Facing the Dead: Recent Research on the Funerary Art of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt
Author(s): Christina Riggs
Source: *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (Jan., 2002), pp. 85-101
Published by: Archaeological Institute of America
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/507190
Accessed: 12-12-2015 15:46 UTC

REFERENCES
Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:
http://www.jstor.org/stable/507190?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Archaeological Institute of America is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Journal of Archaeology*.

http://www.jstor.org

All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Facing the Dead: Recent Research on the Funerary Art of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt

CHRISTINA RIGGS

Abstract

In the 1990s, new scholarship, archaeological discoveries, and high-profile museum exhibitions marked a revived interest in the funerary art of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. Much of this art is characterized by the use of naturalistic portraiture, especially in the form of "mummy portraits" painted on wooden panels, and these two-dimensional portrait representations have received the bulk of scholarly attention. This article examines recent research on the subject and broadens the field of inquiry by addressing other forms of funerary art in use during the periods in question. It explores two particular issues, namely the mechanics of portraiture and the contested chronology of the corpus, and suggests further points for discussion so that the value of art historical evidence can be better realized in considerations of self-presentation and cultural identity.*

Throughout the 1990s, Egyptology, classical archaeology, and related disciplines witnessed a resurgence of interest in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. Ongoing archaeological work has contributed to this revival by helping to fill the large gap left in the record by earlier excavators whose primary concern lay with Egypt's pharaonic remains. Urban and mortuary sites, from Alexandria to the western oases and beyond, have yielded new evidence, while previously published archaeological remains, museum objects, and texts have benefited from renewed scrutiny. In recent scholarship, a marked, and mainly profitable, trend has emerged toward recasting canonical thought on cultural processes in "melting pot" societies.

As a result of ancient Egypt's pattern of archaeological preservation and the evident importance of equipping oneself for death, a pronounced component of our material evidence for the Ptolemaic and Roman periods derives from funerary art—that is, those objects and monuments created expressly to accompany or commemorate the dead. Within the last few years, new studies and several high-profile museum exhibitions have taken funerary art as their focus, picking up the thread of influential scholarship from the 1960s and 1970s.[1] An abundance of relevant material, and the fact that much of it combines Egyptian visual elements with Greek and Roman (broadly speaking, Hellenic or Greco-Roman) traits,[2] has provided fertile ground for speculation as to what happens when different cultural traditions confront each other. The incorporation of "portraits"—naturalistically painted images of the deceased individual on shrouds or, most commonly, wood panels—not only preserves a rare corpus of ancient painting but also presents modern, Western viewers with a series of human likenesses which tempt us to imagine that we can literally and figuratively come face to face with the past.

These mummy portraits, as they are known, have received the bulk of attention in discussions of Ptolemaic and Roman period funerary art, but they were by no means the only form of mummy adornment and mortuary commemoration in use. New freestanding or rock-cut tombs continued to be made and were often designed to accommodate multiple burials in niches or catacombs. Elsewhere, the hallowed ground of pharaonic cemeteries and temples was riddled with burial pits and shafts, and earlier tombs were reused by the busy, well-regulated mortuary industry.[3] Mummification remained the standard treatment for the dead, but cremation and non-mummified burials are also attested and may well be underrepresented in the archaeological record, especially if they were the prerogative of

---

* In preparing this article, I have benefited immensely from discussions with Helen Whitehouse, who also provided several bibliographic references and helpful editorial observations. Additionally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to John Baines and R.R.R. Smith for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of the text. The opinions set forth remain my own responsibility.

[1] Such as Castiglione 1961; Grimm 1974; Parlasca 1966; Parlasca 1969–1980; Thompson 1972; Zaloscer 1961. Zaloscer discussed the development of mummy portrait studies in an article that appeared a few months before her death in December 1999: Zaloscer 1997–1998.

[2] I use "Hellenic" here and throughout this article, rather than Greco-Roman, to emphasize the strongly Greek character of the elite culture of Egypt in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

[3] For a case study of the choachyte profession at Thebes during the Ptolemaic period, see Pestman 1993.

American Journal of Archaeology 106 (2002) 85–101

elites in the major urban centers now lost or inaccessible to excavation.[4]

Funerary art presents a variation across regions and over, not to mention within, generations. In the 500 years between the second century B.C. and the third century A.D., the range of funerary art produced in Egypt encompassed the following:

1. portrait panels from mummies in the Delta, the Fayum (fig. 1), and Antinoe;[5]
2. commemorative shrines of uncertain provenance;[6]
3. painted shrouds from Hawara in the Fayum, as well as Saqqara, Antinoe, Asyut (fig. 2), and Thebes (fig. 3);[7]
4. decorated tombs in Alexandria, Tuna el-Gebel, Qau el-Kebir, Akhmim, and the western oases, including Dakhleh Oasis (fig. 4);[8]
5. mummy cases of mud-mixture or cartonnage from Akhmim (fig. 5);[9]
6. wooden coffins from Abusir el-Meleq, Middle Egypt, and Thebes;[10]
7. plaster and cartonnage mummy masks from the Fayum (fig. 6), Middle Egypt, Thebes, and the western oases, including Bahria Oasis;[11]
8. stelae from Terenouthis, Dendera, Abydos, and elsewhere (fig. 7);[12]
9. tomb sculptures from Tebtunis and Oxyrhynchus.[13]

The examples in the above list are a sample of the diverse forms in which the artistic commemoration of the dead was manifested, and although the array of objects and monuments necessarily reflects the happenstance of archaeological survival, the geographic spread of the evidence is considerable. This "big picture" of mortuary practices in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt has been eclipsed, however, by a scholarly output largely centered around the mummy portraits themselves, thus skewing our perception of contemporary funerary art and, by extension, our view of contemporary society.

PORTRAITS OR MASKS?

One self-acknowledged example of the academic bent for mummy portraits is the volume of papers that resulted from a colloquium on the funerary art of Roman Egypt, held at the British Museum in 1995 and published under the title *Portraits and Masks.*[14] The volume's contents, like the phrasing of its title, highlight the rather limited range of objects that studies have tended to consider. In the conventional nomenclature used for Roman Egyptian funerary art, the word "portrait" refers to a two-dimensional, painted image that represents some specific individual and is "naturalistic" in that the painting aims to replicate human features much as they appear to the observer. A "mask" is the standard Egyptological designation for a three-dimensional, sculpted or molded object made to fit over the head and chest of a mummy. On the surface, the two words are no more than easily understood terms used as academic shorthand in studies of Roman period funerary art: flat, painted images are "portraits" and sculpted mummy head-coverings are "masks."

But set that fact aside for a moment and, for the sake of argument, consider that in standard English usage, we frequently say of a portrait that it "reveals" something about the subject's personality as well as his or her physical appearance. A mask, on the other hand, conceals its wearer, hiding the face in favor of the mask's own features. The juxtaposition of the words "portraits and masks" thus implies two classes of object that are related but mutually exclusive: a mask is not a portrait, a portrait not a mask. If the terminology we use reflects our assumptions and affects our interpretations, such word choices subtly suggest that the painted faces on panels and shrouds tell us something more about the dead of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt than do their counterparts among contemporary coffins, mummy masks, tomb paintings, stelae, and statuary.

---

[4] Venit (1999, 644) addresses variations in the treatment of corpses at Alexandria. In his first season of excavation at the Hawara cemetery in the Fayum, Petrie recorded one cremation burial in a sealed lead urn: Petrie 1889, 11.

[5] Portrait findspots are summarized by Borg 1996, 183–90; for portrait mummies excavated at Marina el-Alamein on the Delta coast, see also Daszewski 1997.

[6] Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 33269, in Seipel 1999, 176–7 (no. 58); Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 74 AP 20–22, in Walker and Bierbrier 1997a, 123–4 (no. 119).

[7] Selection of excavated examples: Dublin, National Museum of Ireland 1911:442 (from Hawara), in Parlasca 1966, 107–8, 167, 251, pl. 57,1; Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE 9/12/95/1 (Saqqara), in Bresciani 1996, 35–59, frontispiece; Louvre AF 6486 (Antinoe), in Aubert and Cortopassi 1998, 123 (no. 73); Louvre E 13382 (Thebes), in Aubert and Cortopassi 1998, 63 (no. 20).

[8] Alexandria: Empereur 1998a, 154–211; Guimier-Sorbets and Seif el-Din 1997; Venit 1988, 1997, 1999. Dakhleh Oasis: Osing 1982, 70–101, pls. 20–34, 36–44; Whitehouse 1998. Tuna el-Gebel: Gabra 1941; Gabra and Drioton 1954. Qau el-Kebir: Steckeweh et al. 1936, 55–64, esp. 57–8 and pls. 21–22. Akhmim: Kuhlmann 1983, 71–81, pls. 33–38.

[9] Schweitzer 1998, esp. her "troisième série," 333; Smith 1997; Walker and Bierbrier 1997a, 30–5 (nos. 2–8).

[10] Middle Egypt: Kurth 1990. Thebes: Horak and Harrauer 1999, *passim*; Walker and Bierbrier 1997a, 149–50.

[11] Grimm 1974 collects examples from throughout Egypt. For newly discovered masked mummies in Bahria Oasis, see Hawass 2000.

[12] Terenouthis: most recently, el-Hafeez et al. 1985. Dendera and Abydos: Abdalla 1992. Of unknown provenance, the stela of Besas illustrated in fig. 7 is Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 27541: Edgar 1903, 39–40, pl. 24; Spiegelberg 1904, 69–70, pl. 23.

[13] Tebtunis: Lutz 1927, 19–20 (nos. 60 and 61), pl. 31. Oxyrhynchus: von Falck 1996; Thomas 2000, esp. 59–60, and figs. 61, 68–74, 79, 117, 118.

[14] Bierbrier 1997.

The goal of the present article is to question and help counterbalance this assumption by placing recent research on funerary art from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods in a broader perspective. The body of work produced on this subject in recent years is sizeable and important. Together, the books and articles considered here have advanced, but not exhausted, specialist knowledge of the field, and they point the way forward for future work.

DISPLAYING THE DEAD

In the summer of 1997, a British Museum exhibition entitled "Ancient Faces" opened to public acclaim. The culmination of more than two years of curatorial research and conservation work, "Ancient Faces" brought together the Museum's extensive collection of funerary art from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, supplemented by loans from other museums. An eponymous catalogue and the *Portraits and Masks* collection of symposium papers were published in conjunction with the show to present the most up-to-date information available on the objects displayed.[15] Over the next two years, several more exhibitions focused on Roman Egypt, and on mummy portraits and other funerary art in particular. In Marseille, "Égypte Romaine" was on view in 1997, with a section devoted to "les hommes et la mort."[16] The Louvre inaugurated a gallery of Roman Egyptian funerary art with the special exhibition "Portraits de l'Egypte romaine."[17] A small 1997 show in Leiden—"Sensaos: Eye to Eye with the Girl in the Mummy"—spotlighted the burial assemblage of an adolescent girl who died at Thebes in A.D. 109; her father Soter was the head of a prominent local family known from numerous coffins, shrouds, mummies, grave goods, and papyri.[18] Florence hosted a 1998 exhibition commemorating the centenary of excavations at Antinoë, a *polis* founded in Egypt by the emperor Hadrian and the findspot of both panel and shroud portraits as well as plaster mummy masks.[19] In 1999, several panel portraits and other material from the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, traveled to Vienna and joined the Kunsthistorisches Museum's own collection for the exhibit "Bilder

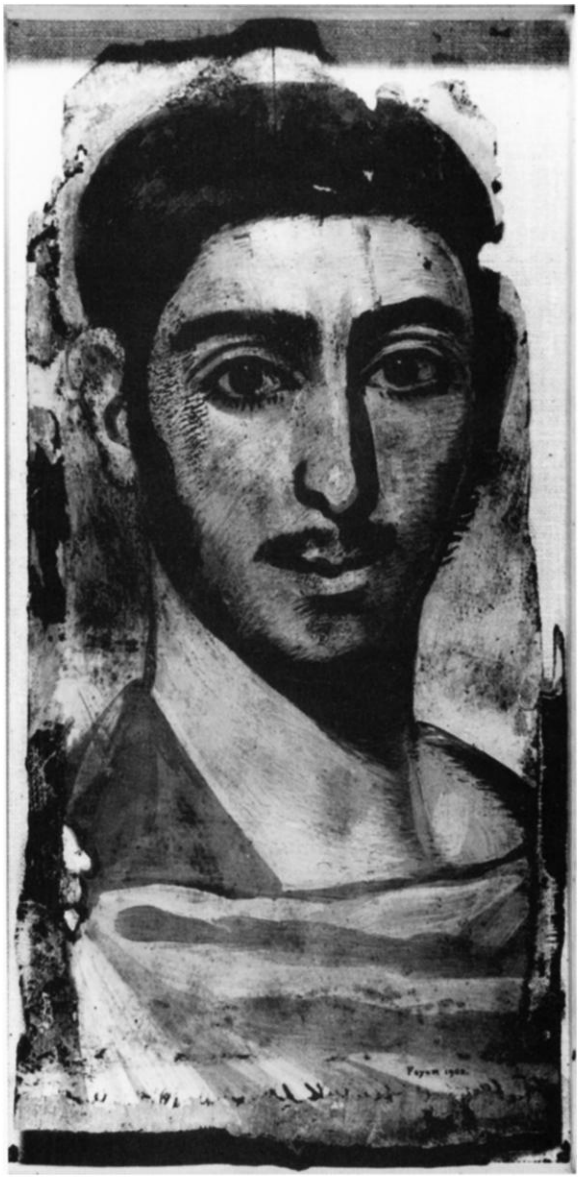

Fig. 1. Mummy portrait of a soldier, early third century A.D. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E.3755. (Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

---

[15] Walker and Bierbrier 1997a; Bierbrier 1997. The exhibition's second venue in Rome was accompanied by an Italian catalogue (Walker and Bierbrier 1997b). For a critique of the English edition from an Egyptological viewpoint, see Teeter 1999.

[16] Musées de Marseille 1997, 140–71, with an essay by F. Dunand.

[17] Aubert and Cortopassi 1998.

[18] No exhibition catalogue, but see the museum's Web site, http://www.rmo.nl/engels/sensaos.html. The Soter family: Van Landuyt 1995.

[19] Del Francia Barocas 1998, with a section (45–8) by R. Cortopassi on Antinoë's funerary portraits.

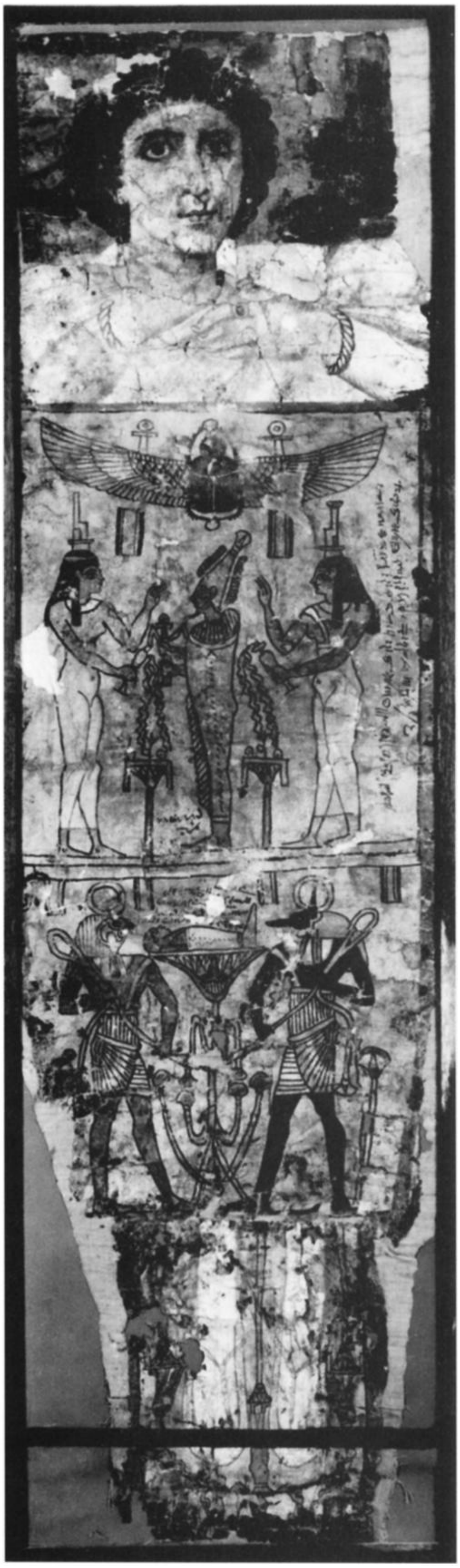

Fig. 2. Shroud of a woman named Tasherytwedjahor, from Asyut, probably first century A.D. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 54.993. (Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

aus dem Wüstensand," while Linz and Klagenfurt hosted "Mumie-Schau'n," based around a coffin and mummy assemblage normally housed in the latter city.[20] An ambitious exhibition entitled "Augenblicke," held in Frankfurt in 1999, had the added distinction of being organized by Klaus Parlasca, whose scholarship on Roman Egyptian funerary art has laid the groundwork for the subject.[21] Between 1999 and 2001, the traveling exhibition "Keizers an de Nijl/Les Empereurs du Nil" brought Roman Egypt to audiences in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands.[22] And in the spring of 2000, the circle begun by the original British Museum exhibition was completed when the Metropolitan Museum of Art hosted a second "Ancient Faces" exhibition, coordinated, like the original show, by Susan Walker and incorporating additional objects drawn from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum and other American and European institutions.[23]

The appeal of these exhibitions echoes the rapturous response that mummy portraits first received in the late 19th century, when the archaeological finds of Flinders Petrie packed London's Piccadilly Hall, and the collection of Theodor Graf awed Viennese art circles.[24] Now as then, the naturalistic portraits on panels and shrouds, generally removed from their associated mummies, form the core of the exhibitions and appeal to Western aesthetic sensibilities, which value any perceived illusionism in art and expect a portrait to capture the subject's personality as well as his or her physical appearance. The ultimate expression of this concern with evaluating "lifelikeness" is the digital or actual reconstruction of mummies' faces—a fascinating exercise in its own right, for the sake of archaeological knowledge, but in specific instances,[25] the practice invites comparisons between the pictorial image and the mortal remains that may be unwarranted. For example, superimposing a three-dimensional "recreation" of the portrait panel from the mummy of Artemidorus onto a computer reconstruction of his face (derived from a CAT scan) effectively tries to test the accuracy of the portrait and the ability of the ancient artist; ironically, it also second-guesses the very lifelikeness that modern ob-

---

[20] Seipel 1999; Horak and Harrauer 1999.

[21] Parlasca and Seemann 1999.

[22] Willems and Clarysse 1999; Willems and Clarysse 2000.

[23] Walker 2000.

[24] See Montserrat (1998, 172–80) for an intriguing consideration of responses to Petrie's exhibition and to the publication of Graf's collection.

[25] E.g., Filer 1997; Raven 1998.

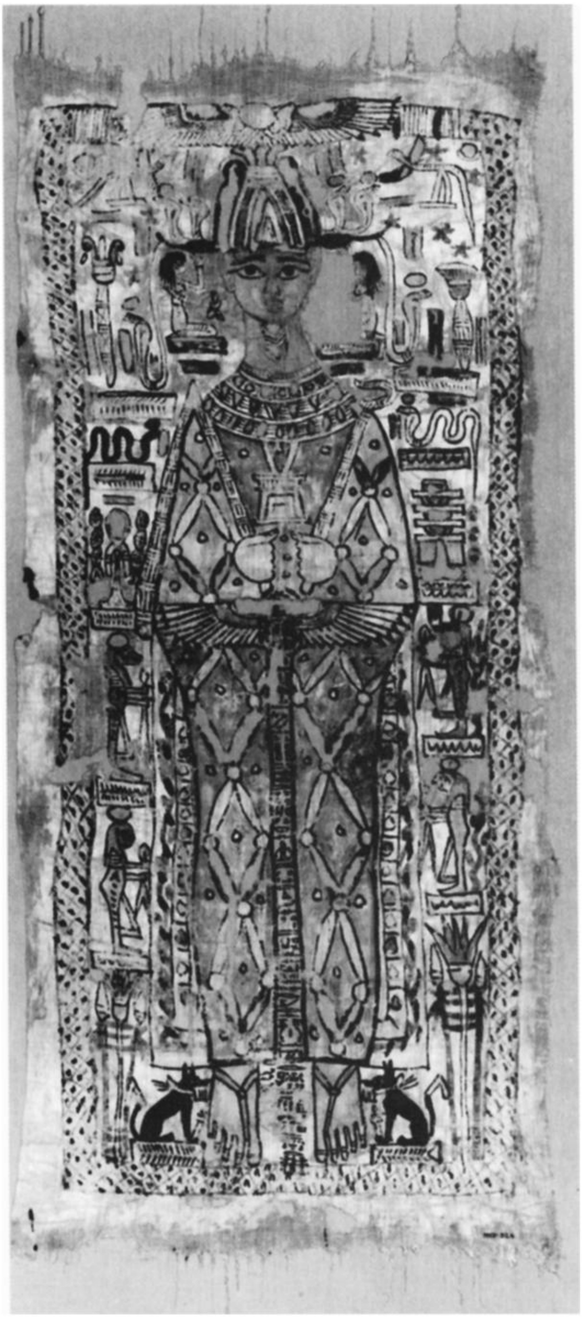

Fig. 3. Shroud of a boy named Nespawtytawy, from Thebes, second century A.D. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1913.924. (Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

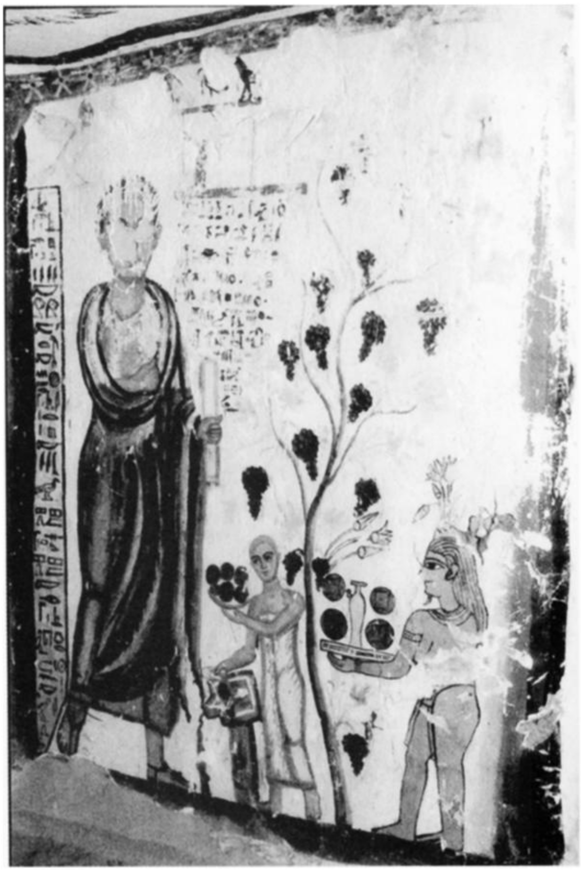

Fig. 4. Portrait of a man named Petosiris, from his tomb at Qarat el-Muzzawaqa, Dakhleh Oasis, first century A.D. (Photo by H. Whitehouse)

servers, like their ancient counterparts, hope to see in paintings of this genre.[26] In a similar vein, much of the popular-press or museological emphasis on portraits' realism risks a facile line of questioning (what did the deceased really look like?) and feeds an assumption that the modern viewer can, and should, have such an intimate, immediate knowledge of the ancient dead. In an article tellingly headlined "Expressions so Ancient, yet Familiar," *The New York Times*'s reviewer likened viewing the Metropolitan Museum "Ancient Faces" show to attending a party among friends and saw emotions of "despair, bafflement, anger" in the mummy portraits themselves.[27] Although it is rewarding when curatorial efforts receive a positive response from the public, it is nonetheless the case that feeling empathy for long-dead individuals says more about ourselves than it does about the ancient society or individual in question.

Criticisms aside, the recent exhibitions have been invaluable in bringing the material culture of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt to the wider attention of

---

[26] The mummy of Artemidorus is London, British Museum EA 21810, in Walker and Bierbrier 1997a, 56–7 (no. 32); the computerized combination of portrait and facial reconstruction is unpublished.

[27] Cotter 2000; this article and two color photographs of portrait panels featured on the front page of the newspaper's "Weekend" section.

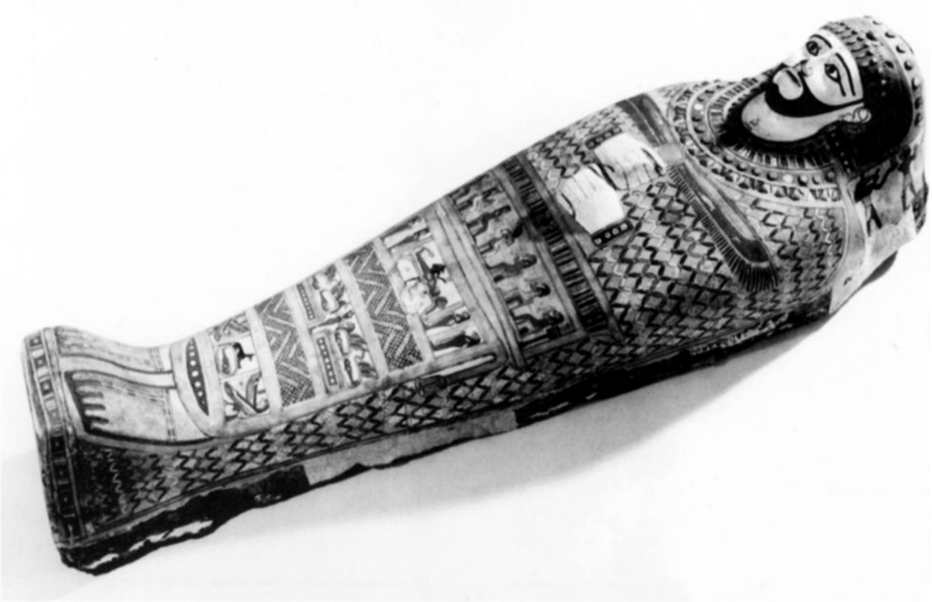

Fig. 5. Coffin for a man, from Akhmim, first century B.C. London, British Museum EA 29584. (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

the public and scholars alike, and encouraging thoughtful interaction with many objects not studied or displayed before. In many of the shows, curators have been able to bring together objects from the same archaeological site which are now scattered among several museums. Well-illustrated exhibition catalogues combine introductory essays with descriptive entries to reflect some of the most up-to-date information available on the objects. At the same time, however, the catalogue format treats a two-dimensional work more easily than any sculpted or three-dimensional piece, and in its presentation of the subject, an exhibition catalogue must strike a compromise between appealing to a lay audience and suiting its academic intent.[28] The spate of museum shows and catalogues, with their necessarily high profile and much-warranted publicity, also has somewhat overshadowed the reception of other publications in wider academic circles, to the detriment of recent specialized studies and archaeological reports. Over the past decade, numerous articles and monographs have furthered the study of Ptolemaic and Roman funerary art. Some of these undertake an in-depth analysis of one object or monument, such as Kurth's study of a coffin from Middle Egypt or the analysis of individual tombs in Alexandria.[29] Others identify a cohesive group of objects—Corcoran explores Egyptian religion and iconography by cataloguing intact portrait mummies in Egyptian museums, while Abdalla focuses on stelae from Upper Egypt.[30]

Surveys of religious practices and editions of contemporary funerary texts are vital complements to any consideration of the visual evidence, as are demographic and social analyses.[31] New archaeological research presents the mortuary record with the benefit of modern recording standards and scientific techniques, and the thorough excavation of a necropolis like that recently discovered in Bahria Oasis will continue to add to and alter many of our perceptions.[32] There, the masked mummies in rock-cut niches, accompanied by small grave goods, apparently preserve an extensive mortuary setting the more rare for having been undisturbed. Reexamination of earlier excavation records can also yield fresh information about the context in which funerary art was employed.[33] Yet the art itself is not merely an adjunct to textual or archaeological evidence. It offers a unique means of approaching the inhabitants of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt and evaluating their society's norms and values. This premise underpins the most effective scholarship in this area and forms the basis for the following discussion.

---

[28] For instance, in Walker and Bierbrier 1997a, four coffins, a shroud, a mummy, and funerary goods belonging to the Soter family are treated on two pages (149–50), with two photographs. Furthermore, the necessities of marketing an exhibit and its catalogue perhaps unconsciously influenced publishers' or curators' selection of cover illustrations, which favor mummy portraits of girls and women: Walker and Bierbrier 1997a; Walker 2000; Aubert and Cortopassi 1998; Parlasca and Seemann 1999; Seipel 1999.

[29] Kurth 1990; Guimier-Sorbets and Seif el-Din 1997; Venit 1988, 1997.

[30] Corcoran 1995; Abdalla 1992. As a reviewer has pointed out, the exact criteria for Abdalla's selection are not clear: De Meulenaere 1994.

[31] Religious practices: Frankfurter 1998; Kákosy 1995. Mortuary practices: Römer 2000; Scheidel 1998; Dunand and Lichtenberg 1995; Dunand and Lichtenberg 1998, 97–124 (ch. 6). Funerary texts: e.g., Smith 1993. Demography and social contexts: Bagnall and Frier 1994; Montserrat 1996.

[32] Reports of recent excavations include Dunand et al. 1992 and the *Études alexandrines* series inaugurated by Empereur (1998b). On the Bahria Oasis discovery, see Hawass 2000.

PORTRAITURE

This section and the next consider two recurring issues addressed in recent scholarship: first, the "lifelike" naturalism of the mummy portraits; and second, the dating of mummy portraits and other funerary material.

Much heated debate has centered around whether the artists of the mummy portraits painted from personal, first-hand observation of their subjects. Borg and Parlasca devote sections of their books to this question, and a prominent review of the London "Ancient Faces" exhibition in *The New York Review of Books* criticized the show's curators for suggesting that the portraits were painted some other way, even perhaps from the dead body.[34] A newspaper review of the New York "Ancient Faces" took an opposing view, asserting that the portraits must have been painted from the body seen "just before or after a death" and could not have been studio products.[35] Regardless, the concept of a portrait atelier and of sitting for an artist to have one's portrait painted is a Western, relatively modern one. Painting or sculpting from a live model continues to be valued even, or especially, in our photo-dependent era, to the extent that submission guidelines for the annual BP Portrait Award at London's National Portrait Gallery specify that "the entry must be a painting from life."[36] In actuality, being painted, sketched, or sculpted during a face-to-face interaction between subject and artist is not essential to an image being called or considered a portrait.

There is little concrete evidence for exactly how ancient artists captured an individual's image or whether personal observation of the subject was considered indispensable. Textual sources inform us that lifelikeness was highly valued—Pliny notes that "realistic portraiture indeed has for many generations been the highest ambition of art"—but realism and resemblance are subjective, socially constructed notions.[37] Further, artistic naturalism is still in service to the physical ideals—of beauty, or wisdom, or youthfulness—embraced by a given culture. The fact that so many ancient commentators on art praised realism and lifelikeness does not tell us exactly what they had in mind, or whether we, from a 21st-century vantage point, would agree with their judgments if presented with the

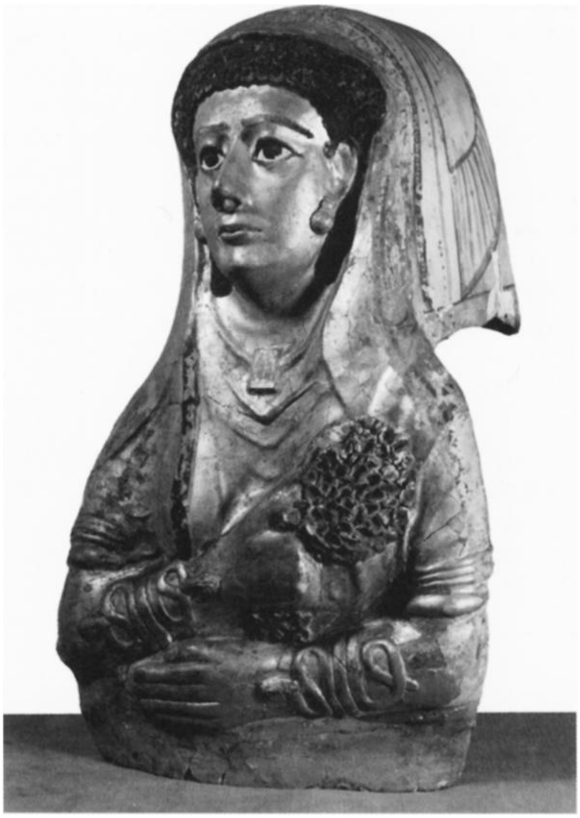

Fig. 6. Mummy mask of a woman named Aphrodite, from Hawara, mid first century A.D. London, British Museum EA 69020. (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, V&A Picture Library)

---

[33] E.g., Montserrat and Meskell 1997; Riggs 2000.

[34] Borg 1996, 191–5, esp. 193; Parlasca 1966, 59, 73–5; Fenton 1997.

[35] Cotter 2000, for *The New York Times*. Although the comparison is not explicitly made, observers like Cotter may have in mind 17th-century deathbed portraits like Van Dyck's "Venetia, Lady Digby on her Deathbed," now in the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London. For this portrait and the genre, see Sumner 1995.

[36] Information taken from the brochure for the BP Portrait Award 2000, rule 5.

[37] *Natural History* 35.52: "Hic multis iam saeculis summus animus in pictura," in reference to portraits of gladiators; see discussion in Isager 1991, 136–40. Gombrich (1996) explores issues of artistic realism at some length and cites the example (1996, 86) of a lion "drawn from life" by Villard de Honnecourt, although the resulting image hardly fits our idea of how an accurate portrayal should look. In addition, see Bryson (1983, esp. 13–5, 53–5) concerning the cultural relativity of realism.

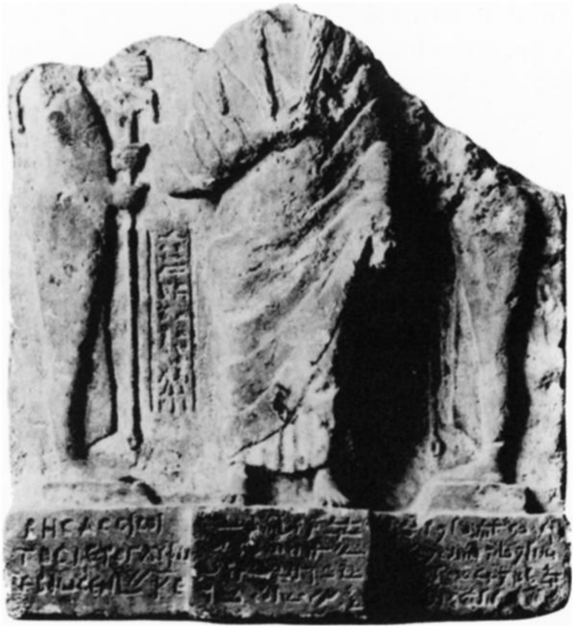

Fig. 7. Stela of a man named Besas, inscribed in hieroglyphs, Demotic, and Greek, first century A.D. Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 27541. (Edgar 1903, pl. 34)

same images they considered. Because post-Renaissance Western art has embraced classical art's appreciation of portraiture and of realism (two separate concepts, after all), it is understandably difficult to keep in mind that the production methods for, and ultimate goals of, ancient portraiture need not have been identical to our own. Methodological soundness, however, requires such potential differences between "us" and "them" to be acknowledged and explored.

Official portraits required ease of identification and the replication of certain very specific features, and although careful study of imperial images reveals much about how they were created and disseminated, it is less clear what procedures applied in portraiture outside the most elite circles.[38] Certainly artists could and did paint from life, as demonstrated by another passage from Pliny (*NH* 35.147–8) in which the Hellenistic painter Iaia of Kyzikos is said to have painted a portrait of herself by using a mirror, presumably to consult her reflected image. Other textual and visual sources for painters are silent on the artist/subject relationship: the painter seated at an easel in a sarcophagus scene displays finished portraits on the wall behind him but no model is explicitly in evidence.[39] In a papyrus of the second century A.D., a sailor named Apion writes from Misenum to his father at home in Philadelphia, in the Fayum, to say that he has sent a small portrait (εἰκόνιν) of himself back to the family.[40] Although his gesture suggests that Apion had the financial wherewithal to purchase this item and that he personally approved of an image that would, in effect, replace him during his absence with the imperial navy, his letter gives no indication of how he obtained the portrait or what it looked like, nor does the word εἰκόνιν imply a specific medium, such as painting.

It is telling that the debate over painting from life and the mummy portraits has arisen from the best quality shroud and panel portraits with their dark-eyed, rosy-cheeked immediacy. Mummy masks, tomb paintings, stelae, and sculpture have not inspired similar inquiries—to put the matter in simplistic terms, does anyone imagine that Petosiris (fig. 4) posed while the wall of his tomb was painted or that Besas (fig. 7) spent a long afternoon while the sculptor chiseled away?[41] But each of these is a portrait image and is more naturalistic than not. It is the painting medium, so similar to our Western painted portraits and so attuned to our photorealistic mindset, that can easily lead modern observers to respond to them with a particular immediacy, inviting artificial distinctions. Painted portraiture in "naturalistic" mode—the word is used here to describe an image that attempts to copy what a given person or object "looks like" to the artist and viewer—is not a universal or inevitable pictorial development. If, as Norman Bryson has argued for classical Western painting, naturalism attempts to persuade the viewer that the subject of the painting is the same as the painted image itself, then this denial of painting's role as a sign imparts additional potency to portraiture and other representations of the human form: "[p]robably the most striking aspect of the encaustic portraiture of antiquity is the credibility it lends to the idea of the body's endurance as persistent substrate to all cultural enterprise: the work of culture seems only a matter of costume and parure superadded to the recurrent genetic pattern." In Bryson's text, two mummy portrait panels illustrate this point.[42]

---

[38] Useful discussion of imperial portraiture: Smith 1996. Nowicka (1993, 154) observes the poor papyrological documentation for artistic production methods.

[39] Roman period sarcophagus from Kerch on the Crimean peninsula, now in The Hermitage, St. Petersburg; published most recently by M. Nowicka in Blanc 1998, 66–70 (no. 32). It seems unlikely that the centrally positioned scene of the painter is meant to be seen in direct spatial relationship to the content of the scenes on either side of it.

[40] BGU 423; see Hunt and Edgar 1932, 304–7 (no. 112). Cited by Nowicka (1979, 24), with further references in her n. 30. The word in the papyrus has been restored on the basis of [. . .]κόνιν, so both the reading and the meaning remain hypothetical.

[41] Petosiris: supra, n. 8, Dakhleh Oasis; Besas: supra, n. 12, of unknown provenance.

Any ancient portrait will have conformed to ideals that were current at the time it was produced and that contributed to, or controlled, how the image would be read by its audience. In part because of these shared ideals, contemporaneous portraits give an impression of sameness when seen alongside each other, and workshops might well have maintained a stock of sculpture or paintings that artists could adjust for salient physical features and costume details as required.[43] Viewing similarly dated and provenanced panel portraits together, for instance, one is hard pressed to say whether three or more portraits do not show just one person—which neither diminishes their artistic and "portrait" quality nor detracts from their ability to inform us about the subjects and their world.[44] The degree of verisimilitude, or the "likeness" of image and subject, does not define a portrait. Instead, it is the intentional representation of an individual that sets portraiture apart from other depictions of human physiognomy and form.[45] Furthermore, even if the ancient actors assigned special prestige to a perceived mimetic verism in the panel and shroud portraits, it does not necessarily follow that these particular objects had a higher material or social value than other types of funerary art or other types of portraits, such as busts and statues.

Ancient artists undoubtedly did rely on the physical presence of their subjects at some stage in the creation of many portraits, in whatever medium, but human images serving a portrait function could be created by other means as well, employing schematic "types," for instance, or imaginative reconstruction, as the posthumous portrayal of a historical or semi-legendary figure like Homer would have required. The portrait genre itself does not necessitate the artist-subject relationship to which we are accustomed.[46] Thus the question with which this section began, whether mummy portraits were painted from life, does not lend itself to a "yes" or "no" answer and is somewhat of a manufactured debate, skirting around other issues pertinent to the production and use of portraits in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.

CHRONOLOGY

Establishing a chronology for Ptolemaic and Roman period funerary art has been a foremost concern of scholars in the field, but the wide range of dates assigned to individual objects is a sign of continuing disagreement on the issue and of reliance on formal or stylistic criteria inadequate to the task.[47] Dating an object is valuable insofar as it allows us to see diachronic developments or synchronic trends, especially when the work in question is of known provenance or has other contextual information. Fortunately, much of the corpus of funerary art displays reliable indicators of date, such as the Roman hairstyles decisively analyzed by Borg, or permits a range of dates to be narrowed by comparative study of the material.[48] Likewise, paleography and the content of object inscriptions can suggest or refine a date, sometimes requiring a reinterpretation of the pieces in question, as with the earlier dating recently established for a series of anthropoid coffins from Akhmim. These coffins, of which some 40 examples survive for both adults and children, were modeled in a mud and straw mixture, which was then given a surface treatment including paint, gilding, and textile or plaster additions. Plundered around the turn of the last century, the coffins are devoid of precise archaeological context, but their Demotic inscriptions contain Egyptian recitations for the dead and point to a date in the first century B.C.[49] The Akhmim coffin group highlights a persistent tendency to adopt a low chronology for funerary and other material, based in part on the fallacy that anything that looks "unusual" or has a naturalistic appearance must date to the Roman period.[50]

Another case for redating is the shroud of a woman named Tasherytwedjahor (fig. 2), preserved in three fragments. The shroud represents the arms, shoulders, and head of the deceased in the formal language of Hellenic art, while the fields below contain Egyptian scenes. Two Demotic inscriptions name the deceased and her husband (or father—the reading is debated), who was a priest of Wepwawet at Asyut; the date of her burial is given as the fourth (?) regnal year of an unspecified ruler. Based on this date and a perceived similarity between the woman's hairstyle and those of Severan empresses, publications of the shroud have placed it in the reign of Septimius Severus, and specifically at A.D. 195/6.[51] However, the Demotic handwriting of the inscriptions, each by a different scribe, bears orthographic and paleographic similarities to texts of the late Ptolemaic period or the first century A.D.[52] Since the hairstyle worn by Tasherytwedjahor reveals her earlobes and narrows at the nape of her neck, without indicating any gathering or folding of the hair into the *Scheitelzopf* typical of Severan styles, it also does not support a Severan date. The hairstyle may simply be a variation of the neatly dressed "melon" coiffure, or it may not be explicitly based on a Roman imperial model. Tasherytwedjahor's earrings are a fashion already attested in the early first century A.D.,[53] and the position of her arms and hands parallels a first-century A.D. shroud portrait from Hawara.[54]

---

[42] Bryson 1983, 167. The two portraits he illustrates (figs. 34 and 35) are National Gallery 3932 and 3931, respectively, for which see Walker and Bierbrier 1997a, 94–5 (no. 85) and 86–7 (no. 76).

[43] A suggestion also made by Nowicka 1993, 154.

[44] Cf. the portraits illustrated in Doxiadis 1995, 56–9.

[45] Intentionality underscores many definitions of portraiture, e.g., Campbell 1996, 274; Brilliant 1991, 38, 127; Nowicka 1993, 9–13.

[46] Variations in Western portrait painting are discussed by Campbell (1996).

[47] For instance, a female mummy mask in the British Museum, EA 29476, has been dated to the second half of the second century A.D., in Parlasca and Seemann 1999, 315 (no. 208), and to A.D. 100–120, in Walker and Bierbrier 1997a, 136–8 (no. 208). Also in Parlasca and Seemann 1999, two male mummy masks of identical manufacture are arbitrarily separated by a handful of years, with one mask dated to the beginning of the first century and the second mask to around the birth of Christ, presumably just a bit earlier than its counterpart; no explanation for this is given: Parlasca and Seemann 1999, 306–7 (nos. 202 and 203).

[48] Borg 1996, plus her contribution in Doxiadis 1995, 229–35.

[49] Smith 1997.

[50] Terracotta figurines are among the objects whose traditional dates have been shifted earlier in light of new evidence: Török 1995, 22, with further references.

Naturalistic portraiture in the Hellenic manner was not an innovation under Roman rule but a development that had, unsurprisingly, earlier roots. What the beginning of Roman rule did introduce to the Egyptian artistic milieu was the authoritative and highly crafted imperial image, the influence of which had almost immediate repercussions in private portraiture throughout Roman territory.[55] The effectiveness of the Augustan artistic program and the portrait commemoration of the Julio-Claudian dynasty no doubt contributed to the use of Roman hairstyles in funerary art in Egypt, where they appear as early as the reign of Tiberius.[56] Fashionable hairstyles continued to distinguish much of the Egyptian corpus for as long as naturalistic portraiture was used in conjunction with the preserved corpse. The most up-to-date research on hairstyles in Roman sculpture informs Borg's *Mumienporträts*, an authoritative study that employs valid comparanda to restructure the chronology of the panel portraits. Borg places the latest examples in the mid third century, convincingly reassigning to the second century A.D. several portraits previously held to be of fourth century date.[57] Funerary art later than the Severan period—some shrouds from Antinoe, for instance, and the tomb sculptures from Oxyrhynchus—employs minimal, if any, Egyptian iconography and often is not specifically associated with the mummification of the dead.[58] The economic, political, and social alterations of the third century A.D. transformed the actualization of native religious practices and mortuary customs, and those segments of the population that had maintained the Egyptian funerary tradition, and the visual codes it required of art, likewise will have adapted to the changing times.[59]

Borg identifies no portrait panels as dating later than the mid third century A.D., a downward revision of the chronology developed by Parlasca.[60] Within the narrow field of Roman Egyptian funerary art, the ramifications of this chronological debate have been strongly felt.[61] Parlasca disagrees with the new dates proposed by Borg and others and cites one panel that, judging by the prominence of the female subject's *Scheitelzopf* hair roll, should date to the late third or early fourth century.[62] His strongly worded review of Borg's 1996 monograph is largely devoted to the late chronology of the mummy portraits.[63] The weight of the evidence, however, supports the reasonable conclusion that adorning mummies with portraits, masks, and shrouds became increasingly less common during the course of the third century. Other chronological disagreements exist as well: Parlasca rejects the redating of the Akhmim coffin group to the first century B.C. (or early first century A.D., conservatively) by reverting instead to a second-century A.D. date for a female coffin included in the *Augenblicke* exhibition.[64] The nonspecialist might be left with the impression that assigning dates to art, and especially funerary art, from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt is an uncertain business, but the uncertainty generally arises from attempts to date material using ill-defined criteria of quality or style. Subjective judgments still abound, including assumptions that something of "lesser" quality must be earlier, or later, than a "better" example.[65] Only reliable methods, such as textual and paleographic evidence, appropriate comparisons with Roman fashions and portraiture, and similarities in manufacture and decoration observed within a "workshop" corpus, permit reliable conclusions and show the way forward for future refinements to the chronology.

---

[51] D'Auria et al. 1988, 240–1 (no. 154); Parlasca and Seemann 1999, 228 (no. 137); Parlasca 2000, 178, fig. 7. Initial discussion of the date of the shroud: Parlasca 1966, 186–7. In Demotic script, some numbers closely resemble each other, leading to uncertainty in the specific readings.

[52] I am indebted to Mark Smith for discussing this point with me and suggesting possible paleographic comparisons, to Mark Depauw for an additional opinion on the paleography, and to Martin Andreas Stadler for further information on the shroud inscriptions.

[53] Compare a portrait panel inscribed in Demotic for Eirene (Stuttgart, Würtembergisches Landesmuseum inv. 7.2): Borg 1996, 30 (Julio-Claudian) pl. 1, 2; Walker and Bierbrier 1997a, 115–6 (no. 111), as Trajanic.

[54] Walker and Bierbrier 1997a, 41–2 (no. 15); Walker 2000, 38–9 (no. 1). The present mounting of the Tasherytwedjahor shroud fragments in fig. 3 leaves no room for the folded floral wreath that should be expected in the subject's right hand.

[55] Zanker 1989, esp. 102–3.

[56] E.g., Hannover, Kestner Museum 1966.89: Borg 1996, 29–30, pl. 1, 1. For the pictorial propaganda of Augustus and his successors, see Zanker 1988.

[57] Borg 1996, 22–6.

[58] Fourth-century A.D. shrouds from Antinoe: Parlasca and Seemann, 74–8, esp. n. 15; Walker 2000, 147–8 (no. 99). A late third- or early fourth-century funerary sculpture from Oxyrhynchus: Schneider 1992, 88–9 (no. 37).

[59] Cf. Borg 1996, 204–8; Frankfurter 1998, *passim*.

[60] Borg 1996, 80–4, in contrast to Parlasca 1969–1980, esp. his vol. 3 (1980); cf. the review of all three published volumes by Jucker 1984.

[61] Susan Walker neatly summarizes the debate, its origins, and its effects in "A note on the dating of mummy portraits," Walker 2000, 34–6.

[62] Parlasca and Seemann 1999, 36; Parlasca 2000, 181–2, in reference to Morlanwelz, Musée Royal de Mariemont 78/10,

REPRESENTING THE DEAD

As the above remarks have shown, mummy portraits on panels were one of several options for representing the dead in the Egyptian mortuary tradition as practiced in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. Naturalistic portraiture like that of the panels also appeared in tomb paintings and in sculpted form, on masks, coffins, stelae, and statuary. Many other shrouds, coffins, and masks do not depict the deceased in a "lifelike" manner at all but in an idealized form marking the deceased's close association with an Egyptian deity, or simply as a participant in scenes of the Egyptian afterlife. Naturalistic portraiture did not replace or take precedence over more traditional, idealized representations. At Hawara, Petrie excavated one of the most extensive Roman cemeteries yet discovered in Egypt, where he found several dozen mummies bearing naturalistic portraits or cartonnage masks with hairstyles modeled on those of the ruling Julio-Claudian family (fig. 6). Hampered by the speed with which the excavation was conducted, and the large area it covered, Petrie's records are imperfect but nonetheless reveal the general layout and character of the interments.[66] During the mid first century A.D., burial customs at Hawara accommodated both two- and three-dimensional artistic treatments for the head of the deceased, with varying degrees of naturalism.[67] Masked and portrait mummies could be deposited in a single grave, and the shrouds that wrap the lower bodies of some mummies, in combination with either a portrait or a mask, are very similar to each other in construction and decoration. What these interrelationships demonstrate is that the Hawara cemetery does not simply present evidence for the concurrent use of masked and portrait mummies. The intertwining of mask, portrait, and shroud usage indicates that the mortuary sphere in which these goods were produced was small and that the same artisans or workshops contributed to burials that modern scholarship has tended to treat separately, imposing a distinction that the ancient actors do not seem to have made.[68]

Mortuary practices operate on multiple levels of meaning to mediate the communal and personal experience of death and, in Egyptian thought, to transform the dead for an eternal existence. Because funerary art is an active component of these practices, the agency through which it was created and employed should be a central consideration in any interpretive effort. This is all the more true when funerary art includes a prominent pictorial representation of the deceased. Creating an image of this sort necessitated the selection of appropriate visual cues and provided an opportunity, perhaps otherwise rare, to communicate the subject's self-identity and whatever considerations influenced the construction of that identity. The funer-

---

for which see Parlasca 2000, fig. 8; Parlasca and Seemann 1999, 238 (no. 146), with further bibliography and a discussion of the panel's date. According to Walker (2000, 36), this portrait panel is one of only two known to her that certainly postdate the early or middle third century.

[63] Parlasca 2000.

[64] Amsterdam, Allard Pierson Museum 723, in Parlasca and Seemann 1999, 335 (no. 229). The redating established by Smith (1997) on firm paleographic and onomastic evidence is ca. 50 B.C.–A.D. 50. This is a conservative date range, and the Demotic papyri used for paleographic comparison with the coffin group's inscriptions favor the 50 B.C., or an even earlier, date; cf. Hoffmann 1995, 38–9.

[65] Perhaps the basis on which the male masks mentioned above in n. 47 were dated?

[66] Roberts (1997) compares Petrie's excavation records with his published reports.

[67] A mask that inserts a painting where the sculpted face would be expected underscores this point: Manchester Museum 1767, illustrated in Borg 1998, 73.

[68] Thus the standard reference works (Parlasca 1966; Grimm 1974) focus on either the Hawara shrouds and panel portraits (Parlasca) or the masks (Grimm). Similarly, Walker and Bierbrier 1997a separates "Portraits and mummies from Hawara" (at 37–76) and "Gilded masks from Hawara" (at 77–85).

ary art from Hawara illustrates this point. Given that masks and painted portraits were both viable options for representing the dead at Hawara in the first century A.D., it was presumably patron choice that governed their use, with or without a shroud. Factors contributing to this decision might include some element of personal preference, or "taste," or some quality of the dead individual which we are not always unable to discern from the information available to us, such as his or her membership in a familial, professional, religious, or other social group, or the cause of the person's death. The costs of various options, and how much a purchaser was willing to spend on funereal outlay, are also likely to have been considerations, although there is minimal evidence for the pricing of funerary equipment, and the expense of a burial assemblage need not have been directly related to the socioeconomic status of that individual. In the absence of thorough archaeological documentation for most of the Ptolemaic and Roman cemeteries in Egypt, it is difficult to establish what a "typical" burial assemblage was and how funerary art, in its original context, related to other mortuary factors, such as spatial distribution, body treatment (where mummies have not survived), and the deposition of any other grave goods.[69]

The age and sex of the deceased do not seem to have been decisive factors in choosing one type of mummy adornment over another, since masks, portraits, and shrouds from Hawara were used for the interments of males and females, adults and children alike. At the same time, however, funerary art of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods expressed an evident concern for gender differentiation, maintaining clear correspondences between the sex of the deceased and any representation of him or her. This apparent requirement extended to representations whose primary goal was not to provide a naturalistic portrait of the deceased but to record his or her assimilation to an Egyptian deity. Dead males were identified with Osiris, dead females with Hathor, an iconological interpretation supported by funerary literature of the period and object inscriptions that prefix the name of the deceased with "Osiris" or "Hathor" as appropriate. In the Theban necropolises of the late first and early second centuries A.D., shrouds identical to those from the Soter family burials employ a life-size image of Osiris for males (fig. 3) and, for females, an image to be understood as Hathor or as the deceased in the guise of Hathor.[70] These shrouds represent the dead not by replicating what a person looked like, or indeed any individual characteristics, but by linking the deceased to his or her divine counterpart.

To return to the question of agency, funerary art presented options not only in regard to what type of object or monument would be used but also in relation to what pictorial representations the object or monument would incorporate. The conscious and deliberate character of such representational choices is nowhere more evident than in works of funerary art that combine visual elements from the Egyptian and Greek or Roman repertoires—such as a naturalistic portrait on an actual or represented mummy, or contrasting figures making offerings to a tomb owner (fig. 4). A 1961 article by the Hungarian Egyptologist László Castiglione addressed this phenomenon, which he termed a "dualité du style," and noted its particular prevalence in funerary art of the Roman period, specifically in the depiction of the deceased. Castiglione's choice of words, however, obscured his argument; the word "style" is notoriously difficult to define and cannot support the weight of meaning with which scholars have tried to imbue it in this instance.

The examples Castiglione collected, like the examples presented here, do not combine different styles: they employ two discrete *systems of representation,* the Egyptian and the Hellenic. From its earliest inception, the Egyptian representational system relied on a standard conceptualization of the human form and used bordered areas to assert order in compositions; both traits are especially evident in two-dimensional art. By contrast, the Hellenic system, descending from the Classical Greek tradition, sought to render the observable world more nearly as the viewer sees it. The two systems are pictorial languages, each with its own grammar and vocabulary. Societies and their arts do not exist in a vacuum: just as a person can learn another spoken language, so artists and viewers alike can acquire additional artistic languages with adequate exposure and incentive. Thus Roman art developed an idiom that drew on the art of Classical and Hellenistic Greece, exploiting athletic body types and ideal faces, for example, to convey divinity and youth.[71]

---

[69] Petrie's (1911, 1) observation that perhaps two in 100 of the mummies at Hawara bore panel portraits is vague at best. On the fallacies of directly extrapolating social status from grave goods and other mortuary characteristics, see for instance Morris 1993, 103–8.

[70] Hathor had close and ancient ties to both Nut and Isis, and the three can share iconographic traits; thus the floors of Soter-group coffins employ an essentially identical female representation where a depiction of Nut would be expected. Some coffins depict a *nw*-pot hieroglyph over this figure's head to identify her as Nut: Horak and Harrauer 1999, 11 (Edinburgh, Royal Museum of Scotland 1956.357A); Schmidt 1919, 231, fig. 1329 (Louvre E 13016). For the Soter family, see Van Landuyt 1995.

In the funerary art of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, the combination of the Hellenic and Egyptian representational systems is often quite striking because the systems contrast so emphatically and could be integrated in diverse ways. Two tombs in Alexandria, studied by Guimier-Sorbets and Seif el-Din (see n. 8), each juxtapose the two artistic systems by depicting the abduction of Persephone in one register, in Hellenic form, while the register immediately above shows Anubis tending a mummy on a bier, in keeping with traditional Egyptian form. In most dual-system objects or monuments, a figure of the deceased following Hellenic representational norms fills a prominent position. For example, the "arm-sling" pose was a popular male portrait type in the Greek East from the third century B.C. onward: the subject supported his weight on his left leg and wrapped a Greek mantle decorously around his body so that his right arm, clasped to his chest, held the draped garment in place. This is the posture that dominates one wall of the Dakhleh Oasis tomb of Petosiris (fig. 4), as opposed to the other walls' register-ordered Egyptian scenes.[72] The arm-sling portrait type was also adopted for a coffin lid whose base bears a traditionally formed *ba*-bird, and for the trilingual stela of Besas, who is flanked by protective mummiform figures in Egyptian profile view (fig. 7).[73] Poses from the repertoire of Greek and Roman funerary compositions—the deceased on a dining couch, or in the act of burning incense—appear in combination with Egyptian elements as well.[74] Nor are Hellenic-based images limited to representations of the deceased: witness the offering figure nearer Petosiris in figure 4, or the depiction of Osiris on a group of shrouds or wall-hangings from Saqqara.[75] Similarly, the Egyptian representational system could accommodate subject matter that was Hellenic in origin, as in a cartonnage fragment depicting a man wearing a Greek tunic and mantle yet drawn according to Egyptian conventions.[76]

Content and artistic form do not always correspond predictably, but in general, established Egyptian artistic forms relay traditional Egyptian religious iconography. Some scenes and symbols—Anubis embalming a mummy, the weighing of the heart—seem intrinsically related to the manner of their pictorial presentation. Egyptian iconography preserves the key elements of the funerary cycle through which the deceased, like Osiris and the sun god, would overcome death, repel any dangers, and be eternally rejuvenated in the afterlife. Like the native temples, which were still being decorated into the mid third century A.D., the Egyptian funerary tradition provided a functional prerequisite for preserving and passing down Egyptian art. And although Egyptian art appears entirely typical to a modern Egyptologist, to a viewer in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt its distinctive conventions were not the sole or even the primary visual idiom, and at some point the conventions themselves must have come to signify a delimited religious sphere.

The dissemination of artistic forms through building projects, coinage, publicly displayed objects (whether a statue or a shop sign), and ephemeral media now lost, all made the Hellenic visual language a familiar part of lived experience. Some scholars have gone to great lengths to posit a native Egyptian origin for a range of artistic developments, imagining that the country's populace valued and wished to perpetuate its pharaonic heritage in much the same way as modern scholars do.[77] Such formulations can be as inaccurate and patronizing as the earlier pejorative views they seek to replace.[78] The adoption of Hellenic art was an ongoing process and an inevitable development, particularly in an eastern Mediterranean society that privileged naturalistic portraiture as a means of self-presentation.

---

[71] Hölscher 1987, 15, 34, 57–8; Smith 1996.

[72] Whitehouse 1998, with discussion and further references.

[73] Coffin: British Museum EA 55022, in Walker and Bierbrier 1997a, 36 (no. 10); cf. Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum 17016, from Abusir el-Meleq, in Parlasca and Seemann 1999, 212–3 (no. 120). Stela of Besas: supra, n. 12.

[74] Reclining on couch: Terenouthis stelae such as Hannover, Kestner Museum 1925.225, in Parlasca and Seemann 1999, 252 (no. 156). Burning incense: Abdalla 1992, 103–4.

[75] Including Moscow, Pushkin Museum I 1a 5747 and Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum 11651: Parlasca and Seemann 1999, 246 (no. 153) and 260–1 (no. 165), respectively.

[76] Louvre E 25384: Aubert and Cortopassi 1998, 82 (no. 38); also published by du Bourguet (1957) and illustrated in Castiglione (1961, 212).

[77] For example, the language of struggle and competition that Bianchi uses to characterize "the ultimate triumph of Classical over Egyptian art" (Bianchi et al. 1988, 80), or Corcoran's assertion that "two rival cultures" existed (Corcoran 1995, 2).

[78] Such as McCrimmon 1945, 61: "The Graeco-Egyptian mummy . . . is a spectacle of ugliness, mediocrity, and incongruity."

The intimate connection between self-presentation and the need to create a lasting image of the deceased is a hallmark of the funerary art produced in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, and the question of who used such art is vital to any interpretation of it. As Borg has demonstrated, the mummy portraits display markers of Greek identity, which formed a sharp contrast to Roman identity from the late Hellenistic period into the mid second century A.D.[79] Features of the portraits, such as tunics, mantles, and beards, would have been read in keeping with the societal predilection for cultivating Greek language, education, and values. This holds true for other naturalistic representations of the dead as well, whether on coffins, stelae, tombs, or statuary. The fact that Greek identity could be framed within the traditional sphere of Egyptian mortuary practices indicates the extent to which Greek-ness was a desirable model for the self. At the same time, the portraits and other forms of funerary art often point to the deceased's engagement with Egyptian cults by means of iconography that seems to reveal more than a divine assimilation. Studded stoles and floral bandoliers can mark priestly office, for example, and the depiction of women in a knotted mantle and corkscrew curls, as worn by Isis in Roman cult statues, recorded their cult affiliation.[80] Similarly, the star-emblem diadem and contabulated mantle seem to mark priests of Sarapis.[81] Using Egyptian mortuary practices, and accompanying them with highly decorated funerary art, may itself signal that the people thus memorialized were particularly involved with native cults and temples. The elaboration of Egyptian iconography and Demotic or hieroglyphic texts on numerous objects suggests that patrons and artists had recourse to specialist knowledge of the kind that the religious infrastructure preserved and passed down. In short, the specific manner in which Egyptian and Hellenic art interacted as a means of funerary commemoration can be seen not simply as a passive reception of dominant (Greek and Roman) visual forms but as an active and considered response to the multiple cultural factors that shaped selfhood in that time and place.

What funerary art of any form or content does not automatically indicate is the social rank and economic means of the deceased, despite a common assumption that the more numerous and more intrinsically valuable funerary goods are, the wealthier and more important the dead person must have been in life. Although mummification rites, a coffin or stela, and space in a tomb represent a significant financial outlay, it is difficult to gauge how people prioritized such expenditures. Art is chiefly endowed with status by the contexts in which it is owned and used within a society. A costly burial, perhaps with a gilded coffin or the best-quality mummification available, might well have been the prerogative of a local elite of some means, but in the larger picture of Roman Egyptian social structures, the emphasis should lie on *local*, rather than elite. There is no evidence that any of the officials who administered Egypt, or any holders of Roman or Alexandrian citizenship, were buried with the varieties of funerary art that typify the corpus, for example, a panel, shroud, mask, coffin, or tomb with Egyptian features. Entrance to certain social orders, like the gymnasium and metropolitan citizenship, was tightly controlled, and again no firm links can be made between members of these privileged urban classes and the extant funerary material.[82] Although such links might well have existed, in the absence of supporting evidence, it is a fallacy to allege that the bulk, and "best," of the funerary art from Roman Egypt must have been used by the highest-ranking, and "best," people of the community, region, or country. That said, the costs implicit in the combination of mummification, interment, and funerary art point to a level of affluence among the patrons. Further, decorated burials tend to occur in cemeteries associated with urbanized areas, where a wealthier, more "hellenized" population existed alongside the skilled craft industries that such burials required.

More than anything, the variety of the forms, materials, and representational styles observed in this funerary art, along with its physical and chronological spread, suggests that no blanket explanation as to the social status of its owners can be sufficient.

---

[79] Borg 1996, 150–76; Borg 1998, 34–59.

[80] On stoles and bandoliers, see Whitehouse 1998, 261; cf. Rosenbaum 1960, 134 (appendix II, no. 1), pl. 134. For the Isiac affiliations of women and girls, in Egypt and elsewhere, see Thompson 1981; Eingartner 1991; Walters 1988. The mantle costume associated with Isis ultimately derives from Egyptian sources; one explication of this is offered in Bianchi 1980.

[81] Goette 1989. Borg (1996, 164) corrects his identification of the contabulated garment, which is a mantle rather than a toga.

[82] Although Walker (1997) argues that the subjects of mummy portraits may have been metropolitan elites and members of the gymnasium. Papyrological evidence for attaining membership in these groups is collected in Nelson 1979.

Some funerary assemblages have a conservative, non-Hellenic character, such as the Soter group of coffins, shrouds, and papyri from second-century A.D. Thebes (e.g., fig. 3).[83] One little-explored consideration is that such material purposely employed native iconography to craft an alternative to the prevailing social structure and its visual norms. In the Soter group, Egyptian texts and representations dominate, with archaizing formulations in the language, the coffin shapes, and the large-scale figures of the deceased. Similarly, the names and (rarely) titles of the three-dozen individuals associated with the group suggest families of predominantly Egyptian descent and with local concerns; one coffin-owner held Egyptian priesthoods at nearby Coptos.[84] If the design and deployment of the Soter material was intended as an expression of Egyptian identity and Egyptian values, in contrast to Hellenic ones, it is probably not an isolated case among contemporaneous funerary art. At the very least, the celebration of native mortuary rites and the traditional decoration of burials provided a safe and specific setting in which Egyptian-ness could be emphasized by those who wished to do so.

CONCLUSION

The popular appeal of exhibitions like "Ancient Faces" and the scholarly achievement of the many recent catalogues and publications concerned with Ptolemaic and Roman funerary art have accentuated the interpretive potential of a large and varied corpus of material. Fascination with this art is such that the response at the close of the 20th century has been as enthusiastic as the initial reception these works, and the mummy portraits in particular, received at the end of the 19th century. It is useful, however, to consider the full spectrum of funerary art and related mortuary evidence without unduly privileging one type of object or documentation. The range and quantity of the material is extraordinary, and for much of it, multiple sources of information—archaeological, visual, textual, even physiological—can coalesce in a way that is not often possible in scholarship on the ancient world.

This corpus of funerary art offers us an unparalleled opportunity to see the inhabitants of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt as they presented themselves and wished to be seen within the parameters of mortuary commemoration. In this way, reading representations of the deceased, regardless of whether those representations are naturalistic portraits, can provide a window into the self-identity of the individuals portrayed. Funerary art may well have been the most opportune, if not the only, venue in which some people could both record and negotiate various aspects of identity: class, sex, profession, religion, family, and cultural ties. In doing so, they drew on the artistic and religious traditions then available, and the resultant visual imagery dovetails their aspirations for this life and the next. The interplay of Roman, Greek, and Egyptian cultures was a dynamic process, and it is more useful to look for the variety of ways in which this process manifested itself than to characterize it as either a jumbled mixture or a combative divide. As visual evidence indicates—especially that which can be characterized as dual-system—the actors were aware of the multiple cultural derivations that contributed to their contemporary existence. Recent research in this field demonstrates how far forward scholarship on the funerary art of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt has moved and also how much remains to be done if the material is to be used to full advantage in the study of this multifaceted society.

THE QUEEN'S COLLEGE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY
OXFORD OX1 4AW
UNITED KINGDOM
CHRISTINA.RIGGS@QUEENS.OX.AC.UK

Works Cited

Abdalla, A. 1992. *Graeco-Roman Funerary Stelae from Upper Egypt.* Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press.

Aubert, M.-F., and R. Cortopassi. 1998. *Portraits de l'Égypte romaine.* Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux.

Bagnall, R., and B. Frier. 1994. *The Demography of Roman Egypt.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beinlich-Seeber, C. 1998. "Ein römerzeitliche Sargfragment in Marseille." In *Ein ägyptisches Glasperlenspiel: Ägyptologische Beiträge für Erik Hornung aus seinem Schülerkreis,* edited by A. Brodbeck, 9–40. Berlin: Mann.

Bianchi, R.S. 1980. "Not the Isis Knot." *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 2:9–31.

Bianchi, R.S., et al. 1988. *Cleopatra's Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies.* Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum.

Bierbrier, M.L., ed. 1997. *Portraits and Masks: Burial Cus-*

---

[83] Cf. Van Landuyt 1995; although attributable to the same workshop, not all material from this group belongs to the Soter family, which is the focus of Van Landuyt's study.

[84] Beinlich-Seeber 1998, discussing a panel from the Soter-group coffin of a man named Imhotep.

toms in Roman Egypt. London: British Museum Press.

Blanc, N., ed. 1998. *Au royaume des ombres: La peinture funéraire antique.* Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux.

Borg, B. 1996. *Mumienporträts: Chronologie und kultureller Kontext.* Mainz: Phillip von Zabern.

———. 1998. *"Der zierlichste Anblick der Welt–": Ägyptische Porträtmumien.* Mainz: Phillip von Zabern.

du Bourguet, P. 1957. "Une peinture-charnière entre l'art pharaonique et l'art copte." *MDIK* 15:13–7.

Bresciani, E. 1996. *Il Volto di Osiri: Tele funerary dipinte nell'Egitto romano.* Lucca: M. Pacini Fazzi.

Brilliant, R. 1991. *Portraiture.* London: Reaktion.

Bryson, N. 1983. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze.* London: Macmillan.

Campbell, L. 1996. "Portraiture." In *The Dictionary of Art,* edited by J.S. Turner, 273–87. London: Macmillan.

Castiglione, L. 1961. "Dualité du style dans l'art sépulcral égyptien à l'époque romaine." *ActaArchHung* 9:209–30.

Corcoran, L. 1995. *Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt. SAOC* 56. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Cotter, H. 2000. "Expressions so Ancient, yet Familiar." *The New York Times,* Friday, 18 February, page E39 and continuation.

Daszewski, W. 1997. "Mummy Portraits from Northern Egypt: The Necropolis in Marina el-Alamein." In *Portraits and Masks,* edited by M.L. Bierbrier, 59–65. London: British Museum Press.

D'Auria, S., P. Lacovara, and C. Roehrig. 1988. *Mummies and Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt.* Boston: Museum of Fine Arts.

De Meulenaere, H. 1994. Review of *Graeco-Roman Funerary Stelae from Upper Egypt,* by A. Abdalla. *BibO* 51:315–8.

Del Francia Barocas, L. 1998. *Antinoe cent'anni dopo.* Florence: Istituto papirologico G. Vitelli.

Doxiadis, E. 1995. *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits.* London: Thames and Hudson.

Dunand, F. et al. 1992. *Douch I. La Nécropole.* Documents de fouilles 26. Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.

Dunand, F., and R. Lichtenberg. 1995. "Pratiques et croyances funéraires en Égypte romaine." *ANRW* II/18.5:3216–315.

———. 1998. *Les momies et la mort en Égypte.* Paris: Éditions Errance.

Edgar, C.C. 1903. *Greek Sculpture.* Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Cairo. Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.

Eingartner, J. 1991. *Isis und ihre Dienerinnen in der Kunst der römischen Kaiserzeit. Mnemosyne* Suppl. 115. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Empereur, J.-Y. 1998a. *Alexandria Rediscovered.* London: British Museum Press.

———, ed. 1998b. *Alexandrina I.* Études alexandrines I. Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.

von Falck, M. 1996. "Vorüberlegungen zur Datierung einer spätkaiserzeitlichen Denkmalgrüppe aus Ägypten: die Grabreliefs von Behnasa." *Bulletin de la Societé d'archéologie Copte* 35:29–35.

Fenton, J. 1997. "The Mummy's Secret." *The New York Review of Books* 44, no. 12 (17 July). Reprinted in *Leonardo's Nephew: Essays on Art and Artists,* edited by J. Fenton, 20–40. London: Viking Press, 1998.

Filer, J.M. 1997. "If the Face Fits: A Comparison of Mummies and Their Accompanying Portraits Using Computerised Axial Tomography." In *Portraits and Masks,* edited by M.L. Bierbrier, 121–6. London: British Museum Press.

Frankfurter, D. 1998. *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gabra, S. 1941. *Rapport sur les Fouilles d'Hermoupolis Ouest (Touna el-Gebel).* Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.

Gabra, S., and É. Drioton. 1954. *Peintures à fresque et scènes peintes à Hermoupolis-Ouest (Touna el-Gebel).* Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.

Goette, H.R. 1989. "Kaiserzeitliche Bildnisse von Sarapis-Priestern." *MDIK* 45:173–86.

Gombrich, E. 1996. *Art and Illusion.* 5th ed. London: Phaidon.

Grimm, G. 1974. *Die römischen Mumienmasken aus Ägypten.* Wiesbaden: F. Steiner.

Guimier-Sorbets, A.-M., and M. Seif el-Din. 1997. "Les deux tombes de Perséphone dans la nécropole de Kom el-Chougafa à Alexandrie." *BCH* 121:355–410.

el-Hafeez, A., J.-Cl. Grenier, and G. Wagner. 1985. *Stéles funéraires de Kom Abu Bellou.* Paris: Éditions recherché sur les civilizations.

Hawass, Z. 2000. *Valley of the Golden Mummies.* New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Hoffmann, F. 1995. "Neue Fragmente zu den drei grossen Inaros-Petubastis-Texten." *Enchoria* 22:27–39.

Hölscher, T. 1987. *Römische Bildsprache als semantisches System.* Heidelberg: Carl Winter.

Horak, U., and H. Harrauer. 1999. *Mumie-Schau'n. Totenkult im hellenistische-römerzeitlichen Ägypten.* Linz: NORDICO – Museum der Stadt Linz.

Hunt, A.S., and C.C. Edgar. 1932. *Select Papyri I.* Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Isager, J. 1991. *Pliny on Art and Society: The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art.* Odense: Odense University Press.

Jucker, H. 1984. Review of *Ritratti di Mummie* (Repertorio III), by K. Parlasca. *Gnomon* 56:542–7.

Kákosy, L. 1995. "Probleme der Religion im römerzeitlichen Ägypten." *ANRW* II/18.5:2894–3049.

Kuhlmann, K.P. 1983. *Materialen zur Archäologie und Geschichtes des Raumes von Achmim.* Mainz: Phillip von Zabern.

Kurth, D. 1990. *Der Sarg der Teüris: Eine Studie zum Totenglauben im römerzeitlichen Ägypten.* Aegyptiaca Treverensia 6. Mainz: Phillip von Zabern.

Lutz, H. 1927. *Egyptian Tomb Steles and Offering Stones in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnicity of the University of California.* Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs.

McCrimmon, M. 1945. "Graeco-Egyptian Masks and Portraits in the Royal Ontario Museum." *AJA* 49:52–61.

Montserrat, D. 1996. *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt.* London: Kegan Paul International.

———. 1998. "Unidentified Human Remains: Mummies and the Erotics of Biography." In *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity,* edited by D. Montserrat, 162–97. London and New York: Routledge.

Montserrat, D., and L. Meskell. 1997. "Mortuary Archaeology and Religious Landscape at Graeco-Roman Deir el-Medina." *JEA* 83:179–97.

Morris, I. 1993. *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Musées de Marseille. 1997. *Égypte Romaine: L'autre Égypte.* Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux.

Nelson, C.A. 1979. *Status Declarations from Roman Egypt.* American Studies in Papyrology 19. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert.

Nowicka, M. 1979. "La peinture dans les papyrus grecs." *Archeologia* 30:21–8.

———. 1993. *Le portrait dans la peinture antique.* Bibliotheca Antiqua 22. Warsaw: Academie polonaise des sciences.

Osing, J. 1982. *Denkmäler der Oase Dachla aus dem Nachlass von Ahmed Fakhry.* Mainz: Phillip von Zabern.

Parlasca, K. 1966. *Mumienporträts und verwandte Denkmäler.* Wiesbaden: F. Steiner.

———. 1969–1980. *Ritratti di mumie.* Repertorio d'arte dell'Egitto greco-romano Serie B I-III. Rome: Bretschneider.

———. 2000. "Eine neue Monographie über Mumienbildnisse." *ChrÉg* 75:171–86.

Parlasca, K., and H. Seemann. 1999. *Augenblicke: Mumienporträts und ägyptische Grabkunst aus römischer Zeit.* Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle.

Pestman, P.W. 1993. *The Archive of the Theban Choachytes.* Studia Demotica 2. Leiden: Peeters.

Petrie, W.M.F. 1889. *Hawara, Biahmu, and Arsinoe.* London: Field and Tuer.

———. 1911. *Roman Portraits and Memphis (IV).* British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Egyptian Research Account. London: Bernard Quaritch.

Raven, M.J. 1998. "Giving a Face to the Mummy of Sensaos in Leiden." *KMT* 9 (3):18–25.

Riggs, C. 2000. "Roman Period Mummy Masks from Deir el-Bahri." *JEA* 86:121–44.

Roberts, P.C. 1997. "'One of Our Mummies Is Missing': Evaluating Petrie's Records from Hawara." In *Portraits and Masks,* edited by M.L. Bierbrier, 19–25. London: British Museum Press.

Römer, Cornelia. 2000. "Das Werden zu Osiris im römischen Ägypten." *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 2 (2):141–61.

Rosenbaum, E. 1960. *A Catalogue of Cyrenaican Portrait Sculpture.* London: British Academy.

Scheidel, W. 1998. "The Meaning of Dates on Mummy Labels: Seasonal Mortality and Mortuary Practice in Roman Egypt." *JRA* 11:285–92.

Schmidt, V. 1919. *Levende og døde i det gamle Aegypten.* Copenhagen: J. Frimodts.

Schneider, H. 1992. *Beeldhouwkunst in het land van de farao's.* Amsterdam: Bataafsche.

Schweitzer, A. 1998. "L'évolution stylistique et iconographique des parures de cartonnage d'Akhmîm du début de l'époque ptolémaïque à l'époque romaine." *BIFAO* 98:325–52.

Seipel, W., ed. 1999. *Bilder aus dem Wüstensand: Mumienportraits aus dem Ägyptischen Museum Kairo.* Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Smith, M. 1993. *The Liturgy of Opening the Mouth for Breathing.* Oxford: Griffith Institute.

———. 1997. "Dating Anthropoid Mummy Cases from Akhmim: The Evidence of the Demotic Inscriptions." In *Portraits and Masks,* edited by M.L. Bierbrier, 66–71. London: British Museum Press.

Smith, R.R.R. 1996. "Typology and Diversity in the Portraits of Augustus." *JRA* 9:30–47.

Spiegelberg, W. 1904. *Die Demotischen Denkmäler I: Die Demotischen Inschriften.* Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Cairo. Leipzig: Drugulin.

Steckeweh, H., et al. 1936. *Die Fürstengräber von Qaw.* Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs.

Sumner, A., ed. 1995. *Death, Passion and Politics: Van Dyck's Portraits of Venetia Stanley and George Digby.* London: Dulwich Picture Gallery.

Teeter, E. 1999. Review of *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt,* by S. Walker and M. Bierbrier. *JNES* 58:305–7.

Thomas, T.K. 2000. *Late Antique Egyptian Funerary Sculpture.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Thompson, D.L. 1972. "The Classes and Hands of Painted Funerary Portraits from Antinoopolis." Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina.

———. 1981. "A Priestess of Isis at Swarthmore College." *AJA* 85:88–92.

Török, L. 1995. *Hellenistic and Roman Terracottas from Egypt.* Rome: Bretschneider.

Van Landuyt, K. 1995. "The Soter Family: Genealogy and Onomastics." *Hundred-Gated Thebes. Acts of a Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban Area in the Graeco-Roman Period,* edited by S. Vleeming, 69–82. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Venit, M.S. 1988. "The Painted Tomb from Wardian and the Decoration of Alexandrian Tombs." *JARCE* 25:71–91.

———. 1997. "The Tomb from Tigrane Pasha Street and the Iconography of Death in Roman Alexandria." *AJA* 101:701–29.

———. 1999. "The Stagni Painted Tomb: Cultural Interchange and Gender Differentiation in Roman Alexandria." *AJA* 103:641–69.

Walker, S. 1997. "Mummy Portraits in Their Roman Context." In *Portraits and Masks,* edited by M.L. Bierbrier, 1–6. London: British Museum Press.

———, ed. 2000. *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt.* New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Walker, S., and M. Bierbrier. 1997a. *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt.* London: British Museum Press.

———. 1997b. *Fayum: Misteriosi volti dall'Egitto.* Rome: Fondazione Memmo.

Walters, E. 1988. *Attic Grave Reliefs that Represent Women in the Dress of Isis. Hesperia* Suppl. 22. Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

Whitehouse, H. 1998. "Roman in Life, Egyptian in Death: The Painted Tomb of Petosiris in the Dakhleh Oasis." In *Life on the Fringe: Living in the Southern Egyptian Deserts during the Roman and Early Byzantine Periods,* edited by O. Kaper, 253–70. Leiden: Research School CNWS, School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies.

Willems, H., and W. Clarysse. 1999. *Keizers an de Nijl.* Leuven: Peeters.

———. 2000. *Les Empereurs du Nil.* Paris: Peeters.

Zaloscer, H. 1961. *Porträts aus dem Wüstensand. Die Mumienbildnisse aus der Oase Fayum.* Vienna: A. Schroll.

———. 1997–1998. "Die Mumienbildnisse und die Geschichte ihrer Rezeption." *Enchoria* 24:103–24.

Zanker, P. 1988. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

———. 1989. "Statuenrepräsentation und Mode." In *The Greek Renaissance in the Roman Empire. Papers from the 10th British Museum Classical Colloquium,* edited by S. Walker and A. Cameron, 102–7. London: British Museum Press.