FACES & VOICES
IDENTITY, CULTURE AND ARTEFACTS
FROM ROMAN TO CONTEMPORARY EGYPT

MUMMY
PORTRAITS, PAPYRI AND EGYPTIAN
CONTEMPORARY ART

19 JULY - 25 NOVEMBER 2012

THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY
150 Deansgate - Manchester

www.manchester.ac.uk/library/deansgate
www.facesandvoices.wordpress.com
Egypt has always been a treasure-house for historians. Rich cultures have taken root there over the centuries, and while the Egypt of the Pharaohs is known and beloved by schoolchildren across the world, Egypt’s history after the Pharaohs is equally fascinating, a story of cultural layering as the region became annexed successively to Greek, Roman, Arab, Turkish, and European empires.

Thanks to Egypt’s sands and its hot, dry climate, we know far more about daily life in different historical periods there than we do about any other region of the world. While the tombs of Egypt are well known, there were other deposits made in the sands, from rubbish heaps to lost property. Instead of rotting away, written texts and artefacts of daily life remained buried for archaeologists to discover centuries later. Faces and Voices explores the secret histories which can be reconstructed from these finds.

Egypt after the Pharaohs was—and remains—a melting-pot of cultures, with ancient and peasant cultures overlaid by the traditions of successive conquerors. When the Greeks, the Romans and then the Arabs conquered Egypt they brought their own language and their own gods, but the indigenous languages and gods of Egypt remained. And when new religions arrived—first Christianity, then Islam—the mix of cultures became even richer.
FROM EGYPT TO MANCHESTER

With the establishment of the British protectorate over Egypt in 1882, a wave of Egyptomania swept the United Kingdom. Manchester participated in the colonial experience through its entrepreneurs and cultural institutions. Cotton magnates and merchants, such as Jesse Haworth, sponsored William Flinders Petrie’s excavations in Egypt from 1888 onwards and saw to the establishment of the Egyptian collection at the Manchester Museum. The ten mummy portraits on display are a small but exceptional part of that legacy.

In 1898, Enriqueta Rylands, widow of the textile manufacturer John Rylands (1801-80), founded the John Rylands Library in her husband’s memory. Through the efforts of Mrs Rylands, Manchester quickly came to hold what has become one of Europe’s great collections of texts written on papyrus.

The relationship between Egypt and the North of England is still alive today. Faces and Voices includes works on paper evoking the imaginative landscape of the portraits and papyri by the contemporary Egyptian artist Fathi Hassan, along with podcasts made by student contributors based in Manchester and Burnley.
LIVING AND DYING IN A MULTI-CULTURAL SOCIETY

Texts and visual art from the Roman Fayum.

*Faces and Voices* exhibits ten Roman-period mummy portraits, generously loaned by the Manchester Museum, alongside Roman-period treasures from the Rylands papyri. The portraits and the majority of the papyri come from the Fayum, an area densely colonized by Greek settlers from the time of Alexander the Great’s invasion (332 BC) up to the Roman and Byzantine Empire (29 BC-642 AD).

In the Roman period, the Fayum was inhabited by a mixed population living in the main city of Arsinoe, and surrounding villages and countryside. The Roman administration privileged Greek culture over the Egyptian, and tried to control access to membership in the privileged class of the Hellenised elite. But intermarriage and the encounters of everyday life produced hybrid cultural identities for many of Egypt’s inhabitants.

Since Greek was the language of administration, it was widely spoken and written, but during its time as a Roman province Egypt continued to be a multilingual environment. Egyptian was widely spoken and written both hieroglyphic and phonetic alphabets, while many other languages, including Latin, were also in use.

The individuals commemorated in the portraits on display were mummified according to ancient Egyptian rituals and buried in the pre-Roman necropolis of Hawara, in the first and second centuries AD. Their portraits were placed over the faces of the dead. These Roman-style portraits are visual proof of the fact that identity reached across ethnic and religious boundaries and followed more flexible and complex patterns. Members of the elite wanted to be remembered with the Roman clothes, or a hairstyle copying that of the current Roman empress, even as they were buried in the traditional Egyptian style in the Egyptian cemetery outside the capital.
FATHI HASSAN  
Questioning Egyptian identity.

Born in Cairo in 1957 from a family of Nubian origin, Fathi Hassan has exhibited in museums and galleries all over the world. Fathi was the first African artist to be selected for the Venice Biennale in 1988, and his work is in the permanent collections of distinguished institutions across the world, among them the Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Museum.

Faces and Voices presents a selection from his most recent work on paper, a medium that links his work to the papyrus writings exhibited. From calligraphy to human faces, animals, houses and landscapes from his native land, the themes of Fathi Hassan’s work are a reflection on Egyptian identity in a time of radical, traumatic changes for the nation.

Ten specially commissioned pieces known as the ‘Fayum containers’ will be added to the exhibition in October, when the mummy portraits return to a dedicated room in the new Ancient Worlds galleries of the Manchester Museum.
In collaboration with the RCUK/Global Uncertainties project, Constantine’s Dream: Belonging, Deviance, and the Problem of Violence in Early Christianity, Faces and Voices is working with A-level and University students in the North-West to raise awareness of how ancient cultures can challenge our understanding of how religious and ethnic identities shape our lives.

In the Conflicting Identities North West initiative, students from the University of Manchester and Thomas Whitham Sixth Form, Burnley, have contributed video podcasts to the exhibition which will also be posted online (http://ancientvoicesproject.com), in order to bring the faces and voices of the papyri and mummy portraits to life for audiences beyond the Library.

Conflicting Identities North West continues into 2012-13, when Student Ambassadors from Thomas Whitham’s Sixth Form will offer workshops contributing to the GCSE citizenship curriculum in Burnley schools, sharing how learning about the everyday problems of ancient societies can shed light on religious, gender, and ethnic concerns in modern Britain.
We would like to thank Rose Issa of Rose Issa Projects London (www.roseissa.com), who has generously lent Fathi Hassan’s works for our exhibition, along with Fathi Hassan himself, whose specially commissioned works inspired by the Manchester mummy portraits has been an inspiration to us all.

We are grateful to the Manchester Museum for the loan of its magnificent mummy portraits, and to the staff of the John Rylands Library and the Manchester Museum for their generosity, erudition, and hard work. Carol Burrows, Katie Donlon, Karen Exell, Elizabeth Gow, John Hodgson, John Prag and Campbell Price have made contributions far beyond the call of duty.

Finally, we would like to thank the staff and students of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form, Burnley and the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester, along with the Higher Education Academy and the Global Uncertainties Scheme of Research Councils UK (www.globaluncertainties.org.uk), who have generously funded our work.

Images of the mummy portraits reproduced by courtesy of the Manchester Museum. Images of the papyri reproduced by courtesy of the John Rylands Library.

Information

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