



ANCIENT EGYPT

**The
College
of
Wooster
Art
Museum**

Ebert Art Center

PTOLEMAIC EGYPT

Egypt was ruled by indigenous pharaonic dynasties for nearly 3,000 years prior to the arrival of Alexander III of Macedonia (the “Great”), though he was not the first foreigner to conquer and rule Egypt. The preceding Late Period (712–332 B.C.E.) saw a number of non-Egyptian governments including two Persian dynasties, the second of which Alexander defeated in 332 B.C.E. After founding the eponymous city of Alexandria and, legend has it, receiving royal titles in the pharaonic tradition, Alexander left Egypt to continue his conquests. After his death in Babylon in 323 B.C.E., Alexander’s empire was divided amongst his military leaders—Egypt was given to the general Ptolemy—who administered lands while the issue of Alexander’s successor was decided. A series of wars were fought, and the outcome was the permanent division of Alexander’s vast empire into separate kingdoms. The Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt included its traditional ancient boundaries, Cyrenaica (Libya), Cyprus, and Syria-Palestine; the latter was lost to the Seleucid Empire in 195 B.C.E. Egypt became a Roman province in 30 B.C. after the deaths of its last Ptolemaic rulers Cleopatra VII and her son by Julius Caesar, Ptolemy XV Caesarion.



Cemetery of El-Hawawish, east of Akhmim, Egypt
Photograph: Courtesy Jonathan Elias, AMSC

FROM AKHMIM TO WOOSTER

The city of Akhmim, Egyptian *Khent-Min* and Greek *Khemmis* or *Panopolis*, rose to particular prominence during the Late Period overshadowing other Upper Egyptian cities—a status it held throughout the Ptolemaic and Roman eras. Located on the east bank of the Nile approximately 290 miles south of the modern capital of Cairo, the city was sacred to Min, a fertility god associated with the Eastern Desert. As a religious center, it was home to important Egyptian families from which came the priests and priestesses who staffed its many temples. In life, the Wooster mummy may have belonged to this social group.

The Akhmim necropolis was discovered in 1884 by French archaeologist and later head of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, Gaston Maspero (1846–1916). In his personal correspondence, Maspero describes the excavation of thousands of mummies and funerary objects from the site. The scope of the find and the lack of security allowed many objects, including mummies, to be looted and sold in bazaars to foreign tourists; the authorities themselves were involved in the illegal trade of artifacts. In 1885 in the nearby town of Asyut, a Presbyterian missionary and alumnus of Westminster College, the Rev. John Giffen, purchased four Akhmimic mummies and their coffins for eight dollars each. One was given to the Asyut College Museum in Egypt, where it still resides, and the rest returned with the Rev. John R. Alexander on his voyage home to the United States to be distributed amongst three



Mummiform coffin
Ptolemaic, c. 320–220 B.C.E.
wood, paint, gold
31 x 23 1/2 x 67 inches
The College of Wooster Art Museum 1901.1 a,b
Photograph: Matt Dilyard

Presbyterian-founded colleges: Erskine College in Due West, South Carolina; Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania; and the College of Wooster. The Erskine mummy was destroyed in a fire, but “Pesed,” the Westminster mummy, remains on display in their science library.

Upon her arrival in Wooster in 1885, the mummy was displayed in the College’s natural history museum in “Old Main.” A fire destroyed the structure in 1901, and the coffin sustained soot and water damage before it was carried out of the east wing’s first floor. By the 1920s, the mummy and her coffin were on display in Scovel Hall, and in the mid-1960s, she entered the Art Museum collection then housed in the College’s former library, Frick Hall.

THE WOOSTER MUMMY

Ptolemaic Egyptian society was comprised of a Greek-Macedonian aristocracy, Greek military pensioners, and a large indigenous Egyptian population. Despite foreign influences, a powerful priestly class assured that Egyptian religious and cultural traditions would remain strong until the very end of the period. The Wooster mummy and her coffin are examples of this continuum. The mummiform coffin first came into use in the Middle Kingdom, (2100–1640 B.C.E.). Though much



Dena Çirpili of Objects Conservation Services removing the soot from the Wooster coffin lid. Note the darker, uncleaned area to the right of her hand.

later in date, the Wooster coffin shows the deceased wearing a heavy wig, and her face is painted in gold symbolizing the incorruptible flesh of the gods. The body of the coffin is painted with a cream-colored background typical of Ptolemaic coffins; from the side it resembles a dress from which feet emerge toward the base of the coffin. Divided into horizontal registers, the imagery presents various depictions of the gods and goddesses associated with the funerary cult. Sacred hieroglyphic texts on the coffin would ensure the preservation of the body and the successful journey of the spirit of the deceased into the afterlife.

In October 2004, the mummy and lower coffin underwent a CT (computed tomography) scan at the Wooster Community Hospital Healthpoint facility. Present were two Akhmim Mummy Studies Consortium members, Jonathan Elias, Director, and Carter Lupton, Associate Director; the

AMSC is engaged in a long-term study of Akhmim mummies using CT technology. Analysis of the scan by Elias indicates that the Wooster mummy is female—determined by the shape of the pelvis—and that her estimated age at death was 35 to 43 years of age. Elias noted that the Wooster mummy’s right arm probably sustained a fracture that healed prior to her death, as did the oblique fracture identified on the mummy’s right femur. As a result of the latter healed fracture, the mummy’s right leg became shorter, possibly causing the scoliosis visible in her spine. Within the abdominal cavity, there are four linen packets that contain the mummy’s preserved internal organs.

In addition to the scan, a small piece of linen from the wrappings was supplied to the AMSC for Carbon 14 analysis. The results showed that the mummy, who is most likely the original occupant of the coffin, was prepared for the afterlife between 320 and 240 B.C.E. The CT scan also made possible the forensic reconstruction of the Wooster mummy’s head included in the exhibition. After the coffin’s cleaning in 2005, Jonathan Elias was able to translate some of the hieroglyphs. According to Elias, the possible name of the occupant of the coffin is Ta-irty-bai (ta yur tè bi) or “The Two Eyes of My Soul.”

FUNERARY ARTS

On display with the Wooster mummy are a variety of related funerary objects, most of which date to the Late Period (712–332 B.C.E.). *Ushabt*i or “answer” figurines were first made in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom (2100–1640 B.C.E.). They replaced earlier tomb statuettes of servants that accompanied the deceased on their journey into the afterlife where they would carry out a variety of domestic chores. *Ushabtis* usually take the form of an idealized, mummiform portrait of the deceased with



CT scan of the Wooster mummy skull
Courtesy Wooster Community Hospital
Radiology Services and Jonathan Elias



Beaded necklace with winged scarab
Late Period, 712–332 B.C.E.
faience, 1 x 3½ x ½ inches
The College of Wooster Art Museum 1975.546
Photograph: Matt Dilyard

painted or incised inscriptions that include the individual's name. Although in earlier times a range of materials was employed in their manufacture (wood, stone, metal, etc.), by the Third Intermediate Period (1070–712 B.C.E.) they were made almost exclusively in either clay or faience (glazed silicate). From this period onward, it was common for a burial to include 365 *ushabtis*, or one for each day of the year. The requirement led to a decline in both scale and quality; *ushabtis* became simple, mold-formed figures often without inscriptions. The multiple figures were commonly stored in a shrine-shaped box, such as the replica seen in the exhibition, and placed in the tomb.

Amulets (small plaques or pendants) and traditional jewelry forms were intended to prevent the desecration of the body by potential tomb robbers or to halt the ravages of time. As the chief resting place of the *ka*, the spirit of the deceased, the body was essential to the survival of the individual in the afterlife. The efficacy of these objects was ensured by the use of specific materials and the choice of symbolic imagery. These items were frequently placed on Egyptian mummies or included within their linen wrappings. The body of the pharaoh Tutankhamun (c. 1333–1323 B.C.E.) was decorated with 150 objects, though most Egyptians could not afford such an extravagant display. By the Ptolemaic period, amulets had become less common; the Wooster mummy has no amulets or jewelry in her wrappings. However, the collar and pectoral necklace depicted on the coffin lid were inexpensive alternatives to real jewelry.

Stephen J. Lucey
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Ancient Ohio/Ancient Egypt provides an opportunity to compare the material culture of two peoples that existed at the same time on two different continents. Both exhibitions were developed by Stephen Lucey, Assistant Professor of Art History at Wooster, who I thank for his boundless enthusiasm for the art and archaeology of ancient cultures.

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At Wooster, Doug McGlumphy, Museum Preparator, produced beautiful installation designs for both exhibitions, and Joyce Fuell, Museum Administrative Assistant, handled the many logistical details.

Kitty McManus Zurko
Director/Curator
The College of Wooster Art Museum

FURTHER READING

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The College of Wooster Art Museum
Sussel Gallery and Burton D. Morgan Gallery
Ebert Art Center

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