**Title: Unveiling the Identities of the Juvenile Mummies from the Capuchin Catacombs of Palermo, Sicily**

**Authors:** KIRSTY SQUIRES1, MARK D. VINER2,3, WAYNE HOBAN3, ROBERT LOYNES4, KATHERINE VAN SCHAIK5, and DARIO PIOMBINO-MASCALI6

**Affiliations:** 1Department of Society, Crime and Environment, Staffordshire University, UK 2Cranfield Forensic Institute, Cranfield University, UK 3Reveal Imaging Ltd, UK, 4KNH Centre for Biomedical Egyptology, University of Manchester, UK, 5Harvard Medical School and the Harvard Initiative for the Science of the Human Past, USA 6Department of Anatomy, Histology and Anthropology, Vilnius University, Lithuania.

**Abstract:** Two kilometers west of the historic city of Palermo (Sicily) lie the Capuchin Catacombs. This site is home to 1,284 mummified individuals, including the mummified and skeletal remains of at least 163 children. The individuals within the Catacombs provide a window into historical funerary rites, beliefs, and traditions. Until recently, anthropological research has focused on the adults; this study aims to rectify this imbalance. Using a portable direct digital (DR) radiography unit and anthropological methods, forty-three individuals, the majority of whom were housed in the “Children’s Room”, were examined. This methodological approach provided an insight into demography, pathology, funerary attire and artifacts, and mummification methods associated with the children of nineteenth-century Palermo.

In total, 35/43 (81.4%) individuals were between two and eight years of age. The high concentration of young children in the “Children’s Room” may have been an attempt to appeal to visitors’ preferences over the course of the twentieth century. Despite the high social standing of these children, some individuals exhibited Harris Lines, which suggest physiological growth disruption or disturbance. Most individuals (35/43) were spontaneously mummified, while evidence suggests the remaining juveniles were likely offered anthropogenic mummification. This may indicate a difference in social identity and/or status, which was possibly associated with family wealth. The overall findings have revealed new evidence for the age profile, health status, and funerary rites associated with the children who inhabited and died in late modern Palermo, allowing researchers to form a fuller understanding of the city and its inhabitants during this period.