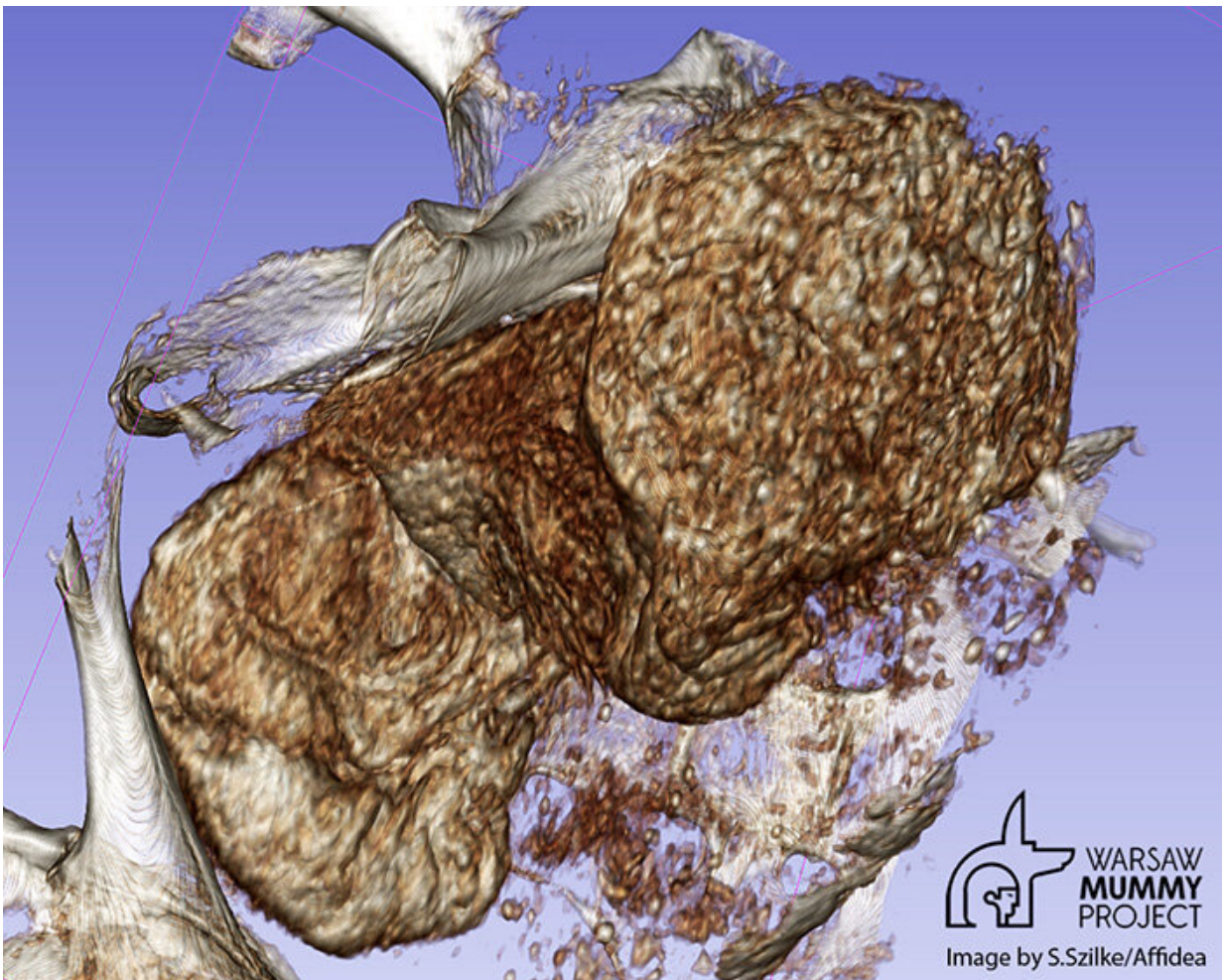


Pickled fetus found inside ancient Egyptian mummy

January 25 2022, by Bob Yirka

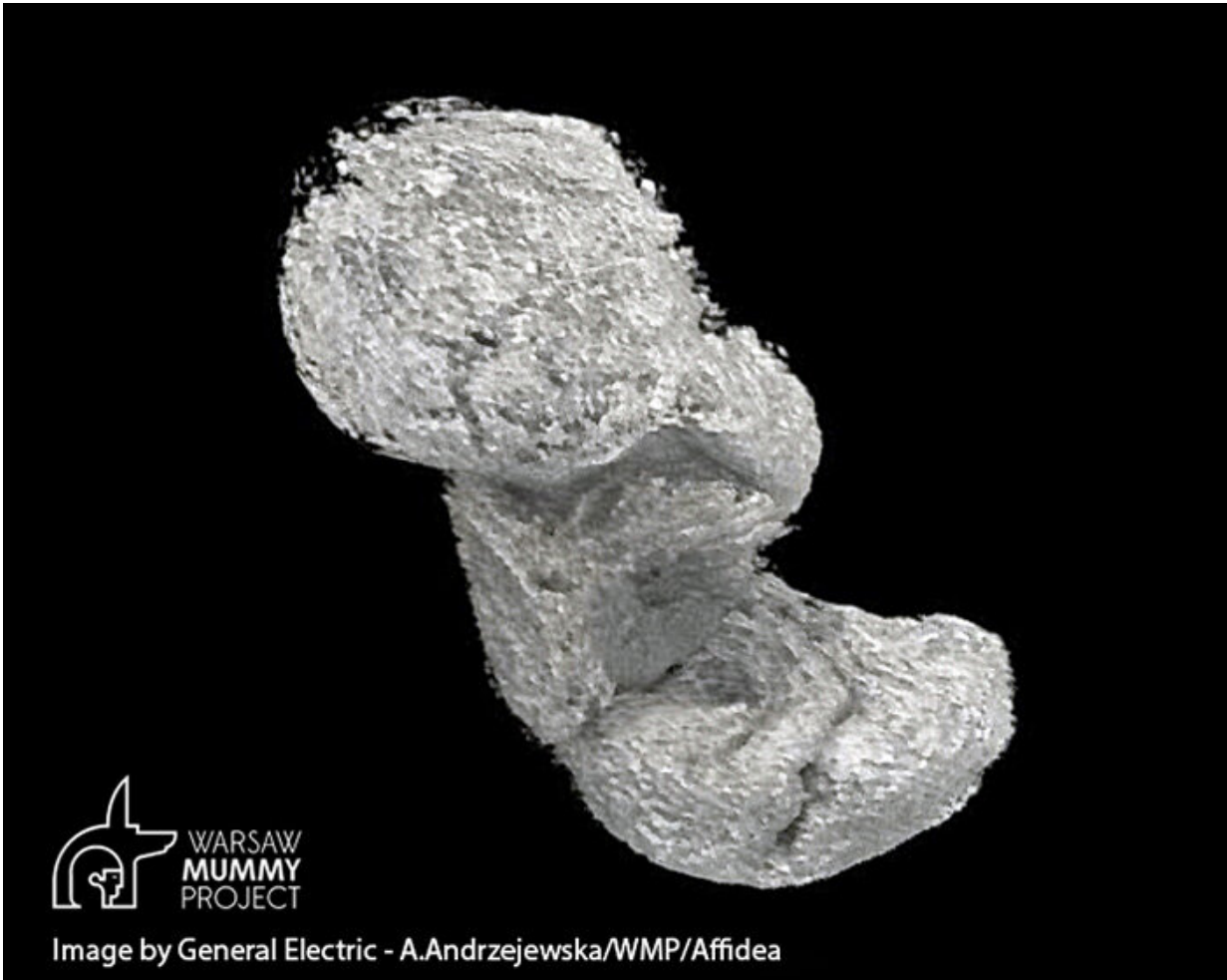


Credit: Warsaw Mummy Project

A team of researchers working on the Warsaw Mummy Project studying the Egyptian "Mysterious Lady" mummy has determined how a fetus was preserved in her womb for more than 2,000 years. The team discovered the fetus last summer using a CT scanner and published their results in the *Journal of Archaeological Science*. In this new effort they uncovered the reasons for the survival of the fetus and have published a [follow-up](#) in the same journal.

During their study of the mummy last summer, the researchers found that not only was she pregnant at the time of her death, she was also a member of the Theban community. She had also been very carefully mummified and adorned with amulets. They also estimated her age at between 20 and 30 years old when she died, and the [fetus](#) was between 26 and 30 weeks along. The find remains the only case ever found of an embalmed pregnant mummy.

In this newer effort, the researchers noted that it is not known where the mummy was discovered, or when. She was found by someone who moved her out of Egypt in 1826. No one knew until last [summer](#) about the fetus in her womb. Prior research on her body had been conducted using X-rays, but they failed to show the fetus because its bones had mineralized.



Credit: Warsaw Mummy Project

A closer look at the mummy and her fetus showed that she did not die in childbirth. They also found the [mummy](#) had been preserved with natron, a type of salt found in dry lake beds. When used to mummify a corpse, it dries out the body and also works as a disinfectant, preventing bacteria from eating the remains. The fetus remained untouched by those who had mummified the remains, which kept the womb pristine.

Under these conditions, the researchers found, blood pH levels dropped,

making the blood in the fetus more acidic as ammonia and formic acid concentrations rose, and that led to mineralization of the bones. And because the [womb](#) remained hermetically sealed, the fetus pickled, preserving it along with its mother for over 2,000 years. The researchers still do not know, however, why the embalmers chose to leave the fetus in the [body](#) when all the other organs were removed.

More information: Wojciech Ejsmond et al, Further evidence to confirm the 'pregnant mummy': A reply to Saleem (2021), *Journal of Archaeological Science* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jas.2021.105504](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2021.105504)

Wojciech Ejsmond et al, A pregnant ancient egyptian mummy from the 1st century BC, *Journal of Archaeological Science* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jas.2021.105371](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2021.105371)

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