

# kids' Q&A

YOU ASK, WE ANSWER



How did the Museum  
unravel the case of the

## Mysterious Mummies?

In this issue of Kids' Q&A, we look at a topic that fascinates us all—mummies! (They're always on the list of subjects that you'd like us to cover.) So get ready to find out about some amazing technology that makes it possible to learn more about the mummies in the Museum. Intrigued? Read on . . .

**They are old. Very old. (They are mummies, after all.) Here at the Met there are thirteen Egyptian mummies, by the look of things. And there are questions. Lots of questions. Who were they? What were their secrets? We wanted to know the inside story. Here's how we unraveled THE CASE OF THE MYSTERIOUS MUMMIES...**

**What makes these mummies so mysterious, anyway?**

Until a few years ago, no one was sure what was actually inside the linen wrappings of all the mummies in the Museum. Some X-rays had been done, but the technology wasn't good enough to reveal much. A recent technology called a CAT scan made it possible to examine the mummies much more fully.



One of the mummies about to enter the CAT scan unit. The images made would show the internal anatomy.  
Mummy of Nesmin; Ptolemaic Period, 332–30 B.C.; Funds from Various Donors, 1886 [86.1.51]; located in Gallery 130)

**What's a CAT scan?**

A CAT scan is a kind of X-ray. The image can be rotated, so the subject of the scan can be looked at from different angles. Pictures can also be taken very quickly—and in very small sections—of the whole body. A computer program can then put the sections back together so they can be studied. The technology is useful because it means that the mummies can be “unwrapped” without actually being unwrapped.

**Where was all this done?**

The actual scans were done right here in the Museum. All the equipment was brought in; different companies loaned it. Then the images were taken to a hospital and studied there. The whole project took about four months.

**How many people were involved?**

About twenty people altogether, including curators, conservators, doctors, technicians, police . . .

**Police?**

**Did one of the mummies commit a crime?**

No. But there was an investigation. Here's what happened: One of the things we learned by CAT scanning the mummies was the cause of death for two of them. One, a man called Nesiamun, had a fractured his pelvis and his left humerus (the bone in the upper arm) also had been broken but was healing (look at the scan on the right). That meant that break had happened before he died. The CAT scan was taken to the medical examiner, who was asked what he

thought the cause of death was. He looked at the scan and said, “Motor vehicle accident.”

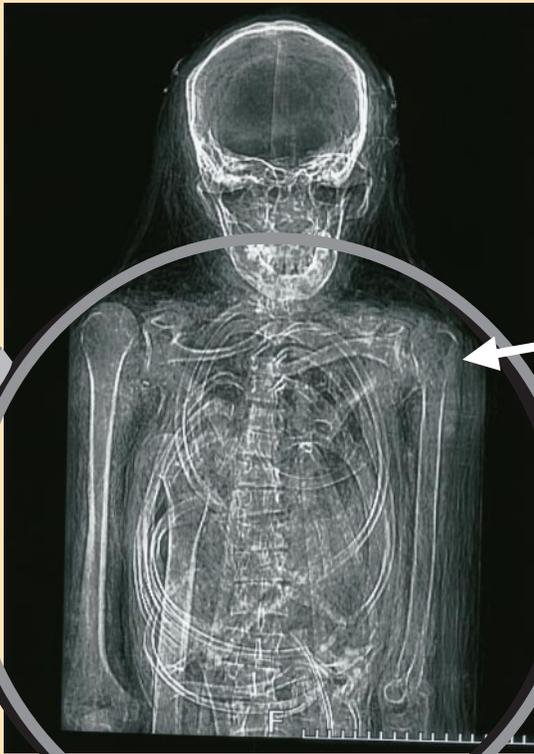
**But there weren't any cars back then.**

Right. But there were chariots. (Note: We can't be positive that it was a vehicular accident; he might have had a bad fall.)

**Wow. Where is that mummy?**

In Gallery 130, but it isn't visible because it is inside its coffin. When you enter the gallery, walk down the pathway on the right, and then turn left between the first and second cases. The mummy of Nesiamun is in the second coffin on your right.

This scan shows one of the mummies with a broken left upper arm (Nesi-Amun; Dynasty 26; Rogers Fund, 1926 [26.3.11]; located in Gallery 130)



### And?

They were quite close, as you can see in the pictures below. The differences are slight and probably not significant.

### Can the CAT scans tell you anything more?

They can help us figure out the age of the person and give us information about any diseases he or she might have had, even facts about nutrition. We can also tell how tall many of them were (about five-foot-five or-six), equal to or a little shorter than many adults today.

### What else should kids know about this technology?

What's really important is the idea of "technology transfer"—taking technology that is used in a hospital and making it useful in a museum. That same technology is useful for other things in this museum. For example, CAT scans have been used on musical instruments, so we can tell how they were made. Museum staff could tell, for instance, that one flute had been hollowed out by being drilled from both ends.

### What else did you learn from the CAT scans?

Roman-period mummies sometimes had lifelike painted portrait panels placed over the face in the outer layer of the wrappings. (See more about them on the back page.) The cover of this issue illustrates the painting on one of our mummies. We weren't sure if this portrait showed a real version of what the mummified person originally looked like or if it was idealized (showed the most perfect version of what someone might look like). We asked a police forensic artist, using the CAT scan imaging, to draw a picture of what he thought the person's face looked like. Then we compared the drawing to the mummy portrait to see how similar they were.



### Anything further we should know?

Look carefully, take your time, and enjoy the galleries!



Left: Composite sketch of the possible appearance of the individual whose mummy is seen on the cover

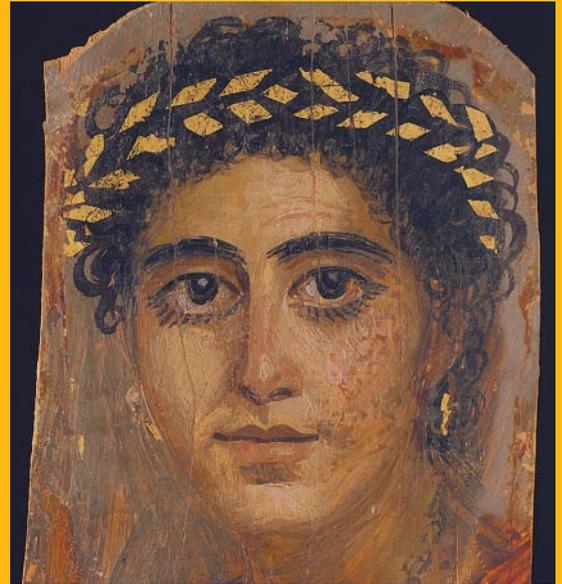
Right: A detail of the mummy portrait on the cover

## More about Mummy Portraits

From about 50 to 250 A.D., during the period of Roman rule in Egypt, painted panel portraits were sometimes placed on the faces of traditional Egyptian mummies. These realistic-looking faces showed people in the Greek and Roman style, with Greek and Roman hairstyles, clothing, and jewelry. You can see some of these portraits in Egyptian Galleries 137 and 138 (the galleries next to the Tomb of Perneb).

Compare these mummy portraits to the faces on the other mummies in the Egyptian galleries. Do they resemble each other? What are some similarities and differences? (FYI: Before the first century A.D., Egyptian mummies were almost always shown with beautiful, idealized masks.)

Right: Panel portrait of a young woman in red (detail), Roman period, probably Flavian, about 90-120 A.D.; Rogers Fund, 1909 (09.181.6); located in Gallery 137



## AT-HOME ACTIVITIES

**Draw a mummy coffin**—perhaps like one of those you saw in the Museum. You can decorate it with hieroglyphs or designs you may have seen or create your own. Do your designs have a special meaning?

**Make a portrait** of yourself or someone you know using materials around your house. When you are done, pretend you don't know the person in the portrait and make up a story about what that person is like. Then ask a friend or family member to make up a story as well. Are there any similarities between your stories?

**Send us your drawing(s)** and we'll send you a Museum goodie. Don't forget to include your name, age, and address. Send it to Kids'Q&A/Mummies care of the address below.

## GET IN TOUCH!

If you are a regular reader of *MuseumKids*, you'll notice that we now have a new look and a new title: *Kids'Q&A*. We will still give you all the information you want about the Museum, based on the questions you send in to us. Tell us what you think about this issue and also what topics you'd like covered in upcoming issues. (The address is on the bottom left.) Keep those questions coming!



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Cover: Detail of a mummy with an inserted panel portrait of a youth, Roman period, about 80–100 A.D.; Rogers Fund, 1911 (11.139); located in Gallery 137. This photograph and that above by the Photograph Studio of The Metropolitan Museum of Art