

Golden Mummies of Egypt

Audio guide

Introduction

00:00:00 Dr Campbell Price

Hello and welcome to this audio guide to the exhibition Golden Mummies of Egypt. My name is Dr Campbell Price, Curator of Egyptology here at Manchester Museum, and I am delighted to be joined by my friend, historian and chart-topping podcaster Greg Jenner. Welcome, Greg.

00:00:16 Greg Jenner

Hi, Campbell.

00:00:17 Campbell

Hi and together we're going to introduce you to some highlights in the exhibition and explain a bit more about some of the items and what they mean.

Golden Mummies of Egypt contains over 100 items from Manchester Museum's, Egypt and Sudan collection. The exhibition explores beliefs about life after death for wealthy people around 2,000 years ago. We call this the Graeco-Roman period because in the last three centuries BC, Egypt was ruled by Greek kings, called Ptolemy, ending in a lady called Queen Cleopatra VII – yes, that's the famous one – and the first few centuries AD when Egypt was part of the Roman Empire. So, you get a kind of Cleopatra sandwich.

This is a multicultural period of Egyptian history. You get Egyptian, Greek and Roman ideas mixed together and the content of the exhibition shows how rich people, not many other people involved, and their families believed that they would survive for eternity by appearing like an Egyptian god after death.

If you like the tour, you can find out lots more about ancient Egypt from Greg and I's new book, *Totally Chaotic History: Ancient Egypt gets Unruly*, which is available from the Museum Shop.

1. Stela of Pawerem

00:01:37 Campbell

This is a roughly rectangular block of basalt, a fine dark grey stone. It's around 40 cm tall and 30 cm wide, and it's been carved with a scene showing a human figure making an offering in front of three gods. Those are Osiris, the goddess Isis and her sister Nephthys, who are each named in captions in hieroglyphs. Below the scene are 5 horizontal rows containing text. Four of the lines are in Egyptian hieroglyphs, and the top line is in demotic, a more shorthand, or cursive script, than the formal hieroglyphs below.

00:02:19 Greg

Well, it's lovely, isn't it? But first question is, what's a stela?

00:02:22 Campbell

What's a stela?

Well, we throw it around, Greg in Egyptology, but it's a really important word.

00:02:29 Greg

We don't throw the stela around though, do we? If you throw a stela around it breaks so we don't do that.

00:02:32 Campbell

We don't physically throw any objects around it.

00:02:35 Greg

OK, good, just checking.

00:02:36 Campbell

We throw the term around. A stela, you are right to ask, is a commemorative slab. They can be...
What's funny?

00:02:46 Greg

What a lovely phrase, a commemorative slab. It's, OK. All right. Sorry I'm being silly. A commemorative slab of basalt rock?

00:02:53 Campbell

Yes. So yeah, rock, really hard stone, you wouldn't want to drop it on your foot. But you get a stela, plural for stela is stelae, from Greek.

00:03:05 Greg

OK. Yeah.

00:03:05 Campbell

You get these in different kinds of material. The most common is stone, like the one we're looking at, but you can also get them in wood, you can even get them in metal.

00:03:17 Greg

So, we've got gods here, which is exciting. Osiris. He's sort of a king god. He's kind of a human man who becomes a god. Is that right?

00:03:25 Campbell

So, he's on the right-hand side as you look at the stela, so he's in the middle. He's right in front of the person doing the offering. And you can always tell Osiris, because he's got a fancy hat. Do you see? The kind of silhouette? You can only see the silhouette on this example. And you can see he's also holding two things, and that's a crook and a flail. They are signs of kingship. So, you are right, he was once the king of Egypt, the Egyptians believed, but he died. He was murdered and brought back to life by the ladies behind him, Isis and Nephthys.

00:04:01 Greg

So, Isis is his wife, and then Nephthys is Isis's sister. So, the three of them are linked in a family, and they're receiving gifts on this stela. And then underneath that lovely bit of art, is two different types of writing. So, you said hieroglyphs and then you said the other one was demotic.

00:04:19 Campbell

Yes.

00:04:20 Greg

Now, I've heard of hieroglyphs because they're famous. Demotic, I know the word, but I don't really know what it means. So, what's the difference?

00:04:28 Campbell

Good question. Because they look so different, people assume they're a different language and they're not. They both write ancient Egyptian, but hieroglyphs, which most people know is ancient Egyptian, but most regular people, Greg, did not sit down and write hieroglyphs. Hieroglyphs are just for temples, for objects like this, for coffins, for Books of the Dead on papyrus. The language of the people; if you were selling your cow to someone, you would draw up a contract, and you wouldn't write in hieroglyphs, you'd write it in demotic, which comes from the Greek, 'the language of the people'. So, it's like most people who could read and write would write in demotic. And so that's why it's included.

00:05:14 Greg

Because *Demos* means 'people', which is where the word democracy comes from. Right?

00:05:17 Campbell

Exactly.

00:05:18 Greg

OK, so it's the people's script. But hieroglyphs, they're really old. I mean, I know this exhibition is about the kind of Graeco-Roman Egyptian world, but hieroglyphs go way back. So Demotic, does that go way back, or is that a more modern language and script?

00:05:34 Campbell

It's a more modern language, it's a more modern script, indeed, writing the Egyptian language. But it's more up to date in a way with how people actually spoke. So, from maybe around 600 BC, people are using demotic as a way of writing. Before that, there's another script called hieratic, and that is also derived from hieroglyphs. But if you were a regular person who could read and write, chances are coming up to this stela, you would be reading the top line, and the other lines would be a bit more of a mystery. And I think that's actually intentional, because hieroglyphic text, we know the ancient Egyptians call that the words of the gods. If you write something in hieroglyphs, it is magically eternal, it's available, it's legible, it's readable by the gods. But if you want actual people, your friends, to read about you, you put your name in demotic.

00:06:32 Greg

We've got a stela here which has got the same thing written twice. Is that what's happening? Yeah?

00:06:39 Campbell

Yeah. So, the information is the guy's name. So, the guy on the right doing the offering to the gods is a guy called Pa-wer-em, son of a guy called Djed-hor. And that's the information that's given on the top line. And I wonder, Greg, whether, when the stela was made, when it was first carved, so the artist did the outline of the scene and wrote the carved the lines, and then someone put in the top line and then someone later on, read the top line and translated that in hieroglyphs and made it more fancy.

00:07:12 Greg

Oh, so you think it's done in stages, so it's not all done. So, it's someone hasn't gone to the shop and gone, "I want the same thing written in two different languages, please, two different scripts, sort that out." You think this has been adjusted later on?

00:07:25 Campbell

I think so, yes.

00:07:26 Greg

So, hieroglyphs is the sacred writing. That's what it means, right? *Hiro* means sacred in Greek. *Glyph* means writing, in Greek. But the Egyptians don't speak Greek. What do they call hieroglyphs?

00:07:38 Campbell

Well, they in ancient Egyptian, they call this script the *medu-netjer*. And *medu* means 'words' or 'speech' and *netjer* means 'gods'. So literally, 'words of the gods'. So, if you're writing words of the gods, the gods are instantly able to understand it, even if you bury that text underground or you wall it up or plaster it up, the gods can still perceive the message. That's very important in Egyptian ideas.

00:08:08 Greg

Because they're like Superman, they can see through walls.

00:08:10 Campbell

Yeah, like Superman. That's absolutely correct.

00:08:15 Greg

So, this stela, you know, how come it's in the museum? How come you've got it?

00:08:19 Campbell

Well, bit of a long and complicated story. It is something which was collected. We don't know exactly where, because there are no records. For most of the collection in Manchester Museum, we can say definitely, you know, which archaeologists worked on a site, which part of Egypt it's from. This was a piece which eventually ended up in the possession of a collector. A guy called Max Robinow, who was a German émigré who moved to Manchester in the mid nineteenth century. And he collected it from Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century. So, that's why it is here today.

00:08:57 Greg

Right. OK. So, this is a stela that says, I've given some gifts to the gods; here's my name, and I want it written in the sacred language, so the gods can know who's given them the gift, because I want to get thanks from the gods, and also I want all my friends to know. But actually, this isn't for the ordinary people of Egypt, this is a posh person showing off to other posh people and gods.

00:09:17 Campbell

Precisely. And honestly, when it was set up inside a temple, if we imagine it was originally put inside, you know, the temple walls, the only people who would see it were priests and priestesses, and that was only a small part of society. So actually, yes, it is a beautiful object. We could admire it in a museum, but in reality, very few ancient Egyptians would have been able to see or read it.

00:09:42 Greg

There we go. What a waste! But now we can all see it. So, you know, it's fine. It's taken a little while, 2000 years, but we can all see it.

00:09:50 Campbell

But we can admire it. And we can say Pa-wer-em's name out loud, and that's what he would have wanted.

2. Terracotta of Bes

00:09:57 Campbell

Measuring around 35 centimetres tall, this is a terracotta figurine of the Egyptian god, Bes. He is a ferocious looking dwarf, with exaggerated features and lion-like facial hair. He wears A headdress with five tall plumes and is dressed in Macedonian-style armour, made up of a tunic and a kilt. He is wielding a small sword, or a dagger, above his head in his right hand, and with his left he holds an oval shield. There are traces of a white plaster wash on the surface of the figurine.

00:10:33 Greg

So, Bes, he's a really distinctive Egyptian god, isn't he? Because he goes all the way back to the old, old days of, you know, the New Kingdom, you know, 2000 years before your exhibition. So, he's hung on for quite a while.

00:10:47 Campbell

He has.

00:10:49 Greg

A very distinctive look.

00:10:50 Campbell

He doesn't look like your regular Egyptian God, does he?

00:10:52 Greg

No.

00:10:53 Campbell

And I think that may actually be why he is so popular. Because as you know, Greg, conventionally you show figures, human figures...

00:11:03 Greg

Side on.

00:11:05 Campbell

Side on. He is shown in wall scenes, even, usually, as full frontal, facing forward. And I think that was to scare off other potentially harmful beings. So, he's made to be pretty... 'in your face'. He has got his tongue out. He's often shown naked with weapons. And this is...

00:11:34 Greg

Nothing scarier!

00:11:35 Campbell

No, nothing scarier than Bes on a dark night. But this is the Graeco-Roman Period interpretation of that.

00:11:45 Greg

Which is why he's wearing Macedonian armour. So, when we say Macedonian, that's Alexander the Great's army. Those are, we call them Greeks, but they're not really Greeks. They're Macedonian. But he comes and conquers Egypt in the, sort of, what, 330s BCE, something like that?

00:12:04 Campbell

Yep.

00:12:05 Greg

So, he's swept in from a different culture, and Bes is an Egyptian god, and yet Bes is now wearing a foreign suit of armour. He's wearing all the weapons, and all the stuff that one of Alexander's soldiers would wear. So, he's sort of, he's kind of role-playing as the invader.

00:12:22 Campbell

Yes, exactly. And I think as you already said, you know, over a thousand years before this figurine was carved, in what we call the New Kingdom, and even a bit earlier, there is a version of Bes called Aha in ancient Egyptian.

00:12:39 Greg

A-ha!

00:12:40 Campbell

Yes, a-ha. Or A-ha, as in the band. He is, if you're very old and remember, like us, the band A-ha from the 1980s.

00:12:50 Greg

Yes, we are old. Yeah. Look them up.

00:12:53 Campbell

But in the Middle Kingdom, so maybe 2,000 BC, Aha's name means 'the fighter'. And I think that's what Bes is always shown doing. And the thing that Bes is shown fighting, is your enemies. So, if you're worried about, I don't know, you're a lady who's pregnant, or you're a very small child, you know, you're quite vulnerable. So, you would have Aha, or later, Bes, depicted on headrests that people would sleep on, on beds – Tutankhamun has a bed with Bes on – on bedroom walls. And in those scenes, the Egyptians of the time knew about knives and daggers, and that's what Bes is holding. As you say, this is probably an indication of when this figurine was carved, say like 300s BC, when the scariest thing you can imagine, if you're an Egyptian, is a Macedonian soldier in Alexander's army, bursting into your house. So, you take something scary and turn it towards defending yourself against unseen forces.

00:14:00 Greg

That's interesting. So, you think he's wearing Macedonian armour to scare off Macedonian soldiers. You don't think it's like... You don't think it's them saying, hey, the Macedonians are the good guys, they've come and freed us from the Persians, who are the bad guys, and we are team Macedonia. Here's Bes, our god wearing their stuff, wearing their kit?

00:14:23 Campbell

It could be that, Greg, but I suspect based on other sources, the Egyptians didn't like the Greeks much, the Ptolemies. So, you know, you know, history depends on who writes it. Some say Alexander was a liberator who freed Egypt from the Persians. Some say he was an invader who really just wanted to be an Egyptian pharaoh himself. So, I would rather suspect it's taking an image of something scary, and using that practically, to defend yourself against these unseen forces.

00:14:59 Greg

Yeah, no, that's that makes sense. I guess that what's interesting is that he, being a soldier, a warrior, there's a sort of martial military quality to him that makes him feel like he's on your side. But actually, he also represents the thing you're scared of most, right, which is enemy soldiers coming in and trashing your house and taking over your country.

00:15:19 Campbell

Yeah.

00:15:20 Greg

So, he's not here to scare off ghosties and demons and goblins and snakes. He's here to scare off people.

00:15:28 Campbell

Potentially. That is, yeah, potentially. I think he could be both. He's there to scare off the ghosties and the demons, but maybe you're also hoping to fight like with like, so yeah, if he's showing him Macedonian armour, then, Macedonian soldiers might still be a threat at this time.

00:15:47 Greg

Fair enough. He's 35 centimetres tall, so he's not big, is he? He's like, the size of a ruler. He's not, you know, he's not dominating the house, but I guess he's small but mighty. That's his thing.

00:15:58 Campbell

He's small but mighty and, as you say, very importantly, he's not set up in a temple. He's not set up in a tomb. He is set up in a house. And where these objects have been found – this piece came to Manchester through a private collection, so we're not absolutely sure of which archaeological site it was found at – but where they have been found, these have been set up in household altars. So, you have your house, you have the kind of equivalent of the living room, and you would have a little shrine, a little kind of cupboard for your images of gods, and that's where the family would pray.

00:16:32 Greg

And you said that it's terracotta, which is like a kind of clay. But you said there was a sort of white plaster wash on it. So, does that mean it was white originally, and that sort of washed off? Was it painted? Do we know?

00:16:46 Campbell

Yes, really good point actually, and this is a cool thing about these figures. You can see, although we can't see looking at it from the front, that at the back it's more obvious, that this piece was made in two parts in a mould. So, they were mass produced. You know, you'd go down the figurine shop and buy yourself these. They were made in two parts and then stuck together, and then, yeah, washed with plaster and then painted. Now, this is interesting. If you'd buried a painted figurine like that in a tomb in Egypt, in the desert, it probably would have preserved the colour. But most of these lack

colour because they were set up in houses where, you know, it gets a bit sweaty. It gets a bit steamy, sometimes it gets a bit, you make the dinner and, you know, things splash about.

00:17:35 Greg

And sunlight pouring, you've got sunlight. It's, you know, this is Egypt, right? It's sunny. It's a sunny country. OK, so the paint, you think, is going to come off over time and not last. Whereas if this had been a tomb, chances are it might be blue and red and green and really lovely, beautiful colours.

00:17:52 Campbell

Yes, I think originally, they were made quite colourful when you bought them in the shop, but handling as well, just being exposed on a, you know, in a living room for 20 years, something is going to lose its colour.

00:18:07 Greg

OK, so maybe you rub him for good luck and, I don't know, maybe, yeah, maybe it all comes off. But yeah, he's small but mighty. You say terrifying. I think he's adorable, but you know.

00:18:17 Campbell

It depends on your taste.

00:18:18 Greg

Yeah, exactly. Maybe if you met him in a dark alleyway, you'd be scared and run away.

3. Glass lens

00:18:24 Campbell

This is a small round piece of glass with a diameter of 5.3 centimetres. The glass, or lens, is convex in shape and completely clear.

00:18:34 Greg

Yeah. So, this one is really interesting because it's not a big shiny statue or a beautiful mummy's coffin, or... It doesn't even look very noticeable. I mean, it's five centimetres across, it's not much bigger than a coin. But you really like this, don't you, Campbell? This is something you're into.

00:18:54 Campbell

That this is one of my favourite pieces in the whole collection from Egypt and Sudan in Manchester Museum, of which we have 18,000 items. Because, yeah, there's quite a lot of Egyptian and Sudanese antiquities in the in the Manchester Museum, and out of all of those, to me, this is the most surprising. As you say, it's not gold, it's not massive, it's not stone. But imagine using this because, Greg, this comes from a time before clear glass was a thing. Now, if you wear glasses, as I do, you're used to, you know, having spectacles. This is something which is like a forerunner of spectacles, glasses, because it shows the Egyptians of this time, so 2,000 years ago, Egypt ruled by the Roman Empire, that shows those people were aware of the properties of light and how light could be manipulated and refracted through certain shapes of glass.

00:20:04 Greg

Yeah, because spectacles are medieval. So, I'm a medieval historian, I know spectacles were invented in the 1200s.

00:20:10 Campbell

I'm so glad you know that. I have no idea. So, where do they appear? The 1200s. Wow.

00:20:15 Greg

And people, they're already using eyeglasses earlier than that, actually, you know, a single eyeglass to read. You know, monks are using them to read very small handwriting, you know, in dark rooms. So, the obvious question. Do we think this was a magnifying glass for reading? For looking at demotic scripts and hieroglyphs, and the things we've talked about? Or do we think this is for something else?

00:20:41 Campbell

Well, the excavator who led the Egyptian archaeologists who excavated these objects was called William Matthew Flinders Petrie.

00:20:52 Greg

Ooh, he was famous. I've heard of him.

00:20:54 Campbell

Flinders Petrie, he's quite a big name in in Egyptian archaeology. And in the nineteenth century when that team was working at the site of Hawara, a very important Graeco-Roman site, southwest of modern Cairo, in the 1890s, they found this piece amongst, you guessed it, lots of papyrus with lots of documents. And so, I would agree with you, you could use it like a, you know, like you would use today, a magnifying glass just to kind of look at a letter, especially if your sight is not so good. But Flinders Petrie had an idea that it could be used as a bullseye lens, so the shape of it, if you hold it up to strong light, like the Egyptian sun, you could focus the light, in such a way that would make the spot it landed on really hot and bright so you could start a fire with it. So, it may have a practical dimension. You know, how do you start fires? You don't have lighters.

00:21:57 Greg

So, if you want to cook your dinner, you don't want to, yeah, you want to cook your dinner, you've got to, you know, you've got to make, you got to cook for the family. How do you start your fire? Maybe with this little glass lens that takes the sun's rays and directs it into the orbit of whatever you're burning, a bit of wood, bit of animal manure that's dried up, and then suddenly, sparks, flames, dinner! Yeah!

00:22:21 Campbell

What's cooking in the kitchen? But the thing that really blows my mind about this is, it is a beautiful and very finely produced thing. And nowadays we're used to clear glass, but in Roman Egypt, clear glass would be something of a novelty. And if, as you say, you know, spectacles aren't really widely used till, god, twelfth century medieval Europe, it shows that people still understood the properties of glass over 1,000 years earlier, which is just mad.

00:22:55 Greg

Because glass is made of sand, basically, isn't it? I mean, and Egypt is full of sand. You got, there's no problem with sand! So, whether they discover it by accident, maybe some sand gets melted by the hot sun and they go, hang on a second, this is fun, or whether they're trying to develop something. But what's nice about it is it's perfectly spherical, isn't it? It looks like it's been polished, like someone has sat there for a long time trying to make it a really specific shape, so it's nice to sit in the hand, but also maybe so it does a job. I mean, it looks like a paperweight, but I'm guessing it's a lot

more practical than a paper weight, because you wouldn't spend so much time whittling away on something as pointless as that. This is beautifully made.

00:23:38 Campbell

We know that the ancient Egyptians knew glass from well over a thousand years before this. They have coloured glass in rods which you can heat up and make into really nice patterns. So, they make, you know, vessels – really beautiful vessels – for perfume made of glass. But clear glass, the kind of glass that you could use for a magnifying device, that is something that really only pops up much later in the Graeco-Roman Period.

00:24:07 Greg

Yeah, so this is what 2,000 years old, give or take? Which is the Roman Period that is the time where Julius Caesar sort of storms into Egypt, and you end up eventually with his heir Augustus, Octavian becoming Augustus, conquering it, and Egypt becomes a Roman province. So, this glass object is from a time where the Roman Empire expands and the Egyptian empire, well, the Egyptian world ends. Really.

00:24:34 Campbell

Yeah, the Egyptian pharaohs, I mean, if we count Cleopatra VII as the last pharaoh, that is subsumed, then, and as you say, the Roman Empire, and the Roman emperor himself says he's the pharaoh, and he's depicted on temple walls in Egypt, doing pharaoh-like things. But yes, Egypt is then part of a much wider international network.

00:24:59 Greg

So, there we go. This beautiful little thing that looks so anonymous and so dainty comes from a time of huge change in Egyptian society. It's the end of Egypt that's been around for 3,000 years. And this little piece of technology is cutting edge, but coming at time of chaos and uncertainty, probably. So, it's actually rather special, isn't?

00:25:23 Campbell

Yeah, chaos, uncertainty and a lot of paperwork. The ancient Egyptians loved those papyrus documents, and we've got lots of them from the site. This piece was found at Hawara. So, I suspect the administration of the Roman province of Egypt would have required objects like this to help you read the latest edict from the emperor.

00:25:46 Greg

Ah, there we go then. Alright. So not so small and dainty. It's actually very important! You've convinced me!

4. Wooden horse

00:25:53 Campbell

This horse on wheels measures 11.5 centimetres tall. The horse-shape has been cut out from a plank of wood and decorated with incised lines. It is mounted on 2 wooden axles at the front and back and has four freely rotating wheels.

00:26:10 Greg

So how many horsepower does this toy have?

00:26:13 Campbell

I've never tried it. Although, Greg, we have made replicas of this.

00:26:19 Greg

Ohh!

00:26:20 Campbell

And they can be dragged and trundled along the ground – quite the thing! And usually, you know me, I would be quite cautious about identifying anything as a toy, but in this case, I think we could probably say this was used by a child as a toy.

00:26:38 Greg

It looks like a toy. It looks like the kind of thing you would give to little toddler, to sort of play with, and it's got that kind of chunky, solid simplicity, that means that if you drop it, it's not gonna break.

00:26:50 Campbell

That sounds like the father of a toddler!

00:26:54 Greg

Yes, I've got a four-year-old, so I'm well aware of what happens. What's lovely about it is that it's a horse with wheels. So, to me it looks like both a horse and a chariot. It looks like, you know, it looks like the horse and the chariot, which makes me think of the Hyksos, who were a people who came to Egypt way before, kind of, the time we're talking about. They were, what, like, probably 1600 BC. So,

that's, I mean, a good 1,300 years before, roughly, the exhibition? But they brought horses to Egypt, didn't they?

00:27:32 Campbell

And I think after that point, horses were always a status symbol. It's funny, you know, if you ask anyone about ancient Egypt, they always think about camels. Camels only show up really late, in the Ptolemaic and Roman period. But horses, as you say, Greg, do come into Egypt with this kind of invading force, the Hyksos, who kind of come down from the ancient Levant into Egypt. And ever since then, owning a horse would be something, you know, the military elite, rich people would have.

00:28:05 Greg

So, a toy horse might be for a posh kid, whose mummy and daddy have got a lot of money and they've got some horses. Is this the sort of thing that an ordinary Egyptian kid is going to play with? Probably not?

00:28:19 Campbell

I wonder, I wonder. And whether there is a reference here. The fact that it's a *wooden* horse. We know the ancient Egyptians, well, the Egyptians of this time, of the Ptolemaic and Roman period, knew – we know this because there are documents found near the site this was found in the Faiyum part of Egypt, southwest of modern Cairo – who were reading Homer. And, you know, he writes about the *Trojan* horse; about these guys who sneak in... Well, you tell me! You know more about the Trojan horse than I do!

00:28:58 Greg

Yeah. So, Homer is an ancient Greek poet, who doesn't really write stuff down. He's an oral poet. He says things out loud. In fact, we're not even sure if he exists. He might be loads of poets who all, like, work together, and then they came up with, they made-up a name for him, for the kind of the gang, and came up with this guy called Homer. So, it maybe he's not even a real guy. But Homer tells the story of the Siege of Troy, where all of the, kind of, Greek city states band together to go and attack this huge city of Troy. It takes 10 years, because Helen of Troy has run off to go and marry the wrong guy and everyone's very upset about it. And they can't get into the city walls. It takes forever. And then they come up with a sneaky trick. They build a very, very large wooden horse that's hollow; a huge wooden horse. They stick in loads of soldiers inside and then they leave outside the gate and say, sorry about the war, here's a lovely gift. We're really sorry. We're so sorry. And the Trojans go, oh, a lovely gift! Thanks so much! And they roll it inside. They go to bed, and the Greek soldiers leap out and open the doors. And then suddenly the army marches in and kills everyone. And this story is called the Iliad. It's a very famous story. It's Homer's Iliad. And the gods are involved as well. They're meddling, you know, those gods love to meddle.

So, a wooden horse. Immediately you do think, oh, it's or a wooden horse on wheels that you can wheel into a city. You're right, it does have a very strong connection to a Greek story. So, we're in, we're talking about Egyptian culture, but as you say, this is the Graeco-Roman time of Egyptian history. So, we have Greek influence. We've had Greek, we've had Macedonian pharaohs called the Ptolemies. They're Greek. They're gonna know all these stories. So, do we think this is a toy from a palace? Is it from a Greek kind of culture? You know, who's playing with these sorts of toys?

00:30:56 Campbell

I wonder, Greg, whether in this case, and just based on what you've said, I'm wondering anew, wondering afresh about this. I think this could have been a fairly regular person's toy, because, if you imagine, as you said, there's a tradition of reading stories out loud. Not a lot of people are sitting, you know, silently reading when we think about, you know, reading books. So, you might have heard this story by a performer somewhere. You've heard bits of the Iliad; you've heard about the Trojan horse. And you say, mum, dad, can I have a toy horse? And you may not be that well off. It's not a very fancy thing.

And, interestingly, this part of Egypt, the Faiyum area, is an area which is settled by retired soldiers, retired Greek and Roman soldiers. So, you wonder if there was maybe a tradition – I mean, it could have been an Egyptian family as well, who'd heard the story, no saying it's not – but there's this kind of, you can imagine this society where there's, you know, people with actual war stories, war tales, telling the younger generation.

00:32:11 Greg

Absolutely, telling this this sort of great legend of the 10-year siege that has ended with a bit of cunning, where you wheel in the horse. Do we know what type of wood it is? I don't think of Egypt being a land of many trees, which might be unfair.

00:32:26 Campbell

It is not. It is absolutely not. The quality of timber native to Egypt is not great. If you wanted to make something really fancy, like, you know, a roof, a massive palace or give the king a beautiful coffin, you brought wood in from Lebanon; from the cedars of Lebanon, from Byblos. So, this looks like local wood, maybe acacia wood, sycamore wood. It's not been analysed by scientists, so we're not sure.

00:32:58 Greg

OK. So, potentially it's a locally grown tree; someone chopped it down and whittled it in their spare time and then handed it to a kid?

00:33:05 Campbell

Yeah.

00:33:06 Greg

Or maybe there's someone making them in a shop and maybe, you know, maybe there's a little, there's a there's a person there, just making thirty, forty, fifty of them, selling them every, you know, every weekend at the local market. It's a lovely thing, isn't it? But it does seem to be, I like the fact that it maybe is connected to this grand story, the Iliad, which is set about 1200 BC. So, the Iliad happens over a millennium before this toy was probably made.

00:33:35 Campbell

So, it really, yeah, survives in folk memory. And I like where you say, maybe there were a few of them made; this is like a set, like you'd get a Mattel doll or, you know, some other company makes dolls. We have, I've seen them in other museums from different sites around the Roman world.

00:33:57 Greg

I'm really surprised you've still got it, though, 'cause it's wood, did it not rot away? Did it not, you know, getting mouldy and damp and turn to mush?

00:34:05 Campbell

Well, that's the great thing about Egypt, Greg, for the most part, if things were buried in tombs or in temples, away from the riverbank – the riverbank's, soggy and wet and used, of course, for farming things in that area where most houses were rot away – but this comes from a site which was on a hill. It was dry. And if you leave something in that sand, then it gets preserved. So, I think we're very lucky, because this is, again, not a big stone statue, it's not a golden mask, it is something someone might have used.

00:34:44 Greg

Yeah, that's beautiful. I love it. Ah, what a treat.

5. Meroitic pottery vessel

00:34:50 Campbell

This round pottery vessel has a diameter of 28.5 centimetres. It is made from red pottery and has a lipped opening at the top. It is decorated with horizontal black bands between which is a freeze of lotus flower motifs which encircles the vessel.

00:35:09 Greg

OK, so this is a lovely thing. I like how round it is. It looks very, I don't know, I feel like I just want to hold it.

00:35:17 Campbell

Very tactile.

00:35:18 Greg

Yeah, it just looks like you could sort of nestle it in your arms and just gently carry it around. So, where's it from? Because it doesn't look very Egyptian to me. So, I'm not, the lotus is, I think lotus is an Egyptian plant, but it doesn't feel like the sort of thing I've seen in Egyptian galleries and museums before. So, is it Egyptian?

00:35:42 Campbell

So, it technically is Sudanese because it comes from a site to the South of Egypt in what is now modern Sudan. And it's part of a whole series of quite distinctively decorated vessels which do borrow pictures, images, motifs, you might call them, from Egyptian art. So, as you say, the lotus flower, this water lily essentially, is quite common in the art of the time of the pharaohs. But this we know quite precisely comes from the Meroitic empire. So, Meroë is a very important town, or city, in ancient Sudan. It's to the north of the modern capital of Sudan, Khartoum. And it was kind of a neighbouring empire to the Ptolemies in Egypt, and eventually to the Roman Empire. The Romans never conquered the Meroitic empire, but they did trade with them. So, I wonder whether this is an object which could have held stuff that was traded.

00:36:54 Greg

Yeah. I mean, presumably, what are you going to put in something like this? Wine? Oil? Seeds? I mean, the little lid at the top, it's not that wide, is it? You can't cram in big objects. It's gonna have to be liquid, probably?

00:37:08 Campbell

Yeah. And I think the fact that, the lid is quite small, so if you imagine, yeah, you put something in and you don't want the thing to splash out, maybe? You would seal the lid with some kind of covering, maybe leather, maybe fabric, maybe linen. Yeah, animal skin is possible, and then you'd bind it with a kind of rope or a cord to keep it closed. Because, you know, in the ancient world there was no plastic, there's no Tupperware. So, if you want to send stuff a long distance, you're going to have to use pottery.

00:37:46 Greg

Yeah, so Meroë, you know, I don't think I've heard of that much. Sudan did have an empire that briefly ruled Egypt, though, didn't it? The Nubians?

00:37:57 Campbell

It did. What Egyptologists call the 25th Dynasty, who for about a century, between like 600, well 700 and 600 BC, rule Egypt and Sudan as a united kingdom. But at this time, again, we're talking last couple of centuries BC, first couple of centuries AD, the Meroitic empire is pretty vast and pretty important, and one of their main commodities, and I visited, Greg, actually went to visit the site where these things are being excavated in Meroë, one of the big commodities was iron. So, if you imagine the Iron Age, named after like a major technological, metallurgical innovation and the use of iron metal, a lot of that was centred in Meroë. So, that meant there was a lot of wealth coming in. And I think, although fewer people have heard of the Meroitic empire, it was very important. They built more pyramids than in Egypt, so there is a pub quiz question answer. Which country in the world has more pyramids than Egypt? It is Sudan. And, so this is the kind of material evidence of the trade networks, because these distinctively decorated pots have been found in Egypt and other parts of the Mediterranean.

00:39:26 Greg

Their pyramids aren't as big as the Great Pyramid, though, are they? We're talking mini pyramids?

00:39:31 Campbell

Yeah, they're relatively small, and they're quite steep compared to those famous ones at Giza.

00:39:36 Greg

OK, ok, because you know the Egyptian pyramids, there's like 100 aren't there in Egypt?

00:39:40 Campbell

Yeah.

00:39:41 Greg

In Sudan we're talking, or in Meroë, we're talking more, but small?

00:39:46 Campbell

Maybe around 200, but yes, smaller and steeper for kings and queens of the Meroitic empire.

00:39:53 Greg

So, there's this big trade network happening. These two civilizations, these two empires have been side by side for a long time, but Meroë is later than Nubia, the 25th Dynasty. And then the Romans show up and they're trading. There's a lot of change happening in the world, isn't there? There's a lot of names and empire shifts and new dynasties and new kings, new rules, new... And then new technologies; iron coming along, which obviously gives you stronger swords, stronger tools for farming, better armour for going into battle. The Iron Age is a big step on from the Bronze Age because, you know, your sword is going to do more damage. So, that's really interesting, actually, that North Africa is place where innovation is happening.

00:40:34 Campbell

Yeah. I think really, in some ways, Meroë itself at some point becomes a little bit of a frontier to the Roman Empire itself. So, if we think of, so, Cleopatra pops her clogs 30 BC. Along comes Octavian, who becomes the emperor Augustus. He has a statue, a really beautiful metal statue, set up in the South of Egypt. And it gets attacked. It gets pushed over. And what happens to the head, perhaps ceremonially and highly symbolically, it is decapitated. The head is taken off and then it's buried at Meroë under a staircase. So, whenever you walk on the staircase, what are you doing? You're trampling the emperor Augustus. So, I really wonder if there was a flashpoint, maybe a military flashpoint around the area of Meroë, or a bit to the north towards the Egyptian border, where the people of the Meroitic empire did not like the Romans.

00:41:43 Greg

Yeah, there's, you know, you can have a minor squabble, but cutting someone's head off and then stamping on it, that's...

00:41:49 Campbell

That's just petty.

00:41:51 Greg

Yeah, not a fan, not a fan. OK, so this little gentle, simple pot actually opens us up to a much bigger political arm wrestle between the mighty Roman Empire, the Egyptian world that's been conquered, and then this new empire that we haven't heard so much about, but actually is also pretty important, the Meroitic?

00:42:17 Campbell

Meroitic, I would say, yeah, Meroitic.

00:42:20 Greg

Meroitic, alright. Cool. Alright, well, that's, that's fascinating. I mean, I'm looking at it, wondering did people wee in it? Was it...

00:42:27 Campbell

You would, Greg!

00:42:30 Greg

I'm just looking thinking is it a potty? I don't think it's a potty. I think you're right. I think it's for transporting wine or milk or oil or something tasty. Hopefully.

00:42:40 Campbell

Greg, I know you are, yeah, toilet obsessed. But yes, I think not used as a loo.

00:44:45 Greg

All right, all right. Sorry.

6. Coin of Cleopatra

00:42:48 Campbell

This is a bronze coin showing Queen Cleopatra VII in profile, facing right. The face of Cleopatra has been cast in raised relief. She has a prominent nose. Her hair is braided and encircled with a band or crown.

00:43:04 Greg

So, Cleopatra.

00:43:06 Campbell

Comin' Atcha.

00:43:07 Greg

Comin' Atcha. I think she's the most famous woman in ancient history, I reckon.

00:43:14 Campbell

I would agree with you. I know you know lots about Cleopatra. I think she's pretty singular in the ancient world. We know of other queens of Egypt, who rule not just as the wife of a king, but in their own right, and I'm thinking, of course, of my absolute favourite, Queen Hatshepsut. But Hatshepsut is almost one and a half thousand years before Cleopatra. Who knows? Maybe Cleopatra knew about Hatshepsut. But you're right, yeah, in terms of fame, she's pretty unrivalled.

00:43:52 Greg

Well, yes, because obviously she is glamorous and beautiful and famous. Also, she's the last ever pharaoh of Egypt. She has a relationship with Julius Caesar, the most famous man in the ancient world, and that's, I mean, the power couple, right? They are the kind of celebrity super couple. Then she has another relationship with Mark Antony, another very famous Roman soldier. And then, of course, dies tragically when it all goes wrong, when Octavian invades Egypt and he becomes the first Emperor. So, you've got all these sort of superstar characters all in the same story. And this coin here, depicts her side on.

Now, the first thing I want to ask, actually Campbell, is Egyptians didn't usually have coins, right? It it's not an Egyptian thing, money. So, when did coins come into Egyptian daily life? Is it with the Greeks, the Macedonians? Is it Alexander the Great who brings them in? Is it a bit earlier?

00:44:50 Campbell

It's maybe a bit earlier. But you're right to think, of course, we think of coinage, although it's kind of going out of fashion a little bit now in the Modern world, but coinage is quite an important thing to our whole concept of society. At this time, coins, in the grand scheme of things, are still quite new. We have evidence of gold coins, you know, coins actually stamped with the hieroglyph for gold in Egypt, just before Alexander shows up. So, 300 years before this. But it's a way of showing, you know, the face of the ruler. In the case of the Ptolemies, in an overtly Greek way. So, you might see Cleopatra in the form of an Egyptian statue, as a form of the goddess Isis, looking very ancient Egyptian. But when you were reaching into your pocket to pay for your onions or your cow, or whatever you were doing, you would bring out this very Greek-looking image of her. So, by the time Cleopatra is on the throne, yeah, coinage is fairly normal among the kind of trading people of Egypt.

00:46:04 Greg

Yeah, but you're right. She is in this coin, we see her side on, so she's facing to the right, and she's got that very distinctive Greek hairstyle. It looks braided almost. It's kind of, you can see like rows of hair. So, it's very fancily done. But it's quite different to how the goddess Isis would normally look in art. So, she's playing up to her Greekness, here, because she's from a Greek family, isn't she? She's *Cleo-patra*, which is a Greek name. It means 'famous, like her father' or 'respectful of her father'. So, she's from that Greek dynasty who came across with Alexander the Great. But we think she speaks Egyptian as well. So, she sort of crosses both worlds. She's got a foot in either camp. She's a bit Greek, a bit Egyptian, pharaoh of Egypt, speaks Greek, trades with the Greek world, dates Roman men, she's...

00:47:05 Campbell

Tries to resist Rome, by dating Roman men.

00:47:08 Greg

Yeah, I mean, that's her. I mean, she struggles, right? I mean, her life is incredible. If you don't know the story of Cleopatra, it's tragic, but it's amazing. She has to marry her brother, her half-brother, twice, who are who are kids. Then she kills them. She kills her sister, Arsinoë. Then she ends up with Julius Caesar. He gets killed so she ends up with Mark Antony. They then die. It's an absolute, I mean, murderfest. It's so violent.

00:47:36 Campbell

It's a soap opera. Yeah, you're right.

00:47:38 Greg

And that's why Shakespeare did an amazing play about it. But, her story is complicated because of course, she's a very powerful queen in some ways, but really not powerful in others, because she's

desperately trying to fight off her brother, who's trying to steal the throne. And then also the Romans are kind of lurking in the shadows waiting to swoop in and take Egypt. So, Cleopatra is caught between a civil war with her own family and a foreign superpower.

00:48:06 Campbell

Yeah, not an easy position to be in. And it's funny, in a way, quite sad that she's been short-changed by a kind of Western-style history, in the sense that, you know, we think a lot of people nowadays think of that very famous 1960s movie with Elizabeth Taylor. And, you know, she's this *femme fatale* and she's, like a beautiful lady. But in Arabic writing, in Arabic tradition, Cleopatra is a scientist, she's a diplomat, she's a linguist. As you said, you know, she can speak Greek, her family are Greek, but she has, you know, diplomatic relations with Rome, which are absolutely critical, and she can speak Egyptian, the native language of the land. So, she is multicultural in a special way and she really, really tries to keep Egypt independent. And with her death, as you said, she's the last pharaoh, pharaonic Egypt dies. Of course, Egypt just becomes a slightly different thing. Egyptians are still Egyptians, but the political landscape totally changes. So, she's kind of this, stopgap against this major change. And what a life. I have to say at this point, Greg has imagined the diary of Cleopatra in a wonderful book, *Totally Chaotic History: Ancient Egypt Gets Unruly*, which gives some flavour of, my goodness, from a really young age she is really involved in politics. And I think this object is so small you would miss it on display. So, this is why I think we're talking about it. It is addressed to an audience. If you have a statue in a temple to an Egyptian god, yes, you appear like Isis, the goddess Isis. If you are wanting to impress people who are quite well to do, Greek merchants, Roman merchants, Egyptian merchants, you appear this way on a coin. And it's funny to think, you know, this was passed around between people, like you and me, when she was still alive and it was used for trade, given she's such a famous name in the ancient world.

00:50:24 Greg

Yeah, that's it. I mean coins are handed between... You know, a statue you put in your house, a beautiful piece of jewellery you wear, but a coin you give away. You know, the whole point of having them is to buy stuff with them. Yeah, you know, obviously it's good to have lots of money, great, lovely, but actually, really the point of having money is to then be able to buy things with it. So, these things are moving through society. They're changing hands all the time. You're always looking down and there's the queen's face, hello! There's Cleopatra staring up at you, or rather staring away from you. But she is out there amongst her people, because every time they buy something, they're holding her face.

7. Gilded mummy mask

00:51:08 Campbell

This cartonnage mummy mask is made of plaster and linen in layers. It measures 48.7 centimetres and is decorated in red and green paint. The face is also gilded with foil so that it has golden skin with striking black and white eyes with a blue outline. The detailed painted headdress extends down onto the chest and includes stylised decoration of seated Egyptian gods.

00:51:38 Greg

This is a beautiful thing, isn't it? This is a wonderfully crafted, gorgeously colourful, very expressive face looking at us with a little smile, there's a there's a kind of, there's a kind smile on, I'm gonna say *her* face, I don't know if that's true. I don't know if this is a woman? A girl? I don't know what the clue would be. I feel like, because often it when you look at mummies, they look kind of the same for men and women. Is that right?

00:52:09 Campbell

Yeah. Deliberately so. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:52:11 Greg

OK, I feel like it's the eyes. The eyes are amazing. The eyelashes, the eyebrows, that's the thing that's maybe is making me think that. But no, what's the clue?

00:52:23 Campbell

OK, Greg, this is a particular hobby horse of mine. This is something that I bang on about all the time. *She* is rare, because can you see in her ears, she's got earrings – little ibex-headed earrings – you almost never get earrings showing on mummy masks.

00:52:42 Greg

Right.

00:52:43 Campbell

And at this period, and I emphasise at this period, so the Ptolemaic and Roman period, the Graeco-Roman period, the last couple of centuries BC, first couple of centuries AD, only women are shown wearing earrings.

00:52:59 Greg

Right.

00:53:00 Campbell

In the time, back in the time of Tutankhamun, Ramesses II, men are wearing earrings as well, but it's not fashionable in the Graeco-Roman period. So, as you say, you know, when you walk into a museum and they've got an Egyptian, you know, coffin lid or a mummy mask on display, they almost always have this long head covering. And to us living today, we culturally associate longer hair with women. So, I think people often assume that the coffins and the mummy masks belong to women. But no, it's a kind of a sign of being godlike, and otherwise we might not be able to tell. But also, there's another possible little clue in that on her forehead you can see there are, like, a little row of curls which come out just, yeah, just above the eyes. That's also an indication that this is a lady.

00:53:56 Greg

OK. So, golden skin. First off the bat, is obviously very... it's quite the look. You don't see that on the Instagram and TikTok do you? But, I know that you have a pet theory on this, well, it's not even a pet theory that, you know, this is very important, but you believe that mummies are about transforming someone into a god. And I thought, you know, I grew up when I was a kid, and when I went to university, and I read books about mummies, it was always about preserving the body, making sure the body lasted for 2,000 years, whatever. But you think mummification is about transforming the body from person, human being, into god. So, is that what's going on here?

00:54:37 Campbell

Absolutely, Greg. This is a subtle, but really important point, that we tend to think that the ancient Egyptians wanted to preserve their dead, their deceased relatives, as they were in life. And that, you know, Nana Flo would be preserved as she was, and she would live like that for eternity. Actually, the evidence from ancient Egyptian texts and images seems to be that the best way, the best chance you had of surviving for eternity, forever, which is a very long time, was to become a god. And the ancient Egyptians are very clear on this point, gods have bones made of silver or iron, they have hair made of lapis lazuli.

00:55:30 Greg

Blue. Yeah.

00:55:31 Campbell

Yeah, blue, semi-precious stone. And they have skin, flesh, made of gold. Gold doesn't tarnish, you know, it doesn't go rusty, it doesn't go off-coloured, it lasts forever, so the Egyptians thought. So, if you're going to be an immortal god like a superhero, you need to have golden skin, if you can afford it. So here, I know you said, you know, she looks like she's got kind eyes and a nice smile. These

features were made in a mould and do not look anything like the person whose mummified body, they were placed on top of.

00:56:11 Greg

Oh no! It's an Instagram filter! She's got a beauty filter on to make her look like someone else?

00:56:20 Campbell

It's a hell of a filter.

00:56:21 Greg

Yeah, it's a god filter! Oh, that's interesting, so, this is just a standard mummy face. This is not what this lady looked like in real life.

00:56:32 Campbell

And you've got to really take a moment, Greg, to think, you know, we all have a sense of self-regard, and we want us to be us for eternity. And I know you get up in the morning and look at yourself in the mirror and think, wow, don't I look fantastic, don't I want to look like this forever. I do. But this is not what the evidence suggests. It suggests that actually, in order to live forever, you have to be less, you, less an individual, and more generically perfect, more symmetrical, more golden skinned, more godlike. Because the idea of the afterlife is once you get there, you know, you're judged in some way. And once you get into the afterlife, you get to hang out with gods and be a god. So, in texts, on coffins on masks like this, dead people are referred to either as Osiris, who is the male god of rebirth and regeneration, or the goddess Hathor, who is often shown as...

00:57:36 Greg

The party cow!

00:57:37 Campbell

As a cow. You may have heard of her. I knew you were gonna say that. Yes. Hathor is the goddess of partying and a good time, and, you know, living forever. She's often called the golden one, so she's associated with gold especially. And she's called the Mistress of the West, the Lady of the West. So, the sun sets in the West, and so that's where dead people are thought to go. So, women become Hathor, men become Osiris, and by that association with those gods, it's like Spartacus. I'm Spartacus. No, I'm Spartacus. No, I'm Hathor. No, I'm Hathor. It's OK, you can have many, many, many countless numbers of Hathors, because it's the afterlife and anything goes.

00:58:22 Greg

The Spartacus reference is from the 1960s, so good luck there, kids, following that one. But, yeah, I see what you mean. It's beautiful, but what's interesting, I suppose, is you said it's made of plaster and linen, so it's not even wood. It's not even, I mean it's solid, but it's not like, you know, if I was to sort of hit it with my knuckles, which I know you want me to do, I won't. But if I did, it wouldn't go dunk! It would be more papery, maybe?

00:58:52 Campbell

Yeah. And I think, I'm glad you mentioned that. A lot of people who have asked, you know, look at that in the case, and think it's made of stone.

00:59:00 Greg

Yeah. Right, yeah.

00:59:01 Campbell

Or, it's made of gold – solid gold. It's not like Tutankhamun's mummy mask, which *was* made of solid gold, but he was a pharaoh. This is made of this material we call cartonnage, which is like papier-mâché.

00:59:13 Greg

Wow!

00:59:14 Campbell

And it's built up in layers, yeah. And it was really commonly used in the funerary industry. And the last layer would be paint or gold leaf.

00:59:24 Greg

So, it's a papier-mâché death mask. So, we could make one at home.

00:59:28 Campbell

You could! And sometimes in Manchester Museum, we run at events where you can do just that, using a mould taken from a 3D scan of this actual mask.

00:59:38 Greg

That's crazy. That's so cool. Alright, so, I said she's got kind eyes and a nice smile. What you're saying actually, is she doesn't. She's got a god's eyes and a god's smile.

00:59:48 Campbell

Precisely.

00:59:49 Greg

Do we think this was a woman of, I mean, do we know how old the person was who died? Because, you know, this is not her, really, is it? This is a god. This is a goddess.

01:00:00 Campbell

Well, Greg, we have to thank the archaeologist who found this, or removed this piece, because they didn't attempt to keep this divine face with the remains, the body of the person.

01:00:16 Greg

Ah, that's a shame, OK.

01:00:18 Campbell

The body of the person that it was covering. So, we don't know who that individual was. But yes, they were mass produced, if you were rich enough. Because, you know, gold leaf is pretty expensive.

01:00:30 Greg

This is this is not. You don't get this if you're an ordinary farmer.

01:00:34 Campbell

No, you absolutely don't. And even amongst those who could afford mummification, which would be, you know, only a small proportion of society, the archaeologist who led the excavations at the site this was found, Flinders Petrie, he describes maybe two or three percent of the total of the mummified bodies he excavated, were decorated in any way. He just threw away the undecorated ones and kept the decorated bits that he found.

01:01:02 Greg

Oh no. So, when we think of mummified masks, and we think of Tutankhamun and the incredible famous golden and blue death mask that weighs like 10 kilogrammes and it's like super heavy and it's, you know, made of the most lavish materials possible. That's the absolute, absolute, like, top shelf stuff. And then you've got really lovely stuff made of wood and stone. And then then you've got this stuff, which is papier-mâché cartonnage. But for 97% of people, it's just, bosh, done, dead, Sorry!

01:01:38 Campbell

Yeah, you're wrapped up and that is it. So, I think those other people may have believed that they, too, were becoming gods, joining the gods, had the idea of a blissful afterlife. But for those that could afford it, who could afford that gilded mask, you wanted to make absolutely sure you were going to have that transformation into a godlike state.

01:02:00 Greg

Well, I think she's achieved it, she looks like a god, she's got a lovely smile. Good for her. Well done.

8. Mummified body of a man with a panel painting

01:02:08 Campbell

This is the mummified body of a young man. His careful and elaborate wrappings form a design of diamond shapes. There is a horizontal orange band decorated with gold studs around his chest. A thin wooden panel painted with a young man's face with dark hair and no beard or moustache is inserted into the upper portion of the linen wrappings. The hair on the portrait is intertwined with a gilded wreath and a line of gold has been added between the lips.

01:02:40 Greg

I love these portraits. They are one of my favourite things from the ancient world. We call them Faiyum portraits, because of where they're found, right? That's the name. Yeah, OK, which is an Arabic name, so it's not necessarily what the place would have been called at the time?

01:02:57 Campbell

Nope. The Faiyum is a lake, really, that that comes off the river Nile, and very good farmland near there, and southwest of modern Cairo, still very good agricultural land. And it was a good settling place in the Graeco-Roman period for Greeks and Romans who had served in the army, and who were kind of pensioned off.

01:03:22 Greg

You've done your 25 years, yeah?

01:03:24 Campbell

In their retirement to go and farm. So, that may explain why this Graeco-Roman focus happens in the Faiyum area. So, we call them Faiyum portraits, but they're attested, they're known, from all over Egypt, so from the north and Alexandria, all the way down south to Aswan and the very southern part of Egypt.

01:03:47 Greg

Now they looked to me very Roman in style. If you get, if you're lucky enough to go on holiday to Italy and you go to Pompeii or Herculaneum, you see portraits of people a bit like this. It's really realistic. This is a man's face where you can see the muscles in his neck. His lips are plump. His eyes are brown and deep, and thoughtful. His eyebrows are on fleek, and his hair is beautifully tussled. His ears are sort of the right size. Like, this looks like, it looks modern. It looks like a, you know, eighteenth, nineteenth century portrait. So, this is ancient, but it feels very different to Egyptian art, as I normally think of it. And it, so I guess what's really interesting is this is a coffin. This is funerary,

right? This is a dead person who's being remembered. And so, how do they go about making it? Like, how do, you know, do you paint it by hand away from the body and then put it on at the end?

01:04:51 Campbell

Well, that is a big question that has got Egyptologists and Classicists, you know, people who deal with Greece and Rome and Egypt in the ancient world very excited, and none of us can agree. So, I've got some opinions about this.

01:05:04 Greg

Oh hello. Fight, fight, fight. Yes, yeah.

01:05:08 Campbell

Right. So, Greg, some people will tell you, you would sit for your portrait in the prime of life. So, you'd have a portrait painted, and it would then hang on your wall at home, and then when you popped your clogs, it would be cut down and wrapped into the mummified body. I don't think that's the case. Technically, they're very accomplished. They're on very thin panels of wood. The wood, incidentally, it's been analysed, and where it's been possible to analyse the wood, it's lime wood, which is not native to Egypt. There is even a theory that the portraits are painted in Italy, and they are shipped to Egypt. They do not represent, necessarily, the person whose mummified body they cover.

01:06:04 Greg

Yeah, because if someone dies in Egypt, you don't get a mail order painting done from Italy, it's gonna look like someone else.

01:06:13 Campbell

Your body goes off pretty quickly as well. So, there's no time to, you know, create a portrait based on a freshly dead person. So, there are lots of questions. As you say, they look so different to ancient Egyptian art. They look very Greek or very Roman in style and they have this kind of immediacy. They look like, you can see it's like, someone is turned to look at us.

01:06:41 Greg

It's very much, you know, you're making eye contact with the dead person.

01:06:46 Campbell

Yeah, there's that flash of light, the little dabs of white in the eyes show light, you know, reflectiveness of eyes. And that livingness, I think has confused modern people. We assume these are, as you said, like modern portraits from the nineteenth century that hang in art galleries. They're not. They are meant to represent the dead people as gods. And, you know, the Roman Emperor is worshipped as a god, while he's alive, when he's dead. He was certainly worshipped in Egypt. This is basically a Roman Period equivalent of the golden mummy masks, which the ancient Egyptians believed the gods had flesh of gold, so, you have a mummy mask covered in gold leaf. Here, the best way of dating them is stylistically, and it seems like, you know, depending on what the Roman Emperor's official hairstyle was like, whether it was Augustus or Hadrian or Tiberius, you had your hair the same way. So, you know, Kate Middleton gets a dress, everyone gets the same dress. Someone, a Hollywood actor, has their hair a certain way, people copy their hair. This is what you've got. The message is the same though, and in this case, Greg, it's made especially clear because you've got those golden laurels in the hair, which of course is a sign of victory in the Classical world. And this little line of gold between the teeth, between the lips, just an indication that this man, were he to speak, would have golden speech, and he would speak like a god. And these are little prompts to tell us this is, yeah, different from reality. And the CT scan, actually we did in the hospital, Manchester Children's Hospital on this body showed that the man is significantly overweight in life. So, I'm not saying that all the ancient Egyptians wanted to be thin, that's not the case, it just shows that the portrait doesn't necessarily match the body underneath.

01:09:00 Greg

Right. OK. So, the person, you know, the image we're seeing here is of someone young, they look like they're in their 20s, they look very, you know, yeah, it doesn't look like someone towards the end of their life, perhaps. But what's interesting, I suppose, is in the other mummy that we looked at, the golden lady staring back at us, she looked like a god because she had golden skin. Whereas here, we're looking at a human with normal Mediterranean-style skin, you know slightly, tanned. What makes him a god is the crown on his head and this tiny bit of gold on his lips. So, it's almost like the accessories now matter more than what the face looks like.

01:09:46 Campbell

Yes. And I think that's true of most earlier Egyptian practise, you know. The accessories are the things that help you achieve that status of godliness. Certainly, the golden skin, as you say, is a really explicit thing because the Egyptians, the ancient Egyptians, believed that gods who golden skin. So, if you've got golden skin, you're good to go as a god. But here, yeah, there could be this reference to the Emperor. How much people, you know, actually knew what the Roman Emperor, who was also the ruler of Egypt, of course, at this time, looked like is a different question. But you've got to think of the purpose of these mummified people. In the Roman period at the site of Hawara in the Faiyum, where this this gentleman was found, we have evidence that the mummified bodies were kept above ground for potentially years after the death of the person. And they were stood up, they were propped up in little kind of chapels, little rooms where people could go and visit. So, if you imagine you go to the family chapel and there are, I don't know, 20 relatives stretching back some time, in there little, you know, niches, ready to say hello. There is an element of trying to grab someone's attention. If you've got to make offerings and say prayers for 20 ancestors, how are you gonna stop

at one over the other? You want to have a really eye-catching portrait, that might improve on reality quite a bit, just as a way of grabbing someone's attention to give you know offerings to *me*. You know, like, pay attention to me. It could be something as practical as that. But we look at the portraits and we think, oh the people are so young and handsome and how tragic they are. I think that might be a kind of modern notion that we're putting on the ancient evidence.

01:11:47 Greg

It's funny, you say modern, because when I look at this, it looks to me like a sci-fi movie where someone in space has had to go into suspended animation, which means they've been put in a special pod, and they're gonna fly through space for 500 years and the machines gonna keep them alive and slow down their heart. And then five hundred years' time, they'll wake up, because you can see their face poking out of the little glass. And then the rest of the body's... And that's what's happening here. You've got a face poking out of them, you know, staring out.

01:12:17 Campbell

Greg, that's brilliant. No one has ever made that analogy in the run of time I've had these on display.

01:12:27 Greg

But do you know what I mean? Like, it looks like they've been put into a little pod and they're waiting, they're waiting to wake up again.

01:12:33 Campbell

And, do you know what, they have, in a way. And I think that's why these mummified people, especially, but mummies in general are so popular, because which of us will be remembered fifty years, a hundred years after we die? After our children die, our grandchildren? We won't, unless, like you, Greg, you're a famous author, your name will live on. But for most of us, there's a real existential, you know, thought about your life after death. These people have got what they wanted, in a way. Playing by the rules they set for themselves, I suspect actually that the analogy of being put into suspended animation is what happened. They are, in a way, in this suspended animation and they will be as young as the portrait is, magically, forever. As long as the portrait survives.

01:13:36 Greg

I was going to say as long as you don't put it out in the sunshine and suddenly the portrait fades away and bye, bye, god. Wow. Amazing. What a beautiful thing.