

Scientists use plants to date Egypt's dynasties

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Scientists have established for the first time clear dates for the ruling dynasties of ancient Egypt after carbon dating plant remains.

The results will force historians to revise their records for the two millennia when ancient Egypt dominated the Mediterranean world and hopefully end debate once and for all between rival Egyptologists.

Led by Professor Christopher Ramsey of Britain's Oxford University and an international team, the research tested seeds, baskets, textiles, plant stems and fruit obtained from museums in the United States and Europe for the landmark study.

"For the first time, radiocarbon dating has become precise enough to constrain the history of ancient Egypt to very specific dates," Professor Ramsey said.

"I think scholars and scientists will be glad to hear that our small team of researchers has independently corroborated a century of scholarship in just three years."

Dates for Egypt's Old, Middle and New Kingdoms had been based on historical documents or archaeological findings, but estimates were notoriously uncertain as each dynasty would reset the clock.

The new data shows the reign of Djoser, the best known pharaoh in the Old Kingdom, was between 2691 and 2625 BCE, some 50 to 100 years earlier than the established wisdom.

The study, published in today's issue of the US journal *Science*, also concludes that the New Kingdom started slightly earlier than thought, between 1570 and 1544 BCE.

The research team included experts from the universities of Oxford and Cranfield in Britain, the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) in France, and experts from Austria and Israel.

Radiocarbon dating, also known as carbon-14 dating, is a technique that can accurately determine the age of organic material.

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