

ABSTRACT

DOPKO, CYNTHIA HOGAN. Reassessment: A Mummy Shroud from the North Carolina Museum of Art. (Under the direction of S. Thomas Parker.)

The purpose of this research has been to reassess the dating and iconography of a Roman period mummy shroud entitled, *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum*, in the collection of the North Carolina Museum of Art. This reevaluation benefited greatly from the recent international scholarship and museum exhibitions done on mummy portraits from Roman Egypt in the past few years. The research for the North Carolina shroud involved analyzing, in detail, the unique symbolic arrangement depicted on the shroud by evaluating each of the object's four registers individually as well as assessing the composition as a whole. This research found that the symbolic content of the shroud, as a whole, possesses a cohesive iconographical message. The registers of the shroud depict the individual, his mummification, revivification, and subsequent rebirth into an afterlife, if read from top to bottom. Further, this research has concluded that the numerous symbols on the shroud support this ritual transformation as well as point to its relationship with the Isiac or Serapion mystery cult. The fourth century date of this shroud has been redated to the third century and the stylistic features of the shroud's design point to an Er-Rubayat provenance. It is hoped that this research will benefit the North Carolina Museum of Art, and enter this mummy shroud into the on-going international scholarship on mummy portraits from Roman Egypt.

**REASSESSMENT: A MUMMY SHROUD FROM THE NORTH CAROLINA
MUSEUM OF ART**

by

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Because he made me believe and believed in me, this paper is dedicated to my father, the patient man who taught me to seek, to question, to focus.

BIOGRAPHY

Cynthia (Cyn) Hogan Dopko grew up in upstate New York in a little city called Auburn, which is nestled in the wine-growing region of Central New York. Cyn married her true love, Jeffrey John Dopko in 1994, and he supported her while she finished her undergraduate degree at Wells College. In 1996, Cyn lost her closest, dearest friend and advisor. Her father, Ned Hogan, passed away after a 5-month battle with bone cancer while Cyn was finishing her senior thesis and final year at Wells. In 1997, Cyn and Jeff decided to move to North Carolina so Cyn could attend graduate school, and Jeff could relocate his custom furniture and cabinetry business, *Dopko Furniture*, to the Raleigh area. In 1998, Cyn was fortunate enough to land a position at the North Carolina Museum of Art in the Education department, and has been happily employed there for over six years. When Cyn was accepted into the History department at North Carolina State University, the Museum graciously allowed her the flexibility to earn her masters degree. Cyn and Jeff remain in Raleigh, and she hopes to enter a doctoral program studying religion and art in the next year or two.

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Introduction

Mummy portraits and mummy shrouds are significant religious documents with much to tell modern scholars. The focus of this paper is to examine a mummy shroud in the collection of the North Carolina Museum of Art (Accession Number 78.1.8) entitled, *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum*. This shroud is currently dated to the fourth century of the Roman period, and has only been published previously as a general article in the *North Carolina Museum of Art Bulletin*, Volume XIV, Numbers 2 & 3, 1980 by David L. Thompson in an article entitled “A Painted Shroud Portrait from Roman Egypt.” A second article related to the shroud entitled, “Chemical Analysis of the Fayum Portrait” by Haskell V. Hart appeared in that same edition of the *Bulletin*. These articles in the 1980 NCMA *Bulletin* were published as a result of the NCMA’s purchase of the object in 1980. No further scholarly work has been done on this mummy portrait.

Important recent scholarship revising previous conclusions regarding Roman period mummy portraits has emerged in the past five years. By applying this scholarship along with a detailed analysis of the North Carolina portrait shroud’s unique iconography, it is hoped that this paper will establish the link between this shroud and an initiate into the cult of Isis and Serapis as well as place the shroud, not in the fourth century, as it is currently dated, but squarely in the third century. As with any material from history, it is critical to accurately date the evidence. Accurate dating of evidence is necessary for its proper interpretation and use in drawing historical conclusions. Establishing a third century date for the North Carolina shroud has larger implications for scholarship in the mummy portrait phenomenon in Egypt during the Roman period.

Understanding the purpose of and context for this shroud will elucidate indigenous pagan funerary religious beliefs surrounding continued mummification practices contemporary with the emergence of Christianity in the first four centuries AD. So much scholarship has been devoted to field of early Christianity, particularly with a focus on the Alexandrian Patriarchs, the monastic movement, and the split between the Constantinople and Alexandria, that the pagan practices in Roman and late Antique Egypt have been viewed only in their relation to Christianity. Thus, this study of the North Carolina mummy shroud as a religious document will broaden our knowledge of pagan life during the Roman and late Antique periods of Egypt, and contribute to a broader understanding of the religious and social climate of the period.

The outline for this paper is as follows: Section one will define the terms related to mummy portraiture as used in this paper, and discuss the various find sites of these works as well as dating methods, recent scholarship and available sources, both historical and archaeological. Section two will provide an overview of the social and religious culture in Roman Egypt during the period that Roman mummy portraits were being produced, the first through the very early fourth century. Section three will examine the various media ancient artists used to create mummy portraits, and will present a detailed description of the North Carolina portrait shroud. The fourth section will provide a thorough analysis of the iconography on the portrait shroud and comment on the composition as a whole. In closing this paper, it is hoped that this study of the exceptional *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* in the North Carolina Museum of Art will benefit the Museum itself, and more largely the scholarship on mummy portraits in general.

Section One

The purposes of this section are manifold. First, it will introduce the topic and field of Roman mummy portraiture in context of the archaeological find sites in Egypt. Second, it will outline the scholarship done in the field and note recent texts and museum exhibitions devoted to Roman mummy portraits. Third, it will briefly describe the historical sources, which must inform any study of Late Antiquity. Fourth, it will provide a general introductory summary of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman portraiture in order to lay the groundwork for this paper's primary purpose, which is the examination of the provenance, iconography, cultural, and religious context of the Fourth-century Roman Mummy Portrait entitled *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* currently in the collection of the North Carolina Museum of Art, *fig.1.1*.



Figure 1.1 Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum, NCMA

The ancient Egyptians were known throughout the classical world for their esoteric magic and national eccentricities. Their civilization was already ancient when the

Greeks began to colonize the Egyptian Delta in the seventh century BC. Complex afterlife beliefs and the perpetual struggle to achieve immortality were characteristic of ancient Egyptian culture, even during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Though Greek and Roman historians looked down their noses at the Nilotic practices, they could not sidestep their own fascination with Egypt's cult of the dead. Native burial traditions were so entrenched on Egyptian soil that they continued well into the fourth century of our era and are well represented among our art historical treasures and archaeological artifacts. Critical to our understanding of Late Ancient Egyptian culture is a mass of distinctive burial images known as "mummy portraits."

1.1 Term: Mummy Portrait

The term "mummy portrait" has come to specify specific works created during the mid-first to fourth centuries from Roman Egypt in which the buried individual is depicted on a more realistic scale than traditional Egyptian funerary accoutrements. The designation "Fayum" has erroneously been applied to mummy portraits due to the fact that so many were found in the Fayum region in western Egypt. However, such mummy portraits have been found in various locales in Egypt. There are approximately one thousand known mummy portraits, one hundred of which are still attached to the bodies of their owners.¹ Most mummy portraits reside in museums, and approximately one hundred and thirty are included in North American collections.² Most of the prominent American museums possess such portraits including New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum of art, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Museum

of Fine Arts, Boston, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and, of course, the North Carolina Museum of Art.

There are essentially three categories of mummy portraits. They are cataloged according to the materials used. William F. Petrie was the first to establish a set of categories for these objects based on his finds at Hawara. Originally, Petrie divided the types of mummy portraits into four groups: undecorated mummies, naturalistic masks with Egyptian decoration on the busts, Greek-styled three dimensional paper maché masks, and finally portraits painted on wood or linen. Petrie concluded that these four categories indicated a progression of artistic technique culminating in the more naturalistic portraits being the later works.³ However, recent scholarship has determined that there is no evolution of materials, and that the various types of mummy portraits co-existed during their span of popularity in Roman Egypt.⁴ Further, Petrie's four categories have evolved into three general types used by most scholars today.⁵ The first type of mummy portrait is the wax encaustic painted upon a wood background, *fig. 1.2*. These portraits were cut down and fitted into the linen-bandage wrapped mummy.

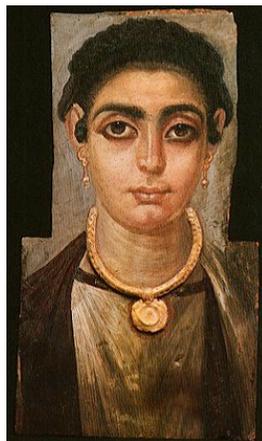


Figure 1.2 Portrait of a Woman, Detroit Institute of Art, Wax encaustic on Wood.

The second type consists of tempera-painted linen shrouds. There are fewer of these types of mummy portraits than the wax encaustic on wood. Tempera on linen mummy portraits demonstrate different iconography, and cannot be easily isolated or grouped solely by their symbology, though attempts have been made.⁶ The mummy to be studied in this paper is tempera on linen and wood, and will be referred to as a “portrait shroud” as there can be no doubt that this image was painted for a funerary purpose.

The third group consists of stucco and gild cartonnage masks. These types of the mummy portraits are the least realistic and remain closest to the long tradition of funerary masks created by the ancient Egyptians for their dead. However, most include hairstyles and fashions based on Roman styles, *fig 1.3*.

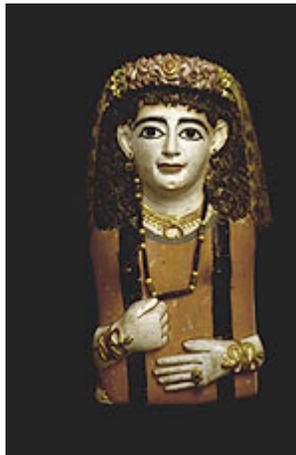


Figure 1.3 Stucco and Gild mummy portrait, Metropolitan Museum of Art

The long history of mummification harkens as far back as the First Dynasty of Egypt, when its procedures were more or less the result of accident and later experimentation. The practice reached its height in the New Kingdom during the Twenty-first Dynasty, and declined rapidly in the early centuries of the Roman Period.⁷ The

mummies from the Roman period were not buried with typically Egyptian grave goods such as canopic jars, shwabti figures, or funerary prayers. However, there was at least one tomb of a young girl, which yielded some grave goods.⁸ Despite this, most of these deceased individuals were not even interred in sarcophagi, and it appears that more attention was paid to the exterior decoration of dead's elaborate wrappings than to the condition of the mummified body.⁹

1. 2 Find Sites

Mummy portraits were found up and down the Nile, though the majority of them were discovered in the Fayum region. Groups of mummy portraits come from the burial grounds used by Fayum towns, and are often named from them by excavators. Hawara was the cemetery for the town of Arsinoe, while Er-Rubayat was the cemetery serving Philadelphia. However, other areas of the Fayum yielded numerous finds as well including, but not limited to, Karanis, Bakchias, Deir el-banaat, Tanis, Kafr Ammar, Tebtunis, Gharaq, Madinet Madi, and Theadelphia.

As was stated previously, the phenomenon of mummy portraiture was not geographically limited to the Fayum. Antinoöpolis, founded in AD 130, has surrendered many mummy portraits. Other finds hail from Thebes, Saqqara, and Memphis.

The majority of portraits found in the Hawara region are the encaustic on wood type, but other areas of the Fayum yielded tempera on linen portrait shrouds. Finds from Saqqara include tempera on linen shrouds, which show the life-size full length of the deceased.¹⁰ Mummy portraits from Antinoöpolis include both encaustic and tempera on linen shrouds. However, it is important to note that the more traditionally Egyptian stucco

cartonnage mummy portraits were mixed in with finds from regions yielding the more realistic encaustic on wood type.

Other than W.M. Flinders Petrie's detailed excavations from 1888-1911, which resulted in a large cache of mummy portraits from various Fayum sites as well as other areas, there is little archaeological data and provenance information for most of the portraits. Many of the portraits were simply ripped from their mummies and sold by natives or foreign antiquities seekers. The loss in provenance information for the great majority of mummy portraits is painfully substantial.

As there has been no history of the "Fayum portraits" recovery per se, the timeline of which the portraits were introduced to European circles probably begins with Pietro della Valle. Pietro della Valle was a seventeenth century Italian nobleman who secured antiquities to bring back home. Among his possessions were several mummy portraits, which he purchased in Saqqara. Another early collector was Henry Salt, a nineteenth century British vice-consul to Egypt who ensured that several other mummy portraits were brought to Europe.¹¹

By far the most notorious name in the piracy of mummy portraits is the Austrian Theodor Graf. In the late 1800's Graf purchased a cache of approximately ninety quality portraits, which most likely came from the Er-Rubayat area of the Fayum.¹² Graf began the trend of exhibiting the works and loaning them to museums, which spiked interest in the mummy portraits throughout Europe. Unfortunately, Graf was neither a trained archaeologist nor Egyptologist. He preferred to solicit the services of local Egyptians to supplement his antiquities trade. As he had little use for time consuming excavations, the

mummy portraits associated with Graf's collection have little or no provenance information. The majority of Graf's mummy portraits were tempera on linen portrait shrouds. As looters hurriedly sought their fortune among the Fayum's burial grounds, the portrait shrouds were most likely detached from their mummies roughly and quickly.¹³

Excavations at Antinoöpolis were carried out by a French team led by Albert Gayat at about the same time as Graf's mummy portraits were circulating, c. 1880-1916. The French team discovered about thirty more mummy portraits.¹⁴ Again, as excavation practices were limited in precision, the French destroyed more provenance information than they yielded, dealing a great blow to an otherwise pristine opportunity.

W.M. Flinders Petrie's excavations at Hawara have already been mentioned, and most of what is known about the Fayum portraits comes from his published reports. In his first term in Hawara, Petrie unearthed about ninety mummy portraits. In subsequent excavations, sixty-five others were discovered.¹⁵ Yet even these excavations are limited in scope and narrative. Petrie published a large number of his finds from Hawara in a polychrome portfolio in 1931, but he only included the portraits made in the encaustic on wood style.

Naturally, other excavations have produced additional portraits, not excluding the exciting find recently discovered in the late 1980's of numerous gilded mummies from the early centuries of the Roman period.¹⁶

1.3 Dating Methods and Scholarship

The dating of the mummy portraits presents several challenges and involves a full history of scholarship in the field. Unfortunately, that lies beyond the scope of this

account. However, a brief survey of the contributing scholarship and a summary of dating methods will outline the difficulties faced in closely dating the mummy portraits.

Scholars in the field are themselves split on the issue of dating and the results of its various methodologies. The first attempt to date the mummy portraits was undertaken by the unscrupulous Theodor Graf and Egyptologist George Ebers. Both Graf and Ebers dated the portraits to the Ptolemaic period based on the quality of the portraits, reflective of Greek techniques discussed by ancient writers, and the misguided perception that they were looking upon the faces of Ptolemaic rulers.¹⁷ However, Petrie disagreed after uncovering several additional examples of painted shrouds and panels through his own excavations. In his published excavation accounts and folios, Petrie determined the mummies to be from the Roman period. After further examination, Petrie modified his diachronic timeline arranging the different types of portraits according to quality. The encaustic on wood portraits were considered the earlier works because they were so naturalistic. The tempera on linen and stucco portrait types were determined to be from a later period because their poorer quality reflected the general decline in the economic affairs of Roman Egypt.¹⁸ Further, Petrie believed that some of the portraits were used in the home prior to their being interred with the mummy. The portrait below (*fig. 1.4*), excavated by Petrie in Hawara and now in the British Museum, has a wooden frame around it, thus leading to the conclusion that the nature of portraiture in Roman Egypt was not entirely funerary.



Figure 1.4 Framed Portrait of a Woman from Hawara, British Museum

Later scholars, including Heinrich Drerup, disagreed with Petrie, and argued that the various types of mummy portraits were actually contemporary with each other.¹⁹

The interesting factor in relation to the mummy portraits was the complete lack of grave goods or inscriptions dating the burials and identifying the deceased. The mummies with shrouds, stucco masks, or encaustic panels were often piled in multiples, leaving excavators to assume that the bodies were of families or relations. Petrie himself was the first proponent of this theory, which scholars continue to debate.²⁰ Other curious points about the portraits are that they include few images of old or elderly individuals.²¹ Most of the faces seem to be in their early adulthood, and certainly no later than early middle age. When children are depicted, they have the traditional Egyptian youth lock, or are in their late adolescence. Therefore, the question of how “realistic” these works are as portraits is also a major consideration in dating the works. Recent investigation undertaken on behalf of the British Museum has revealed some discrepancies between the age of the individual depicted and the age of that individual upon death. For the majority

of the works examined, however, the age of the deceased matches that of his or her portrait.²²

More recently, scholarship on the portraits as well as in the field of Late Antique Egypt has blossomed. Roger Bagnell, Alan Bowman, and David Frankfurter have contributed greatly to our knowledge of the political, economic, cultural, and religious context in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. Specifically regarding mummy portraits, Klaus Parlasca led the field by publishing a three-volume catalog of encaustic on wood and tempera on linen works between 1969 and 1980. Parlasca determined that the creation of mummy portraits spanned the first through the fourth centuries of this era. His basis for dating relies primarily on stylistic concerns and less on the cultural context.²³ Further, his work has not included an examination of the stucco masks or cartonnages, and thus he has not established a comprehensive survey of the mummy portrait phenomenon.²⁴

An American, David L. Thompson, began work on mummy portraits in North American collections during the 1980's. His 1972 doctoral thesis examined mummy portraits from Antinoöpolis, and posited that mummy portraiture was imported into Antinoöpolis by settlers emigrating from the Fayum to the new city. He broke down the custom of mummy portraiture into three periods based on stylistic features reflective of historic events.²⁵ Thompson later worked mainly on mummy portraits from the J. Paul Getty Center, but he wrote the article for the North Carolina Museum of Art's 1980 Museum publication, *Bulletin*, on the *Portrait of Young Man from the Fayum* upon its acquisition by the Museum. Thompson regarded the mummy portraits as deriving entirely from a Hellenized population, and he dated the span of works from AD 30-350, following

Parlasca's chronology. However, Thompson examined the stylistic dating methodology, i.e., comparing styles found in mummy portraits with those depicted in Greek and Roman portrait busts, with a critical eye and noted that its use is effective if also supported by datable archaeological materials.²⁶

In the 1990's, Barbara Borg posited that mummy portraiture came to an end no later than the close of the third century on the basis of diachronic fashion trends. Borg's doctoral thesis provided an extensive study of hairstyles and jewelry design contemporary with mummy portraiture.²⁷ In an attempt to update Parlasca's chronology, Borg's exceptional survey of hairstyles and jewelry has contributed greatly to an understanding of Roman fashion, but perhaps it is not as judicious a tool as archaeological evidence for dating the full panoply of mummy portraits. However, as Dominic Monteserrat rightly observed, studies that view mummy portraits through the sole lens of art historical perspective fail to place these works into larger economic, cultural, or religious context.²⁸

Lorelei Corcoran, who has been working on mummy portraits for the past two decades, has, however, filled that void. She suggests an alternative position for placing the mummy portraits in a native Egyptian tradition. Corcoran dispels Parlasca and Thompson's opinions that a Hellenized Egyptian population was responsible for mummy portraiture. She strongly criticizes previous scholarship in the field as being classically biased, denigrating the contributions made by traditional Egyptian culture in mummy portraiture.²⁹ Corcoran's (1995) position derives from an examination of twenty-three intact mummies complete with portraits, or portrait shrouds, residing in Egyptian

Museums. By studying the remains of intact mummies, Corcoran has been able to add to the classification of mummy portraits by including the categories of *rhombic-wrapped* and *red-shrouded*. Thus she begins to place the mummies into a proper cultural context, stepping out of the art historical confines. Such an approach has tremendous value for understanding the phenomena as a cultural construct.

Corcoran uses four guidelines to arrive at her conclusions: chronology, provenience [sic], ideology and patronage.³⁰ Corcoran concludes the following: the culture that produced the mummy portraits is not classifiable according to ethnicity; instead it was a mixture of native Egyptian, Greek, Roman and their descendants. Further, she concludes that it was the wealthy who commissioned the mummy portraits since only they could afford the costs. Corcoran also posits that this wealthy class sought to maintain traditional burial practices in a quest for salvation. It was due to their desire to uphold traditional indigenous values and notions of cosmic order during a time when the ability of the foreign Roman ruler was no longer relevant in this regard to the native Egyptian population. Though this last supposition is interesting, such a psychological assessment of their purpose is not sustainable, and certainly cannot be applied to all forms of mummy portraits. Much of the critical information necessary to draw such precise conclusions is missing from the many portraits separated from their mummies.

Though her methodology for dating is consistent with other scholars, Corcoran goes further by using data from the intact mummies to clarify some assumptions. For example, not all of the portraits of the deceased accurately portray their age upon death. Corcoran gives several examples whereby the age of the linen wrappings is younger than

their accompanying encaustic wood panel portrait.³¹ This position has most recently been corroborated by the examination of portrait mummies by the British Museum noted above. Corcoran's contributions to the field are considerable, especially her conclusions that many of the suppositions followed by earlier scholars, including Petrie and Parlasca, must be reevaluated. She prescribes a careful analysis of the residual archaeological information gleaned from intact Roman period mummies, an examination of the religious iconography, and a full survey of the religious climate.

Another author writing on the Roman mummy portraits is Euphrosyne Doxiadis. Doxiadis is neither historian, classicist, nor archaeologist; instead she is a Greek painter who has worked in the classical wax encaustic technique. In 1995, she wrote the commentary for a folio study of mummy portraits drawn from Antinoöpolis and the prominent find sites of the Fayum entitled, *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt*. Though her book possesses exceptional color plates, Doxiadis relies on the scholarship of others to conclude that the artists who produced the mummy portraits were Greeks because they used traditional Greek painting techniques. Further, she concludes that the more Egyptianized themes of mummy portraits painted in tempera on linen result from a lack of skill on the part of native Egyptians who were attempting to use the Greek technique.³² Doxiadis focuses mostly on the naturalistic looking encaustic on wood portraits. Few tempera on linen or stucco types are included in her survey, and she provides little information on chronology for the portraits.

She does, however, break down the types of portraits stylistically into four groupings. The first group contains the "highly sophisticated portraits" done by painters

who were “steeped in the Greek naturalist tradition.” The second group consists of works, which are less realistic, and she concludes that the artists who created such works were not well trained in Greek techniques. The third group includes faces and figures, which are neither natural nor realistic. She dismisses these types as “stylized, the best of them are attempts at the rendering of character.” She likens the fourth group to “Indian popular painting, others the Persian popular art known to us from the 19th-century examples found on painting chests.” Such works, Doxiadis seems to suggest, are the remnants of artistic ability not worthy themselves as art, but are merely “interesting as historical documents.”³³ Doxiadis further concludes that the painters of the Fayum portraits were trained in a tradition known as the “Alexandrian school” of Greek painting techniques.

Though Doxiadis makes some useful observations, the tenets of her arguments dissipate under scrutiny. First, there is skepticism regarding the existence of a painting school in Alexandria.³⁴ Further, a widespread use of the portraits in homes before inclusion in mummy wrappings has yet to be proven, and prominent scholars continue to debate the existence of this practice.³⁵ Therefore the premise that naturalistic portraits of high artistic quality were desired for this purpose is to assume too much from too little evidence. It also does not justify the existence and purpose of portrait shrouds or cartonnage masks. Doxiadis approaches the topic from the viewpoint of an artist, and thus does not devote much study to historical, religious, or cultural factors as the means for placing the mummy portraits in proper context. Better to turn to the latest research on the works done in the museum milieu by curators and other authorities, including many of the same scholars noted above.

The exhibition, *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Ancient Egypt*, was organized in 1997 by Vivian Davies, Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities at British Museum and reorganized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2000. The exhibition produced a catalog of the same name, while a collection of papers produced from a colloquium held by the British Museum 1995 was expanded and published in 1997 in tandem with the exhibition. Two of Davies' colleagues from the British Museum worked on the publications; Susan Walker edited the catalog, while M.L. Bierbrier edited the colloquium's volume entitled, *Portraits and Masks*. Both works are invaluable for the study of mummy portraits, from the history of the field to the latest chemical analysis of the works. Still no consensus has been achieved among scholars regarding the chronology of the mummy portraits. Of the several scholars noted above, many supplied essays for the catalog and colloquium volume. Parlasca, Borg, Corcoran, Doxiadis, and Bagnell have each contributed to one or both of the publications noted above, yet Parlasca, Borg, and Corcoran continue to hold their individual opinions on the chronology as well as purpose of the mummy portraits. Parlasca believes that mummy portraiture continued into the fourth century, while Borg maintains that the practice ended in the third century. Further Borg and Corcoran argue for continuation of Egyptian tradition, while Doxiadis places the portraits in an entirely Greek or Greek-inspired context. However, Doxiadis provides a commendable description of the wax encaustic technique for the catalog, and an invaluable essay on the evolution of icons for the colloquium volume.

1.4 Historical Sources

With modern scholars engaged in such disputes, it follows that ancient authors have little to say on the practice of mummification in the Roman period. Though there are many primary sources which discuss the geography, culture and religious habits of the Egyptians, such as Strabo, Cassius Dio, and Diodorus Siculus among others, there is little written information on the culture of the Fayum region or mummy portraits. Naturally, there is an enormous amount of archaeological evidence due to Egypt's unique ability to preserve materials. Though numerous examples of papyri and ostraca demonstrate the continued adherence to traditional cults throughout pharaonic, Ptolemaic, and Roman Egypt, there is no mention of the practice of mummy portraiture and its cultural context. Therefore, what follows is a select group of historical sources, which can only inform the study of Egyptian culture from which mummy portraiture arose, but cannot provide direct information on the practice itself.³⁶

One of the first historians to write on Egypt was, of course, Herodotus, who gives a lengthy description of Egypt's history known in the fifth century BC. Herodotus even mentions Lake Moeris in the Fayum in Book 2:13 of his *Histories* where he discusses the general geography of the country. Later, in Book Two, Herodotus includes important, if not wholly accurate information on the religious practices of Egypt including embalming methods and rites. We will return to Herodotus in future sections.

Another important source for our purposes is Plutarch's "Isis and Osiris" as an essay in his *Moralia*. Plutarch provides a wealth of information on the Isiac mysteries, Osirian rituals, and the syncretism of Greek and Egyptian religion. Though his work is

meant to be morally didactic, Plutarch's detailed work offers a tantalizing glimpse of Greco-Egyptian life in the early second century AD.

In addition, the first Latin novel was written in the second century and it discusses Egyptian religion in the Roman period. Apuleius wrote *The Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass* (after traveling widely in the Roman Empire, including a stay in Alexandria). Though Apuleius presents a fictionalized account of an initiate into the Isaic mysteries through the eyes of Lucius, his description provides unique insights into that cult's practices.

Some Christian writers also mention pagan rituals and beliefs with utter disdain in effort to promote their faith. In the late second century, Clement of Alexandria, in Book I of his "Introductory Note to Theophilus of Antioch," reproaches Egyptian, Greek, and Roman pagans alike for continuing to worship the traditional gods, and for revering sculptures replicating such gods. Further in Chapter 1:13 Clement discusses resurrection in context of the cyclical nature of growth and the return of seasons, attributing this to God, the Christian God. In Egypt, as well as in Greece and Rome, a plethora of deities was involved in resurrection. Thus Clement, an Alexandrian familiar with the Egyptian cults, dismisses the powers and roles of the traditional deities in resurrection and subsequently in afterlife regeneration.

Another early church father, St. Augustine, provides a Christian perspective on burial practices in his fourth century treatise, *De Cura Pro Mortuis* or "On the Care to be had for the Dead," from his *Retractions*. St. Augustine explains that the dead have no

need of sustenance provided by the living. Thus with this declaration the pagan funerary practices are thrown into question and dismissed outright from his Christian viewpoint.

All of these beliefs converged in Egypt as a singular seat of early Christianity. However, the most important regulator was the government. The *Codex Theodosianus* (AD 438) had the greatest effect on the native pagan practices and necessarily frames our study of traditional mummification during Late Antiquity.³⁷ During the later half of the fourth century and well into the fifth, the imperial Roman government began a series of empire-wide campaigns against paganism. The Emperor Theodosius banned pagan rites and sacrifices in AD 391 and again in AD 392. In AD 408, Arcadius and Honorius forbade funerary banquets at tombs. Book 16 of the *Codex Theodosianus* lists a series of edicts related to pagan rituals and sacrifices.³⁸ In Egypt, where the cult of the dead was so historically entrenched, one can only estimate how far into Late Antiquity the traditional burial rites continued to cause so many edicts to be proclaimed.

Turning our attention now to the historical sources related to the art historical techniques of mummy portraits, our inventory grows much smaller. For the ancients, art was a craft, and though respected as a technical profession, the majority of artisans never achieved any great degree of renown. Exceptions existed, as many names of classical Greek sculptors have come down to us, but for the most part painting, weaving, sculpting and carving were the work of an anonymous group of men and women serving the state or their local community.

Our most informative source on the arts of the ancient world is Pliny the Elder whose Book 35 of his first century *Natural History* gives a wealth of details on the

known classical Greek and Roman artists as well as the methods and tools used. It is from Pliny that we learn that the Greeks first used the technique of painting in hot wax. Pliny's word for it is ϵ _____, from which comes down to us through the Latin, *encaustae* from which we arrive at "encaustic" in English. In Greek it means, "to burn in."³⁹ Further, Pliny details the use of portraiture among the Romans in Book XXXV: II, while bemoaning the loss in quality of that particular genre of art.

Yet another classical source is Lucian, known for his satires. Although his "Essays on Portraiture" and "Essays in Portraiture Defended" are not treatises on actual painting techniques or history, Lucian does afford insightful information on how the artists of the time would capture the essence of an individual in a portrait painting.

With this brief survey of the scholarship and historical sources, our best source for explaining the phenomenon of Roman mummy portraiture is to examine the works themselves in context of their materials and techniques. Yet, first it is important to describe the canon of traditional Egyptian funerary images in relation to later Greek and Roman developments in portraiture.

The artistic rule in Egyptian art was set down in the Old Kingdom, and except for very a few dalliances, the stylistic features of ancient Egyptian art did not diverge far from the Old Kingdom precepts. The tradition of portraiture in ancient Egypt was not a long one. Until the Ptolemaic period, portraits *per se* in Egyptian painting did not exist.⁴⁰ Traditional figural representation was idealized and stylized, meant to represent a type, not an individual. Statuary was no exception. For the ancient Egyptians, statues representing the deceased were not about the individual, but about providing a resting

place for the spirit of mobility, or the *ba* on its afterlife journeys.⁴¹ Further, only the wealthy could afford the elaborate mummification process with its lavish burial accoutrements and richly decorated tomb walls. One would be hard pressed to identify the individual Egyptian by his or her cartonnage mask. It can be argued that portraiture already had roots in ancient Egypt, but there is little from Pharaonic Egypt that can compare to the attempts at individualization in the Roman period.

With the Greeks, portraiture began on the Greek mainland during the fourth century BC with Lysistratus. Lysistratus is credited with making the first plaster casts of individual's faces.⁴² Portraiture among the Greeks remained idealized and was largely confined to sculpture. Statesmen commissioned such works to commemorate great generals, intellectuals, or gods. With the coming of Alexander, portraiture had a venerable sponsor and soon, works allegedly representing the young king sprung up all over the Hellenistic world.⁴³

The surviving sculptures from the classical period reflect the difference of artistic values between the Greeks and the Egyptians. In many ways, both are idealized, but in Egypt it was for religious reasons, while in Greece it was due to proportional and aesthetic reasons. The differences between Classical Greek statues and Egyptian statues are profound. Egyptian works are formal, imposing and static. While Greek sculptors invented *contrapposto*, whereby the body is presented with a natural and realistic curve, thus giving Greek art its genius and its appeal for Roman copyists.

We do not know to what extent portrait painting on wood panels evolved in Greece because nothing survives. One can only suppose that Greek painting endeavored

to reflect a more natural depiction of individuals and gods as the sculpture of the period did. The painting that does survive from the Greeks is represented in the vast stores of red and black figure vases crowding Museum galleries and storage worldwide. Their characteristic decoration stands apart from all other ancient pottery. But the purpose of vase painting was not to imbue its figures with individuality, but to tell a story or convey a genre scene.

For years, art historians have been crediting the Romans for being the first to produce realistic portraiture in antiquity and there are many who continue to proclaim this truism. Still, there are others who maintain that the Greeks were the first.⁴⁴ What is clear is that the incidence of portraiture increased during the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, possibly due to a new emphasis on the value of the individual.⁴⁵

In Roman tradition, the cult of the ancestors was strong among the aristocracy. Polybius and Pliny note the practice of constructing masks from the deceased, and this may have played a role in the ascension of portraiture among powerful Romans.⁴⁶ Yet, Egyptians already had a long tradition of endowing their dead with funerary masks. Roman sculpture was based on Greek models, but Rome contributed a great deal to art making, including their desire to portray the individual realistically with all his or her features. Roman art reflected a respect for truth in representation, realistic images for a practical people. The question remains as to whether mummy portraits are indeed realistic. Do they reflect the Egyptian tradition of immortality, the Greek ideal of beauty or the Roman aspiration for truth?

Such questions continue to be provoking, and as we move forward in our inquiry of the *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* perhaps we can add to an understanding of the strange departure from the individually entrenched traditional Egyptian, Greek, and Roman burial practices in Roman Egypt, to the arrival of a mummy portraiture culture in Late Antiquity.

Notes to Section One

¹ Lorelei Corcoran, *Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt (I-IV Centuries A.D.): With a Catalog of Portrait Mummies in Egyptian Museums (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, No. 56)* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1995), p. 6.

² David L. Thompson, *The J. Paul Getty Museum: Mummy Portraits* (California: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1982), p. 3.

³ Barbara Borg, "Problems in the Dating of the Mummy Portraits" in Euphrosyne Doxiadis, *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 1995), p. 229-230. Borg presents a brief but excellent summary of the debates on dating the mummy portraits from Graf to contemporary scholarship. The above account of Petrie's categories is based on Borg's summary, p.229-231.

⁴ Susan Walker, "A Note On the Dating of the Mummy Portraits," in *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Routledge, 2000), p. 36.

⁵ Lorelei Corcoran expands upon the three categories in her survey of intact mummies to include rhombic-wrapped mummies, red-shrouded mummies, and stucco mummies. See Lorelei Corcoran, *Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt (I-IV Centuries A.D.): With a Catalog of Portrait Mummies in Egyptian Museums (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, No 56.)* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1995).

⁶ Corcoran and Thompson both maintain that portrait shrouds can be grouped stylistically and attributed to certain areas or schools. Corcoran, 1995 and Thompson, 1982.

⁷ Christine El Mahdy, *Mummies, Myth and Magic*, (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1998), p. 11.

⁸ Paul C. Roberts, "One of Our Mummies is Missing" in *Portraits and Masks*, ed. M.L. Bierbrier, (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 20. Roberts notes the 1911 find of the mummy of a young girl whose burial included "toilet articles and figurines." Roberts also notes that Petrie maintained that most Roman period burials finds were not in their original burial site, and that they were reburied.

⁹ John Taylor, "Before the Portraits: Burial Practices in ancient Egypt," in *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*, ed. Susan Walker. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), p. 9.

¹⁰ Euphrosyne Doxiadis, *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 1995), p. 125.

¹¹ David L. Thompson, *The Artists of the Mummy Portraits*, (California, The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1976), p. 7.

¹² Thompson, *Getty*, p. 4.

¹³ Morris Bierbrier, "The Discovery of the Mummy Portraits," in *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Routledge, 2000), p. 32.

¹⁴ Thomposn, *Getty*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Thompson, *Artists*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Zahi Hawass discusses the latest finds from the Bahariya oasis region in his book *The Valley of the Golden Mummies*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000).

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- ¹⁷ Borg, *Problems*, p. 229 and Walker, *Note*, p. 34.
- ¹⁸ Walker, *Note* p. 34.
- ¹⁹ Walker, *Note* p. 35..
- ²⁰ Roberts, *One*, p. 19-24.
- ²¹ AF. Shore, *Portrait Painting from Roman Egypt*. (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1962), p. 28.
- ²² Joyce M. Filer, "If the Face Fits...A Comparison of Mummies and their Accompanying Portraits Using Computerized Axial Tomography" in *Portraits and Masks*, ed. M.L. Bierbrier, (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 121-130. One interesting example Filer notes is that of an eighty-nine year old man whose portrait depicts him as middle aged, p. 122.
- ²³ Dominic Monteserrat, "The Representation of Young Males in 'Fayum Portraits'" in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 79, 1983, p. 215.
- ²⁴ Walker, *Note*, p. 35.
- ²⁵ David L. Thompson, "Classes and Hands of Painted Funerary Portraits from Antinoöpolis." (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1972).
- ²⁶ David L. Thompson, *Mummy Portraits in the J. Paul Getty Museum*. (California: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1980), p. 11.
- ²⁷ Barbara Borg's doctoral thesis (Barbara Borg, *Mumienporträts. Chronologie und Kultureller Kontext*. Philipp von Zabern Verlag, Mainz 1996) was not personally reviewed by this author; however Borg summarizes her position in her article cited above, (see note 3). Susan Walker also summarizes Borg's position in her article, (see note 4). See also Karl Parlasca in "Mummy Portraits: Old and New Problems" in *Portraits and Masks*, ed. M.L. Bierbrier, (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 127-129, especially note 3 in that article.
- ²⁸ Monteserrat, *Representation*, p. 215-216.
- ²⁹ Corcoran, *Portrait*, p. 1-2.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6-7.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ³² Europhyne Doxiadis, *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 1995), p. 13.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Ann Powell, review of *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt* by Euphrosyne Doxiadis, *Art History* Volume 19, No. 4 (December 1996): p. 620-621.
- ³⁵ Petrie, Corcoran, and Borg support the use of portraits in homes, however Dominic Montserrat argues convincingly in opposition in "Death and Funerals in the Roman Fayum," in *Portraits and Masks*, ed. M.L. Bierbrier, (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 33-44.
- ³⁶ Barbara Borg, "The Dead as a Guest at Table? Continuity and Change in the Egyptian Cult of the Dead" in *Portraits and Masks*, ed. M.L. Bierbrier, (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 27 and note 21.
- ³⁷ David Frankforter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University press, 1998), p. 23.
- ³⁸ *The Theodosian Code and Novels and The Sirmondian Constitutions*, trans. Clyde Pharr. (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1952) p. 472-475.
- ³⁹ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History in Ten Volumes*, Volume IX, trans., H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library. (London, England and Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heineman LTD and Harvard University Press, (1962) 1984), p. 262-263, and 350-351.
- ⁴⁰ The debate continues amongst scholars as to what constitutes portraiture in pharaonic Egypt and whether it existed or not. This debate will not be taken up here, though this author favors the view that true portraiture, i.e., depictions of the faces of actual individuals purposely created to record the individual's unique facial characteristics in a realistic secular manner did not occur in pharaonic Egypt.
- ⁴¹ John Taylor, *Before the Portraits*, p. 9.
- ⁴² Kurt Gschwantler, "Graeco-Roman Portraiture," in *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*, ed. Susan Walker. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), p. 15.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Anton, Heckler, *Greek and Roman Portraits*. (New York: Hackler Art Books, 1972), p. VI.

⁴⁵ J.J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*. (Great Britain and New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 7-18, posits a credible argument for the rise of the individual and a new cosmopolitan outlook after the spread of Hellenism across the Mediterranean.

⁴⁶ Gschwantler, *Graeco-Roman Portraiture*, p. 20.

Section Two

The purpose of this section is to briefly review the historical and cultural framework surrounding the production of the mummy portrait phenomenon in Late Antique Egypt. This section is far too short to do adequate justice to such a complex period of history; therefore only areas pertinent to our study will be presented.

2.1 Overview of Greco-Roman Egypt

When one thinks of ancient Egypt, it is usually the brilliance of the Pharaonic period, which immediately comes to mind. Egypt's long and glorious civilization was already ancient by the time the Greeks established their first colony at Naukratis in the seventh century BC. The Hellenistic and Roman periods (332 BC –AD 642) have only received minimal attention until recently. Roman Egypt is usually only considered in its association with early Christianity and the contributions of Alexandrian theologians to the formation of Christian doctrine. However, with the work of scholars such as Bagnell, Lewis, and Bowman as well as the recent interest in and publication of mummy portrait research, Roman Egypt's cultural contributions have been brought back into focus.

Octavian Caesar, later Augustus after 27 BC, annexed Egypt as a province in 30 BC. The Romans inherited a very Hellenized Egypt. The Hellenization of Egypt began in 323 BC with the arrival of Alexander the Great, who promptly installed Greeks and Macedonians to administer the country.¹ The Ptolemies (323-30 BC) kept the basic Pharaonic administrative system that divided Egypt into 42 nomes or provinces, 22 in Upper Egypt and 20 in Lower Egypt, but they reduced the number of nomes to 30. Each nome had its nomarch (or *strategos* under the Ptolemies), answerable to the regional vizier, who in turn answered to the pharaoh, or under the Macedonians, to the Ptolemaic

monarch. And, like the pharaohs, the Ptolemies maintained absolute rule in Egypt, keeping land under royal control. Private ownership of land existed, but it was always subject to the discretion of the ruler. Most of the private land belonged to temple complexes run by a hierarchical priesthood, who hired laborers to work these temple estates.²

At first, the arrival of the Macedonian overlords affected the urban centers the most profoundly, with lesser effects felt in rural villages. With two *poleis*, Naukratis and Alexandria, already established, Ptolemy I created only one other *polis* at Ptolemais.³ As more Greeks moved into Egypt, cultural osmosis transpired between the Greeks and the Egyptians. The Greeks absorbed many of Egypt's traditions, while the Egyptians readily accepted Greek deities into their already full pantheon of gods with little trouble.⁴

Egyptian society, like all ancient societies, was class driven. One's class was primarily based on one's occupation or "function."⁵ Ptolemaic society included the monarch, royal court, nobles, scribes, priests, artisans, merchants, soldiers, free peasants, and slaves. At first sight, the social structure was little changed from Pharaonic times. However, there were three critically important differences between the two Egyptian kingdoms: the installment of a Greek elite ruling class, the status of being Greek, and the ability to read and write in Greek. The Ptolemies divided the inhabitants of Egypt into two categories, Hellenes, which included Greeks and others of foreign descent, and Egyptians.⁶

Later, Hellenistic culture infiltrated into even the remotest rural regions and villages. Though there were those who never learned a word of Greek, most Egyptians who did business during the Ptolemaic period would have had to learn some Greek to

complete their transactions.⁷ Certainly, the educated and noble classes circulating in urban society knew Greek. Further, the continuity of the use of Greek and the development of the Coptic script (using the Greek alphabet with the addition of seven native Egyptian signs) throughout the Roman and Byzantine periods illustrate the dominance of the language in the region.⁸

The Ptolemies purposefully brought Greek settlers into Egypt. Though they ruled over the natives, the strength of Egyptian culture was not to be brushed aside lightly.⁹ Egyptian temples continued to be built into the Ptolemaic era, including some erected by the Ptolemies themselves such as the Temple to Isis at Philae.¹⁰ Despite the class structure in Ptolemaic Egypt, which favored Greeks and increased the upward social ambitions of the native elite, the vast majority of Egyptians lived as they had for centuries.¹¹

When Octavian annexed Egypt, the social structure of Egypt changed dramatically.¹² Octavian had just emerged victorious from a civil war, which won him Egypt. Egypt was a source of great wealth, and Octavian Augustus would take no chances with its vast resources being used by another rival. Instead of appointing a senator to govern the province, Octavian chose a prefect from the equestrian class, which had been loyal to him throughout the civil war.¹³ The *Praefectus Aegypti* was the governor under the personal direction of the new emperor. Octavian Augustus secured the new province by leaving a large garrison of Roman troops. Egypt was never to be the same.

Superimposition of a Macedonian Greek elite over the native Egyptians was aggravated by the rigid social structure impressed on the province by Romans. For

political reasons, Augustus realized the necessity to guarantee a grain source for Rome. Since Augustus well understood the potential of Egypt's agricultural production, he designed a social structure intended to keep Egyptians tied to the land.¹⁴

The class structure in Roman Egypt was divided into five legal classes. The most privileged class was, of course, Roman citizen. Next came the Greek citizens of the four *poleis* (mentioned above), Alexandria ranking first among them. Moreover, urban Jews of Alexandria were given some amount of autonomy and were thus lumped in with the Alexandrian *polis*. Then came Greeks who were *metropolitae*, residents of nome capitals. However, in order to be classed as a *metropolitae*, an individual would have had to trace a family lineage back to the original Greeks who settled Egypt during the Ptolemaic period. The rest of the population — whether they were wealthy and educated or illiterate and poor — were altogether grouped in one category, Egyptians.¹⁵

Under the Romans, the administration of cities continued in the traditional Greek manner of *boulai* or town councils, except for Alexandria. Alexandria was punished by Augustus and not allowed to have a city council until Septimus Severus granted the right to all Egyptian cities in AD 200.¹⁶ In effect, the government of Roman Egypt was laid right over the Ptolemaic infrastructure with its existing system of thirty nomes and their *metropoleis*.¹⁷ There were some changes, however, and the efficiency of nome administration was improved.¹⁸ The government of the entire province was streamlined with characteristic Roman practicality. Augustus removed the military authority of the *strategoï*, granted under the Ptolemies, and installed garrisons across the province to police the country and maintain civic security.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that only one city was established during the Roman period, that of Antinoöpolis, built by Hadrian in AD

130 in tribute to his lover Antinous who had drowned in the Nile at that site. Many mummy portraits have been found at Antinoöpolis. Thompson has suggested that Hadrian drew settlers from the Fayum to colonize the new city and these colonists brought the custom of mummy portraiture with them to the new city.²⁰

As was typical of provincial government elsewhere in the empire, local elites were called upon to undertake civil administration and finance public works, with the reward of Roman citizenship for this service. However, by the late third century, the burden of these liturgies on the wealthy class was becoming more and more oppressive as all were citizens after AD 212. By the fourth century, the wealthy citizens were fleeing their imposed responsibilities, either into monasteries or in bands of outlaws on the fringe of the desert.²¹ The widespread decimation of the moneyed class had far-reaching effects, including the abandonment of the Fayum by the fourth century.²²

2.1 Fayum Region

The brief overview above of the class structure and nome system is a necessary backdrop for our understanding of the Fayum region (Fayum is alternately spelled: Faiyum, Fayyum, Fayoum) of Egypt. Located in the Arsinoite nome, the Fayum is the fertile region surrounding Lake Moeris, a large oasis depression in the desert west of the Nile and about fifty miles south of Memphis. The Nile can be reached from Lake Moeris by various river outlets including the Bahr Yusuf. Known as *She-resy* or *Ta-She* in ancient Egyptian, the Fayum was the site of an initial land reclamation project undertaken by Senusret II during the Middle Kingdom.²³ However, the region took on far more

significance during the Ptolemaic period when it was important to find new land for the incoming Greek settlers.

In the third century BC Ptolemy II Philadelphus had the lands surrounding the lake drained in a vast land reclamation program designed to increase land for agriculture and provide for those Greek settlers moving into the country. The settlers moving into the Fayum region were mostly soldiers whom the Ptolemies rewarded with plots of land.²⁴ Arable land was served by an extensive irrigation system, developed by Ptolemaic engineers. Canals were dug to divert water from Lake Moeris into the fields. The Fayum basin was not normally fed by Nile floodwaters, thus agriculture could only be practiced with a regularly maintained irrigation management system.²⁵ With such systems in place, towns and villages grew up in the area including Philadelphieia, Arsinoe, Bakchias, and Soknopaiou Nesos. Arsinoe, the capitol of the Arsinoite nome, was originally Crocodopolis, named for its local god Sobek. The city was later renamed Arsinoe by Ptolemy II for his full sister and wife, Arsinoe II.

However, not all new immigrants to the Fayumic towns and villages were Macedonian soldiers. The Ptolemies increased the native population in the region as well so that the new settlers would have readily available labor for manual work. According to Bagnell, the native Egyptians who were imported into the Fayum came from all over Egypt, and only approximately 30 percent of the Fayum population was actually Greek.²⁶ Naturally, intermarriages would occur, and by the time of the Romans, the class distinctions between Hellene and Egyptian were greatly compromised.²⁷

When Rome instituted its class structure, the people of the Fayum still considered themselves Hellenes, despite the extent of their acculturation. Further, as Walker notes,

these Hellenes identified themselves not in terms of their civic origins, but by their social rank.²⁸

The economy of the Fayum, due to its unique irrigation system, produced a vast variety of crops, which were increased during the Ptolemaic period. During the Roman period, large estates produced cash crops such as grapes, olives, and new types of wheat along with a host of other vegetables and fruits.²⁹ Throughout the early Ptolemaic period, the Fayum region was highly productive. However, with the general decline of Egyptian administration during the late Ptolemaic period, the Fayum irrigation channels fell into disrepair. Yet, under the Romans, the irrigation system was overhauled and rebuilt, and villages were resettled so that production resumed.³⁰

A landed aristocracy owned and resided on large estates in the Fayum during the late Ptolemaic through the Roman periods. However, the ethnicity of the individuals who commissioned mummy portraits remains unclear. The people of the Fayum region cannot be categorized into distinct groups, as Walker and Bagnell have shown.³¹ Therefore, we must proceed on the supposition that the vast majority of the inhabitants of Fayum were ethnically mixed, including the wealthy elite.³² The wealthy inhabitants of the Fayum would have insisted on recognition of their social rank, which was not always tied to ethnicity, for purposes of tax advantage and class status. That these individuals upheld traditional Egyptian funerary practices, worshiped native deities, spoke Greek, and operated in the Roman sphere demonstrates a level of adaptation and sophistication that is not unique in provincial Roman culture.³³

2.2 Religion and Funerary Rites

More than the political and social atmosphere of the Fayum, it is the religious traditions of the period with their accompanying funerary rituals and burial practices, which speak directly to the creation of mummy portraits.

The death cult of ancient Egypt, with its near three thousand year old history, is far too broad a topic to adequately address in this short paper. Therefore, a brief summary should be sufficient to review the major tenets of the native Egyptian funerary beliefs.

Egyptian religion reaches back to the predynastic period, back before any written records. Osiris was associated with the underworld as early as the Pyramid Texts, those spells that were carved on the walls of the pyramid tomb of King Unas (also Wenis) built at the end of the Fifth Dynasty. Further, the elements of the Osiris, Isis, Horus story are already present in these inscriptions.³⁴ The Passion of Osiris is probably best known from Plutarch's account of the tale in his essay "Isis and Osiris" from his *Moralia* of the second century AD. Further, Plutarch weaves in various versions into his story, which make his narrative anything but cohesive. The story of the death of Osiris at the hands of his evil brother Set, the subsequent retrieval and revivification of Osiris by Isis, the engendering of their son Horus, and the avenging triumph of Horus over Set was the reigning family and funerary paradigm across class in ancient Egypt.

Originally, only the pharaoh could be associated with Osiris and receive his blessing to be reborn into the afterlife. By the Middle Kingdom, and certainly the New Kingdom, that right was popularized so that anyone who could afford the funerary rituals and accoutrements could become as Osiris and be reborn.³⁵ For the ancient Egyptian,

preservation of an individual's body was essential for rebirth into the afterlife. Thus, the entire practice of mummification was meant to merge the deceased with Osiris.

Along with the embalmed body, it was necessary to sustain the individual's spiritual components the *ka* (creative life-force) and *ba* (spirit of mobility) as well. Finally, the individual had to be in possession of the correct spells and recitations to pass through to the underworld. These three necessities formed the core of the Egyptian funerary preparations. However the cult of the dead escalated into an enormously elaborate religious system which sustained believers until the Christian period.³⁶

When a death occurred in a family affluent enough to afford mummification, the body underwent a prolonged period of preparation. This included ritual washing, preparation of the body for embalmment, the dehydration of the body, and then finally wrapping the desiccated and preserved body in linens.³⁷ Further, artisans would have been commissioned to construct and paint the coffin, a stonecutter would have carved a sarcophagus, other artisans and scribes would have employed to inscribe and decorate the tomb itself. On the day of the actual burial, the funerary procession would have begun at the home of the deceased's family and then proceeded to the tomb.

Ceremonies such as the 'Opening of the Mouth' would have been performed at the tomb site to bring the spirit of the deceased back to life. Finally, banquets would have been held at the funeral site, while the tomb was filled with grave goods including food, wine, flowers, unguents and other offerings to the deceased, in order that he or she be sustained in the afterlife. Professional mourners would have been employed and additional magical spells and rites would have acted out as the deceased was finally laid

to rest.³⁸ For all intents and purposes, a funeral of this type was an elaborate event which only the very wealthy could afford.

The Osirian cult of the dead, with its mummification tradition and accompanying and on-going rituals, was deeply entrenched in the consciousness of each Egyptian. For the Greeks, some of the same types of customs existed, but there were marked differences. Early in Greek history, cremation and inhumation coexisted, as there is evidence of both from the Mycenaean period forward.³⁹ In Greek tradition, the corpse would have been washed and dressed by the women, who would include a wreath around the deceased's head, and the body was laid out in the family's house for visitors to pay their respects. Again, we see that mourning and cries of lament were left up to female members of the household. Three days later, a wagon followed by the funerary procession left for the tomb site or cremation site. If the individual was to be buried, grave gifts would be brought and laid in the tomb, while some were destroyed in keeping with their sacrificial use. If the individual was to be cremated, the gifts would be destroyed. A banquet followed the funeral, and the tomb marked with a stone, or *sema*.⁴⁰ The Greeks had their own version of the cult of the dead, as can be demonstrated in the practice of remembering the dead at various intervals of time as well as offerings poured through libation vessels, which often covered the grave. Several beautiful painted versions of these vessels survive in art museums across the world.

However, within the breadth of Hellenistic culture, afterlife beliefs varied from locale to locale among the Greek speaking regions. The influence of Greek philosophy and its many branches did little to create a unifying thanatology.⁴¹ Other than heroes who went on to enjoy eternal bliss in the Elysian Fields, the vast majority of individuals

existed as mere shadows of their former existence in Hades. That Greek immigrants into Egypt would have been easily persuaded into accepting the Osirian theology or engage in other mystery religions is perfectly understandable given the Greek's own dour perception of death.

For the Romans, immortality was better achieved through public monuments and public remembrance. Religion for Roman elite was primarily based on public cult and sense of duty to the emperor and the state. However, proper burials were critical so that the spirits of the dead or *lemures* would be propitiated and not cause unrest in the household or harm to the survivors.⁴² Many of the same funerary rituals applied to Roman burials as Greek and Egyptian, including the laying out of the body, female mourners, the funerary procession, etc. Also, as with the Egyptians it was important to mark the burial with stones inscribed with the individual's name and/or profession. Often, manumitted slaves would commission tombstones and *stelae* to mark their free status.⁴³ The importance of status followed one into the grave. Like the Greeks, the Romans did not have a developed afterlife theology, and thus like the Greeks, many found salvation in the various mystery religions. Of the mystery religions, one of the most widespread was that of Serapis and Isis. Though we will discuss the imagery of Serapis as it applies to the North Carolina shroud in Section Four, it is useful to review the foundation of this cult.

Either Ptolemy I or Ptolemy II skillfully manipulated the traditional Egyptian religious cult of the Apis bull, and transposed its worship into one that would appeal to native Egyptians and immigrant Greeks alike. Essentially, the god Serapis was created by and for the Ptolemies as a dynastic god to promote a cultural unity among Greeks and Egyptians.⁴⁴ By giving a Greek form to an Egyptian deity, a new god was born. Serapis

was the syncretistic blending of Egypt's most important underworld god, Osiris, king of the dead with the Apis bull, known from the Old Kingdom, and whose worship was tied to Memphis.⁴⁵ The Apis embodied manifestations of several gods including Ptah, Osiris, and Re, depending on locale. The powers of Serapis would grow until he usurped all of the powers of Osiris, Hades, and Zeus as well as Asclepius. Further, Serapis was linked to Isis, the most popular female deity in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, and further boosted the appeal of the new god.⁴⁶ However, in the eyes of the native Egyptians, Serapis was simply yet another aspect of Osiris. For the Greeks, Serapis was an acceptable human-headed deity who promoted fertility and abundance. His visual imagery included overflowing fruits spilling out of a *modius*, an agricultural unit of measure, or a *calanthis* a vase-shaped container. The reach of the new god, seemingly, was greater than any other as he was able to heal the sick as Aesclepius, promote fertility and rule the underworld. His consort Isis already enjoyed almost universal power. Together, the deities attracted numerous followers from Greeks, Romans and Egyptians alike, and reached out beyond the Mediterranean as well.⁴⁷

The cult of Serapis grew among the Hellenized population of Egypt as temples and Serapeums were erected across Egypt in the more Hellenized towns and villages, while the great Serapeum at Alexandria remained in service until the late fourth century when it was finally demolished by zealous Christians.

The religious trends sparked by the Ptolemies were in turn influenced by the great antiquity of Egypt's own cult of the dead, so entrenched in the consciousness of the natives. The very existence of the *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* shroud and similar portraits of the dead from the Roman era bear this out. That these

shrouds can be connected with the Isiac and Serapion cults is the subject of the next two chapters.

Notes to Section Two

¹ Alan B. Lloyd, “The Ptolemaic Period” in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Ian Shaw, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 396,404.

² Lloyd, *Oxford*, p. 414.

³ Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.25

⁴ Alan K. Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p. 170.

⁵ Bowman, p. 122.

⁶ Roger S. Bagnell, “The Fayum and Its People,” *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Routledge, 2000), p 27.

⁷ Roger S. Bagnell, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.) p. 24

⁸ Bowman, *Egypt*, p. 122-123.

⁹ Bowman, *Egypt* p. 122.

¹⁰ Bowman, *Egypt*, p. 168.

¹¹ Bowman, *Egypt*, p. 122.

¹² Lewis, *Life*, p. 16.

¹³ Lewis, *Life*, p. 14-16.

¹⁴ Lewis, *Life*, p. 33.

¹⁵ This description of social class in Roman Egypt is based on Lewis, *Life*, p. 19-35.

¹⁶ Lewis, *Life*, p. 27.

¹⁷ David Peacock, “The Roman Period” in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Ian Shaw, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 423.

¹⁸ Lloyd, *Oxford*, p. 411.

¹⁹ Lewis, *Life* p. 16.

²⁰ See David L. Thompson, “Classes and Hands of Painted Funerary Portraits from Antinoöpolis.” Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1972.

²¹ Lewis, *Life*, p. 177-184.

²² Barbara Borg, ‘*Der zierlichste Anblick derWelt...’ Ägyptische Portätummien (Mainz 1998)*. This work was not personally reviewed by this author. Susan Walker cites Borg in her article, “On the Dating of the Mummy Portraits” in *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Routledge, 2000), p. 36.

²³ Gae Callender, “The Middle Kingdom Renaissance” in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, p. 164.

²⁴ Roger S. Bagnell, *Fayum*, p 26.

²⁵ Bagnell, *Late Antiquity* p. 17.

²⁶ Bagnell, *Fayum*, p. 27.

²⁷ Bagnell, *Fayum*,p. 28. In addition, Bagnell provides an excellent summary of his analysis of Greek and Roman vs. Egyptian names of individuals the Fayum in his article, “ The People of the Roman Fayum” in *Portraits and Masks*, ed. M.L. Bierbrier, (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 7-15.

²⁸ Susan Walker, “Mummy Portraits in their Roman Context,” in *Portraits and Masks*, ed. M.L. Bierbrier, (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p.3-4

²⁹ Bowman, *Egypt*, p. 101.

³⁰ Bagnell, *Late Antiquity*, p. 111.

³¹ See notes 27 and 28 above.

³² Bagnell, *Fayum*, p. 10.

³³ Bagnell, *Fayum*, 10.

³⁴ Erik Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 6.

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- ³⁵ John Taylor, "Before the Portraits: Burial Practices in Pharaonic Egypt" in *Ancient Faces*, p. 9
- ³⁶ Taylor, *Before*, p. 9.
- ³⁷ This is admittedly an oversimplification of the mummification process, for a more detailed account of the procedure see Christine El Mahdy, *Mummies, Myth and Magic*, (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1989), p. 52-57.
- ³⁸ El Mahdy, *Mummies*, p. 110-116.
- ³⁹ Walter Burkert, trans. John Raffan, *Greek Religion*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985) p. 191.
- ⁴⁰ Burkert, *Greek*, p. 193-194.
- ⁴¹ Jon Davies, *Death Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 127-138. Davies presents several classical sources in respects to their viewpoints on death and afterlife beliefs.
- ⁴² Davies, *Death*, p. 145-147
- ⁴³ Davies, *Death*, p. 150.
- ⁴⁴ Peacock, *Ptolemaic*, p. 438.
- ⁴⁵ R.E. Whit, *Isis in the Ancient World*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 28.
- ⁴⁶ Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, (Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1996), p. 77.
- ⁴⁷ Sarolta A. Takács, *Isis and Serapis in the Roman World*, (Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995). Takács demonstrates the far-reaching arms of this cult into the Rhine and Danubian Provinces.

Section Three

The aim of this section is to discuss the various methods used by ancient artisans to create the three different types of mummy portraits. Further, as this paper's principal aim is to analyze the *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* in the North Carolina Museum of Art, a detailed description of this work will be presented including the condition of the shroud, a formal analysis, and its available provenance information.

As was mentioned in section one, the mummy portraits from Roman Egypt were created in three different media, wax encaustic on wood panels, tempera on linen also known as portrait shrouds, and stucco cartonnages. Each medium has its own characteristics and unique appearance. The three forms were contemporary, and do not show an artistic evolution in technique, style, or skill. The shroud in the North Carolina Museum of Art's collection is tempera on linen, but a brief description of the other two media will help understand the range of funerary choices available to the ancient Egyptians during the Roman Period.

3.1 Wax Encaustic¹

There are two types of wax encaustic used in the mummy portrait paintings, hot wax and cold emulsion, also known as Punic wax. Wax encaustic was used mostly on wood panels, though portraits done in encaustic on linen are extant as well. Wood, however, was scarce and expensive in ancient Egypt. Therefore, types of wood used in mummy portraits can be narrowed down to a limited number of species. Of the mummy portraits analyzed in laboratories, the types of woods attested in panel portraits include

lime and sycamore fig for the majority of the panels, while fir and oak were used less often.² The wood panels vary in thickness from 1.6-2 millimeters up to a quarter of an inch. Each of the wooden panels is flexible enough to be curved or bent, thus allowing insertion into the mummy wrappings. In addition, their small size allowed them to be both portable and quick to complete.

The only wax available was beeswax. Other materials such as pigments, resins, and/or gums were added to the mixtures of both hot and cold versions. There is little in the way of textual documentation for the artistic medium of hot wax encaustic, but Pliny tells us the procedure for using Punic wax

In the early days there were two kinds of encaustic painting, with wax and on ivory with a graver or cestrum (that is a small pointed graver); but later the practice came in of decorating battleships. This added a third method, that of employing a brush, when wax has been melted by fire....³

In essence, what Pliny tells us is that two tools were used in the process of wax painting, a brush and a harder tool, a graver. There is still much discussion over the authenticity of Pliny's account. But an examination of the wax encaustic portraits does show brushstrokes as well as use of a harder implement, whether or not this was the back of the artist's brush or a separate tool is not clear.⁴

The steps the ancient painter would have followed to create a portrait painting are discernible, both upon examination of the works as well as through laboratory analysis. First, the type of wax procedure was chosen. For hot wax, the pigments were added when the mixture was molten. In the cold wax method, an emulsion was created by mixing in other additional materials along with the pigments. Second, the surface of the wood panel would be prepared to accept the encaustic paint. Since the wax would not adhere directly to the surface, a distemper sizing made of animal glue was used to cover

the wood panel. Third, an outline of the figure's facial features and overall composition was sketched over the sizing in black distemper paint. Next, an under painting of wax was brushed on with care. The color of the under painting was determined by the final design. For facial or fleshy areas, the wax under painting was a khaki color; for hair, the under layer was a gray tone. Finally, the desired finishes were brushed on. The various layers combined to create an almost impressionistic whole with the facial features apparent and very realistic. Thicker wax layers were applied to denote illusionistic texture in clothing and jewelry adorning the figure.⁵ Although wax encaustic is a very permanent medium, the artist could resort to reheating the wax to make corrections or additions.⁶

3.2 Stucco Portrait Masks

The stucco and gesso mummy portrait cartonnages are less respected as art objects, but they reflect traditional ancient Egyptian funerary practices and native decorative themes. The stucco mummy portrait masks portray the individuals in a horizontal position, as if they were lying down. Such works resemble the late Middle Kingdom's anthropoid mummy coffins, except that the head and face are constructed in greater relief and are not carved in stone or wood. Another difference is that the head and face seem to pull away from the body, leaning forward and upright. This gives them an eerie and artificial appearance, especially as the portrait forms the upper lid of a coffin. While some coffins were extensively decorated with native Egyptian iconography, others that survive have only traces left of their painted designs.⁷ There is a progression in plaster masks in that the earlier ones, dating from the first century, are flat, depicting the

individual lying on a bier. Masks from the second century raise the head slightly from the rest of the form, while third century masks render the head and shoulders in a vertical position. Gilded portrait masks date from early in the first century to the late second century.⁸

Of the surviving painted stucco portrait masks, the colors remain vibrant and the decoration immutable. The masks seem not to conform to any one style, and each portrays its figure in an individual manner. If the figures are female, they often possess elaborate hairstyles or headdresses. The female figures are provided with luxurious gilded jewelry in the form of earrings, bracelets or necklaces. Very often the artist has portrayed the individual as current with cotemporary Roman tastes in hair, makeup or other adornment. The jewelry or headdresses are usually gilded. Gilding was affixed to the gesso by applying a thin layer of bole, a soft reddish brown clay, then covering the bole with gold leaf.⁹

It seems that these portrait masks were mass-produced however, and therefore they are the least realistic of the three media.¹⁰ The faces were made from stucco plaster, which was placed in a mold until hard. The ears were attached from separate pieces and the eyes were inlaid, usually with glass.

Since these works were mass-produced, they are far more idealized than individualized. Some of them are more natural than others, and even seem to reflect knowledge of classical Hellenic sculpture. Yet there are also examples among this genre which are bizarre conglomerations of figural body parts and Romanized fashions. The stucco portraits are masks in the true sense of the word. These objects were made to fit over the deceased's head and shoulders, or to serve as the lid to a coffin. Because these

works are viewed as less artistically valuable, stucco masks are often overlooked by scholars, who give them only a transitory mention and place them in the back of the catalog. Much more research needs to be done on these works in order to fully understand their importance in the record of Roman Egypt's funerary practices.

3.3 Tempera on Linen

The third and final medium we will discuss is tempera on linen. These works are more often referred to as funerary shrouds or portrait shrouds. Like the stucco group, the tempera on linen works often take a back seat to wax encaustic portraits in the opinions of art historians. Despite this, much can be gained by looking carefully at these shrouds. Though we are not looking into the eyes of an individual from the ancient past, as we seem to be in the far more realistic wax encaustic portraits, we are nonetheless looking into important documents of history.

Tempera is a hard term to define. Scholars today continue to debate the merits of the term in describing a paint medium. Essentially, tempera is a water-soluble medium, which uses a binding agent either from animal origin like egg or milk, or from a plant gum.¹¹ The pigments are finely ground and then added into the tempera mixture. Tempera must be applied with a fine brush, and it produces a flat unnatural effect. The benefits of tempera are that it does not have to be heated or cooled, it can be painted over, and it is a fairly permanent substance when conserved properly.

The portrait shrouds are all tempera painted on linen, which has been specially prepared to accept the paint. The linen is either hardened with distemper, or painted first with another type of sizing.¹² In some instances, white gypsum and/or gesso are used as

the sizing medium. Tempera on linen paintings are often affixed to a wooden board for attachment to the mummy proper. The *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* is no exception, and the board is clearly visible. Like other portrait shrouds, the colors painted in tempera on the North Carolina shroud show a remarkable variety in tone and hue.

The ancient Egyptians throughout their history had access to a wide palette of colors used as paint pigments; in fact they had the full spectrum. The pigments they used derived from mineral, animal, and man-made substances. Black was created from carbon residue, either soot or ground charcoal. Blue was derived from azurite, which was found in the eastern regions of Egypt. Egyptian blue, the most frequently occurring blue paint, was a compound, however. To make Egyptian blue, the ancient Egyptians heated together silica, copper or green malachite, calcium carbonate, and natron to get the appropriate color for the Egyptian blue *frit* as it is known. Green pigments were created from malachite. Red and yellow derive from ochre. However, iron oxides were also used in making red pigments, while naturally occurring sulphide, called orpiment, was used to produce yellow. Gypsum or calcium carbonate provided the base for white pigments. The above list does not include mixed pigments, such as gray, which was formed by blending soot and gypsum, or brown, which was produced from red and yellow ochre. Pink could be obtained by blending red ochre with gypsum, or from the rose madder plant's roots. Purple was not often used, but it could be obtained from the murex mollusk if required. Further, ancient artists produced faux gold effects by blending yellow, red, and white pigments and painting them in layers.¹³

The *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* contains nearly every color mentioned above with the exception of purple. The shades of blue were the Egyptian blue frit described above.¹⁴ However, it must be kept in mind that this work is over sixteen centuries old, and the colors the ancients used were not as steadfast as some scholars believe. The pigments were made from organic compounds and therefore the colors we see may not be the shades actually selected by the artist. The differing shades of blue may actually have once been green, and the gray may actually have been blue.¹⁵ Regardless, the pigments that are preserved are intense and still command respect.

3.4 Detailed Description

The *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* was purchased by the North Carolina Museum of Art in 1978 from London antiquities brokers Bruce and Ingrid McAlpine. It became part of the Museum's permanent collection that same year. The work is textile-painted on linen with the upper quarter of the textile mounted on an unknown wood. It measures fifty-two inches high by sixteen inches wide at its broadest section. The work is painted on linen and for its age, the work is still remarkably intact. However, there are stains and bleached areas as well as portions that are entirely disintegrated. Since the next section will address the symbolism of the decoration, colors and mythological figures on this portrait shroud, the shroud will be described in some detail first.

The shroud depicts a young male in his mid-adolescence. We know nothing of his name, actual age, or environment. Excluding the upper third of the shroud which is taken

up by the portrait, there are three distinct registers visible. The first two depict religious scenes, while the third one has entirely deteriorated (Plate 1).

The upper portion depicting the portrait figure is the largest area of the shroud. Let us begin with it. The youth's jet-black hair is cut short. He possesses prominent eyebrows above dark brown eyes encircled by a thick black line. The eyes are outlined so clearly that it is as if they were lined with kohl. The artist meticulously painted the individual eyelashes on both the upper and lower lids. The eyes are certainly out of proportion with the rest of the features, as is typical of the Egyptian manner of larger than life artistic renderings of human eyes. The face and other areas of skin are painted with a realistic flesh-colored pigment, and the cheeks possess a naturalistic rosy glow. His face is round but the artist painted it so skillfully that the slight dimple below the lower lip denotes the natural curve of the chin's indentation. There appears to be a faint mustache above his pink lips, little darker than the first hopeful facial whiskers of a teenage boy. The countenance on the face relays a sense of happiness, of quiet repose and acceptance of fate. A garland in the form of an organic leafed vine, painted gold with bluish-green flowers or leaves, adorns the boy's head.

The figure's head is encapsulated in a framed blue space. The frame is painted rather than physical, and consists of a faux jewel-encrusted and gold border. The artificial effect is enhanced by the artist's faithful renderings of the jewel shapes; each painted gem has its own faux gold setting. A white circle then separates each jewel and can only be the artist's attempt at painting a pearl. There are three different jewel shapes, oval, diamond and square. The ovals contain either dark red or dark blue, while the diamonds only contain dark red pigment, and the squares only dark blue. Again, the pattern

suggests rubies, garnets or some other semi-precious stone for the red, while the dark blue would of course suggest sapphires, lapis lazuli, or another valuable blue stone.

Outside of the faux gold frame, the artist has painted a pattern replicating the intricate bandage weaves used in mummy wrappings. It apparently represents a diamond shaped wrapping method. The artist used red, gold, white, and black pigments in the wrapping decoration. Unfortunately, due to the deterioration of the textile, the wrapping decoration pattern can only be seen in two places on this piece, the upper left-side, and in a lower register, discussed below.

The figure wears a white tunic with one thin stripe of purple which runs down the left-hand side. Around the boy's neck is what appears to be a rose petal garland, which will be discussed later. Intertwined with the rose garland are what appear to be blue beads. Yet gold beads, slightly larger than the blue, are placed at regular intervals along the string of blue beads.

On the left hand shoulder of the figure, painted onto the white tunic, is a faded bird. The different parts of the bird are delineated by different shades of a bluish-gray. Directly beneath the bird is a swastika painted solely in red and not outlined in any way.

The figure's oversized hands are completely disproportionate with the rest of the upper body and have little natural definition save for a primitive cuticle on each finger. One has to wonder, if, like the eyes, there is purpose to the oversized hands. Or was the artist simply unable to paint them in a more realistic manner? Perhaps this was meant to draw attention to what the figure holds in each hand. Elbows are not apparent, but the hands bend in over the body.

In the right hand is a wide cup or bowl. Inside the bowl is a black substance. The boy holds the cup-bowl over his heart. In the figure's other hand is a pink and red oval, probably repeating the rose petal garland which hangs around the neck. The garland in the left hand is more defined and thicker. Further, it stands alone with no intertwined beads. There appears to be something else in that hand. A two-inch dark gray and black undefined rectangle protrudes from his closed palm. It rests on the first line of the next register. The object cannot be identified. The boy's figure terminates just below what would be the upper third of the body.

The first register is set off from the portrait by a strip of what seem to be oval beads set in a rick-rack pattern across the ribbon-like horizontal band. Each bead has two black lines painted horizontally across their centers. This gives each of the beads the appearance of wearing a belt. The beads are painted light blue, the same color the artist used behind the head and neck. Interspersed with the register beads are tiny donut-like circles. The band seems to be purely decorative.

The composition of this register includes a winged female deity wearing a peculiar vulture headdress. The vulture headdress is unlike the delicate bird image used in traditional Egyptian goddess headdresses, and it looks more like it came to roost there before flying off again. The goddess stands with her arms stretched out over the funerary bier before her. The winged goddess holds identical objects in both hands. Thompson believed that these are *sistra*.¹⁶ This conclusion will be challenged in the next section

Lying on the bier in front of the goddess is a human-headed mummy. The mummy's headdress is iconic in that it depicts a traditional Egyptian funerary mask usually placed over the head and neck of the deceased. The diagonal or diamond pattern

which surrounds the gold frame surrounding the portrait's head in the area above is repeated in the wrappings of the mummy figure on the bier. This is significant as it suggests that the rest of the portrait textile may have been decorated with the same crosshatch pattern, perhaps simulating a expensive mummy wrapping design (Plate 2).

The funerary bier itself is unique and rather bizarre. The bier is composed of two birdlike creatures lying back to back with their wings pulled closed to their body. The curve of the bird's backs and wings creates a deep arch, too deep to hold the body of the mummy perfectly horizontal. The artist solved this problem by filling in the arch with a bridge consisting of a series of vertically standing concentric ovals. The largest oval is in the center and the ovals grow progressively smaller as they move out to the sides. The background of the ovals is black, while the ovals themselves are painted in pale pigments, so that the concentricity of the ovals is apparent and the center is darkest.

The birds are reddish-brown and the artist dotted them with black, no doubt in attempt to represent feathers without having to painstakingly draw them. A primitive line defines the bird's wings. One bird wears the traditional combined crown of upper and lower Egypt, while the other wears an unknown crown type. The crowns are drawn in carefully, but do not stand out against the background of the goddess and the funerary bier. A second diamond pattern is sketched in behind them, giving the illusion of wallpaper, or more likely the stone wall of a tomb or chapel. The crown and diamond patterns are drawn in brown over a yellowish background.

The scene with the goddess and mummy are framed by another register band below and by two vertical scenes, only one of which is visible. Flanking the mummy bier on the left is the figure of Anubis, the tradition Egyptian god of mummification and

embalming. Little remains of Anubis's counterpart on the right since the textile is too badly damaged on that side. However, the remnants of a figure suggest another deity was positioned on the right flank.

Another band of beads comes next and separates the second from the third register. These beads are red, outlined first in white, then in black. Like the beads from the first band, these too have lines across their center. Only this time the lines are drawn in white.

The second register has three panels, like a triptych. The center panel shows a goddess seated on a throne. She is most definitely Isis as she is adorned with Isis's traditional throne headdress. She sits upon a throne suckling a large horned black bull, which stands in front of the goddess. Isis wraps one arm around the neck of the creature, while her other hand is gently holding the bull's mouth to her breast. This is a disturbing image to modern eyes, and no parallel exists in Egyptian iconography.¹⁷ Isis is garbed in a gown that falls from her waist to the tops of her ankles; her upper body is bare except for a collar. The dark hair of the goddess falls over her shoulders and over the collar. The textile is damaged; therefore the facial features of the goddess are not clearly visible (Plates 3 and 4).

The bull appears to be standing on a ribbed floor, which curves back before it meets the spiral column on the left, giving it the appearance of a giant loaf of French bread. Above the bull is a rectangular cartouche. The cartouche terminates against the above beaded band. It is one of the two inscriptions of an unknown script, which are painted on the shroud. Thompson dismisses these inscriptions as meaningless.¹⁸ This conclusion will also be challenged in the next section.

Two human headed birds, in apparent supplication, flank the central panel. Each bird has one arm raised and holds a cup in that hand. The feathers of these human-headed birds are defined and their wings are quite distinguishable. The birds are painted blue with red wings. However, only the bird image on the left can be completely made out. The bird on the left wears the Osiris crown but is badly configured. It looks less like a sacred crown and more like an uninvited bowling pin, which has perched atop its head. The second inscription is visible just to the left of that bird's headdress. Again the script is unknown, and, like the first, its apex terminates in the beaded band separating it from the figure of the boy. The first inscription was contained within a rectangular cartouche; the second is encapsulated in an oval cartouche. The columns, which separate the anthropomorphized birds, are interesting in that the artist chose to decorate them with a spiral or rope-like pattern. The columns and the seat of the goddess again suggest the interior of a temple or mortuary.

The third register is demarcated not by beads, but by a leaved vine. It is painted to resemble gold against a red background and it is defined with black lines. The third register is startlingly different from the others. Where the other two religious sections contain traditional Egyptian iconography, the fourth is entirely alien to native Egyptian representation.

There are three visible figures in the third register. From right to left, the first figure is a bearded blond male, who stands to the far right of the composition. Seated next to the male is a raven-haired female. Little can be distinguished on the male figure due to the condition of the textile, except that he reaches toward the female figure. The female holds her arms out to a majestic human-sized bird. She may have something in her hands,

which she is offering in supplication to the bird. Her hair cascades over her shoulders, but it seems to be pinned at the nape of the neck. She is draped in a long red gown. Both the male and female have *nimbi* about their heads.

The bird faces the male and female figures with its wings stretched out behind it. Upon the bird's head is the crown of upper and lower Egypt. The crown is painted in yellow-gold. Behind the bird's crowned head is a large circle, suggesting the sun, the moon, or another *nimbus*. The background of the couple is blue and dark, and contrasts with the figures. One wonders if that is the fault of the pigments or the intent of the artist. The body of the bird is painted in three different shades of blue. Its lighter underbelly darkens to a tan on its sides and finally evolves into a bluish-gray on the wings. The artist drew scale-like feathers on the body, and the wings have clearly defined naturalistic feathers, which taper outward and upward.

The final band repeats the jewel motif from the gold frame surrounding the portrait face. Sadly, the lowest register is torn and has decayed beyond any hope of giving up its secrets. Though Thompson noted that the lowest register contains traces of the tunic and the figure's feet and ankles, this is certainly not apparent upon inspection of the shroud with the naked eye.¹⁹

3.5 Conservation and Provenance Information

Like most other unexcavated mummy portraits, this shroud has little accompanying provenance information, only that it is attributed to the Fayum region. Beyond the letter from the antiquities dealer, no other provenance information is provided in the curatorial file.

The initial letter of the antiquities brokers who represented the shroud, *Bruce and Ingrid McAlpine*, from September 7, 1978, contains little information on the mummy shroud. However, the shroud was seen by Klaus Parlasca, then at the British Museum and a known authority on Roman mummy portraits, as well as Bernard Y. Bothmer of the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The letter notes that Parlasca had already dated the shroud to c. 350 A.D. Yet, the task of fully authenticating the shroud was given to Thompson, the scholar who wrote his dissertation on Roman mummy portraits at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Thompson had been working in the field for some time and was mostly known for his work at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

In his December 11, 1978 letter to then Museum director Moussa M. Domit, Thompson dated the *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* to the first or second quarter of the fourth century and vouched for the authenticity of the object.²⁰ The object was purchased by the North Carolina Museum of Art very shortly thereafter on Thompson's recommendation.

Just after the purchase of the shroud, the Museum wisely sought expert conservation opinions and treatment. In the conservation report written by NCMA conservator Cathy Leach, she notes that

Linen has been mounted on a coarser fabric resembling burlap. Adhesive looks like animal glue. Original linen has many holes and threadbare areas. Left hand side of face has been badly mangled and reconstructed. Lower 21 inches semi-obiterated by stain which is unlikely to be reversible. A section along the right edge has been bleached. Paint layer fragmentary overall. Note: Although wood may be part of original support, linen must have been removed from it to allow insertion of backing fabric. The abrupt change where wood support ends is putting strain on the original fabric.²¹

If Leach is correct and the original linen was removed from the wooden backing and then replaced, this raises an interesting question as to why this action was taken and by whom. Unfortunately, Leach does not speculate why this took place, but only presents her inspection results. However, North Carolina Museum of Art associate conservator Noelle Ocon observed that the backing was most likely replaced by previous conservation efforts not specified in the purchase or provenance records.²²

The shroud was also examined and tested by Dr. Haskell V. Hart, then Assistant Professor of Chemistry at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. As noted above, Hart found through his chemical analysis that the pigments used were Egyptian blue, gypsum, goethite and hematite (present in the red and pink pigments), but he did not comment on the black or brown pigments. Hart confirmed the use of animal glue in fixing it to the wood panel and that common salt crystals are present in the linen fibers.²³ He concluded that the pigments were typical of those used in Roman Egypt and the salt crystals in the linen are appropriate for a shroud buried in the Fayum region.²⁴ But this leaves open the question of dating the shroud.

Thompson does not give supporting evidence for assigning the shroud a date in the first half of the fourth century in either his correspondence with the Museum or his article on the piece, which appeared in the 1980 *Bulletin of the North Carolina Museum of Art*.

Thompson's dating of the shroud may have been based on his conclusion that the figure is portrayed in a frontal pose, which he states is typical of fourth century portraits, and that it had been painted by a painter known as the "Brooklyn painter" active in the

fourth century in the Fayum near er-Rubayat.²⁵ We will review Thompson's conclusions in light of new evidence.

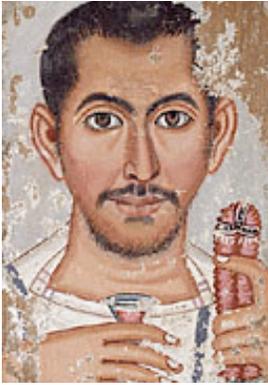


Figure 3.1 Portrait in Getty Museum

The Brooklyn painter takes his name from a mummy portrait of a young girl in the Brooklyn Museum of Art, (inv. 41.848, not shown). Further, Thompson associated another painting in the Getty Museum, *Portrait of a Man in Tempera on Wood*, with the Brooklyn Painter as well, *fig. 3.1*.

Both of these works bear a striking resemblance to the North Carolina shroud. The shape and lining of the eyes, the funerary garlands, and fingernails are all similarly depicted. However there are distinct differences. First, the North Carolina shroud is painted in tempera on linen, while the other two portraits are tempera on wood. Further, the North Carolina shroud has the frame with depictions of faux gold-encrusted jewels; this motif is completely absent from the other two paintings. The hands of the North Carolina shroud are oversized and the gestures differ. The tempera on wood portraits each have the left hand holding the garland in a vertical position, while the left hand in the North Carolina shroud holds the garland across the body. In addition, the neck of the tunic differs slightly between the shroud and the wood panels. The figure in the shroud has the bead-entwined garland around its neck, which is also absent from the other two portraits.

Susan Walker notes that there are several works attributed to the Brooklyn Painter or a school surrounding the artist. Yet, Walker has related both the Getty portrait and the Brooklyn portrait to the early to mid-second century.²⁶

That all of these works are similar may indeed point to a er-Rubayat origin for the North Carolina shroud, and perhaps the frontal pose may not be indicative of fourth century portraits at all, but of a regional or local preference.²⁷ Could it be that the *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* was painted by the same school as the others? It is possible. Corcoran has noted that shrouds with mythological scenes are consistent with burials from Hawara.²⁸ With the recent scholarship on the portraits and dating revisions, it may be possible to assign an actual er-Rubayat origin for the North Carolina shroud as well as amend its date to the third century. However, dating and provenance issues are not the only beneficiaries of recent scholarship; iconography has also been considered.

The symbology of the registers on the North Carolina shroud will be thoroughly investigated in the following section, and should yield further conclusions about this shroud.

Notes to Section Three

¹ For the standard treatment mummy portrait types see Barbara Borg, *Mumienporträts. Chronologie und Kultureller Kontext*. Philipp von Zabern Verlag, Mainz 1996, and Susan Walker in Klaus Parlasca *AugenBliche*, Hellmut Seemann Prestel (1999) Sordereinband.

² Caroline R. Cartwright, "Egyptian Mummy Portraits: The Woodworker's Craft," in *Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt*, ed. M.L. Beirbrier, (London: The British Museum Press, 1997), p. 106-109.

³ Pliny, *Natural History in Ten Volumes*, Volume IX, trans., H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library, (London, England and Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heineman LTD and Harvard University Press, (1962) 1984), p. 371. Also Euphrosyne Doxiadis, *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 1995)p. 96., note 11.

⁴ Doxiadis examines the possibility of a graver or cestrum from her own studies of the encaustic portraits and comes to the conclusion that the tool was used. Euphrosyne Doxiadis, *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 1995), p. 93.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-99. Doxiadis provides a lengthy and detailed examination of the wax encaustic technique, as she herself has reproduced the wax emulsions and worked experimentally with the methods described.

⁶ Laurie, A.P. *The Painter's Methods and Materials*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), p 171.

⁷ Susan Walker, ed., *Ancient Faces*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Routledge, 2000), p. 135.

⁸ Walker, *Ancient Faces* p. 36.

⁹ Laurie, *Painter's Methods.*, p. 6.

¹⁰ Walker, *Ancient Faces*, p. 128.

¹¹ A. Lucas and J.R. Harris, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1999), p.351.

¹² Doxiadis, *Mysterious Fayum*, p. 93.

¹³ See Lucas and Harris, *Egyptian Industries*, pp. 336-351 for a detailed description of ancient Egyptian pigments, and Doxiadis, *Mysterious Fayum*, p. 99 on the painterly use of pigments in producing faux gold effects.

¹⁴ Dr. Haskell V. Hart, "Chemical Analysis of the Fayum Portrait," in the North Carolina Museum of Art Bulletin, Volume XIV, Numbers 2 and 3, (Copyright © North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1980), p. 23.

¹⁵ See Lucas and Harris, *Egyptian Industries*, p. 344, for a description of changes to blue frit over time. Though the compound is quite stable, it is subject to discoloration.

¹⁶ David L. Thompson, "A Painted Shroud Portrait from Roman Egypt," North Carolina Museum of Art Bulletin, Volume XIV, Numbers 2 and 3, (Copyright © North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1980), p. 10.

¹⁷ This author is grateful to Regine Schulz for this observation.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10

²⁰ David L. Thompson, Howard University, Washington, D.C., to Moussa M. Domit, North Carolina Museum of Art Director, 11 December, 1978. Curatorial Files, Accession number 78.1.8., North Carolina Museum of Art.

²¹ Cathy Leach, Conservation Report, North Carolina Museum of Art, Curatorial Files, Accession number 78.1.8.

²² Noelle Ocon's conclusion was provided after a review of the curatorial files with this author, January 2004 at the North Carolina Museum of Art.

²³ Dr. Haskell V. Hart, UNC-Wilmington, NC, to Moussa Domit, North Carolina Museum of Art Director, 29 December, 1978, Curatorial Files, Accession number 78.1.8., North Carolina Museum of Art.

²⁴ Haskell, *Chemical Analysis*, p. 23.

²⁵ David L. Thomson, *The J. Paul Getty Museum: Mummy Portraits*, (California: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1982) p. 57.

²⁶ Walker, *Ancient Faces*, p 84-86.

²⁷ David L. Thomson, *the Artist of the Mummy Portraits*, (California: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1976), p. 12-17. Thomson attempts to group portraits stylistically into workshops.

²⁸ Lorelei Corcoran, *Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt (I-IV Centuries A.D.): With a Catalog of Portrait Mummies in Egyptian Museums (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, No 56.)* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1995), p. 44.

Section Four

The purpose of this section is to discuss the symbology and iconography in the *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum*. The last chapter provided a lengthy description of the work. In this chapter, we will examine the symbols and their meanings in hopes of elucidating the purpose of mummy portraiture as a funerary cult practice.

4.1 Color Symbolism and Iconography of Upper Shroud

There are three documents related to the shroud in the North Carolina Museum of Art. The first is the letter from the antiquities brokers to the Museum prior to the purchase of the object. The second is the article by Thompson announcing the acquisition of the object. The third is the article by Hart on the chemistry of the shroud in the same journal.¹

The initial letter of September 7, 1978 from the antiquities brokers to the North Carolina Museum of Art director provides the first examination of the seemingly disparate symbols contained within the shroud. The descriptive passages from the letter are reproduced below so that we may look more critically at one of the two only available written sources on the actual symbology of this particular portrait shroud.

The portrait shows a young man with short, cropped hair and with a thin moustache which is symbolic of this status between youth and the full maturity of the manly beard, which is usual in the portraits of adults. In his hand he holds a libation cup and in his left a bunched-up garland. This latter is a common funerary symbol and was made of rose petals threaded on to a thin cord. On his left shoulder is embroidered a swastika: a very ancient 'lucky' sign, but still not fully explained in its origins.

The shroud is remarkable for its extensive pictorial scenes on the body. The first register shows the goddess Isis with wings outstretched, standing guard over the mummified body of the deceased, which lies on a sacred boat bearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. In each hand she holds a sistrum, a

ritual musical instrument. To the right stands the jackal god Anubis, the god of death.

In the second register the goddess is seated on a throne suckling the infant Horus. Above the bull is an inscription in late hieratic and to the right is a Ba bird symbolizing the soul of the deceased.

In the third register the goddess is again seated and facing a remarkable representation of a bird, again presumably, the Ba bird symbolizing the dead man's soul. The bird wears the double crown of the two Egypts and its head appears to be surrounded by a halo. This painting is totally unlike any normal Egyptian representations of birds (see the above register) and is a clear link to the Western tradition of art.

Although the symbolism is almost exclusively pagan in inspiration, the pictorial representation of these symbols and particularly the painting of the youth himself is an interesting example of the way in which the Fayum portrait can be a bridge between the Oriental Egyptian style of art and the beginning of the European tradition that leads through to the present day. Professor Parlasca has dated the piece to just around 350 AD.²

The McAlpines were exceedingly well informed on this particular shroud and made some interesting observations; however, some will be challenged below. Thompson does not refute or contradict the McAlpines. Instead he adds to their description with the eyes of an expert. We will go through the important symbols and note Thompson's additions along the way.

Robert S. Bianchi rightly notes that there was purpose in each sign, symbol, and hieroglyph in Egyptian art.³ That this practice continued into the Greco-Roman period is clear from the significance of the symbols used on portrait shrouds.⁴ Therefore, we will posit that the symbols on the *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* do indeed have meaning. Therefore, it follows that color as an extension of symbol also has meaning.⁵ A full discussion of Egyptian color symbolism is not our main purpose here; therefore we will simply tease out the most important aspects of color symbolism used in this shroud as we examine the iconography in detail.

We will begin with the blue surrounding the head of the figure on the shroud. We have already established in the last chapter that it is indeed Egyptian blue frit, but what is its meaning and why was it used? Blue has been used on funerary headdresses throughout Egyptian history. One only has to recall the luxurious blue glass inlays of Tutankhamun's famous golden funerary mask as an immediate reminder of this practice. Blue was used to paint the heavens on tomb walls and denote the waters of the celestial sea across which all the dead must sail to reach the afterlife. Thus the Fayum artist draws upon a long native Egyptian tradition by setting the framed-head of the deceased against a blue background, here symbolizing the afterlife and resurrection.⁶ There are several *ba*-bird figures on the mummy portrait painted in blue tones. This is not surprising since the spirit of the individual was expecting to be reborn into the afterlife. Four freestanding bird figures can be seen on the shroud, and the funerary bier is made from the arched back of two avian forms. In the second register, flanking the bull figure, are two human-headed birds who gesture toward the central panel. These human-headed birds must represent the *bau* (plural form of *ba*) of gods since the one on the left is crowned and we can only assume that its partner on the right would have been crowned as well.

The *ba* is nearly always considered the ancient Egyptian equivalent of the soul and it represented the divine essence in man.⁷ It is, however, more complex than that. For the ancient Egyptians believed that the person was made up of two non-physical entities, the *ka* and the *ba*. Further, the funerary spells said over the dead were to assist the *ba* to evolve into an *akh*. Each individual possessed an exact spiritual duplicate, which needed all of the life-giving necessities that a human would need, including food, drink, and shelter. The *ka* was freed from body upon death, but was still bound to remain close to it

in the tomb. Thus it was the *ka* that would consume offerings left in tombs, and need the items left as grave goods. The *ba* was the spirit of the individual, not just his soul, but all aspects of the individual's personality. The *ba* was not in its final form. It needed aid by magical means to turn into *akh* so that it could remain forever in the afterlife and never perish.⁸ The gods also had *bau*. The Apis bull was considered the *ba* of Ptah as well as Osiris, while Osiris, himself was considered the *ba* of Re.⁹ That the concept of *ba* as the soul awaiting transformation and resurrection was still extant during the Greco-Roman period is clear from temple inscriptions and papyri.¹⁰ Clearly, the number of *ba*-figures on the shroud suggests that the artist was aware of the importance of this symbol.

Besides blue, another dominant color in the shroud is pink. It appears in the garland around the neck, in the pink-hued cup, and in the garland the figure holds in his left hand. Unlike the McAlpines above, Thompson refrains from specifying that the garlands are made from rose petals, only that they are "floral" and that these types of symbols are frequent in shrouds from the early third through the fourth century.¹¹

Lorelei Corcoran notes that roses were not a traditional flower in Pharaonic Egypt because the species was not introduced into the country until the Ptolemaic period.¹² She does, however, note that garlands and wreaths drawn in red have solar significance and may relate to rebirth.¹³ Flowers such as lotuses and papyrus buds were, however, important in traditional funerary art and often represented rebirth.¹⁴ Further, as Corcoran shows, wreaths had symbolic significance and were included in the funerary equipment as a sign of solar transformation, union with divinity, and association with Isis.¹⁵

It is Apuleius as Lucius who tells us, in *The Golden Ass*, that roses are sacred to Isis in this delightful account of Lucius' nightly encounter with the goddess during his

final hour of despair. Isis tells Lucius that her priest will carry rose garlands tied to the rattle, the sacred instrument of Isis, during a festival procession. Isis instructs Lucius to eat those roses, which will then restore him to his human form.¹⁶ In this story, written during the second century, roses symbolize transformation. They can even be considered the instrument of Lucius' rebirth into the Isiac faith since, as a result of this encounter with Isis, he becomes an initiate into her mystery cult. That the pink garland depicted in the shroud is probably meant to represent rose petals is wholly consistent with the other symbolic references to Isis within the shroud as well as the late date of its composition.

Both Thompson and Corcoran have established that the cup held in the figure's hand is a libation cup.¹⁷ The question now before us is why is the cup pink? Is it likely that the color has faded and it was originally meant to be red? This seems unlikely since the red color of the faux stones and the red stripes of the faux cross-hatch linen pattern remain a deep and vibrant red. Therefore, we should assume that the color was intended by the artist to be pink, and that it possessed a symbolic meaning. The color red in ancient Egypt had many connotations; among them were blood, chaos and destruction as well as life and rebirth.¹⁸ As Egyptians were well aware of blending pigments, they were also well aware of opposites. When artists added white, the color of purity and holiness, to red they achieved two important results, the negative in the red was neutralized, and the secondary color took on a new spiritual significance of rebirth, resurrection and transformation.¹⁹

Thus, like the numerous *bau* on the shroud, the pink color of the garlands and the cup are important symbolic references to rebirth and resurrection. Further, one must

assume that their inclusion on this shroud magically serves to assist the deceased in this pursuit.

The appearance of a swastika on the shroud is an interesting addition. Both the McAlpines and Thompson note that the symbol may have been embroidered, but there is no trace of raised thread on the shroud.²⁰ Further, it is painted red, but the pigment does not show up under infra-red analysis. Therefore, whatever pigment was used to paint or stamp the symbol, it does not contain carbon.²¹ Samples of this pigment have yet to be analyzed by chemists; therefore it is unclear what substance the ancient artist used to paint this design. The placement of the swastika is on the left side of the figure and the swastika's rotation toward the right suggests positive connotations.

Swastikas appear in the artwork many different ancient cultures across the Mediterranean. They were used on Greek vases extensively, but the origins of the symbol remain elusive to scholars. Further, there can be no ultimate answer to the question, what does the swastika symbolize in ancient Egypt? The sign does not appear in Egypt prior to the Hellenistic period, and it is not an Egyptian symbol. Thus the Greeks may have introduced it into Egypt, and the swastika may have possessed many meanings. Of them, regeneration would seem the most important aspect for its inclusion on the portrait shroud. Other meanings include references to the sun or moon, mystic center, white magic (if clockwise), black magic (if counter-clockwise), number symbolism, and protection from the evil eye.²²

4.2 First Register

Let us now examine the individual portrayed in the shroud. As noted in the previous chapter, the eyes of the figure are as disproportionately large as are the hands. It is doubtful that the artist was not adept at painting with perspective, but did so to emphasize a spiritual representation of the deceased rather than an exact likeness.²³ There is however an important clue as to the age of the individual, which is the only characteristic we can extract from this painted portrait. The artist has painted in a slight moustache. There may even be whiskers upon the young man's chin; it is hard to determine whether the shadow under the lips is meant to represent the chin's indentation or a slight beard. According to Dominic Montserrat, the inclusions of the moustache puts the age of the individual between fourteen and early twenties. However, he does maintain that portrait shrouds may not be realistic depictions of individuals, but instead may be depictions of an idealized representation of the individual as belonging to a certain social class.²⁴ He further suggests that the practice of adorning the youth with a moustache reflects a traditionally Greek cultural significance of males coming of age. Given the tendency of native Egyptians toward hairlessness, the facial hair on the youths of the portraits seems to identify them as Greco-Egyptians.²⁵

More importantly, Montserrat notes the appearance of a swastika on the shoulder of one of the figures in the second-century *Tondo of the Two Brothers* found at Antinoöpolis and now in the Cairo Museum. Montserrat maintains that the swastika may in fact have phallic connotations as it relates to the *gamma* $_$ of the Greek Alphabet, since swastikas appear to be made from four *gammae* and were associated with Apollo, the sun god, in Greek tradition. That phallic worship did exist in ancient Greece on the

mainland is not in question, nor is the existence of phallic representations unheard of in Pharaonic Egypt. However, Montserrat further suggests that perhaps the swastika on this tondo reflects not only male virility but perhaps even the cause of death of the two brothers represented in the tondo, who may have drowned while participating in the ‘cult of the drowned.’²⁶ This is hard to accept. It seems more likely that the swastika was added as a symbol of rebirth. It is included along with other resurrection and rebirth iconography in the *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum*, which is at least a century older than the tondo.

But we may accept an important interpretation of Montserrat: the representation of the figure reflects a desire to portray him as a member of a socially distinct class. This is apparent in the jeweled frame around his head and the inclusion of a purple strip or *clavi*, apparently fashionable at the time. Thompson also notes that narrow *clavi* are typical of mummy portraits from the Er-Rubayat region in the Fayum.²⁷ A.F. Shore maintains that these *clavi* have no special purpose regarding social status or rank. However, Thompson stated that the tunic style is Roman.²⁸ But, as we have shown, little on these portraits was unintentional. Roman society was class driven; therefore, dress would have been a principal means of identification of social rank. Thus it seems likely that the Roman garb of the figure is as important as the other elements.

Let us now take a closer look at the first register, which shows a winged goddess standing over the funerary bier, which supports a mummy. For such a small register, there is much going on here. The image of the traditionally wrapped and masked mummy contrasts sharply with the fresh-faced boy of the shroud. Presumably, both figures are mummies, but why include an image of a traditional mummy? Hopefully, the

answer will be forthcoming. Further, although the winged deity has been identified as Isis, it is possible that it is another goddess. The vulture headdress was associated with aspects of the sky and heaven in their relation to divinity. Any female deity or Egyptian queen could have worn the vulture headdress. However, in later times the vulture headdress, like the horns of Hathor, were associated with Isis.²⁹ This makes perfect sense as Isis was the supreme mother goddess of the late ancient world.

The McAlpines and Thompson both state that the objects in the winged deities hands are *sistra*, or ancient rattles. Below are images of the two different types of *sistra*. Note the symmetry of the both the hoop and *naos* rattles, *figs.* 4.1 and 4.2.

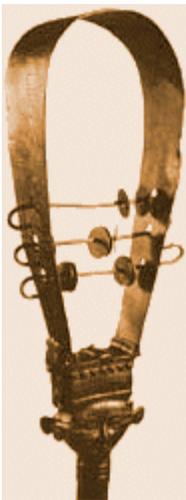


Figure 4.1 Hoop Sistrum



Figure 4.2 Naos Sistrum

According to Plutarch, *sistra* have the power to keep away Typhon or chaos.³⁰

Further he tell us,

The upper part of the sistrum is circular and its circumference contains the four things that are shaken; for that part of the world which undergoes reproduction and destruction is contained underneath the orb of the moon and all things are subjected to the moon.... At the top of the sistrum they construct the figure of a cat with a human face, and at the bottoms, below the things that are

shaken, the face of Isis on one side, and on the other the face of Nephthys. By these faces they symbolize birth and death.³¹

Such a symbol would seem appropriate in funerary iconology. However, compared with the object held in the winged deity's hands on the North Carolina portrait shroud below, the difference is clear. The shape of the objects does not match that of the two known forms of *sistra*. There can be no doubt that what the goddess is holding is a feather, probably meant as a *maat* feather. Originally, Maat was the symbol of order, truth, ethics, and culture. Further, Maat symbolized harmony and balance. The pharaoh, in his role as divine mediator between the gods and man, was charged with upholding maat as the ordering principle of the universe. Later in Egyptian history, Maat became personified as a goddess. However, in iconography Maat is most always depicted as a feather or with a feather headdress, when personified.³²



Figure 4.3 Infra-red image from *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum*

The appearance of a *maat* feather has a long tradition in Egyptian funerary art. The heart of the deceased was weighed against the *maat* feather in the “Weighing of the

heart ceremony” before Osiris. The shape of the object and its striations match more clearly the lines of feathers as in this image of the goddess Maat below.



Fig. 4.4 Maat, New Kingdom

The winged deity then is Isis, and she holds two *maat* feathers over the body. Traditional mummy case decoration often included a scene in which the deceased stands before the scales in the company of the forty-two deities standing witness to the judgment of Osiris and the “Weighing of the heart” ceremony. Therefore, it may be that this scene on the North Carolina shroud usurps that necessity and instead gives this ceremonial power to Isis. There is no doubt that *sistra* were indeed associated with Isis. Further, it may be noted that *sistra* are often included in the decoration of female mummies.³³

We have already discussed the avian aspects of the funerary bier. The importance of the deceased identified with Osiris and crossing the waters to reach the underworld in the western heavens is as old as the Pyramid Texts.³⁴ However, the bier or barque on which the mummy lies is unique thus far in portrait shroud symbology. It could be the artist’s imagination at work, or it could be a crude imitation of collars terminating in Horus heads, known from ancient Egypt as well as on another mummy portrait.³⁵ However, it may be that the concentric round forms which support the mummy could have some greater significance. Since round concentric forms relate to the hieroglyphs

for the sun as well as the moon, it is possible that they have solar or lunar associations.³⁶ Thus the bier could represent the solar barque of Re in his heavenly journey across the night skies, and his triumph each morning with the return of the rising sun. This is yet another allusion to rebirth.

4.3 Second Register

The second register is also rather fascinating for it upholds traditional Egyptian iconography, but at the same time moves beyond convention and incorporates later Graeco-Roman symbology as well. The central panel depicts a female deity seated on a chair suckling a dark black bull. The scene is book-ended by a pair of human-headed birds who hold a lustration cup in gesture toward the goddess and bull.

The McAlpines and Thompson both note that the bull is Horus. From the text quoted above, the McAlpines state that Isis “is seated on a throne suckling the infant Horus.” While Thompson notes that Isis “is enthroned and suckling the infant Horus who is shown here as a bull.”³⁷ Because the image offends modern sensibilities, the bull is immediately assumed to be Horus simply because Egyptian mythology tells us that Horus was the son of Isis. There are no other references to Horus on this portrait shroud (excepting perhaps, a bird sign discussed in the section on inscriptions below). Further, there are no protection *udjat* symbols associated with the eye of Horus. *Udjat* symbols were typically ubiquitous in traditional Egyptian funerary decoration.³⁸ Another absence is notable; there no falcons are present. The birds illustrated on the mummy shroud bear no resemblance to the majestic Horus falcons and hawks of tradition. The falcon-god is as old as the first city of Heirakonpolis and was probably the totem of one of the clans

who took power in Early Dynastic Egypt.³⁹ Horus was the sky-god par excellence in the Egyptian pantheon. He was the celestial falcon, and ruler of all Egypt. Later, when the cult of Osiris took prominence, Horus was incorporated into the theology as the son and avenger of Osiris.⁴⁰ Further, Horus remained an important god in Egyptian religion throughout the Pharaonic era. His four sons were even the guardians of the internal organs of the mummified dead. Horus was considered the helper or guardian of the dead, and people called upon him in this aspect.⁴¹ Why the omission then on this shroud? The answer to that question involves delving more deeply into the importance of the bull in ancient Egyptian culture, and the evolution of the bull cult in the Greco-Roman period.

Like the falcon, the bull may have been an early totem. But unlike Horus, the hawk-headed god, there is no bull-headed deity in the Egyptian pantheon.⁴² The bull was admired for its strength, its virility and its ferocity early on in Egyptian religion, as bull burials have been uncovered at Hierakonpolis. A cult center existed at Saqqara, the burial grounds of Memphis, as far back as the first dynasty.⁴³ In the Pyramid Texts, a bull with four horns who guarded the roads to heaven is associated with Re, the sun god.⁴⁴ Bull cults existed throughout Egypt's long history.

There were three main bull cults co-existing in Egypt, but only one bull at a time could serve as the incarnation of any one of the deities, and it was chosen according to certain marks. There was the Bucchis bull, sacred to the gods Mont and Re, the Mnevis bull sacred to Min and Re, and the Apis, who was sacred to Ptah.⁴⁵ The Mnevis bull was regarded as the mediator of Atum, the Bucchis was the image of Mont, who was also an aspect of Re, and the Apis was the *ba* or soul of Ptah. Each of these bulls was considered incarnations of the deities to whom they were sacred. When the Apis bull died, he

became Osiris. In time, the Apis bull was seen as a living manifestation of Osiris. Further, these animals were so sacred that the ancient Egyptians devoted temples, priesthoods, and finally a mummification service upon death.⁴⁶ The remains of mummified bulls have been found with diamond-patterned linen wrappings, dated to the Greco-Roman period.⁴⁷ Yet, already by the New Kingdom, the Apis and Osiris had been merged by the priesthood of Memphis. The Apis was considered to possess the *ba* of Osiris, and Osiris was known as “the bull of the west.”⁴⁸

However, when Ptolemy established his dynasty in Egypt, the new Greek rulers wished to create a deity that Egyptians could worship and equate with the Greek gods. Greek immigrants to the country could recognize some traces of their own supreme god in the new deity.⁴⁹ Thus Serapis was born, a construct created by the new dynasty drawing upon purely Egyptian religious traditions, but in a Greek form.⁵⁰ Known as either Zeus or Hades to the Greeks, Serapis, from Osiris-Apis, which his name itself derives, was the all-mighty god of the underworld to the Egyptians.⁵¹

The great temple in Alexandria, the Serapeum, was the Greco-Egyptian cult center for this new god, who was not really new at all. Together with the rising popularity of the Isis mystery cult during the Ptolemaic Period, Serapis as Osiris was unparalleled as the god of the underworld. With the conquest of Egypt by the Romans, the cult of Isis and Serapis not only spread throughout the Mediterranean, but also became the most important cult in Egypt. The Apis, in its manifestation of Osiris, remained an important part of it. Further, the mother of the Apis-bull was known as the Isis-cow. This creature was also honored and mummified. To the people of Egypt, the Apis-bull and the Isis-cow

were sacred manifestations of Osiris and Isis, the mother-goddess, and were revered as such.⁵²

Osiris was usually depicted in Egyptian iconography with human features, though with the linen-wrapped body of a mummy. He was known as *useru* meaning “the mighty one” in ancient Egyptian.⁵³ Though Osiris was not himself depicted as a bull, he could be in other manifestations. Horus is only occasionally known in depictions as a bull; usually it is in association with his role as the divine king, while the human king is often equated with bulls. When not depicted with his hawk-head, Horus could take the form of a lion or bull, but only in his manifestation of Menti, a god of war.⁵⁴ However, given the lack of other symbolic references to Horus on the mummy shroud, it is unlikely that the bull is meant to represent Horus.

Further, the color of the bull on the North Carolina shroud is a deep dark black. Black symbolizes the underworld, night and death. Osiris was also known as “the black one.”⁵⁵ In early Egypt, Osiris was also associated with the flood and the regenerating black soil; therefore he is sometimes depicted with a black flesh, and sometimes with a green flesh, green being the color of renewal and regeneration.⁵⁶ According to Herodotus, the Apis “has certain features: it is black, except for a white diamond on its forehead, and an image of an eagle on its back, its tail hairs are double, and it has a beetle shaped mark under its tongue.”⁵⁷ Since the shroud is too decayed, we cannot see the details of the head and forehead which Herodotus discussed, but we can certainly see the dark black of the bull’s coat. There seems to be the remaining outline of some type of headdress or crown on the bull’s head. Yet, it is not the sun-disk, which often adorned the heads of Apis bulls in the Late Period.⁵⁸ It appears to be more informal, almost a garland.

Here we have Isis, giving life to the bull, suckling the creature just as she would if she were the Isis-cow. However, her headdress is not her usual throne headdress, or perhaps it is a poor rendering of it. It may even resemble the hieroglyph for a shrine or a tomb.⁵⁹ Certainly, the walls behind the goddess and the bull depict an interior. Therefore, it follows that the artist of the portrait shroud intended the scene to take place inside the tomb.

Isis was said to revive Osiris after his dismemberment by Seth. Further, Isis and Osiris were brother and sister as well as husband and wife. However, Isis is also the supreme mother goddess, while her original attribute was the throne. As the throne she gave birth to Horus the divine king; she revived Osiris by magical means, thus bestowing life to him. Bewildering as it may seem to moderns, Isis was at once the wife, sister and mother of Osiris and the Egyptians had little trouble with this concept.⁶⁰ Therefore, the blending of Isis and the Isis-cow with Apis and Osiris is in keeping with Egyptian tradition.

More likely it is yet another reference to rebirth and resurrection. Just as a new Apis bull would rise to take the place of the dead and former Apis bull, the soul of deceased, with the life-giving power of Isis, will be reborn just like Osiris. It was more than important for the deceased to become identified with Osiris. It was absolutely critical to be portrayed as one with Osiris in order to obtain his protection and achieve resurrection in the afterlife.⁶¹ Therefore, it is doubtful that the bull on this shroud is an aspect of Horus. Much more likely, it is the deceased in the guise of Osiris-Apis undergoing revivification via the life-generating magical powers of Isis.

Also important to this investigation of the shroud are the two inscriptions visible in this register. The first inscription is contained within a cartouche and is positioned above the bull's back (Plate 5). This cartouche contains signs derived from hieroglyphs. Two scholars have reviewed these signs and concluded that the inscription above the bull does indeed have meaning.

Regine Schulz has suggested that the ankh symbol is often written in conjunction with a bull's head. Together, these signs may refer to the "Living Hapi" or Hapi-Apis in association with Isis and Serapis.⁶²

Richard Jasnow has also reviewed the signs, and noted their unusual configuration. Unlike traditional hieroglyphs where signs are to be read by the direction they face, some signs on the shroud face right while others face left. However, he determined that meaning is inherent within individual signs, but if read together, the signs do not form a comprehensible passage. For example, Jasnow has identified an ox head and perhaps the sign for bread. According to Jasnow, these signs may represent the words from a well-known offering prayer used in funerary settings; yet, the full text for the prayer is absent. Also, Jasnow identified what may be either a Horus- sign or a m-owl.

Therefore, Jasnow concludes that these signs do indeed have meaning and that the artist purposefully included them for their suitability in a funerary shroud. Jasnow has also speculated that the word for "milk" has been included and may refer to the suckling scene, while another sign may indicate a jar or vase, perhaps a container for milk or wine. However, Jasnow would not conclude specific references between the signs and the scene with Isis and the bull.⁶³

Upon Jasnow's suggestion, the other inscription (Plate 6) was reviewed by Duke papyrologist Joshua Sosin, who concluded that the signs were "Greek-like" but nothing intelligible could be derived from them.⁶⁴ The informed conclusions of Schulz, Jasnow, and Sosin indicate that the artist who painted the inscriptions was aware of traditional Egyptian signs used for funerary art, but was neither fully literate in either Egyptian nor proficient in Greek. This supposition is supported by historical evidence that scribes in villages may not have been fully trained in either language.⁶⁵

4.4 Third Register

The third visible register seems to have no equal in shroud portraiture or in Greek painting tradition. It is unique in its iconography. There are three figures in this scene, and the linen is badly damaged so details are missing. However, there are several important differences between this scene and the other two registers. The first is the natural appearance and position of the male and female figures. They are fluid and are much more realistic images; they stand in stark contrast to the staunchly posed figures from the Egyptian scene above. The hair color of the male is light, almost as if the artist drew him as a blond. The female, on the other hand, has dark black hair. Both figures possess haloes or *nimbi*. Egyptian and Greek artists did not give their deities or honored personalities *nimbi*. It was a purely Roman device, and they used it only for gods or emperors.⁶⁶ The artist must have been familiar with Roman designs in order to include the *nimbi* and has the same ability to portray figures with realism, even if somewhat idealized. That the artist chose to fill the third register with an entirely different style of imagery from the two above must have some significance.

4.5 Composition as a Whole

Let us examine the entire composition more closely. The two figures are facing a large crowned bird. The bird is not a hawk, nor does it resemble any other bird in the Egyptian canon. It is almost life-size in comparison with the other two figures, and again the bird's body has hues of gray and blue. The McAlpines state that the bird also has a halo, but the proportion of the halo to the bird in relation to the proportion of the *nimbi* on the other two figures is unbalanced. It seems as if the bird, instead, stands in front of the sun. The bird is crowned. Usually, *ba*-birds were not crowned. In addition, the entire scene appears to be taking place outside, there are no architectural borders like the previous two registers. The remains of a background can be seen, and the same blue frit is apparent in the upper left corner of the composition, giving the scene the illusion of the sky above. Could it be that the afterlife itself is being represented here? The expression on the faces of the human figures is hard to discern, but the setting is not one of sorrow, but of liberation.

Borg and Corcoran have both established that registers on other mummy shrouds have meaning, and that artists intended the images to reflect religious belief and ritual transformation.⁶⁷ With this already established, what might this mean for our shroud? It seems likely that we can conclude that together the registers depict the magical transformation of the young man portrayed in the mummy shroud from his mummification in the first register, to his revivification in the second, to his resurrection into the afterlife in the third register.

As we have seen, each symbol and color on the shroud references resurrection. The scenes each possess an individual narrative pertinent to the traditional cult of the dead in Egyptian religion with numerous Isiac and Osirian images present on the shroud. By reviewing the historical and religious climate surrounding the *Portrait Shroud from the Fayum* and in examining the work in detail, we can now draw some new conclusions and place this work in a narrower cultural context.

Notes To Section Four

¹ David L. Thompson, "A Painted Shroud Portrait from Roman Egypt," and Haskell V. Hart, "Chemical Analysis of the Fayum Portrait," in *North Carolina Museum of Art Bulletin*, Volume XIV, Numbers 2 and 3, (Copyright © North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1980).

² Bruce and Ingrid McAlpine, London, to NCMA Director Moussa M. Domit, September 7, 1978. Curatorial Files, Accession number 78.1.8., North Carolina Museum of Art.

³ Robert Steven Bianchi, "Ancient Egyptian Reliefs, Statuary, and Monumental Paintings," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. IV, (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillian, Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1995), 2533.

⁴ Borg, *Dead*, p 27. Borg notes the importance and meanings on portrait shrouds and argues that such scenes were particularly chosen to reflect certain beliefs.

⁵ Richard H. Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art*, (London, Thames and Hudson, 1994), p. 104.

⁶ Wilkerson, *Symbols.*, p. 107.

⁷ Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. John Baines. (Ithaca< New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 242.

⁸ Christine El-Mahdy, *Mummies, Myth and Magic*, (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1998), p. 12-13.

⁹ Richard H. Wilkerson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 2003), p. 171.

¹⁰ Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 42-43.

¹¹ David L. Thompson, "A Painted Shroud Portrait from Roman Egypt," *North Carolina Museum of Art Bulletin*, Volume XIV, Numbers 2 and 3, (Copyright © North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1980), p.7.

¹² Lorelei Corcoran, *Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt (I-IV Centuries A.D.): With a Catalog of Portrait Mummies in Egyptian Museums (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, No 56.)* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1995), p. 63.

¹³ Corcoran, *Portrait*, p. 51

¹⁴ Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson in association with the British Museum, *The Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, (London and New York: the British Museum Press and Harry N. Abrams, 1995), p. 164.

¹⁵ Corcoran, *Portrait*, p. 63.

¹⁶ Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. P.G. Walsh. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 221.

¹⁷ Thompson, *Bulletin*, p. 7 and Corcoran, *Portrait*, p. 60-61. Corcoran notes that the cup represents the possibility that the deceased may have been an initiate into the Isiac cult.

¹⁸ Wilkinson, *Symbol*, p. 106.

¹⁹ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. John Buchanan-Brown. (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996), 813-814.

- ²⁰ McAlpine, to NCMA, Thompson, *Bulletin*, p. 7.
- ²¹ An infra-red survey of the shroud and its analysis was performed on October 12, 2003 by North Carolina Museum of Art associate conservator Noelle Ocon. Ocon informed this writer that only pigments that contain carbon are picked up by the infra-red camera.
- ²² Chevalier, *Penguin*, p. 956 and Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols & Imagery*, (Amsterdam and London: Holland Publishing Company, 1984).
- ²³ Christina Riggs, "Funerary Art of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt," in *American Journal of Archaeology*, Volume 106, No. 1, January 2002, p. 95.
- ²⁴ Dominic Montserrat, "Young Males in 'Fayum Portraits,'" in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Volume 79, 1993, p. 217.
- ²⁵ Montserrat, *Young Males*, p. 220-221.
- ²⁶ Montserrat, *Young Males*, p. 221. Montserrat has a footnote here to Mark Thorn, *Taboo No More: The Phallus in Fact, Fantasy, and Fictio*, (New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1990), p. 94. Thorn's work is neither a serious work, nor a scholarly analysis of the history of phallic symbology, so the association between the swastika on Fayum portraits and phallic symbology remains tenuous at best.
- ²⁷ David. L. Thompson, *Mummy Portraits in the J. Paul Getty Museum*, (California: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1982), p. 42.
- ²⁸ A.F. Shore, *Portrait Painting from Roman Egypt*. (London: The British Museum, 1962), 15, and Thompson, *Bulletin*, p. 7.
- ²⁹ Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1992), p.85.
- ³⁰ Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," in *Moralia*, Volume V: 63.
- ³¹ Plutarch, *Moralia*, V: 63.
- ³² Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*. (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 2003), p.150.
- ³³ Lorelei Corocoran, "Mysticism and the Mummy Portraits" in *Portraits and Masks*, p. 48. Corocoran notes that sistra often appear on mummy portraits of females who may be initiates into the Isis cults.
- ³⁴ Pyramid Texts, Utterance 267 in Adolf Erman, *The Ancient Egyptians A Sourcebook of their Writings*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), p. 3.
- ³⁵ An example of this collar can be found on the Portrait mummy of the Younger Artemidorus, encaustic on panel with gold leaf, in the British Museum, EA21810. (See Doxiadis 1995, pl. 57,58.)
- ³⁶ E.A. Wallis Budge, *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary*, Vol. I, (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), p.cxxiv-cxxv.
- ³⁷ Thomspon, *Bulletin*, p. 10.
- ³⁸ The *udjat* or *wedjat* eye is a protective symbol and represents the Eye of Horus, pulled out in his battle with Seth, but restored by Thoth. It has lunar associations as well. See Lurker, *Gods*, p. 129.
- ³⁹ Michael Rice, *The Power of the Bull*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 118.
- ⁴⁰ Lurker, *Gods*, p. 65.
- ⁴¹ E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* in Two Volumes, Vol. 2., (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1969), p. 490
- ⁴² Rice, *Power*, 125.
- ⁴³ Rice, *Power*, 118.
- ⁴⁴ Pyramid Text, Utterance 470 ad noted in Manfred Lurker, *An Illustrated Dictionary of The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1980), p. 36.
- ⁴⁵ El Mahdy, *Mummies*, p. 168-9.
- ⁴⁶ Wilkinson, *Complete*, p.1717-172.
- ⁴⁷ El Mahdy, *Mummies*,p. 169.
- ⁴⁸ Budge, *Gods 2*, p. 195.
- ⁴⁹ Wilkinson, *Complete*, p. 127-8.
- ⁵⁰ Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, (Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1996), p. 77.
- ⁵¹ Budge, *Gods 2*, p.197-198.
- ⁵² Wilkinson, *Complete*, p. 170-171, and El Mahdy, *Mummies*, p. 166.
- ⁵³ Wilkinson, *Complete*, p. 118.
- ⁵⁴ Budge, *Gods 2*, p 473, 498.

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- ⁵⁵ Wilkerson, *Symbol*, p. 109.
- ⁵⁶ Wilkinson, *Symbol*, p. 108-109, and Lurker, *Gods*, p. 93.
- ⁵⁷ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 3:28.
- ⁵⁸ Wilkerson, *Complete*, p. 171.
- ⁵⁹ Budge, *Dictionary*, p. cxxvii.
- ⁶⁰ R.E. Witt, *Isis in the Ancient World*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 p. 44.
- ⁶¹ Borg, *Dead*, p. 28.
- ⁶² Regine Schulz very graciously examined the arguments set forth in this paper and reviewed the inscriptions. Schulz concluded that the signs derive from hieroglyphs for Hapi and Hapi's association with Isis and Serapis.
- ⁶³ Richard Jasnow reviewed the inscriptions via digital images sent electronically, and provided his conclusions in an email message on Monday, February 9, 2004. This writer is grateful to Dr. Jasnow for lending his expertise for this study.
- ⁶⁴ Josh Sosin reviewed the left inscription via digital images sent electronically, and provided his conclusions in an email message on February 20, 2004. This writer is also grateful to Dr. Sosin for lending his expertise for this study.
- ⁶⁵ Naptali Lewis, *Life in Egypt Under Roman Egypt*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 82.
- ⁶⁶ James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects & Symbols in Art*, (Colorado and England: Westview Press, 1979), 144.
- ⁶⁷ Borg, *Dead*, p. 27 and Corcoran, *Portrait*, p. 58 and "Mysticism and Mummy Portraits" in *Portraits and Masks*, p. 47.

Conclusions

Scholarship on the portraits has stressed that the mummy portrait phenomenon is the product of native Egyptian funerary beliefs adopted by the Macedonian Greek settlers, who strove to depict themselves as Roman, so that they might enjoy the benefits of an afterlife in the guise of their desired class. This paper has shown that the *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum* is an important document of religious history. This study of the shroud has revealed its cohesive iconographical structure, which relates it to the cult of Isis/Serapis and adjusts its date from the fourth to the third century. Further, it may be possible to assign an er-Rubayat provenance for this shroud based on its stylistic features.

To recap, we will begin with a review of the points related to the Osirian-Serapion imagery. First, there is the suggestion by Regine Schulz that the signs in the inscription derive from the hieroglyphs for “Living Hapi” or Hapi-Apis, which include the ankh sign and were commonly associated with Isis and Serapis.¹ The Egyptian priesthood kept knowledge of hieroglyphs and hieratic signs for many centuries, and stone inscriptions upon temple walls would certainly still have been visible. Though Bagnell grudgingly admits that the Egyptian language was still known to the temple priesthood, he argues that native Egyptians had lost all knowledge of their own written script. However, Takács suggests that in order for Egyptian rituals to work, the Egyptian language had to be used.² It is likely that the scribe who inscribed the work had some understanding of native Egyptian hieroglyphs and its derivatives can be demonstrated simply by the presence of a recognizable *ankh* in the shroud.

Further, the appearance of the adult bull in its suckling position in relation to the goddess Isis must be viewed in its association with the Apis bull. The link between Osiris and Apis has been already established above. The link between Horus and the bull is tenuous at best. Clearly, the bull is Osiris-Apis, or as he was known in Late Antiquity, Serapis. A final depiction of Serapis appears in the third register as he stands beside a female, who can only be Isis. The pair was always linked together in underworld associations.

Next, let us look at the composition as a narrative. Corcoran and Borg have demonstrated the coherence of symbolism on mummy portrait cases and mummy portrait shroud iconography. However, Corcoran believes that the registers should be read from bottom to top, while Borg asserts that registers should be read from top to bottom.³ In the case of the *Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum*, the composition can have no other interpretation than being read from top to bottom.

In the first register, the mummy of the individual lies on a bier protected by Isis with outstretched winged arms. The scene occurs inside a tomb since there is what appears to be stone masonry in the background. The mummy is inert but demonstrates a link to Osiris as a human-headed mummy, yet dressed with a traditional funerary mask. In the second register, the scene is framed by walls and vertical elements suggesting again a temple or tomb. Isis is seated on a throne or chair, flanked by two lustrating human-headed birds. The deceased, now in the form of a bull, is the *ba* of Osiris in the guise of the Apis bull as he suckles life-giving milk from the breast of Isis, queen of heaven, consort of Osiris-Apis as Serapis. In the third register, the haloed figures of Isis and Serapis face the deceased who has now been resurrected in the form of a crowned *ba*

bird. The gesture of the bird's vast outstretched wings imply freedom and release, while the blue background, the lack of any architectural elements, and the haloed figures suggest a scene that is taking place in an outdoor paradise. The deceased has achieved, through identification with Osiris-Apis, resurrection and rebirth into afterlife bliss. Such scenes would not make sense if read in any other sequence.

The individual for whom this mummy portrait shroud was commissioned must have been from a wealthy family from the Fayum, as the costs of funerary accoutrements would not have been affordable to the lower classes. That the individuals who commissioned the piece believed in an afterlife is clear from the number of rebirth and resurrection symbols which appear on the shroud. The desire to include native and traditional hieroglyphic signs suggests that the deceased took part in the Isiac-Serapion mystery religion. Further, the appearance of the Hellenistic swastika symbol, the Greek wreath, and the Roman style *clavi* indicate that the family of the deceased were Hellenized nobles who took every care that their relative would be buried with the magical symbols necessary to aid his journey to the underworld and resurrection in the afterlife. This nameless individual, through his magical accoutrements, has joined Osiris-Apis and achieved immortality.

Further, the iconography, the appearance of traditional hieroglyphic-derived signs, and the provenance from the Fayum suggest that this shroud was most likely created in the third century as the elites from the Fayum had moved out of the region and into the urban centers by the fourth century.⁴ The shape and lining of the eyes, the frame around the head, the depiction and size of the hands all suggest contact with the "Brooklyn Painter" tradition or school known to have been active in the er-Rubayat

region of the Fayum during the third century.⁵ Assigning an er-Rubayat origin to this work would update the Museum's records to reflect current research and data.

As far as re-dating the North Carolina portrait shroud, Susan Walker has noted that there are only two examples from the fourth century, and that all other mummy portraits have been re-dated to the third century.⁶ The North Carolina shroud has not been re-examined again since Thompson in 1980. Therefore, as scholarship has increased and our knowledge of mummy portraiture has expanded, the date of this shroud must be re-evaluated. The date of this mummy shroud should reflect the new findings, which place the production of these types of shrouds in the third century. Adjusting the date for this shroud is critical to best reflect the most recent findings. Though precise dating of this shroud may not be possible, scholarship on these works must build upon and reflect the most current and accurate data. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will update the information on the North Carolina shroud, and facilitate its introduction into larger social and religious discourses related to pagan funerary beliefs and practices during the discrete phase of history when the production of mummy portraiture was active.

Notes to Conclusion

¹ See Section Four, note 61.

² Bagnell, *Late Antiquity*, p. 236-237, and Sarolta Takács, *Isis and Serapis*, p. 5.

³ See Section Four, note 66.

⁴ See Section 2, note 22.

⁵ See Section Three, note 26.

⁶ Walker, *Note*, p. 36

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APPENDIX

COLOR PLATES



Plate 1

Mummy Portrait of a Young Man from the Fayum,
North Carolina Museum of Art



Plate 2

Detail, Lower Four Registers,
North Carolina Museum of Art



Plate 3

Detail, Second Register,
North Carolina Museum of Art

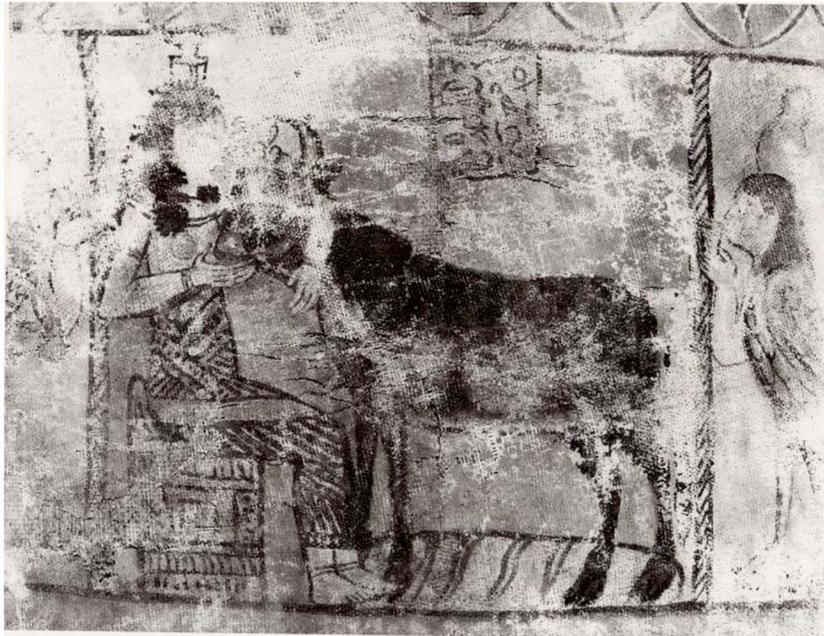


Plate 4

Close-up, second register,
North Carolina Museum of Art



Plate 5

Left Inscription,
North Carolina Museum of Art



Plate 6

Right Inscription,
North Carolina Museum of Art