Expressions of Identity: Analysis of a Funerary Mask from Roman Egypt (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Inv. 19.2.6)

Rachel Madison Wilson
EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY: ANALYSIS OF A FUNERARY MASK FROM ROMAN EGYPT (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Inv. 19.2.6)

By

Rachel Wilson

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For Momma and Olivia

In memory of Grandma Linda
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Abstract

The object of this study is a painted plaster mask of an adult woman from Roman Egypt currently housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Inv. 19.2.6. The mask has been stylistically attributed to Meir, the primary necropolis for Cusae. This mask represents the social identity of the deceased woman, while also embodying how she was transformed into a divine being through mummification. Through an analysis of the iconography of this funerary mask, as her chosen form of self-representation, I will place the multiple aspects of the life of the deceased into social, historical, and religious context. This thesis argues that the iconography on the funerary mask was utilized to represent the cultural identity and beliefs of the deceased and her renewal in the afterlife by representing her as Hathor, the patron goddess of Cusae.
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Chapter One

Introduction

The object of this study is a painted plaster mask of an adult woman from Roman Egypt currently housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (19.2.6), which I will refer to as the Met Wreathed Mask (Figure 1). According to the museum’s files, the mask, dated to 60-70 CE, was purchased in Cairo, on behalf of the museum, from an antiquities dealer named Nicolas Tano. While its provenience is unknown, the mask has been attributed to Meir based on stylistic similarities to other masks found at the site. The mask is a well-preserved representation with a detailed iconographic program, yet has never been analyzed in depth nor placed into its larger context. Having never seen this mask in person, I have completed my research based upon photographs published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Funerary Masks

As far back as the Old Kingdom, adornment was used to emphasize the head of the deceased, hence the beginnings of the mummy mask. The mummy mask was evidence of the

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ancient Egyptian belief in the transition to the afterlife and the deceased’s own transformation into a divine being. This emphasis placed on the head related to the preservation of the deceased’s image, as the mask served as a representation or substitute for the divine visage of the deceased. Starting in the Second Intermediate Period, Spell 151 from the Book of the Dead, “Spell for the Head of Mystery,” would be inscribed on the back of funerary masks, declaring the divine nature of the head and aiding in the rejuvenation of the deceased after death. The mask, which enabled the deceased to see beyond the coffin, served as a symbolic magical link between the body and its container. According to Spell 151, the mask’s purpose was also to protect the deceased, as it retained the power to drive away enemies. Furthermore, the mask was meant to represent the head of the deceased in order to ensure that one would be recognized as a divine being in the afterlife. In this sense, the mask became the “likeness” of the deceased, representing the transformation of the mummy into an Osirian form (a divine being) through mummmification, with the mask serving as a construct of those divine features.

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7 Sousa, Gilded Flesh, 38.
8 Thomas George Allen (trans.), The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day: Ideas of the Ancient Egyptians Concerning the Hereafter as Expressed in their Own Terms (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1974), 147; Corcoran, “Masks,” 346; Sousa, Gilded Flesh, 38.
9 Corcoran, “Masks,” 346.
10 Root, Faces of Immortality, 5; Sousa, Gilded Flesh, 38.
Plaster Masks

The Met Wreathed Mask belongs to the category of plastered cartonnage funerary masks. Plastered cartonnage masks developed in the First Intermediate Period (2134-2040 BCE) and the Middle Kingdom (2040-1640 BCE). These masks were most common in Middle Egypt, at sites such as Meir, Antinoopolis, Hermopolis-West, and Tuna el-Gebel. They masks were made up of layers of soaked linen placed over a sculptural mold, over which a layer of plaster was applied before the mask was painted. Sculptural molds enabled the creation of exaggerated facial features.

Plastered cartonnage masks evolved into the plaster form that became popular in the Roman Period (30 BCE-395 CE). Though still considered a form of mask, plaster masks were attached to the coffin rather than placed over the wrapped head of the mummy. This genre involved creating a mask out of clay or plaster to be placed on the lid of the coffin, depicting the deceased reclining on a bier with hands folded on the chest and head raised.

Despite having been made in a mold, plastered cartonnage and plaster masks of the Roman Period could be individualized. The linen surface of the mask was covered in a thin layer of white ground in preparation for the addition of painted and modelled details added to distinguish the features of the deceased, such as with Roman hairstyles, clothing, and jewelry.

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13 Root, Faces of Immortality, 3; Corcoran, “Masks,” 346.
14 Walker, Ancient Faces, 128.
15 Walker, Ancient Faces, 128.
16 Grimm, Die römischen Mummienmasken, 103; Walker, Ancient Faces, 128; Riggs, “Roman Period Mummy Masks,” 125; Corcoran, “Masks,” 347.
and painted funerary scenes incorporating traditional Egyptian iconography.\textsuperscript{17} Despite, however, their connection to pharaonic practices through the use of traditional Egyptian funerary iconography, excavators in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries thought the plaster masks looked too strange to be considered a continuation of Egyptian funerary art.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Mummy Portraits}

As an alternative to the plaster masks, panel paintings, often referred to in scholarship as “mummy portraits,” were another popular type of funerary facial covering from Roman Egypt. Portrait mummies, or mummies that had a naturalistic panel painting or were painted on linen shrouds, in \textit{lieu} of a more traditional funerary mask, were popular from the first to fourth centuries CE, peaking in the second century.\textsuperscript{19} Mummy portraits were first discovered by an

\textsuperscript{17} Riggs, “Roman Period Mummy Masks,” 125-140.


\textsuperscript{19} Campbell Cowan Edgar, \textit{Graeco-Egyptian Coffins, Masks, and Portraits}, Catalogue général des antiquités Égyptiennes du Musée du Caire (Cairo: L’Institut français d’archéologie Orientale, 1905); Sue D’Auria, Peter Lacovara, and Catharine H. Roehrig (eds.), “Roman Period,” in \textit{Mummies & Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt} (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1988), 205; Barbara Borg, “Problems in the Dating of the Mummy Portraits,” in \textit{The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt}, ed. Euphrosyne Doxiadis (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1995), 229-233; Joy Kremler, “Imperial Fashion Victims in Provincial Egypt: Re-dating Egyptian Mummy Portraits,” \textit{Art Journal} 43 (Published June 2, 2014): C. C. Edgar and Heinrich Drerup attempted to date the mummy portraits according to their hairstyles by comparing the coiffures depicted in the portraits to those depicted in Roman statuary and coinage in order to determine in which period the portraits were most likely created; Klaus Parlasca, \textit{Mumienporträts und verwandte Denkmäler} (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1966): Parlasca dated the mummy portraits to ca. 1\textsuperscript{st}-4\textsuperscript{th} c. CE based on his stylistic analysis; Barbara E. Borg, “Painted Funerary Portraits,” \textit{UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology}, Vol. 1 (2010): 3-4: Borg argued that production of the wooden panels ended in the mid-3\textsuperscript{rd} c. CE based on her comparison of women’s hairstyles on the mummy portraits to the fashionable hairstyles on sculptures of royal women in the Roman Empire; Corcoran, \textit{Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt}, 3: Corcoran argued that the mummy portraits belonged to a genre of funerary art that remained in production until the 4\textsuperscript{th} c. CE, analyzing the style of the portrait as well as the mummy wrappings of the deceased when possible to determine chronology; Christina Riggs, “Facing the Dead: Recent Research on the Funerary Art of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt,” in \textit{American Journal of Archaeology}, Vol. 106, No. 1 (Jan. 2002): 93-95: Riggs agreed with Borg’s end dating of the panel portraits, noting that the evidence suggests that the practice of “adorning mummies with portraits, masks, and shrouds became increasingly less common during the course of the third century.”
Italian traveler, Pietro delle Valle, at an informal excavation at Saqqara in 1615.\textsuperscript{20} They were first archaeologically excavated in large numbers by Flinders Petrie at the Fayum site of Hawara in 1888 and 1910-11,\textsuperscript{21} thus the masks have been designated “Fayum Portraits,” although they have subsequently been found throughout all of Egypt.\textsuperscript{22} These “Fayum Portraits,” or mummy portraits, are impressionistic paintings of the deceased in encaustic (colored beeswax) or tempera (watercolor) on a wooden panel or linen shroud that was placed over the face of the mummified deceased, held in place with the bandages of the mummy (Figure 2).\textsuperscript{23} While painted naturalistically, with individualized features, the mummy portraits still embody the generic mode of funerary masks, continuing the Egyptian tradition of preserving the deceased with an idealized image.\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{Previous Scholarship}

Funerary masks from Roman Egypt are the subjects of discussion and debate in scholarship due to the depiction on one object of both traditional Egyptian funerary imagery and the Hellenistic illusionistic representation of the deceased. This complex combination of traditions led to a division in the study of the masks, as Classicists and Egyptologists debate over

\textsuperscript{20} Morris Bierbrier, “The Discovery of the Mummy Portraits,” in \textit{Ancient Faces} (Routledge, 1997): Informal excavations were carried out by locals at sites such as Saqqara to find mummies for tourism and to engage in the trade of \textit{mumiya}, mummy dust, which was used for medicinal purposes.

\textsuperscript{21} W. M. Flinders Petrie, \textit{The Hawara Portfolio: Paintings of the Roman Age, Found by W M. Flinders Petrie, 1888 and 1911} (London: School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1913); Corcoran, “Masks,” 347.


\textsuperscript{23} d’Auria, “Roman Period,” 205; Corcoran, \textit{Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt}, 3; Corcoran, “Masks,” 347; Root, \textit{Faces of Immortality}, 7; Borg, “Painted Funerary Portraits,” 8-9.

\textsuperscript{24} Corcoran, “Masks,” 348.
whether the artistic style of the portraits should be attributed to the preferences of Roman or Egyptian patrons and traditions.

In his *Graeco-Egyptian Coffins, Masks, and Portraits*, C.C. Edgar imposed an in-depth stylistic analysis on funerary masks from Roman Egypt, dating the masks through a comparison of the depicted hairstyles with those found in Roman sculpture.²⁵ Klaus Parlasca dated the funerary masks according to stylistic changes, comparing the forms of dress and decoration on the masks and identifying them as either stylistically Egyptian or Hellenistic.²⁶ In *Die römischen Mummienmasken aus Ägypten*, Günter Grimm attempted to categorize the plaster funerary masks into individual workshops, attributing a shift to more individualistic details in the masks to the influence of Italic Hellenistic portraiture on Egyptian art forms during the Roman Period.²⁷

Scholarly debate regarding the styles²⁸ of this class of objects has focused primarily on whether the masks are purely Hellenistic, Egyptian, or a mixed form of representation that has been labeled “dual style.” Castiglione argued that the cartonnage masks of Meir and Hawara fit into this categorization of “double style,” as the mask was decorated with ritual scenes in the so-called “Egyptian style” coupled with the more naturalistic image of the deceased in the “Greco-Roman style.”²⁹ Castiglione therefore posited two distinct styles (Egyptian and Greco-Roman),

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²⁵ See Edgar, *Graeco-Egyptian Coffins, Masks, and Portraits*.
²⁶ See Parlasca, *Mumienporträts*.
²⁷ Grimm, *Die römischen Mummienmasken*.
²⁸ Jas Elsner, “Style,” in *Critical Terms for Art History (Second Edition)*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003): “Style” in art history refers to the grouping of like objects on the basis of formal analysis, using observation to build a narrative for the object in question and reconstruct its historical context and culture. Thus, when I refer to “style” in this paper, I mean the manner in which the object is grouped with others like it, in opposition to a different group of objects, i.e., Egyptian curly-haired wigs versus Roman imperial coiffures as indicative of their individual “styles.”
which he does not clearly define, being merged into one work. Euphrosyne Doxiadis, in giving her perspective as an artist, argued that while the painted portraits are incorporated into an Egyptian context (mummies), they are “purely Greek” creations due to their naturalistic style.30 Correspondingly, Susan Walker interpreted the mummy portraits as Roman adaptations within local parameters, implementing the Roman idea of commemorating the deceased within the Egyptian form of mummification.31 In a view similar to that of Castiglione, Sally-Ann Ashton argued that Romano-Egyptian art like that of the portrait mummies reveals a “true mixing of traditions.”32 While art in the Ptolemaic Period involved Greek and Egyptian cultures borrowing elements from each other, Ashton states that representations such as Horus wearing a toga indicate that the Egyptian and Roman styles were combined into one new artistic tradition.33

Margaret Root argues against studying the masks separately as Roman or Egyptian products, instead placing the Roman Period mummy masks within the context of Pharaonic tradition.34 She discusses the idea of “true likeness,” arguing that while the mummy masks were conventionalized, they achieved “true likeness” by representing the Egyptians as they wished to be represented.35 She attributes naturalism in the Roman Period mummy masks to the strong impact of Classical art forms on Egyptian works, representing a fusion of Graeco-Roman artistic

30 Doxiadis, The Mysterious Fayum Portraits, 12.
33 Ashton, Petrie’s Ptolemaic and Roman Memphis, 29-33.
34 See Root, Faces of Immortality.
forms with indigenous concepts of portraiture in Egypt. In 1988, Lorelei Corcoran argued that the attribution of the portrait mummies to Roman and Greek artistic traditions was due to the study of the mummy portraits as isolated art objects, separated from their cultural context. In studying the mummy portraits in conjunction with their decorated body coverings and within their greater cultural and religious context, Corcoran concluded that the decoration of the portrait mummy as a whole was a continuation of Egyptian tradition, not a fusion of two cultures. Corcoran stated further that the iconography of portrait mummies documented a traditional Egyptian belief in the transformation of the deceased into a deity with solar attributes, confirming a continuation of native afterlife beliefs.

Barbara Borg’s analysis of the mummy portraits organized them into iconographic groups, analyzing the clothing, jewelry, and hairstyles depicted on them in comparison with imperial Roman art to establish dating parameters. She argues that the portraits themselves have no pharaonic Egyptian elements, but represent Graeco-Roman culture, though noting that the religious depictions are Egyptian. Most recently, the subject has been discussed by Christina Riggs in The Beautiful Burial in Roman Egypt: Art, Identity, and Funerary Religion, in which she studies how art, identity, and funerary religion intersected in representations of the

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36 Root, Faces of Immortality, 7-8.
37 See Corcoran, Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt, 3.
38 Corcoran, Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt, 5.
41 Ibid, 176.
deceased in Roman Egypt. Riggs addresses the concept of “Romanization,” in which people within the Roman Empire adopt and become familiar with Roman material culture in both their art and everyday objects. Despite this assimilation, traditional Egyptian culture was clearly maintained, preventing a complete “Hellenization” of its ideologies. This combination of Romanization with the continued presence of the native culture led to new methods of expressing beliefs, aiding in the preservation of those traditional ideas rather than their elimination. As a result, art continued to develop in order to satisfy the changing social needs of local communities.

**Thesis Objective**

The plaster mask of this study has never been the subject of an in-depth analysis, although it has been briefly discussed in some works. In *The Artists of the Mummy Portraits*, David Thompson includes an image of the Met Wreathed Mask in his catalogue, but he includes only a brief discussion of the object as a contrast to the panel paintings. The mask was also included in a catalogue for the 2000 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, curated by Elizabeth Milleker, who provided a brief description of the mask that focuses on how the

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46 Ibid, 36.
deceased is adorned. Milleker does not, however, provide any significant analysis of the mask’s attributes. Walker provides the most in-depth description of the Met Wreathed Mask in her catalogue section on “Portraits on Painted Plaster Masks,” listed under No. 84, “Painted plaster and cartonnage mummy mask of a woman with a jeweled garland.” She includes the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s images of the mask, giving a detailed description of how the deceased is depicted and listing her attributes and the figures in the mask’s decoration. This description, while comprehensive, does not include much analysis, listing the figures and attributes adorning the mask without discussing their significance. Asja Müller categorizes Roman Period mummy masks according to their workshop, dividing the Meir Masks into two variants. She includes the Met Wreathed Mask in her discussion of the Meir masks, attributing it to Variant A which she entitles “box masks,” including a brief discussion of the shared characteristics of the box masks from Meir.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an analysis of the Met Wreathed Mask within its historical, religious, and social context, culminating in a detailed discussion of the mask’s iconography and how it reveals the broader socio-religious identity of the deceased within her community. In order to accomplish this, I have organized my discussion into five parts. As a form of portraiture, or representation of the deceased, I will first discuss in Chapter Two how concepts of portraiture differed in antiquity from today, determining whether the Met Wreathed


51 Ibid.
Mask should truly be referred to as a portrait. In Chapter Three, I will define how one can make an informed inference about identity and social status, and what elements must be considered when discussing the identity of one who lived so long ago. In Chapter Four, I will situate the Met Wreathed Mask into its social, historical, and archaeological context through a discussion of Roman Egyptian society and the Meir necropolis where the mask was likely found. Focusing on the social implications for the deceased represented by the mask, I will examine the roles of women in Roman Egypt, and the social changes that were undergone in the transition from the Ptolemaic Period to the Roman Period. In Chapter Five, I will complete an in-depth iconographic analysis of the Met Wreathed Mask, identifying the significance of each element of the mask’s decoration. In my final chapter, I will determine why the deceased chose to represent herself in this way and discuss the cultural and religious meaning behind her choices and what that reveals about her identity.

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52 The mummy portraits have been attributed to the “elite” but without critical criteria for the identification of this social class. See Barbara Borg, “Das Gesicht der Elite: Multikulturele Identitäten im römischen Ägypten,” in Heinz Felber and Susanne Pfisterer-Haas, Ägypter, Griechen, Römer, Begegnung der Kulturen, Kanobas 1 (Leipzig, Wodtke, und Stegbauer, 1999): 83-93: Borg notes that the high costs of commissioning a portrait mummy were due to the high value of color pigments, linen bandages, and the gilding of the mummies, a luxury that she posits was only accessible to the very rich; Lorelei H. Corcoran, “‘They Leave behind them Portraits of Their Wealth, Not Themselves’: Aspects of Self-Presentation in the Dress of the Deceased in Mummy Portraits and Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt,” in Dress in Mediterranean Antiquity: Greeks, Romans, Jews, Christians (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2021), 6: Corcoran remarks that the patrons of mummy portraits have been vaguely characterized as “elite” due to the high costs of mummification and burial, however these parameters are too limited, and scholars now try to more definitively account for the lifestyles of these individuals by identifying their education, property ownership, and “chosen expression of self-presentation.”
Chapter Two

Portraiture

Modern Concepts of Portraiture

In its simplest form, a portrait is an “individualized representation of a recognizable person.”¹ Portraits are historically considered to be biased images, depicting a representation that presents the agency of both an artist and a sitter, and which shows a “distorted, ideal, or partial view” of the individual.² Its meaning as a genre changes throughout history, often as part of a hierarchical form of art in which portraits fall on both ends of the spectrum, representing distinguished or heroic individuals or being considered a “low status” art due to its association with imitation.³ Portraiture appears in a wide range of mediums and contexts, making it familiar and popular, with its one constant being that it is generally associated with likeness or mimesis.⁴

The simple association of portraiture with likeness ignores its complex nature and social connotations. Portraiture is a multi-level art form, with likeness falling on a continuum that incorporates specificity of likeness, generality of type, and distinctive aspects of not only the sitter but also the social climate in which the sitter lives.⁵ It captures the outer, physical qualities as well as the “inner life” of the subject, embodying aspects such as the character or virtues of the sitter, while also reflecting negotiations between the artist, sitter, and/or patron during the

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2 Shearer West, Portraiture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12.

3 West, Portraiture, 12.

4 West, Portraiture, 12-14.

5 West, Portraiture, 21.
commissioning and production of the work. The representation of the outward appearance as well as the inner life of the individual are socially shaped, dependent on the aesthetic, cultural, and social expectations of society and, therefore, representing the character and values of an individual may reveal the social group to which one belongs. A true portrait is meant to represent a living person as he or she existed in the individual’s own time, becoming in essence a historical “document.” In appreciating an individual for one’s own sake, a portrait is meant to represent what is personally significant, using a representation of the body as a tool to depict the personality of the individual.

_Ancient Egyptian Representation_

In ancient Egypt, the representation of human physiognomy was constantly adapting to the requirements of each period, but the images were consistent as idealized representations. Breckenridge argues that Egyptian art came close to “true” portraiture, but never fully developed it, as the individual was not meant to be the object of the work. During the Old Kingdom, the representation of a subject was identifiable through inscription, using the person’s name rather than a physical likeness.

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9 Ibid, 14.

10 Ibid, 50; Dr. Lorelei Corcoran’s graduate seminar on Egyptian art at the University of Memphis was very helpful and provided a basis for my discussion on portraiture in ancient Egypt.

11 Ibid, 71.
than physical resemblance as identification. Breckenridge argues that funerary “portraits” were idealized images of the deceased that may have depicted some individualistic features, but did not include aspects of the deceased’s personality or “inner self.” Funerary statues were meant to be substitutes for the mummified body once they were brought to “life” through the “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony in the sculptor’s workshop. During the Middle Kingdom, the portrait statue lost significance in favor of the mummy mask as the deceased’s image. Individuality was not stressed, however, as the subject took on a resemblance to the reigning pharaoh. The same idea can be seen in Amarna masks in the Eighteenth Dynasty (1346 BCE-1336 BCE), which tended towards more naturalistic features while emulating those of the royal family.

According to Assmann, funerary statues are not always considered portraiture due to their tendency towards uniformity, perceived as a lack of individuality. It was not meant to individualize the deceased, but to effect a transformation into a “super-individual,” leading to uniformity in funerary art. In opposition to Breckenridge, Spanel argues that portraiture in ancient Egypt was concerned with representing inner life, not focusing on the distinct individual so much as the societal factors by which one was shaped. Representations of people in ancient

12 Breckenridge, Likeness, 41-42.
13 Ibid, 42.
14 Ibid, 42.
15 Ibid, 45-46.
16 Ibid, 51.
17 Ibid, 63.
19 Ibid, 70-71.
20 Spanel, Through Ancient Eyes, 3-5.
Egyptian sculptures and relief are influenced by the contemporary ideals of society, each “portrait” then representing an ideal image rather than being an exact reflection of reality.²¹ Laboury considers idealization to be oppositional to portraiture, which relates more directly to realism as an accurate rendering of reality.²² Spanel further states that realism encompasses the entire personality of the person, not just the outer appearance.²³

Spanel argues that while the modern, Western concept of portraiture may have only existed intermittently in ancient Egypt, that does not mean that portraiture itself did not exist, only in a different sense.²⁴ For scholars such as Ashton, Bothmer, Root, and Spanel, a portrait in ancient Egypt was an image that depicted the qualities that the individual wished to be perpetuated.²⁵ The significance of an image was therefore determined through the agency of the subject, who utilized representation as a tool to perpetuate social status. While aspects of the outer appearance of the person were certainly included, the image needed to reflect the societal values with which the individual wished to be associated, this eternally beautiful representation then becoming the reality in the social memory.²⁶ Assmann described portraiture as “visualized memory,” meant to keep the achievements and character of the deceased alive within social

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²² Laboury, “Portrait versus Ideal Image,” 1.
²³ Spanel, Through Ancient Eyes, 31.
²⁵ The Brooklyn Museum, Egyptian Sculpture of the Late Period, 700 B.C. to A.D. 100, catalogue compiled by Bernard V. Bothmer (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1960), xxxviii: “A portrait embodies the individual traits of a definite human being.”; Ashton and Spanel, “Portraiture,” 56; Root, Faces of Immortality: Root argues that this form of representation should be called “true likeness,” rather than portraiture.
²⁶ Spanel, Through Ancient Eyes, 5; Assmann, “Preservation and Presentation of Self,” 80-81; Borg, “Painted Funerary Portraits,” 8.
memory.\textsuperscript{27} This version of portraiture was critical to preserving identity—as the personal integration of an individual into society—rather than simply one’s outward appearance.\textsuperscript{28}

Evidence of this separation from outward appearance can be seen in the royal appropriation of sculptures. Derived from the Latin term, \textit{appropriare}, “to make one’s own,” appropriation signifies taking something for one’s own use.\textsuperscript{29} The common occurrence of ruler’s adopting past pharaohs’ sculptures and works reveals that facial resemblance was not a significant factor, as inscribing a new name on an image would effectively transform it into a portrait of the new king.\textsuperscript{30} The statue would still have been considered a “portrait” of the usurping king, as it displayed his name and represented an expression or ideal that he wished to communicate.\textsuperscript{31}

\textit{Roman Concepts of Portraiture}

Ancient Roman portraiture constituted the creation of an individual’s “likeness,” representing the individuality of the subject by depicting unique traits and characteristics.\textsuperscript{32} The “likeness” of an individual was both a reflection of an individual’s appearance as well as one’s

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\textsuperscript{27} Assmann, “Preservation and Presentation of Self,” 81.


\textsuperscript{30} Spanel, \textit{Through Ancient Eyes}, 9; Ashton and Spanel, “Portraiture,” 56; Laboury, “Portrait versus Ideal Image,” 3.

\textsuperscript{31} Spanel, \textit{Through Ancient Eyes}, 10.

societal roles. The practice of *verism* in the Roman Empire involved depicting the individual with extreme realism through highly detailed, and often exaggerated, physiognomic features (Figure 3).\(^{34}\) Individuality in Roman art was focused on the head and face of the work, while the body tended to be in a more standard form that expressed social status.\(^{35}\) Roman portraiture was highly metaphorical, and what attributes are emphasized in a representation of an individual could reveal one’s character, virtues, and status in the community.\(^{36}\)

While meant to depict an individual, portraits still emulated the appearance of the emperor and empress, actively copying the imperial trends.\(^{37}\) This practice resulted in a “Zeitgesicht,” or “period face,” constituting the close association between the Roman emperor and his subjects through their portraiture, as ideological portraits of the emperor became icons for his citizens to copy.\(^{38}\) Likewise, women would be represented in the idealized form of the Roman empress, forming a connection between the imperial family and private citizens.\(^{39}\) Portraits of the Empress Livia (58 BCE-29 CE) depicted her as the ideal Roman woman, emphasizing her virtue and fertility as a model for all Roman women.\(^{40}\) These values are also

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\(^{34}\) Fejfer, *Roman Portraits in Context*, 262.


\(^{38}\) Assmann, “Preservation and Presentation of Self”: The same phenomenon was present already in Egypt, going back to the Middle Kingdom, as noted above; Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 226-230; Fejfer, *Roman Portraits in Context*, 271-274.

\(^{39}\) Fejfer, *Roman Portraits in Context*, 368.

emphasized in tomb inscriptions for women. The eulogy for a private woman named Claudia, dating to the Roman Republic (509 BCE-27 BCE) focuses on her duties as a wife and mother, expressing her beauty, grace, and charm.\textsuperscript{41} Female portraits seem to have been generally more idealizing than those of males, suppressing personal identity in favor of representing virtue through idealized beauty.\textsuperscript{42} Though idealized, these portraits still represented individualistic details, and hairstyle may have been the only feature that truly corresponded with the living individual, though still patterned after the hairstyle worn by the empress.\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Portraiture in Roman Egypt}

The representation of individuals began to change in Egypt after the introduction of Greek and Roman ideas of individual characterization and the artistic technique of illusionism.\textsuperscript{44} As portraiture had been a significant art form in Roman art, it was quickly adapted into Egyptian funerary practices as naturalistic representations of the deceased were attached to mummies.\textsuperscript{45} Sculptural forms such as plaster masks and coffins incorporated the Roman form of portraiture by representing the deceased in contemporary Roman fashions accompanied by representations of Egyptian gods in traditional dress, as seen on the Met Wreathed Mask. Essentially, objects of the real world would be represented in a naturalistic mode, while things of an “otherworldly”

\textsuperscript{42} Fejfer, \textit{Roman Portraits in Context}, 351-352.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 352.
\textsuperscript{44} The Brooklyn Museum, \textit{Egyptian Sculpture of the Late Period}, xxxiii; Breckenridge, \textit{ Likeness}, 174; Riggs, “Tradition and Innovation,” 349.
\textsuperscript{45} Riggs, “Tradition and Innovation,” 349.
nature would be depicted in a conceptual mode.\textsuperscript{46} In practice, methods of commemoration and display were prominent in both Roman and Egyptian societies.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, memorializing the dead through representations of their transfiguration after death was a technique which fit with both belief systems.\textsuperscript{48}

A work like the Met Wreathed Mask may have qualified as a portrait in ancient Egypt in that it commemorated the deceased and represented the aspects of her identity that she wanted to perpetuate in the social memory of her. While this mask represents the deceased, it is not a realistic, individualized image. Rather than the word, “portrait,” I would prefer using “representation” when referring to this mask and others of its genre because it circumvents modern associations with mimesis and conveys a more layered meaning that might include physical likeness, but which incorporates a more inclusive definition of the social identity of an individual.

\textsuperscript{46} Riggs, “Tradition and Innovation,” 349.


\textsuperscript{48} Riggs, “Tradition and Innovation,” 351.
Chapter Three

Identity

Concepts of Identity

Visual art in any culture can be utilized as a medium for representing or constructing identity. However, re-building or attempting to articulate an individual’s self-defined cultural identity is a challenge without written documentation of what that individual was thinking and feeling during her lifetime. In Pharaonic Egypt, tomb biographies and genealogical references on statues provided textual insight on the deceased’s identity. Assmann refers to biography as the inscriptive counterpart to portraiture, evoking the achievements and character of the deceased. Recently, the idea of self-representation in art and literature has become a focus of interest for Egyptologists. For a representation without an inscription, such as the Met Wreathed Mask, it is more productive to analyze how that individual may have been shaped by broader societal factors by detecting the identifiers with which the individual chose to depict herself in artistic representation. Mairs defined identity as “the relationship between the component parts of an individual’s wider social identity: gender and professional roles, age, social status, and grounds

1 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 423.

2 Assmann, “Preservation and Presentation,” 81.

on which people differentiate themselves.”\(^4\) Similarly, Landvatter defined it as “the means through which social subjects are constructed into relationships of taxonomic similarity and difference in comparison with other subjects.”\(^5\) A more contemporary meaning of identity is how a person identifies with others due to a shared group ideal, essentially encompassing how one finds their place in society.\(^6\) Mattingly breaks identity into categories:

“1) The basis of serial or political action; 2) A collective phenomenon, relating to the sense of sameness within groups or categories; 3) A core element of individual or collective “selfhood”; 4) The product of social or political action; and 5) The product of multiple and competing discourse, highlighting the dynamic, fragmented, and plural nature of sense of self.”\(^7\)

Identity, therefore, is made up of multiple factors that interact with each other and that define into which groups an individual belongs. The practice is to place an individual into their social context, linking those different aspects to form a complete profile.\(^8\) Studying the intersectionality of these aspects or roles of an individual’s identity is key to understanding their identity, though this is often difficult with ancient works as we may only have one aspect depicted on any given object.\(^9\) Due to its multiform nature, identity tends to be ambiguous and


was just as difficult for ancient sources to classify as it is for modern scholars.¹⁰ According to the concept of situational identity, an individual may emphasize different aspects of her identity depending on time, place, and company.¹¹

These aspects could be considered almost as separate identities within the same individual and could determine which group the individual identifies with or is identified with by others at any given moment.¹² How these different identities are defined is also highly variable. The meanings ascribed to them change depending on who is defining them. This adds even more factors to one’s identity, which has a different meaning when viewed through the individual’s own agency than it does as affected by the social norms and beliefs of others within their broader society. This characterizes the subjective nature of identity, which is affected by not only the agency of the individual but also others within that individual’s society.¹³ Identities are both social and relational, dependent on interactions.¹⁴ A woman will understand her own complex identity differently from how her peers may see her, just as a teacher today may see herself differently than her students, peers, and/or family sees her. That same teacher could be seen as a role model, parent, partner, colleague, church leader, former roommate, or scholarly peer depending on who she is talking to and in what context.

While scholarly discussions on identity in the past often focused on only one aspect of a person’s overall identity, the significance of intersectionality is now changing how scholars

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¹⁰ Mairs, “Intersecting Identities,” 2.


approach the subject, with an awakened focus on how identities could be fluid according to situation. Individuals have a natural tendency to group together and to share ideals and characteristics, leading to their having multiple cultural associations as well as the creation of “plural identities.”\(^{15}\) Mattingly argues that plural identities are common in all societies and were particularly prominent in the Roman Empire due to complex colonial power networks.\(^{16}\) While the concept of “personhood” was certainly prevalent in ancient societies, people likely defined themselves more by what groups they were a part of than is common today.\(^{17}\) Identities, then and now, are socially defined, and involve a plethora of external factors that aid in how an individual’s identity is shaped.\(^{18}\)

Because people have multiple identities, they can belong to multiple groups at any one time or act differently depending on audience.\(^{19}\) As such, a single representation is not capable of expressing someone’s entire identity, but rather expresses only certain aspects that one wishes to define oneself with. Studying identity through material culture allows scholars to interpret how the individual utilized and defined himself, herself, or their group affiliations through that object, effectively creating or manipulating social perception.\(^{20}\) Identity in the context of funerary representation is meant to emphasize and reflect the aspects of the deceased that they wished to


\(^{16}\) See Mattingly, “Identities in the Roman World,” 35.

\(^{17}\) Wendrich, “Identity and Personhood,” 200.


\(^{19}\) Mattingly, “Identities in the Roman World,” 46.

be identified with and remembered by. Funerary masks, for example, are not meant to show the personality of the deceased but are emphasizing their public presentation and social identity. Analyzing how these identities are formed and change provides the potential for a deeper understanding of the effects of cross-cultural interaction in a society like that of Roman Egypt. Noting what was significant enough to emphasize in the funerary representation of one woman can reveal aspects of her different identities as well as what was important to the society as a whole.

*Ethnicity*

One complex variable of identity is the subject’s ethnicity. Ethnicity is a multi-faceted concept; it is not as straightforward as identifying a person’s country of origin. The term “ethnic” tends to be used to define a minority group, to create borders between “them” and “us,” designating outliers as individuals belonging to a group which does not fit in with the common population. These barriers, defined by Barth as conceptual constructs, are created and reinforced by communities and are incessantly changing according to a “false conceptual order” being imposed on society. Ethnicity refers to the relationship between social groups that

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distinguish themselves from other cultural groups. Ethnicity itself is a socially constructed barrier, determined by the choice of the individual as well as others in society, created through a group’s collective beliefs and activities, such as a belief in common descent, shared genealogies, history, culture, territory, and social rituals such as language or religion. As an aspect of identity, ethnicity is dependent on context and is formed in relation to other ethnic groups. It is not only defined by the shared features of a particular group, but is dependent on its interactions with those other groups. These groups are not functioning in isolation, so group identities, both in ancient civilizations as well as today, are continually changing through those interactions with other groups.

Ethnic identity is considered a “constructed identity” based not only on behavior but cultural attributes. Ethnicity and culture, however, are not synonymous. Abdelwahed stated that “Ethnic groups are not defined so much by their cultural content as by the permeable social boundaries by which they are enclosed.” At its basic level, ethnicity is a perceived, and socially constructed, shared origin. It does not necessarily include cultural values or even race. Thus, it


28 Revell, Ways of Being Roman, 21.

29 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 18-20.


32 See Abdelwahed, Egyptian Cultural Identity, 2.

cannot be used as a sole identifier of an individual’s cultural identity, nor is it conclusive of what an ancient individual’s ethnicity even is from such limited evidence.

In studying Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, it becomes even more difficult to ascertain with which group a particular individual ascribed to as that choice could change based on situation. A person’s “Greek-ness” and “Egyptian-ness” were constructions that could “complement, compete with, or blend” together depending on context. How the woman represented by the Met Wreathed Mask was labeled in official documents was likely different from how she might have spoken about herself depending on who she was with. Bagnall stated, “Ethnicity does not exist in isolation from the relationship of one group to another; there is no consciousness of ethnicity except where one must talk about one group as against another.” Both Ptolemaic and Roman governments assigned ethnic labels to the occupants of Egypt. However, those labels served an official purpose and as such had a narrow definition, not encompassing all the factors modern scholars attribute to ethnicity or to what contemporary occupants of Egypt may have attributed to themselves.

*Gender*

Roman Egypt witnessed an overall increase in individual female burials compared to earlier periods in which women were included in the tombs of male relatives. As burial goods

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were incorporated into individualized tombs, they revealed more gendered distinctions.\textsuperscript{38} Artists tended to be more innovative with women’s burial goods, experimentation with their decoration leading to the use of iconography to represent the deceased’s social identity while still adhering to Egyptian funerary traditions.\textsuperscript{39} This would allow the deceased to maintain her Egyptian identity while adopting certain attributes which would mark her with the higher status of a “Greek” within the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{40}

Gender identity was clearly emphasized in how the deceased was portrayed, not only with clothing and attributes but also in the iconography of the decoration of a mummy mask. The depiction of gender in the mummy masks was meant, in part, to reflect the distinct social roles applied to men and women within Roman Egypt.\textsuperscript{41} More significant for our purposes is how this preservation of gender expresses ideas of rebirth in the afterlife. Reproductive capability and sexual desire were directly linked to rebirth and renewal, likening the gendered appearance of a deceased woman to her goal of rejuvenation through death.\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{40} Rowlandson, “Gender and Cultural Identity,” 13; “Greek,” meaning here one labelled by the Roman administration as a Greek, not an ethnic determinative.

\textsuperscript{41} Riggs, \textit{The Beautiful Burial}, 41.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 47.
Chapter Four
Demography of Roman Egypt

Roman Annexation of Egypt

Egypt became a province of the Roman empire in August 30 BCE when Octavian descended upon Alexandria.¹ The last Ptolemaic ruler, Cleopatra VII, had been on the throne of Egypt since 51 BCE, until she and Mark Antony were defeated by Octavian in the naval Battle of Actium in 31 BCE.² Octavian became Emperor Augustus in 27 BCE, ruling the Roman Empire as Princeps.³ Egypt was designated as the “personal estate of the emperor,” ruled by a prefect that he appointed, accountable only to him, in order to “depoliticize” the country.⁴

As a wealthy agricultural province, Egypt’s resources were a valuable asset to be commandeered by the Romans as grain, trade goods, and cultural influences flowed from Alexandria to Rome.⁵ Due to the already Hellenized administration under the Ptolemies, the change to Roman rule did not have abrupt consequences for the general population. Augustus maintained the country’s division into 30 administrative nomes, allowing the Greek strategoi, or governors, to keep their civil authority over their districts while the military force would be made

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² Milleker, “Roman Egypt,” 79.

³ Riggs, The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt, 3-4.

⁴ Milleker, “Roman Egypt,” 79; Ritner, “Egypt Under Roman Rule,” 1.

⁵ Milleker, “Roman Egypt,” 79-81.
up entirely of Romans. Life in the typical village continued as usual, relying on an agricultural way of life and a barter economy.

**Social Stratification**

The greatest changes came to the stratification system in Egypt as cultural groups were labelled and barriers between classes became even more strict. Society became structured by status as a way to further Hellenization through urbanization. Roman citizens were the minority at only 1% of the population, making up higher officials, legionaries, and the occasional traveler. The population of Roman Egypt was divided into three categories: Roman citizens, *metropolites*, and non-citizens. While the Ptolemies had distinguished between Greeks and native Egyptians, intermarriage and the ability to move between social classes resulted in a mixed Greco-Egyptian population. This led the Roman administration to label anyone who wasn’t a Roman citizen as Egyptian. These ethnic labels were not, therefore, biological or cultural in nature, but were applied for governmental purposes, primarily that of tax collection.

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The Romans preferred keeping social groups distinct, with strict regulation of social classes and movement between them. To encourage Hellenic culture in the cities, the Roman administration would favor the registered citizens of Greek cities known as the *metropolite* class. The class was made up of only the local gentry in Greek cities who claimed, and could prove, Greek “ethnicity,” keeping the class exclusive. The *metropolites*, comprised of the wealthy citizens of Alexandria, Naucratis, and Ptolemais, were exempt from paying the *laographia*, a poll tax introduced by Augustus in 23 BCE, and were often given special financial privileges and pardons due to their class. Monitoring the population through censuses allowed the Roman administration to supervise and control, or restrict, social mobility. A 2nd century CE jurist named Gaius Gracchus stated that a marriage between a Roman citizen and foreigner could be made lawful if the couple applied for and received a grant of *conubium*, “the right of contracting a marriage valid in Roman law (*iure civili*),” though it was rarely granted. According to Chapters 22 and 86 of the Flavian municipal law, children born to a marriage in which the *conubium* had been granted would take their father’s status. However, the *Lex

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Minicia, or the Minician Law, stated that a child of a mixed marriage would take the status of the “inferior parent,” further discouraging intermarriage between classes.\(^\text{19}\)

This barrier to intermarriage thereby ended social mobility for Egyptian women, no longer enabling them to climb the social ladder through marriage as they had been able to do in the Ptolemaic period.\(^\text{20}\) While Clause 52 of the *Gnomon of Idios Logos* permitted intermarriage of Romans and Egyptians, Clause 39 enacted the Minician law in Roman Egypt.\(^\text{21}\) This prevented people of other social orders entering the *metropolite* class, and would even impose fines upon those who attempted social mobility.\(^\text{22}\) By the late first century CE, a person had to trace their matrilineal descent back seven generations to apply for status as a *metropolite*.\(^\text{23}\) Boys would be registered to enter this class at the age of fourteen, with their parents being required to prove that they were members themselves through records such as earlier censuses.\(^\text{24}\) Those who were able to achieve status as a *metropolite* shaped their lives in accordance with the norms of Greek cities in Egypt like Alexandria.\(^\text{25}\)

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\(^\text{19}\) According to the writing of M. Minucius Rufus, tribune in 121 BCE, as restored by Theodor Mommsen and Paul Krueger, see Cherry, “The Minician Law,” 251; The law was in effect at least until the time of Caracalla (188-217 CE), see Cherry “The Minician Law,” 262.

\(^\text{20}\) Vandorpe & Waebens, “Women and Gender in Roman Egypt,” 8.

\(^\text{21}\) See Cherry, “The Minician Law,” 261. According to Cherry, this law is obscure in Egypt at this time due to trouble in translation. Clause 39 states, “Where a Roman man or women marries an Alexandrian citizen or Egyptian on account of ignorance, their children take the status of the inferior parent.” However, if translated correctly, this refutes Clause 46, which states, “Where a Roman man or woman marries an Alexandrian citizen on account of ignorance, their children take the father’s status.” Either these laws are in direct opposition to each other, or something is missing from the translation that would clarify.

\(^\text{22}\) Vandorpe & Waebens, “Women and Gender in Roman Egypt,” 7; Clarysse, “Ethnic Identity,” 306.

\(^\text{23}\) Riggs, “Portraits, Prestige, Piety,” 424.


Women in pharaonic Egypt had significantly more rights than their Greek and Roman counterparts, though they were still under immense pressure to reproduce. As little as a fifth of the women of Roman Egypt would actually survive their teens, succumbing to illness or childbirth.\textsuperscript{26} Such high mortality rates made the pressure of reproducing that much higher, hence the focus on fertility in funerary decoration.\textsuperscript{27} Women did have a significant role in society, however, outside their requirement of producing children. Both women in Egypt and women in the Roman Empire were able to share in the property rights of their family, capable of inheriting property and owning it in their own name.\textsuperscript{28} Approximately one-third of women in Roman Egypt owned property, giving them a place in the economy through real estate.\textsuperscript{29} Such an economic role proves that women were not simply positioned in society according to their sex, but that their family, wealth, and class were significant factors in determining their societal role.

Women in Egypt could not only inherit but could engage in business and legal transactions without a male guardian, were given consent in marriage, and held rights to their own property even after marriage.\textsuperscript{30} Conversely, Roman women needed the approval of a male guardian to inherit property or engage in legal matters.\textsuperscript{31} Under the Ptolemaic administration, these different rights were acknowledged, and the people were able to choose between Greco-

\textsuperscript{26} Roger S. Bagnall, \textit{The Demography of Roman Egypt} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 76.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 135.


\textsuperscript{29} Hobson, “Women as Property Owners,” 321.

\textsuperscript{30} Vandorpe & Waebens, “Women and Gender in Roman Egypt,” 2.

\textsuperscript{31} Treggiari, “Women in Roman Society,” 119.
Roman or Egyptian traditions when dealing with legal matters.\textsuperscript{32} This changed in 212 CE when all free women became Roman citizens and were then forced to comply with Roman law, which demanded that a woman be appointed a \textit{tutor}, or guardian, when dealing with real estate and legal business.\textsuperscript{33} What released women from their domestic restraints was their contribution to religious activities. Egyptian and Greco-Roman religion required priestesses to fulfil cultic responsibilities, and elite women of Roman Egypt were known to serve goddesses such as Athena-Thoeris, Demeter, Isis, and Hathor.\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Religious Adaptations}

After the initial transition to Roman rule, Egypt’s funerary religion was allowed to continue in relatively the same manner, with the priesthood continuing to build temples, though secular building projects certainly took precedence.\textsuperscript{35} Approximately forty pharaonic temples were built under Roman administration, while Roman-style temples were primarily limited to Alexandria.\textsuperscript{36} Egyptian temples built at this time were concerned with simplification, returning to pre-Ptolemaic temple plans.\textsuperscript{37} These new temple complexes demonstrated the combined interests of Egyptians and Greco-Romans, and over time the two “styles” began to share elements.\textsuperscript{38} The

\begin{flushright}
32 Vandorpe & Waebens, “Women and Gender in Roman Egypt,” 2.
33 Ibid, 4.
34 Riggs, “Portraits, Prestige, Piety,” 432.
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temple of Hathor at Dendera was decorated in the traditional Egyptian style within, with the addition of Greek inscriptions and classical sculpture outside the entrance. However, written records from Roman Egypt reveal that temple revenues and priesthoods came under stronger state control, with new incentive for private gain as the government applied “Greek” privileges and rewards to the Egyptian priesthood. Furthermore, Augustus broke down the traditional order of temple properties and based the priesthoods in Alexandria, with a single Roman administrative center. There were strong differences between Egyptian and Greek temple operations. Egypt had developed an exclusive priestly class, which not only ran the temple culture but also had significant influence in royal affairs. The Greeks had a much more accessible, albeit elite, priestly class, as their religious offices were open to anyone of wealth.

The Roman administration highlighted these differences, allowing the two communities to continue their separate cultural traditions in order to emphasize their stratification policies. A 2nd century will found at Oxyrhynchus clarifies the desire for an “Egyptian fashion of burial,” indicating that people could choose a burial that fit within their cultural sphere. That being said, Augustus did lessen the power of the Egyptian priestly class, reducing their wealth and political influence. Additionally, the beginning of Roman administration also meant the inclusion of Roman gods in Egypt’s religious culture, creating a Greco-Roman temple atmosphere in the

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40 Milleker, “Roman Egypt,” 83.
41 Arnold, Temples of the Last Pharaohs, 225.
42 Lewis, Life in Egypt under Roman Rule, 91.
43 Ibid, 91.
44 See Riggs, The Beautiful Burial in Roman Egypt, 429.
45 Lewis, Life in Egypt under Roman Rule, 91-92.
Greek cities. This included worshiping the Roman emperor as a living deity. This practice started in Rome when Julius Caesar was deified posthumously by the Roman Senate in 42 BCE. The deification of a ruler was not a new concept in Egypt, where the pharaoh had always been considered a living embodiment of a god, a practice adopted likewise by the Ptolemaic rulers. Octavian was depicted as pharaoh in temple ritual scenes such as that on the Kalabsha gateway, representing himself as both king and god (Figure 4). The imperial cult of the Roman emperor took place in imperial temples throughout Egypt called sebasteia or caesarea, the largest of which was in Alexandria.

These religious mergers did not always go over smoothly, particularly when viewed by outsiders like Roman travelers who saw the Egyptians’ sacred animals as “tourist attractions” to be ogled. Augustus, too, never actually gave offerings to Egyptian deities, as he ridiculed gods in animal form like the Apis bull. Other deities, such as the goddess Isis or the personification of the Nile river, were more readily embraced, becoming absorbed into the Roman pantheon and assimilated with other gods.

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49 Arnold, Temples of the Last Pharaohs, 225; Pfeiffer, “The Imperial Cult in Egypt,” 86.
50 Lewis, Life in Egypt under Roman Rule, 90.
52 Lewis, Life in Egypt under Roman Rule, 94-95.
Meir was the primary necropolis for the ancient village of Cusae, located approximately 30-40 miles north of Assiut.\(^{53}\) The cemetery is located on the west bank of the Nile. Cusae was the capital of the 14\(^{th}\) nome of Upper Egypt.\(^{54}\) It now lies under the modern village of el-Qusiya, which has essentially buried most of the archaeological evidence of the city.\(^{55}\)

The patron deity of Cusae was the goddess Hathor, recognized in the Ptolemaic era as Aphrodite Urania.\(^{56}\) The 2\(^{nd}\) century Roman author, Aelianus (c. 175- c.235 CE) wrote in his *De Natura Animalium* that there was a temple at Cusae dedicated to Aphrodite Urania at which a sacred cow was worshipped.\(^{57}\) He states that villagers in Cusae paid tribute to the sacred cow due to its association with the goddess and that its desire to mate at the sound of a bull’s roar was evidence of its connection to Aphrodite as a goddess of love and pleasure.\(^{58}\) A tablet found in Cusae states that Ptolemy I founded the sanctuary, however its existence beforehand suggests that Ptolemy I simply appropriated the already-standing temple to Hathor.\(^{59}\) The rock-cut tombs

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excavated at Meir reveal several inscriptions including epithets of Hathor as “Mistress of Cusae,” “Goddess of Love,” “Mistress of All,” “Mistress of Heaven,” and “Mistress of Two Lands.”

Becoming a Priestess of Hathor was very common for elite women during the Old Kingdom (2649-2134 BCE). The title and occupation came to have a strong authority in society. Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II (2061-2010 BCE) married a Priestess of Hathor. Other rulers delegated the title to their wives and daughters as a form of legitimization. During the Middle Kingdom (2040-1640 BCE), Cusae was a major center for the cult of Hathor and the women who became priestesses held a significant role in society as Mistresses of Cusae. The role of Priestess of Hathor nearly ceased entirely in the Twelfth Dynasty as women were increasingly excluded from cultic positions. The occurrence of the title in later periods seems to have been in an archaizing attempt to claim political or cultural legitimacy by adopting a title of authority from the past.

Little has been found of the actual village of Cusae. However, the Meir necropolis contained the tombs of Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom officials, providing archaeological evidence for the afterlife beliefs of the inhabitants of Cusae for those periods. The lack of

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62 Graves-Brown, Dancing for Hathor, 27.
63 Graves-Brown, Dancing for Hathor, 27.
66 Gillam, “Priestesses of Hathor,” 211.
67 Gardiner, Ancient Egyptian Onomastica, 77.
evidence in the necropolis for other periods is primarily due to the destruction of the site, as
locals had been digging up coffins to use for wood for years before the site was excavated.68

The first documented excavation was under the direction of Muhammad Shehin around
1877-78. However, Shehin only sent undamaged sarcophagi to the Egyptian Museum, burning
anything that wasn’t fully painted, and thereby further destroying evidence from the tombs.69 In
1888, ten of the cartonnage masks discovered in Meir were sent to the Egyptian Museum, Cairo,
described as being decorated with deities and inscribed in hieroglyphs or Greek text, and which
were later catalogued by C. C. Edgar.70 Starting in April 1910, Ahmed Bey Kamal was directed
by Sayed Khashaba71 to excavate Meir and Quseir el-Amarna (the cemetery on the east bank),
with most of what they found being purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New
York.72 He had discovered an important burial complex, unearthing seven mummies intact with
their funerary masks, dated to the Roman period according to their hairstyles.73 This discovery
confirmed that the necropolis had continued in use well into the 1st century CE.74

68 Blackman, Rock-Cut Tombs of Meir, Vol. I, 14: As written by Aly Hasan of the Department of Antiquities in
Egypt.


70 Edgar, Graeco-Egyptian Coffins, Masks, and Portraits, 35-37; Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 109-110.

71 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 110: A wealthy businessman from Assiut who had an archaeological permit to
excavate Meir.

72; Blackman, Rock-Cut Tombs of Meir, Vol. I, 16; Grimm, Die römischen Mummienmasken, 61: The mask
descriptions in these works did not correlate with catalogued figures, but may include the mask of this study; Yann
Tristant and Ellen M. Ryan (eds.), “Meir Project,” in Death is Only the Beginning: Egyptian Funerary Customs at

73 Grimm, Die römischen Mummienmasken, 59-66.

74 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 107.
Chapter Five

Iconography and Text

Funerary Masks of Meir

The Met Wreathed Mask has been attributed to Meir due to its stylistic similarities with other funerary masks dated to the Roman Period that have been found at the site. C. C. Edgar described the Meir masks as being less Hellenic than the Fayoum portraits, with their hair styled in the Egyptian mode, as well as some of their jewelry. Likewise, the male masks from Meir are depicted in what Edgar considers the Egyptian style. These male masks show the deceased as a well-groomed, youthful man. They are decorated with the mumiform, funerary iconography of Osiris with a bead net across the abdomen, a broad collar, and a tripartite headdress revealing a fringe of hair (Figure 5). In studying the masks, Edgar argues that they were likely made in the same workshops that were manufacturing female cartonnage masks of the “Roman” style, thereby placing them contemporary to the latter. Style and hairstyle have always been the most common criteria for dating funerary masks. Grimm was the first to debate whether dating the masks by hairstyle was the most effective method, noting inconsistencies when comparing the masks to contemporary Roman art, an issue that is still being questioned today.

1 See Edgar, Graeco-Egyptian Coffins, Masks, and Portraits, 10-11.
2 Ibid, 11.
3 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 125.
4 Edgar, Graeco-Egyptian Coffins, Masks, and Portraits, 10-11; Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 113-115.
5 Borg, Mumienporträts, 22-27; Corcoran, Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt, 16.
6 See Grimm, Die römischen Mummienmasken, 63.
7 For a discussion of the recent rebuttals to the usefulness of this criterion for dating, see footnote in Corcoran, “Aspects of Self-Presentation,” 7.
The characteristics of the Meir masks are fairly consistent. The collection at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo,8 (Figures 6, 7, 8, and 9) reveals that the masks feature wide foreheads, a straight brow ridge, straight and narrow noses, well-defined lips with a slight smile, and a cleft in the chin. There is also consistency in the execution of the Egyptian scenes decorating the masks.9 In addition to the Egyptian funerary scenes, the masks also carry Egyptian inscriptions written in hieroglyphics and Demotic. However, the name of the deceased is often written in both Egyptian and Greek. Riggs argues that this is evidence that those buried in Meir were part of a bilingual society that included inhabitants with dual Greek and Egyptian names.10

The clothing and jewelry depicted on the female funerary masks represents the dress of wealthy women in Roman Egypt, demonstrating how a woman may have appeared in life or how she wished to be seen by others in society.11 The opulence evident in how they are adorned may be testament to their social status, if one presumes that only the wealthy could have afforded the high expense of such funerary outfits.12 However, neither the men nor the women were represented at the actual age of their death. Riggs stated, “The agelessness of these images is one more sign that despite their debts to hair, clothing, and jewelry fashions of the first century AD,

8 I am grateful to Dr. Lorelei Corcoran for securing photographs of the Cairo collection for my use in this paper.
9 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 116-118.
10 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 121.
11 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 124; Corcoran, “Aspects of Self-Presentation,” 9: Those depicted in the mummy portraits were represented in the standardized form of dress with the type of clothing, colors, and motifs utilized, though it still would have been their most formal attire.
12 Corcoran, Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt, 68; For alternate explanations for ways in which such elaborate burials could be afforded by those not actually members of the wealthiest class, see footnote in Corcoran, “Aspects of Self-Presentation,” 6.
the Meir masks are not naturalistic portraits of the living, but formalistic evocations of the transfigured dead.”

Facial Features

The Met Wreathed Mask (Figure 1) represents an adult woman whose skin is painted a pale white, alluding to her sex. Her eyes are heavily outlined in dark green pigment and she has faint “Venus rings,” which are the lines across her neck, adding to her somewhat fleshy appearance and emphasizing her elevated status by depicting her as young and plump. She has a long, straight nose and cleft in her chin. Her lips are thick and painted red, slightly upturned in a small smile. This archaic smile is a Greek element from the Archaic Period (650-480 BCE), representing the immortal, tranquil representations of the kore. The feature was adopted in Roman Egypt from earlier Ptolemaic statuary. Stretched across her forehead are thick, caterpillar-like eyebrows, a feature seen on the Meir masks in the Cairo collection as well as on the funerary mask of Artemidora (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Inv. 1911 11.155.5), dating to 90-100 CE (Figure 10). The mask of Artemidora was excavated in Meir, suggesting that this is a local characteristic.

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13 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 126.
15 A freestanding statue of a young woman, the female counterpart to the kouros, in Archaic Greece.
17 Walker, Ancient Faces, 132.
Hairstyle

A prominent feature of the female masks from Meir is their loose, black, curly hair as opposed to it being fixed in a contemporary Roman imperial style. The hair on the mask of Artemidora, more specifically, combines the rigidly arranged curls of the Flavian imperial style with the corkscrew curls typical of Egyptian goddesses. The Met Wreathed Mask depicts the deceased with long, flowing black hair made of dyed plant fibers with short bangs and tight cork-screw curls tucked behind her ears. Depicting herself in this manner is an implicit statement of the close association of women in Meir to the goddess Hathor, a connection which became more prominent after death. An image of Hathor in sunk relief on the Western Colonnade of the Temple of Isis at Philae shows Hathor with her hair in tight curls tucked behind her ears (Figure 11). A relief from the Temple of Hathor at Dendera (South crypt 4, Room E) depicts an enthroned Hathor with the same hairstyle (Figure 12). Portraying a woman in this guise gave her divine connotations, addressing her transition to the afterlife. This hairstyle being a feature of Hathor, and later Isis, became associated with death and rebirth. The free-flowing locks of the Met Wreathed Mask are likely associated with the deceased’s desired appearance after death.

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18 Grimm, Die römischen Mummienmasken, 108; Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 123: These Egyptian style cork-screw curls were common in Middle Egypt until their usage ceased in the middle of the 2nd century CE.

19 Bleeker, Hathor and Thoth, 45.


22 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 102.

as long, curly hair in funerary contexts was also a tool meant to evoke a woman’s beauty and desirability.24

Wreaths, Roses, and Garlands

On the head of the deceased is a garland of leaves and faded pink roses, framing a gold-encircled red sun-disk at the center. Flinders Petrie discovered the remains of roses from garlands, wreaths, and bouquets decorating mummies in an early Roman Period cemetery at Hawara.25 These garlands were made up of rose petals and pink lotus flowers, which were also imitated in colored plaster, linen, or wood to decorate funerary masks.26 While roses were not native to Egypt, they were introduced by the Greeks and became popular during the Roman period.27 Wreaths were protective emblems for the deceased, alluding also to festivals and ritual events in which they were worn by the living, effectively signifying the higher social status of the deceased.28 These garlands are also considered to reference the crown of justification associated with Osiris. Called m3h n m3r-ḥrw, the “wreath of justification” symbolized the vindication of Osiris by Horus.29 The placement of a wreath on the brow of the deceased while reciting Spells 19 and 20 of the Book of the Dead referenced the triumph of the deceased after

27 Corcoran, Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt, 63.
28 Riggs, A Beautiful Burial, 81; Lisette Marie Jimenez, Transfiguring the Dead: The Iconography, Commemorative Use, and Materiality of Mummy Shrouds from Roman Egypt (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2014), 107.
the final judgment.\textsuperscript{30} The wreath, or “Crown of Justification,” became a symbol of the deceased’s “justified” state through victory over death.\textsuperscript{31}

A popular motif on funerary covers from Roman Egypt is of the deceased holding a wreath or bouquet of pink flowers in her right hand, such as on the mask of Aphrodite (British Museum EA69020).\textsuperscript{32} The Met Wreathed Mask not only depicts the deceased wearing the garland of pink flowers on her brow, but also has an intricate gilded wreath engraved on the top of the mask, behind the head of the deceased (Figure 13). This golden wreath has engraved berries and leaves and is accented with a bow at the bottom and sun-disk at the top. Within the wreath is a colorful woven patterned design on which rests a golden scarab-beetle. Scarabs were used to represent the sun god, with the beetle emerging from the ball of dung just as the sun god is reborn from the earth every morning, embodying the process of $\textit{hpr}$, meaning “coming into being.”\textsuperscript{33} Scarabs often decorate the top of the head or chest of the body or coffin of the deceased and are associated with the rebirth of the sun each morning, as well as the rejuvenation of Osiris,

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\textsuperscript{30} Corcoran, \textit{Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt}, 62; Corcoran, “Aspects of Self-Presentation,” 24.

\textsuperscript{31} Corcoran, “A Cult Function,” 58; Riggs, \textit{A Beautiful Burial}, 81.

\textsuperscript{32} See “mummy-mask; cartonnage,” The British Museum, britishmuseum.org., accessed March 2021, \url{https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA29472}.

evoking the theme of solar rebirth. This woven pattern, evoking reed matting or basketry, is used as filler decoration for the entire mask.

Jewelry

The Met Wreathed Mask shows the deceased adorned in what was likely the best of, if not all of, her jewelry in order to indicate her placement in society as a woman of wealth. While she likely did not wear every item depicted as part of her daily routine, her funerary mask is emphasizing her status through her possessions, thereby showing her at her best. It is also possible that the deceased did not own the jewelry at all, but was depicted wearing jewelry that conveyed the status she wished to claim in death. Evidence that this jewelry actually existed can be seen in that the style of jewelry depicted on the masks matches what was described in dowry receipts and jewelry found in the archaeological record.

Her necklace is made up of black beads and green stones representing emeralds, alternating with gold pearls in addition to gilded earrings with blue-green stones, also seen on a mask in the Cairo collection (Figure 6). Some 2nd c. CE necklaces in the collection at the British Museum show that necklaces of gold and emerald were common at that time, in fashion from the


35 Corcoran, *Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt*, 50.

36 Riggs, “Roman Period Mummy Masks,” 128.

37 Ibid, 128.

1st to 4th centuries CE.\textsuperscript{39} They were often worn with another, more simple gold necklace to showcase the emeralds.\textsuperscript{40} The deceased has coupled hers with a golden band around her neck with a crescent pendant, a popular motif in the funerary masks of women from Roman Egypt.\textsuperscript{41} These crescent pendants, or \textit{lunulae}, are associated with fertility and also indicate a lunar and/or solar symbolism when combined with the cobra clasps as found on those in the archaeological record, denoting concepts of rebirth.\textsuperscript{42}

The amount of jewelry the deceased is wearing coupled with its detail and portrayed quality was meant to showcase her wealth and status. She has two gilded rings with red and blue-green stones on her fourth and fifth fingers. On both wrists, she is wearing gilded snake bracelets with two heads, their bodies forming a modern infinity sign wrapping around her wrists. Snakes were a popular motif throughout the Roman Empire and can be found in much of the jewelry of Roman Egypt from the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.\textsuperscript{43} The same elaborate bracelets can be seen on the wrists of Artemidora (Figure 10), along with the mask of a woman named Aphrodite found at Hawara, and on two masks in the collection at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (Figures 6 and 9).\textsuperscript{44} They were associated primarily with the Greek healing god, Asclepius, who was popular in

\textsuperscript{39} See Walker, \textit{Ancient Faces}, 154.

\textsuperscript{40} Borg, \textit{Mumienporträts}, 170: Necklaces of pearls, stones, and gold chains were very common on the mummy portraits. Stones would be cylindrical, square, oval, or round, accompanied by pearls that could be golden, but were usually green or black; Walker, \textit{Ancient Faces}, 154.

\textsuperscript{41} Borg, \textit{Mumienporträts}, 168-169: \textit{lunulae} are only seen on women and young girls on the mummy portraits, though they were worn by both men and women outside of Egypt and could also be seen on animals. Borg notes that \textit{lunulae} originally functioned in Egypt as protective amulets for a mother and child, perhaps going back to pharaonic times as Borg cites a small lunar pendant hanging on the end of a stick, dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty.


\textsuperscript{43} Walker, \textit{Ancient Faces}, 151.

\textsuperscript{44} Walker, \textit{Ancient Faces}, Catalogue 28.
private cults because he was more directly involved with the lives of his followers.\textsuperscript{45} Snakes in ancient Greece were associated with sexuality and were considered divine mediators between the physical and spiritual worlds, and their images were used to protect the wearers from evil.\textsuperscript{46} The harmless, yellow-brown \textit{coluber longissimum}, or Italian Aesculapian snake, was an attribute of Asclepius embodied by his snake-entwined staff which became a symbol of the modern-day medical profession.\textsuperscript{47} Its shape on the bracelets recalls the Egyptian word, \textit{dt}, a concept referring to the divine aspect of time, meaning either “cyclical perpetuity or infinite, absolute timelessness,” signifying the afterlife of the deceased.\textsuperscript{48}

\textit{Clothing}

As for her clothing, the deceased is depicted in what was the common Roman garb of the time: a red tunic with black \textit{clavi}, vertical bands that descend from the shoulders on both sides of the tunic, outlined in green, as seen on the majority of Meir masks.\textsuperscript{49} Tunics were typically woven from wool or linen into a single sheet with openings for the arms and neck of the wearer, reaching to at least the ankles on women and often worn with a belt.\textsuperscript{50} The deep red of the tunics was meant to represent Tyrian, or Imperial, purple, which was a symbol of high status in


\textsuperscript{47} Riusse, “Asclepius at Epidaurus,” 8-9.


\textsuperscript{50} Shamir, “Dress, Hellenistic and Roman Period,” 330.
antiquity for civilizations such as the Persians, Greeks, and Romans. Discovered in the early second millennium BCE (ca. 1600-1200 BCE) on the Syro-Palestinian coast, extracted from Muricid mollusks, Tyrian purple spread cross-culturally through maritime trade. Its use in the Persian Empire was restricted to ceremonial purposes, as the royal court dressed in purple to showcase their higher status with purple sleeved robes and diadems. Alexander III of Macedon (336-323 BCE), known as Alexander the Great, adopted purple for royal dress and insignia after the defeat of the Persian Emperor Darius III (336-330 BCE) in 330 BCE, establishing the color as a world-recognized status marker.

Julius Caesar revived the more restrictive uses of the valuable dye in his antiquarian practice of linking the dye to triumphal attire such as the toga picta and toga praetexta worn by senators. Regulations such as the Lex Oppia, or Oppian Law, carried out by the tribune Gaius Oppius in 215 BCE, in addition to Caesar’s own policies, reveal that the dye was only permitted to be used by certain Roman citizens at specific times. Even much later in the Byzantine Empire, the Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian’s (527-565 CE) Law codes stated that the wearing

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54 Ibid, 28.


of Imperial purple was strictly regulated. However, such strict regulation of the color ceased towards the end of the Republic, the use of purple became widespread in the public by the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (293-246 BCE) as imitations became available to a wider audience at more affordable prices. However, while the practice of using Imperial purple to denote rank had ceased prior to its appearance in Roman Egypt, the expensive purple dye remained a marker of status, not only in Rome but also in the Near East.

Clothing, both during life and in depictions after death, was used to indicate the social status of the wearer through material, color, and even length. The depiction of a red tunic on the woman represented by the Met Wreathed Mask reveals her desire to be represented as a woman of higher status and affluence in her lifetime as well as in the afterlife. While her clothing is of the Roman tradition, that does not necessitate that the deceased identified herself as Roman over Egyptian. Rather, it suggests that this style is what the women in her region were actually wearing at the time. She is likely depicted wearing the best of her clothing, though it should not necessarily be taken as a sign of her conscious cultural identification, but as a status marker as well as evidence for the adoption or sharing of certain cultural features between the Romans and Egyptians over time.

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57 S. P. Scott, “The Enactments of Justinian, The Code: Book XI,” in The Civil Law, XV (Cincinnati, 1932): Title 8; Title 8.3 of Justinian’s Law Code states that wool is not permitted to be dyed with any color resembling the Imperial purple. Title 8.4 states that anything dyed with the Imperial purple will be removed and surrendered to the Emperor.

58 Reinhold, History of Purple, 32, 40-48, 52-53: According to Cornelius Nepos (d. 24 BCE), an inexpensive quality of violet would sell for 100 denarii/pound, while Tyrian purple at the highest quality sold for 1000 denarii/pound. Even in the Fourth Century BCE, inexpensive imitation purples were spreading in the markets that allowed middle and lower classes of people to utilize a form of the color.


60 Shamir, “Dress, Hellenistic and Roman Period,” 335.

61 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 14; Personal Communication with Dr. Lorelei Corcoran, October 15, 2019.
Procession and Identification of Gods and Goddesses

Osiris

In contrast to the woman’s Roman style of dress is the depiction of dress that appears on the deities in a procession that decorates the headrest portion of the funerary mask. The middle figure in the center panel of the headdress (Figure 13) is Osiris, God of the underworld. The inscription reads, \textit{\textit{d}d-\textit{m}dw \textit{j}n Wsjr \textit{h}nty \textit{j}mntt}, “Recitation by Osiris, foremost of the West.”

Unusually, he is not depicted with his typical green skin or in mummiform, a stiff pose with legs together and arms crossed over the chest, but has a more naturalistic skin tone and is facing forward like a statue. Osiris, like all of the figures decorating the mask, is depicted barefoot. His position as the central figure marks his importance, as does his regalia.

Osiris is depicted holding a blue \textit{sn} (Gardiner S34), the hieroglyphic sign designating life, and a black \textit{wss}-scepter (Gardiner S40), a popular attribute of the gods that indicates their power. He has a long, thin beard and is wearing an intricately patterned kilt, a garment worn wrapped around the figure’s waist that descends to his knees. It is a form of the royal \textit{sn}w\textit{wt}-skirt worn by kings and gods, with the attached red bull’s tail demonstrating another form of

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62 The identification of these deities is based on those provided in the Metropolitan Museum of Art website. I consulted Christian Leitz, \textit{Lexikon der aegyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen} (Peeters Publishers, 2002) for traditional epithets. I am grateful to Dr. Lorelei Corcoran for her aid with translations and iconographic identification.


66 Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, \textit{Pharaonic Egyptian Clothing} (Leiden, New York, & Köln: E. J. Brill, 1993), 53: Men are depicted wearing kilts as early as the First Dynasty on objects such as the Narmer Palette.
kingly regalia. The front of Osiris’ kilt has a diamond pattern in green, while the back is checkered in red, black, green, and white. A gold strip of cloth divides the front and back of the kilt. Hanging from the back of the kilt is a black and white, geometrically patterned cloth, visible between his legs.

His shirt emulates falcon feathers, painted gold with the feathers tipped in red and green. Two white shoulder straps, outlined in black with black-outlined circlets, extend from his shoulders to the top of the shirt. These body straps are another pharaonic feature that can be seen on figures like King Narmer, as depicted in his profile on the Narmer Palette. Body straps go around the upper body and may cover both shoulders as they do this figure of Osiris, or only one as depicted on King Narmer. They were not only decorative or symbolic attributes, but also may have functioned to prevent the dripping of sweat. Osiris is adorned with an intricate gold broad collar, as well as two white armlets and bracelets outlined in red with red circlets. Just as with the deceased, the clothing on these figures was used as a form of symbolic attribute to designate their status as gods.

A significant identifying attribute is the atf (Gardiner S8) crown atop Osiris’ head. The atef crown can be recognized by its conical shape made up of bundled plant stems, flanked by two curving feathers. The feathers are understood to be symbols of the solar and lunar Eyes of the sun god, due to the relationship between the Egyptian word for feather, šwt (Gardiner H6),

69 Ibid, 72.
70 Vassilika, “Ptolemaic Philae,” 95.
and the word for light, šw. These ostrich wing-feathers are typically set upon a pair of ram’s horns, as they are here, with the added elements of two uraei sitting upon the horns. Later variations of the crown also include an increasing number of sun disks, with two sun disks apparent in this example, corresponding to the third variation of the atef crown as identified by Collier.

The atef crown depicted on the Met Wreathed Mask is painted white with multi-colored circlets decorating the surface and plant stems protruding from the top. Hanging behind the headdress is a gold ribbon, draping across Osiris’ left shoulder. Colorful circlets on the atef crown are sometimes seen on Late Period depictions of the ḫprš crown, consistent with the geometric decoration of the entire mask, as well as that found on other masks from Meir (Figures 14, 15, 16). The atef crown is associated with Osiris as a symbol for the renewal of life and a representation of the king as ruler over Egypt in the Netherworld. Its connection to both solar imagery and Osiris signifies its symbolic connotation with solar rebirth through death.

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73 Ibid, 10.
74 See Collier, The Crowns of Pharaoh, 42.
75 “Akhenaten and His Daughter Offering to the Aten,” Egyptian, Classical, Ancient Near Eastern Art, Brooklyn Museum, brooklynmuseum.org, Accessed March 2021, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3699: This ribbon or streamer is also attested in the Amarna period. A relief fragment of Akhenaten and one of his daughters (60.197.6) shows a wide ribbon streaming behind the head of Akhenaten. Another relief fragment shows the same wide ribbon flowing from the cap crown of Nefertiti (71.89).
76 Collier, The Crowns of Pharaoh, 110.
Isis

To the right of Osiris is the goddess Isis, his sister-consort, coming toward him with her arms raised in \textit{dw\text{3}}, or praise. The inscription reads \textit{qd-mdw jn 3s.t nb(t) št3}, “Recitation by Isis, Lady of Mystery.”\textsuperscript{78} Isis had various roles and facets to her identity, but one of her principal duties was to help guide the deceased into the afterlife.\textsuperscript{79} She is depicted here with green flesh, a color usually associated with Osiris. As the color of plants, green was symbolic of regeneration, fertility, and rebirth in ancient Egypt.\textsuperscript{80} By portraying Isis in this way, it emphasizes her role as a mother while strengthening her marital ties to Osiris. Due to the relationship between rebirth and death, this composition also emphasizes Isis’ role with the deceased. During the Old Kingdom (2649-2134 BCE), Isis primarily functioned as a mortuary goddess, along with her sister Nephthys, and was responsible for attending to deceased royalty and assisting in their rebirth.\textsuperscript{81}

As the mother of Horus, as well as the one who restored life to Osiris, Isis had ties to both the living and the dead, making her a mediator between the two realms.\textsuperscript{82}

Isis is dressed in a bead-net dress worn over an orange sheath dress. Bead-net dresses were made out of beads strung together in a geometric, diamond pattern and were usually worn over or attached to sheath dresses.\textsuperscript{83} Women were typically depicted in art throughout Egyptian

\textsuperscript{78} Leitz, \textit{Lexikon der agyptischen}, Vol. 1, 67; I am grateful to Dr. Joshua Roberson for his aid in translating this epithet.


\textsuperscript{81} Hollis, “Hathor and Isis,” 1.


\textsuperscript{83} Vogelsang-Eastwood, \textit{Pharaonic Egyptian Clothing}, 95-95, 125.
history wearing sheath, or wrap-around, dresses, though no physical remains of these garments have been found in the archaeological record.\textsuperscript{84} All of the female figures in the procession are dressed in ankle-length, skin-tight sheath dresses covered in a bead-net dress with no knots, belts or seams, the upper edge of the dress coming just under their breasts, the standard appearance of Egyptian women in art.\textsuperscript{85} Sheath dresses are wrap-around garments that were typically wrapped twice around the body with the open end to one side.\textsuperscript{86} The female figures in the procession have the open end fanning out under one arm, displaying a black and white, sometimes fringed\textsuperscript{87} panel fanning out from them, perhaps meant to be the mantle, part of the attire of goddesses during this period.\textsuperscript{88}

An essential addition to these dresses is the two body straps, independent features added to sheath dresses and worn by women in all social groups.\textsuperscript{89} Only one strap is visible on most of the figures in the procession due to the raising of their arms in praise. The dresses are extremely detailed, the beads showcasing the colorful geometric patterns that were popular in the art of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.\textsuperscript{90} These patterned dresses, however, are distinctive and may be connected to daily life in Cusae, Egypt. A Middle Kingdom tomb scene at Meir reveals that patterned dresses were sometimes worn by the wives of priests of Hathor.\textsuperscript{91} The presence of

\textsuperscript{84}Vogelsang-Eastwood, \textit{Pharaonic Egyptian Clothing}, 96-97.

\textsuperscript{85} Vassiliki, “Ptolemaic Philae,” 97.

\textsuperscript{86} Vogelsang-Eastwood, \textit{Pharaonic Egyptian Clothing}, 101.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 60: Fringing could be done either as a warp fringe, a long length of warp threads with a knot at the bottom, or a weft fringe or loop, a series of compact loops woven into the left-hand selvedge.

\textsuperscript{88} Riggs, \textit{The Beautiful Burial}, 193.

\textsuperscript{89} Vogelsang-Eastwood, \textit{Pharaonic Egyptian Clothing}, 82, 96-97, 101-102.

\textsuperscript{90} Riggs, \textit{The Beautiful Burial}, 80.

\textsuperscript{91} Pinch, \textit{Votive Offerings to Hathor}, 212.
these dresses in funerary art from Meir during the Roman period may indicate that the tradition was not wholly lost, particularly as it pertains to Hathor, their patron goddess.

Isis is adorned with a detailed, gold broad collar and black anklets, as well as golden armlets and bracelets outlined in red with red circlets. She has long hair with corkscrew curls similar to that of the deceased. This hairstyle was a feature characteristic of Isis during the Greco-Roman Period, associating her with Hathor.92 Around her head, Isis wears a white fillet, or circlet, with a uraeus. Known as a sḏ, the fillet is a headband that became a royal headdress once a uraeus was added.93 It is associated with the radiance of the sun, symbolizing regeneration through light and air.94 Coupled with the sḏ is the Isiac, or Hathoric, crown, made up of a pair of bovine horns enclosing a sun disk.95 A symbol of Hathor, this crown is used to symbolize the queen’s role as serving the king, recalling how Hathor served the sun god.96 An example of this can be seen in a relief from the Eighteenth Dynasty Tomb of Kheruef, in which Amenhotep IV is making offerings to Re-Harakhti and Maat with his mother, Tiye, standing behind him.97 After the New Kingdom, Isis became closely connected with Hathor and adopted her physical attributes, like the Hathoric crown and curly hair, as her own.98 Though difficult to discern due to possible damage to the Met Wreathed Mask, the green imprint of a uraeus can be seen at the

92 De Ruiter, “Hathor, Mother of Mothers,” 284.
93 Collier, The Crowns of Pharaoh, 61.
94 Collier, The Crowns of Pharaoh, 65; Personal Communication with Dr. Joshua Roberson, March 25, 2021: The fillet was probably also associated with coming of age, hence the ritual of “tying the fillet” on youths of a certain age as mentioned in self-representation texts.
front of Isis’ fillet (Figure 13). The Hathor crown can be combined with the “Hathoric uraeus,” a cobra wearing its own pair of bovine horns that enclose a solar disk, and that is what might have been intended here. Mounting the goddess’ crown is the hieroglyph for her name, 𓊁𓊑 (Gardiner Q1), meaning “throne.”

Horus

Following Isis in the procession (Figure 17) is the falcon-headed god of kingship, Horus. His inscription reads, ḫḏ-mdi ḫn ḫḏ nm ḫḏ jnt-f, “Recitation by Horus, defender of his father.” Horus, “Lord of the sky,” was a cosmic deity represented by a falcon whose wings symbolized the sky and whose eyes represented the sun and moon. He is portrayed here with blue flesh, aligning with his identification as a sky god. Blue tends to symbolize the sky and water, which could be extended to the primeval floods. Naturally the color blue would also then reference the Nile, a source of life for all of Egypt due to the fertile crop it generates. As a symbol of the Nile and the forces of creation, the color blue takes on the meaning of life and rebirth, continuing

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101 Leitz, Lexikon der ägyptischen, Vol. 5, 237; J. Gwyn Griffiths, “The Meaning of ḫḏ and ḫḏ-ḥr,” Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 37 (1957): 32-37: Griffiths was the first person to correctly explain the significance of this epithet, which was translated previously as “avenger of his father.”


the solar theme of rebirth through death that is present in the mask.\textsuperscript{105} The use of blue could also be used to evoke the brilliance of faience, a material the Egyptians favored due to its luminous quality.\textsuperscript{106} The use of blue emphasizes Horus’ role as a solar deity, an effect which can also be seen in the famous Horus statue of Khafre made of gneiss (Figure 18), which glows blue in sunlight.\textsuperscript{107} Furthermore, the coupling of blue flesh and a green wig, as is depicted here, could also represent Horus as a fertility figure.\textsuperscript{108} Both his kilt and shirt, accompanied by two black body straps, emulate falcon feathers in gold with red and blue feather tips. In addition to the red bull’s tail, a second layer of material is draped over the kilt that resembles falcon wings, with intricate feathers in gold, red, white, and blue. He has on a detailed gold broad collar in addition to white armlets and bracelets outlined in red with red circlets.

Horus is depicted wearing a green tripartite wig mounted with the \emph{shmyt} (Gardiner S6), or double crown, representing his association with the ruler of Egypt.\textsuperscript{109} The double crown is composed of the \emph{hdt} (Gardiner S1), or White Crown of Upper Egypt, and the \emph{dšrt} (Gardiner S3), the Red Crown of Lower Egypt.\textsuperscript{110} When combined in this form, they come to represent the unified kingdom of Egypt. In what appears to be an artistic license of the Roman period, the double crown is depicted here with patterned details, connecting it artistically to the patterned


\textsuperscript{106} Corcoran, “The Color Blue,” 55-56.


\textsuperscript{108} Armstrong, “The Two Non-Blue Amuns,” 190.

\textsuperscript{109} Goebs, “Crowns,” 7; Corcoran, “The Color Blue,” 55: It should be noted that artistic renderings in green on objects dating to earlier than the New Kingdom may actually be degraded from an original blue color, though that is not the case here.

\textsuperscript{110} Collier, \textit{The Crowns of Pharaoh}, 16.
addresses of the goddesses and geometric decoration of the mask as a whole. The red crown has a white fillet tied around it and a green uraeus mounted at its front, while the white crown is painted blue with black circlets. Horus is in the act of presenting offerings, holding a vessel of burning coals in his right hand and pouring libations onto an offering table of bread loaves with his left hand. The table is mounted with the sm3-t3.wy sign in blue, the entwined papyrus and reeds representing the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt.

**Amun-Re**

The next figure in the procession is Amun-Re, king of the gods. The inscription reads, \( \text{d}d-\text{mdw } jn\text{ } jmn-R'\text{ } nj\text{-swt } ntr.w, \) “Recitation by Amun-Re, king of the gods.”\(^{111}\) The Thebans considered Amun to be the oldest god, associated with “heaven,” the Nile, earth, and fertility.\(^{112}\) In addition to being king of the gods, the god Re was the primary solar deity, representing the sun and the creation of the world through sunrise and sunset.\(^{113}\) The Eighteenth Dynasty (1550-1292 BCE) witnessed the merging of these two supreme gods into Amun-Re.\(^{114}\) Though considered a conceptual god, Amun-Re tends to take anthropomorphic form, as he does here.\(^{115}\) Amun was usually depicted blue after the Amarna period, representing air and the sky, the life-giving waters of the Nile, and lapis lazuli, a stone which made up the eyes, wigs, and beards of


\(^{112}\) Armstrong, “The Two Non-Blue Amuns,” 188.


gods. On the Met Wreathed Mask, however, he is depicted black. Black represents the underworld and the fertile black silt of kmt, the “Black Land,” signifying concepts of resurrection and fertility. He is wearing an orange, beaded kilt with the red bull’s tail and falcon wing overlay, and his top is decorated with the gold, red, and blue feathered design. He is also adorned in a detailed gold broad collar and white armlets and bracelets outlined in red with red circlets.

Amun-Re is depicted in his traditional crown, which is comprised of two falcon feathers surrounding a sun-disk on a yellow, flat-topped cap. An untied fillet is streaming from the cap, with a green uraeus attached to the front. Each feather stands straight up and is divided in half, reflecting the dualism of Egyptian beliefs, i.e., the “Two Lands.” The sun-disk indicates his identification in the New Kingdom as the Heliopolitan sun-god, referred to as “eldest of the gods of the eastern sky” in the Book of the Dead. The king identified with Amun as k3 mw3t-f, “bull of his mother,” referencing the belief that Amun was reborn into each succeeding king.

Amun-Re also has strong ties to Hathor, relating directly to the afterlife. The “Beautiful Festival of the Desert Valley,” also known as the Wadi Festival, was meant to celebrate the renewal of life in the Netherworld for the deceased accomplished by Amun-Re and Hathor, involving a procession leading to the chapel of Amun at the Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-


118 Collier, The Crowns of Pharaoh, 95.


121 Collier, The Crowns of Pharaoh, 102.
Bahri. He holds an egg in his left hand, symbolic of cosmic creation. Chapter 77 of the Book of the Dead states that the sun-god emerged from an egg as a falcon, leading to the popularization of egg amulets being placed with the deceased to convey their hope of journeying to the afterlife. In his right hand is a sail, representing “the breath of life” in Spell 38A in The Book of the Dead, “Living by Air in the Realm of the Dead.” In front of him is another offering table holding six bread loaves, the stand of which is made of a lotus blossom on a stalk that is decorated with two intertwined plants, creating the sm3-ts.wy sign.

Thoth

Following Amun-Re is the ibis-headed god of wisdom, Thoth. His inscription reads, ḏd-mdw jn ḏhwjt ssb n nṯr.w, “Recitation by Thoth, superintendent of the gods.” Thoth was a moon-god, possessing great wisdom and occupying a diverse role in the pantheon. He was so valued by Re that he was appointed vizier, serving the sun-god as well as protecting his nightly journey as the sun. He was recognized for inventing cultural techniques such as arithmetic and writing, contributing to his role as a god of knowledge, as well as that of a funerary god. Just as he helped reunite the body parts of Osiris scattered by Seth in the Osiris myth, Thoth was


124 See Faulkner, Book of the Dead, Spell 38A; Wilkinson, Reading Egyptian Art, 154-155.


126 Bleeker, Hathor and Thoth, 114-117.

127 Ibid, 119.

charged with the “uniting” of the deceased.\textsuperscript{129} This involved performing the funerary rites by putting the body back together to ensure the deceased’s continued existence in the afterlife.\textsuperscript{130} Perhaps most importantly, Thoth was responsible for vindicating the dead at their judgment, giving him a prominent role in the afterlife of the deceased.\textsuperscript{131} He is depicted with a green body to highlight his funerary aspects, with a black ibis head and red eyes.

Thoth is dressed in a gold, beaded kilt with the fringed, geometrically patterned, black and white material between his legs, in addition to the falcon wing overlay and red bull’s tail. He is also wearing the gold, feathered top, with an undetailed gold collar and gold armlets and bracelets outlined in red with red circlets. He is depicted in a long, blue tripartite wig tied with a white fillet. In contrast to the figure of Horus, the green flesh of Thoth in combination with a blue wig may also reference his role as a fertility figure.\textsuperscript{132} Atop his wig are a pair of black ram’s horns and the \textit{hmhm} crown, with three sun-disks at the base and top of each reed bundle and a uraeus at the end of each horn. The \textit{hemhem} is the tripled form of the \textit{atef} crown, appearing on deities of sunrise or night and symbolic of cosmic regeneration.\textsuperscript{133} In his right hand are three \textit{rnpt} (Gardiner M4) staffs lined with tally notches, with the \textit{hfn} (Gardiner I8) sign at the base of each, representing an offering of 300,000 years.

\textsuperscript{129} Bleeker, \textit{Hathor and Thoth}, 146.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, 146-147.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 147.

\textsuperscript{132} Armstrong, “The Two Non-Blue Amuns,” 190.

\textsuperscript{133} Goebs, “Crowns,” 11.
Re-Harakhti

The following figure in the procession is the sun-god, Re-Harakhti. The inscription reads, ḏd-mdw jn Rḫ Hr-šḥ.ty, “Recitation by Re-Harakhti.”134 Although the inscription refers to the composite form of Re and Horus, he is depicted in anthropomorphic form with naturalistic skin color. His dress consists of a green, beaded kilt with the red bull’s tail and falcon wing overlay, the geometrically patterned, black and white material between his legs, and a gold, beaded top. He is adorned in an undecorated gold collar and white armlets and bracelets outlined in red with red circlets. He is depicted in a long, blue tripartite wig, representing the lapis lazuli hair of divine beings,135 and a sšd, a gold uraeus attached at its front. Coupled with the sšd is a crown made up of a sun-disk with a scarab-beetle at its center. The scarab beetle is one of the many forms taken by the sun-god, representing his role as the rising-sun god, Khepri.136

Re, the embodiment of the sun, was believed to travel through the sky in his solar barque from his symbolic “(re)birth” in the morning to his “death” when he entered the Duat, or netherworld, at night.137 In those twelve hours of night, he would fight off a multitude of dangers, uniting with his corpse in the primeval waters of Nun in the sixth hour and defeating the serpent Apophis in the seventh, being reborn again in the morning as Khepri.138 This journey is

136 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 28.
138 Hornung, Books of the Afterlife, 37; Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 28.
paralleled by that of the deceased in her rebirth through death. Re is depicted carrying a black form of horned, wild sheep called a mouflon. The mouflon was considered to be the embodiment of the ba of Amun-Re, particularly at Deir el-Medina, while the ram was more commonly associated with him elsewhere. Before him is an offering table with six loaves of bread, a blue \textit{smt-tz.wy} sign mounted at the front of the table.

\textbf{Nephthys}

Opposite Isis, the goddess Nephthys approaches Osiris on his left, also raising her arms in \textit{dws}. The inscription reads, \textit{dd-mdw jn nb.\-t-hw.\-t sn.t-nfr}, “Recitation by Nephthys, sister of the god.” Nephthys and Isis were the protectors and mourners of Osiris, often appearing together in his presence. She is depicted with blue flesh, emphasizing her solar connotations due to her role in greeting the rising sun god. She is depicted with short black hair and the same cork-screw curls as Isis and the deceased. Like her counterpart, Isis, Nephthys is wearing the \textit{s\-\kappa d} coupled with the Hathoric crown of cow’s horns enclosing a sun disk. On top of the crown is the hieroglyph for her name, \textit{nb.t-hw.t}, a rectangular enclosure topped with a basket, meaning

\begin{itemize}
\item \cite{Riggs2004} Riggs, \textit{The Beautiful Burial}, 28.
\item \cite{Leitz1982} Leitz, \textit{Lexikon der ägyptischen}, Vol. 4, 95-104.
\item \cite{Corcoran2006} Corcoran, “The Color Blue,” 55-56.
\end{itemize}
“Mistress of the House.” She is wearing a blue bead-net dress over a red sheath dress in addition to two black body straps adorning her shoulders, though only one is visible. She is adorned with an intricate, gold broad collar and black anklets, as well as white armlets and bracelets outlined in red with red circlets.

**Anubis**

Following Nephthys in the procession (Figure 19) is the jackal-headed god of death, Anubis. The inscription reads, *ḥd-mdw ḫn ḫnpr sỉ Wṣjr,* “Recitation by Anubis, son of Osiris.” The same epithet for Anubis is inscribed on the funerary mask of Artemidora and relates to the characterization of Anubis as the son of Osiris and Nephthys. As “Lord of the Necropolis,” Anubis is usually depicted in canine form and is associated with the process of

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144 Sethe, *Urgeschichte und älteste Religion,* 118; Altenmüller, “Zum Ursprung,” 9; Graefe, “Nephthys,” 457-458; E. Hornung, “Versuch über Nephthys,” in *Studies in Pharaonic Religion and Society* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1992): 186. Scholars have debated the interpretation of Nephthys’s name as “Mistress of the House.” Sethe considered the expression to refer to the “dwelling house,” attributing the role of “wife” to Nephthys, while Hornung interpreted it to mean “Mistress of the Temple.” Altenmüller also suggests that she may be referred to as the “mistress of the embalming room,” relating to the role she and Isis had in embalming Osiris.


147 Plutarch and J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch’s de Iside et Osiride: edited with an introd., translation and commentary by J. Gwyn Griffiths* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970): Plutarch (Chapter 14, 356E) wrote that Osiris and Nephthys committed adultery, which resulted in the birth of Anubis. However, Gaber argues that Plutarch was writing at a time when Egyptian religion was often misinterpreted, instead considering Anubis’ epithet as “Son of Osiris” to be related to his funerary role in embalming Osiris; Brigitte Altenmüller, “Anubis,” in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie Volume I,* ed. Wolfgang Helck and Eberhard Otto (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975), 327; Amr Gaber, “A Case of Divine Adultery Investigated,” in *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt,* Vol. 51 (2015): 303-328.
embalming and mummifying the deceased.\textsuperscript{148} He is painted black, further symbolizing his connection to death, the underworld, and resurrection.\textsuperscript{149} Anubis is associated with black and gold as a lunar and solar deity, whose reach spans the sky, earth, and netherworld in both Egyptian and Roman belief systems.\textsuperscript{150} In addition to the gold, feathered top, he is wearing the gold, falcon-feathered kilt with the falcon-wing overlay and a red bull’s tail, as well as the geometrically patterned, black and white material between his legs.

Adorning his neck is a gold, banded collar, and he has on white armlets and bracelets outlined in red with red circlets. He is depicted in a long, tripartite wig of lapis lazuli, paired with a uraeus and double crown. The red crown has a reed matting pattern and a white fillet tied around it, while the white crown is green and decorated with circlets. In his left hand is a funerary vessel, and in his right hand is a strip of linen, recalling his responsibilities as “Lord of Embalming.” Another strip of blue linen is draped from his shoulder across his chest. Before him is an offering table with three vessels for funerary rites and a red funerary crown or wreath. The blue $smt3-t3.wy$ motif is placed at the front of the offering table.


\textsuperscript{150} DuQuesne, \textit{Black and Gold God}, 24-26.
**Tefnut**

The next figure in the procession is the lion-headed goddess, Tefnut. The inscription reads, $tf<n>.t\ s3\ jr.t\ R'$, “Tefnut, daughter and eye of Re.” Tefnut and Shu were born to the creator god, Atum, becoming representations of duality in the Heliopolitan Ennead, particularly representing the dual male and female nature of the sun god. Together, they became recognized as “protectors of the sunrise,” guiding and protecting the king as Osiris to Re in the afterlife. Referred to as the Daughter of Re from the Middle Kingdom on, Tefnut was the personification of moisture and/or air, often connected with cosmic order, *ma’at*, and *ḏt*. When depicted with the head of a lioness, however, she becomes the embodiment of the solar “Eye of Re,” the first-born daughter of Re as she is depicted in myths such as the *Distant Goddess* and the *Destruction of Mankind*. Her yellow skin emphasizes this solar connection. She is wearing a blue feather-patterned sheath dress, with the tips of the feathers in red and yellow. She also wears an undecorated, red broad collar, white armlets and bracelets outlined in red with red circlets, and black anklets. She is depicted in the long, curly black tripartite wig with a white fillet tied around it.

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153 Ibid, 258: Referred to in PT 690 and attested in the pyramids of Pepi I on the S. wall of the burial chamber, Merenre on the E. wall of the antechamber, Pepi II on the N. wall of the antechamber, Neither on the S. wall of the burial chamber, and Wedjebetni on the N. wall of the burial chamber.


Topping her fillet is a large solar disk, encircled by a cobra. This headdress, sometimes called the “crown of Sekhmet,” emphasizes the goddess’ solar ties. The same headdress adorns the lion-headed Wadjet in her complementary role as the “Eye of Re.” This role has also been embodied by the goddesses Sekhmet and Hathor, as Re summons his ferocious daughter in the form of a lioness to fight his enemies. Hathor is also seen in this role in The Book of the Heavenly Cow, when Nun recommends that Re send her to smite mankind for conspiring against him. In Tefnut’s left hand is a funerary vessel, as she approaches an offering table with six loaves of bread, mounted by the blue sm3-t3.wy motif.

Hathor

The next figure in the procession is the goddess, Hathor. The inscription reads, <ḥwt>-ḥr.t nb.(t) ḫp.t, “Hathor, Mistress of the Womb.” Hathor was a Sky Goddess, connecting with her role as the celestial cow, however she had many names and roles and was associated with several other goddesses. Her role as a solar goddess was established by the Fifth Dynasty when she was worshipped as Re’s daughter or the “Eye of Re,” responsible for protecting his

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156 Lurker, The Gods and Symbols, 60.
158 Hermann Junker, Der Auszug der Hathor-Tefnut aus Nubien (Berlin: The Academy of Science, 1911), 3-4; Pinch, Votive Offerings to Hathor, 191-192.
160 Leitz, Lexikon der egyptischen, Vol. 5, 79; I am grateful to Dr. Joshua Roberson for his aid in translating this epithet.
161 Jackson, Sekhmet & Bastet, 71: The celestial cow originates in the Predynastic Period as a symbol of creation and the sky.
journey in the Solar Barque. Her nature was contradictory, being a goddess of earthly pleasures and sexuality as well as a solar, feline goddess with a volatile temper. She is depicted with green flesh, again alluding to vegetation and rebirth. Hathor is depicted wearing a red bead-net dress over a yellow sheath dress with black body straps, a simple gold broad collar, and black anklets. Her armlets and bracelets may have been gold at one time, but have faded to a green color, and are outlined in red with barely discernible red circlets. In her left hand is a necklace with a shrine amulet containing three non-distinct figures.

She is wearing her characteristic long, curly hair tied with a white fillet. Rather than the Hathoric crown of bovine horns, atop her head is the nb sign, acting as a pedestal for the protective vulture above. The vulture is usually associated with the goddess Nekhbet, who represents Upper Egypt. Yet here, the vulture is depicted wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. The Red Crown is a red, flat-topped cap with a projecting back and characteristic wire protruding in a spiral. It is associated with Northern Egypt, or Lower Egypt, and is referred to as dšrt, “The Red One,” or wzd, “The Green” or “Fresh One,” associating it with the goddess, Wadjet. Wadjet, “The one with a fresh face,” was the counterpart to Nekhbet as the goddess


163 Pascale Marie Teysseire, “The Portrayal of Women in the Ancient Egyptian Tale” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1998), 113; Jackson, Sekhmet & Bastet, 71; Warkentin, “Looking Beyond the Image,” 57. Her destructive nature is represented in texts such as The Destruction of Mankind myth, in which she is often interchanged with Tefnut or Sekhmet. Sekhmet can be interpreted as the embodiment of Hathor’s anger, personifying the more dangerous aspects of Hathor’s strong emotions.


of Lower Egypt. Because Wadjet’s name was also a term for cobra, she became equated with the royal uraeus.¹⁶⁷

When combined, the vulture and snake are symbolic of the two halves of Egypt, becoming in turn the embodiments of the two crowns.¹⁶⁸ As such, in front of the vulture are two cobras wearing the crowns of Lower and Upper Egypt. These two uraeii together represent the two halves of the country.¹⁶⁹ The vulture and uraeus also embody Hathor’s protective roles. The vulture is a symbol for motherhood and may signify Hathor’s role as a fertility goddess who protected women during labor.¹⁷⁰ Snakes also have maternal symbolism, their ability to shed their skin making them symbols of rebirth.¹⁷¹ Like Wadjet, Hathor also embodied the uraeus as the “Eye of Re,” defending the sun-god through its protective power.¹⁷² The depiction of Hathor in this headdress on the Met Wreathed Mask emphasizes her protective role as a solar goddess.

¹⁶⁹ Goeb, Royalty, Rebirth, and Destruction, 163-164: Both crowns also have a luminous quality and symbolism, with the Red Crown having a darker connotation with blood, and the White Crown having the bright light of the moon and stars, their combined representation embodying the dual nature of kingship and the cosmic cycle; Goeb, “Crowns,” 3.
¹⁷⁰ Goeb, Royalty, Rebirth, and Destruction, 182: Vultures may have been considered to be maternal beings by the ancient Egyptians because they could not distinguish between male and female vultures, which, in addition to their brooding habits, led the Egyptians to believe they were all females.
¹⁷¹ Goeb, Royalty, Rebirth, and Destruction, 182.
¹⁷² Pinch, Votive Offerings to Hathor, 129-130; McClymont, “Hathor in ‘Spheres of Belonging,” 55; Jackson, Sekhmet & Bastet, 106-111: Just as a cobra sprays venom into its victims’ eyes, the uraeus attacks with fire, linking it to the burning solar eye as the protector of kings and gods.
Seshat

The following figure in the procession is Seshat, Mistress of Writings. The inscription reads, $Sšt\ wr.t\ nḥt\ sŠ$, “Seshat, the great one, mistress of writings.” Like Nephthys, she is depicted with blue skin recalling the cosmic symbolism and solar association with rebirth. She, too, is wearing the $sŠd$ upon her short, curly wig, signifying her status as a goddess. Above the circlet are two cobras, one wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt and the other wearing the White Crown of Upper Egypt. This combination is often associated with royal women, and symbolically refers to the unification of Egypt as well as to the dual cobras which encircle the solar disk, recalling the ideas of solar symbolism and ideas of regeneration. Between the uraeii is the emblem for her name, constituting a rosette with seven leaves attached to a fastening rod.

Seshat is depicted wearing a red bead-net dress over a gold sheath dress. Additionally, a red leopard’s skin with yellow and blue spots is draped over the dress. A geometrically patterned, black and white panel of cloth fans out from under her arm. She is adorned in an intricate gold collar, white armlets and bracelets outlined in red with red circlets, and black anklets. One of her most important functions, as “She who is foremost in the House of Books,” was recording the regnal years and jubilees of the king. On this funerary mask, Seshat is depicted holding a reed pen in her right hand and two $rnpt$ staffs with the $ḥfn$ tadpole sign at each base, signifying an offering of 200,000 years and emphasizing her role as recorder.

174 Leitz, Lexikon der aegyptischen, Vol. 6, 610.
Decorative Borders

The register above the procession of gods is decorated with alternating *tjt* (Gardiner V39) knots and *qd* (Gardiner R11) pillars. The *tyet*-knot was an amulet symbolizing a loop of red cloth that was identified with the goddess Isis.\(^{178}\) It has strong protective and fertility connotations. The knot may have been a type of sanitary towel due to its association with red, being depicted primarily with red stones such as jasper and cornelian, in addition to its protective, blocking function.\(^ {179}\) Wendrich suggests that the fertility and protective characteristics of the *tyet* amulet may have expanded to include protecting the unborn fetus in the womb.\(^ {180}\) The *Djed*-pillar became a symbol of Osiris during the New Kingdom (1550-1070 BCE), recognized as the god’s backbone.\(^ {181}\) When the two signs of the divine couple are combined as they are in this register, they represent the balance of nature in life.\(^ {182}\) These symbols are also depicted in the geometric, woven patterns seen on the rest of the mask. A linear border of geometric decoration runs underneath the panel, in alternating blue, green, and red. The same pattern decorates the linear border outlining the mask in alternating black and red. A shorter black border lines the top, decorated with white flowers.

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180 Wendrich, “Entangled, Connected or Protected,” 250.

181 Goebs, “Crowns,” 47.

182 Ibid, 92.
Theme of Decoration

The full range of gods decorating the mask represent the entire ancient Egyptian pantheon. This may reference cultural variation and/or archaism taking place in Cusae, as the representation of gods that had been prominent in pharaonic Egypt may indicate the revival or perpetuation of traditional religious beliefs into the Roman Period. Though there were no longer Priestesses of Hathor in Cusae during the Roman Period, the patterned dresses depicted on the goddesses suggest an attempt to reclaim the authority of that role in the decoration of the mask and reflect the reinvigorated cultic interest in Hathor during that time. The uniform dress of the gods in feathered patterned garb recalls the Horus falcon, associating the mask with kingship and accentuating its solar connotations. The attributes of the gods also emphasize their funerary aspects, thereby establishing their connection to the overall theme of solar regeneration in the afterlife.
Chapter Six

Representation of the Deceased as Hathor

Characterization of Hathor

Hathor was a goddess with a multitude of roles and characteristics. She was distinguished in the *Book of the Dead* as “Lady of the West,” “Lady of the Sacred Land,” and “Eye of Re.”\(^1\) She was not only celebrated as a goddess of love, beauty, and joy, but was a goddess of birth and death (or rebirth).\(^2\) In turn, this made her a mediator between the worlds, with a dual nature of one who could be either benevolent or destructive.\(^3\) She is depicted in Egyptian art as a woman wearing a headdress adorned with bovine horns and a sun disk, a woman with bovine ears, or as a celestial cow.\(^4\) Hathor had a prominent role in the Egyptian pantheon by the Fourth Dynasty (2575-2465 BCE); during this time, her relationship with Re was revered as both wife and daughter, which established her connection to the palace and the king.\(^5\) Her name signifies her relationship with the king, \(\text{ḥwt-ḥr}\) meaning “House of Horus,” relating to her role as mother and protector of Horus the Elder, with “house” referencing a mother’s womb.\(^6\) Lesko argues that

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5 Hollis, “Hathor and Isis,” 2.

6 See Barbara S. Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 82; Hollis, “Hathor and Isis,” 1-2; Elizabeth Rose Warkentin, “Looking Beyond the Image: An Exploration of the Relationship between Political Power and the Cult Places of Hathor in New Kingdom Egypt” (PhD diss., The University of Memphis, 2018), 49-50: Horus the Elder is considered the “original Horus,” who appeared in serekhs from the Early Dynastic Period, opposed to the posthumous son of Isis and Osiris.
Hathor was created to be the divine spouse of Re and mother of the king, becoming the chief of all goddesses as a personification of the entire Ennead.7

**Assimilation with Isis**

Hathor and Isis shared many qualities and roles, as both were believed to be solar goddesses of fertility, motherhood, and prosperity.8 Isis had a solar connotation due to her role on the solar barque of the sun god, Re.9 As the sister-wife of Osiris, however, she was primarily associated with the funerary realm and was believed to assist the deceased in transitioning to the afterlife.10 This funerary role further connected her with motherhood and fertility through the Osiris myth, with the Osirian belief in the afterlife becoming popular during the Middle Kingdom.11 Isis had a more prominent role in Egyptian religion during the New Kingdom, which is when she first began to absorb some of Hathor’s attributes, including the crown containing bovine horns with the sun-disk and the sistrum.12 During the Ptolemaic Period, the crown of Hathor became a lunar symbol, emphasizing both Isis and Hathor’s association with fertility and

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11 Griffiths, “Osiris,” 626; Heyob, *The Cult of Isis*, 50; Teeter, “Earthly and Divine Mothers,” 156; Hollis, “Hathor and Isis,” 1: In the Osiris myth, Osiris was murdered by his brother Seth, who dismembered his body and scattered the pieces throughout Egypt. Isis gathered the pieces and bound them with linen, creating the first mummy. She was then impregnated by him, resulting in the birth of Horus, expressing the idea of life after death and rebirth in the afterlife.

12 Hollis, “Hathor and Isis,” 1.
reproduction. During the Roman Period, Isis surpassed Hathor as the more prominent goddess; she adopted Hathor’s roles and aspects through assimilation and was represented with traditional Hathoric attributes, such as her long, curly hair and the Hathoric crown (See Figure 20). The two goddesses often occupied each other’s roles and were nearly interchangeable in texts and representations. As both Hathor and Isis were funerary goddesses with maternal associations, they each had a role in protecting the deceased in the Underworld. McClymont argues that the sharing of roles and characteristics between Hathor and Isis was due to the notion of “complementarity,” by which the dual representation of Hathor and Isis in a tomb scene could offer more protection to the deceased.

Association with Fertility and Motherhood

One of Hathor’s roles was as the goddess of love, sexuality, and joy, naturally associating her with fertility and motherhood. The Ancient Egyptians believed that Hathor gave birth to the sun god in her form as a celestial cow, and thus designated her as a maternal goddess. This role is also seen in representations of Hathor suckling the king as the divine child. Her role as a fertility goddess did not only pertain to the royal family, however. The Egyptians’ belief that

13 Delia, “Isis, or the Moon,” 540-547.
15 Corcoran, Portrait Mummies, 61; McClymont, “Hathor in ‘Spheres of Belonging,’” 47.
16 See McClymont, “Hathor in ‘Spheres of Belonging,’” 47.
18 De Ruiter, “Hathor, Mother of Mothers,” 58.
Hathor was both a mother and a fertility goddess made her relatable for women in Egypt, who identified with her in their daily lives as mothers themselves, and also made her a subject of piety and prayer.\textsuperscript{20}

Hathor was a “life-giving force,” bestowing reproductive fertility on men and women and serving as a protector of pregnant women, particularly during labor.\textsuperscript{21} Due to her role with fertility and childbirth, there are more votive offerings to Hathor than any other deity from the New Kingdom, consisting of phallic objects, fertility figures, and written inscriptions praying for virility.\textsuperscript{22} The ancient Egyptians did not seem to apply the Western separation of childbirth and sexuality, thus Hathor embodied erotic love, drunkenness, and dancing.\textsuperscript{23} Hathor had an important role in the lives of women, supporting them as they grew to adulthood and became mothers, protecting them during birth, and protecting their family thereafter.\textsuperscript{24} As women in Egypt primarily occupied roles in the household, their responsibilities limited to home and family, Hathor’s association with fertility and sexuality would have given her a prominent role in their lives and religion. While motherhood was generally more associated with Isis, Hathor’s assimilation with Isis during the Roman Period likely strengthened her connection to motherhood and thus her importance to women.


\textsuperscript{23} Graves-Brown, \textit{Dancing for Hathor}, 167-168.

\textsuperscript{24} Lesko, \textit{The Great Goddesses of Egypt}, 112-113.
Funerary Roles

A goddess of rebirth, Hathor had a prominent role in the funerary beliefs of the ancient Egyptians. As mother, consort, and daughter of the sun god, she had an active role aiding in the rejuvenation of Re and the dead; and while not a participant in the Osiris myth, she was considered to be the transformational counterpart to Osiris for women, particularly during the Roman Period. Her epithets as “Mistress of the West” and “Goddess of the Western Mountains of Thebes” signify Hathor’s domain over the western necropolis and realm of the dead, paralleling Osiris’ own epithet as “Foremost of the West,” titles which declare their status as protectors of the dead. Hathor’s roles thus included guarding cemeteries and assisting the deceased in the form of a sycomore fig tree, her maternal aspects leading her to offer sustenance and protection to the deceased in the Underworld.

Hathor’s form as the celestial cow, in particular, emphasizes her funerary aspects. Spell 186 of The Book of the Dead is accompanied by a vignette depicting Hathor as a cow, wearing the menat necklace and Hathoric crown, emerging from a mountain with her head embraced by papyrus plants (See Figure 21). This “cow and mountain” motif occurred in New Kingdom tombs, sometimes being depicted as the destination for funerary processions as the West was


26 Pinch, Votive Offerings to Hathor, 129; Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 44; Warkentin, “Looking Beyond the Image,” 54.

27 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 44; McClymont, “Hathor in ‘Spheres of Belonging,’” 47; Jackson, Sekhmet & Bastet, 71.

28 Teyssière, “The Portrayal of Women,” 113-114; Faulkner, Book of the Dead, Spell 186; Pinch, Votive Offerings to Hathor, 179.
associated with the realm of the dead. The imagery of the Western desert mountain accompanied by the papyrus plants emphasizes the idea of rebirth and continuity, reinforcing Hathor’s dual nature as a goddess of life and death. With the mountain representing the entrance to the Underworld, Hathor in bovine form thus became a symbol for the transition from life to the afterlife.

The Assimilation of the Deceased with Hathor

Hathor’s strong associations to kingship, as both mother and consort, made her the ideal “divine model” for royal women, who then identified as Hathor’s earthly counterpart through their relationships to the king. Her popularity was not limited to royal women, however, but permeated society at every level. During the Old Kingdom, high officials and non-royal women served at the numerous temples to Hathor, with around four hundred women having been involved in the cult of Hathor between the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period. Even after the occupation of Priestess of Hathor waned during the Middle Kingdom, her popularity clearly did not, as shown by the number of votive offerings dedicated to her throughout the New Kingdom. In addition to her mortuary and fertility aspects, Hathor was a goddess of pleasure, joy, music, and dance, making her a popular goddess for celebration.

29 Pinch, Votive Offerings to Hathor, 179.


31 Pinch, Votive Offerings to Hathor, 180.

32 Lana Troy, Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History (PhD diss., Uppsala University, 1986), 54; Warkentin, “Looking Beyond the Image,” 46.


34 Pinch, Votive Offerings to Hathor, 6-8; Warkentin, “Looking Beyond the Image,” 47.
Having been pacified with beer in *The Destruction of Mankind*, Hathor was given the title, “Mistress of Drunkenness,” prompting offerings of beer and wine, and was celebrated during “The Festival of Drunkenness” and the “Beautiful Feast of the Valley.” These festivals gave the common people an active role in religious activities, strengthening their connection to the goddess and increasing her popularity.

Her popularity amongst both royal and nonroyal women in addition to her mortuary duties made her the ideal choice for assimilation in the afterlife. During Ptolemaic Egypt, rulers adopted the Egyptian practice of identifying with the gods. Thus, Ptolemaic queens were represented as living embodiments of the goddess Isis, just as Egyptian queens had been identified with Isis and Hathor. Beginning in the Julio-Claudian Period (14-68 CE), the Roman empress was represented with the attributes of a goddess, typically choosing a divinity who represented her own virtues as well as the policies of the emperor. Modelling themselves after the empress, non-royal women adopted the same practice and were assimilated with goddesses after death. The 2nd century CE tomb of Claudia Semne near the *Via Appia* hosts inscriptions and representations that portray Claudia as the goddesses Venus (goddess of love), Spes (goddess of hope), and Fortuna (goddess of fortune). Alternatively, Roman sarcophagi often depict mythological figures in the likeness of the deceased, thereby integrating the deceased into the


37 Matheson, “The Divine Claudia,” 182.

38 Matheson, “The Divine Claudia,” 182.

39 Ibid, 182.
mythological narrative. In being represented as a divinity after death, women would thereby adopt the virtues of those divinities in the public memory.

From the Late Period in Egypt, women were often identified with Hathor after death, capable of a “Hathor form” in death by adopting the form of the goddess during transfiguration, making the preservation of their identity (and body) imperative for achieving rebirth in the afterlife. Inscriptions such as those found on the Roman Period burial shroud of Ta-sherit-Hor-udja designate the deceased as Hathor. As Mistress of the West, Hathor became a model for how deceased women were represented in their transfigured form. The attributes of Hathor, such as curly hair, sheath dresses, and lotus flowers or lily-scepters, were employed in women’s representations to further identify the deceased with Hathor as well as to emphasize their social roles after death. The Akhmim coffins from Kharga represent how artisans modelled deceased men after Osiris and women after Hathor, using iconography such as the lily-scepter, situla, pectoral, and sycomore fig tree to demonstrate their symbolic assimilation with Hathor after death.

The representation of the deceased on the Met Wreathed Mask with a wreath upon her head, coupled with long, unrestrained hair, could indicate her participation in celebrations associated with Hathor while living. Identifying a deceased woman as Hathor, rather than

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40 Ibid, 190: For example, a representation of the deceased as the sleeping Ariadne or Diana at hunt.
41 Ibid,190-192.
42 Corcoran, Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt, 61, 72-74; Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 41; Cole, “The Gendered Individual,” 208-211.
44 Riggs, “Gilding the Lily,” 13; Jimenez, Transfiguring the Dead, 117.
45 Riggs, The Beautiful Burial, 41; Riggs, “Gilding the Lily,” 13; Jimenez, Transfiguring the Dead, 89.
46 Jimenez, Transfiguring the Dead, 119.
Osiris, emphasized the significance of preserving the gender of the deceased as well, due to the association between fertility and rebirth.\textsuperscript{47} Hathor had an influential role in Cusae during the Roman Period, and the deceased would have encountered Hathor often in her daily life and religious activities. The deceased could have been an active member of Hathor’s cult at Cusae. Being represented on this mask as her patron goddess suggests a desire on her part to be assimilated with her in the afterlife.\textsuperscript{48} The decoration of funerary equipment like the Met Wreathed Mask was a way to further represent the cultural identity and beliefs of the deceased and her renewal in the afterlife by representing herself as Hathor.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{47} Riggs, \textit{The Beautiful Burial}, 47.

\textsuperscript{48} Corcoran, \textit{Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt}, 73.

\textsuperscript{49} Riggs, “Gilding the Lily,” 1.
Chapter 7
Conclusion

Funerary masks throughout the history of ancient Egypt signify a belief in the afterlife and the deceased’s transformation into a divine being after death. Those dated to the Roman Period, such as the Met Wreathed Mask, have generated strong interest due to the combination of Hellenistic naturalism and Egyptian funerary iconography in a single representation. The continued presence of pharaonic motifs indicates that traditional Egyptian beliefs were maintained even after the Romanization of Egypt. The function of the funerary mask, to preserve the identity of the deceased through representation, was likewise maintained. This study examines how the Met Wreathed Mask represents the social identity of the deceased by situating her life within a broader historical, religious, and social context.

The Met Wreathed Mask is not a “true” portrait according to modern interpretation; however, it would have qualified as one to its contemporary audience. Rather than depicting individuality, ancient representations were meant to reflect the entire self of the depicted individual, reflecting her values and the social roles she wished to perpetuate in the social memory of her. In this manner, the Met Wreathed Mask preserves the deceased’s identity through an idealized representation of how she wished to be memorialized.

It is challenging to ascertain the identity of one who lived so long ago, as identity is a concept made up of multiple factors that interact with each other and change depending on situation. A single representation such as the Met Wreathed Mask is incapable of expressing the deceased’s whole-encompassing identity, its iconographic elements emphasized instead particularly chosen aspects of the deceased’s societal role and status by which she wished to be defined after death, i.e., her public self-presentation.
As a woman living in Cusae during the Roman Period, what role she held in society would have been determined by the wealth and class of her family. Living in the 1st century CE, her family still had the choice between Egyptian and Roman legalities, and she may have owned her own property. Though her mummified remains are lost, her mask represents an adult woman, indicating she may have lived to adulthood and, if so, likely had a family.\(^1\) Her primary responsibilities would have been to her home and family; however, she also may have had an active role in religious activities, serving Hathor as the patron goddess of Cusae.

Hathor’s association with love, sexuality, fertility, and motherhood made her relatable for women in Egypt and gave her a prominent role in their lives and religious activities. As Mistress of the West, the female counterpart to Osiris, Hathor was a model for how women could represent themselves in their transfigured form after death. The iconography of the Met Wreathed Mask utilizes pharaonic funerary and solar imagery, emphasizing the belief in regeneration after death. The decoration of funerary masks like the Met Wreathed Mask allowed an individual to make a final statement about her place in society, to perpetuate her social image, as well as to display her cultural identity and her transformation into a divine being in the afterlife by portraying her in the guise of Hathor.

\(^1\) Though the funerary mask represents an adult woman, there are many mummy portraits that represent “adult” women, but which accompany the mummified remains of children; See Essi Rönkkö, Taco Terpstra, and Marc Walton (eds.), *Portrait of a Child: Historical and Scientific Studies of a Roman Egyptian Mummy* (The Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, 2019), 79.
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