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**Some Egyptian Objects In A Pretoria Museum
In South Africa**

So many old Egyptian objects of great cultural and historical Value have been removed to countries worldwide. In South Africa of the late nineteenth century, ⁽¹⁾ a few unpublished pieces came to be in a Pretoria Museum, an Egyptian mummy, a few scarabs, a bloodless container and a diminutive statuette of Anubis, god of the dead. With the head of a jackal. ⁽²⁾

The Pretoria mummy (Plates I – II) lies in an airtight, damp-proof display cabinet with a glass top in the company of guns used by Boer generals in the Anglo-Boer War and dummies with sober Voor-trekker outfits. ⁽³⁾

No body seems to know how he came to be in South Africa. But he was probably brought here by ship at the end of the last century. He is remarkably well preserved, bearing in mind that he was brought from the dry climes of Egypt to the relatively humid conditions of South Africa, and that he was probably man- handled during several long journeys. ⁽⁴⁾

Initially he was not displayed in a cabinet, but when he started to show alarming signs of deterioration about twenty-five years ago owing to temperature fluctuations, air pollution and other factors, a cabinet with a glass top was made for him. His linen bandages were wrapped in an almost artistic pattern round the mummy and a few holes in the toes were made by insects here and there.

He is in fact a rather young mummy, lived in about the second or third century A.D. Nobody knows what he was called and X-rays revealed that he was male and he was a young man when he died.

He was perhaps a member of the lower nobility or the middle class and was probably dug up at El-Fayum in middle Egypt.

The Fayum portrait inserted on the mummy (Pls. I—II), encaustic on wooden panel reveals what he looked like and is very valuable because it is in such a good condition. The face is frontal on a gray background. Hair indicated by rows of unroughly drawn spirals representing curls, painted black. The skin painted light red-flesh with two red lines in the forehead representing wrinkles. Pupils of eyes brown outlined in black. Conventionalized eyebrows in black connecting with light black outline of nose. Small black moustache and thick beard outlining lower half of face. White tunic, the folds in black, the narrow clavi in magenta. In its technique and liner quality the portrait is typical of the Orientalizing tendencies of late antiquity.⁽⁵⁾

Some 750 Fayum portraits have been excavated. More or less in the course of the fourth century A.D. this technique of preserving a deceased's identity so that he would know who he is during his long voyage after death, declined as Christianity spread through Egypt. In these circumstances the need for mummy portraits fell out of fashion and corpses were no longer embalmed.

For the portrait of the Pretoria mummy, the encaustic painting technique was used, a technique that reflects a strong Hellenistic influence.

Following the invasion of Egypt by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C., the Macedonian general Ptolemy founded the Ptolemaic dynasty and many Greeks settled in Egypt. By the time Egypt became a province of the Roman Empire in 30 B.C., mummy Hellenic communities chose to adopt the Egyptian funerary customs. That accounts for the Hellenistic features the Fayum in paintings of the middle phase.

Notes

- (1) The nineteenth century was the great period of interesting in Egyptian antiquities and of collections, public or private.
- (2) South African Panorama, July 1989, PP. 18-19.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) There are three kinds of Fayum portraits. Initially the portrait of the deceased was painted on the linen bandages covering the face. In the second and third century A.D. the so-called encaustic technique was used. A person's portrait was painted (probably long before his death) by means of molten bees wax mixed with various kinds of colouring matter such as ochre, using a brush or spatula, on thin wood, the wood bent to the double convex contours of the original mummy case. A framework of bandages then supported the portrait on the face. The third type was painted on much thicker wood, probably Silesian fir or indigenous limewood, making use of the tempera technique (paint mixed with glue or egg white). The delineation was also far more stylish and the support on which it rested on the face more subtle. For more information and Lit.: G. Grimm, *Die Roemischen Mumienmasken aus Aegypten*, Wiesbaden 1974; W. Petrie, *Roman Portraits*, London 1911; K. Parlasca, *Mumien-Portraits und verwandte Denkmaeler*, Wiesbaden 1966; J. Berger, *Portraits Romains d'Egypte*, Paudex 1977; M. Edgar, *Cat. Gen. Du Musee du Caire, Masks and Portraits*, le Caire 1905

PLATE (I)



The Pretoria mummy of a Man

PLATE (II)



A close-up of the Fayum funerary Portrait of A Man