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UWO researcher wins mummy of all grants

INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION: Teams led by Andrew Nelson and Lu Xiao are probing ancient mummies and human rights abuses, respectively, in the digging into data challenge

By **KELLY PEDRO, THE LONDON FREE PRESS**

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UWO researcher Andrew Nelson with the coffin of "Lady Hudson," a mummy he's studying. (Submitted photo)

Kelly Pedro The London Free Press Two Western researchers have won international grants for their projects, one of which will make the university the "ground zero" of mummy studies.

Using CT scans to help him look inside mummies, researcher Andrew Nelson and his team are trying to determine cultural, political and foreign influences in ancient Egypt.

"To look at that pattern, you need to assemble data from lots of mummies," said Nelson, an associate professor of anthropology and associate dean of research in the social sciences faculty.

Nelson is teaming with U.S. research groups.

The project has won him a \$165,000 grant as part of the second annual digging into data challenge. He'll use it to set up a dedicated server for all the research.

"It makes Western the ground zero for mummy studies," he said.

Nelson is trying to track down all Egyptian mummies that have been scanned worldwide to help him build the database that can be used by academics around the globe.

So far, he has scans or X-ray films for 54 human and 25 animal mummies from Tasmania, Europe and the U.S. He and his team expect to get scans or films for about another 110 human and 120 animal mummies Nelson estimates there are hundreds, if not thousands of Egyptian mummies in museums worldwide.

The international challenge is part of a push to use digital media and marks a shift in research that typically studies individual mummies to one that looks at larger patterns.

"The challenge then is to move beyond single studies and try to put together large databases and efficiently utilize, manage and extract information from those databases," said Nelson.

Researchers from around the world are using technology in different ways in their work. Some are scanning music archives, others are using technology to scan epidemiology archives to learn more about the 1918 influenza epidemic, said Nelson.

A second team led by Western researcher Lu Xiao of the faculty of information and media studies was also awarded \$235,000 as part of the same challenge.

Xiao's team is developing an automated reader to search archives of human rights abuses. It will help identify abusers and victims of violence in Guatemala, Burma and Chechnya.

The research will give human rights advocates new tools and witnesses for trials. The international challenge is funded by organizations from Canada, the U.S., U.K. and the Netherlands.

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