

New technology and the increasingly scientific approach to archaeology are combining in the 1970's to solve some of the most puzzling archaeological mysteries. An excellent example of the fruitfulness of uniting archaeology with science has recently been provided by the case of Egyptian Mummy #61070, a heretofore anonymous female known simply as the "Elder Lady" and found in the tomb of Amenhotep II in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes. The true identity of the Elder Lady was a complex problem since many XVIIIth dynasty mummies, whose original tombs had been disturbed by ancient grave robbers, had been hidden by priests of the XXIst dynasty in either the tomb of Inhapy or that of Amenhotep II. Thus the presence of the Elder Lady in the latter tomb did not necessarily mean that she had had any connexion with Amenhotep II. Moreover, in many cases, the XXIst dynasty priests had rewrapped the mummies, thereby removing original wrappings which could have helped to identify the corpses. And so mummy #61070 long remained unnamed to Egyptologists; in fact, in The Royal Mummies (1912), G. E. Smith could only refer to her as "a middle aged woman with long . . . brown, wavy, lustrous hair . . . The left hand was tightly clenched, but with the thumb fully extended . . . the [left] forearm being sharply flexed".

At last, according to a brief note in Scientific American (August 1978), the mysterious lady has been identified by scientists of the University of Michigan. In 1975, a Michigan team took X-ray equipment to the Valley of the Kings and made several plates of the Elder Lady; in addition, they took a small piece of her hair for analysis. The X-ray of her skull, when compared with X-rays taken of already identified mummies, revealed that the Elder Lady bore a strong resemblance to Queen Thuya, the mother of Queen Tiye who was wife to Amenhotep III. The hair sample, however, furnished the real key to the mystery, since the hair of the Elder Lady, when subjected to electron-microprobe analysis, proved to match a lock of hair found in the tomb of Tutankhamen; this latter lock had been contained in a miniature coffin inscribed with the name of Queen Tiye, the grandmother of Tutankhamen. Thus it now seems certain that the Elder Lady is indeed Queen Tiye, wife of Amenhotep III and, more interestingly, mother of none other than Akhenaten, the famous monotheistic pharaoh.

Archaeology is, of course, full of similar mysteries and there is every reason to believe that improved scientific technology will soon provide us with solutions. Long past are the days when archaeologists scorned science as a separate and irrelevant discipline; today's archaeologist is, in fact, a co-worker of scientists, if not a scientist himself/herself. This growing integration of archaeology and science can only bode well for the future of archaeological studies.

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