When Ornithology and 3D Technology meet Egyptology: The Study of the Musée des Confluences' Raptor Mummies

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Résumé

The collection of animal mummies held in the Musée des Confluences, Lyon, is undeniably an exceptional resource for the study of the ancient Egyptian sacred animal cults, in particular the various cults involving the mummification of birds of prey. The remains of a wide variety of raptors – falcons, hawks, kites, buzzards, eagles, and vultures – feature prominently in this collection in the form of approximately 600 wrapped and unwrapped specimens, representing a quarter of the mummified animals in Lyon. For the first time since their acquisition by the museum, this large dataset of Egyptian raptorial remains is considered as a whole as part of the MAHES research project. The first stage of the project consists of revisiting the skeletal remains originally examined by L. Lortet and C. Gaillard, two pioneers in the study of the ancient Egyptian fauna. Their findings will be updated in view of the current knowledge of ornithological taxonomy and avian distributions. Another major component of the project involves the analysis of the X-Ray and CT-scan images of all the mummies *a priori* identified as holding the remains of falcons. The non-invasive and non-destructive aspect of medical imaging technology allows us to not only ascertain the contents of these bundles but also to observe the methods and materials employed to manufacture the mummies. Thanks to the well documented provenience of a majority of these specimens, it becomes possible to propose mummy manufacturing trends associated with a specific site and cult center. Finally, we will conduct statistical analyses of the birds' species and development stage (neonate, juvenile, or adult) to potentially identify seasonal patterns of capture.

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