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Introduction

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Introduction

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Launched in 2013 by the Getty, the Ancient Panel Painting, Examination, Analysis, and Research (APPEAR) project is a collaborative platform that allows participating institutions to study ancient funerary panel painting from Roman Egypt. From the onset, APPEAR has sought to increase our understanding of the materials and techniques employed in the production of artifacts with the best-preserved evidence of ancient painting. The project is made possible through the collaboration and support of more than sixty partner institutions. Their valuable contributions include information obtained from visible and technical examinations and scientific analyses; this data, along with historic archives of the artworks from their collections, are stored in a shared database. The consolidated information allows for comparison and enables the discovery of trends, unique features, and working methodologies, shedding light on artistic practice, material sourcing, and function. The data contributed by collaborators offer a unique window into our understanding of painted works in antiquity and their important influence in future artistic endeavors.

This current volume—the proceedings from the 2022 APPEAR conference, held at the Allard Pierson in Amsterdam—presents the results of nine years of international partnerships and complements the first published volume: *Mummy Portraits of Roman Egypt: Emerging Research from the APPEAR Project*. Over a three-day period, the Allard Pierson and Getty hosted more than one hundred attendees from around the world, representing nine countries and twenty-six institutions. Seventeen speakers and a keynote address covered the

latest research on the history, provenance, materials, methods, imaging, and analyses inspired by the APPEAR project. Speakers and attendees contributed expertise in art conservation, science, Egyptology, classics, art history, or simply a passion for the subject.



The APPEAR conference was launched with a keynote lecture that reviewed the status of the field. Heavily illustrated and with new discoveries that impact the broader technical study of antiquities, “Ancient Relationships: Bridging Mummy Portraiture to Its Past and Future” (not reproduced here) addressed the intersections of artistic production and meaning. Bringing recent investigations to light by exploring the complex production, function, and history of Romano-Egyptian painted funerary portraits, the lecture by Giovanni Verri set the stage for the broad range of topics that followed.

We must not underestimate the pivotal importance of the stories these funerary panel paintings tell. “The Histories They Hold: On Making Mummy Portraits Matter” presents an overview of mummy-portrait studies, examined through a series of questions that have inspired and engaged scholars for over a century. Beginning with the analytical investigation of four mummy portraits in the Allard Pierson collection, this chapter then takes a cross-disciplinary approach that examines alchemical meaning and nineteenth-century principles of exploration and connoisseurship.

Bridging the gap between historical and material information is “Roman-Egyptian Mummy Portraits and

Panels of Gods from the Louvre: Renewed Historical and Material Knowledge.” Here the in-depth investigation of thirty-one mummy portraits and two panel paintings of gods in the Musée du Louvre collection, in collaboration with the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France, allows for a renewed understanding of this group. Using both the existing historical data and the latest developments in non-invasive and non-destructive material analyses, the authors explore the works’ artistic production; the chapter discusses the deliberate use of pigments to represent garments, flesh, and backgrounds and how they relate to iconography, style, and media.

Another interdisciplinary survey conducts a technical analysis of three rare funerary panel paintings and examines their function. “Three Romano-Egyptian Panel Paintings in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek” explores a rare but intriguing group of funerary panel paintings with a very different role than that of the portraits secured to mummified remains. This specific group portrays different subjects (gods and goddesses) and possibly served a purpose as cultic works for display in temples or domestic settings. Technical and scientific analysis deepens the understanding of their production, allowing for comparison within the larger corpus of funerary panel paintings and providing a unique and broader insight into the materials and techniques employed during the Roman period in Egypt.

Two papers explore thoughtful studies of funerary portraits painted on panels and textile shrouds. The first, “Between the Linen and the Overpaint: Understanding the Materials and Techniques Used on Two Romano-Egyptian Funerary Portrait Shrouds,” takes an interdepartmental look at two linen mummy shrouds at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The study of these unique funerary paintings, which have never been systematically examined, aims to fill a gap in technical and art history research. As a unique investigation, this scholarship lays the groundwork for future comparative studies of funerary shrouds from the so-called Soter group.

The second, “Non-Invasive Investigations on Three Ancient Mummy Portraits at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens: Challenges and Benefits,” focuses on the non-invasive findings of three portraits of similar manufacture and style; the authors’ approach during the challenging period of COVID 19 is a model for any institution without technical resources. The research conducted not only shows what cultural heritage conservation professions can achieve during less-than-ideal circumstances but also demonstrates a successful research model that can be reproduced in similar variable and rich collections.

The connoisseurship of mummy portraits is the focus in “Learning from Lemons: Mummy Portrait Forgeries in the Menil Collection.” Acknowledging that demand often outweighs supply, the authors address how forgers sometimes found creative ways to deliver the sought-after mummy portraits that were in fashion during the nineteenth century. An existing knowledge of mummy portrait material and manufacture lays the foundation for forgery detection. The prime message in this special paper is how important it is to combine scientific analyses and collection history with comparative study. Once a neglected topic—works of dubious origin were often ignored and stored in museum basements—the issue of forgeries is important not only to the APPEAR database but also to the greater study of ancient works.

Four essays continue research from the 2020 publication. A significant study identifies the woods used as the primary support for panel paintings. “Mummy Portraits and Painted Panels from Roman Egypt: Seeing the Wood for the Trees” is the culminating summary of wooden panels, conducted through the complex and precise scientific identification of wood species. This scientific research has afforded a comprehensive data set of the underlying processes involved in woods selection. The interpretation of data collected is not only valuable in understanding what woods were used for panel painting in antiquity; it also speaks to access, sourcing, production, recycling, and how ancient artists truly understood the quality and benefits of a material that was not readily available in ancient Egypt. Access to and samples of wooden panels provided by APPEAR participants—and the reliable and consistent scientific approach to their identification—has led to valuable insight into our understanding of ancient wood selection and trade.

Both scientific analysis and forensic methodologies have seen major developments in the detection and interpretation of complex materials used to create ancient paintings. These advancements are a direct result of more sensitive analytical instrumentation requiring little or even no sampling to obtain results, or of keen observation. Peptide mass fingerprinting, carbon-14 dating, and gas chromatography/mass spectrometry are sensitive microsampling techniques for organic analysis. Two papers follow up on the analyses of organic materials used on panel paintings from diverse collections; both essays take a deeper dive into the very complex topic of organic material identification.

“Egg on Their Faces: Investigation of an Unusual Surface Coating Observed on Egyptian Funerary Portraits” calls attention to a unique fluorescence captured with

ultraviolet radiation on painted panels. This feature led the essay's authors to identify a similar coating on six paintings; radiocarbon dating confirmed that two had their coatings applied during the time of manufacture. This finding allows for a better understanding of the function of surface coatings. It also opens the possibility for further discovery on other panels through diagnostic observation. "Insights from a Collaborative Study of Beeswax Paint from Romano-Egyptian Mummy Portraits" addresses the ongoing investigation of binding media, taking a closer look at the ancient beeswax identified on eight panel paintings from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek and National Museum of Denmark. The relationship of lead-based pigments and their interaction with beeswax to produce lead soaps is explored and raises the question of whether modified wax media are the result of intentional influences—i.e., "Punic wax"—as was previously believed, or the result of pigment interaction over time. This little-understood process illustrates how certain pigments can affect paint chemistry and encourages further discussion and debate.

"Calculated Viewing Angles in the Presentation of Romano-Egyptian Mummy Portraits" looks at how portraits were designed/laid out and intended to be viewed. Here, the author takes an extended look into how artists worked when painting funerary mummy portraits from human faces. After reviewing more than two hundred portraits within the APPEAR database, the author finds many considerations (proportion, angle, intention) that affected an artist's approach to produce a portrait balanced with the intended funerary context.

A goal of the APPEAR project has always been use of the database as a source for exploring viable artist workshops. Recognition of visually comparable groups, corroboration of data, and access to the APPEAR institutional network have shed light on how artists worked, revealing comparable groupings of portraits. "The Saint Louis Painter's Artistic Circle" presents a distinct collection of portraits that are housed in several museums yet exhibit similar technical, stylistic, and design features. These observations possibly support production in a workshop or even the hand of one artist. Such evident clues and the systematic approach to looking at painted portraits will no doubt lead to the identification of other groupings and provide a better understanding of ancient artist workshops.

A similar, though more technical, approach is undertaken in "Exploring Artistic Practice in Roman Egypt: A Study of Nine Portraits at The Metropolitan Museum of Art." This essay examines nine funerary portraits, most of which first

entered The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection before the twentieth century. The study breaks down the various unique techniques used in their production, revealing hidden features within the Met's collection. This in-depth investigation has offered valuable clues about artistic practice and methodologies, visualized through technical imaging, non-invasive analyses, and comparison.

"Umbras dividendas ab lumine: Pigments, Their Mixtures, and Distribution on Mummy Portraits in Relation to Primary Sources" explores seven funerary portraits from three Chicago collections—the Art Institute, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, and Field Museum—and from a private collection, the majority of which have never been systematically studied. The authors carried out the technical investigation of these painted panels through various analytical approaches that focused on the distribution and stratigraphy of paint materials. Comparing the methodologies of this group with data within the APPEAR project and using keen observation, the authors found new information on the complex nature of producing flesh tones. The interpretation of these obtained data benefits the ongoing corpus of existing scholarship.

Unique to this publication is the implementation of specialized analytical methodology in the study of ancient panel paintings. Bridging visual techniques is a non-destructive analytical tool that has immensely improved our understanding of materials, by producing elemental maps, effectively illustrated in the Met's study as well as in the in-depth investigation of one portrait in the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art. "Insights into the Materials and Technique of a Roman Egyptian Funerary Portrait Obtained from Elemental Mapping and Luminescence Imaging" addresses a portrait with an Antinoöpolis provenience in the Nelson Atkins collection. Material characterization and imaging techniques aid in the identification of Egyptian blue by revealing its use as an underdrawing or when combined with other pigments to alter shades and color. Additionally, these methodologies can help shed light on the alteration of pigments as a result of unique environmental conditions.

Another intimate examination of a single portrait, with parallels to the study of the Nelson Atkins work, is presented in "Linked Histories: Understanding the Making and Remaking of a Roman Egyptian Portrait at the Detroit Institute of Arts Through Comparison to a Funerary Portrait at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore." All three mummy portraits, suspected to come from Antinoöpolis, feature the addition of gilded jewelry painted in raised relief. The technical examination of the portrait at the

Detroit Institute of Art relays a journey through the various contexts of this portrait, including its collection history, material identification, direct comparison with the Walters Art Museum portrait, and post-antique treatment.

The conservation of a mummy portrait with a complex provenance and treatment history is the focus of “Mummy Portrait of a Boy from the National Museum in Warsaw: Investigation of Its History and Technology.” Recognized for its compelling rendering of a young boy and the unique addition of a rearing horse on the sitter’s proper-right shoulder, the once heavily damaged portrait was restored with the addition of a fragment from a similar ancient portrait and overpainted to disguise the invasive repair. An in-depth historical and technical study to better understand the authenticity, origin, and condition of the various fragments helped guide this work’s de-restoration. This chapter addresses collecting history and practices, restoration approaches at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the challenging treatment choices made in preparation for the panel’s display in the ancient art gallery of the National Museum in Warsaw.

Outreach via exhibitions, lectures, and publications has grown extensively in recent years—mostly due to the interest and appeal among scholars for the study of ancient mummy portraits and the issues surrounding the ethical and intelligent display of this material to the public. This work is summarized in “Funerary Portraits from Roman Egypt: Facing Forward—An Exhibition and Inter-Institutional Collaboration Looking for the Artists of Ancient Philadelphia,” which describes how a curated exhibition at the Harvard Art Museums thoughtfully addressed the various issues surrounding the study of funerary portraits. The exhibition involved a large team of collaborators bringing together for the first time portraits that share common traits (possibly linking them to a

common workshop). In addition to raising important questions about production, ancient practices, and visual connoisseurship, and presenting the main perspectives surrounding the presentation of funerary portraits, the exhibition was a catalyst for public lectures and outreach around the practice, study, and appreciation of mummy portraits from Roman Egypt.

Similarly, an exhibition (2023/24) at the Allard Pierson—*Face to Face, the People Behind Mummy Portraits*—featured thirty-eight portraits with the aim of exploring the artists, descendants, followers, collectors, archaeologists, and researchers connected to these works. Meant to coincide with the APPEAR conference hosted by the Allard Pierson but delayed due to COVID, this exhibition brought together a complementary group of portraits, highlighting artistic similarities and their relationship to modern culture. The technical study of twelve portraits, never previously examined, carried out by the Netherlands Institute for Conservation + Art + Science (NICAS) has further contributed to the growing database and increased our understanding of these significant and engaging ancient artworks.

Independent research and multiple resources give direction for the development of new tools and technologies in the study of ancient materials. These resources, mainly borrowed from other disciplines, are constantly evolving; they are now more accessible than ever and require simpler methodologies and equipment. This volume’s editors hope that the momentum behind the APPEAR project endures and that future collaborations occur, so that all of us—scholars, conservators, scientists, and the public—can better understand the artist’s mind, and so museums, united to benefit from collective knowledge, can create new avenues for sharing and disseminating information.