, 21- CEIP La Montagneta, 22- Colegio Escuelas Pias, 23- CEIP Los Andenes de Taco, 24- Colegio Villa Ascencion, 25- CEIP Las Retamas, 26- CEIP San Fernando, 27- CEIP Barranco Las Torres, 28- CEIP Practicas Anejas, 29- CEIP Acentejo, 30- IES Guimar, 31- IES El Tanque.
RESULTS

All the answers of the 1074 kids were entered in a database which allowed us to work with the corpus of data and produce graphics of the statistics.

From Survey 1 and Survey 2, corresponding to the sets of questions before and after the visit, we decided to analyze in this paper only the most interesting answers and show some examples of the results of the statistics. For each answer analyzed here, there are four bar charts, corresponding to the different group age of the kids: 9-12 (Primaria), 12-14 (ESO 1° y 2°), 14-16 (ESO 3° y 4°) and 16-19 (Bachiller).

The first bar charts inform us about the most common words used by kids to describe a mummy before entering the room of the exhibition, that is, what was their previous knowledge on the subject.
As we can see, at least at a young age (9-12 years old), the kids connect the mummy with Egypt, bandages, dead and toilet paper. This can tell us that the major influence on kids is the cinema, the literature and the games.

Other words nor represented here are also pharaoh, Tutankhamun, pyramid and tomb, confirming the strong connection with Egypt.

![The most used words](image)

**Fig. 2.** Primaria: 9-12 years old.

![The most used words](image)

**Fig. 3.** ESO 1° y 2: 12-14 years old.
After the age of 12, the word toilet paper disappear, but the term antiquity appears as one of the most common words to describe a mummy. The mummy is thus clearly seen as an object, as any other piece of the Museum.

In the age 16-19, Egypt, death and bandages, still appear in a huge percentage, but we also have words like ritual, culture ancestors and religion as terms connected with the mummy.
Something worth noting, because it appear for all the groups, it is the confusion between mummy and skeleton and bones, that is, they do not see any difference between those terms.

The second set of bar charts produced inform us on the number of kids which have seen mummies before. It is interesting to see that in the age 9-12, for half of the interviewed kids, this is their first time to face a real mummy. And when we asked those who already saw a mummy, where it was, they answered that it was in the MUNA. This means that this museum is important for them, and that this exhibition can be another opportunity to “meet” mummies from different cultures. Something worth noting is that there is a percentage of kids, in all ages, bigger as they are older, which do not give an answer. We interpreted this as a lack of interest.

After the visit, the most simple question to ask was if they liked it or not and we could see that the majority liked it. The reason why they enjoyed the visit is that they find the mummies “interesting, surprising, strange and exciting”, which is, all kinds of strong emotions that no other object of the museum can cause or transmit.

If we have a look at the following graphics, we note that indeed the most common answer to the question “What did you feel when you saw the mummies” is: interest, curiosity and intrigue. The small number of kids which didn’t like it felt fear, disgust or sorrow. Obviously, the fear is higher at a young age and goes decreasing while getting older.

![Feelings Chart](image)

**Fig. 6.** Primaria: 9-12 years old.
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Fig. 7. ESO 1° y 2: 12-14 years old.

Fig. 8. ESO 3° y 4°: 14-16 years old.
When they were asked if they would like to see mummies again, the kids who don’t want to see them anymore, give as a reason that they find them scaring, boring and that they don’t catch their attention.

Those who want to see them again, nonetheless feel the need to be provided with different kind of information. They express that only seeing the mummies as dead bodies, is not enough and, for our surprise, they want to know about their life.

These are the most common questions they want an answer to: How were they during their daily life? Who were they? What about their origins? Where did they live and what did they do? What was their name and age? What was the history of that person? How did they die? How were they mummified? How did the mummies reach the museum?

CONCLUSIONS

How can we answer those needs?

With a different museographic strategy, that is to place the mummies in a broader context.

The experience of the visit to a mummy exhibition needs to be enriched with information on daily life, customs and traditions, religion and rituals, environment,
through different graphic supports, new technologies, virtual reconstructions, capa-
ble of attracting the interest and providing information and participation of the
visitors on multiple levels.

Other than mummy’s life, it is interesting and necessary to know about
mummy’s history, which is, what happened to the mummies once they were dis-
covered and started to attract interest amongst people.

Here we made an example of reconstruction of mummification rituals of the
Guanche population of Canary Islands, illustrated in all the different steps, from
the washing of the body to the final wrapping in goatskins and the deposition of
the mummy in the burial cave.

Here we suggested an idea of a possible layout in which the mummies are sur-
rounded by all kinds of elements used during the mummification process, like
plants, minerals, tools, which all contribute to create a more complete and partic-
ipated experience.

Fig. 10. Reconstruction guanches mummification (mirlado).
The room explaining the mummification rituals can be completed by a section dedicated to the life, habits, customs and beliefs of those mummies, answering thus the needs of the young public of a contextualization of a mummy, and answering the representative need of a 14 years old girl who told us: “I want the mummy to tell me more about his life”.

We trust that the results of this study and others may be useful to determine the most convenient criteria to exhibit mummies according to the needs of the public.