

CT scan reveals mummy likely mommy

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FAIRFIELD — The mystery surrounding Pa-Ib, a 2,500-year-old Egyptian mummy owned by the Barnum Museum in Bridgeport, has begun to unravel.

Little was known about Pa-Ib before Wednesday, but a CT scan done at Advanced Radiology Consultants revealed the mummy most likely was a woman and at least 30 years old.

"We're leaning toward female," Dr. Ruben Kier, chairman of the board of Advanced Radiology Consultants, said to a flock of media about 5:20 p.m. "That's preliminary — probable girl."

Kier said CT scans showed evidence of arthritis in the pelvic area, which is common with women who have given birth. The examination showed no external genitals, another indication the mummy may have been female, he said. However, the remains were severely dried out, making a definitive identification of the gender difficult.

Kathy Maher, the museum's executive director and curator, had assumed the mummy was a male and was delighted by Kier's revelation. "This is just too much fun, that there's a very viable chance it's a female," Maher said.

Pa-Ib was donated to the Barnum Museum in 1892 by P.T. Barnum's second wife, Nancy Fish Barnum. P.T. Barnum claimed the mummy was an Egyptian priest who served the pagan deity Min 2,500 years ago.

The museum last month confirmed through endoscope analysis that the mummy was real and not one of Barnum's elaborate hoaxes. But little else was known.

"Now we've graduated to another layer of significance," Maher said during Wednesday's research.

The shape of the pelvis also indicates a female, according to Kier and Gerald Conlogue, co-director of the Bioanthropology Research Institute at Quinnipiac University in Hamden.

The mummy was at least 30 years old at its time of death because of arthritis on the cervical spine, Kier said. "People may have lived a hard life back then, but if somebody's rich enough to be a mummy, they probably didn't live too hard a life," he said.

Maher believes Pa-Ib was prominent because of the way its arms are positioned across the chest. "This is a mummy of some status," she said.

Wednesday's full-body CT scan of Pa-Ib, who's 5 feet 3 inches to 5 feet 5 inches tall, was done in a Toshiba Aquilion 8, an advanced machine that gives doctors a detailed, three-dimensional view of a body's insides. Pa-Ib went into the CT scan fully wrapped.

The CT scan also revealed an "unusual packet" in Pa-Ib's stomach, which led some to speculate it housed an offertory bird, and two layers of resin in back of its skull. That was due either to two different porings or something that changed the dilution of one poring's surface, said Ronald G. Beckett, co-director of Quinnipiac's Bioanthropology Research Institute.

A little bump also appeared in the resin, which may be a glob of resin, a rock or something else, Beckett said.

An MRI also was done on Pa-Ib but it didn't turn up anything because the machine looks for hydrogen, which is found in water and soft living tissues, and Pa-Ib's body is dry as a bone.

The mummification of a body involved removing a body's insides, packaging them and reinserting them. The brain, drawn out of the skull through a hole created in the nasal cavity, usually was not put back in.

"They didn't think the brains meant anything," Beckett said of ancient Egyptians. "They thought the heart was the center and core of a person."

The hole created to remove Pa-Ib's brain was unusually large, Beckett added.

Initially, only prominent people were mummified, but the practice carried down to the middle class in later years, Maher said.

Egyptologists will be able to determine the era in which Pa-Ib lived based on incisions and how its organs were put back, according to Beckett. Pa-Ib's incisions are vertical and on the left side and its organs were wrapped and not in jars, Conlogue said.

The revelation that Pa-Ib likely was female doesn't rule out P.T. Barnum's claim that the mummy was an Egyptian priest. Priests back then could be women as well as men, according to Maher.

Pa-Ib arrived at Advanced Radiology Consultants via police escort about 4:15 p.m. The mummy traveled in a black sport utility vehicle, courtesy of Parente-Lauro Funeral Home on Washington Avenue in Bridgeport.