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Stately Mummy Dazzles Experts

Beauty of design may be unrivaled

By PAUL GARWOOD, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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SAQQARA, Egypt - A superbly preserved 2,300-year-old mummy bearing a golden mask and covered in brilliantly colored images of gods and goddesses was unveiled Tuesday at Egypt's Saqqara Pyramids complex south of Cairo.

The unidentified mummy, from the 30th pharaonic dynasty, was enclosed in a wooden sarcophagus and buried in sand at the bottom of a 20-foot shaft when it was discovered recently by an Egyptian-led archaeological team.

"We have revealed what may be the most beautiful mummy ever found in Egypt," Zahi Hawass, chief of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, said as he helped excavators remove the sarcophagus lid to show off the find.

Hawass said experts will use CT scanning technology within the next week to reveal more details about the ancient Egyptian's identity and how he lived and died.

Afterward, the mummy will be displayed at Saqqara's museum of Imhotep, the famed architect who designed the Stepped Pyramid - Egypt's oldest.

The mummy, found two months ago, was covered from head to toe in burial cloth painted in bright colors that depicted a range of graphic scenes, including Maat, the goddess of balance and truth shown with outstretched arms in the shape of feathered wings.

Also shown were the four children of the falcon-headed god Horus and the rituals and processes to mummify the person, who Hawass believes must have been wealthy considering his burial location and the fine gold used for the mummy's mask.

"The artists who made this mummy more than 2,000 years ago demonstrated the brilliance of the ancient Egyptians by using stunning colors and depicting his face so graphically," Hawass said.

The mummy was buried within the necropolis of King Teti, a funerary area containing dozens of burial chambers, false doors that ancient Egyptians said the souls of the dead would use to leave their tombs, and temples.

The necropolis lies alongside the collapsed pyramid of Teti, who ruled during ancient Egypt's sixth dynasty, more than 4,300 years ago.

Hawass also said a previously unknown pyramid had been located in the Saqqara area and would be uncovered after two months.

Saqqara, about 12 miles south of Cairo, is one of Egypt's most popular tourist sites and hosts a collection of temples, tombs and funerary complexes.