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Roman and Early Byzantine Burials at Fag el-Gamus, Egypt:
A Reassessment of the Case for Religious Affiliation

Kristin H. South

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Roman and Early Byzantine Burials at Fag el-Gamus, Egypt: A Reassessment of the Case for Religious Affiliation

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Master of Arts

The Late Roman necropolis of Fag el-Gamus on the eastern edge of Egypt's Fayum Oasis is a valuable archaeological site for exploring issues of personal and cultural identity in Roman Egypt. Former scholarship regarding the people buried at Fag el-Gamus has claimed—based on narrow evidence—that they represent an exceptionally early Christian community in Egypt. However, a more careful look at the evidence—using recent theoretical approaches, data-driven analyses, and comparisons with contemporary sites throughout Egypt and neighboring areas—reveals a more complicated portrait of their religious affiliation and other aspects of their identity. This study examines several potential markers of religious affiliation at Fag el-Gamus placed in the context of burials from throughout the Roman and early Byzantine eras in Egypt. Aspects of burial that appear to be “Christian” innovations or first occur in the period during which Christianity first appears are highlighted. Conclusions from this broader and more in-depth evidence suggests that the case for the early arrival of Christianity in Egypt is highly ambiguous, and any arguments concerning it must be correspondingly complex. The necropolis of Fag el-Gamus, due to its extensive size and excellent preservation, provides valuable evidence for the unfolding of this slow and piecemeal change and for the discussion of multiple aspects of identity.

Keywords: burial practices, Byzantine Egypt, Fag el-Gamus, identity theory, Roman Egypt

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The process of gathering information about other sites, much of it unpublished or only available in obscure locations, was greatly facilitated by a generous and friendly set of international scholars who welcomed me as one of their own. My first and greatest debt is to John Peter and Felicity Wild, who provided offprints and photocopies of hard-to-find publications and generously offered their hospitality for a visit to Manchester in June, 2011. Thanks also to Susan Martin (Manchester Museum) and Frances Pritchard (Whitworth Art Gallery) for meeting with me and sharing their collections during my visit to Manchester.

I am grateful that Cécilia Fluck sent photographs and references by email and went out of her way to provide access to a hard-to-find book. Her organization of the Textiles of the Nile Valley conference in 2011 facilitated important discussions with Beatrice Huber, Fleur Letellier-Willemin, Petra Linscheid, and Tineke Rooijakker (who suggested that I look at modern Coptic liturgy for parallels and holdovers to ancient ribbon use). Gillian Bowen and Rosanne Livingston also graciously corresponded from Australia and provided unpublished information about their work at Kellis. Annette Paetz Schieck and Sylvia Mitschke of the Curt-Engelhorn-Stiftung in Mannheim were also particularly friendly and helpful.

Emilia Cortes of Metropolitan Museum in New York City graciously provided access to critical information about finds from Bagawat, Lisht, Dahshur, Deir el-Bahari, and the Monastery of Epiphanius, and help in locating one Pharaonic example of purpose-woven ribbon. Thanks are due also to Marsha Hill of the Egyptian Section for sharing photographs from early Metropolitan Museum excavations at Deir el-Bahari and for suggesting useful bibliographic references; Helen Evans of the Department of Medieval Art for a lively discussion of how to distinguish Christianities in Egypt and for access to the unpublished photographs of the Bagawat excavations; Christine Brennan for helping me access the photographs; and Giovanna Fiorino-Iannace for a tour of the Museum's impressive Antonio Ratti Textile Center.

My work has benefitted greatly from grants that allowed me to travel to collections and to conferences. Thanks to the Pasold Research Institute for funding to travel to the British Museum and to the *Purpureae Vestes* conference in Naples; to the Harold B. Lee Library Student Research Grant, which allowed study in Jordan and England; to Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Brigham Young University for funding to participate in the *Dressing the Dead* conference in Sheffield, England; and to the Anthropology Department and Ancient Near Eastern Studies for funding to participate in the *Textiles of the Nile Valley* conference in Antwerp, Belgium.

Additionally, the BYU Graduate Studies Fellowship allowed me time and resources to finish the thesis quickly and begin constructing a database that will facilitate future work at Fag el-Gamus.

Thanks also to the members of the Fag el-Gamus excavation team--Kerry Muhlestein, Giovanni Tata, Joyce Smith, Paul Evans, David Whitchurch--who endured my endless questions with good humor and who collected data for me when I was not able to participate in the dig seasons personally. Naturally, none of this work would have been possible without the years of excavation at Fag el-Gamus by Wilfred Griggs, who included me in the excavation team in 1998

and in 2009. Thanks as well to John Gee for productive conversation and for locating useful references about burial direction.

Last and most of all, I thank my family for their patience and support. Thanks to my sweet boys for granting space and time. Words cannot express my debt to my husband, Mickle South, whose well-timed runs for dessert and sweet potato fries were no less helpful than his patient reading and rereading of my manuscript and able technical assistance.

NOTES

Previous Publications

Chapter Three, “Analysis of Data,” and Chapter Four, “The Wider Context in Egypt,” rely heavily on four of my past chapters, articles, and conference talks for the information in them, and in many cases entire paragraphs of my previously published writing have been recombined to present a composite of the most up-to-date research on these topics. Although the chapters have multiple authors, in each case the wording and research is my own.

The sources for these sections are as follows:

South, Kristin H.

2013 (projected) Regarding Ribbons: the Spread and Use of Narrow Purpose-Woven Bands in Late Roman Egyptian Burials. In *Proceedings of the 7th Conference of the Research group ‘Textiles of the Nile Valley,’* edited by Antoine De Moor and Cécilia Fluck. Lannoo, Antwerp.

2012 Minor Burial Textiles and Religious Affiliation: An Archaeological Case Study from Roman Egypt. In *Dressing the Dead in Classical Antiquity*, edited by Maureen Carroll and John Peter Wild, pp. 62-74. Amberley Publishing, Stroud, Gloucestershire.

South, Kristin H., Joyce Y. Smith, Giovanni Tata, and C. Wilfred Griggs

2009 ‘Face Bundles’ in Early Christian Burials from the Fayum. *Archaeological Textiles Newsletter* 48: 2-5.

2011 Textile Finds from a Typical Early Christian Burial at Fag el-Gamus (Fayum), Egypt. In *Purpureae Vestes III: Proceedings of the Conference held 13-15 November, 2008*, edited by Carmen Alfaro, Jean-Pierre Brun, Philippe Borgard, and Rafaela Pierobon-Benoit, pp. 127-136. University of Valencia, Naples.

The data for the current study came from an overlapping but not identical sample to those used above. For this reason, some statistics have changed even though the wordings are similar. For instance, in 2012 I reported that 77 percent of the ribbons were of the red and white variety

(South 2012:65), but amongst the current sample, it is only 72 percent. Likewise, the 2009 report on face bundles could not make use of the 2009 excavation season data, while the current study does. The general conclusions are not affected by these differences.

Terminology of Dating

Because the places and time periods discussed in this thesis include those that could be designated with the Western Christian calendar (Anno Domino), the Coptic Orthodox calendar (Anno Martyri) and the Islamic calendar (Anno Hijra), a word on systems of dating is in order. I have opted to retain the Christian terminology of AD/BC to refer to dates post and prior to the year 0 of our modern Western calendar. The alternate system employing CE/BCE refers to the same set of dates but is not used here.

Spellings

The archaeological site under study was known as “Seila” (Saila, Seilah, Sila) in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mentions of the site (Grenfell and Hunt 1900:4-7, Bagnall and Rathbone 2004:136), but this names the Fourth Dynasty pyramid rather than the necropolis that lies nearby. The modern name of the area around the necropolis has been spelled “Fagg el-Gamus” by its first modern excavator and other recent observers (Lesko 1988, Bagnall and Rathbone 2004), but when Brigham Young University gained the concession, the preferred spelling became “Fag el-Gamous” (Griggs 1988). Unaware of Lesko’s spelling of the site name, I have used “Fag el-Gamus” in recent publications (South 2009; South et al. 2010; South 2012) in order to minimize confusion of the pronunciation of the second word (it rhymes with “moose,” not with “mouse”); doubtless the use of “Fagg” rather than “Fag” had more to do with objectionable false cognates in English than with the original Arabic term.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Late Roman necropolis of Fag el-Gamus on the eastern edge of Egypt's Fayum (see map, Figure 1) has yielded over a thousand human burials, many in excellent states of preservation, in the course of the past thirty years of excavation by Brigham Young University (BYU). The cemetery's poor but unfairly earned reputation of having few valuable objects to excavate has worked in its favor, leading most of the area to remain unlooted despite its close proximity to villages and vegetation (Lesko 1988:223). The continuing importance of this site lies in its ability to shed light on the demographics of late Roman Egypt and on the transitional period between traditional Egyptian and early Christian funerary practices.

Former scholarship regarding the people buried at Fag el-Gamus has centered on the claim that they represent an exceptionally early Christian community in Egypt, based largely on the orientation of their burials. A careful look at the evidence, however, integrating recent theoretical approaches with data-driven analyses, and comparisons with contemporary sites throughout Egypt and neighboring areas, reveals a more complicated portrait of their religious affiliation and other aspects of their identity. This reexamination of the data suggests that the date at which Christianity arrived in this area was later than previous publications from this site have claimed, and that the process of supplanting traditional religious identities was also longer and less complete than previously argued.

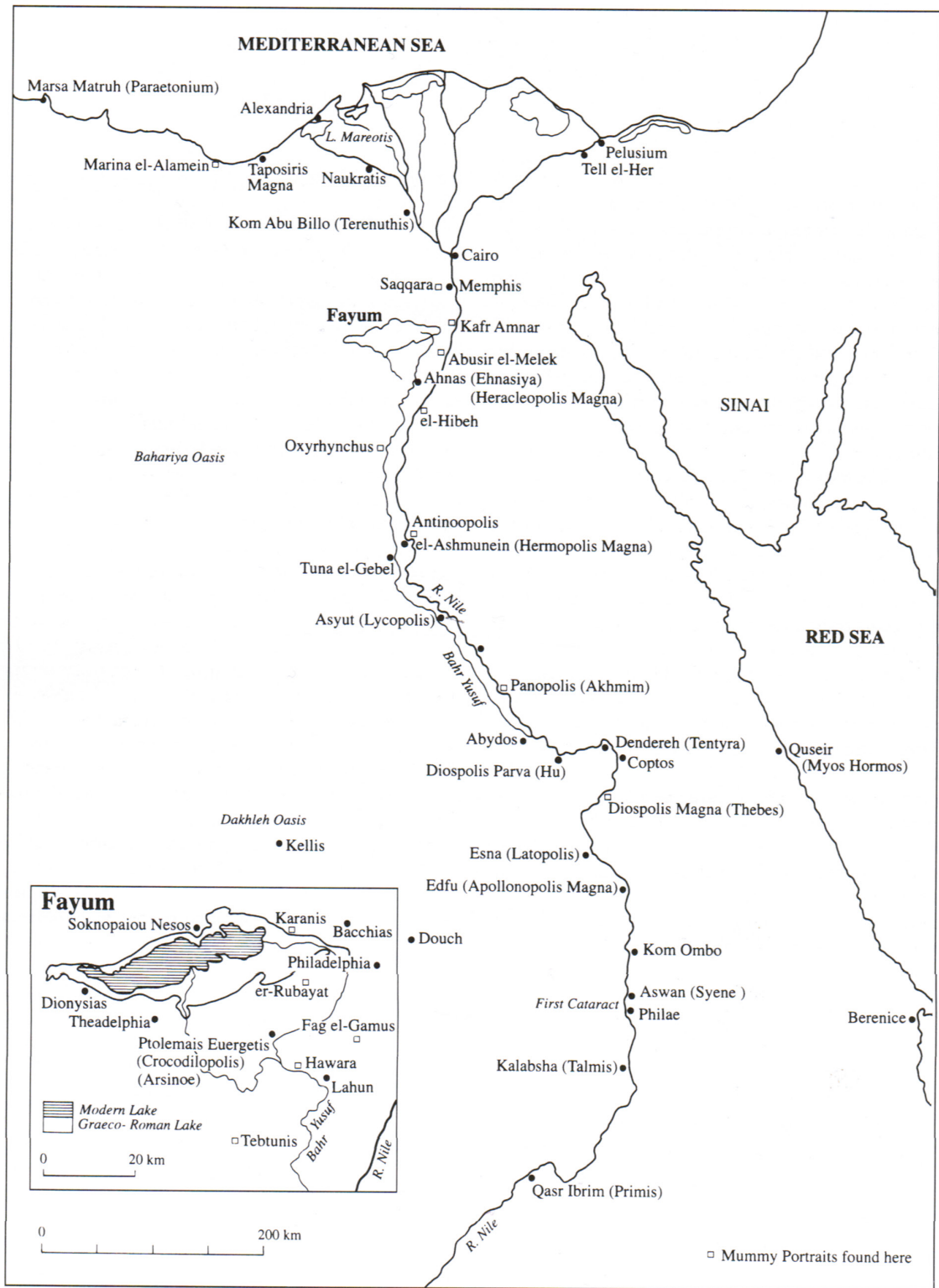


Figure 1. Map of the Nile Valley in Egypt showing Fayum Oasis to the southwest of Cairo and Fag el-Gamus in the detailed map of the oasis (Walker and Bierbrier 1997:8)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SPECIFIC AIMS

The major question of this paper is *whether* and *how* those who interred the occupants of this cemetery marked changing religious identity as it occurred. Specifically, is it possible for a modern observer to recognize early Christian burials in Egypt as discreet and different from traditional Egyptian burials of the same period?

The following specific aims will be addressed, within this overall goal of creating a more complex view of changing religious affiliations within the cemetery at Fag el Gamus:

1. First, this paper tests the claim that changes in burial direction at Fag el-Gamus automatically signal changes in religious affiliation. The remainder of Chapter One will directly challenge the published assertions that all eastward-facing burials are Christians and all adherents to traditional Egyptian religion would have been buried facing to the west.

2. The lack of an overt theoretical framework weakens the utility of the previous interpretations of the data. Chapter Two shows how recent scholarship in the archaeology of identity provides one useful framework for interpreting the finds at Fag el-Gamus.

3. Accurate and replicable reporting of the data is central to plausible analysis. Chapter Three reports data from multiple lines of evidence, including in-depth analyses of two prominent but new types of funerary goods found at Fag el-Gamus, namely face bundles and purpose-woven ribbons used as binding materials.

4. Contextualizing the finds is as important as theorizing and accurately reporting them. In order to understand the specific data from any one site, it is necessary to consider the context of parallel sites in time and place. Chapter Four compares the burial practices at Fag el-Gamus with broader trends in Egyptian and Christian burial practices.

EXCAVATION AND PUBLICATION HISTORY

The explorers Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt first surveyed the necropolis of Fag el-Gamus in the early twentieth century, extracting a handful of Fayum mummy portraits from an undocumented location on the site (1900:4-5; 1901:2-5). Although unsystematic and lacking in details, their attentions did show that the necropolis of Fag el-Gamus was worthy of future study.

In the 1970s, conservation specialists and excavators turned their attention toward the Fayum and recognized it as one of the most endangered areas in Egypt, due to expanding agriculture and high ground water levels. At that time, the cemetery at Fag el-Gamus was called “one of the most important untouched cemeteries in the Fayum” (Lesko 1988:215).

In 1980, Leonard Lesko of the University of California, Berkeley, gained the excavation concession for the site and began systematic study. His 1981 season was divided between the Seila pyramid, where he oversaw the work (and from which the site took its name in official publications), and the necropolis, where the field director was C. Wilfred Griggs, of Brigham Young University (Lesko 1988). Leonard Lesko concluded that the necropolis was in more urgent need of excavation than the pyramid, due to encroaching agriculture and potential tomb robbing (Lesko 1988:235).

When Wilfred Griggs assumed leadership of the team after the 1981 season, he also focused most of his time and resources on the necropolis. Griggs subsequently led an excavation team to Fag el-Gamus most years from 1984 until his retirement in 2011. The vast size and extended amount of time during which the necropolis was actively used, combined with its mostly un plundered state, make it potentially one of the most important witnesses of the Roman Fayum.

Future Excavation and Research

The work of excavation, research, and study at Fag el-Gamus is now poised to move forward. Brigham Young University has retained the right to continue to study and excavate at the site under a new director, the Egyptologist Dr. Kerry Muhlestein. The excavation team now includes a biologist (Paul Evans), a second Egyptologist (John Gee), a papyrologist specializing in early Christian Egypt (Lincoln Blumell), a religious and art historian (David Whitchurch) and three textile analysts (Giovanni Tata, Joyce Smith, and Kristin South). The team is going forward with a new emphasis on best practices in excavation, transparent scholarship, and frequent publication.

BURIAL DIRECTION

Five separate summaries of the work at Fag el-Gamus, published between 1988 and 2005 (Griggs 1988a, 1992, 2005; Griggs et al. 1993, 2001) stated that the burials at Fag el-Gamus represent some of the earliest evidences for Christianity in Egypt. This claim started from the observation that the most deeply buried individuals were orientated toward the west, while the higher burials, those more recently buried, faced east. The first report (Griggs 1988a:80-82) noted that the burial shafts appeared to have been dug with reference to the seasonal location of the sun and propose the theory that a “major cultural upheaval” occurred with a change in burial direction from westward-facing (as the lowest burials tended to be) to eastward-facing (as all of the higher burials were). Griggs proposed Christianity as the probable cause for this change, and further conjectured, based on pottery finds, that these changes occurred around the end of the first century AD. The underlying premise of the claim was that traditional Egyptian religious beliefs about a blessed afterlife would lead to burial facing the realm of Osiris, in the west; the

Christian afterlife focused instead on Christ, whose coming from the east would be welcomed by resurrected Christians facing in that direction (Griggs 1988a:81-82; C. Wilfred Griggs personal communication). This hypothesis regarding the religious affiliation of the people buried at Fag el-Gamus was established very early in the history of the excavation and remained the organizing principle throughout the following years. Since that time, however, a great deal more data have been collected, which complicate this claim without, however, denying that eastward-direction in burial is a frequent marker of newly-Christianized populations (Fletcher 1997:260 discusses this change in Europe; Bowen 2003: 168 notes that this change occurs in the western oases).

Burial direction in the earlier Predynastic, Pharaonic, and Ptolemaic times was neither uniform nor predominantly westward facing. In fact, the opposite was true. Raven's study of burial direction (2005), as part of a larger study of the importance of the orientation of the human body in various ancient Egyptian ritual settings, shows that from the Predynastic to the Middle Kingdom, bodies were most often laid on the left side with the head to the south and face to the west, but from the New Kingdom onward, bodies were most often placed in the ground on their backs with the head to the west (Raven 2005:40-41), and an equation between the east and resurrection was understood (Raven 2005:47). Eastward orientation, then, rather than westward, would have marked an affiliation with traditional Egyptian thinking about resurrection and practices for burying the dead.

In the Southern Levant, Iron Age burials of Canaanites who wanted to show an affiliation with Egypt were placed on an east-west axis, generally with heads to the west (Bloch-Smith 1992:31). In this setting, the combination of factors that marked these burials as "Egyptianizing" included imported pottery, Egyptian linen wrappings, and other artifacts; a head-west burial direction was among these choices and differed from usual Canaanite practice. This shows that

even outside of Egypt, an Egyptian preference for head-west burial was known and imitated as early as the thirteenth- and twelfth-centuries BC (Bloch-Smith 1992:31).

Another complication arises from viewing burials contemporary with and slightly earlier than the burial of Fag el-Gamus. Chapter Four provides data, where available, regarding the orientation of burials from many sites close in time and place to Fag el-Gamus. It shows that during the “Christian” era, most of the excavated and reported burials did face east and that an eastward orientation was associated with Christianity. The slightly earlier site of Hawara, however, provides some important data regarding burial direction that should be considered here, as it complicates the picture: Petrie’s 1911 publication of Roman burials at the Middle Kingdom pyramid complex of Hawara shows that buildings there contained burials facing in every direction. In the northeast compartment of a building divided into four sections, eight out of ten mummies had heads to the north, while the southeast compartment had three mummies, all of whose heads were to the south (Petrie 1911:3, Plate XXIII). Another building contained burials facing both east and west, including a head-west burial with two head-east burials directly below it (Petrie 1911:Plate XXII). This is particularly significant in the context of Griggs’s observation that at Fag el-Gamus the earlier burials have heads to the east and later burials have heads to the west and that the change occurs only in this order (Griggs 1988a:81-82). At Hawara, which is very close in time and space to Fag el-Gamus, the opposite type of reversal of burial direction (from facing east to facing west) does occur in at least one instance, despite both burials occurring in a pre-Christian context. This changeability in burials of individuals of presumably the same religious affiliation shows that burial direction alone is not sufficient to mark religious affiliation.

The specific purpose of this discussion is to show that it is too simplistic to claim either that Egyptian burials that were part of the Pharaonic tradition would always be buried with a westward orientation or that a “switch” to an eastward orientation would automatically signal a great upheaval in society. In the excavated portions of the vast burial grounds at Fag el-Gamus, the lowest (earliest) burials did face west and those who interred the higher (later) burials did choose the opposite orientation, which makes it reasonable to suppose that burial direction was meaningful at this site. Eastward-facing burials were not unknown in traditional Egypt, though, and some evidence indicates it may have even been the preferred direction from the New Kingdom onward. While it is true that the majority of early Christian burials were placed on an east-west axis with heads to the west (so that they would face east), it was not only those who wanted to show a Christian affiliation who could have chosen to inter their dead in that direction: association with the rising sun was a significant factor long before Christianity’s emphasis on the rising Son. Thus, burial direction is only one of several choices that should be examined in considering evidences for Christianity.

2 SOCIAL IDENTITY

THEORETICAL ISSUES

As Matthew Johnson (2010:2) declares, no archaeological work is truly atheoretical: “theory is the order we put facts in.” With this extremely simple definition of theory in mind, it becomes obvious that even (or perhaps especially) a scholar who simply describes his or her work has had to make choices about what to describe, but in such a case, those choices are based on subconscious preconceptions. Without a defined theoretical stance, a specific methodology, and guiding research questions, archaeology quickly becomes an exercise in digging up and displaying the shiniest objects. *Why* we dig, *how* we dig, and *how we interpret* what we dig are all dependent on having a theoretical framework.

Although the explicit study of theory can discourage the very human tendency not to evaluate our own assumptions, the pull of pre-conceived views is strong (Johnson 2010:6, 105-6). Nonetheless, the current team of researchers desire to reset the interpretations of religious identity at Fag el-Gamus by developing an understanding of how to think about group identity, including but not exclusive to religious identity, on a theoretical level. Detailed observation of how the individuals buried at Fag el-Gamus were represented in death leads to a recognition that “Christian” and “traditional Egyptian” belief systems could have intermingled more than has been acknowledged previously, and that what Christianization meant for an individual differed from person to person. Sharp distinctions and pre-packaged separations of identity must give way to an understanding that includes mixed grouping of identities that could fluctuate with occasion and need.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

The majority of the publications from Fag el-Gamus have focused on the single issue of religious affiliation. While the site does provide very important data for the transition from traditional Egyptian religious identity to the newly-arrived Christianity, this focus on religious affiliation has prevented scholars at the site from building a fully nuanced picture of the inhabitants of Fag el-Gamus. Infant and child burials, for example, are scarce throughout the Roman world (Carroll 2012) but abound at this site, providing much-needed demographic data about the entire course of life in one particular ancient population. The cemetery itself, taken as a whole, can illustrate aspects of the general population of the Fayum. Disease and age at death are well documented. Textile finds at Fag el-Gamus are outstanding in quality, quantity, and variety, and have the potential to illuminate status, wealth, occupation, religious, and ethnic identities. This list of possible data sets is incomplete, but suggests that the uses to which evidence from Fag el-Gamus has been put in the past have not reached their full potential. Theoretical approaches to the study of identity can merge these and other viable areas of study and provide a meaningful direction for future work.

IDENTITY IN ARCHAEOLOGY

At a very basic level, archaeology deals with questions of identity: who were the people of the past? What material correlates to their lives provide evidence of how they lived, as individuals or as groups of people? To what level of specificity is it possible to discern between groups of past peoples? What does information about individuals tell us about their larger society? Although archaeological exploration has turned in many other directions, these social dimensions remain central to any inquiry about the human past, and changes in how these kinds of questions are approached coincide with larger changes in archaeological thought. Modern

identity theory has emerged as an important and flexible set of paradigms, providing theoretically sophisticated but easily comprehensible means of answering multiple related questions about the people of the ancient world.

“Identity” in archaeology generally centers on questions of “individuals’ identification with broader groups on the basis of differences socially sanctioned as significant...[and] inextricably linked to the sense of belonging” (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:1). This sense of identity can include both inherited attributes like sex, national origin and ethnicity, and more fluid categories like age, gender, and economic status.

Archaeologists use the same term, “identity,” to refer to “a wide variety of disparate phenomena” (Allison 2008:42), leading at times to an overly-broad application of this concept. The term can be used both for self-referential inclusion in a group and external application of categories of difference (Insoll 2005:192,206). In addition to this distinction between categories of inclusion and exclusion, social psychologists recognize that “the self-image includes both a personal self, which reflects idiosyncratic aspects of the self, and a social self, which reflects information about the groups to which people belong” (Tyler et al. 1999:1-2). Because these two scales of identity—the individual and the group—overlap but are distinctly different, the terms “social/group identity” and “personal identity” more specifically distinguish between them. For the purposes of this paper, however, “identity” if not otherwise specified will refer to the social/group aspects of identity, that is, one’s membership in various socially-defined categories, rather than to idiosyncratic aspects of personal preferences.

A person’s identity, according to contemporary archaeological thought, is multi-layered, subject to change over time, socially constructed, and open to reformulation as different situations and needs arise (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005; Insoll 2007; Meskell 2001).

Social/group identity and personal identity, while differing from one another, are nonetheless related and inform each other as varying aspects of “the generation of the self at a variety of levels” (Insoll 2007:14).

Although archaeology has been concerned with questions of identity for much of its history, the scale and terms of inquiry have changed significantly in recent years. The older, essentialist position, common throughout much of the twentieth century, assumed that an individual’s—or, of more interest, a group’s—identity formed at an early stage as a stable and predictable construct, and that the work of the scholar was to retrieve this identity by reference to lists of fixed common traits. Identity was thus “objective, inherent, and primordial” (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:2). In fact, the idea of individual identities was most often subsumed under the construct of “cultures,” which took on identities of their own and could be born, grow and develop, flourish, and die. An archaeologically-defined culture was seen as the same as an ethnic group, and sometimes even explicitly equated with such; after a time, this equation between ethnicity and culture came to appear natural and self-evident (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:3). The aim of such studies was to create chronologies and categories and then to trace the spread, transformation, and decline of cultures through their material manifestations. An abundance of ethnographies detailing the peculiarities of different ethnic group resulted from this preoccupation on a present-tense, society-wide level, while culture-histories abounded to account for the categorization of groups of ancient peoples (Tilley 2006:9). Individuals were of greatest interest when high-value objects associated with them marked them out as having wealth and status in their societies, and a straightforward and unproblematic equation between material remains, social claims, and social reality was assumed (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:2, 4; Lucy 2005a:86). Although the processual movement of the second half of the twentieth century scored

an important theoretical advance through its insistence on quantifiable results and conclusions, it continued to neglect “the particular, the individual, the acting human” (Babić 2005:85).

In contrast to the rigid and limiting essentialist formulation, recent debates in sociology, anthropology, and archaeology have sought to rediscover a broader and more realistic range of individuals in society. With the interest in feminism and gender studies that took hold in Western thought in the 1970s and 1980s, archaeologists began to question the absence of women in interpretations of the ancient past—and the androcentric assumptions that had guided those interpretations—and in so doing, opened up a host of new inquiries into age, disability, gender, and status (Diaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:7; Johnson 2010:137). Along with the recognition of multiple levels of identity, archaeologists now noted that identities could coexist synchronously or change over time (Casella and Fowler 2005: 2). The idea of multiple and changing identities means greatly expanded possibilities for understanding variation within a society. If, as Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens suggest, societies can only exist as collectives of individuals (referenced in Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:5), then these individuals together create their societies and selves through habitual practices that leave traces in the material record (Dobres and Robb 2000:7; Hodder 2003:124).

With an eye toward recognizing the great diversity that is inherent in the archaeological record when scholars stop focusing primarily on those dominant groups that are represented by high-status architecture and burials, post-processual archaeologists seek also to find the “muted groups”: those lower-status groups of people whose experiences have often been discounted or overlooked (Meskell 2001:203-4; Shackel 2000:234). Identity is not an unchanging trait of a person, marked and determined from birth. Rather, identities—plural—are socially constructed and dynamic, changing with circumstances, place, and time, and capable of manipulation and

intersection. Individuals can identify themselves or be identified by others through reference to multiple categories (such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, professional affiliation) at any given time, and those categorization of self can shift with progress through the course of life (Casella and Fowler 2005:2; Johnson 2010:137; Trigger 2006:459).

This dynamic sense of identity grows out of a recognition that people have the ability to make meaningful choices about their lives: “identity becomes, in part, something that may be chosen, constructed, and manipulated” (Tilley 2006:10). Human agents can construct temporary identities (Meskell 2001:196) or shift the focus from one category to another depending on current needs; different aspects of identity can be created or emphasized, depending on what one wants to hide as much as on what one wants to display (Insoll 2005:195). Despite the freedom inherent in these paradigms, however, people are limited in their ability to manipulate their social settings. This stems partly from the limitations of their understanding about their own situations: social agents, in daily performance of their identities, act “not as omniscient, practical, and free-willed economizers, but rather as socially embedded, imperfect, and often impractical people” (Dobres and Robb 2000:4).

How identities are projected and perceived, then, are neither rigidly determined by society nor entirely up to the desires of individuals. Some aspects of a person’s identity, such as age, gender, or ethnicity, stem from embodied characteristics that are not as malleable and hence cannot be manipulated at will (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:8). And while individuals are free to make choices that affect their social standing, these choices are always constrained by the realities and limitations of individual circumstances and by the willingness of others to recognize one’s social claims; additionally, lack of full knowledge of a situation may create unintended consequences because people are not omniscient actors, despite their ability make choices based

on the information available to them (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:2, 5; Hodder and Hutson 2003:96; Pauketat 2000:113).

An agency-based perspective, then, notes that the daily choices of social actors constitute their identities: identities develop and are reinforced, questioned, and reconstituted through regular performance of social practices. Where agency merges into practice, identity follows: “while people are reproducing the material conditions of their lives, they are both reproducing their society and their personal and group identities...Archaeologies of practice are ideally suited to interpretations of identity in archaeology” (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:6; Dobres and Robb 2000:4-6). Thus, the three strands of identity, agency, and practice intertwine to support the individual in the archaeology record.

MORTUARY STUDIES OF IDENTITY

Mortuary studies provide a useful entry point into looking at identity. Mortuary studies have always dealt with identity issues, although not always with that explicit orientation or with full exploration of the potential range of questions that such studies could answer. The post-processual critique has left as forceful an imprint in mortuary studies as in other aspects of archaeological study: scholars today pay more attention to burials of non-elites than in times past, and they consider embedded and unconscious meanings on an equal level with spoken and intentional messages; the “particular and contingent” have as much place in recent scholarship as universalizing principles have had in the past (Parker Pearson 2000:33). Mortuary studies join with other contemporary archaeological strands to show that scholars must be cautious in accepting material culture as directly representing a social reality; social claims in a funerary context can invert or otherwise misrepresent the social realm of the living for a variety of purposes (Parker Pearson 2000:32, 84-5).

When a combination of factors that are each independently likely to signify either traditional Egyptian or Christian religious affiliation is present in one burial, that makes conclusions about that individual's affiliation much stronger. In all of these discussions, though, the caveat must always be noted: the dead do not bury themselves. Religious affiliation, like other physically marked aspects of identity, is portrayed by the living in behalf of the dead whom they bury. Individuals may have contested or ambiguous identities, and it is possible that those who buried the dead chose to hide or emphasize aspects out of line with the wishes of the individual buried. In a hypothetical example pertaining to religious affiliation, a younger, Christianized generation may bury their parents according to their new set of beliefs, even though the parents would have identified themselves differently. In such a case, the presence of Christian symbols would erroneously suggest a Christian identity. Even in such a situation, however, the evidence for this new affiliation could only occur at a time when Christianity is present, even if the individual portrayed in death as Christian would not have chosen such a burial. On a larger level, then, the burial witnesses truthfully to a larger trend, regardless of the personal motivations or affiliation of the individual buried or the individual(s) doing the burying.

While the varied approaches that dominate archaeological thought today, together termed post-processual, have particularized and deepened the study of the individual in society, they bring with them a concomitant post-modern distrust of universal truth claims. The conditions of contemporary life, including rapid globalization and instant communications, have led some observers to doubt the relevance of identity today as anything other than a consciously formed and mutable creation based on non-universal constructs that do not translate backward in time easily or accurately (Casella and Fowler 2005:8; Tilley 2006: 11-12). It will be important in this study, then, to distinguish between the conditions of modernity and antiquity. It is entirely

possible that personal and social identities were constructed anciently—if at all—in ways far afield from modern sensibilities (Meskell 2001:204; Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:12).

Nevertheless, that ancient peoples grouped and divided themselves, creating distinctions between Self and Other seems little in doubt. That they embodied these differences in the performances of daily living and employed material objects in ways that distinguished them from one another also seems past debate. Whether these differences were seen as meaningful in the same ways that modern observers would now judge them is the real question, and one that archaeologists must remember as they seek to uncover ancient identities.

IDENTITY IN ROMAN EGYPT

The idea that identities can be polyvalent, exchanged, manipulated, and discarded, within limitations, is recognized by some scholars of Roman Egypt, and some recent studies implicitly accept the central tenets of identity theory without overtly expressing a debt to this line of thought (e.g., Bagnall 1997; Riggs 2002). The utility of identity theory in Roman Egypt is easily seen by enumerating the broad categories to which identity can pertain and applying them to the questions at hand in the excavations at Fag el-Gamus.

Nationality/Ethnicity

In studies of the broader Roman world, the idea of the “Romanization” of local populations has long dominated scholarly debate: once the Romans had achieved political control of other lands and peoples, how long did it take for them to “become” Roman? Was this process a calculated attempt to intervene in local affairs, or did local elites choose Romanization as a means of consolidating their positions of power (Pitts 2007:693)? Identity as a field of study has the ability to break apart this narrow perspective and refocus on non-elites in history, recognizing

the agency of local populations to accept or reject aspects of Roman culture apart from any intention on the part of the Roman rulers.

Although Romanization might be a big topic in Roman archaeology generally, “Egyptianization” arguably has more relevance in studies of this ancient and proud province: in order to rule with less resistance, the Ptolemaic and later the Roman rulers portrayed themselves as pharaohs in the millennia-old traditions, making use of traditional Egyptian mythology in their decrees and explanations of military actions taken (Bowman 1986:30). The syncretistic Egyptian god Sarapis and the powerful goddess Isis flowed outward from Egypt to gain followings throughout the Roman world, as evidenced, for example, by a temple to Isis that stood in Rome. Higher ranking Romans were not allowed to set foot in Egypt because of fears that they might gain too much power if able to sway the allegiance of this richest of provinces or to cut off the essential flow of grain from Egypt to Rome (Bowman 1986:38). On economic, political, and mythological levels, Egypt was the rich, exotic, and dangerous Other, more likely to seduce than to be seduced by Rome. This suggests a caution for archaeological research in Egypt: “Roman” Egypt is more variegated than singular, and outward appearance of Egyptian, Roman, or Greek may mask an entirely different underlying sense of self.

Tilley (2006:12) notes that British colonial rule relied on administrative mechanisms of power that denied the possibility of crossover or multiple identities for the subject peoples. This is also true of Roman imperial rule in Egypt, where each person was assigned an ethnicity or nationality that corresponded to rights and levels of taxation but created more formal divisions than existed in practical terms of social discourse. Official Roman citizenship conferred the highest prestige along with exception from taxes; second best was citizenship of one of the “Greek” cities in Egypt (Alexandria, Ptolemais, Naukratis, and, after AD 130, Antinoopolis). At

the bottom of the scale were “Egyptians,” which category officially included all of the Hellenic settlers, Jews, Persians, and others who had settled in Egypt but not obtained citizenship, along with the native inhabitants of Egypt. Thus, the Romans created a “flagrant divorce between social reality and juridical categories” (Bagnall 1997:19); for them, as for the later British empire, national or ethnic identity could be legally assigned despite personal background, cultural inclination, or even place of birth.

Intermarriage, interaction in common villages, and generations of presence in Egypt all meant that the difference between an “Egyptian” and a “Greek” was not always clear to those participating in daily activities. Gender-based disparities in the frequency of Greek names (more common for men) and Egyptian names (more common for women) suggest, too, that “ethnic” identity could be a deliberate choice based on the public roles played in their society (Bagnall 1997:20). Most often, people in Roman Egypt probably saw themselves as having a far more complex relationship to their own ethnic makeup than identification with a singular group. Even the rich local upper class, the local administrators and arbiters of fashion, were ethnically mixed (Borg 1997:27). In some cases, records of individuals who straddled multiple social spheres have been preserved: a certain Dionysios entered the army as a “Persian” in 105 BC, but through his army service received the designation of “Macedonian.” Once settled in Egypt, however, he was listed as a “royal cultivator,” a role usually reserved for Egyptian peasants. He was able to read and write both Demotic and Greek, indicative of a high level of education, and he served in a priestly office in an Egyptian temple, the epitome of purely Egyptian identity (Bagnall 1997:18; see also Lang 2004 for other examples of “dual identities” and the tax benefits that accrued). Thus, despite designations by government officials in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, the actual ethnic identity of individuals could be multidimensional and subject to manipulation. Both

“Romanization” and “Egyptianization” occurred, but neither process should be viewed as one-directional, irrevocable or mutually exclusive.

Gender

Gender identity issues are among the most frequently studied, best documented, and most highly theorized of all the planes of identity (Diaz-Andreu 2005:13, Meskell 2001:190). In the Roman world, and specifically in Roman Egypt, gender identity was a factor whose impact varied according to one’s membership in other social categories: the experience of being a young female servant was vastly different from the experience of being a respected adult woman of wealth and status. In both cases (and across the spectrum between these extremes), the life experiences of women contrasted from those of men who, apart from gender, held a similar standing in society.

Gendered experiences also varied according to nationality. To be an Egyptian woman was to have more favorable access to legal contracts than a Roman woman would have had. Egyptian women could buy and sell property, lend money with interest, foreclose on mortgages, and initiate divorce proceedings entirely independent of a husband, as a women’s-suffrage-minded Victorian scholar told her contemporaries with obvious and negative comparison to the conditions of her own time (Edwards 2005 [1889-1890]:852-3).

Throughout ancient Egyptian history and into the Roman era, gender identity continued as an important defining characteristic into the afterlife. Decorated mummies of Roman Egypt shows clear anatomical distinctions in the representations of males and females; hairstyles, jewelry, and clothing served as additional separators and markers of gender and status (e.g., Corcoran 1995, Doxiadis 2000). Religious texts that accompany Roman-period burials could also distinguish

between genders in the respective associations of male and female dead with Osiris and with Hathor in the afterlife (Riggs 2006:66-70).

At Fag el-Gamus, spindle whorls are the only material objects placed in the graves that serve as gender markers: weaving was closely associated with women in this as in many ancient societies. The inclusion of these implements at Fag el-Gamus is inconsistent, however. Clothing and hairstyles could also mark gender identity: many burials at Fag el-Gamus include sprang hairnets, and these only ever exist on female burials. This clear distinction is true at other sites around Egypt as well (Linscheid 2011). Hairstyles can also mark gender: individuals at Fag el-Gamus with long hair, frequently plaited and piled on the head, have been identified as female, based on osteological indications. Some adult male burials have beards. The level of preservation at this site thus makes it possible to view the individual and make generalizations about socially-appropriate layers of gendered practice directly from the embodied witnesses of the people of Roman Egypt themselves.

Sexuality

Sexuality is not the same as gender, although there are clear connections between the two categories. Gender roles as distinct binaries (boy/girl, man/woman) frequently also prescribe attitudes toward sexuality. In ancient Egypt, adult heterosexuality was the accepted norm, although the meaning of the term “adult” started at a much younger age than in the modern Western world: marriage by the age of fourteen was typical for women (Tyldesley 1994:51). Fertility and productive heterosexuality were often celebrated in art and ritual, and triads of gods formed families that consisted of a father, mother, and child. Polygamy and brother/sister marriages were not uncommon among the royal class. Extended family groups would commonly include multiple generations (Meskell 1998:233). Seth, the only god associated with

homosexuality, was also closely linked to rape, chaos, and violence. Seth represented the antithesis to Ma'at, the correct order of the Egyptian universe (Wilkinson 2003:197-8). Although the ancient Egyptians did not outright name the varieties of sexuality, they certainly constructed narratives that provide a sense of their culture's attitude toward them, and examples of the approved relationships in literature and practice also demonstrate the limits of their cultural tolerance of divergent sexualities (cf. Meskell 2001:197).

By the Ptolemaic period, the Greek influence in Egypt brought about a shift in sexual paradigms. An example of this is found in a love spell from Hermopolis Magna, dated to the third or fourth century, that promises to attract one woman to another (Rowlandson 1998:361). In excavations at Tell Atrib (ancient Athribis), terracotta figurines found in a bathhouse dedicated to Bes/Dionysus include images of two roosters and two naked dancers with prominent phalluses (Myśliwiec 2000:204-7), common imagery suggesting what was termed "Greek love" (Bonnet 1992:131-132). In this instance, Bes, a traditional Egyptian god of home, hearth, love, and childbirth is associated with Dionysus and all of the varied forms of sexuality he represents. A syncretistic widening of mythological identities here accompanies a broadening of the view of approved sexual identities.

Status/Wealth

The question of how to identify stratifications of wealth and status is tricky at Fag el-Gamus. The contemporary "Fayum portrait" mummies are laden with status markers, but the burials at Fag el-Gamus are comparatively unadorned, with the exceptions of a few portrait mummies taken from an unidentified but probably separate portion of the cemetery (Picton et al. 2007:19-20). The obvious explanation—that the people of Fag el-Gamus did not have the same wealth as the people buried with portraits—certainly has some merit: it is estimated that the portrait

mummies represent no more than a “tiny fraction” of all burials (Bagnall 1997:17). At many other sites throughout Roman Egypt, it is only the portrait burials that have been retained, thus skewing the sample. At Fag el-Gamus, however, burials of all types have been studied. In addition to wealth differentials, religion provides another complication in comparing portrait mummies with the burials at Fag el-Gamus: with the introduction of Christianity, the ancient practice of equipping the dead for eternity was severely discouraged. Gold crosses appear rarely at Fag el-Gamus as part of a necklace; earrings occur frequently on female burials. These types of objects merge identity categories and can simultaneously signal wealth, gender, and religious affiliation.

A case study in Ptolemaic Egypt has shown the multiple layers that went into creating social identity in Greco-Roman Egypt through an examination, first, of the medical profession, and then of other professions that were associated with a Hellenistic way of life (Lang 2004). Egyptian medical practices differed from Greek medicine. The Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt provided tax incentives for Greek medical personnel to practice in the Fayum and other parts of Egypt that had large Greek populations. Under Ptolemaic rule, there were also tax exemptions for teachers, athletic coaches, artists of Dionysus, and victors at the Alexandrian games; later, police, priests, physicians, fullers, and brewers also obtained this favorable tax-exempt status (Lang 2004:118). Lang hypothesizes that these professions were useful to the Greek authorities in promoting a Hellenistic way of life and encouraging further Greek settlement by soldiers in Egypt. In thus privileging occupations associated with Greek ethnic and cultural identity, they sought to maintain and expand an ethnically Greek population in Egypt; that they did so through targeting specific types of workers shows once again the intertwining categories of social identity.

In another case study of Roman professional duties and identities, Bagnall (1977) shows that policing the Upper Egyptian desert's edge may have been an assigned rotating duty, "temporary and compulsory," under Roman rule, rather than a professional paid position. Knowing how such professional duties were organized helps modern scholars to avoid writing our own categories and assumptions backward onto ancient peoples or "doing interpretive violence" to them (Meskell 2001:201) as we try to understand how they created their societies.

Different professions or classes of work create horizontal groupings of similar status but different identity; such diversity certainly existed in Roman Egypt. They can be found archaeologically through the practice of burial with objects that signify one's work; in a sense, the burial of women with spindle whorls is an extension of this concept.

Age

Age has been much neglected in schemas of identity, but recent studies are starting to fill the gap (Lucy 2005b, Gowland 2006). Nevertheless, age is often ignored or assumed. Brune (2005:33-43), for instance, multiplies examples of practice texts written by scholars-in-training in Roman Egypt, but there is no mention of the age at which this training would have been undertaken: age is either irrelevant or unknown. Likewise, other aspects of identity are ignored. The male gender of the scholars, for instance, seems to be taken for granted, but is never explicitly mentioned.

Sam Lucy, in his survey of age and identity, notes that "children did not simply grow into adults as time went on. They had to learn how to behave as an adult according to the traditional norms of their society, and they had to learn to conform to accepted female and male norms, that is, they had to adapt to a gender" (2005b:63). Both natural variation and cultural alterations emerge as individuals undergo the aging process.

The necropolis of Fag el-Gamus is a particularly rich setting for the examination of identity groupings by age in Roman Egypt. Many burials of children, infants, and even neonates, have been found there in addition to adults across the spectrum of ages, including advanced old age. Preliminary evidence suggests both some continuities and some marked differences in the ways that children are prepared for burials as compared to adults (South 2012), but there is room for a great deal more study. For instance, a pair of possible twins, approximately six years old based on their dentition, was found in 2009. They had been buried with one atop the other. A woman in her twenties was buried directly below the two children, with another woman in her late forties directly beneath. If these burials represent three generations of one family, all buried at the same time, there are exciting possibilities for comparing the grave goods (textiles, in this case) from the two virtually identical child burials to the two adults. Preliminary study of infant burials has also already shown some striking differences, leading to a hypothesis that expectations for religious display in burial were not as strictly marked for young children as they were for adults (South 2012).

As this example demonstrates, different aspects of identity are better understood in conjunction with one another than in isolation. Although religious identity has been the specific focus of previous work at Fag el-Gamus, the foregoing survey of facets of aspects is designed to show that many social claims can be staked by and for any individual. Religious identity may have played an important role in how individuals were portrayed in death, but a singular focus on any one aspect of identity can be misleading.

Religion

Religion is an underexplored but crucial element of identity (Insoll 2005:193-194). A survey of the major literature on identity in archaeology displays this general neglect, although a few

scholars recognize this weakness and invite scholarship in the subject (Diaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:8). Much of the following discussion relies on the work of Timothy Insoll, one of the few scholars of identity in archaeology who actively promotes work on the problems of religious identity.

Among twentieth- and twenty-first century scholars (Insoll's so-called "Homo Seculariosus"), a secular outlook is assumed, and scholars who do not strongly identify with a religious tradition or beliefs may not understand the importance of this aspect of identity to those who do (Insoll 2004a:3-4) or may display "overt antipathy" to religion and its study (Edwards 2005:111). Contemporary scholars do recognize that their own "preoccupations" (Meskell's own term, 2001:187) determine their interpretive vantage point, but many who study identity issues seem uninterested in the category of religion. In Meskell's call to avoid "single-issue questions of identity" (2001:187), she mentions "other axes of identity" that should be considered, but religion is not among them (2001:188). Although a later listing of crucial domains of identity formation (2001:198) includes religion, the remainder of her article emphasizes the axes of sexuality and gender, and religion seems to fall into her "etc." This kind of omission neglects the importance of religion both in determining the beliefs and practices that people perform, and in creating group identities that in many cases are ranged in opposition to one another.

While the intertwined and contingent nature of the categories of identities must be remembered, religious identity specifically deserves further study. This is not to push "single-issue questions of identity," as Meskell cautions, but to acknowledge that religious identity deserves more attention as one of the fundamentally important aspects on which people base their sense of identity. Insoll (2005:193) points out that in some parts of the world, even in today's increasingly secular conditions, religion is the "structuring structure of identity within

which [other] categories such as ethnicity and gender are slotted.” In other words, one is Muslim first, and then, additionally, female or Indian. In the modern Muslim world, as in other cases of actively performed religions, religious identity supersedes other categories and, as such, becomes a vitally important subject of study. “Secular” and “religious” activities are often so intertwined as to make their separation impossible (Insoll 2004a:1). If such conditions can exist today, we must be very cautious about imagining only a slight importance for religious identity in ancient times. During the first four centuries AD, religious identity clearly played a vital role in the categorization of others and the self, as the “imperial Roman colonization of consciousness” (Edwards 2005:121) demonstrated: emperors regularly promulgated edicts regarding religious practices; religious identity was mentioned in legal documents; and persecution of others due to their religious preferences was legalized.

Even if Western scholars do not always value religion as a vital category of human existence, they should not imagine that religion plays no role in what they are allowed to study or to conclude from their studies: in the Arabian peninsula, for instance, there exists archaeological evidence of local Christianity dating to the sixth and seventh centuries, but the Saudi Department of Antiquities has suppressed the evidence and claimed one local Nestorian monastic community to be instead “a foreign seafarer’s chapel of short chronological duration, ending with the arrival of the Islamic faith in AD 634” (Insoll 2005:198). In this case, pressure for modern interpreters to accept an instantaneous (and by extension miraculous, religiously inspiring, and convincing) conversion of the entire peninsula to Islam precludes the less biased observation that religious conversion of large numbers of people occurs over process of time. Ironically, the opposite pressure continues to push back the date at which scholars are willing to acknowledge the arrival of Christianity along the banks of the Nile.

Any of these previously mentioned aspects of identity would be equally interesting and worthy of deeper research among the population of Fag el-Gamus. This survey has explored them, in part, as an invitation to more multifaceted research in the future. The current study, however, must focus most directly on religious identity, because despite its inattention in general scholarship, it has been the nearly exclusive concern of research to date at Fag el-Gamus.

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN EGYPT

According to traditional accounts, St. Mark introduced Christianity to Egypt in AD 46; he later died in Egypt as a martyr to his religion in AD 68. These two claims form the crux of the narrative of the early church for Egyptian Christians: their religion is both orthodox and of an early date (founded by one of the four original evangelists); and it is steeped in the proud blood of martyrs. While scholars continue to debate how accurately that narrative reflects the reality of Egypt's introduction to Christianity and what form the earliest doctrine took, the presence of at least a few Christians in Egypt during the first two centuries seems confirmed by the very early translations of Christian scripture into Coptic that have been found in Egypt. During the third century, there were unquestionably significant numbers of adherents to Christianity, as evidenced by the martyrs who died during the mid-century Decian Persecution and even more witnesses attest to the deaths of Christians in the Great Persecution of Diocletian at the start of the fourth century. Although modern scholars dispute the accuracy of specifics in the ancient sources, no one doubts the general assertion that Diocletian's edicts claimed many Christian lives and particularly many in Egypt.

After the death of Diocletian, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in AD 313, granting religious tolerance to Christians. By the end of the fourth century, Theodosius I had not only

effectively made Christianity the official state religion of the empire, including Egypt, but participated in tearing down temples to the old gods and issued decrees that legalized the persecution of followers of the traditional religions of the empire. Mummification and other ancient practices associated with traditional Egyptian beliefs were forbidden. This decree led to increased use of clothing and larger textiles in burial (De Moor 1993:11). By the mid-sixth century, the last temple to an Egyptian god, the temple of Isis at the southernmost island of Philae, was closed.

The ending point for the Byzantine period is generally fixed at AD 642 with the Arab invasion of Egypt, although the culture and religion of Egypt continued virtually untouched for another hundred years. Not until the Tulunid Dynasty (AD 850) did the majority of Egyptians converted to Islam. Today, Christians make up a minority of Egypt's population.

The foregoing presents a tidy version of the transition into Christianity but it cannot account for the particular and local events that transpired along the way: this kind of abbreviated history makes the triumph of Christianity appear natural, linear, and unstoppable. Recent scholars have shown, however, that conversion proceeded unevenly and gradually across different regions (Frankfurter 1998; Trombley 1994), and that even within a single community, the degree and meaning of conversion would have differed from person to person. Conversion itself is a slippery and much-debated concept and it often does not imply a complete turning away from earlier beliefs, practices, and identities (Insoll 2004b:199-200). This is demonstrably true throughout the Roman empire in the earliest centuries of Christianity (MacMullen 1984:74-85), and is well documented in Egypt (Frankfurter 1998; Trombley 1994).

Religious pluralism among the nascent Christian community was frowned on by early Christian leaders, who often spoke out fervently against continuing practices that implied any

degree of continuity with traditional Egyptian religious beliefs. Christianity was itself a severely monotheistic religion with no public tolerance for the ancient ways, but folk religion persisted tenaciously: numerous borrowings from ancient Egyptian religious themes and iconography (including, famously, images of Isis suckling her infant son Horus, or the adult Horus spearing his enemy Set) framed the new religious vernacular (as Mary holding the Christ child, and St. George slaying the dragon, respectively); vivid descriptions of the torments of hell in Christian literature have been traced by some scholars to the images of the afterlife journey in the Egyptian Book of the Dead (Pinch 2006:170). Nonetheless, by the end of this transition the native people of Egypt were universally identified as Christians politically and socially even if the daily, local practice of their religion still bore resemblances to the ancestral cults. In this sense, religious identity in early Christian Egypt intertwined with other axes of identity and practice as much as, if not more than, with strictly ideological aspects of belief.

Due to their relatively small numbers in the early stages of conversion, and perhaps due as well to the danger of persecution, patently “Christian” burials only begin to appear in the archaeological record in Egypt in the mid-third century (Bowen 2003:168), when mortuary practices began displaying new expectations for the afterlife. Christians strongly preferred burial on an east-west axis with heads to the west, orienting them toward an eastward facing resurrection (Bowen 2003:169), while earlier practice in Egypt had burials inconsistent in orientation (but see Raven 2005:40-41). Large amounts of grave goods, which had been numerous and essential for equipping the dead in ancient times, were less frequent among Christian burials (Bowen 2003:168). Layers of linen shrouds were supplemented or even replaced by burial in often sumptuous clothing (De Moor 1993:11, Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006:127; Pritchard 2006:49). And while practitioners of traditional protective medicine and

magic willingly added Christian names of power to their arsenals (Pinch 2006:165), those who believed in the traditional gods followed specific burial practices that had no use for Christian iconography (e.g. Corcoran 1995:78).

The difficulty of getting an entire population to drop their traditional practices was not lost on early Christian authorities. Shenoute of Atripe, for example, decried the inclusion of amulets in burial (a practice going back thousands of years in Egypt), accusing monks in his own monastery of distributing them (Davis 2005:351-322 and fn 29). St. Anthony, the famous founder of monasticism in Egypt railed against ongoing mummification and reverence toward the dead (Lee 2000:194), inadvertently demonstrating that at least in some parts of Egypt, this ancient practice continued even among Christianized communities into the fourth century; conversely, a Bishop Abraham of Hermonthis would specifically request burial “according to traditional customs” [e.g. with mummification] over two hundred years later (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006:127). Other ancient practices, however, disappeared: mummies with arms crossed over the chest are common in earlier times, but seem never to occur among Christian burials (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006:182).

Christian Identity at Fag el-Gamus

When many of these changes occur together and can be traced archaeologically, a pattern of distinct difference begins to emerge that allows us to assign religious identity with a greater degree of confidence. The higher (later) burials at Fag el-Gamus face east, include very few grave goods, are often buried in clothing rather than exclusively in shrouds, and occasionally display Christian iconography: small crosses appear rarely, either on necklaces or earrings, as stand-alone finds, or woven into the textiles. It is in the context of this full package of changes that two other significant burial innovations must be viewed. Fag el-Gamus burials, along with

others from roughly the same time in Egypt, display tall superstructures of textiles positioned over the face area (“face bundles”) that do not correspond to earlier practices (Figure 2). Additionally, the layers of linen wrappings around the body are held in place with purpose-woven linen “ribbons” (Figure 3). That each of these innovations appeared during the same centuries in which Christianity began to gain a foothold in Egypt suggests that they could have had something to do with positing a Christian identity in death; their frequent presence at other sites independently identified with Christianity strengthens this association (see Chapter Four, “The Wider Context in Egypt”). Alternative hypotheses are possible, however, and are also discussed below.

In sum, scholars have variously posited that body treatments, religiously significant artifacts, and types of textile wrappings included in burial changed with the introduction of Christianity. The necropolis of Fag el-Gamus presents a valuable challenge to these propositions and represents one of the first burial sites in Egypt at which questions of religious identity have been specifically studied. Comparison with burials from parallel sites throughout Egypt, however, will provide a context for understanding the finds from Fag el-Gamus. Some changes in the material culture of early Byzantine burials are clearly tied to Christianity, and others are potential markers of Christian identity, while others are likely to mark other aspects of identity. Sorting out the identity markers at Fag el-Gamus, and noting whether clear distinctions between traditional and Christian Egyptians exist and can be found archaeologically, is one of the explicit goals for this thesis.



Figure 2. Typical example of a face bundle, *in situ* on an intact burial.



Figure 3. Typical red-and-white ribbons.

3 ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM FAG EL-GAMUS BURIALS

DATA-DRIVEN ANALYSIS

The main publications of the site of Fag el-Gamus have either centered on qualitative descriptions of spectacular finds from the site or have made assertions that, if accurate, would significantly alter the accepted timeline of early Christian Egypt. Unfortunately, these publications have not included data to confirm or validate the claims, and in some cases, a closer look actually suggests the opposite. A 2005 publication, for instance, asserts that “with nearly every head-west burial there are associated amphora sherds, and small drinking cups are nearly as numerous” and suggests that a Christian Eucharist service took place at the gravesides where these amphorae and drinking cups were deposited (Griggs 2005:192). The number of burials studied in making this claim, the field seasons from which those burials were taken, the average number of sherds, and representative examples of the sherds are not given. A look at the data from three recent years’ worth of excavations (2006, 2007, 2009) shows that only thirteen percent of the burials have any kind of grave goods associated with them, and of the 156 burials excavated in those three years, only seven (4 percent) were associated with a potsherd of any kind, much less one that might be considered a drinking cup. These findings seem to contradict the assertion that “nearly every” head-west burial included a specific set of goods that suggest Christian affiliation.

The three field seasons of 2006, 2007, and 2009 were all completed after the publication in which these claims about Christian grave goods were made, and so it is possible that they represent a different subset of the population of Fag el-Gamus, but without the data, it is impossible to tell. If the data from these three seasons do indeed contradict the earlier seasons’ findings, this fact would highlight another important problem: the underlying assumption that all

head-west burials have a uniformly Christian status that is displayed the same way across the necropolis needs to be explicitly stated and thus made available for examination and analysis.

The accuracy of the conjectured date of the switch from traditional Egyptian burial to Christian burial is one of the most frequent points of contention. Based on a close reading of the evidence, fixed dates that can be assigned to burials at Fag el-Gamus are both later and less certain than the publications have intimated. The final section of this chapter addresses problems of chronology at Fag el-Gamus.

For scholars to be able to read evidence from the burials of Fag el-Gamus accurately, it is imperative that the data be presented along with the findings, creating a transparency that would allow anyone who wishes to analyze the data again to replicate the original findings. The methods and data used in the present study are laid out below.

FAG EL-GAMUS BURIAL DATA

Former Excavation Methods at Fag el-Gamus

The Brigham Young University (BYU) excavation concession in Egypt is located on the eastern edge of the Fayum. It includes the Fourth Dynasty pyramid of Sneferu located atop a bluff at Seila, on a direct east-west parallel with the Meidum Pyramid (also completed by Sneferu); the Ptolemaic and Roman-era town of Philadelphia (also called by the modern names of Darb el-Gerza or Kom el-Kharaba el-Kebir); and a necropolis of the Late Roman to Byzantine eras, located about 5 km south of Philadelphia and 2 km northwest of the Seila pyramid. The BYU excavations have mostly taken place in the necropolis, but the pyramid has also been studied and mapped.

The necropolis covers approximately 125 hectares and includes over two million burials, according to calculations based on the burial density of the excavated squares (Griggs 1993:215, 228). Additionally, three pit tombs date to the Middle Kingdom (Grenfell and Hunt 1900:4-7, 1901:2-5) and some limestone overhangs include Late Period tombs. Since 1981, BYU has excavated 24 5x5 meter squares and exhumed over one thousand burials (Figure 4).

Dig seasons were generally short (around three weeks) and excavated bodies were unwrapped on site. Textiles and other extant grave goods were described and sampled. Teeth and bones were examined to determine sex and age, and gross abnormalities were noted. Most of the exhumed finds were then reburied in a mass grave without marking its location, although skulls and tooth samples were frequently kept for DNA analysis. Textiles were examined and the better preserved were often kept in storage on site while the rest were reburied, again without marking the location for future reference. Small finds of grave goods were usually kept, either on site or registered and placed in the regional museum at Kom Aushim in the Fayum; likewise, a few textiles were sent to the local museum or to the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Potsherds were often discarded without examination and without official notice of the find locations in the field books. With a variety of personnel involved in the dig from year to year, there was little regularity in the documentation, although forms for recording osteological data were used consistently, albeit not always by trained personnel. The level of photographic documentation also varied greatly from year to year, but a significant improvement in the number and quality of photographs began with the 2005 season and has continued since.

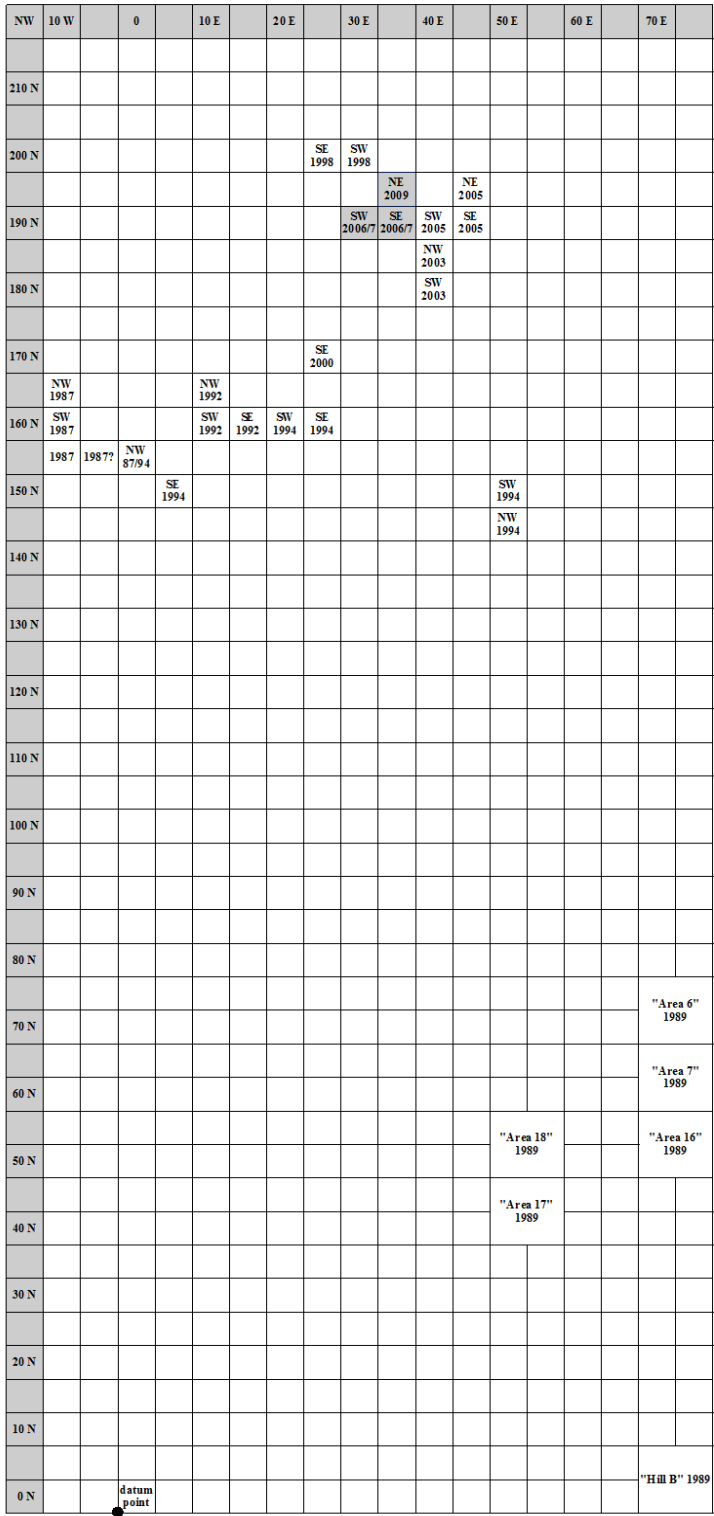
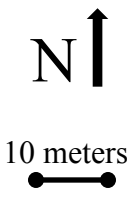


Figure 4. Excavation map of the BYU concession at Fag el-Gamus. Data from areas highlighted in grey were included in the sample.



METHODS FOR THIS STUDY

Choosing the Sample

The current analysis is being conducted three to six years after the excavation of the data. Although the documentation of the excavation process at Fag el-Gamus has been inconsistent, a surprising amount of information can be salvaged, especially from the later years. Given the importance of this site as a witness to the first few centuries AD in Egypt, it is worthwhile to retrieve and re-analyze the data in order to extract as much information as possible.

The first step required collecting as many field notes and other aspects of documentation as possible, in order to determine to what level of specificity the burials could be studied. Although field books did exist for each year of excavation, some were held privately and excluded from use, while others were missing entirely. Field books for the seasons of 1987 (textiles only), 1998, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009 were available. For most of these years, osteology reports were also held at BYU and made available as needed.

Photographs became an extremely important aspects of documenting the site, especially for those seasons in which the personnel on site did not have specialized training to note and describe aspects of the burials accurately in their written records: for instance, textiles are often described inaccurately, and the acceptance of the written records at face value would lead to erroneous conclusions about the nature of the finds. 2006, 2007, and 2009 were the best recorded years in terms of numbers of raw images of the finds, both *in situ* and after excavation.

In summary, the burials excavated during the seasons of 2006, 2007, and 2009 (156 burials in total) were chosen for this extended study due to the combined availability of field books describing the original field locations; osteological reports providing age at death, sex, gross pathologies, and further record of small grave goods or textile finds associated with each burial;

and adequate photography to determine the types of wrappings and bindings used on the burials well-preserved enough to still have them.

Location and Depth of the Burials

The excavations in 2006, 2007, and 2009 took place in three adjacent 5x5 m squares, identified as 190/200 meters north and 30/40 meters east of the datum point. The excavations were located in the southwest (SW), southeast (SE), and northeast (NE) quadrants of this larger 10 x 10 m square. Table 1 provides basic descriptive data for burials included in this thesis.

Table 1

DESCRIPTIVE DATA FOR EXCAVATION SEASONS

Excavation Year	# 5x5 m Squares	Square N/S of Datum Point	Square E/W of Datum Point	Quadrant	# of Burials	# Head- East	Max Depth	Min Depth	# Head- West	Max Depth	Min Depth
2006*	2	190/200 N	30/40 E	SE	54	3	225	165	48	220	5
2006*	2	190/200 N	30/40 E	SW	6	0	n/a	n/a	6	110	35
2007**	2	190/200 N	30/40 E	SE	9	4	230	146	5	240	95
2007**	2	190/200 N	30/40 E	SW	20	3	202	175	17	225	18
2009	1	190/200 N	30/40 E	NE	67	3	207	150	64	260	40

*2006 Six skulls (SE 3-8) without articulated bodies are included in the overall count but omitted from the directional counts. One burial (SE 13) included in count but only bones from knees to feet were preserved due to disturbance.

**2007 Finished squares from 2006 season.

The burials of this necropolis that date to the Late Roman and Early Byzantine eras were packed into shafts dug directly into the hard sandy substratum, often with five to six burials in the same vertical area. Lower burials make use of discernible shafts while higher burials are scattered across the sand. Often these later burials occur in clusters of two or more that appear to

have been interred at the same time. All burials are aligned on an east-west axis, but the lowest burials have heads to the east while the later burials were placed with heads to the west. Burials occur from close to the surface down to a maximum depth of 2.35 meters in this section of the cemetery, but depths across the site can vary according to natural variations in the depth of the limestone bedrock.

In the years included in this study, a total of 156 burials were recovered. Burial density for these three squares averaged 2.08 burials per square meter, or, taking a maximum depth of 2.35 meters, .89 burials per cubic meter. Of this total, 25 were completely skeletalized; 7 had no recorded textile data; and 8 were only skulls. Accordingly, these 40 burials were excluded from the textiles analysis, but provided data for other totals, including lists of burials with other types of grave goods. Fifteen burials that occurred at the lowest or second lowest position in their respective shafts were buried with their heads to the east (i.e., with a westward orientation). Thirteen of these head-east burials were skeletalized, with no diagnostic textile remains. The other two head-east burials were also excluded from the textile numerical analysis, since the arguments to be tested revolve around the changes in burial practice among the head-west burials specifically. This means that 114 burials were included in the final analytical set for textile finds, but the 42 excluded burials also provided data regarding less perishable grave goods and body positioning. Table 2 lists the 42 burials excluded from the textile study; Table 3 gives the data for the remaining 114 burials.

Table 2

BURIALS INCLUDED IN TEXTILE ANALYSES (N = 114)

Year	Quadrant	#	Depth (cm)	Age Category	Grave Goods	Wool Possible	Tunic	Face Bundle	Torn Strips	Rope	Ribbon
2006	SE	1	5	infant	glass	x		no		x	
2006	SE	2	25	infant		x					
2006	SE	9	35	child	necklace with beads	x	x	ND			x
2006	SE	10	45	child				x			x
2006	SE	11	48	subadult	bracelet			x			x
2006	SE	12	59	subadult		x	x	x		x	x
2006	SE	13	46	child?							x
2006	SE	14	51	adult		x		x			x
2006	SE	15	52	infant				x			x
2006	SE	16	53	child				x			x
2006	SE	17	50	child		x	x	x			x
2006	SE	18	75	child				ND/no			x
2006	SE	19	65	adult		x	x	ND			x
2006	SE	20	70	baby				x		x	
2006	SE	21	67	child				ND		x	
2006	SE	22	48	child				x		x	
2006	SE	23	65	child				ND			x
2006	SE	24	85	adult				x			x
2006	SE	25	110	subadult				x			x
2006	SE	26	119	adult/subadult				x	X		
2006	SE	27	95	infant		x		ND/no			
2006	SE	28	105	small child				x			x
2006	SE	29	112	small child		x	x				
2006	SE	30	58	adult				ND			x
2006	SE	31	129	adult				ND			x
2006	SE	32	138	adult				x			x
2006	SE	33	153	adult				ND	x		
2006	SE	34	138	subadult	reed mat	x		x	X		
2006	SE	35	80	infant					X		
2006	SE	36	129	adult				x			x
2006	SE	37	125	adult				ND	X		
2006	SE	38	140	adult				x	X		
2006	SE	40	135	adult/subadult				x			x

Year	Quadrant	#	Depth (cm)	Age Category	Grave Goods	Wool Possible	Possible Tunic	Face Bundle	Torn Strips	Rope	Ribbon
2006	SE	41	150	adult	spindle whorl, comb			ND/no			x
2006	SE	42	145	adult				x			x
2006	SE	44	152	adult	necklace, two earrings	x	x	x			x
2006	SE	47	80	small child				ND		x	
2006	SE	48	90	adult				ND			x
2006	SE	52	160	adult				x			
2006	SE	54	152	adult				x			
2006	SW	1	35	child		x	x	x			
2006	SW	3	70	adult		x					
2006	SW	4	95	child		x	x				
2007	SE	1	102	adult/subadult					x		
2007	SE	2	95	adult/subadult				x	x		
2007	SE	3	105	adult/subadult		x		x	x		
2007	SE	4	105	adult/subadult				x			x
2007	SW	1	30	child or infant				ND			x
2007	SW	3	18	adult		x	x				x
2007	SW	4	38	child				ND/no		x	
2007	SW	6	146	adult				ND/no	x		
2007	SW	7	149	adult				x	x		
2007	SW	11	120	child				ND	x		
2007	SW	12	120	adult				x			x
2007	SW	14	78	child				ND/no			x
2007	SW	15	69	adult	palm wreath			no			x
2007	SW	16	110	adult				ND	x		x
2007	SW	17	87	adult				x			x
2007	SW	18	141	adult				x	x		
2009	NE	1	40	child				x			x
2009	NE	2	60	adult male	pot, half a wooden tablet			no		x	
2009	NE	3	55	infant				ND		x	
2009	NE	4	55	subadult				ND			x
2009	NE	5	70	child				x			x
2009	NE	6	75	subadult				x			x
2009	NE	7	85	adult				x		x	x

Year	Quadrant	#	Depth (cm)	Age Category	Grave Goods	Wool Possible	Tunic	Face Bundle	Torn Strips	Rope	Ribbon
2009	NE	8	75	adult				x			x
2009	NE	9	80	adult				x	x	x	x
2009	NE	10	80	adult female				x			x
2009	NE	11	105	child				ND			x
2009	NE	12	102	child				ND	X		
2009	NE	13	105	child				ND	X		
2009	NE	15	105	child				ND	X		
2009	NE	16	115	subadult				x	X		
2009	NE	17	120	adult				x	X	x	
2009	NE	18	40	child				ND			x
2009	NE	19	110	infant				ND		x	
2009	NE	20	110	child				ND	X	x	x
2009	NE	21	60	child				ND/no		x	
2009	NE	22	110	adult	leather, bell, staff, stone carved as shell(?), pots			x			x
2009	NE	23	118	adult				x	X		x
2009	NE	24	75	adult				x		x	
2009	NE	25	80	child				ND/no		x	
2009	NE	26	45	subadult	pot			x			x
2009	NE	27	85	infant				ND			x
2009	NE	28	95	child				ND	X		
2009	NE	29	80	child				ND		x	
2009	NE	30	90	adult				ND			x
2009	NE	32	110	infant				ND	X		
2009	NE	34	90	adult female	sandals / sprang bags; spindle(?) with no whorl	x	x	x	X	x	x
2009	NE	35	122	child		x		x	X	x	
2009	NE	36	115	adult	wreath			x	X		x
2009	NE	37	125	child		x		ND	X		
2009	NE	38	145	child		x		x	X		
2009	NE	39	145	adult		x		x	X		x
2009	NE	40	124	child				ND			x
2009	NE	41	114	child				ND	X	x	
2009	NE	42	170	child		x		ND	X		
2009	NE	43	175	child		x		ND	X		
2009	NE	44	145	infant		x	x	ND		x	
2009	NE	45	123		glass			ND		x	x

Year	Quadrant	#	Depth (cm)	Age Category	Grave Goods	Wool Possible	Tunic	Face Bundle	Torn Strips	Rope	Ribbon
2009	NE	48	114	child		x	x	ND/no			x
2009	NE	49	150	adult	pot			x	X		x
2009	NE	50	170	child				x	X		
2009	NE	51	185	adult		x		x	X		x
2009	NE	53	120	child		x	x	ND	X		
2009	NE	55	180	child				ND/no			x
2009	NE	56	70					ND		x	
2009	NE	57	70	adult		x		x			x
2009	NE	58	90	infant		x		x		x	
2009	NE	59	113	child						x	
2009	NE	60	80	adult	wreath			x			x
2009	NE	66	165	adult				x	x		
2009	NE	67	180	adult				ND	x		

*ND = Insufficient data

Table 3

BURIALS EXCLUDED FROM TEXTILE ANALYSIS (N = 42)

Year	Quadrant	Number	Depth (cm)	Age Category	Head Direction	Condition*
2006	SE	3		unknown	n/a	SO
2006	SE	4		unknown	n/a	SO
2006	SE	5		unknown	n/a	SO
2006	SE	6		unknown	n/a	SO
2006	SE	7		unknown	n/a	SO
2006	SE	8		unknown	n/a	SO
2006	SE	39	225	adult	E	ND
2006	SE	43	195	infant	E	SK
2006	SE	45	220	adult	W	SK
2006	SE	46	175	adult	W	SK
2006	SE	49	176	adult	W	SK
2006	SE	50	175	adult	W	SK
2006	SE	51	218	adult	W	SK
2006	SE	53	165	adult	E	SK
2006	SW	2	48	child	W	SK
2006	SW	5	110	adult	W	ND
2006	SW	6	100	adult	W	ND
2007	SE	5	146	adult/subadult	E	SK
2007	SE	6	170	infant	E	ND
2007	SE	7	240	child	W	SK
2007	SE	8	170	child	E	SK
2007	SE	9	230	adult	E	SK
2007	SW	2	18	infant	W	ND
2007	SW	5	185	adult	E	SK
2007	SW	8	190	child	W	SK
2007	SW	9	216	child	W	SK
2007	SW	10	202	adult	E	SK
2007	SW	13	225	adult	W	SK
2007	SW	19	175	adult	E	SK
2007	SW	20	146	adult	W	SK
2009	NE	14	95	child	W	SO
2009	NE	31		infant	W	ND
2009	NE	33		unknown	W	ND
2009	NE	46	150	infant	E	SK
2009	NE	47	121	infant	W	ND
2009	NE	52	250	adult	W	ND
2009	NE	54	260	adult	W	SK
2009	NE	61	205	unknown	E	SK

Year	Quadrant	Number	Depth (cm)	Age Category	Head Direction	Condition*
2009	NE	62	209	adult	n/a	SO
2009	NE	63	235	child/subadult	E	SK
2009	NE	64	195	infant	E	SK
2009	NE	65	207	adult	E	SK

* SK = whole body skeletalized; SO = skull only is found; ND = no data available

Available Data in Individual Burials

Rather than relying on the single variable of burial direction, the current study hypothesizes that multiple elements go into the presentation of identity. Not all of these elements may have significance specifically for religious identity, but work at other sites and evidence from historical sources has revealed that several variables do have importance in showing, practicing, or maintaining such identity (see Table 4): burial direction is one of these variables, but arm position and mummification are other aspects of body preparation that can have significance as well. The inclusion or deliberate exclusion of grave goods, including terracotta figurines, amulets, sandals, clothing (as opposed to sheets of wrapping cloth), and other minor textiles can also differ between traditional Egyptian and Christian Egyptian burials. Each of these categories is briefly mentioned and the data discussed below.

Among the best documented and preserved elements of burial at Fag el-Gamus are the textile finds, which form the core of the analysis in this paper. Several related issues stand out: the use of clothing in burial has been postulated as a significant difference between traditional Egyptian burials and Christian approaches to burial. Whereas traditional burial consisted of wrapping in multiple layers of linen, Christian burials could include tunics, sometimes decorated with ornate patterns in dyed wool, a fiber considered unclean and unfit for use in burial in earlier Egyptian religious practice (De Moor 1993:11; Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006:127; Pritchard 2006:49). Any burial that includes either wool or definite clothing elements has been clearly identified in these data.

A second striking element of burials at Fag el-Gamus that occurs consistently and differs from earlier burial customs pertains to the wrappings that cover the area of the face (Figure 2).

Table 4

POTENTIAL MARKERS OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

	Traditional Egyptian Practice	Innovation in Roman Egypt	Early Christian Practice in Egypt	Potential Utility as Religious Identity Marker at Fag el-Gamus	SOURCES
Burial Direction	Alignment could vary in any direction; some Pharaonic burials preferred head-west burials.		Oriented to the east (head-west)	<i>The eastward-facing burial direction at Fag el-Gamus does not rule out the presence of traditional <u>or</u> Christian Egyptians.</i>	Raven 2005
Arm Position	Crossed over chest Down at sides Covering pelvis		Straight down at sides or covering pelvis (<i>never</i> crossed over chest)	<i>Arms crossed over chest signals the presence of traditional Egyptians. None occur in this section of the necropolis.</i>	Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006:182
Mummification	Standard for those who could afford it		Forbidden (but still practiced in the sixth century)	<i>Mummification becomes significant only in combination with other factors that also signal non-Christian identity.</i>	Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006:127 Lee 2000:194
Grave goods (in general)	Often numerous and seen as part of equipping the dead for eternity		Theologically unnecessary and frowned upon, but sometimes present in modest amounts	<i>Smaller quantities of grave goods cannot help us determine religious affiliation because economic pressures also affect their presence. Additionally, there is some evidence of selective grave robbing at Fag el-Gamus.</i>	Bowen 2003:168

	Traditional Egyptian Practice	Innovation in Roman Egypt	Early Christian Practice in Egypt	Potential Utility as Religious Identity Marker at Fag el-Gamus	SOURCES
Terracotta figurines	Popular in the Roman Period		Possibly present as a syncretistic borrowing	<i>The terracottas at Fag el-Gamus are very sparse. Those from the same period at other sites are usually interpreted as traditional.</i>	Edwards 2005:121
Amulets	Standard in traditional burials		Theologically unnecessary and frowned upon, but sometimes present	<i>Absence of amulets at Fag el-Gamus tells us very little, whereas their presence would signal traditional practices.</i>	Davis 2005:351-2
Sandals	Sandals were frequently represented on coffins in Pharaonic times and included in burials in the Ptolemaic period. Could show affiliation with Isis.		Unknown.	<i>If sandals signal identification with the cult of Isis <u>and</u> have no meaning for Christians, their presence in burials at Fag el-Gamus could help identify those who continued in a traditional religious affiliation. The potential meaning or lack of meaning for Christians is unknown, however.</i>	Corcoran 1995:77 Griffiths 1975:136

	Traditional Egyptian Practice	Innovation in Roman Egypt	Early Christian Practice in Egypt	Potential Utility as Religious Identity Marker at Fag el-Gamus	SOURCES
Textiles and Clothing	The body was wrapped in rectangles of pure linen, rather than in clothing. Only linen was traditionally considered “pure” for burial.		Tunics are an acceptable element for burial. Linen and wool are both present.	<i>Many burials at Fag el-Gamus include at least small amounts of wool in addition to the preponderance of linen.</i>	De Moor 1993:11 Pritchard 2006:49 Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006:127
“Face bundles”	Never present	Present abundantly	Present abundantly: perhaps a Christian innovation (?)	<i>It is not known why or when face bundles came into use, but their presence is correlated with other markers of Christian identity.</i>	South et al 2009
Binding Materials	Torn strips of linen	Narrow, purpose-woven ribbons (Torn strips of linen and rope also present)	Ribbons present abundantly: perhaps a Christian innovation (?) Rope: also present at higher burial levels.	<i>It is not known why purpose-woven ribbons came into popular use, but their presence in large numbers in gravesites is correlated with other markers of Christian identity. Rope is also an innovation in later burials.</i>	South 2012

These so-called “face bundles” uniquely mark burials from the Late Roman into the Byzantine period, and deserve closer attention, below.

The use of a variety of binding materials to hold the burial wrappings in place is the final textile element to be analyzed (Figure 3). Brightly colored, purpose-woven “ribbons” first occur in Egyptian burials during this time period and seem to originate from this region (see “The Wider Context in Egypt,” below). Face bundles and ribbons are particularly worthy of study for several reasons: 1) they represent a clear departure from earlier Egyptian burial practices; 2) they are ubiquitous at the site; and 3) they have not been the formal object of study until now. These two aspects of burial are thus accorded in-depth analysis.

Presence or absence of clothing elements and wool are also noted, but because the excavators for these seasons did not specifically seek to document these kinds of finds, conclusions about their frequency cannot be reached. Ribbon frequency is documented in every case where preservation allows, but in cases of very well-preserved burials, some were not opened. Hence, information about external binding materials is known, but internal bindings (known in some cases to have differed in type from external ones) could not be recorded.

FINDINGS

At Fag el-Gamus, some of these ten potential markers of religious affiliation are well-represented in the data set while others occur only rarely. Burial direction is well documented and has been studied to the exclusion of many other potential signifiers, but a quick survey of the available data will show to what degree each of these markers has significance for the situation at Fag el-Gamus.

Body Positioning

In both traditional and Christianized burials, the bodies are laid out in an extended position on their backs. Arms were crossed over the chest in traditional Pharaonic burials, but this aspect of burial has never been documented among the head-west burials at Fag el-Gamus, nor among the head-east burials in this portion of the necropolis. A small number of Ptolemaic burials in the limestone cliffs do attest to this earlier practice (Joyce Smith, personal communication).

Mummification

Mummification seems not to have been practiced regularly among this population: only one burial (2009-NE-57) shows definite signs of desiccation prior to wrapping and includes a generous sprinkling of salt among the layers of linen or spread close to the body. Salt crystals have been found in other burials, but this alone is not evidence of mummification.

Grave Goods: Terracotta Figurines, Amulets, Sandals

Grave goods in general are sparse, but their preservation seems more complete than that of textiles: twenty burials include some object other than textiles buried with or in close proximity to the body, of which two are among the skeletalized burials excluded from textile data analysis (see Table 5). This amounts to 13 percent of the 156 total burials. Some types of grave goods have clearly religious meaning and may point toward religious affiliation: a female terracotta figure with raised arms and bent legs is often associated with the worship of Isis, for example. One Fag el-Gamus burial from the three seasons under study, discussed in Chapter Five, included a terracotta figurine of this type (2007-SW-6). A total of eight terracotta figurines have been retrieved in all of the excavations at Fag el-Gamus thus far. Traditional Egyptian amulets, used to protect the body prior to this time in Egypt, are not present in any identifiable way in this

sample. The absence of amulets and figurines could potentially signal a new set of burial customs linked to a new set of beliefs, but their absence might just as well stem from issues of availability of figurines and/or economic status of the individuals performing the burials. One burial included a pair of sandals (2009-NE-34). Sandals had been traditional in Egyptian burials since predynastic times (Corcoran 1995:77) and could signal affiliation with Isis (Griffiths 1975:136), but this significance has not been demonstrated in other burials of this type, so generalizations from this one piece of data must remain inconclusive.

Table 5

BURIALS WITH GRAVE GOODS

Year	Quadrant	Number	Depth (cm)	Age Category	Head Direction	Goods Description
2006	SE	1	5	infant	W	glass
2006	SE	9	35	child	W	necklace with beads
2006	SE	11	48	subadult	W	bracelet
2006	SE	34	138	subadult	W	reed mat
2006	SE	39	225	adult	E	salt
2006	SE	41	150	adult	W	spindle whorl, comb
2006	SE	44	152	adult	W	necklace: faience, ivory, glass and shells beads. Two earrings with possible pearl
2007*	SW	5	185	adult	E	basket
2007	SW	6	146	adult	W	terracotta figurine
2007	SW	15	69	adult	W	palm wreath
2009	NE	2	60	adult	W	pot, half a wooden tablet
2009	NE	22	110	adult	W	leather, bell, staff, stone carved as shell(?), pots
2009	NE	26	45	subadult	W	pot
2009	NE	34	90	adult	W	sandals / sprang bags; spindle with no whorl
2009	NE	36	115	adult	W	wreath
2009	NE	45	123		W	glass
2009	NE	49	150	adult	W	pot
2009*	NE	54	260	adult	W	pot
2009	NE	60	80	adult	W	wreath

* These two burials were excluded from the textile analyses because of their skeletalized condition

Tunics and Wool

Earliest Egyptian burial practices called for layer upon layer of linen woven into sheets and wrapped around the body (Ikram and Dodson 1998:153). The Fag el-Gamus burials, in line with several other sites in Egypt from the same time period, include not only rectangles of plain linen but also linen with colored wool decorations woven in, and textiles made entirely of wool. Twenty-nine burials (25 percent) include some form of wool, from an individual weft threaded into a linen sheet to entire cloths made exclusively of wool. If the ancient prohibition on burial with wool was still active among traditional Egyptian at this time, then this finding could have significance for religious affiliation. Although some scholars have assumed that burial with clothing and wool can occur only after Christian conversion (De Moor 1993), this aspect of burial has not yet been explicitly studied.

In some cases, it is clear that a burial textile had been used previously as a tunic. Identifying features of tunics include sleeves, neck and arm holes, fasteners, hoods, and sewn edges where two selvages meet. Decorations on tunics include roundels, long narrow stripes of purple (*clavi*), sometimes ending in floral or figural designs, and bands of decoration over the shoulders. Fourteen burials (12 percent of the 114 with any textile fragments) included potential tunic elements (of which often only one or two scraps remain, rather than a full garment). Significantly, only two of those fourteen were adults. Age at burial may therefore be more strongly marked by the use of tunics in this population than other aspects of identity.

Here the analysis runs into difficulty, though: the excavators did not always recognize elements of clothing as they excavated, so there is certain underreporting of the finds, in addition to the limitations imposed by preservation issues. As another note of caution, many richly decorated textiles were first made as furnishings for the home. Roundels, for example, which do

appear on tunics, could also be woven into rectangular sheets and used in the home (De Moor and Fluck 2009). Thus, where roundels appear in a burial, we cannot be certain on that basis that a tunic was part of that burial. The identification of three of the 14 burials as potentially including tunics was based on the presence of a roundel and no other extant tunic elements (2006-SW-4; 2006-SE-17; 2007-SW-3). This could be important in looking at age in conjunction with burial clothing, since one of these three is one of the two adult burials.

Face Bundles

Through the use of extra padding material, many of the burials have an exaggerated height at the head and foot areas (Figure 5), with particularly impressive shapes and inclusions over the face. These “face bundles” are found on almost half (56 of 114, or 49 percent) of the burials despite poor preservation of textiles on many of them. This includes burials of men and women, adults and children (South et al. 2009). This created shape mirrors the human profile: without additions at head and feet, the prone and well-wrapped body resembles nothing more than a puffed cylinder. The superstructure over the foot area is often composed of the fringes and ends of the sheets used to wrap the body; they are folded up and over the feet. Sometimes additional sheets are folded and placed directly over the feet as additional padding.

The face bundle can be built up using various materials (Figure 6). Typically, these materials include the following:

- 1) Tunics or plain sheets of linen folded and placed covering the face.
- 2) Small wads of cloth, reeds, flax tow and/or wool roving around the sides of the face.
- 3) Rectangles of linen folded into strips and supported in place directly down the center of the face by smaller folds or wads of linen.



Figure 5. Mummy in profile displaying head and foot bundles.



Figure 6. Internal structure of a typical face bundle.

The first and second types of face padding are frequently but not consistently present. The third, in contrast, occurs in nearly every face bundle at Fag el-Gamus. These linen strips are folded and laid in a single vertical line over the area of the mouth, nose, and eyes. The most common weaves are 1x2 and 2x2 basket weave. The strips are folded 3-6 cm wide and doubled lengthwise to a length of 13-20 cm. They are made only of torn strips of linen (no wool and very rarely any color) even on burials that otherwise include brightly colored textiles. In many of the burials, a twist of linen follows as the final layer, furthest from the face (Figure 7) rarely, two twists may be included (Figure 8). The twist is tight and secure, often with visible stitching to hold it in place. The number of layers below the twist (i.e., between the twist and the face) can vary but usually amounts to a depth of around 10 cm.

These face bundle finds differ from hanks of linen thread in that they are torn strips that have been twisted into shape after weaving rather than plain unwoven linen thread. When thread and other unspun fiber does appear in the head superstructure, it functions as padding in a smaller area. A rare exception, found in 2005 (SW 19) was a twist made of non-woven palm fiber (Figure 9).



Figure 7. Twist of linen.



Figure 8. Double twist.



Figure 9. Twist made from palm fiber.

A high enough proportion of the burials at Fag el-Gamus include these face bundles that previous publications have supposed that they must originally have been present in all head-west burials (South et al. 2009). According to this logic, burials without face bundles were generally so poorly preserved that their lack must be due to preservation issues: if the burial were only in good enough condition, a face bundle would surely be found. For instance, in the 2009 season of excavation, 25 burials definitely included these “face bundles,” while two others may have had one. Thirty-nine additional burials were incompletely preserved in the head and face area, making it impossible to determine if a face bundle was originally present. Only one burial with textiles in the head area intact did not include a face bundle (2009-NE-2), and the photographs of this burial indicate that much of the body was indeed skeletalized.

Contrary to this earlier idea that face bundles can be assumed present in cases where they are not found, more careful examination of the evidence from the 2006 and 2007 seasons suggests that the face bundle may actually be readily preserved even in cases where few other textiles remain. The face bundle is at a distance from the parts of the body that decay most and commonly includes a very tight twist of cloth. These two facts argue in favor of its better preservation. In at least six instances from the 2006 and 2007 seasons, a face bundle does remain despite overall poor preservation of the remainder of the burial (Table 6). If the face bundle is among the most likely textile elements to remain, then in cases where a face bundle has not been found, we are somewhat more justified in supposing that it was never present in the first place. Without going too far in “arguing from absence,” it does seem that we can suggest that face bundles may not have occurred on every head-west burial, and in fact that assuming their presence without evidence, as was done in previous studies, is the wrong kind of assumption to make. During the three seasons of analyzed data, a total of nine burials (8 percent) that seem fairly well preserved otherwise did not have any evidence of face bundles, while for another 43 percent (49 burials), enough evidence does not exist to make a designation.

Notably, none of the head-east burials of any season have been found to include face bundles, but it is also important to note that virtually all of them are so poorly preserved that few if any textile finds remain in those burials. Nonetheless, face bundles are completely unknown in earlier periods of Egyptian history. Amongst other Late Roman and Byzantine burial grounds, however, variations on the face bundle do occur in a few documented sites (see “The Wider Context in Egypt” below). Horak’s article summarizing Coptic Christian burial practices (1995:39-71) also comments generally that superstructures occur over the face and feet in burials

at several sites in Egypt; in most cases, though, their contents include bunches of plant material that she sees as having a protective function.

Table 6

GOOD FACE BUNDLE PRESERVATION IN THE CONTEXT OF POOR OVERALL PRESERVATION

Year	Quadrant	Number	Depth (cm)	Age Category	Description
2006	SE	54	152	adult	A large adult burial, badly preserved, collapsed abdomen, wrappings on legs and feet (medium linen), overlaid with torn linen strips in diagonal pattern, face bundle.
2006	SE	42	145	adult	Badly deteriorated body. Disarticulated. Bones on left side. Face bundle. Coarse white linen cloth.
2006	SE	40	135	adult/subadult	SE 40 mostly skeletalized, with linen over feet, with four-strand red ribbon over that. Face bundle. Under face bundle, very blond hair.
2006	SE	37	125	adult	Collapsed body cavity. Badly deteriorated. Medium linen wrap, diagonal pattern, four linen strips for "ribbon" face bundle. Linen wrapped up over the feet.
2006	SE	28	105	small child	Poor preservation. Small face bundle. Fine linen. Twisted linen strip in face bundle. Ribbon. Four strand red.
2007	SW	18	141	adult	Poorly preserved through the body area but with a perfectly preserved face bundle.

Face bundles present such a different appearance from earlier Egyptian burial practices that their presence raises the question of what purpose they served. Although protection of the face area could make sense of the size of the bundle, such an explanation cannot account for the carefully prepared twist of linen and stacks of cloth that are often found in the interior layers of

the earliest face bundles. This burial innovation is widespread at Fag el-Gamus, however, and can also be found in several other sites of the same period along the Nile Valley, mostly in Middle Egypt from Saqqara to Antinoopolis.

Without a better understanding of the purpose for which face bundles became a part of the burial equipment at this time, we cannot state whether or not they mark religious affiliation, or, indeed, any other aspect of identity. If we look at other potential markers of religious identity in conjunction with the presence or absence of face bundles, however, one interesting fact emerges: of the nine burials marked as probably not having had face bundles originally, five did include some kind of grave goods. That number compares dramatically to the 12 percent overall incidence of grave goods. Given that both the *presence* of grave goods and the *absence* of a face bundle could signal traditional Egyptian religious affiliation, this strengthens the potential importance of both kinds of evidence when they occur together.

Ribbons

Through all the stages of Egyptian mummification, wrapping the body in linen comes as one of the last steps. In order to hold the linen wrappings in place, thin strips of linen were bound around the body (Figure 10). Usually these were made by tearing, folding lengthwise, and pressing long strips of plain-weave or basket-weave linen to create narrow tapes with the frayed edges tucked underneath. In rare instances, including one example from the burial of King Tutankhamun, the binding tapes were woven to shape instead of torn (Metropolitan Museum 09.184.797). The modes of binding changed over time, but torn strips of linen were the common thread. By contrast, the burials of Fag El-Gamus employ a mixture of different binding materials. In all, they include torn strips of linen, ropes (small and fine or coarse and large), and purpose-woven "ribbons" or tapes.



Figure 10. Torn strips of linen.

A word on terminology is in order here: when talking of the binding materials for mummies, scholars have variously referred to *cordage*, *tapes*, *bands*, and *ribbons*. *Cordage* is a general term that can take in the whole spectrum of binding materials, but is most often used to refer to rope. *Tapes*, *bands*, and *ribbons* all mean roughly the same thing, but scholars have used *tapes* and *bands* to talk about the binding materials used in Pharaonic Egypt, which differ in specific ways from some of the binding materials at Fag el-Gamus. *Ribbon* is preferred as a more specific descriptive term that implies that the binding materials found there, as opposed to ropes and torn strips of linen, are *flat, narrow and woven to shape with two selvedges* (Figure 11).

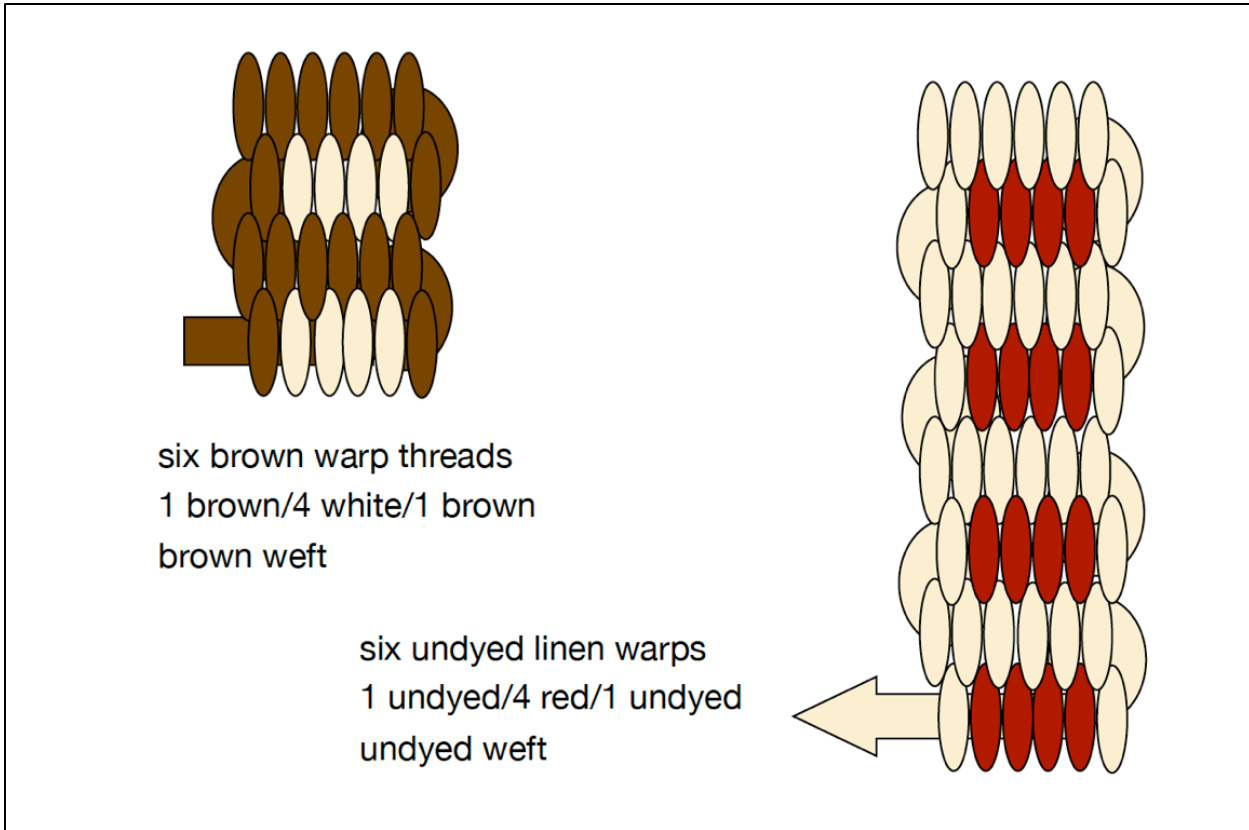


Figure 11. Schematic drawing of ribbon construction.

The ribbons are made of plant materials, the majority linen. Most employ plain, undyed linen in combination with red dyed linen. Darker brown threads also appear, generally among the later burials (Figure 12). The red threads are stained on the outside with red ochre (ferrous oxide), as confirmed by chemical (EDAX) analysis performed by the author with samples present at Brigham Young University. The red is not color-fast, suggesting its specific preparation for this mortuary use without an intention of reuse or washing. Even in these post-Pharaonic times when brightly-colored clothing was allowed in burial, rather than only linen shrouds, the ribbons nearly always remain limited in their color variety to red and naturally occurring shades of plant fibers. This is true for 100 percent of the burials from the current sample. The only two

exceptions thus far were found in 1998 and are limited to two burials in close proximity to each other. These unusual single-color ribbons were made of blue-stained linen and of yellow linen (South and Griggs 1998:10). Even in this rare case of blue and yellow ribbons, flax remained the preferred fiber.



Figure 12. Brown and undyed linen.

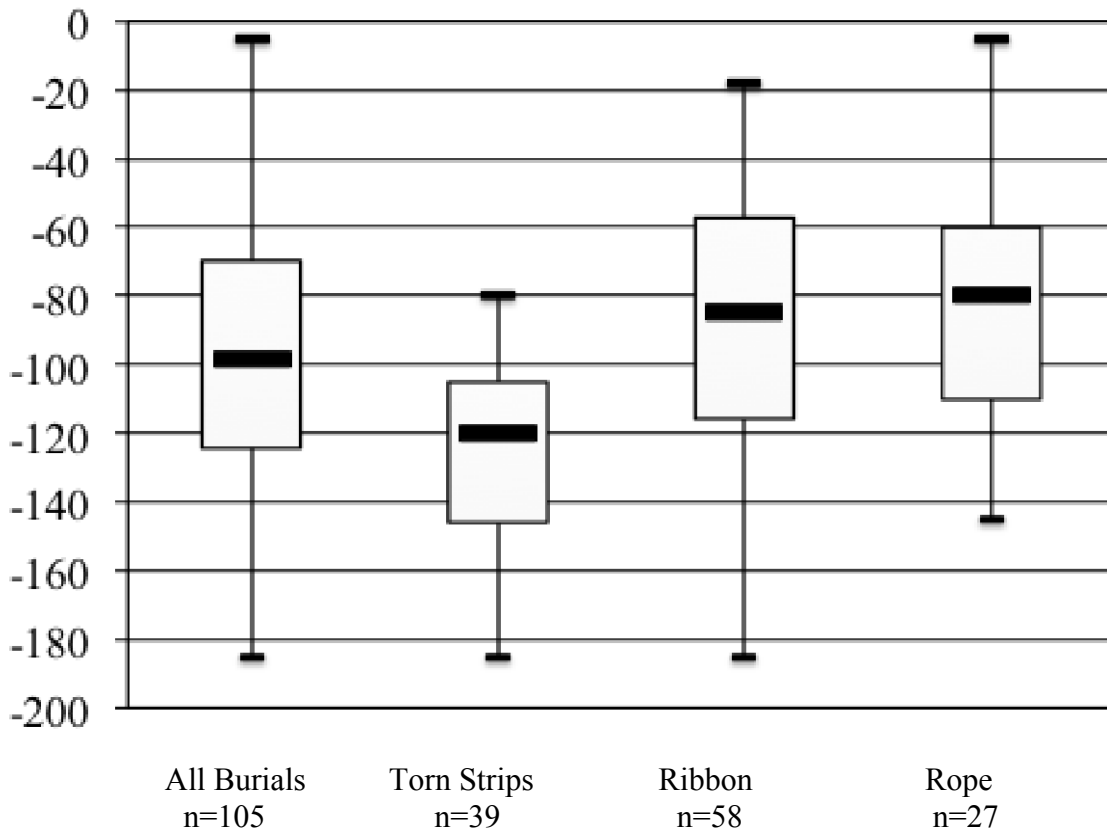
The relative abundance and the levels at which each type of bindings occurs display some interesting trends. Of 156 burials uncovered during these 3 seasons, 114 had any sort of textile remains and 105 had any sort of binding material remaining. The following analysis is based on these 105 burials. Burial depth is understood to be an imperfect gauge of burial date, but it serves

here as a gross estimate of relative chronology. Very few of the burials can be dated with certainty, although associated pottery place them as a set within the first to sixth centuries AD. In most instances it is clear that the lower burials were undisturbed as later burials were placed on top of them. In those few instances where a burial clearly disturbs earlier strata, it was omitted from depth calculations to prevent confusion.

Working upward from the deepest burials, torn strips of linen first appear in abundance, but red-and-white ribbon also occurs sporadically (Figure 13). The deepest burial with any binding material remaining is a head-east burial at 225 cm (2006-SE-39); it has torn strips of linen. All of the rest of the burials with bindings are head-west burials. At 185 cm depth, the next burial with any preserved bindings (2009-NE-51) has both torn strips and ribbon: the ribbon is visible at the outermost layer, while the torn strips are used to hold the inner layers together. This pattern—ribbon on the visible layer and torn strips used internally—holds across the nine instances where ribbon and torn strips both occur in the same burial. It is also possible that there are more burials with both torn strips and ribbons, but in some cases they were not opened to see the inner layers, and in some instances the poor preservation did not allow any further observations.

The lowest burial that includes ribbon is at 185 cm, while the highest burial that includes torn strips occurs at 80 cm. Figure 13 shows a gradual transition across this range from the usual use of torn strips to the total absence of torn strips in favor of ribbons and rope. The last use of torn strips not in conjunction with ribbon occurs at 95 cm below the surface. About 80 cm below the surface, the torn strips completely stop appearing in burials, even though another 35 burials were found above this level. There is very little overlap in the interquartile ranges between torn strips and ribbons/ropes, showing that torn strips occur at deeper (and presumably earlier) levels. The trajectory, while not perfectly even, is nonetheless very clear: the ancient, Pharaonic practice of

binding mummies with torn strips of linen had been entirely replaced within this community by the use of purpose-woven ribbons by about the time that two-thirds of the burials at this site had been deposited.



(Total is more than 100% due to coincidence of more than one binding material on 15 burials.)

Figure 13. Boxplot of occurrence of binding materials by burial depth. Dark bars represent median depth; boxes bracket the interquartile range; whiskers depict minimum and maximum burial depth for each category.

Binding Materials: Age at Death

Categories of binding materials used in the burials differ in some cases according to the age at death. The percentage of child burials with torn strips or rope but no ribbon (29/53, or 55 percent) is statistically significantly higher than in adult burials (12/44, or 27 percent) (Fisher's

exact $p < .01$). Sixteen burials marked as “sub-adult” were excluded from these analyses despite the presence of textile remains; use of the category of “sub-adult” would compromise these findings, since individuals so categorized could belong in either grouping.

During the transition period when ribbons first come into use, the data show that ribbons occur in adult but not child burials. Before the first child burial with ribbons at 124 cm, there had been 6 child burials with torn strips alone but 9 adult burials (out of 19) that included ribbons. Around this level, there are two cluster burials [2007-SW-11 (child) and 2007-SW-12 (adult); and a cluster of four with two adults (2009-NE-34 and 2009-NE-36) and two children (2009-NE-35 and 2009-NE-37)] in which the adults are wrapped with ribbon on the outermost layer but the children instead have torn strips or rope (Figure 14). The second child burial with ribbons occurs at 114 cm, and at 110 cm there is a child burial with torn strips *and* ribbon. However, after five more child burials with torn strips, these strips disappear entirely from the record and only ribbons or rope are used to bind child burials from this time forward. The slight majority of child burials use ribbon (19/35, or 54 percent), while the others employ rope (17/35, or 46 percent). One burial of that total (2009-NE-1) included both ribbons and rope at 40 cm.

In burials where rope was used as a binding material, it was the exclusive binding material in 14 of 18 child burials. Only six adult burials, by comparison, included rope at all, and of those six, only two used rope exclusively. One possible interpretation for this disparity in binding patterns is that rope was arguably the cheapest and most readily available material, and might suggest less importance attached to burying children with a particular protocol. Alternatively, child burials were likely often unexpected and more hastily performed. If mortuary use was the primary function for ribbon, ribbon might not have been readily available in the case of an untimely death. We do find children buried in reused household textiles more often than adults,

who usually used new rectangular sheets of linen for their burying cloths (see, for instance, South et al. 2011:128-132). Perhaps this lack of ribbon is another indication that haste in unexpected burial or lack of uniform protocols come into play with child burials.



Figure 14. Adult with ribbon and child with torn strips of linen.

A set of five infant burials that were fairly well preserved but included no visible binding materials of any kind also supports this idea that burial practices for children could differ substantially from the norm for adults (Table 7). In these cases, very small children or infants were placed inside tunics or other colorful fabrics which were then folded around the body and placed in the ground without the usual layers of wrappings (see Bergman 1975 Pl. 14 for a

similar burial of a child in Late Nubia). This difference in burial practice indicates the importance of further study of infant burials as a distinctive subset of the entire population.

In sum, these results suggest that the patrons of this necropolis who used torn strips of linen did so without regard to age at death, but that torn strips of linen gradually passed out of use, first among adults and later among children. Once ribbons made their way into child burials, they appeared in the slight majority of child burials, with the others using rope. Rope occurred in child burials at a much higher rate than in adult burials at all levels, while infant burials sometimes employed no binding materials at all. Age at death thus appears to be another variable of identity that would benefit from further research.

PROBLEMS OF CHRONOLOGY AT FAG EL-GAMUS

General dates can be given for Fag el-Gamus, but specific and accurate chronological markers are difficult to find: because of the practice of relatively unadorned burial, few grave goods are available. Of those that do occur, the best (but still scanty) witnesses include pots and terracotta figurines. Textiles can provide some additional clarity. A limited number of radiocarbon dates have also been collected. Relative dating by depth remains problematic but perhaps the most reliable of the current options for dating this site, when combined with the other results.

Datable ceramics or glass have been found directly associated with or in close proximity to nine of the 156 burials examined for this study (see Table 8, “Datable Finds”). A closer examination of the depths at which each of these presumably datable finds occurred, however, reveals a muddled correspondence between burial depth and date of burial. Potsherds and cups of an earlier date occur at both higher and lower depths, while intrusive later burials can cut through earlier layers.

Table 7

INFANT BURIALS WITH NO BINDING MATERIALS

Year	Quadrant	Number	Depth (cm)	Age Category	Head Direction	Description
2006	SE	29	112	small child	W	Small child, poor preservation. Linen wrapping. No obvious ribbon. Cloth hem stitched or whip-stitched in middle of body. Band of purple with design.
2006	SE	27	95	infant	W	Infant burial in beautiful purple cloth. Not protected. Some repair with linen. Very small. Seemingly no face bundle, but not a traditional burial -- small infant placed in folded cloth
2006	SE	2	25	infant	W	Newborn. Cloth. Yellow, red, two-over-two weave, green thread, hem with red binding. Multi-colored cloth at head and feet.
2007	SW	2	18	infant	W	No cordage at all; small infant. May be a burial with folded cloth and no ties or may just not be preserved.
2009	NE	44	145	infant	W	This child burial had a nice tunic with hood that was located near the chest area -- maybe scooted off the head?

Table 8

DATABLE FINDS

Year	Quadrant	Number	Depth (cm)	Object	Probable Date
2006	SE	43	195	pot	Pre-Roman Hellenistic
2007	SW	6	146	terra cotta figurine	2 nd to 3 rd century
2009	NE	18	40	pot	5 th century
2009	NE	26	45	pot	Early 2 nd century
2009	NE	17	120	pot	Mid- to late 2 nd century
2009	NE	45	123	glass	1 st century
2009	NE	49	150	pot	4 th century (certain intrusion)
2009	NE	54	260	pot	Late 1 st to early 2 nd century

The 2009 season contains a particularly egregious example of such intrusions (2009-NE-49): a fifth-century potsherd occurs in a burial only 5 cm above one containing an early second-century potsherd (at 40 and 45 cm depths respectively); over 100 cm below, another second-century pot occurs (at 130 cm), and a burial containing first-century glass is nearby (at 123 cm down). At 150 cm down, however, a burial with a fourth-century pot—clearly a later intrusion—cuts through another burial. To add to the intrigue, another first-to-second-century pot occurs in a burial another 100 cm down (at 250 cm). Without the fourth-century intrusion, this sequence would seem fairly simple, but the juxtaposition of the top two finds (from the fifth and second centuries) also displays an abrupt and unrealistic transition. While not rendering dating by burial depth entirely unreliable, these finds do present a major caution against taking dates too seriously that are acquired through reference to depth and potsherd analysis.

The question of how these layers were formed is relevant to the problem of these potsherds. The lower burials at Fag el-Gamus occur in shafts that were reused multiple times, while many of the higher burials occur in clusters that spread out horizontally in the sand. In order to reuse a shaft, it would have been necessary first to find a pre-existing shaft and then to

dig down deep enough to cover the new burial but not so deep as to disturb the burials already present. If an earlier burial were disturbed in this process, the small objects placed around and atop the burial, including pots, would have been among the first to emerge. To complicate the scenario, it is also likely that pots thus uncovered would have been removed, examined, and possibly reused as part of the backfill for the new burial. In this way, far earlier ceramics could be found above, and appear to be associated with, far later burials. This type of find makes sense for many of the potsherds at Fag el-Gamus, where their provenience are “near” burials but often not directly associated with them.

Historically, the dating of textiles has relied on subjective factors like art historical analyses of decorative motifs (De Moor 1993:23), but in the past couple of decades, archaeological textile specialists have studied textile finds intensively from many angles and have discovered alternate ways that they can inform. Close examination of weaving techniques, radiocarbon dating of textiles, and dating by association with coins are techniques particularly favored by European and British researchers (De Moor 1993:23-27). A sequence of twelve tunics, radiocarbon dated to the fourth through eighth centuries, has provided an important reference collection from which other museums have drawn to date their own collections (Pritchard 2006:16-23). In cases where the radiocarbon dates contradict conventional wisdom about Christian iconography or even the possible presence of Christians, however, scholars often discount the radiocarbon evidence in favor of a later, more commonly accepted, range of dates (for instance, Bowen 2003:168, 174 and De Moor 1993:130).

To this point, the textile finds collected by Brigham Young University have received little treatment with an aim toward dating: this is due in part to the nature of the finds (mostly undyed linen for which dating methods are unrefined) and in part to the need for vastly more time to

analyze the multitude of textile finds. A few general remarks about dating from the textiles can be made, however: the majority of plain-weave and basket-weave linen textiles from the first four centuries AD were constructed as warp-faced fabrics (Pritchard 2006:47). This accords well with the finds from Fag el-Gamus, which are overwhelmingly warp-faced linen: in the 2009 season, for instance, 151 instances of warp-faced linen are reported, while only 32 of either balanced weave or weft-faced fabrics are listed. These numbers reinforce but cannot refine the general dating scheme for these finds. Tunics of recognizable technique are few at Fag el-Gamus, but the near-absence of gussets and sewn-on decorative borders and medallions suggests (Pritchard 2006:17-19) that from the textile finds we can conjecture that this cemetery faded out of use by the seventh or eighth century. No silks, Islamic tiraz, or other later designs have ever been identified at Fag el-Gamus.

The first radiocarbon dates from Fag el-Gamus were calculated in 2011 from five biological samples. These samples were chosen to represent possible extremes in the dates of use for the cemetery and to try to determine how great a gap of time (if any) existed between the head-east burials and the switch to a head-west configuration. Samples were taken from the deepest head-east burial (at 255 cm) and deepest head-west burial (220 cm); from a head-east and a head-west burial that were vertically adjacent in the same shaft (at 145 and 120 cm depths, respectively); and from the deepest head-west burial to display a cross in the jewelry found on the body (95 cm). The ranges of possible dates for the burials, while not necessarily at odds with the estimates from the potsherds and other small finds, is broader and especially later than otherwise suggested (Figure 15). In particular, finding of a burial at 95 cm depth calculated at AD 550-640, and a head-east burial at 145 cm depth dated to the mid-third to the mid-fifth century were later than expected and will necessitate some revision to previous publications that

proclaimed earlier dates for this site. It is encouraging, though, to see that the radiocarbon dates correspond to a logical progression through time rather than jumping backward and forward as the potsherd evidence seems to suggest.

One lesson from the differing dates at similar burial depths is that, at Fag el-Gamus, burial depth as used to indicate relative dates is risky, and for absolute dates is useless. Within a single section of the cemetery, later burials could be dug deeply, cutting through earlier ones (e.g., the fourth-century intrusion 2009-NE-49). Additionally, the only geographic limitation to depth is the limestone bedrock under the sand, which varies in depth from one section of the cemetery to the next: the burials found in the 2000 season came from an area with a deeper underlying bedrock than the 2005-2009 seasons (Griggs et al. 2001:2), complicating any attempts at comparison by burial depth. However, data from the three dig seasons included in this study come from three adjacent squares with what appear to be fairly consistent burial depths. Apart from obvious exceptions, the lower burials were laid down at an earlier date than the burials directly over them. Dating by depth remains an uncertain process, however, and is treated with caution throughout this study.

All in all, the desert necropolis of Fag el-Gamus can generally be dated to within the first seven centuries AD. The earliest possible date for a head-east burial confirmed by radiocarbon testing is first century AD while the latest may be as late as the fifth century. Given that these findings are based on only head-east two samples, however, it is far too early to draw strong conclusions. Of the head-west burials, again based on an extremely limited sample of only three burials, the date range currently appears to be as wide as the second to seventh centuries, but these dates could also fluctuate with more data. Much work remains to be done on the question of burial dates at Fag el-Gamus.

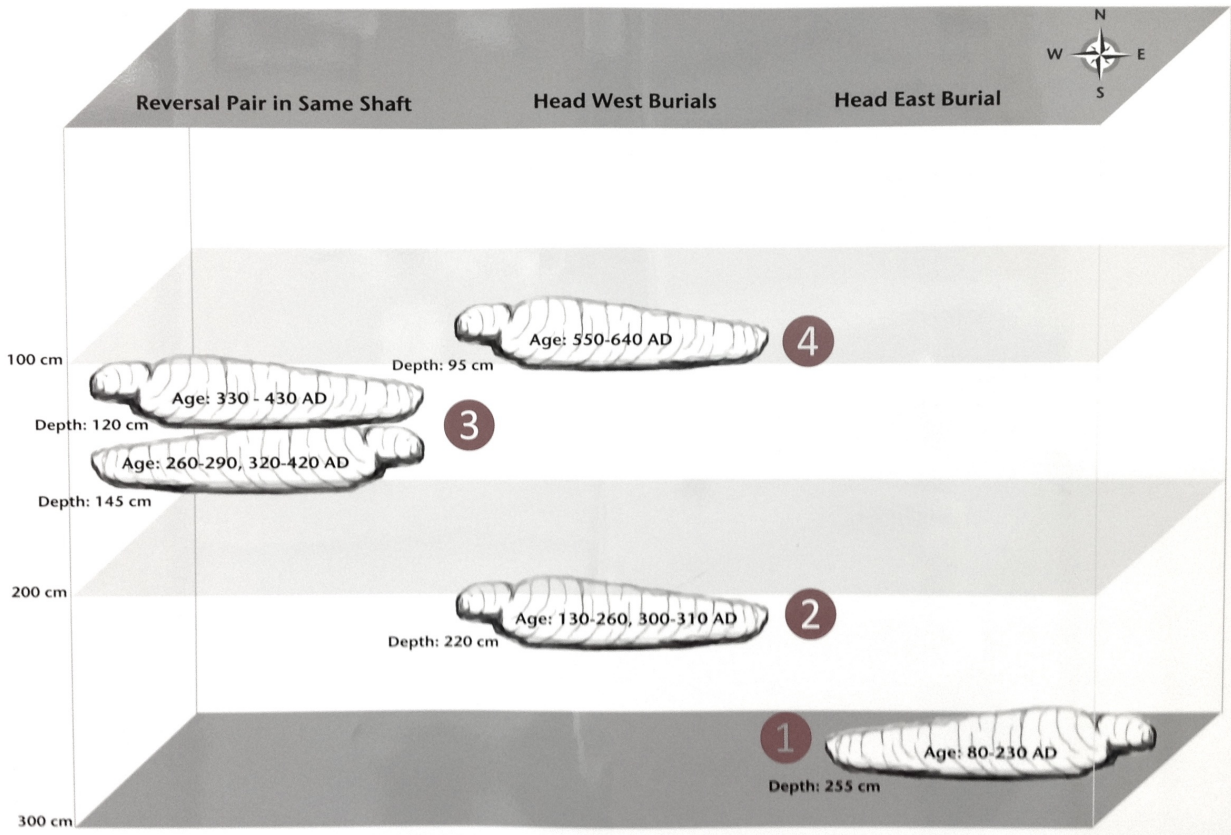


Figure 15. Relative orientation and depth of burials used for radiocarbon dating (Evans and Whitchurch 2011).

4 THE WIDER CONTEXT: ANTECEDENTS AND PARALLELS

COMPARISON AND CONTEXT

Many former publications of Fag el-Gamus have built on two assumptions: 1) that the site could provide a unique window into earliest Christianized Egypt, because 2) the finds are special and unlike those from other sites. This has led to claims that run directly contrary to other scholarship of this period and place (Griggs 2005:191). Much of this argument is tautological: when terracotta figurines are found within the portions of the cemetery assumed to be Christianized, they are interpreted as representing Christian figures (Mary, angels), and thus show that the burials are Christian (Griggs 1988a:82; Griggs 2005:192). A brief survey of museum collections and other excavations from this time, however, would reveal multitudes of similar figurines whose context and style reveal them as associated with traditional Egyptian religious beliefs and practices (Edwards 2005:121; Frankfurter 1998).

While there are certainly unique contributions that can come from a study of the particular burial population of Fag el-Gamus (as there would be with the study of any other), there is no justification for positing exceptionalism. Accepting the idea that the burials of Fag el-Gamus reflect changes in broader Egyptian society of their time allows evidence to emerge that situates them exactly among their peer in Roman and Byzantine Egypt (South 2013). This necessary comparison is accomplished in this chapter by examining data from as many sites as possible throughout Egypt for the same time period.

THE WIDER CONTEXT IN EGYPT

Method of Study

A helpful analogy to the burials of Fag el-Gamus may be found in burial practices in Egypt both prior to and, more cogently, contemporary with the centuries in which they were interred. What follows is a survey of burials from the Roman and early Byzantine eras in Egypt, highlighting those aspects of burial that appear to be “Christian” innovations or first occur in the period during which Christianity first appears.

In order to find as broad a set of parallels to the finds from Fag el-Gamus as possible, the author has searched libraries and museum collections and contacted experts from Australia to Europe (many of whom are listed in the “Acknowledgements” section at the front). Visits to the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, the British Museum in London, and to the Manchester Museum and the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, England, have been particularly helpful. The results are listed below, with a chart to summarize and clarify the extent of the finds (Table 9). Because the three-thousand-year history of Egyptian mummification and burials is far too broad a background to detail for this study, only those sites prior to the third century AD whose finds could serve as antecedents for some of the unusual finds at Fag el-Gamus are treated closely.

Table 9

SUMMARY OF FINDS FROM OTHER SITES IN THE REGION

Fag el-Gamus

Site	Dates	Religious Affiliation	Evidence for Affiliation	Face Bundles?	Ribbons?
Fag el-Gamus	1st-8th centuries	Traditional Egyptian, Christian	miscellaneous small grave goods, including crosses on some of the later burials	yes	red and white; red only; white only; brown only; brown and white

Burials located on/near pyramid fields, within 100 km to north of Fag el-Gamus

Site	Dates	Religious Affiliation	Evidence for Affiliation	Face Bundles?	Ribbons?
North Saqqara	5th-6th centuries	Christian	inscribed stelae, Coptic inscriptions, surface debris	unknown	"striped red and white cords"
Dahshur	3rd-7th centuries	Traditional Egyptian, Christian		yes	yes
Lisht	speculate to 1st century	Christian	Coptic grave stela	yes	red, white, and brown (in Met Museum)
Abu Rawash	Late and Roman Periods	likely traditional Egyptian and Christian	presence of monastery nearby	unknown	unknown

Burials located to the North

Site	Dates	Religious Affiliation	Evidence for Affiliation	Face Bundles?	Ribbons?
Quesna	Ptolemaic to Roman	probable traditional Egyptian, Christian	Context suggests changing burial practices, but nothing definite.	unknown	unknown

Burials located in Middle and Upper Egypt, starting 180 km south of Fag el-Gamus

Site	Dates	Religious Affiliation	Evidence for Affiliation	Face Bundles?	Ribbons?
El-Hibeh	3th-6th centuries	Traditional Egyptian, Christian		similar externally	red and white; red only; white only; brown and white
Qarara	4th-7th centuries	Christian / Gnostic	Rich Christian imagery; Book of Judas found here	similar externally	“red, black, white”
Kom el-Ahmar	4th-6th centuries	Christian, monastic	burials next to church and near monastery	similar externally	red only; brown only; white only; brown and white
Antinoopolis / Antinoe	probably 4th 7th centuries	-no original find context / large Christian community from 4th century onward	thriving monastic enclave, yes many famous Christian martyrs		red and white
Deir el-Bahari (Photograph MM-120-2)	3rd-4th centuries	“Rude Coptic mummies”	similarity to later burials from the monastic burials at the same site (below)	yes	red and white
Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes	6th-7th century	Christian, monastic	monastic site	possible	brown and white

Burials further afield

Site	Dates	Religious Affiliation	Evidence for Affiliation	Face Bundles?	Ribbons?
Nubia: Qasr Ibrim	6th-7th century	Christian, monastic	burial in a monastery	unknown	brown and white crosses woven in
Nubia: Qustul	6th century or later	Christian	unknown	unknown	brown and white
Nubia: Serra and Ashkeit	6th century or later	Christian	tomb and burial type	unknown	brownish wool; brown and yellowish wool

Burials of the same time period with no face bundles or ribbons reported thus far

Site	Dates	Religious Affiliation	Evidence for Affiliation	Face Bundles?	Ribbons?
Bagawat	3rd-5th centuries	Christian	iconography in churches and tombs	none seen	torn strips only, in photographs
Kellis	3rd-5th centuries	Traditional Egyptian, Christian	disparate burial practices	none reported	none reported

Possible Antecedents: Burials of roughly the same era and earlier, that contain different kinds of ribbons

Site	Dates	Religious Affiliation	Evidence for Affiliation	Ribbons?	Common Traits with later ribbon types (1, 2, 3)*
Hawara (Artemidorus)	2nd century	Traditional Egyptian	iconography on cartonnage	wider (approximately 30 mm), simple red and white	1, 3
Philadelphia (Doxiadis 2000:40)	2nd century	Traditional Egyptian	iconography on cartonnage	wider, possibly red and white	1, possibly 3
Fag El-Gamus (1994-SW-26; 1998-SE-8)	probably early (1st-3rd century)	uncertain		wider, simple red and white	1, 3
British Museum EA 6511 (Provenience unknown)	2nd century	Probably Traditional Egyptian	No data.	wide (30 mm) and undyed	1
Bagawat (unpublished photograph K453)	unknown	unknown		wide (approximately 30 mm) and undyed	1
Portrait Mummies	Ptolemaic to Roman	Traditional Egyptian	iconography on cartonnage	torn strips of linen in undyed, red, pink, and brown	3
Qarara	4-8th century	Christian	monastic setting, later dates	wide (30 mm), simple red and white	1, 3

*1 = Purpose woven; 2 =width of 1 cm; 3 = red and white color

The Inhabitants of the Fayum in Roman Egypt

The population of Roman Egypt included a cosmopolitan blend of nationalities, including many of non-Egyptian origin who had settled in Egypt. The Fayum, where Brigham Young University's concession lies, shows this mix in microcosm.

The Fayum had some of the earliest pre-dynastic settlements in Egypt, but it was depopulated for millennia until two Middle Kingdom rulers, Sesostris II and Amenemhet III, created water systems to drain the swamps and provide reliable irrigation (Richter 2005:2). At the end of the Middle Kingdom, the Fayum again languished with diminishing population until the Ptolemaic rulers reclaimed the land and settled retired Greek soldiers on the newly arable acres (Bagnall 1997:17-8). In the following centuries, hundreds of settlements sprang up all across the Fayum. Many important finds have emerged from these sites.

The "Fayum portraits" are among the most famous and recognizable art of the eastern Roman empire. In addition to their great value as art, they provide fascinating witness to the variety in Egyptian society in the Late Roman era: along with personalized portraits, they often include inscriptions bearing names, locations, and professions of the people they memorialize. These portraits include men, women, and children. Their value to the study of identity in Roman Egypt is incalculable. At the same time, it is likely that the portrait mummies are limited to the upper strata of Egyptian society, given the time and expense required to create them (Borg 1997:27). Further, they may only represent the administrative class: if parallels with Rome itself hold, only nobility and families of magistrates in active service would have been allowed representation by portrait (Walker 1997:14). Many scholars have shown conclusively, however, that these "portraits and

masks” have deep roots in the artistic and religious traditions of Egypt; their use could have been a deliberate way of evoking Egyptian identity (Borg 1997; Corcoran 1995; Riggs 2002).

Papyrological finds from the Fayum mark it out as an important witness for the Roman period; early Christian texts of great value have also emerged from sites in the Fayum. Epiphanius of Salamis recorded that Valentinus preached Christianity in Crocodilopolis (modern Medinet el-Fayum) in the second century (Richter 2005:3). The earliest known reference to a monk (*monachos*) comes from Karanis, in the Fayum, from AD 324 (Richter 2005:4); a later revered monk of the Fayum, St. Samuel of Qalamun, witnessed the Arab invasion of the seventh century (Emmel 2005:63). Multiple monasteries, rock-cut hermitages, and churches attest to a burgeoning Christian population by the fourth century (Richter 2005:4-7).

BURIAL PRACTICES IN ROMAN EGYPT

For all of the novelty in the burials of Fag el-Gamus, they remain recognizably a part of the traditional ancient Egyptian way of death. Wrapping in multiple layers of linen is perhaps the most notable continuity, while the introduction of face bundles and ribbons is one of the most interesting innovations. Because these innovations appear to be such a departure from earlier practices, it is worth considering whether they mark a deviation exclusive to Fag el-Gamus or whether these changes are more widespread. To that end, the following section looks for earlier clues to the development of these seemingly new and unrelated burial practices, focusing exclusively on the use of purpose-woven ribbons, since no evidence for earlier inclusions similar to face bundles has been found. The next section outlines the results of an extensive search of other necropoleis of Roman and

Byzantine Egypt and Egypt-influenced Nubia to seek out any face bundles, ribbons, or other aspects of burial that closely parallel Fag el-Gamus while differing from earlier traditions.

ANTECEDENTS

If ribbons and face bundles are both a new development in late Roman Egypt and a widespread development across several parts of Egypt, what accounts for their existence?

Logically, earlier Egyptian burials are the first place to look, and the Metropolitan Museum in New York City holds one promising parallel. Until recently, the museum had on display some burial bandages from the tomb of the New Kingdom king, Tutankhamun (MMA 09.184.797). These bandages (Figure 16) are made of very fine linen, woven to shape, and have selvedges 60 mm apart. Although finds of this type are very rare, they show that narrow, purpose-woven bandages did exist in earlier periods in Egypt and could be used in a funerary context. Most frequently, though, earlier Egyptian burials were held together with torn strips of linen, often folded and pressed to hide the frayed threads. This one example from Tutankhamun currently stands as the only Pharaonic Period witness to the use of purpose-woven ribbons.

Another museum piece, from the British Museum (EA 6511), is labelled as “mummy wrappings with lead seals” and appears to include three layers of linen, of increasingly finer quality from the internal to the most external layer; two or three plain linen purpose-woven ribbons of approximately 30 mm width, and a set of flax ropes with lead seals over the top of it all (Figure 17). This assemblage is dated to the second century AD but the provenience is unknown. The presence here of purpose-woven ribbons tells very little without a broader context or a complete mummy, but it does show that broad ribbons

could be used in conjunction with rope in a burial context and that this combination existed in the second century.



Figure 16. Binding material from the grave of King Tutankhamun (Metropolitan Museum 09.184.797).



Figure 17. Second century mummy wrappings with purpose-woven ribbons (British Museum EA 6511).

The British Museum ribbons, while wider than the standard ribbons of Fag el-Gamus, are identical to a set of ribbons found on a burial at Bagawat (in the Khargeh Oasis). These ribbons were not kept when the Metropolitan Museum finished their excavations, but an unpublished photograph in the museum archives (K453) shows a fully-wrapped mummy with wide (approximately 30 mm) binding strips that exhibit both selvages; no color is apparent in the photograph, suggesting that these, like the British Museum example, are made of plain linen. The finding of these purpose-woven ribbons at Khargeh may be significant, given the likelihood that they predate multi-colored ribbons, which have not been identified in that oasis.

Purpose-weaving is one distinguishing mark of the ribbons at Fag el-Gamus; another is the very consistent width of approximately one centimeter; the final is red color. The three examples given above only correspond in the first of these traits to the ribbons of Fag el-Gamus. The third trait, similarity in color, is witnessed in the Ptolemaic to Roman period portrait mummies, which could employ elaborate bandaging in undyed, pink, brown, and red torn strips of linen to create geometric designs (Corcoran 1995:96, 103, 107, 111). The similarity in place and time makes this another important parallel, albeit an incomplete one.

Closer in time and space to the Fag el-Gamus burials, several other examples provide further possible antecedents or explanations of the scope of use. The mummy of Artemidorus, a near contemporary to the burials of Fag el-Gamus, hails from Hawara, which is less than 20 km from Fag el-Gamus. It was excavated by Flinders Petrie and now resides in the Manchester Museum in the UK. The museum dates Artemidorus to the early- to mid-second century, based on stylistic features of the portrait and the hairstyle.

Although as with most portrait mummies, cartonnage covers nearly all the bindings, the foot end is broken and exposed (Figure 18). This open section reveals purpose-woven ribbons, approximately 25-30 mm wide, made of undyed and red linen. The majority have a single red thread at either side of undyed warps, with undyed wefts, but one ribbon reverses the pattern by using majority red warps with lines of undyed linen at either side, and red wefts. Both are woven in full basket weave, with double warp and weft threads throughout.



Figure 18. Foot area from the mummy of Artemidorus (Manchester Museum).

The second example was also found in the Fayum and is even closer geographically to Fag el-Gamus than Hawara. This female portrait mummy (Doxiadis 2000:40) comes “from the area of Philadelphia,” which is less than 10 km from Fag el-Gamus and part of the same concession. This mummy, acquired by Theodor Graff for the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin, dates to the mid-second century and is identified as early Antonine (AD 138-161). From the photograph, in black and white, it is not clear that the ribbon is red and white, but it appears that one in particular is woven to shape—the weft threads clearly emerge from either side of the warps, establishing a curved pattern all along the edges—and has a darker and a lighter color, in keeping with other examples.

The final parallel comes from Fag el-Gamus itself. Like the red Artemidorus sample, it is made of paired linen threads dyed red with paired red wefts and two lines of undyed linen running along each edge. Like the Philadelphia example, the threads are very loosely arranged. Of over 200 burials studied at Fag el-Gamus, only two samples of this type have been noted. One, from the 1994 excavations (SW-26), was found at the great depth of 190 cm, which places it among the first burials in that section (Figure 19). The other sample, excavated in 1998 (SE-8), was found at only 40 cm depth and came from an incomplete, disturbed burial. Only the area from the knees to the feet remained, with a few other miscellaneous bones found in the area. Perhaps the very wide ribbon, made in the style of two portrait mummy burials, indicates that this had also been a portrait mummy burial that had been unearthed and looted at some earlier time and the uninteresting area at the feet left behind. Both of these examples, then, arguably suggest that the wider and simpler ribbons are an earlier development and may even serve as a rough chronological marker (second century), based on the dating available from two

portrait mummies, from other sites, that also utilize them. Their use may have extended into later times as well: excavations at the nearby Middle Egyptian site of Qarara have also uncovered red-and-white ribbons of this width (Huber 2008:64), dated to between the fourth and eighth centuries (Huber 2008:65).

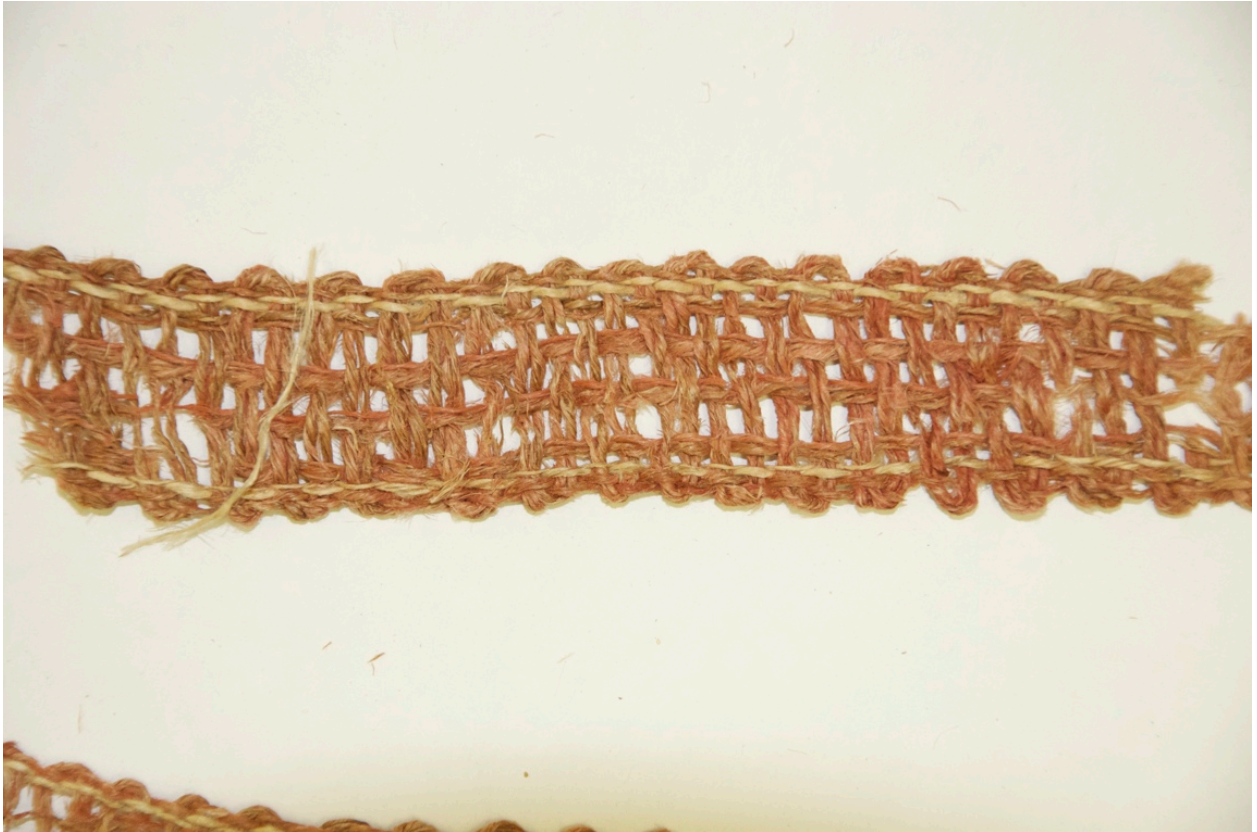


Figure 19. Unusual wide, loosely-woven red-and-white ribbon (Fag el-Gamus 1994-SW-26).

There also exist a few objects of similar construction but employed in dissimilar use. One such parallel occurs at the site of Berenike, in the southeast corner of Egypt along the Red Sea. Here, Felicity Wild has reported finding “webbing” of “strong, narrow, woven bands used for girths, belts, and as reinforcement for more delicate fabrics” (Wild

2002:9). Among the pieces of webbing made of flax were four examples with “a narrow red stripe at each side.” The pieces are 30-35 mm in width.

Wild reports that other examples of a similar type were found at Quseir al-Qadim and she mentions an interesting example of the cross-over use of a sail as “mummy packing in a [Roman-era] grave at Thebes,” which is currently in the Museum of Natural History in Lyon that “is reinforced...[with] similar strips of flax webbing,” some of which have red and some blue stripes down each side (2002:9). These also run 25-38 mm wide. The Berenike samples date to the first century AD. It seems unlikely that these examples represent anything other than a separate use of similar textile production technology in the service of creating bands of a similar shape but for dissimilar use, but it is still helpful to know that such parallels exist, especially when, as seems to be the case with the Lyon example, they are pressed into reuse for burial.

It appears, from this survey of possible antecedents, that the earliest (but extremely rare) parallels to the Roman-era purpose-woven ribbons date all the way back to Pharaonic Egypt, with the first identified example coming from the burial of the boy king Tutankhamun. While his burial tapes are wider than those of Fag el-Gamus and only made of undyed linen rather than undyed and red, they do exist in a burial setting and clearly cannot signal a Christian religious identity. Given the wide disparity in time and the slight resemblance--technique only--they cannot actually be considered a direct contributor to the later purpose-woven ribbons of Fag el-Gamus.

The closest parallels that are earlier chronologically, similar enough to recognize as part of a continuum, and yet different enough to provide a possible bridge to earlier times, are found on two portrait mummies (Manchester’s Artemidorus of Hawara, and a

women of Philadelphia). The “big ribbons” of Fag el-Gamus that are unusually wide and simple in design seem to match this tradition and to fit chronologically among the earliest ribbons in use at Fag el-Gamus. The wider, simple, two-color ribbons of two Fayum portrait burials demonstrate a link, tenuous though it be, between traditional Pharaonic burial practices and the full-blown, varied, and expertly-crafted ribbons of Fag el-Gamus and similar burials. Thus, the ribbons are not a foreign import or a wholesale departure from Pharaonic antecedents, although they do represent a distinct step away from that earlier tradition.

The continuities between the burials of Fag el-Gamus and those in other parts of Egypt show that these small changes, while scarcely noticed in the published literature, actually represent a gradual but widespread shift in burial practices throughout the Nile Valley. The next section shows how these changes occurred in several different sites over the Late Roman and Early Byzantine periods in Egypt.

PARALLELS

In looking for sites with similar types of finds to those at Fag el-Gamus, questions are raised of the geographic spread of the innovations in face bundles and ribbons, along with issues of social identity among the buried inhabitants of the various necropoleis of Egypt. Several other Roman Egyptian necropoleis have been excavated, and many of them can provide additional types of information that are not present at Fag el-Gamus—including written records, burial stelae with names and religious affiliation, and nearby villages with a variety of other kinds of finds—that provide more details about the social identity of the people buried there.

The section is organized to fan outward from Fag el-Gamus, first turning to the north to consider what are perhaps the closest burials of all both in space and similarity of burial situation. The Roman-era burying grounds of Saqqara, Dahshur, Lisht, and Abu Rawash to the north are each located next to an Old Kingdom pyramid and are within 100 km of Fag el-Gamus. Each has been identified by its excavator as a Christian necropolis, and each is located next to what would already have been a very ancient pyramid in Roman times.

To the south, the sites of el-Hibeh, Qarara, Kom el-Ahmar/Sharuna, Antinoopolis, and Thebes also all provide some valuable parallels, although at an increasing distance both in space and time. Other necropoleis in the western oases and in Nubia add further verification—and variation—to the parallels in closer sites.

To a large extent the innovative practices at Fag el-Gamus are similar to contemporary Egyptian burial sites rather than unique in their changes from Pharaonic burial customs. That they are a departure from Pharaonic burial customs is not in question, but equally obvious is the observation that, for whatever reason, the additions of ribbons and face bundles do occur in multiple sites in Roman and Byzantine Egypt.

PARALLELS TO THE NORTH

North Saqqara

The excavators of the Late Roman portion of the North Saqqara site originally described it as a Christian community that had built a village over the remains of the temple of Nectanebo II in the late fourth and early fifth centuries AD (Martin 1974, 19), but a second report more conservatively estimates that the occupation of the village connected to the cemetery began later, sometime from the beginning of the fifth to the

middle of the sixth century (Jeffreys and Strouhal 1980, 33). The identification of the occupants of this site as Christian can be made with confidence. It relies on inscribed stelae found *in situ* and on Coptic-inscribed storage vessels and surface debris (Martin 1974, 20).

The publication of the “Coptic” cemetery at North Saqqara contains this description:

Originally there were at least seventy graves. The interments so far opened show that without exception the bodies, wrapped in coarse linen shrouds bound in criss-cross fashion with striped red and white cords, are laid with head to the west, feet to the east, and with the arms straight down by the sides. (Martin 1974, 21)

Although the description of the burials is brief, the reference to “striped red and white cords” and the head-west burial direction do provide important parallels to the burials of Fag el-Gamus. Nothing similar to face bundles is mentioned in the reports from North Saqqara, and photographs that could confirm their presence or absence are not included in the published articles from this site.

Dahshur

Recent and ongoing excavations by the Metropolitan Museum of New York in the necropolis around Dahshur have revealed burials that seem to parallel the burials of Fag el-Gamus extensively in the use of ribbons. A superstructure over the face area of many Dahshur burials implies the presence of face bundles, but the Metropolitan Museum policy of not unwrapping burials has prevented them from confirming the internal arrangement of the parts (Cortes 2012). This cemetery is dated to the third to seventh centuries AD and is considered by the Metropolitan Museum excavators to hold a Christian population.

Lisht

Lisht was excavated in the 1930's by the Metropolitan Museum of New York and although the later burials were not their primary focus, finds from that site confirm the presence of multi-colored ribbons and face bundles. In the words of the excavators:

...the site lay unused for centuries--until after the beginning of the Christian era. At that time, though the date cannot be fixed with certainty, another community began using it for the burial of their dead. The Copts (the one inscription found, a grave stela, was in Coptic) were apparently also of the poorer class. The graves were shallow and the linen used was poor, but *the bandaging was in most cases quite elaborate*. The outstanding characteristic of the burials was the small amount of linen used on the bodies and the *astonishingly high padding over the faces*. (Lansing and Hayes 1933, 25. Emphasis added).

Although this description would almost be enough to confirm their similarity, Figures 36 and 37 included with the text (Lansing and Hayes 29-30) display beyond doubt that face bundles and ribbons of the types familiar at Fag el-Gamus were also present here.

An unpublished photograph at the Metropolitan Museum (L33-34:24) shows five examples of brown and white ribbon with brown weft threads. The excavation notes mention that they came from Roman burials at the mastaba of Senwosret-Ankh, near the Middle Kingdom pyramid of Sesostris I at Lisht. In addition, the Metropolitan Museum has on display a particularly fine example of the ribbons (Accession Number 34.1.121). It is exactly the width of the classic ribbon of Fag el-Gamus, but has alternating brown and white warps with deeply dyed red warps on either side. This particular piece was found out of context and the museum speculatively dates it to the first century AD, but given the many similarities with well-documented finds from Kom el-Ahmar/Sharuna (see below), it is likely that these ribbons originate from a few centuries later.

Although the majority of decorative, purpose-woven ribbons are made of one or two colors, this well-made ribbon from Lisht has exact parallels from at least three other sites.

Beatrice Huber has published one example from Qarara (Huber 2010:53); there is at least one like it from Fag el-Gamus as well (2000-SE-10), and Frances Pritchard (personal communication) has also located an identical ribbon in the Whitworth Art Gallery. The existence of four unusually elaborate ribbons, of the same make, found over at least a 150 km spread at distances that make them unlikely the work of the same person, implies a widespread communication of this newer style of funerary ribbon and supports the supposition that their use in funerary contexts was a deliberate choice with attached meaning.

Quesna

Quesna is located in the central Delta about 60 km north of Cairo. Ptolemaic to Roman burials found at Quesna (Rowland 2008) support the conjecture that specific and predictable changes to burial practices occurred during these times: the earlier (Ptolemaic) burials at this site were oriented north/south, with heads to the north; traditional mummification was practiced as evidenced by resins found in cavities of the bodies; and arms were often crossed over the chest. Mud-brick lined graves or coffins occur more frequently among these burials than the later ones. In contrast, the Roman-era burials are oriented east/west, with heads to the west; evidence for mummification is mixed; and arms were most often placed along the sides of the body. These changes did not all occur in concert with the change in burial direction, however. For instance, the only burial (Grave 1019, Burial 21) with head to the south was also one of only two that included traditional plaster amulets and cartonnage; it was also one of the deepest burials, at 48.8 cm below the surface (Rowland 2008:85-86). The second burial to include traditional protective amulets was a head-west burial (Rowland 2008:88-89). The poor

preservation of these burials makes a comparison of textiles impossible. The potential existence or absence of ribbons, face bundles, or other textile elements cannot be determined.

Because of poor textile preservation, Quesna is mainly of comparative value in the juxtaposition of burial direction with grave goods, arm positioning, and mummification. The changes in burial direction to east/west, accompanied by a decrease in mummification and a new position for arms, is consistent with potential markers of Christian affiliation at other sites. A possible Isis-Aphrodite figurine included with a head-west burial (Rowland 2008:79-80) and traditional Egyptian protective funerary amulets in another head-west burial, however, suggest that conversion to Christianity was less than complete, unanimous, or simultaneous, if, in fact, the presence of Christianity is an explanation for these changes.

MIDDLE AND UPPER EGYPT

Proceeding southward from Fag el-Gamus, the sites of El-Hibeh, Qarara, and Kom el-Ahmar are all clustered in Middle Egypt, starting about 180 km south of Fag el-Gamus. The burials here, contemporary with Fag el-Gamus, are notable both for their close similarities to the burials at Fag el-Gamus and for the positive identification of these sites as Christian based on multiple lines of evidence separate from the burials themselves. Even further south, the famous sites of Antinoopolis and Thebes have also produced similar burials from roughly the same centuries and also from somewhat later times.

El-Hibeh

Excavations at el-Hibeh have been ongoing since 2001 under the direction of the University of California at Berkeley; Robert J. Wenke led a previous season of work in 1980. Wenke's preliminary report indicated the presence of a "narrow [brown and undyed] linen band with both side selvages present" (1984:Plate IX), but its lack of context made further analysis difficult (82). More recent excavations have produced both ribbons and face bundles *in situ* on Coptic burials dated to the same centuries as the burials of Fag el-Gamus. The face bundles of el-Hibeh, however, have not thus far produced any linen twists or strips of linen. The cordage of el-Hibeh includes brown and white ribbons, red alone, white alone, rope, and torn strips of linen (Deanna Heikkinen, personal communication).

Kom el-Ahmar/Sharuna

Kom el-Ahmar/Sharuna lies about 100 km south of Fag el-Gamus in the Nile Valley. At Kom el-Ahmar, the burials contemporary with Fag el-Gamus lie next to a Christian church and near a monastery. The church was built no earlier than the end of the third century and the entire site was abandoned in the seventh or eighth century (Huber 2007:37). The burial area, although mostly looted, originally contained at least thirty burials of men, women, children, and infants, oriented east-west (Huber 2007:39).

The single unlooted burial, dated by radiocarbon analysis to the late fourth to mid-sixth century, appeared very similar to the Fag el-Gamus burials from the outside. The burial included colored ribbons draped in elaborate patterns over a face bundle that was described in the publication as "a kind of superstructure that was slipped on like a mask...in the form of a parabola" (Huber 2007:41-2). The internal portion contained "a

compact bundle composed of different padding elements [including palm ribs, textile scraps, and palm fibers] that ultimately made up the triangular shape of the head superstructure” (Huber 2007:44). Although this seems a haphazard collection of materials to create the face bundle, resulting in the same external shape but an inexact match to the internal portion of the bundles at Fag el-Gamus, this degree of similarity places these two sites in close comparison. If this exact mummy were found at Fag el-Gamus, it would fit easily into the spectrum of variants found there, in terms of ribbon use and face bundle. This suggests that based on this one burial alone, we cannot rule out the presence of the standard type of twisted linen face bundle at this site. Huber, in fact, does describe one element of this burial that sounds quite similar although not the same: she mentions one internal layer that was “folded several times” and fitted around the head (Huber 2006:67).

The ribbon colors in this burial included a brown and white ribbon, red alone, and brown alone. Rope was also used.

Qarara

Qarara is just 10 km north of Kom el-Ahmar/Sharuna. Ludwig Borchardt explored Qarara in the early twentieth century and reported on finding a great Coptic cemetery, most of which had been plundered. Some tombs remained intact, including a number richly decorated with Christian imagery (Borchardt 1915). The complete description of the cemetery at Qarara was given by H. Ranke (1926), and a recent article by Ulrike Horak (1995, 65-66) provides a good summary. The cemetery was in use from the fourth to the seventh or eighth centuries (Huber 2008:60).

The burials are oriented with their heads to the west, supine, with arms down to the sides, and are usually found between the depths of .5-1 m, and rarely up to 2 m deep.

Unlike the burials at Fag el-Gamus, many were wrapped in mats or laid on wooden boards or in wooden sarcophagi (Gomaa and Farid 1995:64; Horak 1995:65; Huber 2008:57). Face bundles do occur here, as is strikingly apparent from the photographs of the uncovered burials (Horak 1995:65; Ranke 1926:Plates 2, 10). The area over the face was elevated with palm leaf ribs or pieces of wood and stuffed with old cloth and palm fiber. The whole thing was covered in linen and then tied with red, black, and white ribbons, which also continued down the body in a criss-cross pattern (Horak 1995:65). The ribbons are wider than at Fag el-Gamus, however, with the red-and-white ribbons in basket weave having a reported width of 3 cm, as compared to the usual 1 cm at Fag el-Gamus (Huber 2008:64).

Beatrice Huber (2008, 2010) reports from her firsthand observation that the people of Qarara were clothed for burial in tunics, followed by several layers of cloth held in place with cords and ribbons. Mummification was not present. Young children, up to the age of seven or so, are never buried with ribbon at Qarara. There are, however, many burials of small children that employ rope or torn strips of linen. Face bundles often have palm fiber twists inside, and in one unusual instance, a very long and thin linen twist was arranged all around the outside perimeter of the face to create a padded structure (Beatrice Huber, personal communication). The close proximity between Middle Egypt and the Fayum, and the use of both ribbons and face bundles at Qarara, make this an important parallel site for Fag el-Gamus.

Antinoopolis

Another important city of Late Antique Egypt lay at Antinoopolis 220 km south of Fag el-Gamus. Antinoopolis (also called Antinoe, Ansina, or Sheikh Ibada) was founded

in the early second century AD and existed as a thriving city into Islamic times. A prominent center of Christian martyrdom in the Diocletian persecutions of the early fourth century, Antinoe was also known for its many monastic enclaves. Ribbons found at Antinoe include red and white ribbons, brown and white, and red alone. The technique, look, and size of these ribbons correspond exactly to those from Fag el-Gamus. The ribbons themselves cannot be dated accurately: they were found in the city's peristyle court but apparently originate from the mummies that were found in the area, the remains of which have since been scattered (Cäcilia Fluck, personal communication). From an engraved image of Albert Gayet's work at Antinoopolis at the turn of the twentieth century (Gayet 1904:34), it is apparent that face bundles covered with wide linen strips were also once present at this site, but they were not recorded, preserved or discussed.

Deir el-Bahari

In the process of uncovering the Middle Kingdom temple of Mentuhotep and the New Kingdom temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari, Edouard Naville, working for the Egypt Exploration Fund, also encountered several Roman and Byzantine burials grouped around the ancient temples. Naville, in his 1894-5 excavation report, described "rude Coptic mummies...[with] numerous wrappings, without ornament or painting, but generally [with] a leather apron and a leather belt upon the body" (Naville 1895:37). These leather accessories display an affinity with the finds from the Monastery of Epiphanius (below), situated on the same site but probably dating somewhat later. Unpublished photographs in the Metropolitan Museum archives include one (MM 120-2) labelled "Naville's Excavations" that shows two burials side by side on a reed mat, both of which have face bundles. The burial on the right clearly also has red and white

ribbons. No further information about exact provenience is given, but the photograph was taken during the Metropolitan Museum excavations of 1923-4. Further excavations by the Metropolitan Museum of Art on the same site in 1928-9 uncovered several Roman-era burials that included face bundles, foot bundles, and multi-colored ribbon; the unpublished photographs of these burials are found in the archives of the Museum. Notably, two of those with possible face bundles and ribbon were recorded as buried directly in the soft, wind-blown sand, and oriented to the east, with the heads to the west (MM 120-31). Given their similarities, these burials are assumed to have been placed during a two to three generation period during the third and early fourth centuries (Riggs 2000:138-139). One additional burial excavated by the Metropolitan Museum (Photograph MM 121-1, M36 28) shows a “Coptic burial among walls, south side of Mentuhotep temple compound” which also has a face bundle, foot bundle, and ribbon use, but there is no further explanation that would situate this burial chronologically.

Other burials from this small area include several with elaborate funerary portrait masks and traditional religious iconography painted on linen shrouds (Riggs 2000). These portrait burials are dated to the mid-third century. An unpublished photograph (MM 120-7) chronicling the unwrapping of one of these portrait mummies shows that torn strips of linen were present in this burial, but no ribbons.

The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes

Dating from the sixth and seventh centuries (Winlock and Crum 1926:3), the Monastery of Epiphanius consisted of individual cells, communal areas, and a small cemetery that was apparently exclusively used by the monks themselves. Of the original eleven graves, six were totally empty, three partially plundered, and two intact when the

excavators began their work (Winlock and Crum 1926:45). The eleven bodies had been laid out with heads to the southwest and covered in multiple layers of linen wrappings secured by sets of binding tapes (Winlock and Crum 1926:48-49). Plates XI and XII of the publication show that these “binding tapes” were ribbons of the brown and white type, similar in width and technique to those at other sites (one is shown in detail on Winlock and Crum 1926:Plate XXII.C).

While the existence of a face bundle cannot be definitely shown at this site, it seems a plausible explanation for the protrusion over the face seen in the first through third stages of unwrapping the Theban monk in Grave 7 (shown in Winlock and Crum 1926:Plate XII); the fourth stage shows a piece of linen twisted over from the crown of the head and tucked into a rope at the neck. Whether this was an intentional reference to an earlier face bundle practice or simply a practical means of wrapping the end of the cloth (as Winlock suggests at Winlock and Crum 1926:48) is unclear. The exact alignment of the twist down the middle of the face may be entirely coincidental, but in this context it does seem to evoke an earlier face bundle practice. Winlock’s (Winlock and Crum 1926:48) own description supports this supposition: “over the face were thin pillows of folded cloth between the [four] different layers [of sheets used to wrap the body].” How these “pillows” exactly appeared is unstated, but the same words could be used to describe the elements of a face bundle at Fag el-Gamus. The pieces at Fag el-Gamus, however, are not interleaved between full sheets that cover the body but rather lie together over one of the layers closest to the body.

The evidence from the excavations at the Monastery of Epiphanius is enhanced by the addition of written material that discusses the use and importance of the objects found

there (Crum and White 1926). Among the letters found at the monastery is one (Crum and White 1926:351) in which a monk mentions “bandages mounted upon the loom” and requests more linen in order to finish them. Other letters comment on “pairs of bandages” in company with burial clothing (Crum and White 1926:532). The term used for these “bandages” is the same used in the New Testament account of Lazarus to describe how his corpse had been bound (Crum and White 1926:245 n. 2). It seems, then, that these bandages/ribbons were specifically made for funerary purposes (Winlock and Crum 1926:71) and were locally produced and sold as a means of supporting the inhabitants of the monastery. This clear connection between funerary ribbons and a Christian monastery, although somewhat late, provides useful potential for analysis.

NUBIA AND THE WESTERN OASES

Nubian sites fall outside of an immediate sphere of Egyptian identity, but the interactions between Egypt and Nubia were plentiful and continual throughout the Roman period and into Byzantine times. Likewise the people of the western oases, although not located in the Nile Valley, considered themselves Egyptian and participated in similar practices. Thus a consideration of some parallels in these sites is also instructive.

Parallels to the South (Nubia): Qasr Ibrim

Excavations at Qasr Ibrim, now one of the few remaining ancient sites of Nubia not covered by Lake Nasser, have resulted in a vast quantity of textile finds. A 2011 publication of the textiles from the Cathedral cemetery at Qasr Ibrim includes one undisturbed burial of an elderly monk (QI.84T/965), which includes what Crowfoot

considers the standard kit for a monastic burial of its day (the sixth or early seventh century AD): the body was clothed, wrapped in three shrouds, and then bound with two types of ribbon (Crowfoot 2011:20). One ribbon, similar in appearance to the three-colored ribbons of Lisht and Fag el-Gamus, is called a “picket-fence binding” in the publication of the site (Crowfoot 2011). The second, unusually, has crosses woven in, making the religious identity of its user very clear. Crowfoot notes in her discussion of these ribbons that their use in burials became so standard in Christian Nubia that a painting of the Entombment in the eighth- to tenth-century cathedral at Faras appears to show Christ himself wrapped with this type of binding (Crowfoot 2011:21; Michalowski 1967:Plates 55, 56).

Parallels to the South (Nubia): Qustul

Qustul lies just north of the Joint Scandinavian Expedition concession, also near the border between the modern political boundaries of Egypt and Sudan. Burial practices at this site south of the southernmost Roman frontier are a mix of Nubian elements and those common to the eastern Mediterranean. The 1979 publication of the textiles finds from Qustul by Christa Mayer-Thurman included a child burial (Grave Q 206a) with head to the west in which was found a tape woven to shape at 10 mm wide and employing two alternating colors (Mayer-Thurman 1979:144). The grave is identified as Christian. Earliest Christianity in Nubia is dated most commonly to the sixth century, but a possible fifth-century church under the later famous cathedral of Faras could push this date earlier (Gardberg 1970:14).

Parallels to the South (Nubia): Serra and Ashkeit

The Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia excavated 168 Late Nubian tombs from the area of Lower Nubia just south of the modern border between Egypt and the Sudan, bounded by Faras on the north and Gamai on the south (Bergman 1975:7). Of the 141 tombs containing textile remains, those considered “Christian” by the excavators received this designation based on tomb and burial types because no pottery was found, unlike the earlier periods where pottery finds were the main source for dating (Bergman 1975:8).

Ribbon remains from a handful of sites excavated by the Scandinavian Joint Expedition are dated to the earlier end of the Christianized era in Nubia. Tomb 25/192:1 at Serra had a quadrangle of stones forming a superstructure around the edges of the tomb. The 15-year-old occupant was buried in a simple shaft cut straight down and buried on his or her back, with head to the west (Säve-Söderbergh et al. 1981:103). Single-colored purpose-woven ribbon of brownish wool was the only textile find from this burial (Bergman 1975:69). At Ashkeit, Tomb 63/1G contained the well-preserved burial of an adult, buried under a superstructure mound, with body in extended dorsal position and head to the west (Säve-Söderbergh et al. 1981:141). The textiles from this burial included a plain tabby-weave cotton and twenty-nine fragments of a two-colored ribbon in dark brown and yellow wool (Bergman 1975:76). The appearance of this ribbon (Bergman 1975:Plate 18) is identical to one type of brown-and-undyed linen ribbons at Fag el-Gamus considered to be later based on its appearance in shallower burials. Another adult female burial from the same cemetery (63:1C), with head to west and in

dorsal position, was also listed with “plaited, two-colored strings” tying the textiles in place (Säve-Söderbergh et al. 1981:140).

These few witnesses from approximately sixth-century Nubia corroborate the evidence from Qasr Ibrim and Qustul that two-colored ribbons used in a human burial context are associated with Christianization. Burial direction, while not differing from other Christianized sites in Egypt, cannot strengthen the case for Christianity, because many burials of earlier periods also employed a head-west orientation (Säve-Söderbergh et al. 1981:15).

Parallels in the Western Oases (Khargeh): Bagawat

From Bagawat, another site excavated by the Metropolitan Museum, have emerged quite a few burials dated to the early Christian era (third to fifth centuries AD). About 200 brick funerary chapels whitewashed and painted with murals attest to a Christian presence here (Lythgoe 1908). Pit graves with the same east-west alignment indicate the burials of other less wealthy individuals (Kajitani 2006).

Hauser (1932) describes one set of head-west burials found under the floor of a chapel. Some were in elaborate wooden coffins, while others were stacked atop the coffins. Excellent preservation of the textiles shows that torn strips of linen held the wrappings in place, and a large but spherical-shaped head wrapping indicated that no face bundle was present. Grave goods were not shunned in this location: one coffin also contained cut-glass bottles, a bone ointment jar, beads from necklaces, a bronze nail, a bone bracelet and five iron bracelets, a bronze figure of a nude cupbearer, and two bone ointment sticks. The body had silver earrings and five strings of colorful beads (Hauser 1932:44-5). In another head-west coffin of the same grouping, extensive traditional

Egyptian religious iconography suggests that this coffin was reused: (Hauser [1932:46] describes it as “shabby and dilapidated.”

Arguments about religious identity in this grouping begin with either/or dichotomies: Hauser believed them to be Christian at first, based on their location in a chapel, but when the traditional gods appeared on the coffins, he suggested instead that “the chapels were begun by the pagan community” and adapted for Christian use (1932:50). Given that later burial settings at this oasis did make extensive use of Christian iconography such as monograms of Christ, *crux ansata*, and biblical scenes (Hauser 1932:50), it does seem curious that earliest Christian burials would prominently display traditional pre-Christian religious symbols, unless familial relations trumped religious identity, or a set of Christian identifiers had not yet been arranged. A later analysis stated simply that

Each burial contained mixed objects and textiles of different types preventing interpretation as to whether the deceased were pagans or Christians—besides any relevance of decoration in the form of ankhs—as they were known to have lived side by side. (Kajitani 2006:105)

This mixing of iconography and objects does show that the boundaries between traditional Egyptian and Christian burials were more fluid than fixed, suggesting that religious identities may have been similarly dynamic. Earliest Christians did not insist on iconographic purity in their burials, however, and multiple examples of burials of Christians with hellenistic or Egyptian iconography could be listed (Bowen 2003: 170-171; Huber 2008:58).

Nobuko Kajitani examined the burials again in 2006 from the perspective of a textile conservator, and she observed of the Bagawat burials in general, “the outermost layer [of linen wrappings] was securely wound with a narrow-woven tape in an open lattice pattern” (Kajitani 2006:104) The photograph that accompanies this assertion, however,

shows torn strips of linen folded over and used as binding materials. Kajitani observes further that none of these binding tapes were saved (Kajitani 2006:104). From my personal study of the unpublished photographs of the Bagawat expeditions in the archives of the Metropolitan Museum, it appears that no ribbons of the classic red-and-white type were found there, but at least one burial did include a wider purpose-woven ribbon. This find is particularly interesting, given the otherwise lack of ribbons from the western oases.

Parallels in the Western Oases (Dakhleh): Kellis

Several thousand burials at Kellis, in Dakhleh Oasis, date to the earliest Christian centuries, starting by at least the first half of the fourth century and possibly as early as the mid-third century (Bowen 2003:174). These display differences between known Christian and non-Christian burials. The necropolis at Kellis has east-west oriented burials, cut directly in the ground to an average depth of 130 cm, some with subsurface vaults and mud brick superstructures, but others as simple pits (Bowen 2003:167).

Quoting Gillian Bowen in full:

Burial practice throughout the cemetery, as illustrated by the excavated graves, was uniform. The bodies were placed directly onto the floor of the pit with the head on the west and with one exception they were single interments. The corpse was wrapped in a linen shroud that was secured with woven linen ties wound in a criss-cross or lateral fashion and placed directly into the pit in a supine position; the hands were to the sides or over the pelvic region...Burial goods were minimal: one string of beads, a reused glass vessel, the occasional ceramic bowl with red painted ticks on the rim, and sprays of rosemary and myrtle. Infant burials were dispersed amongst those of the adult population...Such burial practices equate with the Christian tradition and, consequently, those interred have been identified as belonging to the Christian community at Kellis. (Bowen 2003:168).

Bowen's classification of these burials as Christian, then, rests on her understanding that certain burial elements differ from earlier traditional Egyptian burial types and mark

a Christian identity. These elements that differ include head west burials; hands to the sides (not crossed over the torso); minimal burial goods; and infant burials scattered among adult burials. At Kellis, where two cemeteries existed side by side during the same early Christian centuries, it appears that those who were not Christian chose, when possible, to be buried in a separate cemetery from the Christians, while the Christians, on the other hand, did not mind burial alongside their non-Christian neighbors (Bowen 2003:172-173).

The community at Kellis in Dakhleh Oasis was geographically separate from the Fayum, but its exact chronological parallel and associations both with Christianity and with traditional Egyptian culture makes it an important comparison population. Although both traditional Egyptian and early Christian burials have been found and studied there (Bowen 2003), no similar face bundles or ribbons have been found in either population (Gillian Bowen, personal communication, 2009). The importance of this observation lies in its implication that if this known Christian population made no use of ribbons or face bundles, despite the marked differences between their Christianized burials and the burials of people still identified with the traditional Egyptian religion, then perhaps ribbons and face bundles were regional variants that were never adopted outside of the Nile Valley. This brings into question any hypothetical symbolic importance they may have had, or at least suggests that their meaning was geographically circumscribed.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT PARALLEL FINDINGS

In summary, then, burials of the type found at Fag el-Gamus can be found with varying degrees of similarity at multiple necropoleis up and down the Nile, all dated within the same general period. Two prominent and unusual aspects of burial at Fag el-

Gamus, face bundles and ribbons, occur only among populations that included--or were exclusively--those who identified themselves as Christian. Although this does appear to be a strong correlation, the alternate explanation of ribbons as a new fashion originating in Middle Egypt and spreading outward is also supported with multiple examples and cannot be discounted. Of the few sites in Egypt where face bundles have been found, they co-occur in every instance with ribbons. Despite the excellent documentation of Christian burials from the western oases, ribbons of the undyed-and-red variety are not present there. In Nubia, however, ribbons were so firmly a part of Christian burial practices that in addition to the archaeological evidences, a cathedral painting in Faras even depicted the entombed Christ as wrapped with them.

5 RE-EXAMINING EVIDENCES FOR CHRISTIANITY AT FAG EL-GAMUS

This thesis began with four specific aims, intended to provide a foundation necessary for future work at Fag el-Gamus to take a place in respected academic discourse. The first aim was to show that burial direction by itself is inadequate for making claims about religious identity. Aim Two reviews the need for a strong theoretical basis and elucidates the value of focusing on religious identity as one essential aspect of multifaceted concepts of individual and group identity. Aim Three reports quantitative and qualitative data-driven analyses related to several aspects of *in-situ* textile finds, as an example of possible techniques for dealing with the richness of data available at this site. Aim Four represents a significant addition to the analyses of finds within the Fag el Gamus concessions: it is an extensive review of parallel geographic and religious sites that critically situates the BYU finds in a broader context. Together, results from these four perspectives suggest that evidence for the presence or absence of wide-spread Christian-specific burial practice is not overwhelming at this site.

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON BURIAL DIRECTION

Chapter One has shown that even prior to the rise of Christianity in Egypt, burial direction was not uniform in Egypt, but that if one burial direction was more prominent than others, it was eastward-facing, rather than westward-facing. The summary of multiple burial sites in Roman Egypt in Chapter Four has shown that although head-west burial is generally taken to indicate Christian identity, direction of burial is not enough for firm determination in that period either. At Quesna, for instance, traditional amulets on a head-west burial (Rowland 2008:88-89) bring into question the meaning of burial direction for that individual. Likewise, among the head-west burials at Bagawat (Hauser

1932:46) was one in a coffin covered with traditional religious iconography and presumably reused for a later burial. The intended meaning of these choices in burial escape us now, but it is certain that they do not represent a thoroughly Christian burial. Generally, non-Christian burials could occur in any direction, while Christians preferred eastward facing. But since the lack of specificity for non-Christian directionality includes eastward facing, it is possible that eastward preference in burial direction only indicates a uniformity of practice by those responsible for interment: in other words, if a sufficiently large minority preferred that direction, it would be easiest for mortuary workers to bury everyone in that direction, knowing that the others would not object.

Some evidence even suggests that those who handled and interred the corpses would have preferred an eastward direction because they, themselves, were Christian. Christians could have moved into lines of mortuary work at a date earlier than the conversion of the general population due to their more liberal attitude toward handling corpses. For example, The *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Connolly 1929), a third-century document from Syria masquerading as the words of the early apostles, instructs Christians that a proper burial will consist of meeting together in the cemetery, reading scriptures, and offering the Eucharist to those assembled (Connolly 1929:252). It is notable for commending death to Christians as a joyful event, leading to greater glory and happiness (Connolly 1929:167-8); the *Didascalia* also states that, in contrast to popular understanding, the handling of the dead is not an unclean activity (Connolly 1929:254). This attitude contrasts sharply with the common view in the Roman world of death as a mournful descent into an uncertain but fearful shadowland (Davies 1999:127-138). Even the Egyptians, who prepared carefully for an anticipated afterlife full of pleasures similar to

the best to be found in this life, avoided the handling of corpses or associating with those who did so (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006:94-95).

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* declared that Christian belief, in contrast the teachings of Judaism or of “heathens,” held that touching a dead body did not pollute a true believer: “do not observe these things, nor think them uncleanness...for this cause therefore do you approach without restraint to those who are at rest, and hold them not unclean” (Connolly 1929:252-4). The *Apostolic Constitutions* (AD 400) proclaimed the same doctrine to its audience, inviting both bishops and laypersons to “touch the departed [and do not] think yourselves defiled, nor abhor the relics of such persons,” reasoning that “we do not abominate a dead man, as do they, seeing we hope that he will live again” (Donaldson 2009 [1886]).

In contrast to this hopeful attitude toward the death, traditional Egyptian embalmers were shunned and made to live apart, despite the necessity of their work (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006:12, 94-95). The relative open-mindedness of the Christians regarding handling of corpses would have eased such difficulties. Could Christians, perhaps, have been recruited as necropolis workers for this reason? The presence of a guild of Christian necropolis workers at Kysis, in Kharga Oasis, shows that Christians were openly employed in this line of work already in the third century (Bowen 2003:169).

If this reasoning holds, it would make sense that Christian necropolis workers would have interred bodies according to their sensibilities, regardless of the religious identity of the person being interred. Hence, head-west burials would replace head-east burials with an ease and thoroughness not indicative of the actual state of conversion of the population. Burials at Fag el-Gamus, once they switch to head-west, never have burials at

higher levels with a head to the east; the other lines of evidence, however, are not so unilateral. Burial direction, unlike grave goods and the textiles provided for burial, was handled by necropolis workers. If their inclination to bury in a certain direction did not contradict any cherished practices of the traditional religion holdouts (and there is no indication that it did), then head-west burial direction only suggests the presence of *some* Christians in the community, rather than providing a sweeping affirmation of Christianity's early and universal spread.

THEORY, DATA, AND CONTEXT: UTILITY OF TEXTILE INNOVATIONS AS EVIDENCE FOR CHRISTIANITY

Given that burial direction is of only limited use as a marker of Christian conversion, by extension the presence of ribbons and face bundles exclusively in burials with an eastward orientation does not provide firm evidence for any special Christian meaning; however, the above study of the prevalence of ribbons and face bundles at other Egyptian sites that have been identified as Christian contextualizes such an argument as possible though not conclusive.

This section of the paper considers first an alternate hypothesis of geographic rather than religious similarity in burial patterns that can be argued with good evidence from multiple sites around Egypt. It concludes with an examination of additional evidence for a religious explanation.

The “Geographic Spread” Hypothesis

If the earliest instances of ribbon and face bundle use occur in one geographic area, perhaps this indicates a simple fashion or preference that took hold in that area and

spread from there. This prosaic but plausible suggestion would help explain why ribbons and face bundles are common in Middle Egypt and the adjacent Fayum, but have not been found in necropoleis of Christian populations in the western oases. The oases are geographically far distant from Middle Egypt, and although the people there experienced a similar transition from the ancient Egyptian religious beliefs and tradition of mummification to the new ideas of Christianity, they did not develop these same innovations in burial practice (Bowen 2003; Hauser 1932).

The portrait mummies from the Fayum with wide, purpose-woven ribbon (Manchester Museum's Artemidorus, and Doxiadis 2000:40), described above, argue in favor of this "geographic hypothesis." Their existence hints at a transition that is otherwise lacking: they *do* come from the Fayum, but they are *not* otherwise identifiable as Christian. They *do* have red and white binding materials, but they do *not* follow the later pattern (the red threads are near the edges and there are only two of them). The ribbons *are* purpose-woven to shape and used as a burial tape, but they are *not* as narrow or complex as those from Fag el-Gamus. In other words, these examples are potential antecedents that could help to explain when and where the idea of purpose-woven ribbons originated. They suggest an evolutionary link between the traditional Pharaonic torn strips of linen and the full-blown, varied, and expertly-crafted ribbons of Fag el-Gamus and similar burials.

Although to all appearances the portrait mummies and the burials at Fag el-Gamus and similar sites represent two separate traditions, these examples show this separation to be less than complete. If a few pre-Christian burials made use of purpose-woven ribbons, perhaps there is no need to postulate Christian meaning for them. The one Pharaonic

example—a burial ribbon from the tomb of Tutankhamun (MMA 09.184.797)—also shows that this weaving technique, while not popular or widespread, did exist in much earlier times. A second-century bundle of wrappings in the British Museum uses the same weaving technique but without the additional red color along the sides. Examples from Qarara and two burials with unusually wide ribbons from Fag el-Gamus itself also show that ribbons of greater width but similar fashion existed simultaneously with or in proximity to the “usual” ribbons of one centimeter width.

Contrary to the geographic hypothesis, however, examples of the wide, earlier style of ribbon have emerged from Bagawat, in the distant Khargeh Oasis (Photograph K453). If the preparation of burials with purpose-woven ribbon were limited to Middle and Upper Egypt, their appearance at Bagawat would be extremely unexpected. The widespread use of the narrow two-colored ribbons in Christian sites in distant Nubia also argues against this geographical proximity theory. Although their appearance in Nubia first occurs several centuries later, it is clearly in Christian contexts that they occur.

Nubian examples may suggest a link, however between the two hypotheses: ribbon use may have started as a regional specialty, but as Christianity spread, the new burial practices, popular in areas where Christianity had taken hold, became intertwined with the spreading religion. As they moved outward together, meaning that had not originally existed could have become attached to the use of ribbons.

The “Christianity” Hypothesis

Each of the sites where ribbons and face bundles occur have been independently identified, through literary, monumental, and burial accessory evidence, as including a Christian population at the time from which these finds originate. Further research into

textual evidence and modern parallels provides reason to entertain the claim that ribbons and face bundles are linked to Christian affiliation, but does not prove its accuracy. Of these two potential markers of religious identity, it is ribbons, however, that can most readily be explained in terms of Christian beliefs and later practices.

The earliest textual reference to something akin to ribbons in an overtly Christian context is found in the legends of St. Anthony, the fourth-century ascetic and founder of Egyptian monasticism. According to the legend of St. Anthony, he became bored while meditating in his solitary cell one day, and was treated to a vision of an angel wearing a “girdle” with a cross who would sit and braid palm leaves, stand to pray, and then return to his braiding. A heavenly voice instructed Anthony to do the same, whereupon he began to wear a girdle and employ himself with weaving between his prayers (St. Mark Coptic Church 2005a). Several instructive elements come from this incident: Anthony here initiated the wearing of distinctive elements of clothing as a mark of his monasticism, and this specific type of clothing, a “girdle,” became an important sign of monasticism from this point onward. In today’s Coptic church, the girdle can be made of linen or silk and embroidered with crosses (St. Mark Coptic Church 2005b), or it can be made of leather with leather crosses (Coptic Cairo 2008). The ribbon with tapestry-woven crosses in a monastic burial at Qasr Ibrim (QI.84T/965, in Crowfoot 2011:20) is tantalizingly similar in description and appears in a monastic context. Could purpose-woven ribbons be, in fact, woven in the same technique as the original “girdles” created by and for early Christian ascetics in Egypt?

A further element of St. Anthony’s vision deserves mention in this connection: with this story, the employment of monks in weaving became an acceptable way to pass the

time and prevent boredom. By the seventh century, ribbon weaving was such standard practice for monks in a Theban monastery that the letters recorded by Crum and White (1926:351, 532) contain regular mention of the procedure and of the financial transactions that followed from making and selling them. Thus, regardless of the origin and first intent of ribbon use, their later association was with Christianity in their manufacture and use. Further south, in Nubia, ribbons are explicitly an element of burial that signal the transition to Christianity.

Modern Coptic liturgical practice also points to possible symbolic meaning for ribbons, especially those, like the earliest standardized kind found at Fag el-Gamus, made with red-stained linen. Leeder (1918:116-117) describes Coptic wedding rites: “The couple are bound together with a ribbon, as a symbol of the indissoluble character of marriage, and that they are no longer two, but one.” This ribbon is not further described here, but a recent description (St. Mark Coptic Church 2005c), affirms that they are red.

The same red ribbons are also used today at baptism and confirmation (St. Mark Coptic Church 2005d), and the symbolic association of the red ribbon with the blood of Christ is explicitly made:

The priest then ties a red ribbon (girdle) around the waist of the baptized...the girdle is red, symbolizing the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shed His Blood for us, and upon which the...Sacraments were founded.

This description also helpfully indicates that “ribbon” and “girdle” may be two ways of referencing the same thing.

In Leeder’s century-old description of baptism (1918:99, 101), it is a multi-colored girdle that was used for the same sacraments:

After the laying on of hands in blessing, the priest takes off the child’s wrap, and clothes him in a white robe, tied with a holy girdle, or *zennan*, which is tricolored; the girdle being unique to the Coptic Church...On the eighth day after baptism the rite of

loosing the girdle is observed in the baptistry of the church...After a special prayer the water is signed thrice in the form of a cross by the priest, who then removes the girdle and washes the child and his clothes.

The girdle, according to Leeder (1918:189) is a distinctive and important element of Christian identity in Egypt: “the famous Coptic girdle...comes from remotest antiquity, and to the Christians of Egypt must always have a special meaning.” Whether the baptismal ribbons or girdle are red or multicolored, both have parallels in the types of ribbons found at Fag el-Gamus. Leeder does mention (1918:169-170) the choir members in “their white robes with the cross bands...of scarlet (embroidered with crosses),” which can be read as a further evidence for the existence of narrow red textile bands in contemporary Coptic ceremony.

These descriptions of Coptic practice in modern times may help to explain ancient ribbon use or show continuity with ancient traditions, but evidence for the intervening years is not available to show definite and continual links, and none of these modern uses are specifically linked to mortuary use. The case could be made, however, that with the introduction of Christianity, blood (as represented symbolically by the color red) became an explicitly sacred link to divinity. The death of Christ, as a central tenet of Christian worship, sanctified the symbolism of blood, whereas in the immediately prior religious worldview, its meaning was ambivalent and frequently polluting, despite the ever-presence of blood in ritual sacrifice (Requena 2011). The introduction of red-and-white ribbons, then, would allow identification with the body and blood of Christ through physical ritualized dress (Davis 2005:360). Ribbons were inexpensive and available widely to people of every social level, but could invoke potent identity with Christ, effectively sacralizing the body of the wearer (Davis 2005:359). The identification with

Christianity may have been enhanced if they were made and sold by monks, the most visible and extreme soldiers for Christ apart from the martyrs.

While these suggestions could make sense of the evidence, they remain tentative and are included here for the sake of showing that if claims regarding religious meaning are made, they should also include possible explanations for how that meaning could emerge from the physical evidence. At Fag el-Gamus in particular, ribbons entirely replace torn strips of linen at and above 80 cm from the surface, suggesting that at this site, their placement in burials was deliberate and significant. If the use of multi-colored, purpose-woven ribbons, rather than burial direction, accounts for the real rate of conversion, their gradual introduction followed by total replacement of the ancient practice of burial with torn strips of linen accords with what is known of the piecemeal process of conversion to Christianity.

Resistance and Partial Conversion

The few datable burials from Fag el-Gamus suggest that the majority of the head-west burials there were interred in the post-Constantine years. If instead of starting from the assumption that head-west burials indicate Christianity, we postulate that those burials were interred by a Christian funerary guild—or indeed that edicts supporting Christianity led to prescriptions in the way of death as certainly as they circumscribed the way of life for Egyptians of the fourth and later centuries (MacMullen 1984:88-90)—then other aspects of the burials can provide clues about religious identity. Mummification, for instance, would have been performed against the opposition of church leaders: it would have to be an active choice and one that signified resistance. Likewise, burial with amulets, traditional iconography, or figurines of the traditional gods indicated at least

partial adherence to the ancient ways, which would have put the bearers of such items in muted rebellion against the religious and secular authorities as early as the reign of Theodosius, who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in AD 380 and outlawed traditional religious practices in AD 391. In this view, individual inclusions of terracotta figurines and amulets would actually be forms of resistance to the imposition of religion from above.

Looking past burial direction, then, several aspects of burial may indicate greater nuance in religious identity. Not the least of these is the use of ribbons versus torn strips of linen. After the switch to head-west burials, the use of torn strips of linen as bandaging agents declined gradually, only eventually giving way to ribbons. If ribbons did bear significant religious symbolism for Christians, then their use in burials would be a far more accurate indicator of religious identity than burial direction. Michelle Hegmon, in writing about stylistic choices that convey messages, has noted that “material visible only in private is more likely to convey messages about ritual or belief systems, whereas highly visible material often indicates group or ethnic boundaries” (Hegmon 1992:521). Depending on the level of “visibility” of the completely wrapped corpse, then, the use of ribbons and/or face bundles could have served as a marker intended for the in-group and could have conveyed information about religious identity, while burial direction was a more public marker that showed group allegiance. During the period leading up to the exclusion of torn strips from use, a number of burials use ribbons on the outer (visible) layer and torn strips on the inner (hidden) layers. While this might only be an economic choice if ribbons were more costly, it could also be a way of showing one identity

outwardly, but hiding another. The use of rope as a binding material, too, could have served an additional purpose of resisting the imposition of a Christian burial identity.

None of these possibilities can be proven, but a variety of explanations for the burial practices at Fag el-Gamus can be adduced, and this multiplicity of reasonable interpretations should slow the rush toward single-issue understanding of the finds from this site. What follows is a case study that supports this need to step back and re-examine our biased interpretations.

A COMPLICATED QUESTION: BURIAL 2007-SW-6

Fag el-Gamus Burial 2007-SW-6 is an adult male, 20-25 years old (Figure 20). It is of particular note for the figurine that was found associated with it, a terracotta female figurine (Figure 21). With the assumption that all burials in this necropolis are Christian once their burial direction changes from head-east to head-west, members of the dig team have suggested in the past that this figurine and others like it represent the Virgin Mary.

If every other element of the burial pointed to Christianity—use of ribbons, presence of a face bundle, later date, absence of any traditional goods—then a syncretistic use of Isis as Mary might follow. But if the starting conjecture instead states that this is a traditional Egyptian burial and that the figurine simply represents Isis, then more detailed observations could reveal other elements of the burial that correspond to a traditional affiliation: we might expect that this burial used *torn linen strips* rather than ribbons, that perhaps it had *no face bundle*, and that it was buried fairly *deeply*. All of these factors turn out to be present: the burial has torn strips of linen and no ribbon; it was interred at a depth of 146 cm, and despite its fairly good preservation, it has no face bundle. A traditional Egyptian religious affiliation for 2007-SW-6 would also make better sense of

another aspect of this burial: at a higher level in the sand, near this burial, a bag of jewelry was found. Since traditional Egyptian burials were more likely to include grave goods, this jewelry makes sense in association with a burial that also contained a figurine of Isis.



Figure 20. Fag el-Gamus burial 2007-SW-6.



Figure 21. Terracotta figurine from 2007-SW-6

Although archaeologically-documented terracotta figurines are the exception rather than the rule in Roman Egypt, a set of figurines at the Louvre provide good parallels, based on their similar hairstyles, arm positions, and the shortened and inward-turned legs. The closest of these parallel pieces (Catalogue Nos. 551-554) suggest that a second- or third-century date for this figurine is probable (Dunand 1990:202-203). Based on this

evidence, a Christian identity for the person buried here would be possible, but numerically unlikely.

David Edwards (2005:121) has also suggested that the great abundance of terracotta figurines of Isis, Harpocrates, and Bes in the Roman period could be seen as popular local resistance to the imposition of Christianity:

At the local level ‘popular religion’ could assume many new forms derived from regional as well as pan-Mediterranean religious idioms. This is perhaps most visible archaeologically in the abundant terracotta figurines, of Isis, Harpocrates, Bes and other deities that are such an abundant, and intractable feature of this period. These provide very material evidence for the resilience of indigenous religion, if in new forms...

According to this view then, there is no need to hypothesize syncretistic blending. Isis was Isis, and her presence in a burial site both affirms the influence of “pan-Mediterranean religious idioms” and displays active resistance to the imposition of religion from above. That a very small number of burials at Fag el-Gamus include terracotta figurines (a total of eight documented, out of approximately 1000 burials opened) shows that their inclusion was never a trend, but an intentional, individual choice.

This look at several factors deliberately problematizes the question of religious affiliation. Communities rarely make important changes in lock step (but note Frankfurter’s suggestion [1998:20] that villages converted together, based on the choices made by charismatic leaders). Individuals could continue to hold to older religious traditions even after the majority had changed and the practice of head-west burial became standard. In this scenario, then, and making the unproven assumption that face bundles and ribbons had become markers of Christian identity, the absence of a face bundle is not due to poor preservation but simply because it was never there in the first

place, and the use of torn strips or rope instead of ribbons was a conscious, calculated statement.

LIMITATIONS

This paper represents an attempt at systematic, data-driven analysis of data at and around Fag el Gamus within the context of significant limitations of available data and methods. The most basic of these difficulties stems from the order in which the work has been done: excavations have taken place over the past thirty years, but this *post-hoc* study faces significant obstacles because relevant data was not recorded during many of those seasons of work. This attempt to closely examine findings from Fag el-Gamus relies on excavation methodology and observations of others that were not verified by the author. It is possible that more specific details would have emerged, for example, with regard to the presence or absence of face bundles, if the author had been able to have examined and photographed more of the burials *in situ*.

The reburial of many finds following each season's work, without marking the individual burials from which each reburied bone or artifact came, and without marking the location of the reburial, is an additional obstacle. Those finds of a high quality of preservation or high market value (such as gold, jewelry, complete and colorful textiles, and small bits of papyri) were presented to the Egyptian authorities, who scattered them among three museums (The Egyptian Museum in Cairo; The Coptic Museum in Cairo; and the regional museum at Kom Aushim in the Fayum). Objects in these Egyptian museums are difficult to access for study due to political and travel considerations, and in many cases, inadequate conservation has rendered them too fragile for study or even destroyed them outright. The Egyptian authorities have allowed finds that they judge to

be of lesser value and significance to remain at the storage magazine on site in the Fayum for future study, but conservation issues and the limited amount of time available on site also make these finds difficult to use. A smaller sampling of textiles for study and research are kept at Brigham Young University. These study pieces are an important and unique collection, but their utility to demonstrate overall patterns at Fag el-Gamus is limited by small sample size and unscientific selection. Examination of these samples was useful for technical descriptions of common types and for enhancing understanding of how textiles found at this site were produced.

The recurring question at Fag el-Gamus of whether the vast cemetery is basically uniform across the site, or differs from area to area, remains problematic. The data analyzed here came from a bounded area (three five-by-five-meter squares, all within one larger ten-meter square), and there is no certainty that this localized sample is representative of other parts of the cemetery, which has been calculated to cover about 125 hectares (Griggs 1993:215, 228). Published descriptions, anecdotal evidence, and photographs from other seasons of work in scattered portions of the necropolis do, however, substantiate the idea that these finds are typical of other sections that have been excavated thus far. The limited size of this sample actually strengthens the overall claim of this study: because such variability of burial practices clearly exists even within this tightly bounded area, earlier broad claims that suggested full uniformity through the cemetery cannot hold true.

With the possibility of containing literally millions of burials and the certainty of several centuries of use, there is no record of how the ancient inhabitants of the Fayum decided in what part of this vast cemetery to bury an individual. Ethnic groupings are

known have been diverse in the Fayum in Roman times, but, in an attempt to keep the research questions manageable, this aspect of burial identity was not explicitly examined in the present study; discussion of its importance to the study of Roman Egypt, however, is found in Chapter Two. The textile finds provide some hints of possible ethnic diversity; this fascinating but tangential possibility could not be addressed here. DNA studies of the Fag el-Gamus population are underway and may yet clarify some of these questions of the ethnic makeup of this region. The villages that used this cemetery have never been identified.

It does seem that each area recently excavated was in use over approximately the same span of time, based on pottery found in each area that ranges from the first to sixth centuries, but there is no reason to assume a constant rate at which each area of the cemetery was “filled.” If these were family plots, a wide disparity in the rate of use would apply. Excavation in a distant part of the site may yet uncover a different range of dates.

On the basic level of methodology, a stronger set of conclusions might emerge from a study of the order in which burials were deposited within each burial shaft, rather than looking across the entire area at comparative burial depths. Within each shaft, the burials have a definite order of deposition, while burial depths across the site may not provide accurate absolute comparisons. The limitations of the available data made shaft-specific comparisons impossible at the present time, but such comparisons may become available at a future date as databases are digitized and made viewable in three-dimensions.

The current study has only considered a limited number of aspects of the burials, focusing on how to think about religious affiliations in the context of the arrival of early

Christianity in Egypt. There are many more ways to parse the data, and each filter will provide a different interpretation.

CONCLUSIONS

These ideas are suggestive of the more nuanced picture of this community that emerges from considering many small aspects of their burial practices together, instead of pinning all of our understanding on one or two very obvious, major changes such as burial direction or the inclusion of crosses. Very few of the burials at Fag el-Gamus blatantly proclaim one religious affiliation or another, so the minor details become of great value, if they truly mark an aspect of religious identity rather than another aspect of identity or simply an idiosyncratic choice.

The nature of “conversion” at this time and place is also worthy of discussion. Individuals and groups might self-identify as Christian while carrying on traditional practices; or identify with the traditional religion but make use of the Christian gods on amulets and in incantations. All of these aspects suggest a non-linear relationship between religious identity and practice, with more fluidity in identities than previously recognized, and concomitant difficulties for archaeologists seeking to delimit differences. They caution against claims of instant or universal conversion, and show that the conversions that did take place may have occurred for a wide variety of reasons and to varying degrees of conviction.

Seeing conversion as piecemeal both on a societal level and on an individual level affirms that a few Christians may have been scattered among such visible burials as the Fayum portrait mummies. For example, a set of portrait mummies from Antinoopolis, dated to the mid-third century (Walker and Bierbrier 1997:160-1), depict deceased

women, painted on a shroud, as holding the exclusively Christian *crux ansata* and, significantly, lacking Sokar boats or Osirian imagery that are found in traditional Egyptian burial practice. Likewise, an otherwise typical Roman period mummy in the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria has an inked cross at the center of the neck (Ikram and Dodson 1998:165). It may be that these individuals were deliberately depicted as bearing some kind of Christian affiliation, whatever that term might have meant to that person at that time. They were still Egyptian, and still belonged to a wealthy class, and hence still participated in burial according to the customs of their time, but someone among those who buried them felt that their identity as Christian was important enough to mark it in burial alongside the other aspects of identity that were also marked. If the Christian population did not spring suddenly into existence in Egypt but gradually grew at a reasonable rate (Stark 1997:4-13), then the occasional Christian should emerge from among the many well-preserved burials from the first three centuries AD, and a complete absence of Christians would be the more surprising finding.

The question of Christian identity at Fag el-Gamus is problematic and complicated by many factors. The entire population probably did not self-identify as Christian simultaneously, and religious affiliation was not necessarily the most important factor leading to decisions about what to include in burial. Different registers of identity can be stressed depending on what one wants to hide as much as what one wants to emphasize. The creation of group identity (and hence safety in numbers) may require people of minority ethnicities to emphasize their cohesion with the dominant religious identity grouping, while those of similar ethnicity might take this for granted (Insoll 2005:195); there are many other such examples of choosing to emphasize one aspect over another. In

a time of religious persecution like Egypt's third century, adherents to the "out-group" of Christianity may have deliberately obscured their religious identity. In the following century, with the traditional religions outlawed and subject to violent attack, the opposite groups may have felt threatened and have had to hide their affiliation beneath seeming compliance with the newly militant ideology of Christianity. All of these factors need to be considered in looking at issues of identity in third- and fourth-century Egypt.

The categories of identity function together rather than in isolation. Identity is polyvalent and needs to be addressed from multiple perspectives. Religious affiliation, ethnic or national affiliation or citizenship, gender, and wealth or status all played a role in how the people were presented in death at Fag el-Gamus. Different aspects of identity come to the fore at different points in the life course, and each is experienced in different ways depending on what other categories one fits in: childhood is different for a wealthy citizen than for a slave, but wealth and citizenship create different roles for men and women. Gender roles, meanwhile, vary with religious affiliation, and religious expectations differ for children and adults. Identity is thus complex, interwoven, and textured.

In a similar fashion, the categories of material finds function together rather than in isolation. Stronger conclusions come from analyses based on multiple types of facts, tying archaeological arguments to disparate strands of evidence that are not all based in the same theory (Hodder and Hutson 2003:200). Facts are both political and timely (Hodder and Hutson 2003:201), because it is one's own theoretical agenda that determines the evidence one collects and the way that evidence is interpreted, and, over time, reinterpreted. With the current study, the explicit agenda has been to show that the

case for the early arrival of Christianity in Egypt is highly ambiguous in the case of burial data, and any arguments concerning it must be correspondingly complex. The necropolis of Fag el-Gamus, due to its extensive size and excellent preservation, provides valuable evidence for the unfolding of this slow and piecemeal change and for the discussion of multiple aspects of identity. As archaeologists and other scholars approach Fag el-Gamus with other questions and other theoretical agendas, the rich data will nourish many additional interpretations.

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