

Mysterious life and death of Tutankhamun revealed

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The University of Liverpool's Dr Matthew Ponting and Robert Connolly are featuring in a new TV documentary about the causes of the death of Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamun. Their research has shed new light on how the embalming process of the young king only partially succeeded.

Dr Matthew Ponting is a Senior Lecturer in Archaeomaterials at the University of Liverpool's Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology.

He said: "Theories about the life (and afterlife) of the Egyptian [pharaoh](#) Tutankhamun have grown to legendary status since the excavation of the boy-king's tomb by Howard Carter in 1922. And on Sunday night a new TV documentary, with which I was involved, will put forward the case that he was killed in a chariot accident and looks in depth at how the Egyptians tried to preserve his corpse.

"My investigations focussed on the [mummification process](#) itself. We were able to compare a sample of Tutankhamun's skin with those of two other mummies provided by my Liverpool colleague Robert Connolly, who was part of the team that first x-rayed the Pharaoh's remains in 1968.

"It was clear that this important burial ritual was botched by the ancient Egyptians. Using our [scanning electron microscope](#) we could detect carbonisation on the skin of the pharaoh that wasn't present on the two other samples. The combination of embalming oils, oxygen and linen

used resulted in Tutankhamun's corpse being cooked at 200C – we think – soon after his mummification.

"We're one of the few archaeology departments in the country to have our own scanning electron microscope, and researchers and students routinely use it to investigate everything from Roman weapons to medieval stained glass.

"It's rare that you'll make a discovery that's as exciting as this, but it goes to prove that even when written sources are scarce and the physical evidence has been badly corrupted, it is still possible to find out more about the lives of people who lived and died millennia ago."

Provided by University of Liverpool

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