

Ramses blockbuster to showcase mummified lion cub, cats

By Liz Hobday
Updated July 15 2023 - 6:03am, first published 6:00am



📷 Ancient Egyptians mummified animals as well as humans, as part of their religious practices. (PR HANDOUT IMAGE PHOTO)

The deep importance of animals in ancient Egyptian religious practices will be on show when a major exhibition of antiquities opens in Australia in four months' time.

The Australian Museum's upcoming blockbuster will feature recently discovered mummified animals, including cats, a mongoose and a 10-month-old lion cub, which are thousands of years old.

They were unearthed south of Cairo at Saqqara - an active Egyptian burial site for three millennia - where a treasure trove of ancient relics has been unearthed.

"They were just discovered a couple of years ago, so not even Egyptians have had the chance to see these pieces," Dr Mostafa Waziry, Secretary-General of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities told AAP.

Dr Waziry, Egypt's gatekeeper of all these finds, was visiting Australia from Cairo ahead of the opening of the 'Ramses & The Gold Of The Pharaohs' exhibition at the Sydney-based museum in November.

Archaeologists also came across scarabs, snakes, crocodiles, and a vervet monkey. Some of these animals had never been found mummified before, he said.

They also found a grave of 500 cats mummified as offerings to the Egyptian goddess Bastet, who was often depicted as a woman with the head of a cat.

It's fascinating discoveries like these that keep Dr Waziry returning to dig at Egypt's archaeological sites every week, after 30 years in the field.

"Whenever you discover something that nobody has seen for thousands of years, and you are the first one ... it's a feeling that you will never forget for the rest of your life," he said.

The intrepid Egyptologist is the also star of two recent Netflix documentaries - the 2020 release *Secrets of the Saqqara Tomb*, and the trending series *Unknown: The Lost Pyramid*.

Dr Waziry is pleased the shows have been a success but said the *Lost Pyramid* filmmakers were simply following archaeologists doing their regular work.

"Everybody in the world is talking about this one, and how happy they are to watch us doing excavating and digging," he said.

Ramses & The Gold of the Pharaohs will showcase 181 priceless artefacts, many of which have never left Egypt before.

The Australian Museum had organised another Egyptian antiquities show, 'Tutankhamun: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh' for 2021 but it was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs will run at the Australian Museum in Sydney from November 18 until May 2024, with tickets available from Monday.

Australian Associated Press

