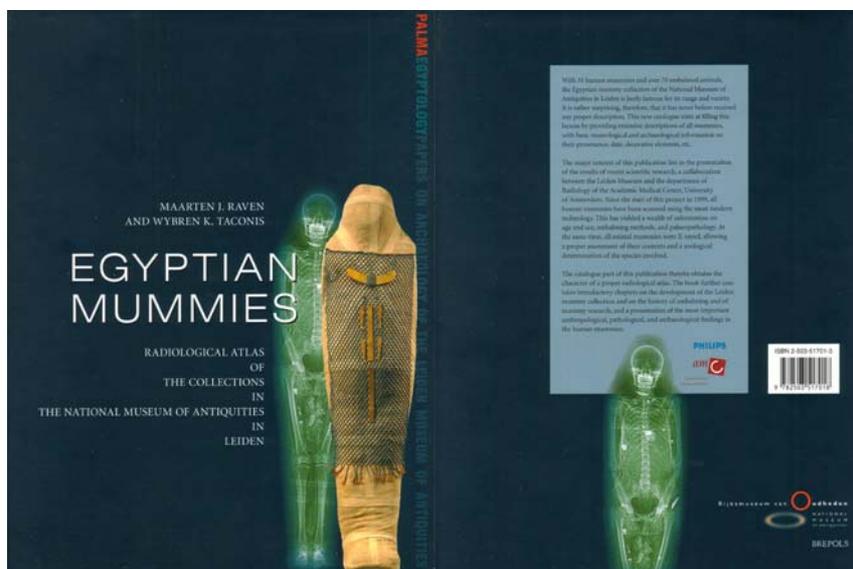


Raven, M.J. & W.K. Taconis. 2005. Egyptian Mummies: Radiological Atlas of the Collections in the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden. – Turnhout, Brepols (Papers on Archaeology of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities 1)

Book review by G. Metz



The National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden houses one of the finest collections of artefacts from ancient Egypt in the world. A major highlight is the rich collection of human and animal mummies, famed not only for its breadth and variety, but also for the excellent condition of many specimens. Various earlier catalogues published by the museum since the 19th century have mentioned the mummies in passing, and a popular account was released by Raven in 1993 in connection to an exhibition. This book is, however, the first comprehensive and academic description to appear.

The main focus of the current volume is the presentation of the results of the recent Dutch radiological survey of the Leiden mummies - the first systematic examination of a large collection with the latest CT technology. It also details the long and interesting history of the collection and of the scientific study of Egyptian mummies in general as well as giving a short and informative introduction to the art of mummification as it was performed in ancient Egypt.

The initial chapter by Raven consists of a history of the mummy collection in Leiden. This fascinating story begins in the 1620s when two mummies were acquired by Otho van Heurn, the professor of anatomy at Leiden University, and placed on public display in the 'Theatrum Anatomicum'. No new acquisitions of this type were made for the following 200 years, but in 1818, professor Caspar Reuvens, who was appointed director of the newly founded National Museum of Antiquities, set out to amass a large collection of antiquities in order to compete with other National Museums in Europe. Egyptian objects and especially mummies were among his highest priorities. Over the following decade, three major private collections of Egyptian artefacts including mummies were purchased by the museum, the largest belonging to Giovanni d'Anastasi, a famous pioneer of the antiquities trade. By the 1830s, Reuvens had been able to collect at least 30 mummies of humans and more than 50 specimens of animals. Although Reuvens unwrapped and dissected his initial human acquisition in 1824, he was perhaps the first to recognize the need to preserve wrapped mummies intact. After the death of Reuvens in 1835, few new acquisitions were made and interest in the mummies declined due to the changing priorities of the museum staff. Many of the mummies actually deteriorated during the latter half of the 19th century, a problem caused by high humidity in the museum. In several cases this decay was so widespread that dissection was eventually considered inevitable. The most famous and well documented of these dissections was that performed by Willem Pleyte in 1878 on the mummy of Djedhor. Few new acquisitions were made during these years, although the two mummies originally exhibited in the 'Theatrum Anatomicum' during the 17th and 18th century were relocated in an attic in 1872. After this, a period of stagnation ensued during which little was done in the fields of acquisition and further research. Modern non-destructive methods of investigation were first used in 1965 when P.H.K. Gray was invited from England to make a radiographic examination of part of the collection. 27 human mummies and a loose head were X-rayed and the results of this study were published in the museum's journal. The recent radiological survey performed by the museum in collaboration with the Academic Medical Center of the University of Amsterdam began in 1999 as a continuation of a similar survey carried out by the

Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam the previous year. The entire mummy collection in Leiden was studied, the results of which are presented in later chapters of this atlas.

The following chapter by Taconis allows the Leiden mummies to be viewed in a historical and scientific context. The author begins with an outline of the history and development of human mummification in ancient Egypt from its earliest traces during the Predynastic Period through its final stages in the Roman and Byzantine Periods. The history of the mummification of animals in Egypt is similarly reviewed. This is followed by an historical overview of Western interest and investigation of Egyptian mummies from the misguided use of mummy as medicine during the Middle-Ages and Renaissance to the modern multi-disciplinary approaches used in most recent surveys.

Chapter three by Taconis and Maat summarizes the methodology and results of the radiological survey of the human material. All told, this part of the survey studied 27 human bodies and 8 detached heads dating from the 21st Dynasty to the Roman Period in great detail. The first part of this chapter is an overview of the radiological and physical anthropological methods used. All external features were recorded and scans were made using spiral CT. A multitude of anatomical details were studied allowing for estimations of age at death and stature as well as the determinations of sex and cranial index. This is followed by a detailed report and discussion of the results divided into sections concerning physical anthropology, anatomical embalming details, the degree of preservation, anomalies and palaeopathology, and finally wrappings and artefacts. These discussions are accompanied by tables which present all the data collected for each mummy.

The remaining chapters of the book combine into a catalogue of the mummies in the Leiden collection - subdivided into sections for human mummies (31), parts of human mummies (28) and animal mummies (74). Chapter four, which consists of a catalogue of the human mummies, begins with a discussion concerning the dating of specimens in the collection and continues with detailed exterior and radiological descriptions of each mummy along with comments. Colour images of each mummy are accompanied by black and white radiological images of internal details and 3D reconstructions of artefacts. The catalogue of mummy parts (chapter five) begins with an overview of such objects, followed by a detailed description of each specimen. The final chapter concerning the animal mummies is naturally divided into subsections for the mummies of mammals, birds, reptiles and fish. The results of the radiological and zoological analyses are discussed in each subsection.

There are a few minor points of criticism that the current reviewer would like to mention. Many of the mummies are only depicted *en face* and it would have been useful with side views even in those cases where little or no decoration was visible. It would also have been very interesting to see more numerous 3D reconstructions in a much larger size than the small thumbnails used. Clearly, such additions would have made this book more expensive although solutions to this could have been an included DVD or an accompanying homepage making a more complete photographic and radiographic documentation available.

This atlas is nothing less than a milestone in the study of ancient Egyptian mummies, setting a high standard for future surveys. It should prove a useful reference tool for specialists in Egyptology, palaeopathology as well as for medical personnel involved in similar projects. This is especially due to the fully referenced and indexed texts and extensive bibliography. The multitude of large colour photographs throughout the catalogue together with the introductory chapters on mummification techniques and the study of mummies all make this book readily available to the non-specialist reader as well and should do much to promote interest in this field.

Raven, M.J. & W.K. Taconis. 2005. *Egyptian Mummies: Radiological Atlas of the Collections in the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden*. – Turnhout, Brepols (Papers on Archaeology of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities 1). 333 pp. SBN 2-503-51701-3. Price € 55.00 (hardback).