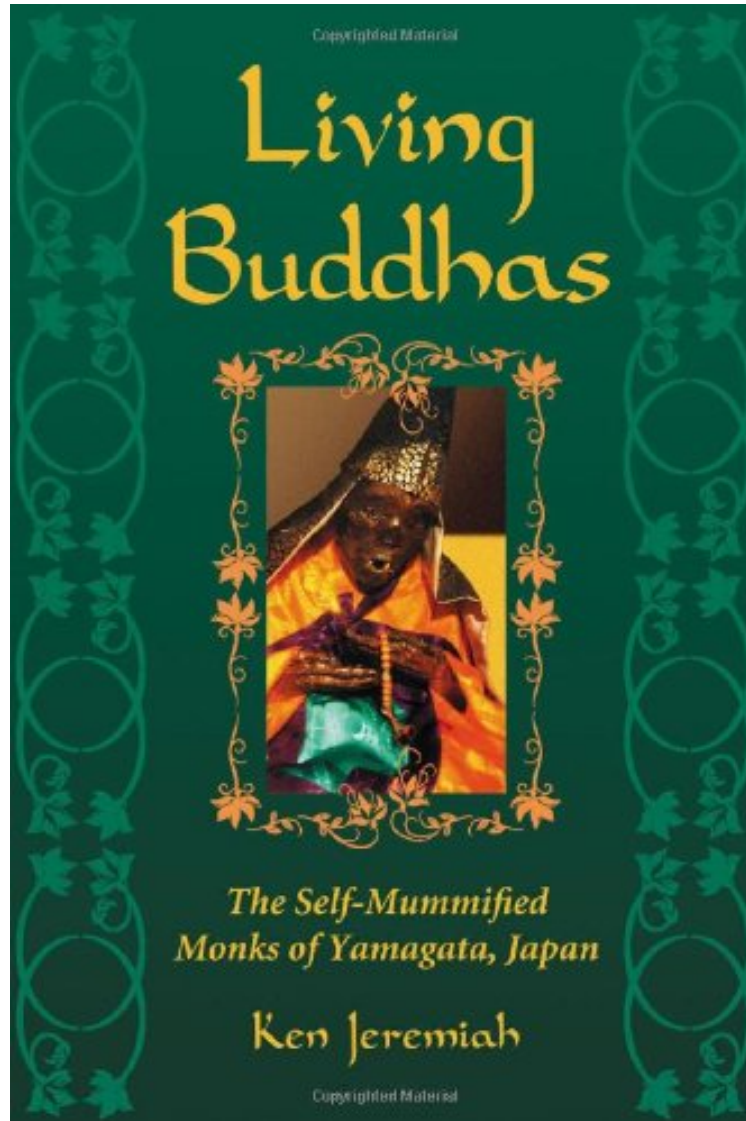


(Read free) Living Buddhas: The Self-Mummified Monks of Yamagata, Japan

Living Buddhas: The Self-Mummified Monks of Yamagata, Japan

Ken Jeremiah

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Ken Jeremiah : Living Buddhas: The Self-Mummified Monks of Yamagata, Japan before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Living Buddhas: The Self-Mummified Monks of Yamagata, Japan:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent, scholarly, book for those interested in the subjectBy CustomerThis is a well researched book on a subject that is not written about much. I have been a Buddhist for over 40 years so my interest is the book is the various ways that Buddhism is practiced around the world. I found it fascinating

others may find it macabre. It was compiled from many sources and there is some repetition in the book. The book gives an interesting insight how far, even unto death, some people will take their beliefs in what needs to be done in order to help all sentient beings. 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Life and death are two sides of the same coin.

By Anca I. A book that goes beyond the historical aspects of self-mummification, *Living Buddhas* is a unique masterpiece in which the author talks about the diverse religious influences that led to the sect of Shugendo, on life and death being two sides of the same coin (and how these mummified monks are neither alive, nor dead, but in suspended animation), about the discipline and altruism of asceticism and the diverse ways people find meaning in life - whether through creating values, children or being devoted to religious life. A very rarely-researched subject, self-mummification is a shock to most people when they first hear about it. This was practiced by a Japanese Buddhist sect called Shugendo (Sokunshin jobutsu is the Japanese name for the practice of self-mummification) - a sect which favors asceticism - and it was virtually unknown to Westerners until this detailed print appeared for the English-speaking public. Shugendo is still practiced today, but the practice of self-mummification was banned in Japan. In a religion that favors non-attachment in order to avoid pain, how could such a practice be developed? Since these highly spiritual monks performed miracles during their lives, preserving their bodies as much as possible was an act of altruism. Their behavior is not that different from the ascetic saints of Europe - the incorruptibles - on which the same author wrote a book called *Christian Mummification*. Their self-mummification was done in three stages: -losing fat- dehydration- poisoning. In the first 1000 days, the monks were doing strenuous physical activity while eating only nuts, berries and seeds, foregoing all cereals. For another 1000 days, they ate only bark and roots and decreased their food consumption almost to nothing but pine needles and resin. Dehydration and poisoning were attained by drinking a poisonous tea from the Urushi tree. This caused severe vomiting, diarrhea and made the body poisonous, so as to avoid being eaten by maggots. Afterwards they would bury themselves alive in a cave leaving only one bamboo tube for oxygen while meditating in front of upcoming death, keeping oneself in the lotus position. They would ring a bell every day for the other monks to know they are still alive. Once the bell didn't ring anymore, they sealed the cave and waited for another 1000 days, after which they checked to see whether mummification was achieved. This signified great spiritual achievement and the monk would be painted in lacquer and displayed in temples. This whole process took about a decade(!). If the self-mummification did not succeed, the bodies were forgotten in time. The state in which these monks continued their existence as mummies was considered a form of suspended animation and not actual death. Once can still see some of them in Buddhist temples in the Yamagata region of Japan, thanks to the directions provided by this book for the English speaker. The book includes lots of exclusive photos of these monks and the Buddhist temples they inhabit and also an index of their names in Japanese. The Japanese language skills and the trips to Japan were fruitfully used for writing this book and I am deeply grateful for the information in it - it is amazing how much unique information you can get access to by knowing a foreign language. 17 of 18 people found the following review helpful.

Sacred Mummies **By Zack Davisson** The self-mummified monks of Japan are an obscure phenomenon. They are little known in Japan. Unless they live in a town that has one, your average Japanese person is unlikely to know that they exist. My wife had never heard of them, nor had any of my Japanese friends. They are obscure enough that even someone like me--who purposefully seeks out rare and obscure phenomenon and once planned a trip just to see a mummified kappa and traveled to Omine-san to train with the Shugendo monks--was only vaguely aware that they existed. Which is why it was a treat to read Ken Jeremiah's book "*Living Buddhas: The Self-Mummified Monks of Yamagata, Japan*." Often it takes someone like Ken Jeremiah--someone obsessed enough with a single, obscure phenomenon, to take the necessary time to research and write up the story--adding to the available body of knowledge so that someone like me can learn a little more. Self-mummification happened during a time when ascetic practices were taken to the extreme. The practice was considered to be the holiest of holies--a transformation into Buddhahood while still inhabiting your physical body. Monks attempted the transformation for centuries; the oldest known self-mummified monk is from 1128 and the most recent from 1878. For a period of up to 3,000 days monks would prepare both physically and mentally, reducing their diet to little more than pine needles and resin, and meditating constantly in dark caves. When they were ready, they would be buried alive. After a suitable period, their bodies were dug up, and if mummified then the transformation was considered to be successful and they were venerated. If the body had decomposed, then it was felt that they had not achieved Buddhahood. "*Living Buddhas: The Self-Mummified Monks of Yamagata, Japan*" is a somewhat misnamed book. While it does go into the history of the seven self-mummified monks of Yamagata, Japan, there really isn't enough information on them to fill out a book. Instead, Jeremiah adds chapters on various practices of mummification, on Kobo Daishi and the Shugendo religion and the various beliefs that influenced the monks, and on asceticism and self-immolation practices worldwide. Being interested in these subjects, I enjoyed the additional chapters, although there are better and more complete books available. But if you aren't familiar with Japanese religion then the extra chapters make for a good background as to why these monks would do this. In all honesty, I can't say that "*Living Buddhas*" is a particularly well written book. The chapters could be better organized and the transitions smoother. Some of the chapters can be a slog to get through. Jeremiah mixes history with personal belief, and I laughed out loud when I saw pseudo-scientist Graham Hancock (*Underworld: The Mysterious Origins of Civilization*) quoted as a reliable source. The last chapter in particular, "The

Nature of Life and Death," is more of a personal essay and seemed out of place. But given the obscure nature of the subject matter, I am willing to forgive a lot. Jeremiah's book is the most complete you are likely to find on the subject, if not the only book available. I am grateful that he took the time to research and write it. And now I have a new stop to see on my magical mystery tour of Japan.

Northern Japan is home to an ancient, esoteric tradition of self-mummifying Buddhist monks, little known to the outside world. Long after death, these ascetics continue to be revered as Living Buddhas. This first English-language work on the subject recounts the process by which these monks starve themselves for a decade, bury themselves alive with only a small breathing tube, and meditate until death. After three years, the mummified body is exhumed and displayed. The biographies of various monks are presented within, as is an examination of the religious beliefs involved, an amalgamation of three distinct religious traditions. Also explored is the role of asceticism in religion, and beliefs about life and death shared by the Buddhist sects involved in self-mummification.

About the Author Ken Jeremiah has written extensively about spiritual and religious phenomena. He lives in Narragansett, Rhode Island, and runs tour groups to Japan, Italy, and other countries yearly.