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UN nuclear agency helps unlock secrets buried with Egyptian mummies



Inside an ancient Egyptian tomb

6 July 2009 – The United Nations nuclear agency is using its expertise to help archaeologists unearth millennia-old secrets, from the supposed murder of King Tutankhamun to the mysterious death of Great Pharaoh Ramesses II, from Egyptian mummies.

Paleoradiology is a type of science using nuclear technologies – including x-rays and neutron activation analysis – to study artifacts, skeletons, mummies and fossils.

Rethy Chhem, Director of the Division of Human Health at the UN International Atomic Energy Agency ([IAEA](#)), is an expert in that field and said that science allows radiologists to uncover details about mummies, such as their sex, age of death and illnesses.

X-rays found that Pharaoh Ramesses II did not, contrary to popular belief, have arthritis of the spine, which Mr. Chhem said is in line with his depiction as a great warrior.

The IAEA is helping countries apply nuclear technologies to archaeological study and cultural preservation.

The technologies can also be applied to monitoring pesticides in milk and finding answers to a series of sudden deaths of males in north-eastern Thailand, the IAEA said in a [press release](#).

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