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**ABSTRACT**

**Cartonnage to Plaster**

Mummy Masks of the Ptolemaic and Early Roman Periods from Tuna el-Gebel

Ahmed Derbala – Asja Müller

This paper deals with the fragments of four cartonnage and plaster masks excavated in 2018 during the excavations of the University of Minia at Tuna el-Gebel. Starting with a summary of the state of knowledge on pre-Roman tombs at Tuna el-Gebel, these objects are described both iconographically and stylistically and a chronological classification is attempted. Furthermore, the currently very limited state of research on Ptolemaic mummy masks as a whole is (re)assessed, critically exploring the possibilities and limitations of a discussion of production technique, function and dating. The paper concludes that three of the mummy masks (I–II and IV) find their closest parallels in the neighbouring necropolis of Antinoöpolis, while one piece (III) corresponds most closely to masks from Thebes. All the masks probably belonged to local persons of high status but were not intended to represent the deceased before a living audience. Their main function was rather to assist the deceased in his/her transformation into a divine being. Based on current knowledge, a relative chronological sequence can be suggested from the cartonnage masks I–III from the early to middle Ptolemaic period to plaster mask IV from the late Ptolemaic to early Imperial period.

**KEYWORDS**

mummy mask, Tuna el-Gebel, Ptolemaic period, burial equipment, cartonnage, plaster

# Cartonnage to Plaster

## Mummy Masks of the Ptolemaic and Early Roman Periods from Tuna el-Gebel

### Pre-Roman Tombs at Tuna el-Gebel: State of the Art

<sup>1</sup> The ancient site near the modern village of Tuna el-Gebel (Fig. 1) is best known for its extensive above-ground cemetery from the Roman period<sup>1</sup>, in addition to the so-called Ibiotapheion<sup>2</sup> and the dwellings there<sup>3</sup>. This necropolis served as a burial place for Hermoupolis Magna, the capital of the Hermoupolitan nome, and the small cult community that lived next to the tombs. However, apart from the huge underground galleries from the Late period to the Ptolemaic period containing thousands of animal mummies, very little is known about the period before Roman rule, i. e. the New Kingdom, the Late period and the Ptolemaic period, when this site was already used for religious purposes and as a burial site. Only in recent decades has research renewed its interest in the tombs from the period before the reign of the Roman emperors in Egypt. The presence of such tombs from the New Kingdom<sup>4</sup>, the Late period and the Ptolemaic period has been demonstrated near Al-Margua and Al-Ghureiffa<sup>5</sup> to the North, West and Southwest of the modern village of Tuna el-Gebel. However, these contexts are still awaiting detailed evaluation and publication.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to a DFG project of the Landesmuseum Hannover headed by Katja Lembke and a joint mission of the Universities of Cairo and Munich, more information is now available on the Late period and Ptolemaic tombs<sup>6</sup> at the ancient Ibiotapheion (dating from the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty to the Ptolemaic period). Most of these newly discovered or recently re-investigated tombs are concentrated in three areas: 1) in the Gebel, west of the animal galleries, 2) in the east, directly on a processional axis from the settlement to the Ibiotapheion, and 3) in the south, around the early Ptolemaic tomb of Petosiris.

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<sup>1</sup> Gabra 1941c; Gabra 1971; Lembke 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Kessler 1983; Boessneck 1987; Kessler 1998; Kessler 2011; Schlüter 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Flossmann-Schütze 2013; Flossmann-Schütze 2017a; Flossmann-Schütze – Brose 2018a; Flossmann-Schütze – Brose 2018b; Flossmann-Schütze 2020; Flossmann-Schütze et al. 2020.

<sup>4</sup> So far, the data collected is mainly prosopographic in nature: Auenmüller 2017; Auenmüller 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Abou Seif 1928.

<sup>6</sup> Overview: Lembke 2015; Flossmann-Schütze 2017b; Awad 2020.

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One was even inserted in the Ibiotapheion itself<sup>7</sup>. Many of them belong to priests of Thoth, as in the case of Anch-Hor<sup>8</sup>, Djet-Thot-iu-ef-anch<sup>9</sup>, Petosiris<sup>10</sup> and two persons named Padikam<sup>11</sup>. In contrast to the high Imperial period (2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D.), when most tombs had the form of houses made of mud bricks and people were buried above ground on wooden planks and on benches or beds<sup>12</sup>, the pre-Roman buildings had superstructures hewn into the rock (cf. the chapel of the Late period tomb of Padikam<sup>13</sup>) or were built of limestone ashlar as temple-like structures (pronaos and inner chapel, they date mainly from the early Ptolemaic period<sup>14</sup>). The mummies themselves were buried in underground burial chambers, which could be reached through deep shafts leading off from the pronaos or the chapel<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> However, there is a fundamental lack of information about the grave furnishings and the burial ritual associated with these architectures. Most of the tombs were extensively reused during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods<sup>16</sup> and looted in antiquity and modern times, leading to a very confusing picture regarding the furnishings of the original tomb owners. To make matters worse, reports from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when many of these tombs came to light, rarely discuss their exact contents and positioning<sup>17</sup>. Only two Roman tombs<sup>18</sup> and one tomb from the Late period<sup>19</sup> were essentially undisturbed when they were discovered; this is not true of any of the Ptolemaic tombs.

<sup>4</sup> This situation is reflected in the available information on mummy furnishings: the burials at Tuna el-Gebel and Al-Ghureiffa show a wide range of external burial furnishings, ranging from Late period rectangular and anthropoid stone sarcophagi and anthropoid wooden coffins<sup>20</sup> to Roman wooden beds<sup>21</sup> and anthropoid coffins<sup>22</sup>, or even gilded plaster envelopes<sup>23</sup>. The mummy itself could be decorated with bead nets and metal masks in the Late period<sup>24</sup> or in the Roman period with (decorated) shrouds<sup>25</sup> and/or plaster masks<sup>26</sup>. The mummy vessels of the (early) Ptolemaic period, on the other hand, resemble those of the Late period: rectangular and anthropoid stone sarcophagi as well as anthropoid wooden coffins<sup>27</sup>. Nonetheless, the mummy decoration itself, such as envelopes or masks, is practically unknown.

<sup>5</sup> Yet, new excavations began in 2018 through a joint mission of the Centre for Archaeological Research and Studies of the University of Minia and the Ministry of

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<sup>7</sup> Gabra 1939, 493–495; Wass 2013; Wass 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Wass 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Sabottka 1983.

<sup>10</sup> Lefebvre 1923/1924; Cherpion et al. 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Gabra 1941b; Prell – Lembke 2015, 216–251; Brose et al. 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Flossmann 2010; Lembke 2015, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Brose et al. 2019, 77.

<sup>14</sup> Lembke 2015, 6 f.; Prell – Lembke 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Lembke 2010, 234–240.

<sup>16</sup> Lefebvre 1923/1924, 18–29; Prell – Lembke 2015, 211–215; Flossmann-Schütze 2017b, 136 f.; Awad 2020, 109.

<sup>17</sup> Weill 1914, 90–93 Nr. 8; Gabra 1941b; Gabra 1941c; Gabra 1971.

<sup>18</sup> Kessler et al. 2008; Flossmann 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Kessler et al. 2008, 24–36; Wass 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Gabra 1928; Maspero – Gauthier 1939, 79–109 no. 29315; Wass 2013, 537–542; Aboda et al. 2018, 89–142; Brose et al. 2019, 78 f.

<sup>21</sup> Schütze 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Kurth 1990.

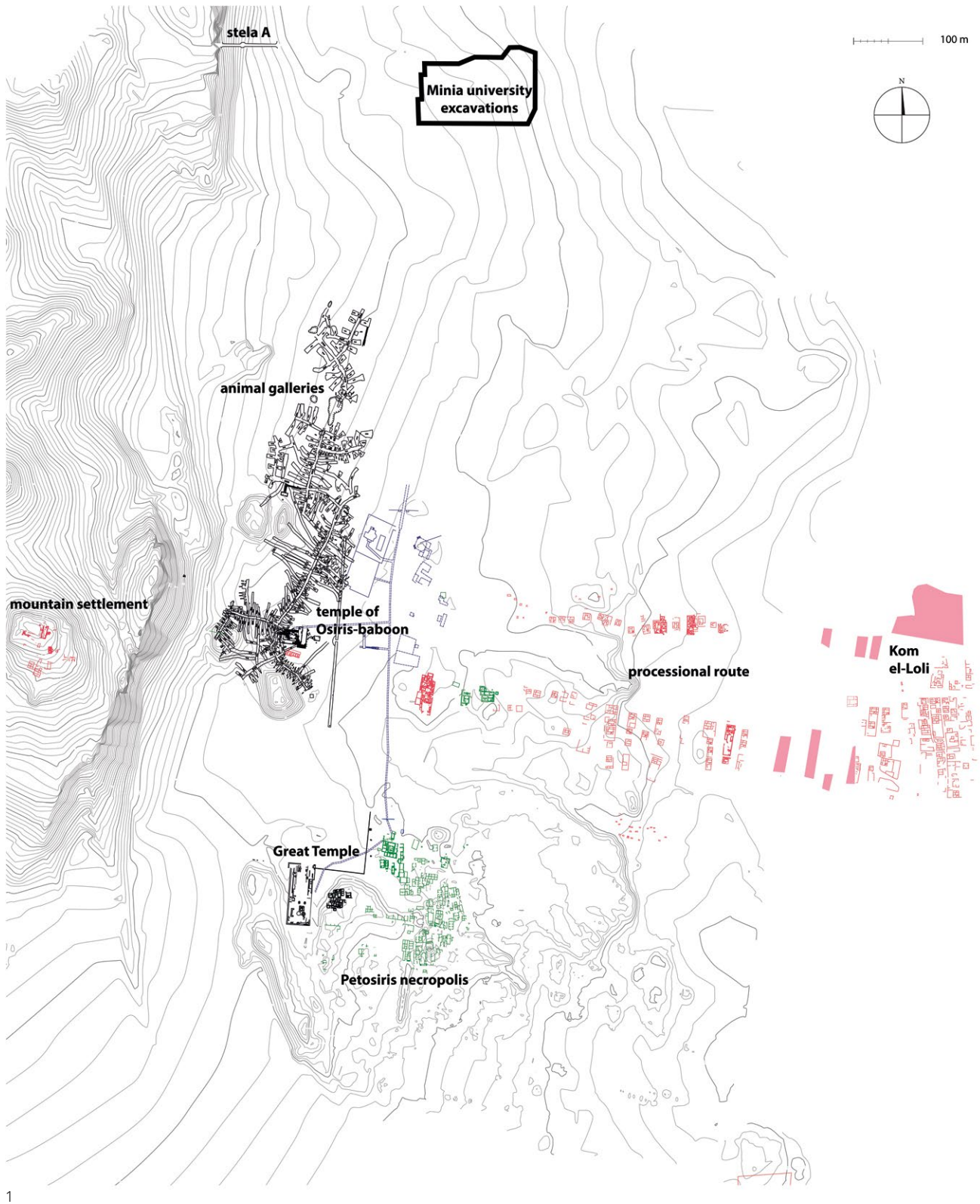
<sup>23</sup> Kessler et al. 2008, 84–93.

<sup>24</sup> Wass 2013, 545; Brose et al. 2019, 79 f.; Wass 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Flossmann-Schütze 2017b, 135; Ortiz-García 2020, 119–123.

<sup>26</sup> Grimm 1974, 71–91; Kessler et al. 2008, 84. 94 f.; Flossmann 2010, 91; Müller 2021, 180–187.

<sup>27</sup> Lefebvre 1923/1924, 17–21. 201–205; Gabra 1941a; Gabra 1941b, 14–17. Two limestone sarcophagi and wooden coffin planks from the early Ptolemaic tomb TG2004.G2 probably belonged to the original tomb owners: Kessler 2006, 79.



1

Antiquities. They focus on the area east of the northernmost animal galleries and north of the excavations of Cairo and Munich Universities (Fig. 1). The research area borders the ancient settlement mound of Kom el-Loli to the east and the main road leading to the archaeological site of Tuna el-Gebel; the boundary stela of the city of Tell el-Amarna is located opposite. Several recently discovered tombs containing (disturbed) human remains as well as parts of their grave goods<sup>28</sup> reveal fascinating new details about the

Fig. 1: Tuna el-Gebel. Egyptian research area

28 Griffiths 2019, 6.

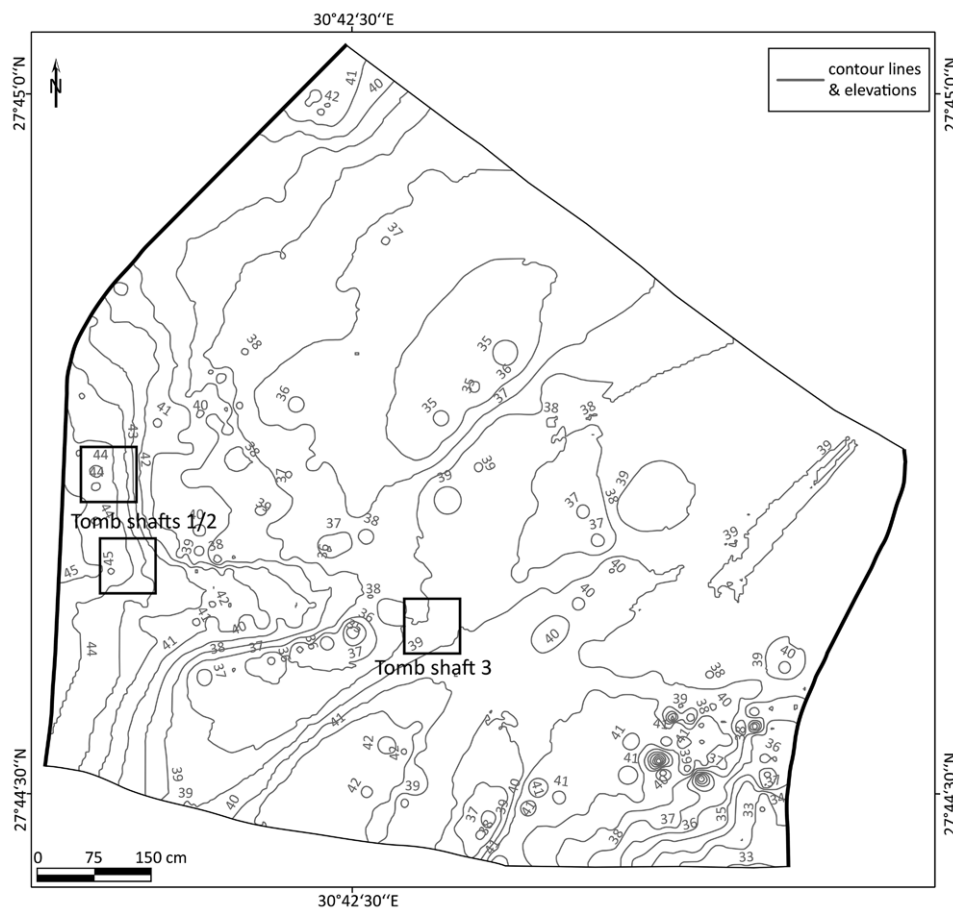


Fig. 2: Tuna el-Gebel. Egyptian research area (scale 1 : 100)

2

Ptolemaic mummy decoration at Tuna el-Gebel, about which so little is known so far. Four of the finds from inside these monuments, including three mummy masks made of cartonnage (masks I–III) and one made of plaster (mask IV), will now be discussed<sup>29</sup> in order to improve our understanding of the Ptolemaic necropolis of Tuna el-Gebel and its burial ritual, which is largely dominated by Roman material in current publications.

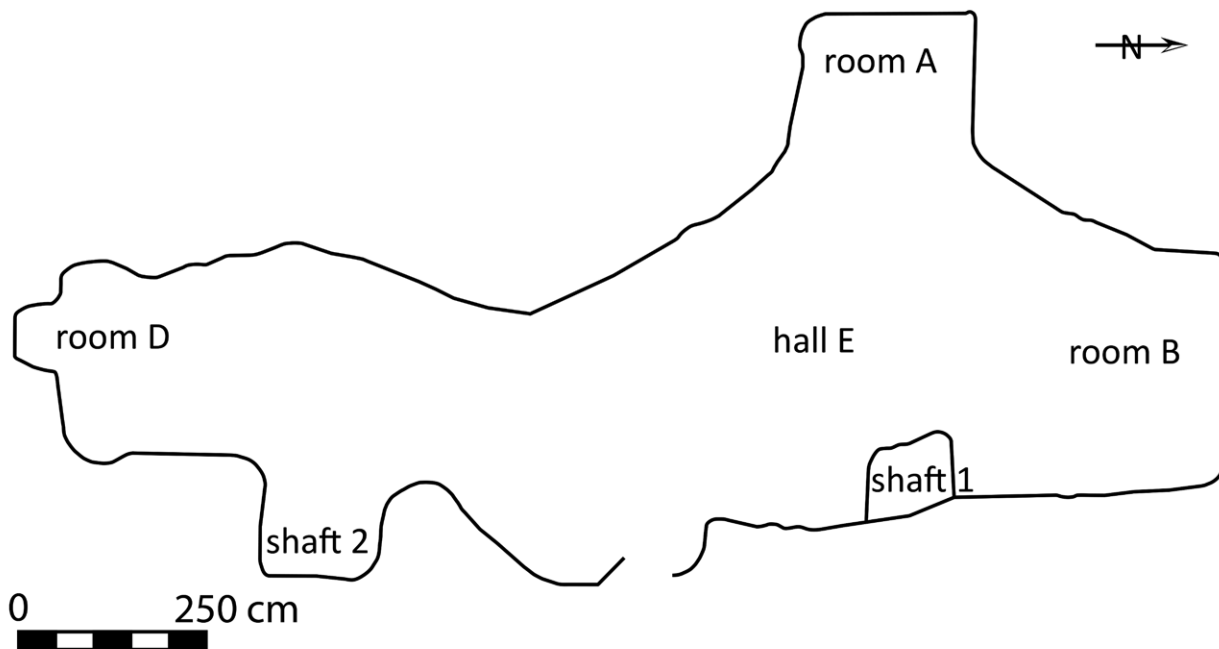
## Context and Description of the Mummy Masks

6 The masks were discovered during the first season of excavation work from February to April 2018. The site is a flat area with some sandy mounds of low height, probably the result of looting (Fig. 2). Work at the site uncovered shaft tombs dug into the sandstone. Signs of above-ground superstructures such as chapels are missing, which could be due to unfavourable preservation conditions.

### Masks I–III of Tomb 1/2

7 The first three masks (I–III) were found in a tomb (1/2) with an irregular cross-section, to which two separate shafts lead down (Fig. 3). The tomb contained scattered bones and charred remains of mummies, suggesting that the contents of the tomb

29 The two authors of this paper were entrusted with the publication of these objects due to their proven expertise in this field of research. Dr Ahmed Derbala is an expert in the field of Ptolemaic-Roman funerary art from Egypt. He was part of the Egyptian excavation team at Tuna el-Gebel in 2018–2019. Dr Asja Müller also has a research focus on Graeco-Roman Egypt. She wrote her dissertation on Imperial period mummy masks from Egypt (Müller 2021).



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had been manipulated in an earlier period. The shafts allow access to a transverse room (E), to which all the other chambers adjoin. Rooms B and C (not on the map) were not excavated during the season, but room A (2.10 m × 2.70 m × 2.47 m), contained the two cartonnage masks (I–II) and another one (III) in room D.

8 Masks I–II are very fragmentarily preserved, having been crushed by the lid of a stone sarcophagus that originally protected them from above (Fig. 4). Both masks consist of a cartonnage on a papyrus base, as indicated by Greek letters on the inside. Thin layers of plaster were applied to this base layer of papyrus sheets glued together. They formed the base for the application of the colour coating<sup>30</sup>.



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Fig. 3: Tuna el-Gebel. Tomb 1/2 (scale 1 : 100)

Fig. 4: Tuna el-Gebel. Mask II *in situ*

### Mask II

9 Mask II is somewhat more extensively preserved than mask I, so it will be described here first. Three main fragments remain which very probably belong together. The first one (Fig. 4) includes the upper part of the head, which shows a winged creature stretched out above the head of the deceased. Directly above the forehead, two ornaments can be seen framing the head: a multi-coloured band with alternating red, blue and green strokes and, directly below, another wider band decorated with alternating triangles in yellow and blue. On the same fragment, the temples of the mask are also depicted directly above the ears. This area is painted deep blue without the continuous layer of colour being interrupted by ornamentation. The upper part of the mask's

30 For the fabrication of cartonnage: Adams 1966; Krutzsch 2008, 99 f.; Vandenbeusch et al. 2021.





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Fig. 5: Tuna el-Gebel. Masks I-II

Fig. 6: Tuna el-Gebel. Mummy mask, Paris, Musée du Louvre E 12059 C

Fig. 7: Tuna el-Gebel. Antinooupolis, mummy mask, Lyon, Musée des Confluences 90002432



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right ear is also preserved. It is painted on the smooth surface, not sculpted and shows a fine finish. On the pink ground, the inner details of the ear are painted in thin red strokes. The three-dimensional depth of the auricle is illusionistically represented by a purple shadow. Both the ears and the face are framed by a narrow yellow colour stripe, which is separated from the adjacent elements by a red line.

10 The second fragment of mask II shows the face of the deceased including

his left ear (Fig. 5). Under the yellow band mentioned above, two thin brows span small round eyes with the typical long eyelid line. The nose is badly damaged by the weight of the sarcophagus lid; its shape cannot be identified with certainty but appears to be rather short and broad. Most striking, however, are the mouth and chin. The lips are delicately painted in deep red, with a dividing line between them. At both ends, the mouth is framed by a thin line in the shape of an S (reversed on the right side), suggesting wrinkles in this area. Another red line is below the mouth, this time curved to represent a round chin. As remains of deep blue paint next to the left ear of the mask show, the face was framed by blue wig lobes starting at the temples and probably extending to the chest.

11 Where the third large fragment of mask II was located is not entirely clear. On the *in situ* image (Fig. 4) it lies just below the chin and could therefore represent part of the chest of the mask. However, because the context was so disturbed when it was discovered, it is also possible that the fragment belongs to the back of the mask and thus shows the back of the head. The original position is of great importance, as the

fragment shows a deep blue area under a yellow bar. On the right side, a rectangular field can be seen. It consists of a red and a green square with black lines forming a triangle. If this was part of the front of the mask, it could have been part of a false beard. However, if it is part of the back, it could be the remains of a braid that adorned some Egyptian masks.

### Mask I

12 Mask I resembles mask II in many details, although in this case only one fragment is preserved (Fig. 5). It shows the completely preserved face of the deceased with thin brows arching small, round eyes and a short, broad nose. The little mouth is painted in the same way as in mask II: S-shaped folds flank the dark red lips. It is not clear, however, whether the chin has also been highlighted with paint. Below, a dotted line possibly suggests a necklace or the upper part of a Wesekh collar. The ear is depicted in the same illusionistic manner as in mask II, with purple strokes texturing the conch and earlobe, and shadows for three-dimensional depth. The only clear difference between the two masks is the way the brownish-yellow face has been separated from the deep blue area of the wig. As with the forehead of mask II, a continuous band frames the forehead, ears and neck of the mask. Here, however, this is subdivided with red, green and blue strokes, whereas in mask II it was a simple yellow stripe.

13 Overall, apart from such minor differences, there can be little doubt that the two masks were made in the same workshop, as their technological, iconographic and stylistic features are largely the same.

### Mask III

14 However, this does not apply to the third cartonnage mask (III; Fig. 8, 10) found in tomb 1/2, room D (1.80 m × 1.35 m × 155 m). It is the smallest room in the complex, which, like the others, contained scattered human bones. In some respects, this specimen is better preserved than the other two masks in this tomb complex. Although only the lower left quarter of the face is preserved, its shape, as well as large parts of the decorative programme, can be reconstructed from the fragments that fit together. This mask is also made of cartonnage, but here no traces of reused papyrus are visible. The three parts of the cartonnage are instead made of linen and plaster. Since so little of the face has survived (Fig. 8), it is practically impossible to describe the stylistic features of the deceased. It seems that the face is organically shaped, with a straight nose and a regularly shaped mouth, while the left ear has been modelled rather fleetingly. But that is all that can be said. The skin of the face and neck is painted with a bright yellow colour that probably imitates gold. No traces of natural hair are visible on the left temple, but a band framing the jaw indicates a thin beard. The head is framed by parallel yellow and grey-green colour strokes representing a formal three-part Egyptian wig. It ends at the chest of the mask, as shown by the preserved chest panel (not shown on the pictures). Below and between the two lobes is the usual wide Wesekh collar, consisting of alternating rows of vegetal patterns (triangles,



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Fig. 8: Tuna el-Gebel. Mask III, face fragment

Fig. 9: Tuna el-Gebel. Mummy mask of Hornedjitef, London, British Museum EA 6678



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Fig. 10: Tuna el-Gebel. Mask III, right side panel

the same room (Fig. 12) showing the goddess Nut kneeling on a basket and stretching her winged arms out to either side. Two jackals (probably Anubis and Upuaut) flank her. An adjoining piece of cartonnage from the left side wall of the same cartonnage shows an adoration scene with Osiris as a djed pillar including a woman (Isis or Nephthys?) and a mummy-shaped figure (a son of Horus or the deceased?). These two fragments belong to a different object than the one described above (whether mask or cartonnage cover) since the wings of the groove are much more slender than those of the winged creature on the yellow-faced mask III. Moreover, the fracture lines run completely differently on the two specimens. Nevertheless, the two smaller fragments can indicate what the yellow-faced mask once looked like from behind.

16 If not the top of the head, at least the right-side wall of the yellow-faced mask III is almost completely preserved, even if some smaller patches of paint have come loose (Fig. 10). Similar to the two smaller pieces that do not belong to this mask, it shows a scene that focuses on the worship of Osiris. Here, too, Osiris is depicted as a djed pillar with a human upper body. He is flanked by two rearing uraea, which testify to his royal position. To the left and right of Osiris are two women raising their hands in a gesture of worship. As their headdresses indicate, the woman on the left is Nephthys and the

Fig. 11: Tuna el-Gebel. Mask III, fragment with uncertain positioning

Fig. 12: Tuna el-Gebel. Fragments of another mask(?)



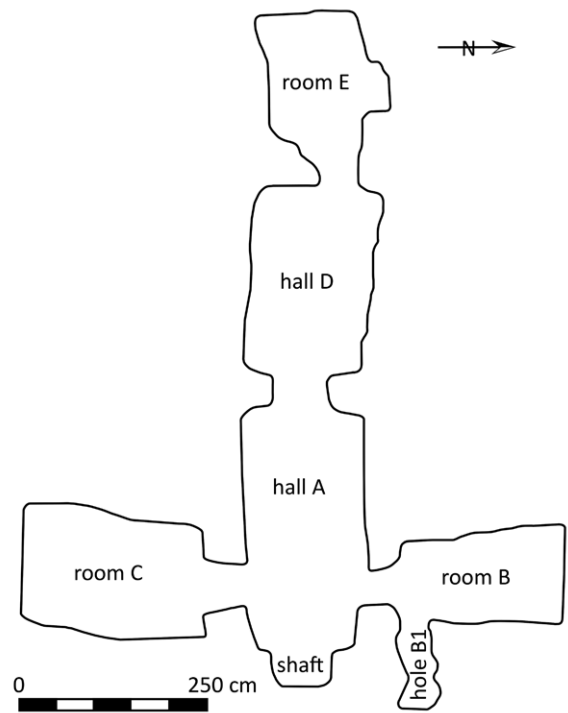
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12

woman on the right is Isis. The entire scene is framed by a band of red, green and blue lines at the bottom and on the left edge. Since there is quite a large space between Nephthys and this band, which bears some very faint black strokes, another figure may have been depicted here. Possibly, as with the two isolated cartonnage fragments mentioned, this is a son of Horus or the deceased. That the decorative programme of the yellow-faced mask contains such mummy-shaped figures is proven by another fragment of this mask, whose original position cannot be determined with certainty (Fig. 11). Furthermore, the scene of the right panel was probably mirrored exactly on the left side, as another depiction of Isis with raised hands is preserved there.

17 So, we have a pretty good idea of what the yellow-faced mask originally looked like. There is little doubt that the cartonnage mask originally represented the deceased (male or female, it cannot be decided) in torso-like form, with the head and a semi-circular chest panel on which were the lobes of the tri-coloured wig. And the decoration programme included a winged solar creature at the back of the head and matching scenes from Osirian mythology on the left and right. However, we have no idea what, if anything, was depicted on the back.



13

Fig. 13: Tuna el-Gebel. Tomb 3 (scale 1 : 100)

### Mask IV of Tomb 3

18 Mask IV was found in tomb 3, the shaft of which leads to an underground gallery consisting of two axes, one north-south and one east-west (Fig. 13). The tomb comprised five chambers. The first is the central chamber A (3.10 m × 3.30 m × 2.10 m × 2.47 m), at the eastern end of which the shaft enters. Four dismembered mummies were found here, as well as numerous human bones scattered throughout the hall and the tomb in general. This clearly indicates that the tomb had been looted at an unknown time. The long side of an undecorated stone sarcophagus was also found in this room. From this chamber, three further rooms open on either side. Room B (1.96 m × 1.35 m × 3.46 m × 3.32 m) is connected to room A via an opening in the north wall. Inside, scattered human bones and two skulls of young baboons were found. None of them showed traces of mummification.

Amid this pile of bones, however, parts of mask IV were also found, which was lying on its face when it was discovered. Exactly opposite this chamber, on the south side, was another room. This room (C) contained a pile of scattered bones and many human skulls. Apart from this north-south axis, there were two other rooms connected to room A on the east-west axis. Room D (3.72 m × 3.74 m × 2.02 m × 2.15 m) opens in the west wall of room A. Here, besides some scattered mummies, two undisturbed burials were found (Fig. 14). Through this area one reaches another room, E (2.02 m × 1.92 m × 2.25 m × 1.93 m), which lies like an annex on the



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Fig. 14: Tuna el-Gebel. Mummies from room D



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Fig. 15: Tuna el-Gebel. Coffin without lid with human bones, room E

west side. In it, two more stone sarcophagi without lids and inscriptions were found (Fig. 15). Both were in very poor condition and contained scattered human bones. In addition, a well-preserved ceramic bowl was uncovered near the southern coffin in room E (Fig. 16).

19 The fourth mask (Fig. 17) from the Egyptian excavations differs greatly from the specimens from shaft tomb 1/2. This mask consists of a rather thick layer of plaster that is broken into several small pieces. There is no evidence of a papyrus or linen layer. The face is relatively complete. It shows the deceased with broad, long brows arching over two large eyes, which are rimmed with black paint. In contrast to masks I and II, there is no extended eyelid line reaching to the temples. The nose is long and has a broad bridge. The cheeks emerge gently rounded from the face. The mouth is relatively wide with full lips and sharp contours. There are no signs of wrinkles. The chin is accentuated by a deep dimple in the centre. Directly above the face is a sharp edge separating this part of the body from the top of the head. Only the front part of this area is preserved. It shows a pattern of black strokes on a blue and red surface, probably representing the feathers of a winged creature. However, the creature itself is not preserved. Instead, we have a uraeus rising

from the centre of the wig, right at the edge, bearing a sun disk on its head. As the ears have detached from the face, their positioning cannot be commented on. Both are of life-like size; if there was an illusionistic rendering by colour, it has not been preserved. Of the other small fragments found during the excavation, only one can be identified with certainty (Fig. 17, turned upside down): it is the left or right lobe of the mask's wig, which was originally attached to the chest panel. Its identification cannot be questioned, as it is clearly identifiable by its gently rounded shape with a horizontal border in the lower part, as well as by the multi-coloured paint strokes that decorate the surface vertically.

20 The extremely fragmentary state of preservation of mask IV makes it very difficult to make statements about its original overall appearance. We can say with certainty that this mask covered the head and part of the chest of the mummy since a

Fig. 16: Tuna el-Gebel. Bowl from room E

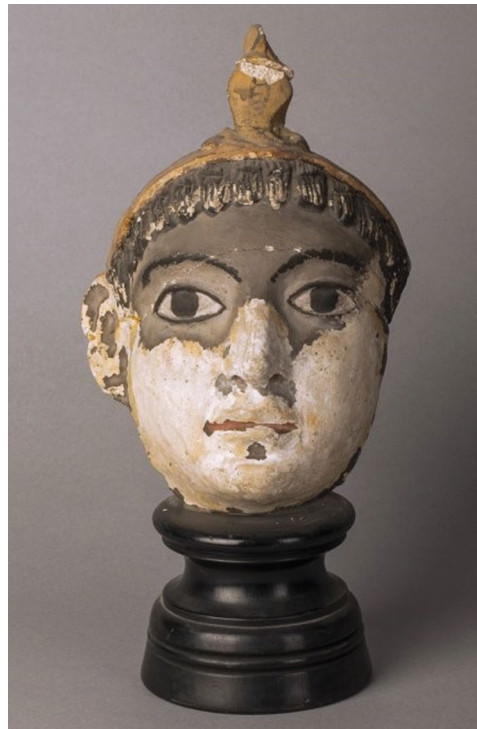




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Fig. 17: Tuna el-Gebel. Mask IV from room B

Fig. 18: Mummy mask, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM 13163

Fig. 19: Mummy mask, Evansville Museum of Arts, History & Science, Evansville, Indiana, 1958.061

fragment of the wig lobes has been preserved. However, we have no indication of the overall shape. It could well be that mask IV had the box-like appearance of the Roman plaster masks from Tuna el-Gebel with cartonnage panels attached around the head<sup>31</sup>, but nothing has survived to confirm this assumption.

31 Müller 2021, pl. 48, 2.

## Dating the Masks

21 As we will show in the next section, an assessment of the date of manufacture in relation to all four masks is extremely difficult and can only be approximated by a thorough and step by step discussion of all relevant aspects including iconography, method of manufacture and material, context and objects of comparison.

### Iconography

22 The masks themselves do not have any iconographic features that could be independently dated, as is the case with the Roman specimens from Tuna el-Gebel (which show fashionable hairstyles, jewellery, and clothing of the Imperial period<sup>32</sup>). This could indicate a date before the high Imperial period, but nothing more, because it is not compelling that such features must always have been present in all Imperial period mummy masks – perhaps we have simply not recognised examples with purely Pharaonic period iconography in the Imperial period so far, because there was nothing to indicate such a dating<sup>33</sup>.

### Fabrication

23 Similarly, this also applies to the method of manufacture. As shown, masks I–III consist of cartonnage on a papyrus (I–II) and linen base (III), while the head of mask IV was moulded exclusively in plaster. The heads of more easily datable Imperial period mummy masks from Tuna el-Gebel were also worked exclusively in plaster<sup>34</sup>. However, they also had cartonnage panels on the chest and sides of the head, and this cartonnage was made exclusively of linen<sup>35</sup>, never of papyrus as in the case of some specimens dated to the Ptolemaic period<sup>36</sup>. If we take this as the basis of a relative chronological sequence, we could assume that masks I and II were made first, since they are entirely made of papyrus-based cartonnage (like some of the Ptolemaic masks). Then follows mask III with a linen cartonnage (as with the panels of the Imperial period specimens) and finally mask IV with a pure plaster head without supporting layers of linen (as with the Imperial period specimens). But even this cannot simply be taken at face value without further consideration, since we are so woefully ill-informed about the workings of individual workshops. It is quite conceivable that several workshops or craftsmen<sup>37</sup> worked simultaneously with different approaches, some using recycled papyri as the basis of the cartonnage, others using reused linen. That there are masks with an assured Ptolemaic date made of linen cartonnage is beyond question<sup>38</sup>, so a simple equation of papyrus cartonnage with Ptolemaic dating must be ruled out. Only an Imperial dating

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32 Müller 2021, 60–72. 85–90. 93–98.

33 There is a comparable case in Imperial period Hawara (Fayum). The mask in question has purely Pharaonic-Egyptian characteristics – if the name of the deceased had not been preserved (Titos Flavios Demetrios), this object would undoubtedly have been dated much earlier than the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. as Stadler 2004, 33 f. has already noted.

34 Clarke 1995; Colinart et al. 2002; Müller 2021, 42.

35 Aubert – Cortopassi 2004, 16; Haslauer 2007, 126; Müller 2021, 43.

36 Unfortunately, many of these pieces were dismantled in order to extract the papyri, whose value was estimated to be higher than that of the masks themselves. In the meantime, however, there is at least a strong tendency to develop methods to extract or even read the papyri without destroying the entire object. The literature on this subject is numerous, cf. e. g. Wendelbo 1975; Hofmann 1976; Wright 1983; Janis 1997; Krutzsch 2008; Frösén 2009, 87–91; Gibson et al. 2018.

37 That masks I–II were not made by the same craftsmen as mask III is in any case unquestionable, if one recalls the great differences in iconographic and stylistic features.

38 Compare for example the mask of Hornedjitef dated to the early Ptolemaic period by an associated inscription (Johnson et al. 1995).

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for the papyrus cartonnage can be excluded in this way with a reasonably high degree of probability.

## Context

24 If we broaden the focus and look at the tomb inventory as a whole, the resulting picture is not very promising either: there are no inscriptions on or near the mummies that would allow a palaeographic dating by association. The roughly hewn stone sarcophagi inside tomb 3 are of a type that cannot be precisely evaluated chronologically. Such unadorned containers occur from the Late period to the Roman period in the tombs of Tuna el-Gebel<sup>39</sup>. The bowl from room E in tomb 3, which is preserved in an excellent state of preservation, does not help either. It is of a very general type described by Mandy Mamedow as S1<sup>40</sup>. This type of vessel was not made for the tomb context, but for domestic purposes, where it was used to make and eat food. Similar bowls have been found, for example, in the tower house TG2012.K6, the period of use for which has been dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.<sup>41</sup>. Nevertheless, type S1 is regularly found in tombs, where it is reused as a vessel for food offered to the deceased, for food consumed by family members at feasts inside or outside the tomb, and as a vessel for burning incense<sup>42</sup>. Thus, this simple form cannot be dated much more precisely than that of the undecorated sarcophagi.

25 Funerary architecture is not much help either. Subterranean passages leading to rectangular burial chambers are by no means limited to a specific period in Tuna el-Gebel. They are found in Late period shaft tombs<sup>43</sup> as well as in Ptolemaic tombs of ashlar masonry<sup>44</sup> and even in the mud-brick houses of the early Imperial period, although underground shafts became rarer over time<sup>45</sup>. What distinguishes these tombs from others, however, is the architecture and decoration of their superstructure, be it a chapel<sup>46</sup>, a temple-like building<sup>47</sup> or a house-like structure<sup>48</sup>. If such a building existed in the case of mask tombs 1/2 and 3, however, it has not survived.

26 So, we have to rely on typological and stylistic considerations to date the masks, which of course can be prone to error. The most obvious step would be a comparison with mummy masks from Tuna el-Gebel itself, for which the dating is certain.

## Objects of Comparison from Tuna el-Gebel

27 The material from Tuna el-Gebel, which can be dated with some certainty on the basis of fashionable Roman hairstyles, jewellery and clothing, includes specimens from the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (at the latest c. 40 A.D.) to the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.<sup>49</sup>. These masks have a box- or tongue-shaped appearance and consist of a plaster head to which linen-based cartonnage panels are attached. It can therefore be said that our three cartonnage helmet masks I–III do not resemble the Roman examples at all. The only piece that comes into question for comparison is plaster mask IV, which is so fragmentarily preserved that its original shape cannot be reconstructed. Yet, apart from

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39 Personal commentary by Mélanie Flossmann-Schütze, project Tuna el-Gebel, Munich University.

40 Mamedow 2017, 64 f.

41 Mamedow 2020, 296. 299 fig. 4.

42 Mamedow 2017, 64.

43 Brose et al. 2019, 78 fig. 7.

44 Lefebvre 1923/1924, pl. 2; Gabra 1941b, pl. 5.

45 Lembke 2015, 11 f.

46 Brose et al. 2019, 77.

47 Lembke 2015, 6 f.; Awad 2020, 97–99.

48 Lembke 2015, 8 f.; Awad 2020, 99 f.

49 Müller 2021, 180–187.



the material (plaster), it has only the three-parted wig in common with the Roman specimens. The ureus, on the other hand, set it apart from the latter, as Roman masks do not usually have this feature (see discussion below).

28 The only pre-Roman mask from Tuna el-Gebel that can be dated with any degree of certainty is a piece of gilded silver found in the tomb of Ankh-Hor in the Ibiotapheion<sup>50</sup>. Its dating to the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty is based on the layout of the gallery in which the tomb was found (the oldest part of the Ibiotapheion), as well as the furniture (canopic, shabtis, etc.)<sup>51</sup>. The material (metal), the shape (which does not enclose the whole head) and the style (broad face) are in no way similar to the cartonnage or plaster masks discussed here. Again, the only consistent feature is the three-parted wig, which was very common in the iconography of mummy masks from Tuna el-Gebel. It is only in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. that the wigs are replaced by the depiction of cloaks<sup>52</sup>.

29 According to Günter Grimm, however, there are a few masks or mummy coverings from Tuna el-Gebel that are made of cartonnage like those found in the shaft tomb 1/2<sup>53</sup>. Only two of these can still be found in the Louvre collection<sup>54</sup> and only one of them (Fig. 6) is unequivocally a mummy mask (the other piece looks rather like part of a cartonnage enveloping the complete body<sup>55</sup>). This helmet-shaped mask of a child shows the deceased of indeterminate sex in a torso-like design with a bluish three-parted wig and a Wesekh collar, similar to cartonnage masks I–II. The forehead is decorated with a red band, but no figures (e. g. ba-bird, falcon, Osiris, etc.) adorn it. Nor does the mask have the same stylistic features as the cartonnage masks I–II, which emphasise the mouth and nose of the deceased. We cannot, therefore, assign it to the same workshop as the other two cartonnage masks. Furthermore, its dating is not certain. The piece from the Louvre comes from André Gombert's excavations at Tuna el-Gebel in 1902–1903, whose untimely demise, caused by an accident, prevented a detailed excavation report. Therefore, nothing is known about the circumstances of the find, although it may have taken place in the vicinity of the recent Egyptian excavations<sup>56</sup>. Grimm assigned the piece to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., but without giving reasons for this<sup>57</sup>. Certainly, this dating stems from his relative chronological sequence of Ptolemaic to early Imperial mummy masks, according to which a small fringe of hair emerged from under the wig as soon as Egypt came under Roman rule<sup>58</sup>. However, this is highly problematic, as Martin Stadler

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50 Wass 2020.

51 Wass 2013, 548.

52 Müller 2021, 182.

53 Paris, Musée du Louvre AF 13203 (former: E 12056) and E 12059 C from the excavations of Gombert in Tuna el-Gebel and a piece of unknown whereabouts from the excavations of Gabra (Grimm 1974, 72 notes 112–114).

54 The mask from the Gabra excavations in Tuna el-Gebel has survived in some photographs in the estate of Ludwig Keimer (1892–1957). At least this is what Grimm reports, who must have seen it in the archives of the German Archaeological Institute in Cairo before 1974. At present, however, these pictures cannot be found (kind information from Isolde Lehnert, German Archaeological Institute Cairo, 04.07.2021).

55 Aubert 2008, 90 f. no. 7.

56 According to the brief accounts of Gombert's excavations published by Émile Chassinat and Francis Griffith (Griffith 1902/1903, 14; Chassinat 1903, 399–401; Griffith 1903/1904, 31–33), Gombert concentrated on three sites at Tuna el-Gebel: slightly southeast of the tomb of Petosiris, at a site called Kom el-Ahmar (where he found shallow pit tombs dug into the sand and mummies with plaster masks, which argue for a Roman date; see: Müller 2021, 180–187), slightly north of it (mud-brick tombs with wall decoration imitating precious stones, so probably also of Roman date; see: Lembke 2015, 16), and considerably further north next to the modern village of Tuna el-Gebel and Amarna Stela A (New Kingdom tombs). He is reported to have uncovered several Ptolemaic sarcophagi while digging trial trenches in the vicinity of these sites (Griffith 1903/1904, 33). If this is true, the child mummy with its cartonnage mask and its rectangular wooden coffin in the Louvre could very well have been found in the plain between the stela and the modern village, i. e. roughly in the area where the new mask finds of the Egyptian team came to light.

57 Grimm 1974, 72 note 112.

58 Grimm 1974, 45 f. 72.

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has already noted<sup>59</sup>. He pointed out that small hair fringes appear in connection with the Nemes headdress as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. Conversely, a wig without the indication of natural hair is not an indication that a piece must be pre-Imperial, as is shown by a mask from Hawara in the Fayum, which according to its inscription can be dated to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.<sup>60</sup>.

30 Theoretically, the Louvre mask (as well as the cartonnage masks discussed here) could even be older than the Ptolemaic period and belong to the Late period. It is true that the only datable Late period mummy mask from Tuna el-Gebel, that from Ankh-Hor<sup>61</sup>, bears little resemblance to the cartonnage specimen. But we must also take into account that this mask belongs to a person of very high status (a high priest of Thoth<sup>62</sup>). The same applies to the Late period tomb of Padikem at Tuna el-Gebel<sup>63</sup> and the Late period grave assemblages discussed by Jean-Louis Podvin<sup>64</sup>. The grave goods from graves 1/2 and 3 at Tuna el-Gebel, on the other hand, indicate a lower status. In this case, the cheaper cartonnage would be more conceivable for decorating the mummy than expensive silver or gold. Ultimately, then, we continue to rely on the very general assumptions about the development of mummy furnishings from the Late period to the early Imperial period, which are based on a few securely dated specimens (from burials of mostly very high status)<sup>65</sup>. They indicate that Late period mummies were equipped with bead nets and metal or wooden masks, Ptolemaic mummies received separate cartonnage panels and helmet-like cartonnage masks, and Imperial period mummies possessed a whole range of mummy ornaments that varied greatly depending on the region (in Middle Egypt: mainly shrouds, plaster covers and/or portraits, and plaster/cartonnage masks). This suggests that the Louvre mummy comparable to masks I–II, with its cartonnage mask, the cartonnage panels and the wooden sarcophagus, belongs to the Ptolemaic period rather than the Late or Imperial period. However, since we do not know how the mummies belonging to masks I–II were equipped, this is only of limited help. Yet, an idea of their original appearance can perhaps be gained by comparing these masks with those that are most iconographically close to them and for which the other mummy equipment is better preserved.

### Objects of Comparison from outside Tuna el-Gebel

31 A masked mummy in Lyon<sup>66</sup> (Fig. 7), which according to an inscription on the sarcophagus belonged to the god's servant Nedjem-Ati<sup>67</sup>, most closely resembles cartonnage masks I–II (Fig. 5) in terms of material (cartonnage, papyrus-based<sup>68</sup>), shape (helmet) and iconography (winged ba-bird on the head, three-parted wig with undecorated lobes, Wesekh collar, contouring band with strokes). Differences exist in the way the nose and mouth are graphically painted on the masks from Tuna el-Gebel, compared to the more sculpted facial features on the Lyon mask<sup>69</sup>. The mummy of Nedjem-Ati was found in the 1907 excavations of Émile Guimet in Antiooupolis<sup>70</sup>, just opposite

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59 Stadler 2004, 31–37.

60 Ipswich, Ipswich Museum IPSMG R.1921-89 (<https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6867011>; Riggs 2005, 21 fig. 4).

61 Wass 2020, 53 fig. 2.

62 Wass 2020, 51.

63 Brose et al. 2019, 79.

64 Podvin 1997a, 375–408; Podvin 1997b, 664 f.

65 Ikram – Dodson 1998, 186–191.

66 Lyon, Musée des Confluences 90002432 (Florence Calament in: Galliano 2012, 192 no. 50).

67 Gayet 1907, 40.

68 Calament 2005b, 420 note 553.

69 Although this impression is certainly also partly due to the fact that the masks of Tuna el-Gebel were pressed flat by the sarcophagi.

70 Gayet 1907; Calament 2005a, 141 f.

Tuna el-Gebel on the other side of the Nile. It did not lie in an underground burial chamber, but in an undecorated monolithic sarcophagus sunk more than five metres into the ground, with a domed lid on which the names and titles of the deceased were engraved<sup>71</sup>. Given the iconographic parallels, it can be assumed that the mummy mask of Nedjem-Ati and the masks I–II from Tuna el-Gebel are products of two workshops that worked in close proximity to each other and perhaps with some exchange between them. Other specimens with a similar appearance are known, especially concerning the striped band framing the face and also the painting of the ears<sup>72</sup>. Unfortunately, with the exception of another masked mummy of a child that may originate from Antinoopolis<sup>73</sup>, none of these masks is provided with a reliable provenance indication<sup>74</sup> and, even more problematically, none of these specimens can be dated on their own<sup>75</sup>. Therefore, their dating fluctuates between the Late period and the Ptolemaic period. The same applies to the mummy of Nedjem-Ati, which has been dated to the Ptolemaic period on the basis of the equipment<sup>76</sup>. This dating is at least consistent with the general development of mummy furnishings described above (cartonnage mask, cartonnage panels). However, it cannot be further narrowed down since the stone sarcophagus, which might have made a palaeographic dating of the name inscription possible, was not recovered by Gayet<sup>77</sup>.

32 After discussing the two cartonnage masks from tomb 1/2 at Tuna el-Gebel, we can now turn to the third cartonnage piece found during the Egyptian excavations (Fig. 8). This mask looks different from the other two (striped wig, thin beard, no graphically highlighted nose and mouth area, etc.), which is why the comparative material listed above cannot be used for this piece. There are many mummy masks from throughout Egypt that share the general appearance of mask III, i. e. the three-parted wig with strands, the Wesekh collar and/or the winged creature on the head<sup>78</sup>. However, as with the other two cartonnage masks from Tuna el-Gebel, the provenance of this comparative material is rarely certain and dating often is speculative at best. There is, nonetheless, at least one object that iconographically corresponds very closely to the mask from Tuna el-Gebel (striped wig, thin beard, Wesekh collar, winged creature on the back of the head) and that has a reliable find location and dating: the mummy mask of the priest Hornedjitef from Thebes<sup>79</sup> (Fig. 9). This man's mask was discovered in the Asasif<sup>80</sup>, which is known for its extensive necropolis of Late period burials, many

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71 Gayet 1907, 42.

72 Guéret, Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie arch.900 (Françoise Dunand in: Lintz – Coudert 2013, 151 no. 2b); Kaunas, State Art Museum Tt-2799 (Berlev – Hodjash 1998, 37 no. III.5 pl. 72); Rio de Janeiro, National Museum 545 (Kitchen 1990, 183 no. 69 pl. 174).

73 Guéret, Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie arch.900 (Gayet 1907, 38; Quémereuc 1992, 125 f. no. 117).

74 On some mummy masks from Abydos, a striped band runs above the forehead, similar to mask I from Tuna el-Gebel. But it does not frame the entire facial contour here. Compare e. g.: New Haven, Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History 6835 (Scott 1986, 160 no. 91); Pittsburg, Carnegie Museum of Natural History 4698-1 (Patch 1990, 92 no. 76).

75 A certain similarity in the graphic emphasis of the mouth and nose area exists between masks I–II from Tuna el-Gebel and some cartonnages from Akhmim (compare e. g. Grimm 1974, pl. 121, 1. 4; Schweitzer 1998, 348 fig. 10; 349 figs. 13, 15), which for palaeographic reasons are dated to the first century B.C. to the first century A.D. (Smith 1997). Another mask of unknown provenance and uncertain dating shows similar characteristics (London, British Museum EA 29472: Seipel 1989, 344 f. no. 520). However, since the other stylistic and iconographic parallels between the specimens from Tuna el-Gebel and this mask as well as the cartonnage covers from Akhmim are limited, we should be cautious about drawing any chronological conclusions from that.

76 Calament in: Galliano 2012, 192.

77 Gayet 1907, 42.

78 To name but two: Florence, Museo Egizio 5703 A (mummy of Takerheb, Thebes, hypocephali dated second quarter to mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.; Guidotti 2001, 40–43 no. 7; Mekis 2020, 219 f. no. 74; 266 f. no. 150); London, British Museum EA 29472 (origin unknown, Graeco-Roman Period; Seipel 1989, 344 f. no. 520; Miatello 2012/2013, 66 f. no. 6).

79 London, British Museum EA 6679 (Strudwick 2006, 294–297).

80 Porter – Moss 1964, 623 f.

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of which were reused in the Ptolemaic-Roman period<sup>81</sup>. The mummy of Hornedjitef came to the British Museum along with its sarcophagus, coffin and other funerary equipment. These objects bear inscriptions indicating that Hornedjitef was buried under Ptolemy III. (246–222 B.C.), i. e. in early Ptolemaic times<sup>82</sup>. Of course, this does not automatically mean that the mummy mask from Tuna el-Gebel has exactly the same period of manufacture (or even comes from the same workshop). After all, there is a certain geographical distance between Tuna el-Gebel in Middle Egypt and Thebes in Upper Egypt. But it at least provides a point of orientation for dating mask III.

<sup>33</sup> Last but not least, there is another mask by Tuna el-Gebel to discuss: plaster mask IV (Fig. 17). This mask differs greatly from the other three in terms of production technique and iconography. This is partly because the head of this mask is made of a thick layer of plaster, resulting in a much more three-dimensional appearance with a prominent nose, cheeks and chin than in the cartonnage masks. Moreover, the stylistic features are completely different, with thick strokes of colour on the surface, in stark contrast to the restrained, ornamental rendering of the ears and mouth that characterises the cartonnage masks I–II. The plaster mask gets its liveliness mainly from the finely modelled surface rather than the illusionistic painting, with the iconographic feature of the rearing cobra on the forehead being particularly prominent. In contrast to the striped tri-coloured wig and the winged creature on the head, this is a feature that mummy masks of non-royal individuals generally do not have, neither in Tuna el-Gebel nor in other areas of Late period to Imperial Egypt.

<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, some parallels are present. So far, three head pieces of mummy masks are known that resemble the Tuna el-Gebel masks in terms of material (plaster) and iconography (uraeus protruding from the forehead): one in Berlin<sup>83</sup> (Fig. 18), one in Evansville<sup>84</sup> (Fig. 19) and one in Paris<sup>85</sup>. All are in a poor state of preservation, even more fragmentary than the mask of Tuna el-Gebel, since only the face and nothing of the chest is preserved. Only the location of the mask in Paris seems to be reliable (excavations by Albert Gayet in Antinooupolis<sup>86</sup>), while the Evansville piece is said to come from the Kharga oasis<sup>87</sup> and the origin of the Berlin piece is completely unknown (it was bought by Georg Steindorff in Egypt in 1896). Of these three pieces, the Berlin piece is stylistically closest to the one from Tuna el-Gebel, as it has the same oversized eyes and a similar representation of the mouth. One could even assume that both pieces were made in the same workshop. This is not unlikely, as Georg Steindorff's collection included other plaster masks that are now in the Egyptian Museum in Leipzig, and these are typical examples of an Imperial period workshop group of Tuna el-Gebel/Antinooupolis<sup>88</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> As with the cartonnage masks, this small group of plaster masks is very difficult to date, as we lack iconographic and stylistic features that might help on this point. The only comparative piece where hair emerges from under the headgear is the mask at Evansville (Fig. 19). However, this is a very undifferentiated hairstyle with simple long strands on the forehead. It cannot be associated with any certainty with a specific Imperial period hairstyle fashion, so a production date from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. would be possible. Some masks from the Meir workshop group also wear a row of

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<sup>81</sup> Budka et al. 2012; Budka 2017; Budka 2020a; Budka 2020b.

<sup>82</sup> Quaegebeur 1995, 143 f.

<sup>83</sup> Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM 13163 (<https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6866674>).

<sup>84</sup> Museum of Arts, History and Science 1958.061 (<https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6866886>).

<sup>85</sup> Musée du Louvre AF 6667 (<https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6867423>).

<sup>86</sup> Gayet 1901, 15.

<sup>87</sup> This is a highly dubious indication of the place of discovery, since specimens that certainly came from there have a completely different iconography. Compare the remarks in Grimm 1974, 29 f.; Müller 2021, 184. 186 f. 281 f.

<sup>88</sup> Müller 2014, 59 f.; Müller 2018, 101 f.; Müller 2021, 180–187.

uraea over the forehead<sup>89</sup>. The entire workshop group is dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. on the basis of iconographic features (hairstyle, jewellery, clothing)<sup>90</sup>. This shows that the comparatively rare uraeus on the forehead of the masks was probably in use into the Imperial period<sup>91</sup>. A forehead uraeus is also found on some cartonnage (?) specimens from the Ras el-Tin necropolis in Alexandria<sup>92</sup>, which are roughly dated to the transitional period between the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. by associated coin finds<sup>93</sup>. In contrast, a veritable wreath of uraea frames the forehead of some cartonnage cases from Akhmim<sup>94</sup>, which for palaeographic reasons are also dated from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. to the early 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.<sup>95</sup>. In view of these findings, the mask from Tuna el-Gebel is most likely to date to the transitional period from Ptolemaic rule (roughly the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.). This would also fit in with the general considerations regarding the production technique. With the transition to the Imperial period, the way in which the face of the deceased is designed changes. At this time, the facial features are no longer formed only from cartonnage with an outermost thin layer of plaster over an inner mould core, as in the Ptolemaic period<sup>96</sup>. The head is now made entirely of plaster so that the features are modelled from the outside with the help of a mould<sup>97</sup>. This allows for a much more three-dimensional design of the facial features<sup>98</sup>.

### Relative Sequence

36 If we now try to place the four mummy masks from the more recent excavations at Tuna el-Gebel in a relative chronological order, then we can relatively confidently date cartonnage specimen III roughly to the early Ptolemaic period based on the comparative piece from Thebes, while plaster mask IV represents the ›missing link‹ between the Ptolemaic period cartonnage masks and the Imperial period plaster masks.

37 Much more difficult, however, is the question of the chronological relationship between the papyrus-based cartonnage masks (I–II) and the linen-based cartonnage mask (III). So far, there is only one typology for Ptolemaic mummy masks: the one established by Martin Stadler based on the Würzburg mask collection<sup>99</sup>, which primarily includes specimens that he has assigned to Hawara in the Fayum<sup>100</sup>. His chronological sequence is based on the assumption that masks with simpler iconography belong to the beginning of the Ptolemaic period. Later, other features were added, so that the masks with the greatest accumulation of iconographic elements and decorative motifs were produced at the very end of the period under consideration<sup>101</sup>. Applying this typology to the masks of Tuna el-Gebel, we can say that the linen-based cartonnage mask III fits

89 Baltimore, Walters Art Museum 78.3 (Grimm 1974, pl. 16, 3; <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6866620>); Kairo, Ägyptisches Museum JE 42951 (Grimm 1974, pl. 16, 4; <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6867123>).

90 Riggs 2005, 115; Müller 2021, 179 f.

91 It is also found on some mummy masks from the Baharija oasis (compare for example Hawass 2000, 57 fig. to the right). However, these have not yet been comprehensively published and therefore cannot be dated with certainty (Müller 2021, 217–219).

92 Compare for example Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum 20260 (Helmbold-Doyé 2009, pl. 83, 2; <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6850423>).

93 Adriani – Bonacasa 1966, 188; Müller 2021, 171.

94 Amsterdam, Allard Pierson Museum 7068; London, British Museum EA 29584 and EA 29588; Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek ÆIN 1383 (Riggs 2005, 83–87 figs. 31–35).

95 Smith 1997.

96 Vandenbeusch et al. 2021, 291–293.

97 Müller 2021, 42 f.

98 Vandenbeusch et al. 2021, 297 f.

99 Stadler 2004.

100 Stadler 2004, 47.

101 Stadler 2004, 37 f.

into category 1 (from the late period onwards<sup>102</sup>; striped wig, little figural decoration<sup>103</sup>), while the papyrus-based cartonnage masks I–II belong more to category 2 (3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.<sup>104</sup>; monochrome wig, later with some figural decoration<sup>105</sup>). However, this does not mean that all the following categories include only masks with monochrome wigs. On the contrary, most of them are partially striped, while the lower part is covered with a multi-figure decoration<sup>106</sup>. It is very unfortunate that the lower part of the masks with monochrome wigs from Tuna el-Gebel have not been preserved, because it would be very interesting to know whether they were decorated or not. At least in Tuna el-Gebel, mummy masks with figural decoration (jackals) on the lower part of the striped wig appear towards the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.<sup>107</sup>, whereas slightly earlier pieces include undecorated striped wigs<sup>108</sup>.

38 Even if we can apply Stadler's assumption of an increasing complexity in the appearance of the masks to the specimens from Tuna el-Gebel, the small number of specimens and the fragmentary state of preservation currently warn against drawing conclusions regarding the relative chronological sequence (mask III before masks I–II)<sup>109</sup>. This would also mean that the masks were first made of linen, that the manufacturers then switched to papyrus and finally, from the Imperial period onwards, used linen again. This is of course possible, but in any case, does not help to support this relative chronological sequence. Until an investigation is carried out on a larger material basis, we can only postulate a sequence from cartonnage to plaster (masks I–III to mask IV), and for the time being, cannot differentiate more precisely between the three cartonnage masks in chronological terms.

## Some Conclusions: Funerary Ritual, Identity, Workshops, Chronology

39 If we are now to draw some tentative conclusions from the above discussion of the context, iconography and dating of masks I–IV from Tuna el-Gebel, we must first admit that there are far more questions than answers. Nevertheless, there are four points – funerary ritual, identity, collaboration of workshops, chronology – that are worth commenting on as they are fundamental to our understanding of mummy masks in the pre-Roman period.

### Funerary Ritual

40 The general discussion of tombs 1/2 and 3 from the recent Egyptian excavations has shown that these underground chambers were not intended to be visited regularly, as their entrance at the end of a steep shaft did not allow easy access into the burial chambers. This means that the grave goods (including the masked mummy) were intended to rest down there for eternity without being repeatedly included in cultic acts

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102 Stadler 2004, 45.

103 Stadler 2004, 38–40.

104 Stadler 2004, 45.

105 Stadler 2004, 41.

106 Stadler 2004, 84–96.

107 Compare for example Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 33191 (Flavian Period; Edgar 1905, pl. 26; <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6867092>).

108 Compare for example Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG 33162 (Neronian Period; Edgar 1905, pl. 23; <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6867064>).

109 This is also contradicted by the fact that, according to Stadler's typology, there was a rather long period of overlap between his first and second types in the 3<sup>rd</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> centuries B.C. (Stadler 2004, 44 fig. 12).

after the actual burial. The bowl found in grave 3 shows no traces of burning. We can therefore not interpret it as a vessel for incense that was used during the regular sacrificial rites; rather, it is a container for food offerings or the like that was placed down there during the burial. This fits quite well with our current picture of cultic action in the necropolis of Tuna el-Gebel before the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.: all the regular sacrificial rites must have taken place in a location above ground, perhaps in a small chapel or similar structure frequented by the family of the deceased. This is the case at the rock-cut Late period shaft tombs in the Gebel, the stone temple tombs of the Ptolemaic period and the mud-brick house tombs of the early Imperial period (see the first part of this paper). In the case of shaft graves 1/2 and 3, no traces of such structures can be detected, but given the parallels mentioned above, they may simply not have survived due to unfavourable preservation conditions (flat plateau without protection from the weather, continuous looting of the entire area, etc.). Alternatively, we can also imagine some kind of central building somewhere in the area that was used jointly by several families to pay homage to their dead.

### Identity and Function

<sup>41</sup> This kind of separation of the mummy from the earthly ritual directed at it is also reflected in the way the dead person is dressed. There was no attempt to visually refer to the person's state in life through contemporary hairstyles, jewellery or clothing, as is the case later in the Imperial period. Instead, the iconography of the mask corresponds entirely to that of an ancient Egyptian god who wore a three-parted wig, a Wesekh collar and, in some cases (mask III), even a beard similar to that of Osiris. In the transitional period between Ptolemaic and Imperial times, there were apparently even some specimens that referred to the royal status of the deceased by crowning his forehead with a uraeus<sup>110</sup>. All this suggests that the identity representation of the deceased before a living audience was mainly limited to the period of the burial itself, including the funeral procession and a possible ritual of opening the mouth at the entrance to the tomb.

<sup>42</sup> All four masks from Tuna el-Gebel show a winged being on the head of the deceased. The fact that this creature is not sufficiently preserved to establish its identity (scarab? ba-bird? falcon? vulture? goddess Nut?) does not change the fact that the gesture itself is unambiguous: the creature spreads its wings around the head. It is a familiar gesture that serves as protection<sup>111</sup> against evil forces that the dead person will encounter during his dangerous journey through the underworld. The same can be said about the Wesekh collar depicted on mask III<sup>112</sup>. Further protection against such otherworldly as well as earthly calamities might have been provided by a stone sarcophagus and/or a wooden coffin in which the mummy lay. The comparison with similar burials in Antinooupolis and Thebes shows very clearly that mummies that were equipped with such precious things as masks were normally not simply placed on the ground without further ado. Unfortunately, due to the poor state of preservation of tombs 1/2 and 3, we have only a few clues for reconstructing the complete tomb furnishings, which certainly included other elements. Whether or not the rough stone sarcophagi belonged to the masked mummies, we simply cannot say.

<sup>43</sup> Some efforts in protecting the mummy can be seen in the form of magical mummy equipment, aimed at transforming the deceased into a god worthy of joining the company of Osiris in the afterlife. This function of the Osirian mummy form, to

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<sup>110</sup> Schäfer 1904; Johnson 1990, 5–11.

<sup>111</sup> Blumenthal 2003; Shonkwiler 2012.

<sup>112</sup> Handoussa 1981; Beaud 1990; Riggs 2001.

which the mask contributed an important part, was supported and reinforced by the images on the mask and certainly on other parts of the mummy equipment (pieces of cartonnage covering the chest and legs, a foot case, etc.). Mask III as well as the cartonnage fragments from tomb 1/2 show worship scenes in which Osiris as a djed pillar<sup>113</sup> is surrounded by Isis and Nephthys. They create an analogy between the deceased and the god whose happy destiny the deceased hopes to share – an analogy that magically actively supported the transfiguration of the deceased<sup>114</sup>. However, this in no way implies that the deceased had given up his or her entire identity and individuality in exchange for a new divine existence. It is true that his or her identity was not visually preserved (we cannot say, for example, whether the masks belonged to male or female deceased). But there were certainly inscriptions somewhere on the mummy or the other grave goods since the parallels from Antinoöpolis and Thebes strongly suggest this. We can even speculate a little about the status of the people. The fact that they were equipped with masks, which were certainly not a cheap product even if cartonnage and plaster were used instead of precious metal<sup>115</sup>, points to a person of elevated status. Nedjem-Ati from Antinoöpolis and Hornedjitef from Thebes, whose grave goods resemble those of mask I–III, were persons who held high positions in the cults of their respective regions. The same seems conceivable for the masked mummies from Tuna el-Gebel. It may be that they were not high priests such as Ankh-Hor or Petosiris in Tuna el-Gebel, though, a position within the cult personnel who maintained the Thoth temples and underground galleries at Hermopolis Magna and Tuna el-Gebel seems at least worth considering.

## Workshops

44 In view of the close parallels between the masks of Tuna el-Gebel and those in Antinoöpolis and Thebes, we can also extend our considerations to include a more technically oriented question: How can we imagine the functioning of the workshops in the Ptolemaic period? It is certainly no coincidence that close parallels to the masks I–II as well as IV from Tuna el-Gebel come from the neighbouring necropolis of Antinoöpolis on the other side of the Nile. There is some evidence that both sites were supplied by the same workshop(s) in the Imperial period since pieces from the same mould were found at both sites<sup>116</sup>. The importance of Antinoöpolis as a Ptolemaic burial site was underestimated for a long time, just as in the case of Tuna el-Gebel, as researchers were convinced that no significant burial grounds had been established before the visit of Emperor Hadrian in A.D. 130<sup>117</sup>. However, the new excavations by the University of Florence have clearly shown that the site of Antinoöpolis was not first settled in the Imperial period, traces of a Ptolemaic occupation can also be found, regardless of how sparse they may be<sup>118</sup>. The question, therefore, arises whether there was a large workshop somewhere in the vicinity that produced cartonnage masks from reused papyri and supplied both the necropolises of Tuna el-Gebel and Antinoöpolis. Or, since there are stylistic differences (sculptured mouth and nose in Antinoöpolis, graphically designed ones in Tuna el-Gebel), do we have to turn the picture around and rather say that both had their own workshops, though there was a strong exchange of ideas and iconographic patterns that resulted in similar products? The same applies to mask III from Tuna el-Gebel and the mask of Hornedjitef from Thebes. The similarity between the two is significant, especially with regard to the thin beards, which appear

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113 Lutz 1919; Amann 1983; Masoud 2020, 180–182.

114 Schneider 2000.

115 See Vandenbeusch et al. 2021, 298 for a similar conclusion.

116 Müller 2021, 183.

117 Grimm 1974, 67.

118 Pintaudi 2012.



to be more common in the Theban area<sup>119</sup>. Since the distance between these two sites is much greater than between Tuna el-Gebel and Antinooupolis, one could even consider a mummy being transported from Thebes to Antinooupolis. Given our insufficient knowledge of Ptolemaic mask-making, we are limited at the moment to pointing out possibilities without being able to decide on one of them. Only further research that systematically collects and compares material from all these sites will be able to answer these questions.

## Chronology

<sup>45</sup> Such a more in-depth study, which is far beyond the scope of this paper, would have to start from scratch with the fundamental and urgent question of chronology; it remains more or less completely open to this day. Only when this question has been answered can we put assumptions about a more detailed development of the grave goods from the Late period to the Roman period on a solid basis. In the case of the masks from Tuna el-Gebel, we have only been able to roughly establish a relative sequence from the cartonnage masks I–III in the early to middle Ptolemaic period through to the plaster mask IV in the late Ptolemaic to early Imperial period and finally the plaster masks from the middle and late Imperial period, i. e. from cartonnage to plaster. But we still have no clue as to the relative order of all these Ptolemaic cartonnage masks. Were they first made from papyrus cartonnage (masks I–II) and then from linen cartonnage (mask III), or the other way around? Or were both materials used simultaneously by different workshops (one with stronger contact with Antinooupolis, the other with stronger contact with Thebes)? Was there the same development towards the use of mummy masks as carriers for a growing number of ritual scenes as with the Ptolemaic masks from Hawara? These are pressing questions that must remain unanswered for the time being. Therefore, we would like to conclude our contribution by renewing the call already made in earlier publications<sup>120</sup>: the time is right for the first systematic study of Ptolemaic mummy masks, not to mention Ptolemaic mummy furnishings in general. There is a growing number of studies publishing new material with contextual information<sup>121</sup> (like the present paper), as well as a renewed interest in their construction techniques<sup>122</sup>. And some pieces can be dated with certainty on the basis of inscriptions and could serve as anchors for the construction of a chronological typology of Ptolemaic mummy masks. All we lack at the moment is someone willing to take up this challenge.

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119 Another mask with a thin beard, dated for certain to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. on the basis of the date inscription on the accompanying papyrus, is that of Menthesouphis from Sheikh Abd el-Gurna in Thebes (Edinburgh, National Museums Scotland A.1956.191; <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6866850>).

120 Gestermann 2001, 108 f.; Stadler 2001, 154 f.; Stadler 2004, 11–17; Haslauer 2004/2005; Miatello 2012/2013, 52; Zdiarsky 2013, 380 f.

121 Compare for example the Ptolemaic burial equipment in Mekis 2010 and Landvatter 2013.

122 Vandenbeusch et al. 2021.

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Fig. 18: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM 13163: Asja Müller

Fig. 19: Evansville Museum of Arts, History & Science, Evansville, Indiana, 1958.061: Jordan Barclay Photography

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