

The MUMMY at MIZZOU

By CAROL HUNTER

Slain and dismembered, King Osiris was revived after his wives bound his body back together, according to ancient Greek mythology. Egyptians re-enacted the legend in mummification, part of the ritual to speed the deceased to an abundant afterlife.

The secrets and science of mummification are bound up in the mummy of Pet-meneh, on loan to Mizzou's Museum of Art and Archaeology for 10 years from Washington University. In exchange, the museum staff is preserving the coffin, wrappings and cartonnage, a decorative cover placed over the body.

The 2,300-year-old mummy and coffin are the centerpiece of a fall

exhibition, *Egyptian Art under the Greeks and Romans, 332 B.C. to A.D. 330*. The exhibition includes about 30 objects from the museum's own collection of Egyptian works and more than 110 borrowed works from 19 American museums.

"The mummy and coffin are of great historical and artistic value," says Morteza Sajadian, assistant museum director. "It's an illustration

through art of the interest Egyptians had in the afterlife."

Part of the elaborately painted coffin, for instance, is inscribed with prayers from the *Book of the Dead*, incantations to help the soul get to the other side. Some of the mummy's linen wrappings also contain verses from the *Book of the Dead*. "The theory was that if a mummy made a mistake in reciting these spells, it



could go back to the coffin or look at its bandages to brush up," says Maura Cornman, museum conservator and adjunct assistant professor of art history and archaeology. "The *Book of the Dead* was always in close proximity to the body."

The sycamore fig coffin, or sarcophagus, also depicts Egyptian burial scenes. Cornman says the coffin is more decorative than most of that period, but the reason remains a mystery. "This sarcophagus is even decorated on the inside, which is unusual, since you aren't supposed to see the inside," Cornman points out.

Mummification during Pet-meneh's day, however, was not done so meticulously. "In that time, they were getting kind of slack," Cornman says. Earlier embalmers, for instance, removed the brain through the nasal passages. Pet-meneh's brain was taken out through a hole chiseled in the skull.

Also in earlier times, embalmers placed most of the internal organs in special jars in the tomb. The heart, regarded as the center of intelligence, was not disturbed. Not so with Pet-meneh. A CAT scan done at the School of Medicine revealed that embalmers removed all of his organs. The dried remains were then wrapped in two cloth packages and stuffed back into the belly.

To plump out the dehydrated body



Jeff Wilcox photo

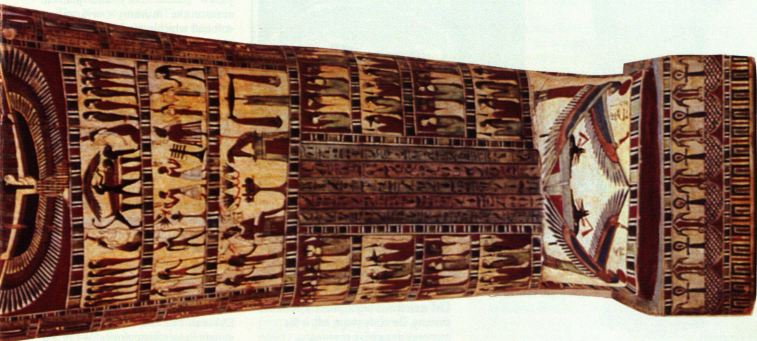
for wrapping, it was filled with a mixture of tree resin and bitumen, a tarry substance from the Red Sea. Some of the mixture eventually leaked from the mummy's cracked skull into the sarcophagus, leaving a stain.

Understandably, the outside of the coffin also showed the effects of age. No one knows exactly when it was excavated, but Charles Parsons, a St. Louis banker, gave the mummy to Washington University in 1896. It was later loaned to the St. Louis Art Museum, where it was

Museum Conservator Maura Cornman cleans the mummy's coffin. The entire sarcophagus, below, is more ornate than most of that era.

displayed until 1978.

Over the years, changes in relative humidity caused paint to peel from the coffin. To the rescue came Cornman, the only museum conservator in Missouri outside of Kansas City and St. Louis. She applied an adhesive beneath each peeling paint chip and bonded it to the case using a tiny tacking iron. With Amparo Torres, a graduate student in textile and apparel



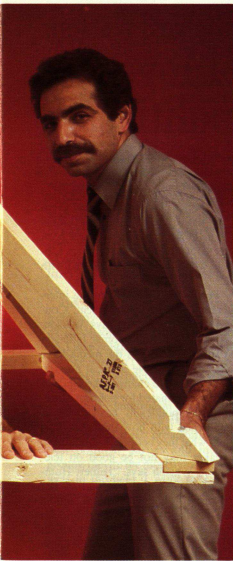


From this wooden model, above, a pyramid was built for a children's program. From left are Jane Biers, museum curator; Luann Andrews, children's program coordinator; Dr. David Guell, associate professor of civil engineering; and Morteza Sajadian, assistant museum director. Above, a CAT scan shows organ packets inside the mummy. The cartonnage, left, is the mummy's decorative covering.

management, Cornman pieced together the crumbling cartonnage like a jigsaw puzzle. They also plan to restore the mummy's wrappings, some of which were snagged by glass chips, probably from a shattered display case. A video on the mummy conservation will be shown during the exhibition.

Experts from anthropology, archaeology, biochemistry, forestry, geology and medicine analyzed the coffin and mummy without unwrapping the body, in keeping with the loan agreement. "This museum has unique capabilities because of the number of University departments that can participate in this project," says Sajadian, the assistant museum director.

One surprise was finding cotton seeds in the coffin. "Cotton was not of the period of the mummy," says Dr. Deborah Pearsall, research associate in American archaeology. "We're not



Larry Boehm photo

sure what it means, but it probably relates to the mummy's travels after it was taken from the tomb."

The X-rays and CAT scans taken at the Medical School show that Pet-menekh was a healthy, middle-aged individual before his death, says Dr. Sam Stout, associate professor of anthropology. Dr. Richard Tully, associate professor of radiology, found traces of arthritis, but says the bones were basically strong. Pet-menekh probably died quickly, since a lingering illness would have weakened the bones. His most unusual trait is his height. At 5-foot-6, Pet-menekh would have towered 12 inches above his average Egyptian male contemporaries.

Despite Pet-menekh's unremarkable medical history, about 50 University physicians stopped by to get a look at the mummy being CAT scanned. The general population shares their fascination with mummies, says Dr. Bill Bondeson, professor of philos-

ophy and medicine.

"Americans are latter-day romantics who, in an increasingly bureaucratic and impersonal world, are looking for things which inspire the imagination," he says. "We're interested in the bizarre and the occult. What would it have been like to live in a culture that built cities for the dead?" The pyramid is a symbol on U.S. dollar bills, he observes. And, there's even a place in Beverly Hills, Calif., where people can make funeral arrangements for Egyptian-style mummification. Bondeson shared his thoughts on mummy fascination during a panel discussion held in conjunction with the Egyptian exhibition.

Classic films like *The Mummy* with Boris Karloff and *Cleopatra*, starring Elizabeth Taylor, also were part of the special activities. The *Cleopatra* audience was briefed on historical inaccuracies in the film, such as scenes showing architecture that wasn't built until centuries after her death.

A lecture series and a monthlong children's program rounded out the event. Pupils in grades 2 through 6 wrapped up their Morning with Mummy program by re-enacting an Egyptian burial Oct. 31 on Francis Quadrangle. With assistance from the art department, the children made Egyptian amulets and wrapped mummy models. The objects were entombed in a 17-by-10-foot wooden pyramid built on the Quadrangle by mechanical engineering students.

While not all ancient Egyptians were entombed in traditional pyramids, the monuments still loomed large in Egyptian life, Sajadian says. And ironically, much of Egyptian life centered on the afterlife.

Perhaps, Sajadian muses, their ancient beliefs were not so peculiar. "Look at all the attention the mummy is getting—is that not afterlife? Could this individual have envisioned being so well cared for? It's placed in a climate-controlled room in a setting that's important to its life and period. Its coffin and wrappings are being made to look as good as possible. Isn't that paradise?" □

The Egyptian exhibit continues through Nov. 15 in the Museum of Art and Archaeology, located in Pickard Hall on the east side of Francis Quadrangle. The mummy will continue to be displayed in the ancient gallery after the exhibition closes.

FRIENDS of MUSEUM CONTRIBUTE to COLLECTION

Generosity is on permanent display at the Museum of Art and Archaeology. Most of the 12,000 treasures in the museum's collection—the third-largest in Missouri—are gifts. The state's largest collections are displayed at Nelson-Atkins Gallery of Kansas City and the St. Louis Art Museum.

At the Campus museum, credit for several acquisitions goes to Museum Associates Inc., a private corporation. (The University allocates money for the museum's operating expenses but not acquisitions.) Townsfolk formed the financial support group in 1976, the same year the museum moved from the fourth floor of Ellis Library to Pickard Hall. One of the chief founders was the late Harold Riback, BS BA '32, who operated a Columbia plumbing supply company.

Since its founding, the group has grown to 581 annual members, who donate at least \$25 a year, and 177 life members, who have given \$1,000 or more. All but 40 of the associates live in Missouri. "The membership consists of people who are the museum's very best audience," says Dr. Bill Bondeson, professor of philosophy and medicine, the group's first president. "These are people who really use the museum." Museum Associates have given more than \$90,000 in the past 11 years for purchase of eight works of art and a jewelry collection.

Associates have sponsored two auctions and operate the museum's gift shop on a volunteer basis. In addition to raising money, the group provides a valuable link to residents of mid-Missouri, says Betty Parrigin, a Columbia attorney who is the group's president. "We're interested in promoting the arts in the community, especially for children."

In appreciation for their support, associates are invited to sneak previews of exhibitions and special programs on the world's great cities. The group also takes tours, with a spring trip planned to Portugal.

The group's current financial goal is raising \$60,000, which will be pooled with \$40,000 from museum endowments to buy an ancient Greek or Roman art object. "The \$100,000 will be the most money we've ever had at once to spend on an object," says Forrest McGill, museum director. "Museum Associates is our largest and most important source of funds to develop the collection."
—Carol Hunter