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Portraits and Portrayal: an analysis of the presentation of mummy portraits from Roman Egypt in the Allard Pierson Museum

Storm, Sebastiaan

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Portraits and Portrayal:

an analysis of the presentation of mummy portraits from Roman Egypt in the Allard Pierson Museum.

Sebastiaan Storm

Cover image: An exhibition poster showcasing a mummy portrait. This poster is located close to the entrance of the Allard Pierson Museum and has been photographed by a fellow student (photograph: Sa Mu)

Portraits and portrayal: an analysis of the presentation of mummy portraits from Roman Egypt in the Allard Pierson Museum.

Author:	Sebastiaan Anton Matthijs Storm
Course:	Thesis BA3
Course Code:	1083VBTHEY
Supervisors:	Dr. M.E. Berger
	Dr. M.E.J.J. van Aerde
	University of Leiden, Faculty of Archaeology
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the past, mummy portraits from Roman Egypt have received the majority of scholarly focus compared to other forms of funerary art from that period (Riggs, 2002, p. 85). In this period, the funerary art combined Greek and Egyptian styles (Riggs, 2005, pp. 6–7). After a large portion of them were discovered in the late nineteenth century, collections and exhibitions of the portraits emerged (Barr, 2020. 111–112). Research on the portraits is still ongoing. A recent and significant development in the study of panel portraits is the collaboration that led to the first conference of the “Ancient Panel Painting, Examination, Analysis and Research” (APPEAR) project. This project is a collaboration between museums with these portraits in their possession, the Allard Pierson Museum being among them, and other researchers. The project intends to further our understanding of the portraits by combining their research and making a collective database. Currently, the project has even expanded into other forms of funerary art in Roman Egypt as well (Svoboda et al., 2020, pp. 1–2).

In light of those past exhibitions and the emergence of the APPEAR project, a temporary exhibition on mummy portraits at the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam becomes an exciting topic to study. The exhibition is called “Face to Face. The People Behind Mummy Portraits.” This exhibition combines portraits from many different museums and displays them together, thus bringing together portraits, usually hundreds if not thousands of kilometers apart (Allard Pierson Museum, 2023). Therefore, this is a unique opportunity to study how the new research and perhaps the changing times affect how the portraits are represented in this exhibition.

The reason for this study is partly because, as mentioned, the exhibition offers a unique opportunity. Besides that, however, the historical popularity of the portraits and the amount of unknown information on them makes them very interesting for me as a topic to study. The ancient Roman and

Egyptian worlds have always been part of my biggest interests; this topic allows me to combine them in the context of Roman Egypt. Moreover, combining different cultural art styles makes the portraits more complex. Most have been removed from their corresponding mummies; thus, not much is known about their find contexts (Borg, 2012, p. 623). In the past, they were not always represented as mummy portraits but seen as separate from their funerary context (Thompson, 1982, p.1). Cultural determinations of those depicted in the portraits were a big focus of scholarly study (Borg, 2023, p. 123). Researching the exhibition can help in understanding the choices the museum has made in representing all of these complex and sometimes contextually lacking topics in the exhibition.

In this research, I aim to understand the choices made by the museum in creating the exhibition. To achieve this, I have formulated the following research question:

How are the mummy portraits presented in the temporary exhibition “Face to Face: The People Behind Mummy Portraits” at the Allard Pierson Museum?

To answer this question, I have formulated the following sub-questions:

To what extent are the original contexts of these objects addressed/sketched/recreated/ignored?

How are the mummy portraits presented in terms of object categories?

None of these questions can solely rely on literature as they combine the portraits’ context with the exhibition's contents. The same can be said for the opposite; simply studying the exhibition itself is not enough to answer these questions. The main question and the two sub-questions can only be answered by studying the exhibition itself and comparing its contents to the background provided by the literature.

The theoretical background of this research is presented in the first two chapters. In these chapters, I discuss both archaeological and

museological background through literature. This includes information from literature on the history of ancient Egypt, burial customs and funerary art in ancient Egypt, curational activities and choices, APPEAR project, and many other topics. Secondly, data will be gathered from the exhibition itself. Information can be gained by analysing the exhibition through the displays and the corresponding texts provided. Wall texts, plaques, and other museum tools are all possible sources of information on the exhibition and are thus essential. This data also includes the audiovisual media that is available with the exhibition. Finally, information will also be gathered from the museum's online environment.

When it comes to data, several sources of information will be used. Firstly, I use existing literature to provide a contextual background to the mummy portraits that is necessary to understand them. Some of this literature is related to the exhibition, such as the exhibition catalog or the publications related to the APPEAR project. Secondly, data will be gathered from the exhibition itself. Information can be gained by analysing the exhibition through the display and the corresponding information provided through plaques and other museum tools. This includes audiovisual material such as the audio tour. Finally, data will be gathered from the museum's online environment, which includes catalogues, inventories, and websites. Methodologically speaking, the used literature is compared to the data from the exhibition itself. By comparing the background to the contents of the exhibitions, I will analyse the choices made by the museum in the way it represents the portraits.

The chapters are divided in the following ways. The second chapter is focused on the archaeological context. It provides an overall explanation of what the portraits are. Besides this, it contains background on historical context, Roman Egyptian funerary art, and identity. The third chapter focusses on a museological background. Its topics include provenance, provenience, and information on exhibiting the portraits. The chapter also focuses on general museum theory related to the choices made when designing an exhibition. The fourth chapter describes the exhibition's contents based on the different halls and topics. The fifth chapter is a

discussion that combines the exhibition's contents with the aforementioned theoretical background of the second and third chapters, thus comparing the historical context and the museological context to how the portraits are represented. Finally, the sixth and last chapter is a conclusion in which I answer the research questions.

Chapter 2: The archaeology of the mummy portraits

2.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter will provide the necessary background information for the research. First, the chapter will provide a brief history of Egypt to understand the context in which the portraits were created. After that, it explains what the mummy portraits are and why I have chosen to use that term. Next is a focus on burial customs and funerary art in Roman Egypt. The mummy portraits are part of a range of forms of funerary art. Lastly, the chapter will discuss the benefit of focusing on identity rather than ethnicity when studying the portraits.

2.2 Ancient Egypt: chronology and background

To understand the social context in which the mummy portraits were created, it is essential to place them within Roman Egyptian history. Despite the focus of this thesis on Roman Egypt, this subchapter starts at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period because this period is relevant to understanding the social and demographic context of Roman Egypt.

2.2.1 Ptolemaic Egypt

A significant historical point in time was when Egypt was conquered by Alexander the Great. Lloyd (2003) describes the effect Alexander's rise to power and eventual death had on Egypt and its rule. Alexander came to Egypt in 332 BCE; he appointed various people to different positions and assumed the role of an Egyptian king or pharaoh. When Alexander died in 323 BCE, one of his former marshals, Ptolemy, was allocated Egypt. With Ptolemy's rise to power, the Ptolemaic empire was born (pp. 388–391).

The capital of this empire was Alexandria, founded by Alexander the Great himself in 331 BCE. Ptolemy claimed a Macedonian and Greek legacy (Lloyd, 2003, pp. 391, 499–400). He wanted Alexandria to be: “the centre of Greek culture” (Lloyd, 2003, p. 400). However, this focus on Greek culture was not the same everywhere in Egypt. Ptolemaic rulers had been portrayed similarly to pharaohs in traditional Egyptian ways outside of the big cities such as Alexandria, while inside Alexandria, they were portrayed as Macedonian kings (Manning, 2009, p. 81). The Ptolemies can be viewed as Pharaohs to the Egyptian people and kings to the Greek elite (Lloyd, 2003, p. 402). Other differences exist between cities like Alexandria and the rest of Egypt, including treating the dead. In Alexandria, those of Greek origin mostly cremated the dead. Outside such cities, however, they adjusted to local traditions and even had traditional Egyptian imagery on their coffins. Some of Egypt's long-term common grave goods, such as canopic vessels, became much less common during the Ptolemaic period. However, the decoration of mummies with masks was common (Zesch et al., 2020, p. 3).

In the late third to first century BCE, the Ptolemaic empire was experiencing both external and internal problems. Meanwhile, Rome was extending its activity in the Eastern Mediterranean. Due to long-time conflicts, the Ptolemaic empire was much smaller than it once was. The relationship between Rome and Ptolemaic Egypt was already present during the reign of Ptolemy II. However, the equality in this relationship slowly faded away, with Rome having the upper hand. Rome finally took over Egypt in 30 BCE when Augustus beat Mark Anthony and the last Ptolemaic ruler, Cleopatra (Lloyd, 2003, pp. 392, 410-412).

2.2.2 Roman Egypt

Despite Egypt’s inclusion in the Roman empire, little change occurred culturally. Like when the Ptolemies were in power, the pharaonic religion was taken over in Roman Egypt (Peacock, 2003, p. 428). Borg (2012, p.

614) even refers to Ptolemaic rulers and Roman emperors as Egyptian pharaohs, stating they had pharaonic religious status. According to Hellström and Russel (2020), fitting Roman imperial imagery to local traditional styles was not unique to Egypt. It was often adjusted to what they call interpretive frameworks (p. 15). They write the following on this: “Egyptian patrons portrayed emperors according to Pharaonic image systems, with attributes and features that would not have been recognisable outside Egypt (or even, most likely, to the emperor himself) but carried messages to locals that were laden with long traditions” (Hellströn & Russel, 2020, p. 15). Besides this, the emperors continued the construction of Egyptian temples, and Egypt also received religious autonomy, allowing for the continuation of the existing religious cults. Through this policy, Augustus gained favour with the Egyptian people (Jimenez, 2014, p. 3). Egypt was important for the Roman Empire for several reasons. Economically speaking, Egypt offered much. Food production was one of its most important contributions (Peacock, 2003, p. 420; Riggs, 2005, p. 16). Even before Roman rule, it was a prominent place to produce grain for the Roman empire during Ptolemaic times (Peacock, 2003, p. 420). Peacock (2003) writes that the production of minerals in the Eastern Desert was also an essential aspect of the economy of Roman Egypt, with a particular mention of gold (p. 422). Another economic benefit to Egypt was its location. It provided access to Nubia and the Red Sea and connected trade routes (Peacock, 2003, p. 425; Riggs, 2005, p. 16). Access to these routes provided various luxury products from India for the Roman Empire (Peacock, 2003, p. 425). Regarding burial customs, using existing burial grounds was preferred. Old cemeteries were expanded, though new ones were also made close to sacred spaces of earlier periods (Riggs, 2010, p. 347). In this period, small graves, pits, and existing tombs were common settings for burials, although tomb architecture continued to exist (Zesch et al., 2020, p. 3). Even in areas where previously Greek funerary customs, like cremation, were prevalent, there are some indications that mummification became more common. Evidence from a cemetery in West-Alexandria showcases that mummies are stratigraphically located above earlier cremations

(Riggs, 2010, p. 346). At the same time, naturalistic portraiture of the deceased made on panels or shrouds and places above the face emerged in this period (Riggs, 2010, p. 349).

2.3 The Mummy Portraits

2.3.1 Description, Context, and Terminology

The mummy portraits were found or excavated in Egypt, where they were created during the Roman Egyptian Period. They were made on wooden panels or shrouds made from linen, thus the term panel paintings. The portraits were placed in front of the face of their corresponding mummies (Ikram, 2015, p. 105; Svoboda et al., 2020, p. 2). If the portrait was made on linen shrouds, in many cases, a layer of plaster was applied as reinforcement. The wax encaustic technique, which combined a Greek painting technique with Egyptian use of beeswax, was often used to paint the panels (Ikram, 2015, p. 105 ; van Daal & van Oppen de Ruiter, 2022, p. 145). Almost seventy-five percent of these panels have been made on European linden or limewood (van Daal & van Oppen de Ruiter, 2022, p. 131). Cartwright describes how these paintings were part of a mummy or a cartonnage case which contained a mummy. In the case of a mummy, a portrait was wrapped in the linen. An example of such a mummy is shown in Figure 2.1 and more closely focussed on the portrait in Figure 2.2. Figures 4.8 and 4.9 in Chapter 4 show a mummy where the portrait is directly made on linen instead of on a panel. In the case of a cartonnage body casing, however, a portrait was inserted into the cartonnage, which consisted of linen layers mixed with plaster. Such a cartonnage case with a portrait is shown further in this chapter in Figure 2.5 (Cartwright, 2020). The examples in the Face to Face exhibition are, with one exception, not combined with a mummy. To illustrate an example of what a mummy portrait looks like without a mummy, Figure 2.3 showcases one that is also on display in the Allard Pierson Museum.

Figure 2.1 Mummy with an Inserted Panel Portrait dating between 80-100 CE. An example of how a mummy portrait was part of a mummy. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession Number: 11.139, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547697).

Figure 2.2 A closer look at the mummy with an inserted panel portrait dating between 80 and 100 CE. An example of how a mummy portrait was part of a mummy, seen from close by. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession Number: 11.139, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547697).

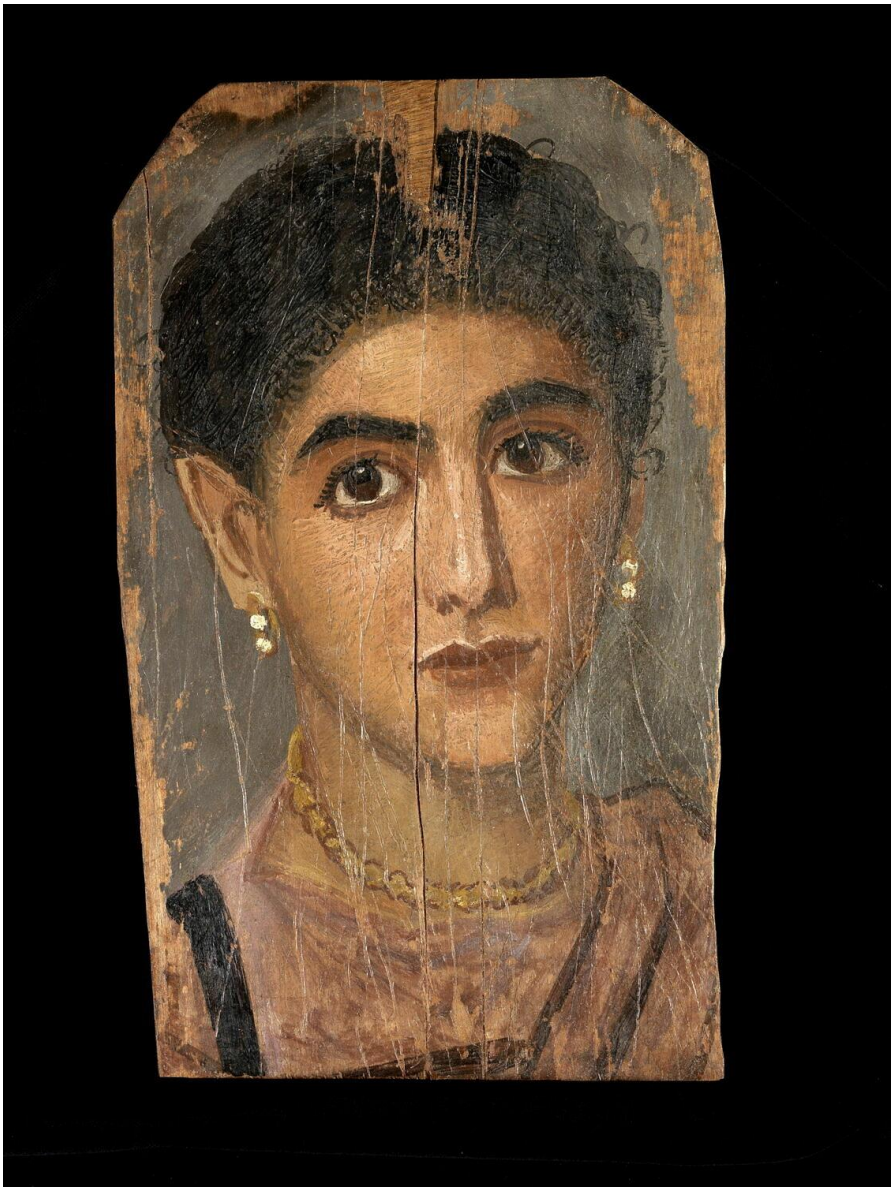

Figure 2.3 Mummy portrait of a woman from Roman Egypt dating between 150-200 CE. An example of a mummy portrait which is present in the Face to Face exhibition in the Allard Pierson. (The Louvre, Inventory number: N 2733 3, https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010035043).

These portraits are often described as naturalistic and have often received the majority of scholarly attention compared to other Roman Egyptian funerary art (Riggs, 2002, p. 85). They are sometimes called the “Fayum portraits,” as most have been discovered in the Fayum oasis. However, this term can be criticized as numerous portraits have been found outside the Fayum region. In the past, this term has even been used to separate

the portraits from their association with a funerary context (Concoran, 1995, pp. 35–37; Ikram, 2015, p. 105; Thompson, 1982, pp. 1, 5). Due to these criticisms and because the vast majority of the recent sources I have consulted do not use this terminology, I have also chosen to avoid this term. The Allard Pierson Museum does not use this term and calls the paintings “mummy portraits” in the exhibition (Oog in oog, 2023–2024). The term ‘portrait mummy’ was coined by archaeologist William Flinders Petrie (Petrie, 1889, p. 15). Now, it seems more common to use the term “mummy portrait.” This term can also be criticized as it still connects these objects to the modern portrait concept, while it is very uncertain if they can be regarded as such. Despite this criticism, this terminology has often been used in the literature and still connects these paintings to mummies, which is not done by the term “Fayum portraits” (Concoran, 1995, p. 35). The use of this term by the very exhibition this thesis is about also benefits its use. Therefore, I have chosen to use the term mummy portraits for these objects, though I acknowledge that this is not a perfect terminology.

2.3.2 State of the Research

In terms of research, much work still needs to be done. I will use a recent study as an example to showcase some of the current focusses and techniques in studying the portraits. It evaluates one particular portrait, owned by the Allard Pierson Museum, referred to as “The young lady in pink” (van Daal & Oppen de Ruiter, 2022, pp. 126). This portrait is shown below in Figure 2.4. The majority of mummy portraits have not yet received technical analysis. In this case, the technical analysis focuses on the materials used and the techniques employed in making the portrait. One restriction the study deals with is that no samples were allowed to be taken, thus providing only approximative results (van Daal & van Oppen de Ruiter, 2022, p. 131). Because of the restriction in sampling, only visual, imaging, and spectroscopic techniques are used. Such techniques can provide information on many components of the portraits. For

example, X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF) can give information about the used pigments through elemental composition. Infrared reflectography (IRR) can provide information on painting techniques. Fiber-optic reflectance spectroscopy (FORS) can provide information on the wax used (van Daal & van Oppen de Ruiter, 2022, pp. 131–138). Other studied topics include provenance and acquisition, dating, and art historical context (van Daal & van Oppen de Ruiter, 2022, pp. 128–130, 139–144, 145–147). Other recent research, such as that within the APPEAR project, contains similar topics regarding materials, pigments, and provenance while using similar analytical techniques (Svoboda et al., 2020, pp. 3–6). Borg (2023) also discusses modern research topics such as data, locations, social circumstances, cultural identity, and religion (pp. 125–128).

Figure 2.4 Mummy portrait of a woman from Roman Egypt dating between 200-300 CE. The mummy portrait that has recently been researched through technical analysis. (The Allard Pierson Museum, Inventory number: APM14232, https://hdl.handle.net/11245/3.28421).

2.3.3 Excavation History

As for an excavation history of these objects, it is first necessary to mention that many portraits do not come from a documented excavation context. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, much information has been lost. Hundreds of portraits have been found, most without proper documentation (Barr, 2020, p. 112; Thompson, 1982, p. 5). Besides that, many portraits have been separated from their mummies (Borg, 2012, p. 623). The three excavations mentioned here have been retrieved from work by Boender (2021), who has given an overview of some of the rare documented find contexts of these portraits. Perhaps the most crucial figure in the early excavations of the portraits was the archaeologist Williams Flinders Petrie, who started his excavations at Hawara in 1888 (Barr, 2020, p. 111; Thompson, 1982, p. 4). Here, he mostly found mummies without portraits, though a small number did have portraits (Boender, 2021, p. 12). After finding a framed portrait that faced a mummy rather than being attached to it, Petrie believed that, in some cases, the portraits were removed from the mummies to be temporarily displayed at home for commemorative purposes. He also believed that from the Roman Egyptian period onwards in Hawara, mummies were no longer buried immediately, pointing at several types of damage to mummies and cartonnages as evidence that they had been kept above the ground for longer periods. (Boender, 2021, p. 12; Petrie, 1889, pp. 10, 15–16). Though he might have documented much on his excavations, there are clear limitations to what knowledge can be gained from Petrie's writing. Because of vague descriptions, it is sometimes hard to understand what he meant (Boender, 2021, p. 12). Petrie's findings suggest that it might have been common for the mummies with portraits to have been buried in groups. Due to poor documentation, many things remain unclear, making reconstructions of group burials possible in only six out of Petrie's ten documented cases (Boender, 2021, p. 11).

Another excavation at a similar time to Petrie was the excavation of the Tomb of Aline in 1892, which is also located at Hawara. This tomb was named after the possible name of a deceased woman, which was found on an inscription. Eight mummies have been excavated, five with decorations and three without decorations. Three of the decorated mummies contained portraits painted on linen. Grave goods have also been found in association with this tomb, which is rare. Despite a lack of documentation during the excavation, contexts have survived through later writing (Boender, 2021, pp. 11–12).

Finally, the last excavation is at Marina el-Alamein, which took place in 1991 and is described by Daszekski. This Polish excavation took place at a tomb complex. This complex partly consisted of a mausoleum above the ground and an underground complex connected by a staircase. At the halfway point of the stairway, the excavation revealed two sealed burial chambers, one located east and the other located west. The eastern chamber contained eleven bodies which were badly preserved due to humidity. Two of them had portraits, already destroyed at the time of excavation. In the western chamber, the excavators had better luck. Among four mummies, one with an intact portrait was found. This portrait of a young man dates to the early second century CE. What is unique about this find is that up to that point, most portraits had been found either in the Fayum oasis or other places in Upper Egypt in the south. The site of Marina el-Alamein is located on the Mediterranean coast and thus far North of the find contexts of the other portraits (Daszewski, 1992, pp. 33–34).

2.4 Burial customs and funerary art

2.4.1 Mummification

Perhaps one of the most well-known aspects of ancient Egypt was mummification. Through the process of mummification, it was attempted to

preserve the bodies of the dead (Ikram, 2015, p. 53). Information on the process of mummification is rare in Egyptian texts. Texts are not the only way to gain information on the process. Ikram (2015) mentions a few other ways to study mummification, namely examination of the mummies, scientific testing, experiments, and studying embalming caches. These sources have provided information on methods of mummification and substances that were used in the process, such as resins. To explain further, embalming caches are the buried waste material from embalming. They can provide information on used tools and materials through their residues (pp. 52–53). The mummification methods differed over time and between social classes (Ikram, 2015, pp. 53–57; Riggs, 2010, p. 346). Riggs (2005) mentions three practical functions of mummification: furnishing the burial, protection of a body, and religious functions (p. 2). In the Roman Egyptian period, mummification maintained its former quality despite some suggestions to the contrary in the past (Riggs, 2010, p. 345). The wrapping of mummies improved during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The bandages and shrouds that were part of the mummies were covered in religious imagery and texts relating to gods and Underworld books. Restoration of damaged bodies in some of the uncovered mummies showcases the importance of an intact body for the Egyptian belief in the afterlife (Ikram, 2015, p. 71).

2.4.2 Religious functionality and preservation

Regarding religion, it was believed that the spirit or Ka of the dead would sometimes temporarily incorporate a body (Assman, 1996, pp. 61–62). Mummification served as a way to preserve the body for the spirit. However, it was also known that even mummies were at risk of perishing or decay, while the religious belief in the need for a body maintained. Portrait statues could take over such a function in case of harm to the mummy. This unveils a functional connection between mummification and these forms of portraiture (Parnofsky, 1967, p. 14). Though it cannot be

concluded with complete certainty, there are indications that the makers of the Roman Egyptian mummy portraits also chose their painting techniques to ensure long-term preservation of the image within the Egyptian climate (van Daal & van Oppen de Ruiter, 2022, p. 132). This would again showcase an example of the importance of longevity in ancient Egyptian portraiture.

2.4.3 Considering the Terminology of Funerary “Art”

Before further examining funerary art, it is important to consider that using the word “art” is not without scholarly criticisms. Baines (1994) mentions linguistic arguments that such a modern concept did not exist in ancient Egyptian times and is thus not applicable in this context. Other concerns involve the different functions of the many types of objects and images grouped as ancient Egyptian art. However, there have also been arguments in favor of this terminology. Baines suggests that this term can be used as long as these criticisms and the fragility of this word are considered (pp. 67–69). This consideration of the terminology is also important in this chapter. When reading about ancient Egyptian art, it is crucial to separate its meaning from the modern concept of art.

2.4.4 Ptolemaic and Roman Egyptian burial customs and funerary art

The Ptolemaic period had an important influence on Roman Egyptian funerary art (Riggs, 2005, pp. 6–8). Several questions can be asked considering the multicultural nature of Egypt at that time. Regarding funerary art and how the bodies were treated in the Ptolemaic times, there have been suggestions that differences are due to ethnicity and culture. However, this does not seem to be entirely accurate as many other factors divided individuals other than their cultural background (Landvatter, 2013, p. 3). Landvatter (2013) names a few factors, such as social class, region,

and gender (p. 3). A similar case can be made for Roman Egypt, where there is a disparity between the poor and the rich in burial. A poor person in Roman Egypt would typically only receive basic treatment for mummification and not much further. Further dedication to the deceased, such as a case or funerary art, was usually only given to the rich (Peacock, 2003, pp. 431–432; Riggs, 2005, pp. 1–2). According to Ikram (2015), the Roman-Egyptian period bodies were sometimes put in a cartonnage casing after death. Wooden sarcophagi were reserved for those who were able to afford them. The cartonnage cases could be decorated with classical and Egyptian motifs (p. 125). An example of such a cartonnage case with a mummy portrait is shown in Figure 2.5. Peacock (2003) describes the mummy portraits as burial items specifically for the rich (pp. 431–432). The wealth associated with the portraits also becomes clear from the excavation of the Marina el-Alamein site. Here, the very presence of the portraits is described as an indicator of the suspected wealth of the inhabitants, as only the wealthy could afford such funerary art (Daszewski, 1992, p. 34).

Another important topic to consider is that mummy portraits were not the only form of funerary art in Roman Egypt. Besides board or panel paintings, forms of naturalistic funerary art in the Roman Egyptian period included sculptures, masks, coffins, and shrouds, amongst other things (Borg, 2012, pp. 615–624; Riggs, 2002, p. 95).

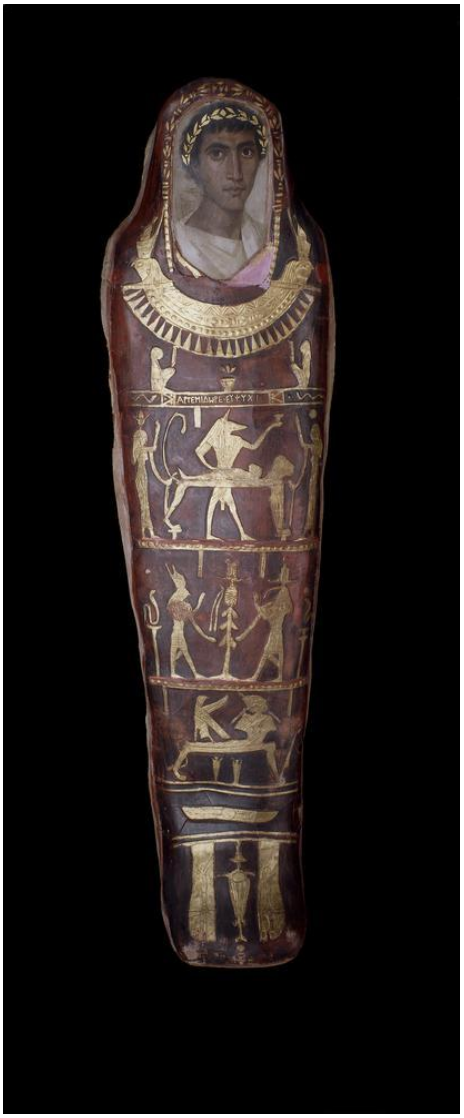

Figure 2.5 Cartonnage case with a mummy portrait dating to the early second century. An example of what a cartonnage case would have looked like, specifically with a mummy portrait. (British Museum, museum number: EA21810, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA21810).

2.4.5 Artistic traditions

According to Riggs (2005, pp. 6–7), Roman Egyptian funerary art combined Egyptian and Greek artistic traditions. Riggs explains that Roman imperial art is part of the Greek artistic tradition in her terminology. But considering this combination, what are the differences between both

art traditions? Egyptian funerary art was meant to be more private and not publicly displayed. It served only for the benefit of the deceased themselves in their tombs. For this reason, the Egyptians also did not write much about their funerary art (Riggs, 2005, p. 6). It was also reserved for a very exclusive elite that sought to restrict the art; thus, it was not always accessible to those outside of this elite. (Baines, 1994, pp. 70–72). It should be considered that no matter the lack of writing about funerary art in texts, the Egyptians did show much on the funerary components themselves. The aforementioned religious texts on the shrouds and layers of mummies are just one example (Ikram, 2015, p. 71). They also showcased much of their beliefs in the afterlife on the walls of their tombs, on which the journey to the underworld was often painted (Venit, 2015, p. 201).

Greek art, in comparison, differed in focus. The focus of the art was to realistically capture the image of a person, using painting techniques to ensure an image as close to reality as possible (Riggs, 2005, pp. 6–7). Elsner mentions that such naturalism has been used to differentiate ancient art from Medieval art, with naturalistic art being seen as better. Such distinctions are also visible when looking at religious art. Despite most ancient art having a religious function, the scholarship tended to also differentiate between Christian religious art after Constantine and ancient naturalistic art. Ancient Greek art was mainly looked at through style and form rather than this religious functionality (Elsner, 2007, pp. 1, 29). Thus, it is important to remember that the Greek art tradition also had a religious function. Another notable aspect of the Greek tradition is the use of panel paintings, which started in the fifth century BCE. In the third to first century BCE, panel portraits were absent, though panel paintings were still present (Abbe, 2021, pp. 248–249). Riggs argues that understanding how both styles are combined in individual objects is important to interpret these objects further (Riggs, 2005, pp. 6–7).

Despite the emphasis on the Greek and Egyptian styles, it is important to remember that the Romans also had their portraiture with unique characteristics. Within Roman society, people interacted with portraiture

for various reasons, such as religion, during their daily lives. Since ancestors were very important in Roman culture, portraiture of ancestors had an important place in society (Wood, 2015, pp. 260–262). The concept of verism, connected to Roman portraiture, is akin to Hellenistic realism in many features. So much so that, in some cases, it is hard to stylistically differentiate between the two (Dillon & Prusac-Lindhagen, 2021, p. 8). Thus, it showcases that accurate portrayal, similar to Greek art, was important to the Romans. Roman portraiture was not the same everywhere. Sculptures, for example, showcase how portraiture was adjusted to local styles, including in Egypt (Wood, 2015, p. 270–271). Two examples from the main tomb of the Kom-el Shoqafa catacomb are statues with Egyptian poses and clothing and a Roman-style portrait head (Venit, 2015, pp. 67–69, 198). They are shown in Figure 2.5 and Figure 2.6. The Roman elements in these statues from the Roman Egyptian period serve as a reminder that Greek and Egyptian styles are not the only influence on the funerary art of Roman Egypt.

Figure 2.6 A statue of a woman at the Kom el-Shaqafa catacomb in the main tomb. This portrait statue shows a combination of Roman and Egyptian style portraiture elements. (Venit, 2015, p. 68, Illustration 2.16).

Figure 2.7 A statue of a man at the Kom el-Shaqafa catacomb in the main tomb. This portrait statue shows a combination of Roman and Egyptian style portraiture elements. (Venit, 2015, p. 68, Illustration 2.17).

2.4.6 Dating

There is also the matter of dating Roman Egyptian funerary art. Materials from this period, including funerary art, are sometimes hard to distinguish between the Ptolemaic or Roman periods. Therefore, they are sometimes referred to as Greco-Roman. In the past, naturalistic portraiture was often assumed to be from the Roman period despite the Greek roots of this tradition (Jimenez, 2014, p. 8). Common methods of dating naturalistic portraiture include studying the portrayed hairstyle, jewellery, and clothing, which can then be compared to the fashion in the rest of the Roman empire to estimate a period (Jimenez, 2014, pp. 8–9; Riggs, 2002, p. 95). This can be criticized, however, as there is no guarantee that fashion in Egypt was necessarily the same as in other parts of the empire (Jimenez, 2014, p. 11). Other ways of dating the art are through studying the texts related to the portraiture (Jimenez, 2014, p. 9; Riggs, 2002, pp. 94–95). In the recent past, there has been discussion about different timeframes for mummy portraits in different forms. The most likely conclusion, however, is that there was a decrease in mummy's funerary art during the third century CE (Jimenez, 2014, pp. 8–9; Riggs, 2002, pp. 94–95). However, recent research by Dal Fovo et al. (2021) questions this timeline due to new results. In this study, carbon dating a portrait indicated a 95% probability it was made between 425-590 CE (pp. 10–11), centuries after the commonly assumed end of mummy portrait production. Dal Fovo et al. (2021) conclude that this dating could have major implications on several topics and periodizations (p. 12)

2.5 Ethnicity and identity

An important question about the portraits is why people chose to be represented as they were in the portraits. Riggs (2005) argues that how

someone is represented is important to understand as that might show how someone wanted to be perceived. In funerary art, when someone is represented in Greek or Roman style, it does not necessarily have to mean that they are Greek or Roman. The same can be said for Egyptian-style depictions of the dead; they do not necessarily mean that a deceased person was Egyptian (pp. 15–16). In past scholarship, there was a great deal of focus on determining the ethnicity and race of those on the mummy portraits. Names were used to determine ethnicity, though such conclusions are often misinformed and too simplistic. These ethnic or racial determinations were sometimes even related to existing stereotypes in the descriptions of the portraits (Borg, 2023, p. 123, 128). Rowlandson (2013) states that the term ethnicity has often been applied and defined differently by writers who all relate it differently to identity and people's self-perception. Thus making understanding what it actually entails more difficult (pp. 215–216).

2.5.1 Ethnic labelling

Vandorpe (2012) distinguishes three forms of ethnic labelling used in documentation in Roman Egypt. The first is the way the government labels someone or their legal status. Secondly, there is the way people view themselves, which considers how a person or group reflects on their own identity. Finally, there is the ethnic labelling of features, both religious and cultural. An example Vandorpe gives is how people distinguish some hairstyles to be Roman (p. 268). Despite this distinction, Vandorpe recognizes that these forms of identity might differ in the complex cultural context of Roman Egypt. Someone could, for example, consider themselves ethnically different than the Roman government (Vandorpe, 2012, p. 268). However, there are criticisms of this division. Rowlandson (2013), for example, thinks Vandorpe's system is convenient but should be adjusted. The second form of identity, how people view themselves, is argued to be absent from the documentary evidence of Roman Egypt.

Rowlandson fears that by describing how certain groups in Ptolemaic Egypt labeled themselves, readers of Vandorpe might assume that this was exclusive. People who saw themselves as Greek could still also see themselves as Egyptian; this was not conflicting (pp. 213–214). To keep the argument of this chapter structured, I shall use the system Vandorpe provides, though I will also take the nuance and critique by Rowlandson into account.

To start with the first way of ethnic labelling, namely legal status. The Romans recognized three forms of legal status, which were Roman citizens, citizens of the Greek cities, and non-citizens or simply Egyptians (Borg, 2023, p.128; Jördens, 2012, p. 249; Riggs, 2005, p. 18). Roman citizenship was uncommon in the population (Jördens, 2012, p. 249; Riggs, 2005, p. 17). Determining who was Roman and who was not nowadays is very complex. Papyri from this period suggest that names are a way of knowing who was a Roman citizen, but that is not always true (Jördens, 2012, p. 250).

For the second and third ways of ethnic labelling, namely how people viewed themselves and their cultural features, it is harder to separate them due to a culturally complex context that had already emerged before Egypt's inclusion in the Roman empire. Therefore, they are both discussed alongside each other in this paragraph. In the Ptolemaic period, as Greeks moved to Egypt, they lived with Egyptians and married them. The difference between both groups became smaller, and they influenced each other (Borg, 2023, p. 128; Riggs, 2005, p. 19). At this time, official documentation did not classify people as “Greek” or “Egyptian,” but private documents show that people thought in such terms in some cases. The distinction between who was Egyptian and who was Greek was likely made through the language they spoke (Goudriaan, 1988, pp. 66–67). Ethnic identity, in that sense, was part of people’s self-image in Ptolemaic Egypt but less important than other factors such as profession and place of birth (Riggs, 2005, p. 20).

At the end of the Ptolemaic period and in the Roman-Egyptian period, Greek and Egyptian cultural elements also merged in some forms. There were Greeks who visited Egyptian temples and some Egyptians who became part of the primarily Greek elite. Despite adopting new characteristics, Egyptians kept their language and historic pride (Vandorpe, 2012, p. 269). Understanding how these changes affected how people viewed themselves becomes even more complex when considering features. Due to cultural hybridity, it is complicated to determine how people labelled cultural and religious features, which could all have been seen as Egyptian, Greek, or Roman (Vandorpe, 2012, 269). Moreover, even if these features say anything about someone's ethnic identity, Rowlandson's (2013, pp. 213–214) criticism reminds us that that still does not have to exclude that they also felt close to another ethnic identity. When the Romans reformed Egypt's government, it was impossible for them to differentiate between Egyptians and Greeks, or they did not wish to do so. Instead, they classified most of the population as Egyptian, even the people who would most likely be considered more Greek nowadays (Riggs, 2005, pp. 22–23). The cartonnage casket shown in Figure 2.4 exemplifies how ethnic categorization of funerary art is not easily done. The casket contains an inscription in Greek that states the following: "O Artemidorus, Farewell" (British Museum, n.d.). Does the use of Greek language in this inscription indicate that this man should be seen as Greek? Does the naturalistic portraiture indicate a Greek or Roman identity? Does the Egyptian-style art on the casket indicate that this person should be seen as Egyptian? Is the name Artemidorus enough to make an assumption?

2.5.2 Identity

The complexities and questions mentioned above already reveal the difficulty of thinking in ethnic terms when discussing identity in Roman Egypt. Riggs writes the following on the importance of focussing on

identity compared to ethnicity: "'Identity' is a more useful term than 'ethnicity' in discussing self-presentation in Roman Egypt, since being a Greek or a Roman had come to be a cultural designation, not an ethnic one" (Riggs, 2005, p. 23). After this, the argument is made that using Roman cultural features does not necessarily indicate that someone tried to be associated with the Roman empire, though it might. There could be various reasons someone would choose to be portrayed that way, and their identity was not just contained to their status. The combination of Egyptian and Greek art styles combined with Roman influences, such as specific hairstyles, makes it hard to put a specific cultural identity on the people portrayed. What culture is assigned to a portrayed person largely depends on who looks at it or the context (Riggs, 2005, p. 24). Another critical point Borg (2023) made is that the concept of a singular ethnicity seems impossible within the Roman Egyptian context and likely in general. Considering the marriage of Egyptians and Greeks from the Ptolemaic time onwards, with the Romans included later (p. 128). All of this showcases how complex understanding the funerary portraits in their various forms is. But also, past ethnic descriptions of the mummy portraits are not always as clear-cut as they might have seemed at the time.

2.6 Chapter conclusion

Several aspects relating to historical context and background have been described. First, the chapter explored the history of ancient Egypt. I described the emergence and downfall of Ptolemaic Egypt, a time when Egypt was under Greek rule after the conquest of Alexander the Great. The foundation for the cultural combinations that led to the mummy portraits was made here. Next, Roman Egypt and the place Egypt had within the Roman Empire were explored.

Further on, the chapter has given a general explanation of the mummy portraits. Following this was a description of burial customs through mummification and funerary art. Several art forms have been mentioned,

though the main focus was the unification of Greek and Egyptian styles. Finally, the chapter concluded by examining ethnicity and identity as research focuses. Here, it was concluded that there are many complexities in classifying the people portrayed in the portraits, thus making analyzing them more complex.

Chapter 3: Museum Background

3.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the museum background of the portraits. To start with, the chapter explores what is generally known about the provenance and provenience of the paintings. Because each portrait is unique, this will be described generally, though some prominent figures in the history of the portraits will be discussed. After that, a brief description of the past exhibitions of the mummy portraits is given. This is followed by a look into why the portraits have been historically popular with the public and convenient for exhibiting purposes. Finally, the chapter concludes with general museum theory on the elements of exhibiting and the influence of interpretations necessary to understand before the description of the exhibitions themselves in the next chapter.

3.2 Provenience and Provenance

Barr (2020, p. 110) writes that the term provenance is commonly used to describe an object's ownership history. In some cases, certain owners get more attention than others, which makes it harder to find information on their ownership in other periods. In most cases of mummy portraits, the provenance lacks the information needed to understand the ownership history completely. Other meanings of provenance are the place of creation or the first known period of creation of artifacts. In the case of the mummy paintings, that would be from the first century CE onwards when the paintings replaced previous masks in some locations in Roman Egypt (Borg, 2012, p. 622). Barr continues to argue that perhaps in the case of the mummy portraits, a provenance should also contain information on the necessary components to make them, such as wood and pigments (Barr, 2020, p. 110).

Another essential term to understand is provenience, which refers to the documented context in which an object was found. (Barr, 2020, pp. 110–111). This is not the only way of describing provenience, however, as its meaning can refer to places as well, namely place of discovery and place of origin (Price & Burton, 2010, p. 213). Considering the similarity between both words and the many different meanings they can have, I have decided to use similar definitions to Barr. This means that a mummy portrait's provenience is the context and place it was found, and provenance is its ownership history.

To make matters more complex, objects with the same provenience can differ in their provenance, as they could be sold to different people or displayed in different museums, separating objects from the same findspots (Barr, 2020, p. 111). Not only have the portraits often been separated from each other, but also from their corresponding mummies. Almost all of them have been removed from the mummy they belonged to (Borg, 2012, p. 623).

In 1887, fewer than two dozen mummy portraits were known, according to Thompson (1982). These portraits comprised two groups, one collected in 1615 and the other in the early 1800s. Some individual portraits were also purchased by travellers (p. 3). The group from 1615 had been acquired from Saqara by Pietro Della Valle from the local people who had found them. It contained two mummies with corresponding portraits dating back to the late Roman Egyptian period in Egypt. Della Valle added these mummies to his antiquities collection in Rome (Zesch et al., 2020, p. 4). In 1887, one of the most important collectors of mummy portraits, Theodore Graf, started his collection (Barr, 2020, p. 111; Thompson, 1982, p. 4). It is suggested that his collection consisted of about 330 portraits and fragments. Not much is known about how he bought his paintings and thus their provenance, according to Barr (2020), though there are some known names of the local art dealers in Egypt he bought them from (pp. 111–112). On the other hand, Thompson writes that the portraits from his collection were found by local miners in Er-Rubayat, located in the northeast of the Fayum oasis. This likely was the location of an ancient

burial ground of the city of Philadelphia (Thompson, 1982, p. 4). This claim, which was commonly believed at the time Thompson wrote his book, has recently been questioned, though, as there is diversity in Graf's collection (Barr, 2020, p. 112). Still, additional information on the portraits' past can be gained from his collection. Through the documentation of his collection, such as sale documents, photographs, and exhibition documentation, information can be gained on the market for mummy portraits just before the twentieth century (Barr, 2020, pp. 111–112). Only shortly after Graf, in early 1888, archaeologist William Flinders Petrie found mummy portraits at Hawara (Barr, 2020, p. 111; Thompson, 1982, p.4). According to Thompson (1982) questions about the authenticity of Graf's sudden enormous collection were resolved by Petrie's excavation. Around ninety mummies and portraits were excavated by Petrie at first. Later, between 1910 and 1911, sixty-five other mummies with their portraits were excavated by Petrie (p. 4). Barr (2020) remarks how both men are known in association with the portraits, Petrie for the most excavated portraits and Graf for the biggest private collection, though entirely without provenience (Barr, 2020, p.113).

The emergence of the APPEAR project has been a significant development in studying the mummy portraits on provenience and provenance. Because of the size of this project, it provides a vast selection of portraits to study. The project's database includes 278 items, some of which are fragments. Only around a hundred of them have a clear provenience with information on the excavations they came from. This leaves most mummy portraits without a clear find context, half of them being owned by Graf in the past. Both Petrie and Graf are present in many of the provenances of the artifacts (Barr, 2020, pp. 112–113). Though they do not represent the full scope of all portraits, the portraits of the APPEAR project do show that the lack of provenience is a big problem when it comes to the mummy portraits. The information they have on the portraits comes from various sources containing documents, catalogues, archives, and even markings in or on the paintings (Barr, 2020, pp. 112, 114–115).

3.3 Exhibitions

By the late nineteenth century, the mummy portraits were being displayed. In this period, both Petrie's and Graf's portraits were on display in Europe, though in separate places (Riggs, 2002, p. 106; Thompson, 1982, p. 4). Ever since, many exhibitions have been held showcasing the portraits. In Europe, as recently as between the years 1997 and 2000, exhibitions in London, Marseille, Leiden, Florence, Vienna, and Frankfurt took place. One exhibition travelled through Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. The London exhibition even got a continuation in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (Riggs, 2002, pp. 87–88).

But what is it that made these exhibitions so popular? One benefit that they enjoy is that their two-dimensional form suits catalogues better than three-dimensional objects, thus making them easier to promote (Riggs, 2002, p. 90). Shape, however, is not the only thing that made the portraits convenient in an exhibition setting. Riggs writes that they: "appeal to Western aesthetic sensibilities, which value any perceived illusionism in art and expect a portrait to capture the subject's personality as well as his or her physical appearance" (Riggs, 2002, p. 88). This implies that an onlooker feels that they can get a sense of who the portrayed person is. It also means that part of what makes these portraits so popular in Europe and America is that they fit well with the cultural preferences in art. Another example of how their appearance and presentation fit our culture and perception is the frames in which they are displayed. Many of the portraits have been removed from their earlier frames and given new ones that fit the current European trends (Barr, 2020, p. 116). Despite the way that people might feel about their connection to the portraits, Riggs (2002, p. 89) remarks that this tells us more about ourselves than about the portrayed people. Similarly, Vogel writes the following: "We can be insiders only in our own culture and our own time" (Vogel, 1991, p. 193). Both art and artifacts from the past, including Egyptian tomb furnishing, have been regarded similarly to our own art. Meaning that we treat them as if their function is to be looked at. It is as if we can understand their

qualities simply by looking at them. In doing so, we do not even ask if they should even be considered as art in our understanding of it (Vogel, 1991, p. 192). The portraits have not just been described as and compared to the art of our own time, however. An example of this is art collector Jean Paul Getty, who explicitly wanted to see the portraits as a combination of Greek and Roman styles, which allowed them to be linked to art of other periods, especially the Renaissance. For personal reasons, Getty wanted to avoid collecting Egyptian art, and thus, the use of the very word “mummy” was avoided (Thompson, 1982, p. 1). This question of how to regard the mummy portraits specifically is also asked by Barr, who mentions the difficulty of the changing reception they have received over time. Should they be seen as art, as human remains, or rather as artifacts (Barr, 2020, p. 116)?

3.4 Museum Theory

When designing an exhibition, museums face choices. Several aspects come into play in this. Dubé (1995, p. 4) mentions and differentiates between three terms related to exhibition making. Namely presence, presentation, and representation. First, there is presence, which is described as how a group of objects is brought together in the exhibition location and already holds an expressive power. Secondly, there is presentation, which refers not just to the arrangement of an exhibition but also to the techniques that are used by exhibition makers, with spatial techniques being named. Finally, there is representation, which refers to the intangible qualities or meanings that are conveyed through the exhibition and the brought-together objects (Dubé, 1995, p. 4).

These terms already showcase some of the complexity that is involved with exhibition making. When taking these three concepts into account in the design of an exhibition, you have to pay attention to which objects you bring together, how you arrange them, what meaning you want the

exhibition to have, and more, as all these things influence the effect of the exhibition.

When considering meanings, texts are an important aspect. According to Lidchi (1997, p. 166) this term does not just refer to what is written down in an exhibition, but also to, for example, oral texts. When a reader is not familiar with a subject, the text guides the reader to what Lidchi calls a preferred reading. The term decoding refers to how an object can be broken down into multiple different meanings. The term coding, on the other hand, refers to the selection of those meanings and their incorporation into a text. Thus, it guides the way a reader who is unfamiliar with an object or topic interprets something when a different choice might have led to a different interpretation (Lidchi, 1997, pp. 166–167). This showcases the influence a curator has through the choices they make.

There is a lot of debate about the way museums and curators represent cultures. Curators and their choices are receiving critiques for some of the choices they make (Lidchi, 1997, p. 153). Vogel (1991) notes that a curator's name is rarely mentioned in an exhibition. This is even though a curator's interpretation of the material is highly influential in the making of an exhibition and might not always be without assumptions. We might be too far removed from the original creators of objects to justify any idea that we can fully understand cultures other than our own (pp. 191–193). This leaves the question as to how art from non-Western origins should then be understood. Here, Vogel reveals that some views, mostly from artists, argue that the form of an object is enough to understand its meaning. However, Vogel herself is not a proponent of this approach and believes that at least some contextual information is a necessity (Vogel, 1991, pp. 194–195). Despite the uncertainty and discussion on how to portray and interpret cultures and objects, it would be impossible for museums and their exhibitions not to contain interpretations of those who work on them. What is important, however, is that they are clear about this subjectivity so that the influence of the makers of exhibitions is known to the visitor (Vogel, 1991, pp. 200–201).

3.5 Chapter conclusion

Provenance and provenience are essential concepts in contemporary museum work. They focus on the contexts the mummy portraits came from and their history after that point. Some of the important people in the portraits' past have been named, namely Theodore Graf and William Flinders Petrie, who both are associated with the portraits in the late nineteenth century. Data from the APPEAR project shows that the mummy portraits often lack provenience, which poses a problem in understanding them. After that, the chapter focussed on exhibiting the portraits. This part not only investigates what exhibitions there have been in the past but also focuses on the question of why the portraits are popular in an exhibition format. It concludes that their shape is beneficial for exhibiting purposes, but also that their similarity to Western aesthetics causes people to feel a connection and even understanding for them, although this felt connection does not mean that we can understand the portrayed people. Though they might be seen as the modern concept of art, this was not their original function. Over time, the portraits have been perceived in many different ways, such as art, human remains, or artifacts, making understanding how to categorize them even more difficult. Finally, the chapter finishes by looking at museum theory. Concepts related to exhibition-making and their complexity are described. The influence of curators through their interpretations, selections, and other choices is shown. Their influence guides the visitors' experience despite their names often being absent. The questions that are raised relating to these themes are how we should present and understand objects from cultures that are very different from ours. Though opinions differ on this topic, what does seem to be vital is that there is transparency on the choices museums and curators make.

Chapter 4: Description: The exhibition and related contents

4.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter, I describe the exhibition in the Allard Pierson Museum. The contents of the exhibition and the way they are displayed will be given. The different rooms will be discussed along with the way they are designed. Besides that, audiovisual material, including the audio tour of the exhibition, is also discussed. For this tour, the museum has chosen to have an artist talk about his favourite portraits. I will analyse the contents of this tour and the elements of the portraits it chooses to focus on.

4.2 Walkthrough of the exhibition

For the analysis of the exhibition itself, it is first important to note that it is not possible to describe every room fully. The main point of this walkthrough is to get an understanding of what sections there are in the exhibition and what topics are mentioned within each room. Because of the size of the exhibition, the number of portraits, the number of other objects, and the large amount of text, it is better to give each section a brief description so that the overview of the main focus remains. Therefore, the titles and themes of each room will be given, along with some of the topics and information presented. To do this, each room will be discussed one by one. I will refrain from further analysis until the discussion, however. The pictures of the exhibition shown in this chapter have been added with consent from the curator, whom I briefly spoke to at the museum.

Figure 4.1 showcases a map of the exhibition, with all the room titles present in the attached legend. These titles are also presented on the walls of their respective halls, surrounded by an explanation of the subject or message of the hall in bigger lettering than any other wall texts present.

These explanations will be referred to as title texts for the rest of the chapter.

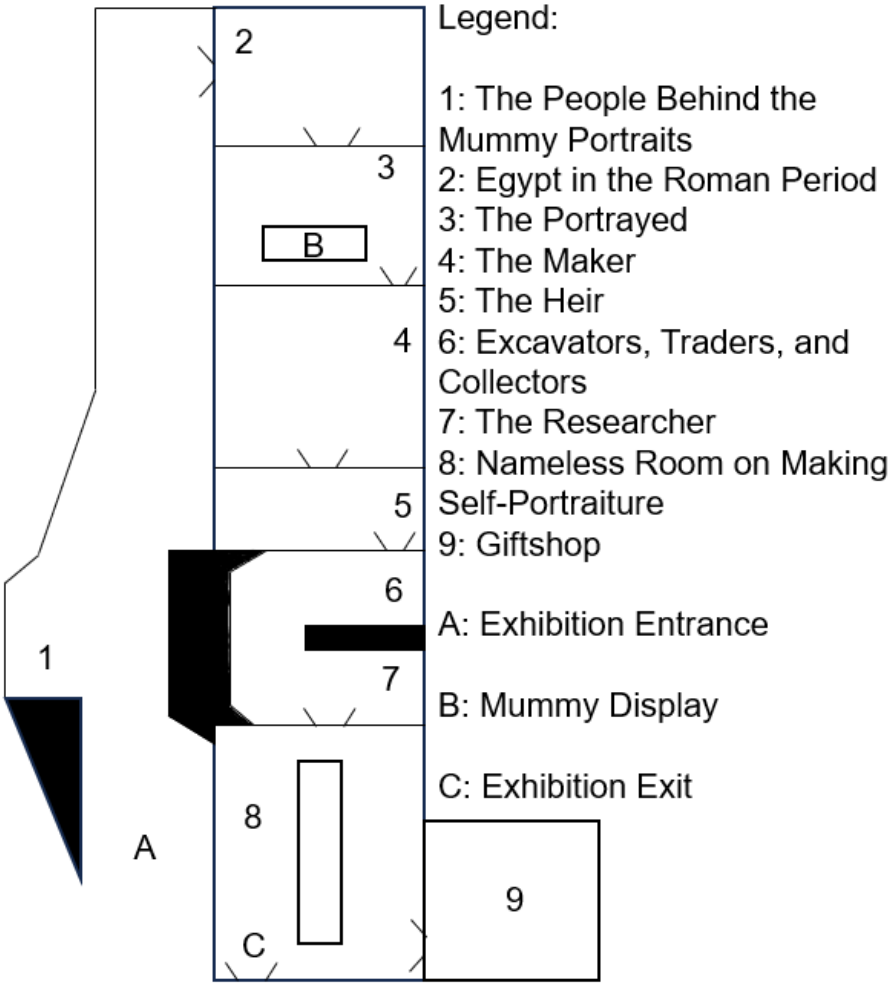

Figure 4.1 A map of the Exhibition. A map based on a sketch with rough distance estimates made in Microsoft PowerPoint. (photograph: Sebastiaan Storm)

4.2.1 Hall 1: Face to Face

The first room of the exhibition does not seem to be a hall in the typical sense. Figure 4.1 showcases its location at the mark indicated as 1. This

has been placed there because all the information in this room is located on the walls of this corner; the rest of the long hallway is empty. Admittedly, there are two walls showcasing a giant image of the faces of two mummy portraits, the first being the portrait in Figure 2.3. Figure 4.2 showcases this corner. One wall showcases the title of the hall, while the other wall contains a description. Here, the first description of the exhibition is given. It briefly explains the period the portraits are from, what they are, and how they were positioned on the mummies' faces. After this, however, the text mentions that these portraits combined Egyptian religious beliefs, Hellenic painting techniques, and Roman realism. The writing continues, saying that the exhibition does not just focus on those who are portrayed but also on those invisible people who contribute to the story of the mummy portraits, the painters and collectors, for example. The claim is made that we can connect to those people through. Another statement says that we can get to know both the portrayed people and the artist of the paintings through the expressiveness in the portraits. Finally, the text ends with some questions that are related to the exhibition (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

Next to these big texts is a small warning text, which mentions that a small mummified boy is displayed in the exhibition. This text mentions how the exhibition has extra information on why the museum decided to display this mummy. It also mentions that the museum is aware of the debates around the topic of mummy displays and that viewers can avoid seeing the mummy if they wish (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

Figure 4.2 The title of the Face to Face Exhibition at the hall the start. This picture shows wall texts at the very beginning of the exhibition. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

4.2.2 Hall 2: Egypt in the Roman Period

The second hall is called Egypt in the Roman period. Immediately upon entering, the first mummy portraits are shown facing the entrance. The hall contains five mummy portraits in total, as shown in Figure 2.3 from the entrance perspective. They are described through topics such as clothing and jewellery, painting technique, and their gaze. One shared description on the left side of the left display, however, is about the merging of cultural elements in the portraits. They are described as representing an upper middle class while combining: “A longstanding ancient Egyptian tradition of depicting a death mask or coffin, Roman realism, and Hellenistic painting techniques and clothing” (Oog in Oog, 2023-2024). When only paying

attention to the text, one might miss an additional element to the way these portraits are presented. Behind their glass displays, parts of the curtains have been made darker, in a shape that represents a shadow. These implied shadows go all the way to the floor and contain the shapes of clothing in their outlines (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

The title text of the room is shown in Figure 2.4. It describes when Egypt became part of the Roman empire, explaining the benefit Egypt offered in food production and trade. After this, the text focuses on things that stayed rather similar, mentioning how the Ptolemaic administration was partly adapted by the Romans. It even questions if people outside the big cities would notice any change. The text seems to suggest a large continuity from before and after the Romans came, though some changes are mentioned. The rest of the room contains small artifacts displayed on the wall. They are related to various relevant themes such as religion, but also homes, villages, cities, entertainment, and administration. Thus, the hall focuses briefly on many topics of importance in the Roman Egyptian period (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

Figure 4.3 A picture of the Egypt in the Roman Period Hall. This pictures shows the Hall from the position of its entrance. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.4 A picture of the Egypt in the Roman Period Hall. This pictures shows the hall from the opposite end compared to the entrance. Here the title and its related texts are visible, along with the shadow outlines behind the portraits. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

4.2.3 Hall 3: The Portrayed

The third exhibition hall is called The Portrayed. This is the only hall in which the title and the related text are located outside of the hall itself. They are located next to the entrance of this hall in the previous hall. The title text focuses on questions that could emerge from watching or studying the paintings. An example of this is who the portrayed people are. After that, however, the text talks about the answers the portraits can provide as well. It mentions how the portrayed clothing, jewellery, and hairstyle can all help with dating. The age of the portrayed people can roughly be estimated from the portraits. But also how small texts added to portraits or mummies can tell us names or sometimes even a profession. The text finishes by explaining that a combination of both a portrait and a mummy allows for a comparison of how the body relates to the image

portrayed. Thus, the text very much seems to focus on what questions and answers can be obtained from the portraits (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

Figure 4.5 showcases the room from its entrance. It contains four panel portraits and one portrait of a different nature. At the entrance are two pairs of mummy portraits displayed next to each other in it. The left pair contains a plaque which, amongst some smaller text, has big letters stating that these two portraits had names attached to them. The right pair has a plaque that contains similar big letters, though in this case, they spell the word anonymous. These displays focus on the aforementioned effect of text that is found with the portraits and how information can be gained from that. Again, the shadow outlines are present on the curtain behind the portraits. The right side of the hall, as shown in Figure 4.6, is focused on other kinds of funerary portraiture in ancient Egypt. A part of the focus is on the development from earlier forms of funerary art towards the portraits, though only a brief description. Items such as funerary masks are present and displayed. The left side of the room focusses on the looks of Roman Egypt. A smaller part of this side is shown in Figure 4.7. Displays here contain objects and information on topics such as hairstyles, clothing, jewellery, and accessories (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

Figure 4.5 A picture of the The Portrayed Hall. Here the displayed portraits can be seen, along with the screen showcasing the room’s video in the back. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.6 A picture of the The Portrayed Hall. The right side of the hall, containing other forms of funerary portraiture. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.7 A picture of the The Portrayed Hall. A small part of the left side of the hall, containing items related to the way people looked in Roman Egypt. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

This particular hall has one extra element that is important to include in this description. It is the aforementioned mummy display. I see this as an important part of the exhibition partly because the museum warns visitors about the mummy's presence textually multiple times, thus laying emphasis on it. But besides that, it provides the only visual example of how a portrait is connected to a mummy and, thus, a body. This extra visual context cannot be found elsewhere in the exhibition. Figure 4.8 shows the display, while Figure 4.9 showcases the mummy closer so that the portrait is visible.

Before continuing the description, it is important to explain why I have decided to showcase this child mummy here, despite the ethical debates regarding the display of human remains. The primary reason is the aforementioned importance the mummy has within this exhibition as the only display of a portrait in a more complete context. Another reason is that despite personal ethical considerations, the warnings also describe that the museum had a similar ethical consideration but decided to display the mummy. Considering that this chapter is focussed on describing and showcasing the contents of the exhibition, with emphasis on the choices made by the museum in later analysis, this display is part of those choices, and therefore, I believe it should be shown here. For the final reason, this is not the only mummy shown in the thesis, as there is also Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2. The inclusion of each of the mummy pictures in this thesis has a functional goal. The function of these figures is to illustrate the writings; in the case of the child mummy, it is the only one showing a portrait on linen. For these reasons, I have decided to add the images below.

As can be seen from the number B in Figure 4.1, this display stands close to the wall and also close to the door to the next room. It is positioned in such a way that the mummy is only visible from the small corridor that is formed between the display and the wall, though if someone walks back from room 4, they would also see the mummy. That the mummy cannot be

seen from the middle of the room does not mean that the mummy's presence is hidden, however. Information on the mummy is presented on a black background on the display, once more giving a warning to the visitor and a more elaborate explanation of why the museum has chosen to display this mummy. The warning itself refers the visitor to a route that allows them to avoid seeing the mummy. The further text explains that the mummy is a young boy from the first century CE. The suspected provenance and provenience of the mummy are described, though these terms are not named. Further information is about ethical considerations done by the museum while also inviting visitors to discuss the display of human remains with the museum. The provided reasoning for the choice of display, however, is that this mummy shows the function of mummy portraits, as there is one on the linen of the mummified face. Another reason is that this mummy has had a facial reconstruction made through recent research. This reconstruction is displayed next to the mummy itself. The reconstructed head is displayed slightly higher than the mummy itself looking forward. On the other side of the mummy, there is a wall text giving more context-specific information about the mummy. It contains a brief description of mummification. After that, it is revealed that the facial reconstruction actually showcases that the child would have been younger than assumed based on the portrait (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

Figure 4.8 A picture of the mummy and its facial reconstruction at the The Portrayed Hall. The mummy display at the back of the hall. Taken from the exit of the hall. (Photograph: Sa Mu).

Figure 4.9 A picture of the mummy The Portrayed Hall. The mummy on display at the back of the hall. A closer image of the portrait. (Photograph: Sa Mu).

4.2.4 Hall 4: The Maker

The fourth hall is called The Maker, which refers to the people who made the portraits. This hall is shown in Figure 4.10, Figure 4.11, Figure 4.12, and Figure 4.13. Each of these figures shows a different part of the hall. The title text confirms that the makers of the portraits are the topic of this hall. The text explains how early in Roman Egypt, almost all the painters had Greek names, though as time went on, Roman names also became more common amongst the painters. The text continues by stating that the painters were usually either enslaved people or formerly enslaved people. It also suggests the likelihood of workshops in which the painters were trained. Another wall text discusses the question of how to regard the people who made the portraits. It describes how they are often seen as artists, though, in actuality, they are more like craftspeople. Research with an available mummy has shown that the mummy portraits are often not completely accurate compared to the body. The wall text continues to argue, however, that the painters managed to portray people as they wanted. Through angles and other ways of varying in portraiture, paintings could be individualized and show different expressions (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

This room, in particular, is probably the biggest in the entire exhibition. It displays the most portraits, eleven to be exact. The middle of the room is filled with four displays relating to some of the materials needed to make a portrait. Their topics are Travel and Trade, Pigments and Binding Agents, Wood, and Toolkit. Seen from the entrance, the long walls on both sides of the hall consist of multiple displays consisting of two or three mummy portraits each. Their related texts describe some of the painting techniques used on them. More clearly than anywhere else in the exhibition, the kind of clothing on the shadow outlines behind the portraits differs per person. The top of the implied shadows is slightly above the paintings, making them easier to see above the displays (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

Figure 4.10 A picture of the The Maker Hall. A picture showing the title of the Hall and its related texts along with the displayed portraits on the left side of the hall. The picture has been taken from the right of the entrance. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.11 A picture of the The Maker Hall. A picture showing the displays in the middle of the room, taken from the right of the entrance. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.12 A picture of the The Maker Hall. A picture showing the mummy portraits on display on the right side of the room, with shadow outlines behind them. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.13 A picture of the The Maker Hall. A picture showing the room from the back of the hall, revealing the screens containing video footage. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

4.2.5 Hall 5: The Heir

The fifth hall, called The Heir, is shown in Figure 4.14 and Figure 4.15. The title text describes that despite unclear connections in looks between

the portraits, their function is more clear. Both commemoration and deification of the deceased are mentioned as functions. After that, the description continues to explain that the portraits did not always immediately get put into a tomb and were accessible to others. Bodies sometimes still needed to be kept to offer people a chance to mourn and also to arrange necessary matters relating to money. At the end, the text mentions that those with relations to the deceased will also come to pass. However, because the portrait mummies still inspire craftspeople and artists, the text says that they still have a figurative heir. This idea of the paintings having a legacy through the people they inspire is also visible in another part of this hall. A self-portrait from Charley Toorop is shown, with its description talking about the connection between her and the mummy portraits. The portrait has been borrowed from the Kunstmuseum Den Haag (Toorop, 1922). Figure 4.16 showcases this portrait. The related text explains that artists such as Toorop were inspired by the portraits, thus leading to works such as the displayed self-portrait. It offers an opportunity to compare the twentieth-century painting and the paintings from Roman Egypt. The rest of the room contains information on the processes and activities that were related to death in Roman Egypt and how the bodies were treated. According to one text, it was possible that the portraits might have been ordered during the time of arranging practical matters relating to the burial. Another part of the information is about the Egyptian religious beliefs related to death, and there is a display on mummification and internment (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

Figure 4.14 A picture of the The Heir Hall. A picture showing the room from the back of the hall with its Title. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.15 A picture of the The Heir Hall. A picture showing the room and its displayed mummy portraits from the entrance. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.16 A self-portrait made by Charley Toorop in 1922. This portrait is shown in the exhibition, where this portrait is presented in light of Toorop's inspiration by the mummy portraits. (Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Object number: 0333194, https://www.kunstmuseum.nl/en/collection/self-portrait-8).

4.2.6 Hall 6: Excavators, Traders and Collectors

The title text of the Excavators, Traders, and Collectors Hall describes the more recent history of the paintings. The text starts from the 1880's, a period where not many of the portraits were known. Shortly after, however, the text describes how Theodor Graf, amongst others, collected hundreds

of portraits without documenting an archaeological context. The text then continues to mention William Flinders Petrie, whose excavation in Hawara is described as a partial response to the lack of documentation. After this period in the late nineteenth century, only a few portraits have been dug up, according to the text. The information in the room, on related topics and on the displayed portraits themselves, focuses on the people involved in their modern histories. Whether this be the archaeologist who dug the portrait up or someone who owned the portrait at some point in time. Figure 4.17 shows portraits presented in such ways. The displays shown in Figure 4.18, on the other hand, focus on specific sites where portraits have been found. The portraits in each of these displays are connected to the site mentioned on the wall text next to it. These three sites are Er-Rubayat, Hawara, and Antinoöpolis (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

Figure 4.17 A picture of the Excavators, Traders and Collectors Hall. A picture showing the room and some of the displayed mummy portraits from the entrance. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.18 A picture of the Excavators, Traders and Collectors Hall. A picture showing some of the displayed mummy portraits connected to specific find locations, namely from left to right Er-Rubayat, Hawara, and Antinoöpolis. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

4.2.7 Hall 7: The Researcher

This is the final hall that contains new information on the paintings. This hall is called The Researcher, with research also being the focus of the hall. The title text, which is visible in Figure 4.19, describes the scholarly interest the portraits have gained ever since their plentiful discoveries in the late nineteenth century. Past research focusing on art historical and ethnographic perspectives is described. The text explicitly mentions how scholarly attention was focused on comparisons with later painting styles and with ethnic determination. Further on, the focus shifts to more recent research. Information is given on recent technical analysis that has provided much new information on the portraits. Not just about their components and production materials, but also about their provenance. Finally, the text mentions recent research collaborations that focus on the portraits, including the APPEAR project. The paintings displayed in the

room have texts that mostly focus on information that has recently been gained through modern techniques, they are shown in Figure 4.20. One, for example, has been restored in the past; through the macro XRF technique, the original and the restoration material can be distinguished. This same technique has been used on another portrait, which revealed an added date that was not yet visible before. The techniques are not explained in detail in this hall, but their results are (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

Figure 4.19 A picture of the The Researcher Hall. A picture showing the title of the hall with its related text, along with the screen displaying the room's video. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.20 A picture of the The Researcher Hall. A picture showing some of the displayed mummy portraits with information on the results of recent research on them. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

4.2.8 Hall 8 and the gift shop

The only other room numbered 8 in Figure 4.1, is partly filled with mirrors, with a wall text on the topic of self-portraiture. An opportunity is given to the visitors to do so on paper in front of the mirrors, which have different shapes that seem to correspond to the shapes of the portraits. The hall is also connected to the exhibition's gift shop, in which the portraits are portrayed on several commercial items. All that remains is one final wall text close to the exit. It is named People from the Past and the Present. The text explains that the phrasing People behind mummy portraits does not just refer to the portrayed people but also to the many different people related to them that have been mentioned in the exhibition, such as the makers and researchers. After that, the text states that the people were portrayed in a specific way for specific purposes. This information is related to the visitor as the text continues to ask them about their feelings on the topic of mortality and their preference if an image of them should live on (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

4.3 Audiovisual Material

4.3.1 The Audio Tour

The audio tour of the exhibition is voiced by artist Jasper Krabbé. The exhibition webpage states that Krabbé shows the visitor his personal favourite portraits. After this, the question is asked what you can see when you look at them from an artist’s perspective (Allard Pierson Museum, 2023)? At the entrance of the exhibition, it is possible to ask for an audio device, which allows a visitor to hear the tour by holding the device close to small devices that are attached to the six portrait displays that are part

of the tour. Because the tour was only available in Dutch, the description that I give is a translation.

Throughout the tour, Krabbé focuses on different aspects, though there is also a similarity, considering that he compliments the looks of every portrait he describes. Words such as beautiful and handsome are used regularly. In one case he even states that a portrait of a woman has “ogen om in the verdrinken en die kunnen verslinden”. Which translates to “eyes to drown in and that can devour.” For the first portrait, he focuses on things like facial positioning and jewellery but also on how the paint was made, thus providing contextual information. The major focus of the description of the second portrait is its special portrayal of a white background and hands, which differs from the other paintings. He mentions that the painter used different styles. The third portrait is described through the facial components before Krabbé complements the craftmanship. This painting is also located in hall 4 in Figure 4.1, The Maker. Krabbé mentions that he finds it weird that the painters were anonymous but also explains that they were probably more like craftspeople.

For illustration, the fourth painting that is part of the audio tour is shown in Figure 4.21. Krabbé remarks that it seems like this portrait was painted fast. Still, he compliments the calm colors, even stating that he would murder for that shade of purple. The combination of the background colouring with the shade of the man is called pretty. After that, however, Krabbé describes this portrait as impressionism, a long time before that art style even came into existence. This comparison is the reason I have chosen to include this portrait as a feature. According to him, the painting comes to life. The interpretations of reality and visual tricks applied by the maker are the reason these paintings are still very relevant, according to Krabbé.

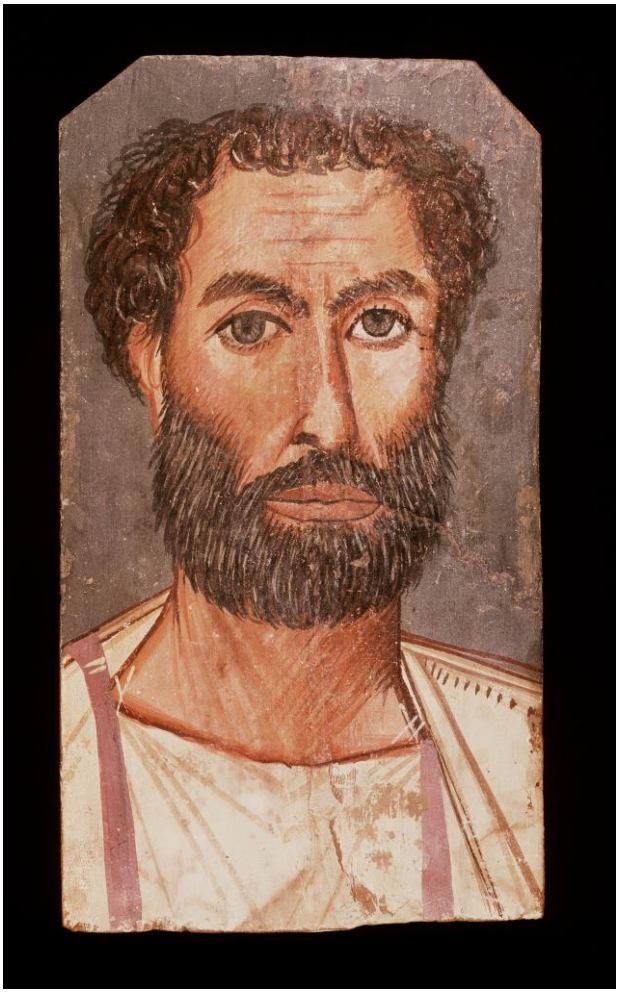

Figure 4.21 A mummy portrait dating to 175-225 BCE. This portrait is part of those described in the exhibition's audio tour. (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, inventory number: F 1932/3.1, https://www.rmo.nl/collectie/collectiezoeker/collectiestuk/?object=22655).

The fifth painting is described using the colouring and outline of the portrayed woman. He compares this painting to expressionism, another art style. This is also the painting that he referred to about the eyes. Finally, the last painting that is part of the audio tour is introduced as one of Krabbé's favourites. He describes the long brush strokes at the bottom, mentioning that it is likely that when it was painted, a cloth covered the bottom. He compares the painting to Picasso but mentions that this is ages before Picasso. The ear of the painting is called the first abstract ear in history.

4.3.2 Video material

Every hall included a video showcasing experts from different fields talking about the portraits in ways that are related to the specific topic of that hall. These experts include people like Jasper Krabbé and Marie Svoboda, who is one of the researchers and authors of the APPEAR project. The people in these videos are all interviewed individually. Every interview is shown in parts, which sometimes show up multiple times in the same video. In every hall, the settings the shown experts are in are the same, thus making it likely that they have been filmed in one session and then edited to make the videos. Besides factual information, they refer to their own interpretations, associations, feelings, and thoughts on the portraits. One of the interviewees compares them to selfies, for example (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

4.3.3 An interactive tool

Finally, in The Researcher, an interactive tool is located on the ground. This tool has a touchscreen showcasing the portraits in six squares where they are compared differently. The tool is shown in Figure 4.22. The image on the touchscreen is also projected on the wall, as seen in Figure 4.23. By clicking on one of the six squares, the tool zooms in so that the visitor can have a closer look and move the view of the individual portraits. Here, a word in the upper left corner reveals the topic or term that groups these images together on the same square. These words are Jewelry, Iron, Gold Foil, Details: eyes, and Photo (Oog in oog, 2023–2024).

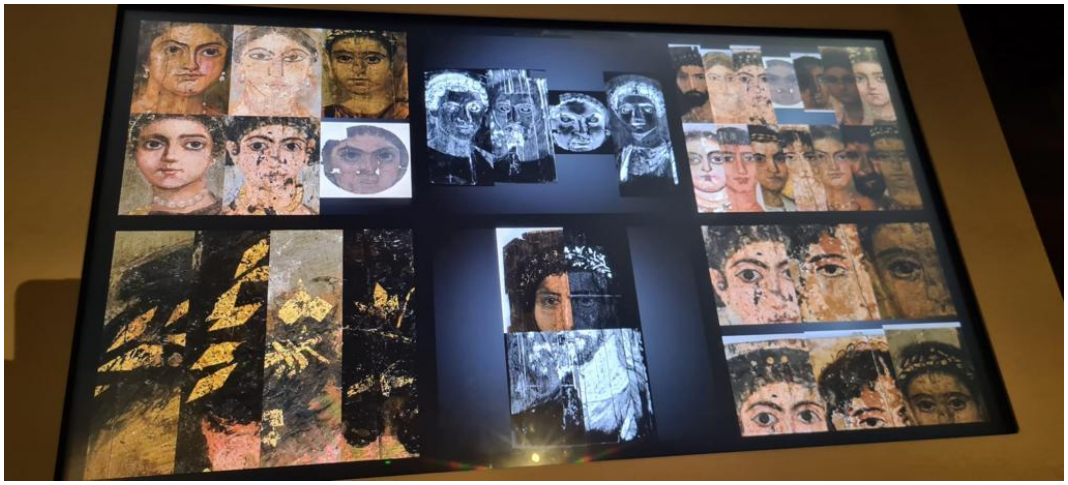

Figure 4.22 The interactive tool in the The Researcher Hall. This tools places images of different portraits next to each other in six different squares that visitors can interact with. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

Figure 4.23 The interactive tool in The Researcher being projected on the wall. This image showcases how the display of the tool is also projected on the nearby wall. (Photograph: Sebastiaan Storm).

4.4 Chapter conclusion

I have summarized and described the contents of the exhibition. By focusing on the main halls, their names, main texts, and part of their contents, the main focuses and themes of the exhibition come to light. The

audiovisual media also provides information on the perspective the museum has chosen to showcase in the exhibition. Using this knowledge of the contents of the exhibition in combination with the archaeological and museological background will allow for a more complete analysis in the Discussion.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter, I focus on combining the data from archaeological and theoretical backgrounds with the exhibition's contents. By doing this, I will analyze and critique the choices made by the museum. Firstly, this chapter will be about the choices the museum has made and how they influence the overall content of the exhibition. Next is a section on art. The question of a cultural Western sense of art and how this relates to the way the portraits are presented will be discussed here. After that, I focus on another part of the exhibition that was noticeable, or rather noticeably absent, ethnic identity. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a short summary in which I provide the main conclusions.

5.2 Choices

In the theoretical and museological background, I have discussed how curators have a big influence in making an exhibition. Dubé's (1995) concepts, such as presence, presentation, and representation, showcase only some of the complexity of understanding an exhibition as a whole and how things are connected. Presence is described as how a group of objects is brought together in the exhibition location and already holds an expressive power (p. 4). The choice of the objects and topics to put in the themed halls next to the paintings alone showcases this. An example of smaller choices is the choice of sub-themes to provide extra context in Egypt in the Roman Period. Through the presence of the chosen objects, an image of Roman Egypt, such as the importance of religion, is already being communicated. The presence of different forms of funerary art close to the portraits in the third hall also communicates their similar function. Curators have their own interpretations and cannot fully be objective; thus, choices have to be made (Vogel, 1991, pp. 191, 201).

Lidchi (1997) explains how, through the concepts of decoding and coding, a topic or object can be dissected into many different understandings or explanations (pp. 166–167). Through the selection of the possible topics, the contents of all six themed halls could have been selected (I have excluded the first hall as this is more a general introduction than an actual theme). By exhibiting at least two mummy portraits per hall, which reflect the theme of that specific hall, the museum highlights specific parts of those portraits, while their entire description might have been completely different if they had been placed just one hall further.

Not only the topics of the main halls but also the title of the exhibition itself is part of this process of selection. Instead of only focussing on the mummy portraits themselves, the title clearly mentions the people behind them, which we learn to refer to just about anyone connected to their history. Thus, the wordings and selections that are present in the exhibition reflect the sometimes invisible choices that were made when the exhibition was designed. When analyzing different parts of the exhibition in this chapter, I will take these choices into account.

5.3 Art

In the museological background, I discussed how part of what makes the mummy portraits so historically popular is the way they correspond with “Western aesthetic sensibility” (Riggs, 2002, p. 88). Their shape and design are close to our own modern art. When keeping in mind that these portraits were never intended to be looked at in the future, much less to be in a museum, the question of whether or not they can even be understood as the modern concept of art emerges (Vogel, 1991, pp. 192). Another important question brought up by Barr (2020) was how to regard objects with such changing receptions as these portraits. Whether they are to be seen as art, artifacts, or human remains is difficult to establish (p. 116).

Despite this complexity, however, it seems the museum has chosen to present the mummy portraits as art, at the very least partially. On the wall text in the very first room they are already referred to as “small works of art” (Oog in oog, 2023–2024). The place in the exhibition where their portrayal as art seems to become the most clear is in the fifth hall, called The Heir. The text mentions that the craftspeople and artists who get inspired by the portraits are a sort of figurative heir to the portrait mummies. Thus connecting the mummy portraits to modern artists and, consequently, art. Not only this, but the displayed self-portrait from Charley Toorop is also part of that shown connection (Toorop, 1922). The description of this portrait mentions how Toorop was inspired by the mummy portraits, which influenced her self-portraiture. In that sense, the portraits are connected to modern art once again. Though they might not be explicitly called art everywhere, that is not necessary to represent them as such. If we remember Dubé and his terminology, two terms are very relevant in understanding this effect. Firstly, presentation refers not just to the arrangement of an exhibition but also to the techniques that are used by exhibition makers, with spatial techniques being named. Secondly, representation refers to the intangible qualities or meanings that are conveyed through the exhibition and the brought-together objects (Dubé, 1995, p. 4). In this case, it seems that the curator has chosen to present modern art next to the mummy portraits. By bringing together the portraits and modern art that is inspired by them, the idea is conveyed that the portraits are to be seen as art. Here, choices in presentation lead to a particular representation.

Another factor in this is the audio tour. Even on one of the exhibition’s webpages, the first mention of the audio tour immediately indicates that Jasper Krabbé is an artist and looks at the portraits from an artist’s perspective (Allard Pierson Museum, 2023). Choosing an artist to provide the audio tour and focus on his favourite portraits is already an indicator that the museum has chosen to present the mummy portraits at least partly as art, but the audio tour itself further solidifies this idea. Krabbé does provide contextual information to every painting, but the majority of

his analysis is about the painting techniques, which he sometimes relates to his own practice. The information he provides is not always related to the topic of the room, while the portraits' plaques mostly do involve that topic. The language he uses is often very expressive and, at some moments, more focused on his perception of the portraits' beauty than actual information. His comparisons between the portraits and art styles that had not even come into existence during the Roman Egyptian period also contribute to the idea of the portraits as art objects. Impressionism, expressionism, and Picassoesque abstract ears, it is highly questionable if the original intention of these portraits was to fit into art styles that did not even exist yet. Ironically, a wall text in the 'The Researcher' hall mentions comparisons between the portraits and mostly post-medieval painting traditions as a scholarly focus of the past. Such receptions to ancient Egyptian material as Krabbé's are not a new thing. The material culture of ancient Egypt has fascinated people for a long time with its looks. The aesthetic power of ancient Egypt and the reception of its material culture is part of what has shaped the formation of Egyptology as a discipline. Even archaeological research has been influenced by such responses (Moser, 2015, pp. 1277, 1302–1303). Therefore, it is important to understand that such receptions do have influence.

There is nothing wrong with examining the portraits from an artistic perspective. Artistic approaches are part of the current research, and there is still much more that can be learned from the analysis of painting techniques (Boender, 2021, pp. 17–18). However, Krabbé's description does not strictly stick to analytical observations. The choice to add his perspective has certainly influenced the visitor experience for those who do decide to follow the tour. It is important to keep in mind that it might not always be as clear for an unfamiliar visitor how these choices have influenced an exhibition and its emphasis.

5.4 Identity

In the archaeological background, I discussed that being portrayed with Roman cultural features does not necessarily indicate that someone wants to associate themselves with the Roman Empire. A claim often made in the past scholarship (Riggs, 2005, p. 24). Some people in the past, such as Jean Paul Getty, did not see the mummy portraits as Egyptian. No matter the reason for that, there was a benefit to this. “Greco-Roman” art could more easily be connected to the portraiture of later periods, such as the Renaissance. Therefore, even the word “mummy” was avoided (Thompson, 1982, p. 1). This is very much different in the case of the Face to Face exhibition. Not only do the connections the portraits have to their mummies get mentioned, but one such mummy actually gets presented to the visitor, with the portrait still intact on the linen. The descriptions of research possibilities in cases where both the mummy and the portrait are together are another indicator that the exhibition tries to showcase the connection the portraits have to the ancient Egyptian tradition of mummification. In hall 7, called The Researcher, past scholarly focus on ethnic determination even gets mentioned on the wall text, thus clearly showcasing that the museum is aware of this previous line of thinking. Considering the recommendation made by Riggs (2005, p. 23) that the concept of identity is much more useful than ethnicity when it comes to Roman-Egyptian self-presentation, the exhibition seems to follow a similar idea. It refrains from bold ethnic claims and focuses on the other kinds of information the portraits can provide us. The likely reason for this decision becomes apparent in the catalog of the exhibition that was released soon after its opening. In one of the chapters, Borg (2023) mentions the inaccuracy of past ethnic determinations. Names, for example, were seen as indicators of ethnicity in the past, but that alone is not an accurate indicator of ethnicity. The very applicability of ethnicity as a term is questioned (pp. 123, 128).

5.5 Chapter conclusion

I have critically analyzed the Face to Face exhibition in this chapter through several subjects. First, it has been established that curators' choices are an important part of an exhibition’s design process. There is not one possible way to design an exhibition. Instead, many different ways of representing a topic are possible through selection. The topics of this exhibition are examples of such selections. After that, I described the presentation of the mummy portraits as art in the exhibition. By analysing both the exhibition contents and the audiovisual material, I have attempted to showcase another such choice that has been made in creating this exhibition. It is also important to mention that we cannot understand the portraits as if they are our own art. Finally, I analyzed the lack of ethnic descriptions in the exhibition. Historically, the portraits have been ascribed to specific cultures, and scholars have focussed on ethnic determinations. By presenting the portraits with extensive information on their origin as mummy funerary art and by avoiding ethnic claims, the museum has chosen to focus instead on different aspects of the mummy portraits.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Answering the Research Questions

In this chapter, I will start by answering the research questions. They will be answered individually so they can be given proper attention. First, the two sub-questions will be answered. Because of the different wordings of the first sub-question, each possible wording will be answered separately. The second sub-question is answered next. After both sub-questions have been answered, it is time to look at the main research question of this thesis.

To what extent are the original contexts of these objects addressed/sketched/recreated/ignored?

The exhibition attempts to address the original contexts of the mummy portraits in a couple of different ways. Firstly, the second hall attempts to give context to the Roman-Egyptian world. It tries to describe different parts of Roman Egyptian society, thus already giving a part of the basic information needed to understand the origins of the portraits. For example, the hall on the makers describes the techniques used to make the portraits. It features some of the materials and tools used in their creation, thus attempting to showcase that process through more than just text. Meanwhile, the hall about the portrayed showcases some of the information available on the identity of those portrayed. Portraits with a name description have been put in the hall on those portrayed so that they can be used to exemplify how text can add to our understanding of someone's identity.

When sketching the original contexts, a good example is the shadow outlines throughout the exhibition. They attempt to sketch those portrayed as regular people, showcasing their clothing and an outline of what their

whole bodies might have looked like. Thus emphasizing the people "behind mummy portraits," as the exhibition title would call it.

The original contexts of the mummy portraits are impossible to recreate fully as there is a lot of missing information. Most of them lack a clear provenience, and thus, much of the information on how they were found is lost. The exhibition, however, addresses this issue. The context in which many of them were privately collected while some were excavated only to be displayed not long after is part of the exhibition. Still, the display of a mummy provides extra context as to what it looks like when mummy and portrait are together.

However, what is also apparent from the exhibition is that the original context is not the only focus. The exhibition wishes to focus on all the people involved in the history of the portraits, thus making those invisible visible. The exhibition does not restrict itself only to the time the portraits were made. It also addresses more modern times in which the portraits became relevant after many were discovered in the late nineteenth century. Besides that, the exhibition also attempts to showcase what work is currently being done in researching the portraits.

In terms of ignoring original contexts, there is only one thing that is very clearly missing. As seen in Figure 2.1, Figure 2.2, and Figure 2.5, the portraits were part of mummies or cartonnage cases. Yes, the exhibition does showcase a mummy with a portrait, but there is one important aspect to this that should be kept in mind: this portrait is made on the linen itself. The exhibition showcases thirty-seven panel portraits, but the only example of an actual mummy with a portrait is not one that contains a wooden panel. It does not showcase how a wooden panel portrait would have been placed in a mummy, which remains visually absent. It is understandable that it might not have been possible to display such a mummy or sarcophagus with a portrait. However, that does not mean that it is impossible to showcase images.

Though it is not ignored fully, another noticeable aspect is the lack of a long analysis of the portraits as a combination of different cultural

traditions. Yes, this does sometimes get mentioned, but not as explicitly and detailed as some of the literature focussed on the portraits would make likely. This is not a negative, however. The focus the portraits have received in the past on cultural and ethnic determinism has not always led to a complete and unbiased view of them. There are many more angles to them that are both interesting and worth showcasing. Thus, this choice by the exhibition is noticeable, but not a downside.

How are the mummy portraits presented in terms of object categories?

In terms of object categories, it seems that the exhibition presents the mummy portraits as works of art. In the first room, they are called art. Besides that, throughout parts of the exhibition, emphasis lies on how the portraits still inspire people to this day. Comparisons are made with later art that has been inspired by the portraits. However, their connection to mummies is not ignored. The display of a mummy demonstrates that the museum makes some effort to visually showcase that these portraits are not just art in our sense but are related to burial customs. However, as mentioned before, this is only one example compared to the thirty-seven displayed panel portraits. The audio tour provided by an artist presents the portraits even more as art. A large part of its description is about the painting techniques used on them. Many of the things that are said on the audio tour are personal statements on the appreciation of the beauty of the artifacts. Sometimes, the tour even describes what kind of look they have on their face. Here, parts of the portraits are sometimes also compared to later painting styles, which were not even invented in Roman-Egyptian times. Thus further showcasing the choice of presentation of the portraits as art.

How are the mummy portraits presented in the temporary exhibition “Face to Face: The People Behind Mummy Portraits” at the Allard Pierson Museum?

Corresponding with the different topics of each hall, the portraits in different halls all have a description that fits the theme. It seems that the portraits that best fit the narrative of a certain topic hall have been selected so that those portraits with unique features or information can be presented in light of this. The additional items in every hall are meant to give even further context, showcasing related topics that give more of a general sense of understanding of the portraits. In such ways, the exhibition uses the specific characteristics of each painting fittingly to provide information to the reader. If that is the case, then the way the portraits are portrayed in the exhibition is perhaps best understood simply by looking at the names of the halls and the topics they encompass. The second hall, Egypt in the Roman period, contains some general descriptions of the portraits that do not seem to be unique to these portraits, though that might be fitting for a hall with contextual background. The Portrayed presents the portraits through the questions and answers that can be derived from them. Here, paintings with a name are compared to those without one to showcase what text can tell us about identity. The Maker looks at the techniques employed by the craftspeople to make the portraits. The Heir focuses on how the paintings relate to those left behind, whether that be those who knew the deceased or the people nowadays. Excavators, Traders, and Collectors presents them through information on their provenance or provenience, giving examples of where they came from or of someone who owned them in the past. And finally, The researcher shows them in the light of modern research with relatively new techniques and new information. These halls might describe the objects in their spaces through these themes, but it is important to remember that each of them has more displays, objects, and texts that are intended to give extra context. Though they are not directly next to the portraits, their presence is also part of how the portraits are understood by visitors.

Bringing different forms of funerary art together with the portraits in the same hall, for example, associates them with the funerary context.

Besides the themes of the rooms, the aforementioned object category of art is also important to consider in light of how the mummy portraits are presented overall. This is because, though the topics differ throughout the exhibition, the audio tour takes place in almost every room. The shadows that have been put behind the portraits also show a different way of portrayal. One that focuses more on portraying those on the portraits as normal people. The outlines of these artificial shadows form clothing, though the clothing takes different forms. It becomes clear that these are either meant to represent the clothing shown in the portraits or the typical clothing from the Roman-Egyptian context. It is as if they are trying to give the impression that the portrayed people are standing in front of you, right behind the portraits, which would fit the exhibition name “the people behind mummy portraits.” However, the texts in the entire exhibition make clear that the meaning of this title does not restrict itself to those portrayed; rather, the exhibition attempts to shed light on all people who have been related to the history of the portraits in some way.

6.2: Reflection

Overall, the analysis of the exhibition has seen some difficulties. First and foremost, the original plan of this thesis was to make a comparison between the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (RMO) museum in Leiden and the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam. To my surprise, however, it turned out that the portraits on display in the RMO were being loaned to the Face to Face exhibition in Amsterdam. Thus, that idea was replaced by the thesis in its current shape.

Practically speaking, there was another difficulty. I had to start writing before the exhibition had even opened, thus making it impossible to be sure what topics would be part of the exhibition. For that reason, I decided

to look at the literature and pick the background topics that seemed the most relevant compared to it. In this case, those were topics such as burial customs, identity, and provenance. Reflecting on the exhibition itself, the topics overall were very much related. Therefore, it seems that choosing to follow the literature has worked out well. Part of what made this succeed was using the APPEAR project as a source. Even before I was aware that the Allard Pierson Museum is part of this project, it offered a tremendous source of recent information. The topics written about in the project are similar to the contents of the exhibition.

As for a final reflection and perhaps a recommendation for further study, there is not much to say. Considering the focus of this thesis on a singular exhibition, not much could be said about further research. An exception could be in the case of future exhibitions on the portraits. For that reason, I believe the best recommendation for future study is one that has also been given by many of the used literature: studying the complete funerary art of Roman Egypt. As noted before, the mummy portraits have had the most scholarly and public attention by far compared to other funerary art. Though admittedly, by choosing this topic, I am also guilty of this trend.

Abstract

This thesis evaluates an exhibition at the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam called Face to Face: The People Behind Mummy Portraits. Mummy portraits were made on wooden panels or linen in Egypt during the Roman period. They were inserted in a mummy or a cartonnage case. After their discovery in the late nineteenth century, most of the portraits had been collected, without proper documentation of their find contexts. Because of this, much is unknown about the mummy portraits. Additionally, they were also often removed from their mummies; thus only few portraits are together with their corresponding mummies.

The naturalistic portrayal of the dead in wooden panels did not just gain attention from collectors. Many exhibitions have been held that showcased the portraits, sometimes without much information on their funerary context. Even the word mummy was avoided in some cases. These past exhibitions, along with recent new research collaborations on the portraits make the temporary exhibition at the Allard Pierson an interesting topic to study. Just how does the museum represent the portraits?

To answer that question, the paper combines literature and the contents of the exhibition. The literature is used to provide an archaeological and museological context to the mummy portraits. In the archaeological context, the portraits are described and the terminology is explained. Related topics such as funerary art, ancient Egyptian history and identity are all discussed extensively. As for the museological background, this chapter focusses on the portraits in terms of their provenance, provenience, and exhibition history. Though this chapter also discusses museum theory.

After both chapters on contextual background, the contents of the entire exhibition is described. Here, the halls and their contents are mentioned but not yet discussed. That is done in the discussion chapter, it which some of the choices in designing the exhibition are analyzed and critiqued. Finally in the conclusion, several key points of the presentation choices

from the exhibition are analyzed. The way the museum portrays the portraits in terms of object category is an important example of that. It is argued that the museum presents the mummy portraits as art. The conclusion of the research is that the museum presents the portraits corresponding to the topic of the hall they are in, with much focus on all the different groups of people that were part of their history.

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