MR. MUMMY COMES TO TOWN

Famed Egyptologist will discuss the pyramids and more in museum lecture

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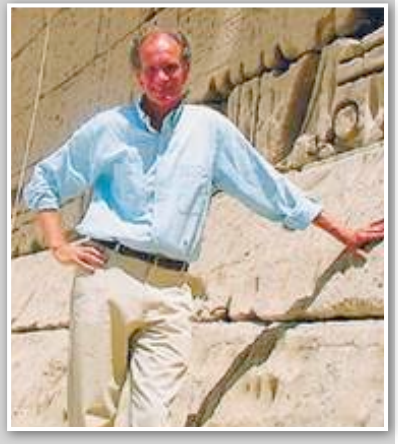

Bob Brier will speak on Friday at the Toledo Museum of Art. (ASSOCIATED PRESS)

Mr. Mummy is coming to Toledo, just in time for Halloween.

Bob Brier, the New York Egyptologist who made headlines and earned his nickname in 1994 when he helped mummify a human cadaver using ancient techniques, now thinks he knows how the ancients built the Great Pyramid of Giza, and he'll talk about it at 7:30 p.m. Friday in the Little Theater at the Toledo Museum of Art.

The free lecture follows the release of Mr. Brier's latest book, *The Secret of the Great Pyramid*, which the 66-year-old co-wrote with French architect Jean-Pierre Houdin, who spent years working on the subject. The event is co-sponsored by the Archaeological Institute of America-Toledo Society.

Mr. Brier, who has been the subject of multiple television specials and an IMAX movie, took some time before his visit to speak to The Blade about his book's hypothesis, why the mysteries of ancient Egypt continue to intrigue us, and just how you remove a cadaver's brain through its nose.

Q: Can you explain your book's theory in a nutshell?

A: With the Great Pyramid of Giza, the big problem is, how did they get the blocks to the very top? It's 480 feet high, and ... the blocks weigh 2½ tons, so it's no little thing. The other theories we had we knew didn't work. [An external] ramp would have to be too long. It would be a mile long and it would be as big in volume as the Great Pyramid. ... The new theory is that indeed it involves a ramp but the ramp is inside the pyramid corkscrewing up inside the pyramid very much like the road inside a parking garage. ... The pyramid is the ramp itself.

Q: Is there any way to get at it so that you can look at it now?

A: I think one thing that will really prove it is that we could go in with an infrared camera, which measures heat differential. So if you've got an internal ramp, the temperature in the ramp is going to be cooler than the temperature of the of the stones. ... We could actually just take a picture of the pyramid. It would almost be like X-raying it with this very high-tech, high-powered infrared camera and that would show if the internal ramp is there.

Q: Do you have any plans to do that now?

A: Yes. We are applying to the Supreme Council of Antiquities for permission to just take the infrared pictures. ... I think we'll get permission in about a year.

Q: What's the importance of this kind of discovery?

A: One thing it shows is that there's always new discoveries to be made in Egypt. Here's a pyramid that's been around for 4,500 years, but we really didn't know how it was built, which is a kind of mystery, and now you can solve the mystery.

Q: What is [your next project]?

A: I'm actually working on a, it's called a Cheops Boat. There was a boat that was found buried next to the Great Pyramid, and it's a 140-foot boat and nobody's exactly sure how it was used. Was it used by the pharaoh actually

on the Nile? Was it a symbolic boat to take him to the next world? I'm going to build the full-scale boat and put it on the Nile and sail it again. ... I once did a project like this before. I mummified a human cadaver.

Q: I was going to ask you about that.

A: We really didn't know exactly how they mummified their dead, and I took a human cadaver and mummified it in the ancient Egyptian way. And I think the real way to learn these things is by actually doing them.

Q: Now your own background, at least in school, was philosophy, right?

A: Yeah, yeah, but I had sat in on classes in medical school. I'm not an MD but I had taken courses in medical school so I had a little bit of a medical background for that.

Q: What was the actual experience like?

A: Very exciting. We had to have our tools made for us to be just like ancient Egyptian tools. I had been studying mummies for years and I knew there were certain things I didn't know, but I was going to learn them now. You know, I was going to figure out how they got a brain out through the nose.

Q: How many tries does it take to get that right?

A: The answer is two.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. I practiced on a cadaver the way that everybody thought it came out, that you put a little hook in through the nose, you break through a bone called the ethmoid bone, you go into the cranium, and you extract a little bit of the brain at a time on this hooked-like instrument. You keep pulling out a little bit of the brain at a time and then you get the whole brain out. And it didn't come out like that. We tried it. It just didn't work. Then I realized the only way to get it out is to, you insert that hooked instrument ... and then you use it like a whisk, turning it around, rotating it inside the cranium and you liquefy the brain. Then you turn the cadaver upside down and the brain runs out through the nasal passages.

Q: What can we hope to learn today from the ancient Egyptians?

A: I'm not sure, to tell you the truth. ... I think it's more the fascination with ancient Egypt. ... Everybody knows they thought they would live forever in the next world, that they would resurrect and keep going, and it's almost like they did it. You look at a mummy and this is a person from 3,000 years ago, and he's a recognizable person and he's still here and it's almost like they pulled it off.

Q: Since it's almost time for Halloween, do you have any scary mummy stories to share?

A: We always, always do Halloween in a big way for the kids in our building and the kids who come trick-or-treating. One of the things we have is, of course, real skulls. We usually put the candy in one of the skulls. When the little kids come, they have to take their candy out of the skull, and they remember that for a while.

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< previous next >