

# New scanning technique allows researchers to read words on mummy waste wrap

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A team of researchers with University College London [has found](#) a noninvasive way to read writing on ancient papyrus used to construct boxes that held mummies inside their tombs. Team lead Adam Gibson

spoke to the press about the new development and why he believes archaeologists and historians will find it useful.

Researchers have known for many years that workers in ancient Egypt recycled [papyrus](#) for different purposes—one particular use was creating decorated boxes into which mummies were placed. Papyrus scraps were glued together using paste and plaster, similar to modern paper-mâché projects. In ancient times, papyrus was used as a type of paper. Tax records were reported on papyrus, for example, as were lists of grocery items. Because papyrus was used for such mundane tasks, examples offer a glimpse of daily life in ancient civilizations such as that in early Egypt. Unfortunately, up till now, the only way to read such information on the recycled papyrus used to create mummy cases was to tear apart the fragments, destroying the box. In this new effort, the researchers have found a way to read the papyrus without causing it any harm.

The technique involved using a digital imaging method that interpreted light bounced back from a subject. Prior research had shown that the pigment in ink used by the ancient Egyptians over 2000 years ago could fluoresce under the proper infrared filter. By using such filters with [digital imaging technology](#), the team was able to see the ink and read what it said.

The team used the technique on a coffin lid held at Chiddington Castle in Kent and report that they were able to make out a word that after translation spelled "Irethoreru," which, the team explained, means "The eye of Horus is against them." It was a common name in ancient Egypt. The team further suggests that because of the way the text was displayed on the papyrus, it was likely the mummy's actual name.

Gibson suggested that moving forward, researchers can use the technique to read other papyrus samples without destroying them in the process.

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