

Fascinating Mummies at the National Museum of Scotland



From the mysterious, draped-filled corridor that beckons you into the show's sepulchral inner sanctum, it's clear that the National Museum of Scotland's new exhibition Fascinating Mummies is going to be something special. But for all its atmospheric staging, it's also a show high on hard fact and illuminating discoveries.

Fascinating Mummies is a collaboration between the NMS and the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden, the Netherlands, which houses one of the world's most important Egyptian collections, and whose treasures are shown alongside striking artefacts from the NMS's own cases.

After a scene-setting section that explains the various ancient Egyptian dynasties and the many methods of burial, the exhibition moves onto the mummification process itself – be prepared for some fairly blunt yet fascinating descriptions of brain removal and other messy procedures. A spectacular display of sumptuous painted coffins and the remarkable treasures that were buried with the mummified bodies explains the Egyptian belief in the spirit's need for these items in the afterlife.

Things get even more fascinating in the second section of the exhibition, though, which charts research into the Egyptian way of death from early 19th-century explorations (describing, for example, how powdered mummy was considered a powerful medicine) right through to the revealing CT scans employed today. In a beautiful computer animation, you can look right inside a wrapped-up mummy to discover not only the skeleton, but also hidden parchments and other treasures kept with the

body.



The Scottish angle is strong throughout, with a special focus given to early 19th-century Edinburgh-born painter David Roberts, who did much to popularise Egypt in the popular imagination, and Scottish archaeologist Alexander Henry Rhind, who carried out extensive research into Egyptian burials and who discovered a mummy in 1857 that is analysed in detail in the exhibition.

With a beautiful, atmospheric staging, clear, approachable descriptions and some breathtaking artefacts, the Fascinating Mummies exhibition not only taps into our fascination with the mysteries of Egyptian burial, but also pushes the boundaries of our knowledge with its cutting-edge research.

[Fascinating Mummies](#) is at the National Museum of Scotland until 27 May 2012. Admission: adults £9, concessions £7.50, children £6, family (2 adults and 2 children) £26.