

## Brazil's Mummy Studied in Turin Congress

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Interested in ancient Egypt, the first Brazilian emperor, Dom Pedro I, acquired, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a rare mummy from the Thebes region. Whoever the supplier was, he was true to his word.

The results of a study presented by palynologist Sérgio Chaves, from the Ecology laboratory of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, and Egyptologist Antônio Brancaglioni, from the National Museum, connected to the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro shows exactly that.

The researchers proved the truthfulness of the tradesman after analyzing grains of pollen found in the resins used to embalm the body.

The substance was removed from the feet of the mummy. The work was presented at the 5th World Congress on Mummy Studies, in Turin, Italy.

The city houses one of the largest collections in the world, in a museum dedicated exclusively to the subject, the Egyptian Museum of Turin.

According to Chaves, analysis of the resin helps identify what kinds of plants were used for preparation of the liquid and, of course, some of the plants that are characteristic of certain regions help specify the origin of the a object studied.

Apart from that, the researchers can detail mortuary practices. The palynologist - a botanist who studies pollen - mentions the use of plants like acacias for scenting of the resins.

In the case of the mummy in question, the researchers found grains of pollen that indicate the presence of plants in the Asteraceae family, of which some members are insecticides, and of Pistacia sp. This latter is characteristic of the Thebes region.

The mummy studied is feminine and, as occurs with most objects belonging to the collection of the first emperor, should have arrived in Brazil in 1825.

According to Chaves, the artefact is rare, as the fingers were embalmed one by one, a practice that was not very common. Apart from that, it is an example dated from the first century BC, also an uncommon period in international collections.

### Five Mummies

Dom Pedro I brought most of the mummies, which are currently included in the National Museum collection. There are at least five human mummies and some cats, sacred animals in ancient Egypt. However, many of them are not open to visitation.

According to Chaves, the objective of the project is to study all the mummies and make them available to public visitation. At the end, the researcher said that his intention is to have a complete analysis of the systems and origins of the mortuary practices.

Ancient Egypt was a matter of great interest to both Brazilian emperors. Dom Pedro I brought the mummies, but his son, Dom Pedro II, a polyglot and scholar, was the first Brazilian head of state to visit Egypt.

His visit also added some elements to the National Museum's collection, as he was in the region more as an intellectual than as the administrator of a nation.

After Dom Pedro II, the next Brazilian head of state to visit the country was current country president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who visited the land of the pharaohs in 2003.

#### Jurassic Park

According to Chaves, the grains of pollen may supply clues for the reconstruction of an environment that existed a long time ago.

Species that have disappeared, or that show a violent climate change, may be rescued through techniques of microscopic separation of this kind of material.

He mentions the example of rocks in northeastern Brazil that recall a time when the Brazilian semiarid was damper.

Chaves makes a comparison with movie Jurassic Park, by Steven Spielberg, in which an entire universe is rebuilt from the DNA of an animal conserved in amber.

The researcher does not go that far, but he states that the idea of rescue, at least in the botanic point of view, would not be exclusively restricted to fantasy.

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