

# FACULTY RESEARCH BULLETIN



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Power for Mind & Soul

**The Discovery of *P.Lond.* 130–137: A Preliminary Report on  
Associated Artifacts Held in the Al-Salam School Museum (Asyut,  
Egypt)**

Mills McArthur

Introduction

The Al-Salam School Museum in Asyut, Egypt contains several artifacts associated with the celebrated papyrus collection *P.Lond.* 130–137.<sup>1</sup> These papyri (which include the *Athēnaïōn Politeia* of Aristotle, the *Mimes* of Herondas, and several other texts) were acquired by the British Museum in 1890. The discovery of these papyri has been described in several sources, including the 1923 memoirs of Assyriologist A. H. Sayce.<sup>2</sup> In Sayce's telling, the papyri were uncovered by native Egyptians in a tomb at Meir. One of the Egyptians then brought the papyri to an American missionary, the Reverend J. R. Alexander, in the city of Asyut. With some help from Sayce, the papyri were soon conveyed to the British Museum. They now reside in the British Library as Papyri 130–137.

However, Sayce states that several other artifacts were found in the tomb alongside the papyri. According to Sayce, these artifacts remained in Asyut rather than being sent to London. Sayce describes the discovery as follows:

The papyri had been found in a tomb which contained the mummies of a man and his wife. Along with them the *fellah* had brought some inscribed strips of the shroud as well as a label that had been placed on the man's breast. The inscription was in gilded Greek letters on a red ground and recorded the name of Sarapous, the son of Serapion, who died 'childless' in the 14th year of Augustus. The label and inscribed strips remained at Assiût.<sup>3</sup>

In a footnote, Sayce adds the following:

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to those who facilitated my visit to the museum in Asyut, in particular Mr. Raouf Farouk (curator of the Al-Salam Museum), Esraa Mohamed (local antiquities inspector) and Amir Samy and Pola Samy (of Shepherd Travel).

<sup>2</sup> Sayce 1923, pp. 333–334.

<sup>3</sup> Sayce 1923, pp. 333–334.

The faces of the husband and wife were painted on the mummy-cases, that of the wife being in white; gold ear-rings were attached to it while a garland of flowers was depicted on the head. Above the label on the breast was the figure of Anubis supporting an orb of gold and clad in a leopard's skin, and a terracotta figure of Harpocrates with his finger in the mouth was laid by the side of the mummy.<sup>4</sup>

While Sayce only says that the objects “remained at Assiût,” other sources demonstrate that they were housed in the school museum managed by J. R. Alexander (now the Al-Salam School Museum). For example, an unpublished typescript containing Alexander's own description of the museum runs as follows:

In one of the cases is a very interesting collection of Ancient Egyptian Curios which were found in an old tomb at Meir. Some mummy cloth, some Mummy beads, an old wooden Lock, some clay figures made to represent the old Egyptian deities, a few interesting clay seals, and numerous other objects which were presented to the Museum by several Egyptian friends. The plaster mask of the face of the childless wife of Serapeus, the owner of the Aristotle papyri, and the plaque containing his name and that of his father form part of the contents of one of the Cases.

A visit to Al-Salam School Museum on December 30, 2025, with approval from the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, allowed for preliminary study of many of the objects which Sayce and Alexander describe. Though some aspects of Sayce's and Alexander's account are inaccurate and will require further study, their key contention—that the papyri were found in a tomb in Meir—appears to be correct. The mummy remains in the Asyut museum are consistent with burials of the Roman period from Meir, including the famous mummy of Artemidora housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, casual perusal of the museum displays allowed me to identify—though not photograph or formally study—the image of Anubis mentioned by Sayce (Inv. 251; American number 111). Though the Anubis was not covered by my original permit, I hope to return to Asyut to study this artifact in person before final publication.

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<sup>4</sup> Sayce 1923, p. 334 n. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Griselle 2022; Riggs 2005, pp. 110–15, 117, 118, 119, 121, 122–24, 247, 270–71; figs. 48, 49, pl. 4.

## Catalogue of Artifacts

The following artifacts, studied during my visit of December 30, 2025, can be plausibly associated with the discovery context of *PLond.* 130–137. Each artifact in the Asyut school museum is assigned a modern inventory number and an older “American number.” Whenever possible, both numbers are provided below.

### Mummy label (Figure 1)

*Inv.* 398 (*American number* 84)

Raised gilded letters against a red background. Attached to linen, seemingly cut from the body of a mummy. The linen forms a thin border around the label.

Maximum width:	180 mm	<i>Includes linen border around label.</i>
Maximum height:	90 mm	"
Label width:	169 mm	<i>Excludes linen border around label.</i>
Label height:	75 mm	"

Inscription:

Σαραποῦς  
Σαραπίωνος  
ἸΔ ἄτεκνος

Sarapous, of Sarapion. 14 years old. Childless.

### Mummy mask (Figure 2)

*Inv.* 396

Plaster mask in several fragments. Inlaid eyes, lined with blue. White skin. Black hair. Pink wreath of flowers around the head. Specks of gold representing jewelry.

Maximum width (face):	129 mm	<i>Excludes ear fragments.</i>
Maximum height (face):	158 mm	<i>Excludes neck fragment.</i>
R. ear fragment, max. height:	145 mm	
R. ear fragment, max. width:	70 mm	
L. ear fragment, max. height:	102 mm	
L. ear fragment, max. width:	51 mm	
Neck fragment, max. height:	86 mm	
Neck fragment, max. width:	95 mm	

### Wooden lock (Figure 3)

*Inv.* 383 (*American number* 80)

Length:	198 mm
Width:	101 mm
Height of base:	38 mm
Maximum height:	78 mm

Figure of Harpocrates (Figure 4)

*Inv. 328 (American number 144)*

Height: 147 mm

Maximum Width: 94 mm

Depth: 50 mm

Dark brown figurine.

Figure of Harpocrates (Figure 5)

*Inv. 328 (American number 147)*

H 177mm

Maximum W 97mm

D 66mm

Clay figurine (Figure 6)

*Inv. 326 (American number 142)*

Maximum Height: 115 mm

Maximum Width: 62 mm

Depth: 30 mm

Clay figurine (Figure 6)

*Inv. 326 (American number 143)*

Maximum Height: 122 mm

Maximum Width: 65 mm

Depth: 35 mm

Clay figurine of a woman (Figure 7)

*Inv. 327 (American number 141)*

Maximum Height: 147 mm

Maximum Width: 113 mm

Depth: 46 mm

Figures

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**



**Figure 7**



### Bibliography

Griselle, Sophie. 2022. “La représentation du défunt et de la défunte sur les masques funéraires de Meir (70-110 apr. J.-C.),” *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 122, pp. 265–307.

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