
KUNST HISTORISCHES MUSEUM WIEN



MAY 8 -
SEPTEMBER 26, 2018

THE FORGOTTEN PAPYRUS

This special exhibition presents a papyrus scroll the museum did not realize it owned. It was discovered by chance in 2013 in the course of work in the depot of the Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection. This fascinating discovery raises a number of questions, and this small exhibition presents the preliminary results of our comprehensive research. Videos document, for example, the unrolling of the ancient papyrus scroll following extensive preparatory work to determine the best way to unroll this extremely fragile artefact.

In 2013, the collection's animal mummies were studied and analysed; they included so-called ibis clay cones – cone-shaped clay vessels that functioned as coffins for ibis mummies.

The Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection holds 29 ibis clay cones, all of which entered the collection in the nineteenth century. Some of them came from the so-called Miramar Collection assembled by Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, later Emperor Maximilian of Mexico, and housed at Miramar Palace near Trieste, after which the collection is named. He had acquired these ancient Egyptian artefacts in the middle of the nineteenth century, and they were eventually incorporated into the imperial collection in Vienna in 1883.

One of the clay cones from the Miramar Collection (inv.no. ÄS 5174) contained not only the expected ibis mummy but also a small packet, which turned out to be a still unrolled papyrus scroll

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wrapped in two pieces of fabric. The first windings of the papyrus scroll had broken away, and the revealed hieratic characters date the papyrus to the late New Kingdom (c. 1100 B.C.). The scroll's inner linen wrapping was in good condition, but the outer piece of linen was badly creased and damaged, and bore an – initially obscure – sketched depiction.

In the spring of 2014, we were joined by an external papyrus conservator and began to unroll the scroll. In order to make the papyrus fibres flexible and supple again they were carefully moistened in a humidity chamber made of Plexiglas. Two pieces of absorbent paper soaked in water/ethanol provided the necessary humidity. Slowly and carefully the scroll was then unrolled, regenerated with a cellulose derivative on a vacuum table, and delicately smoothed out. Unrolling the papyrus scroll took only four days. The unrolled papyrus (incl. all fragments) is 250 centimetres long.

The creased outer linen wrapping was treated in the same way. After smoothing the fabric we were able to identify the image: it is the fragmentary depiction of an upright crocodile standing on its tail, behind the figure of a man.

The papyrus contains writing on both sides; some places still bear traces of some earlier inscription. The hieratic writing, and the shapes of the characters, suggest it dates from the late Ramesside Period (c. 1100 B.C.). The text includes a number of dates that support this attribution. The author of the text was a scribe named Thutmose, who is mentioned in a number of contemporary documents. This papyrus was his private account- or notebook and contains lists of his personal earnings and expenditures as well as the report of a theft.

Animal mummies are mainly documented for the Late Period (7th century B.C.) or later; this was confirmed by a ¹⁴C-analysis of the linen wrappings of the ibis mummy from the clay cone inv.no. ÄS 5174, and the two pieces of linen in which the scroll was wrapped. This dates the outer linen wrapping with the sketch to the same time as the animal mummy, i.e. the Late or Ptolemaic Period (c. 380-300 B.C.). The inner linen wrapping is, however, only a little younger than the papyrus scroll and presumably dates from the 21st or early 22nd Dynasty (late 11th - middle of the 9th century B.C.). Both papyrus and inner linen wrapping are therefore c. 700 years older than the ibis mummy and the outer linen wrapping. This may be an indication that the packet was placed in the ibis clay cone in antiquity, with the papyrus scroll possibly functioning as a symbolic offering for the deity Thoth, regardless of its content. Thoth was

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venerated as the inventor of writing and was depicted as a man with the head of an ibis.

But as long as we have no other examples of written documents being added to an animal mummy we cannot exclude the possibility that the scroll was inserted in the nineteenth century. Subsequent research will therefore concentrate on the search for comparable examples and/or evidence, with a special focus on the many untouched ibis clay cones in the collection, whose content will be analysed with the help of X-ray and/or CT examinations.

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PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

Press photographs are available in the press section of our website free of charge, for your topical reporting: press.khm.at.



Exhibition poster
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Clay cone with lidded bowl and ibis mummy, inv.no. ÄS 5174
Late Period, 30th Dynasty – Ptolemaic Period, c. 380-300 B.C.
red terracotta, L: 28 cm, max diameter: 13 cm
lid: H: 4.5 cm, max diameter: 10,6 cm
linen, ibis mummy: L: 26 cm, W: 9,5 cm, H: 6 cm
1878, from the Miramar Collection
© KHM-Museumsverband



The first photograph after the discovery of the papyrus in the cellar
© KHM-Museumsverband



The still unopened packet containing the papyrus scroll
© KHM-Museumsverband



The papyrus with the opened and fragmented part of the scroll
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The still rolled-up papyrus
© KHM-Museumsverband, Foto: Vanessa Novak



The inner linen wrapping of the papyrus
© KHM-Museumsverband



Unrolling the papyrus and treating it with liquid cellulose
© KHM-Museumsverband



The drawing on the outer wrapping:
A striding man (head and calves are lost)
with a crocodile next to his right arm
© KHM-Museumsverband



The date (right) and name of the scribe Thutmose
in the second column on the front of the papyrus
© KHM-Museumsverband

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Gluing together two fragments under the stereo microscope
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Ibis mummy
Late Period, 30th Dynasty – Ptolemaic Period,
c. 380–31 B.C.
Ibis mummy, linen, L: c. 34 cm, W: 9 cm, D: 8,5 cm
Old imperial holdings, acquired before 1875
© KHM-Museumsverband



Statue of Thoth in the shape of an ibis
Late Period 6th century B.C.
© KHM-Museumsverband



Mock mummy of a monkey
Late Period – Ptolemaic Period 4th – 1st century B.C.
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Piled-up ibis clay cones in the subterranean ibis galleries at Saqqara
Photograph: © Robert Demarée, Leiden

SYMPOSIUM

Symposium organised in connection with the special exhibition
The Forgotten Papyrus

Wednesday, June 13, 2018, Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna
For more information and binding reservations please contact us at
info.aeos@khm.at

CATALOGUE

Sabine Haag – Regina Hölzl (eds.)
The Forgotten Papyrus
paperback, 96 pages, in German
price: € 14,95

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OPENING HOURS AND ENTRANCE FEES

Tuesdays–Sundays, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Thursdays until 9 p.m.

June, July, and August open daily!

Annual Ticket	€ 44
Annual ticket under 25	€ 25
Adults	€ 15
Concessions	€ 11
Vienna Card	€ 14
Children under 19	free
Group ticket (p.p.)	€ 11
Guided Tour	€ 3
Audio Guide	€ 5

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<https://shop.khm.at/en/ticket-shop/>

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