

Mask of a Woman **The British Museum**

From Egypt
Roman Period, about AD 100-120

Painted plaster cartonnage mask of a woman



Funerary images in ancient Egypt were not restricted to the painted wooden panels, known as 'mummy portraits'. Plaster masks, often extending to cover the upper body, were also used, and seem to have been particularly popular in Middle Egypt.

The face of this mask was made separately in a mould and subsequently attached to the head-dress and torso. The woman wears a yellow tunic, leaving the breasts exposed, a collar and a winged scarab beetle, and has a garland of rosebuds in her hair. On her sleeves are the protective wings of Isis and Nephthys, while images of other deities appear behind the woman's hair. She holds a sprig of leaves, perhaps myrtle.

The style of the earrings, bracelets and finger rings suggests a date in the early second century AD; around that time this hairstyle, based on a traditional Egyptian one, became popular for funerary portraits. This mask shows that elements of traditional Egyptian funerary iconography were still to be found well into the Roman era.

S. Walker and M. Bierbrier, *Ancient faces: mummy portrai-1* (London, The British Museum Press, 1997)

Source URL: http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/aes/m/mask_of_a_woman.aspx
Saylor URL: <http://www.saylor.org/courses/arth201>