Unpublished Cartonnage Mummy-Mask from El-Ashmounin Museum Magazine

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Abstract: This paper deals with a cartonnage mummy mask that is now preserved in the El-Ashmounin Museum Magazine, in Minia Governorate. This unpublished mummy mask was not studied or included in any studies concerning cartonnage mummy masks. The piece in question is made of linen and painted plaster. The cartonnage consists of a mask and three breast pieces, except for the ruined lower side parts of the mask, the piece is in a good state of preservation. The paper also aims to suggest the provenance of the cartonnage. Based on the features of Egyptian profane art during the Graeco-Roman period, this paper studies the depicted mythological scenes as well as the accompanying inscriptions. The dating of the mask goes back to the Roman era, where the face bears the features of the deceased in terms of the face, eyes, and fringes of hair, and depicted on the funeral mask scenes bearing the Egyptian traditions according to the common Egyptian funerary art style during the Graeco-Roman Period.

Keywords: cartonnage, mummy mask, Roman period, linen, Mummy.
Introduction:

1- Function:

As early as the First Intermediate Period, the ancient Egyptian used the cartonnage and its use obviously flourished during the Late Period. Mummy masks and cartonnages began to be used on a wide scale by the Graeco-Roman times. The cartonnage mummy mask was usually made of layers of linen saturated with glue and covered with plaster. It was often painted and decorated with various religious scenes. The mummy masks were placed over the upper part of the deceased's body, and covered the head and chest. They were intended to depict the deceased in the best possible shape hoping that they could aspire them after death.

Losing the head of the deceased was one of the most feared dangers of the Netherworld. This was mentioned in spell 43 of the Book of the Dead as follows; ‘for preventing a man's decapitation in the realm of the deceased’. The ancient Egyptian had a continuous fear from the loss of the head or depriving one of his or her physical abilities such as; seeing, hearing, eating, speaking and breathing after death. Thus, the main aim of the mummy masks was to preserve the head and facial features of the deceased. Since it was impossible for a human to exist without a head, the accurate representation of the face and the head was mandatory during the funeral rites to achieve resurrection. Moreover, the scenes surrounding the deceased's head, particularly the deities and protective symbols were used to enable the deceased to cross the underworld safely. Hence, the transfiguration of the deceased was an obvious sign that he or she had successfully reached the Afterlife.

2- The Mummy Condition:

The mumified mummy belongs to an adult male who is tightly wrapped in linen (fig.1). The linen rolls are uncolored and bear some damages on both sides of the mummy, in addition to the lower part of the mummy that bears the body had been covered with black resin. Despite of the body's good state of preservation, the feet and fingers are missing. The mummy lies on a wooden bench fixed with wooden nails, mostly dating back to the same period as the mummy. Concerning the mummy mask, it is made of a linen-made cartonnage which is painted plaster depicting the head and the upper torso of the deceased. The cartonnage is well-preserved except for the two lower parts of the right and left sides of the mask which are ruined. Furthermore, many scattered cracks and traces of restoration on both sides of the mask have been attested.

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4 Meeks, Dieu masque: 6.

3- Mummy Mask Description:

1- The Head and Face (Fig. 2):
A light crimson skin, painted large eyes, and red lips characterize the mask of the deceased. His short hair is topped by a winged solar disc which is flanked by two cobras on his forehead between two bandeaus. The solar disc is colored in red, while the wings are yellow, red, white, and grey. The deceased bears shaved face, thick black eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes and eyelids outlined from the outside with a thick black line. The irises are colored in brown, while the pupils are black. The nose is straight, the mouth is closed, the lower lip is relatively thick, and the chin is pointed.

Through the mummy cartonnage, the deceased is depicted wearing a tripartite headdress and a large collar with lines of lotus bands and geometric shapes ending with white triangle-shaped pearls. The cartonnage is painted with a lifelike eye colors and skin tones. In the middle of the forehead, there is a small square in yellow, and it seems that this square was a part of cobra shape attached to it, but now is missing. Traces of glue on the inside of the square confirm this hypothesis.

The upper part of the mummy mask bears a decorative motive. In the middle, a yellow shape of the \( \text{\textcircled{\( \text{\( qnh \)}} \) } \) -sign is flanked on both sides with a row of six yellow erected cobras all of which are executed on a pink background. The \( \text{\textcircled{\( \text{\( qnh \)}} \) } \) -sign as well as the cobra shapes are crowned with solar disk. This decorative part is surrounded from the top and below by two decorative strips in the form of successive squares, one of them takes the shape of three black longitudinal lines followed by a blue square in blue with a small yellow circle in the middle.

2- The Chest (fig. 2):
In the upper part of the chest, particularly the lateral sides of it, there is a painted shape of a crouching jackal in black holding the skhem- scepter. Over every jackal, there is a sun disk surrounded by a serpent. Under the two jackals, there is a row of four standing cobras with a sun disk on their heads; the cobras are colored yellow on a pink background. Jackals as well as cobra shapes are framed by alternating stripes and rectangles in white, black and red colors. At the bottom end of the mask, there is a red-cross grid on a yellow background with a small red flower inside.

3- Back of the Head (fig. 3, 6):
The back of the mask, it is decorated with two vertical scenes. The upper scene represents Isis sitting in the mourning position, Isis is sitting, bending her torso forward, her left hand raised in front of her face, and the right hand is placed on the face of the deceased lying upon her feet. Isis wears a long, pink dress that reaches the feet and reveals the breasts. She also wears bracelets on both wrists, and another on both arms. The hair was long and curly, tied with a band from the top of the forehead, ending in a knot at the back of the head. Her head is topped with the usual crown in green. Over the head of Isis, there is an empty rectangle shape without any inscriptions. The scene is surrounded by a semi-circle frame, consisting of alternating colored stripes and rectangles. The artist separated the upper and lower scenes by surrounding a starred skyline.

The lower scene represents a winged human-headed Ba bird with the body of an eagle, holding a Ma'at feather in both hands. It also catches two feathers and two branches of the lotus flower by its claws. His head looks to the right of the viewer in
profile. Furthermore, there is a blue band around his head and on top of his head is the red shape of the solar sun disk. The artist also used many colors, particularly in the body and feathers, such as; red, blue, green and yellow.

4- The Left Side of the Mask (fig.4):
The left side of the mummy mask is poorly-preserved. The depicted scenes in the lower part of this side are damaged and show remnants of white gypsum that might have been used in restoration. Only the upper part of the scenes is slightly visible and depicts an incomplete scene of a jackal-headed man representing the Egyptian god Anubis. The body of the deity is colored in black and wears a Double Crown with traces of yellow color and a yellow garment. Anubis is figured holding in his hands a piece of cloth and a jar of natron presenting them to the deceased. In front of Anubis, Osiris-Sokar as a falcon-headed human is depicted in standing position. This deity wears the Osirian crown which bears yellow spots and is surrounded by two blue feathers. His body is wrapped in linen colored in red-pink. His right hand comes out of the linen rolls and holds a scepter. In the space between Anubis and Osiris-Sokar above their heads are two empty rectangles and no text recorded inside them.

5- The Right Side of the Mask (fig.5):
The right-side scene is more damaged than the left side of the mask. The remaining part of the represented scene that shows a deity with a human body and a falcon head. He wears the Double Crown and raises the right hand towards another human shape, apparently the deceased, of whom only the Osiris crown remains. The body of the deceased takes the Osirian human form and his crown bearing traces of yellow spots while the two feathers are colored in blue. Perhaps it expresses the usual form of Osiris. In the middle of the two figures, there is an empty rectangle without any texts in yellow color. Traces of the depicted scene are framed from the top by a row of stars.

Scenes Analysis:

Scene of Isis:
As early as the early dynastic period, the depiction of Isis as a mourner has been attested in Egyptian funerary art. According to the myth, Isis is the one who mourns her husband Osiris and provides him with care for his resurrection. Being associated with Osiris after death, Isis was similarly responsible for the deceased in the Underworld. The back of the mask under study bears the scene of Isis on the upper register (fig. 6), while sitting in the mourning position placing her right hand on top of the mummy of the deceased lying upon her feet. It is worth noting that this pose was a striking iconography of the goddess Isis who was not used to not represent in this pose before. Earlier to the date of this scene, goddess Nut was the one who appeared in this gesture. In the inner room of funerary House No. 21 from Tuna El-Gabel (fig. 7), goddess Nut is depicted taking the same posture. However, whether this posture was for Isis or Nut, this iconography was rarely attested in ancient Egyptian art. Thus, it seems that the

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1 Sami Gabra & Étienne Drioton, Peinture a Fresque et Scenes Peintes a Hermopolis Ouest (Touna El-Gebel), (Le Caire: Service des Antiquités de l’Egypte, 1954), 13; Marjorie Susan Venit, Visualizing the afterlife in the tombs of Graeco-Roman Egypt, (New York: Cambridge University press, 2016), 132, fig. 4.25.
iconography of Isis here in this scene was clearly inspired from the scene of goddess Nut, found also on Rhind Papyrus (fig. 8).

**Scene of Osiris-Sokar:**

Osiris-Sokar is depicted on the left side of the mummy mask. The Memphite god Sokar played a crucial role relevant to the realm of the deceased. In some cases, Sokar was syncretized with God Osiris. The name of God Sokar was relatively associated with god Osiris in spells of the Pyramid Texts such as; spell 364. However, Brovarski rather believes that the complete fusion between the two deities did not occur in the Old Kingdom. According to him, the identification between Sokar and Osiris was clearly attested as early as the First Intermediate Period. In the Coffin Texts, Sokar is said to purify the deceased, take care of him and supply his needs in the Other World; the same function that corresponds to the role of Osiris himself in the After Life. The fusion of Sokar-Osiris was clearly attested by the Middle Kingdom and the reversed form, known as Osiris-Sokar, appeared as early as the New Kingdom. This confirms the strong intimacy between the two deities and their association which developed along the history of Egypt. The shape of Osiris-Sokar as a falcon headed may have been attested by the Third Intermediate Period.

The form Osiris-Sokar spread widely in Egyptian profane art through the mummy corn coffins, which date back to the Third Intermediate Period and to the Ptolemaic period. The lids of these coffins took the shape of Osiris-Sokar as a mummified falcon-headed deity. In many funerary scenes, the shape of the deceased appeared side by side with Osiris-Sokar; an image that continued during the Greek and Roman times. In addition, the deceased was depicted as an associated with Osiris in the human form, or

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5 Smith, *Following Osiris*: 65.


associated with Osiris-Sokar with a human body and the head of a falcon. This remarkable iconography was attested on the mummies-masks.¹

During the Roman period, the form of Osiris-Sokar appeared in funerary art playing different roles. In some instances, the artist depicted this deity as the god of the Underworld, and Anubis as a leader of the deceased in front of him. This iconography is found through a scene depicted on the shroud of the bean mummy ² (fig. 9). Furthermore, there is another depiction of Osiris-Sokar seated on his throne and accompanied by Isis. In these scenes, the deceased is represented standing in front of the deity and raising her right hand towards the god in homage (fig. 10). ³

The Deceased's Features:

1- Hair Fringes:

The artist's keenness to the worldly, lively appearance of the mummy-mask was clearly evidenced through the hair fringes of such non-gilded masks, which have a flushed tone of the skin, without ignoring the mumiform components of burial imagery in Meir's male masks. Hence, when the hair fringes were executed, they had a well-groomed appearance, which necessitates cutting the hair short and treating it to the appropriate form and direction. Consequently, the male masks from Meir usually represent the deceased as having either a short fringe of natural hair or no natural hair at all. Otherwise, all of male masks were always depicted wearing an Egyptian tripartite wig and a wesekh collar. Only few examples of Meir collection rarely represent the male deceased with hair executed according to the Graeco-Roman style⁴. In that case, the head was usually covered with Egyptian tripartite wig, with little fringe of hair growing from below. On the other hand, female masks had long curly hair reaching their shoulders or hairstyle inspired from the Roman fashion⁵.

2- Eyes:

The mask belongs to Meir workshop which was remarked with eye manufacturing of the masks; the irises being inserted in glass or stone (eyeball)⁶. This style of eyes consisted of forms of dark colored eyes or painted eyes. They were made of small white glass or sometimes polished stones, with clear convexity, being inlaid with a small black stone representing the eyeball. After completing the preparation of the eye, the

¹ Smith, Following Osiris: 429.
³ Griffiths, Eight funerary paintings: 242-243, pl. XXVI, 1.
⁴ The funerary mummy masks of Meir were distinguished by the Egyptian style, the Nemes covers the head as usual, but there are few models of the masks for men from Meir, especially the plaster and wood mummy mask of a man from the third century AD, following the classical style and not the Egyptian, where clothes, features and hair tufts are purely Roman, there are currently at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo CG. 33206. C.F: Campbell Edgar, *Greco-Egyptian Coffins, masks and portraits*, CGC n°: 33101-33285, (Le Caire: Imprimerie de l’institut Francais d’archeologie Orintale, 1905), pl. XXIX.
⁶ Müller, Provenancing Roman Period Mummy Masks: 117.
artist put a layer of wax in order to stick it to the plaster of the mask. The eye was slightly grooved to preserve the same thickness of the mask. Therefore, the artist put an additional layer of plaster on the opposite side of the mask, mainly in its interior part to function as a stanchion for the whole eye. This technique was the most preserved method in manufacturing the eyes of the masks due to its hardness and accuracy. It was widely used in the first century AD until the middle of the second century AD, and the eyeballs were surrounded by a blue or brown glass circle.1

3- Decoration:

The area bordering the sides of the hair or headdress can be treated as a zone, although on smaller masks the space is so limited that only a border or pattern will fit there. Registers are usually framed and surrounded from top to bottom by a starred skyline and at the bottom by an Egyptian border alternating stripes and colored rectangles occupying the expanse of the rear projection. The distinctive Egyptian cobra decoration cannot be neglected, in addition to what looks like a grid inlaid at the bottom of the mask, every mask has one major register, with a lesser register positioned above it on occasion. In addition, using multiple colors such as: yellow, blue, red, black, and green always dominates these decorative and geometric elements. 2

4- Workshop:

When we compare the decoration style of Meir cartonnage masks, we find an agreement in funerary context with the mask under study, in terms of decorations and scenes on the sides of the mask and the back head, where we find the depiction of the deceased once in the usual form of a human being, and on the other side the scene of the deceased in the form of Osiris-Sokar with a falcon head. For instance, there is a detail from the left side of a cartonnage mummy mask from Meir that reveals the identification between the deceased and Osiris-Sokar (figs. 11, 12). On the left side of the deceased is represented standing in the middle as Osiris-Sokar, and in the right side. The right side show the deceased stand as Osiris himself in human shape, and the deceased scenes was flanked by specific funeral deities as: Anubis, Nephthys, Horus and Isis. 3

Regarding the context of the front part of the mask, including the scenes depicted on the head and chest, it can be compared with the masks of men from Meir workshop 4 (fig. 13), The deceased in our case is depicted with small fringes of natural hair appearing under tripartite-wig Therefore, it can be compared with Meir masks, which date back to the first century A.D (figs. 14, 15). 5

1 Aubert & Cortopassi, Portraits funéraires de l’Égypte romaine: 17-18.
3 For more information about two cartonnage masks see: Martin Andreas Stadler, Ägyptische Mumienmasken in Würzburg, (Würzburg: Reichert, 2004), 35. Abb. 9; Edgar, Greco-Egyptian Coffins, masks and portraits, pl. XI.
4 Most of those mummy-masks which belong to Meir workshop date between the end of the Ptolemaic and the beginning of the Roman period.
5 Müller, Provenancing Roman Period Mummy Masks: 134, fig. 74.
Conclusion:

Edgar suggests that the masks from the necropolis of Meir in Middle Egypt are less Hellenic, with more Egyptian influences in the modeling and appearance. They were made in the first century A.D. and most likely from the Claudian period to Nero Period ranging nearly 40 to 62 A.D. ¹ On the other hand, Grimm thought that the Meir masks were used from the late first century B.C to the late first century A.D. Grimm divided the male masks' of Meir masks into ‘Egyptian' and 'Roman' categories based on their hair and facial traits in the sole previous study of the collection as a whole, with dates spanning a hundred years. The earliest, according to his plan, are gilded², male ‘Egyptian' masks with no portrayal of hair on the forehead, which he dates to the late first century B.C, followed by male masks non-gilded dating to the early-mid first century ad.³ Based on the artistic features of the mask in question depicts a shaven man bearing the Egyptian style of art. The Greco-Roman features are obviously attested through the style of the eyes as well as the fringes of the hair hanging below the tripartite head-dress. These features reveal the influence of the Greco-Roman art in Egypt during that era. Comparing this piece with the male mummy masks collection from Meir's workshop, this piece could be dated to the mid to late of the first century AD.

¹ Edgar, Greco-Egyptian Coffins, masks and portraits: III- IV.
² Gold is one of the most important precious metals; It is a metal that does not damage, and the ancient Egyptians considered it a symbol of immortality, and represented the flesh of the gods, so gold foil was used to cover masks and vests since the era of the dynasties, and the gilding of masks did not conflict with facial features, as it is a thin layer that does not affect the features and facial expressions, and during the Roman era was Covering the mummy of the deceased directly with gold foil after shrouding, a new trend that did not appear before the Roman era, and this trend continued in parallel with the gilding of masks; or the face with a gilded layer; To believe that gold will protect the face from damage and rot. CF: Klaus, Parlasca, Mumienporträts und verwandte Denkmäler. (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag Gembh, 1966): 136-37.
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(fig. 1) The mummy mask. The lower body has some damage, Taken by (the Author).
The Cartonnage mask, include Head, Face and chest. Taken by (The Author)

Back of the Head, Taken by (The Author)

The left side scene, Anubis in front of the deceased in the form of Osiris-Sokar. Taken by (The Author)
(fig. 5) The right side scene, Horus with double crown in front of the deceased in the form of human Osiris. Taken by (The Author)

(fig. 6) The upper register of Back of the Head, Isis Succoring the deceased. Taken by (The Author)
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(fig. 7) Tuna el-Gebel, House-tomb 21, Burial Room, Detail of the West Wall, Nut Succoring the Mummy. After: Venit, M.S., (2016), 132, fig. 4.25.

(fig. 8) The goddess Nut hold mummy of the deceased, depicted on Rhind Papyrus, from Roman period. After: Nils, B., (2002), fig. 8.

(fig. 9) The deceased stands before Osiris-Sokar, who is seated on his throne. After: Griffiths, J.G., (1982), pl. XXVI. 1.

(fig. 10) one of the fragments shroud the deceased is led by Anubis into the presence of falcon headed Osiris-Sokar. From Thebes, mid-second century ad. After: Griffiths, J.G., (1982), 242-243, pl. XXVI, 1.
(fig. 11) Mummy Detail from the left and right sides of a painted cartonnage mummy mask of a women. From Meir, Mid- to late first century AD. After: Edgar., (1905), pl. XI.

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(fig. 13) Mummy-mask from Meir, 1st B.C- 1 A.D, after Grimm (1974), pl. 16.1
