

UNWRAPPING THE PAST

by Natalie Smith



Dr. Bob Brier and Dr. Angelique Corthals in the lab extracting samples for DNA analysis

Ancient Egyptian civilization began about 5,100 years ago. Millions of mummies were produced. We have learned a lot from these mummies, but they have also been a puzzle to scientists. Now, with the help of high-tech tools, scientists are unraveling more secrets from these ancient remains. The details of their lives are coming to light, but experts say they are not only learning interesting information about the past. Mummies may also help experts someday solve modern medical mysteries."

A mummy is a dead body that has been preserved with special chemicals and wrapped in cloth. When a person died, Egyptians would remove the person's organs, such as the heart. Then they would put chemicals on the body and wrap it in cloth. This would prevent the body from decomposing. Artists and carpenters would create detailed coffins, or cases, for the mummy. The Egyptians did this to protect their loved ones after death. They believed that a person's spirit lived on and still needed a body in the next world.

"By using new high-tech techniques ... we're going to be able to tell all kinds of things about mummies. We can even tell if they ate meat, vegetables, and fish!"