Cultures in Contact
Transfer of Knowledge in the Mediterranean Context

Selected Papers

Edited by
Sofía Toralla Tovar & Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala

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Egyptian burial practices in Late Antiquity: 
the case of Christian mummy labels

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It is not easy to understand the development of early Christian practices, their inheritance from the pagan religion and the developments which ultimately defined their cult. The texts that we have as sources for this task are generally difficult to contextualize or even assign to a practitioner of a particular religion, and archaeology has not been illuminating in this respect until very recently. In this paper, I will deal with the evidence we have for the evolution of funerary practice in Egypt, including some evidence in the papyri but with a special focus on the early Christian use of mummy labels. Mummy labels are artefacts very

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1 I want to thank David Nirenberg (University of Chicago), Miguel Herrero (Universidad Complutense) and Klaas A. Worp (Leiden University) for their invaluable help in improving this paper. K.A. Worp and Alain Delattre were so kind as to let me read their forthcoming paper, 'Une etiquette de momie du IVe siècle au British Museum. Réflexions sur les etiquettes tardives', in the Journal of Juristic Papyrology, and discuss with me several issues about late mummy labels. This article is part of a wider project on funerary practice in Egypt and mummy labels, in collaboration with the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (ACI-PRO-2011-1132).

2 On Early Christianity in Egypt and the papyri, see H. I. Bell, 'Evidences of Christianity in Egypt during the Roman Period', The Harvard Theological Review 37, 3 (1944), pp. 185-208. An excellent project is Macquarie University’s 'Papyri from the Rise of Christianity in Egypt', (http://www.mq.edu.au/research/centres_and_groups/ancient_cultures_research_centre/research/papyrology/pce/overview/).


closely related to Egyptian funerary practice, and hence unexpected among Christians. But their existence is less surprising when we remember that Christians and pagans continued to be buried in the same graveyards into the 4th century and beyond, and that often the features of typically Christian burial are hard to identify. The beliefs and practices of the new converts appear to be something of an amalgam, with no sharp distinction between the pagan practices and those of the newly adopted religion.

Given that early Christians sometimes continued to worship the ‘old’ gods together with the new one, we might expect that they would adapt more material aspects of religious cult, such as the practicalities of burial, to their new faith. Moreover pagan practices such as mumification, so characteristic of the Egyptian religion, were also the only known way to preserve corpses from decay.

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7 See for example the Christian amulet SB III 6584, P.Oslo I 5 (4th-5th cent. CE), headed by the XMΓ (‘Mary gave birth to Christ’), and which refers to gods in the plural.

Egyptian burial practices in Late Antiquity

According to the latest archaeological research in Egyptian necropoleis, mummification continued to be practiced in Egypt in Christian circles as late as 600 CE. The traditional method went through some adaptations. It is not clear exactly what the process was, but it is known that blocks of natron were used in non-traditional ways, and that there is no trace of evisceration. The corpses were not bandaged, but they were wrapped in several shrouds. Sometimes layers of salt were placed under or between the shrouds, and the bodies were often dressed in their everyday clothes. The process of transformation into this new type of mummification was not abrupt, but it developed gradually in the course of the first centuries of Christianity.

The same can be said about other manifestations of funerary practice. In shared burial grounds, the tombs of pagans and Christians differed little from each other, and especially in the case of funerary offerings, some tombs present an amalgam of pagan and Christian beliefs. Here we may mention the offering of amulets, and lamps, or the use of the ‘ankh’, a symbol which was soon adapted as the sign of the cross by the Christians.

However, Christian authorities gradually attempted to distance themselves from pagan practices, and the debate on the resurrection of the body must have had some influence in dispositions for burial. Saint Anthony, for example, asked to be buried in an unmarked, secret grave, and not be carried to Egypt, lest he be buried in the traditional way. As differences became more marked, Christians could even despise and dishonour pagan tombs.

In any case, in this liminal period during the earliest stage of Christianity, burial, mummification and funerary offerings do not present a clear break with preceding practices. The material evidence we have is of complex interpretation.

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11 This seems to be the fact that he wanted to avoid the cult to the bodies that is attested in pagan practice. The mummies were often carried and preserved at home, for family worship. See H.-J. Drexhage, ‘Einige Bemerkungen zum Mumientransport und den Bestattungskosten im römischen Ägypten’, Laverna 5 (1994), pp. 167-175, esp. 170-171.

We can take as an example a well-known text, the Psenosiris papyrus. It attests to a group of Christian νεκροτάφοι, among the ‘undertakers’ of Kysis, who apparently practiced embalming of bodies according to traditional methods, although the interpretation of the papyrus has been contested. The language of this text is clearly Christian and it basically contains the instructions for delivery of a mummy. What is interesting from this text, if the mummification interpretation is correct, is that here we have the testimony of Christians who practiced embalment according to the traditional pagan method, and belonged to a guild of undertakers, within which they formed a minority. They seem to have been preferred by their Christians clients over the other members of the guild because they shared the same religion, and not because they practiced a different method of mummification.

The Christian use of mummy labels is to be understood in this transitional period as a residual practice, which gradually acquired Christian characteristics, as much as the mummification process also did, eventually become a distinct practice, ultimately disappearing. Mummy labels are often taken as evidence of the continuation of the tradition of mummification by Christians. But it is not easy to determine if a given mummy label is in fact Christian. Our task is therefore to identify features which can help classify mummy labels as Christian. These features can sometimes be fairly obvious, as with the use of the cross, but often enough they are not.

There are a number of mummy labels that have already been identified as Christian. B. Boyaval was the first to list five items as Christian mummy labels:

SB I 1190, T.Berl.Möller 116, C.Étiq.Mom. 104, TM 32078 (3rd–early 4th cent. CE); Ταήσαι ἐβίωσεν ἐκουσι ὡκτῷ, / γ(ίνονται) ἔτων κη. εἰς τὴν λαμπρὰν ἀπῆλθεν. "Taesia lived twenty eight years. It was 28 years. She went into the splendorous (land)."

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15 See ll. 2-3 ἀγαπητῷ ἀδελφῷ ἐν κ(ορ)ίῳ, 4-6 ἀσπάζομαι καὶ τούς παρά σοι πάντας ἀ[δ]ελφοῖς ἐν θ(ε)λῳ, 12-14 τοῖς καλοῖς καὶ πιστοῖς ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν νεκροτάφων.
17 G. Bowen, ‘Some observations’, p. 169.
Egyptian burial practices in Late Antiquity


SB XII 10814, C.Étiq.Mom. 1604, TM 32554 (4th cent. CE): θατρὲ ἐβίωσεν / ἔτών σε/ † (drawing of a fish) † “Thatre lived 75 years”.


T.Mom.Louvre 1115, C.Étiq.Mom. 1512, TM 80049 (2nd-3rd cent. CE): Ἀρτεμιδώρας / Μικκάλο μητ(ρὸς) Πανισκίαινης πρεσβ(υτέρας) / ἐκοιμήθη ἐν Κ(υρί)ῳ. “Artemidora daughter of Mikkalos, whose mother was Paniskiaina the elder, went to sleep in the Lord”.

He then adds in a footnote two more labels bearing crosses22 (although he wonders if the first one might be a forgery):

SB I 1201 T.Berl.Möller 94, TM 40166 (273 CE as proposed by TM): Κολλῶθις (unintelligible sign) / χαχηνε κω( ) / ἀπὸ Βοσώχεως / (cross?) / (ἔτους) κ, Μεσ(ο)ιε. “Kollothis, … from Bosochis, 20th year, Mesore 15”.

T.Berl.Möller 125, IGChrEg 687, TM 120473: Ψενθήος Απολ-/λωνίου Πατή-/τος. “Pentheos son of Apollonios, son of Patsetos”.

He apparently does not consider Christian SB I 1205, T.Berl.Möller 120, C.Étiq.Mom. 113, TM 40170: Σατρῖπς Ψενμαγάτος, ἐν Ἀλεξαν-/δρείᾳ ἀναπαυσά-

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21 See image in Marie-France Aubert and Roberta Cortopassi, Portraits funéraires de l’Égypte romaine. Cartonnages, linceuls et bois, Paris, 2008, pp. 84-85, no. 4. It is a beautiful label featuring a portrait of a woman and eight lines of Demotic text on one side, and the Greek text on the other. The fact that the text is partly in Demotic and that the representation of the deceased is wearing a crown of roses, related to the cult of Osiris, to which the Demotic text refers, is against the Christian interpretation. If the cross on the reverse is in fact a Christian cross, this is a conspicuous example of religious ambiguity.

22 We may add for example T.Mom.Louvre 247 = SB I 3540, TM 29392 (2nd-3rd cent. CE, Thebes): ταφὴ Ἀμμών/νοῦς ἀπό κόμις / Τρικατάνεως / τοῦ Κοπτίτου / νομοῦ / †, “Body of Ammonous, from the town of Trikatanis in the Koptite nome”.


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Sofía Torallas Tovar

/μενος, “Satripis, son of Psenmagos, he rested in Alexandria”, which contains, according to Krebs,24 a Christian expression for the verb ‘to die’.25 Froschauer26 calls attention on yet one more mummy label, dated to the 3rd-4th cent. CE, which contains a Christian-like expression:

T.Mom.Louvre 1006, C.Etiq.Mom. 1404, TM 79941: Ἀτρῆς Νικαιφόρος Βήσιος / τοῦ Ἅρχουμος Πχάταπη / ἐβίωσεν ἐτῶν ἐξ ἡμερῶν / ἵθ ἵπτον ἔχει θεοῦ τέκνον / (Ξτούς) α Μεσορή i. “Atres Nikephoros Besios, son of Pachoumis Pchatape, lived six years and 19 days, the son of God has him”.27

More recently, other Christian labels have been published, such as P.Eirene 211, TM 7819428 (7th-8th cent. CE (?), Koma, Herakleopolitès): Recto: † Απολλω / υἱὸς Μηνᾶ / Σικελή "Apollo, son of Menas Sik ele/or the Sicilian (?)" 29; Verso: † Απολλω / υἱὸς Μηνᾶ / ἀπὸ Κόμα "Apollo, son of Menas, from Koma”. Under line 1 of the recto there is an incised text: † ἀντρὸς Απολλ(ω) / υἱὸς Μηνᾶ Σικελ(ή). The Christian feature of this label is the fact that it bears a sign of the cross. It is, moreover, quite late.

Another late example30 is a wooden tabula ansata dated to the 5th-6th cent. CE: † ἐν εἰρήνῃ / τ(οῦ) ἐν ἀγ(ιοις) ἄναπ(αυ)ς(αμένου) / ἱερεμίου ἐν μη(ς(ι)) / Ὑωθ ιη ζ ιν(δικτίωνοσ). “In peace. (Tomb) of Jeremia h, who is resting among the saints, in the month of Thoth, 18, 7th indication”.

27 Or, interpreting a mistake, “he has the son of God”. This is perhaps a rough reference to 1 John 5:12: ὁ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν: ὁ μὴ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ζωὴν οὐκ ἔχει, referring to eternal life.
29 The editor reconstructs μητρός. I agree with F. Mitthof, ‘Urkundenreferat 2004 (2. Teil)’, p. 86, that the word μητρός was never there, especially since there is no attestation of this as a female name at all. He suggests it is a second name of the father. I propose also the interpretation as an ethnonym, although not without doubts, since the form is not correct either.
The Coptic language must be taken as a relevant criterion in the identification of Christian texts, although of course, some prudence is called for. There are, for example, at least two Old Coptic texts which cannot be considered Christian labels. In any case, the number of mummy labels in Coptic is very low, since the mummy labels we can claim as Christian date to the very early period of Christianity, and the practice disappeared at roughly the same time that the Coptic script was standardized.

Among the few mummy labels in Coptic, there is SB Kopt. II 1065, TM 88089:† 

†ⲡⲁⲡⲛⲟⲩ-ⲧⲉ ⲛⲟⲡⲡⲛ-ⲫⲁⲣⲙ. "Papnoute (son of) Apa Ie(re?)mias. Pharmouthi 7". Another Coptic label, edited by Alain Delattre, dated to the 5th or 6th cent. CE: ⲛⲟⲡ-ⲥⲏⲫ-ⲡⲛ-ⲡ Ⲣⲛ-ⲡⲟⲩ-ⲡⲁ ⚢ ⲣⲟⲩ-ⲡⲁⲓ Ⲩⲕ, 'Joseph, son of Papaisaak', which has a slightly larger size than a mummy label. Both feature very concise texts, which can be compared to that of contemporary funerary stelae.

An interesting piece from Strasbourg, edited by Lewis, introduces a new element into the discussion: the size of the labels. It is a block of wood, with an irregular shape – it is triangular in the lower part –, it has two holes, one on each extreme, and is considerably larger than the mummy labels we have presented before (25.5 x 12.7 cm). It contains a Coptic text incised with thick letters:

† ⲣⲩⲡⲣⲉⲙ-ⲧⲁⲡⲟⲩⲑⲏⲕ Ⲣⲛ-ⲕⲁⲱⲫⲁ-ⲧⲏⲥ ⲡⲟⲩ ⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲨⲚ ⲑⲣⲓⲟⲩⲛⲁ ⲡⲓⲙ ⚢ ⚢ ⚢ ⚢ ⚢ ⚢ ⚢ ⚢ ⚢, "Lampos, from Abutig, caulker, died on the eighth of Epeiph. May God have mercy on him".

We may compare this to a Greek one, P.Haun. II 44, TM 32380, an incised Christian piece of wood, dated to the 4th or 5th cent. CE, also large (10.3 x 24 cm). It has an ear under the text on the short side of the tabula, with a string hole, and

31 See G. Steindorff, 'Zwei altkoptische Mumienetiketten', Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde 28 (1890), pp. 49-53: These two bilingual (Greek-Old Coptic) labels present a very early stage of the writing, one of them even runs right to left (SB I 1250; Short Texts 2 885; TM 40213), and the other one features a very crude hand (SB I 1230; Short Texts 2 886; 40194).
32 Alain Delattre, 'Une etiquette de momie copte de l'ancien Collection G.A. Michaelides', Chronique d'Égypte 80 (2005), pp. 373-374, already collects the available data.
35 Alain Delattre, 'Une etiquette de momie'. The dimensions of this piece (16.5 cm x 3.8 cm) were published by the website of a gallery of antiquities. The label is now for sale.
Sofía Torallas Tovar

presents a very mixed and crude text: †ἐκοιμοί-θη τοῦ / μακαρίτ(ου)/ Μερκουρ(ίου) / Μήγος’ Πριμ-/σουαγ. ἐγρ(άφη) / μην(ὶ) Φα-/ μ(εν οθ) ιδ/νδ(ικτίωνος)/δ † “The blessed Mercurius son of Men, from Asuan, went to sleep. Written on the month of of Phamenoth 14th, 4th indication”.37

These pieces may represent two examples of what would be the substitute of the stone stelae. This is suggested not only by their shape and size, but also because the texts they feature are closer to those in contemporary funerary epigraphy than in mummy labels. It is an evolution not only of these wooden objects, but also of their centuries-old purpose. The transformation continued: we find the beautiful example of the 10th century wooden ankh shaped grave stele from the Louvre,38 containing a funerary text for the Deacon Panteleos.

The criteria used to attribute these mummy labels to Christian practice are the addition of Christian expressions to the common basic text of a mummy label (ἐν Κ(υρί)ω, εἰς τὴν λαμπράν ἀπήλθεν, ὁμήν, and ἀναπαυσάμενος); the symbolic use of the cross, which later became a typical element in all Christian private and public documents on papyrus; as well as the use of the Coptic language. I would suggest two additional criteria, one of them referring to the Christian expressions in mummy labels; and the other, a symbolic representation which can be interpreted as a Christian sign.

Sometimes mummy labels present expressions of farewell, encouragement and pain, like ἐπ᾽ ἀγαθῷ or εὐψύχη, or even φεῦ,39 frequent in the funerary context in epitaphs, bandages, sarcophagi and portraits.40 In this context, when these kinds of expressions of condolence, farewell, or lamentation enter the space of mummy labels, we are witnessing a process of change, where certain expressions gradually transfer from one genre of texts to another. One of these is

37 The syntax is complicated. This translation is an interpretation of what would be expected.
40 See for instance the Artemidorus mummy and sarcophage, British Museum EA 21810 (Hawara, 2nd cent. CE), which features under the portrait a gilded inscription Ἀρτεμιδορὲς εὐψύχη.
a well known expression, which is very much extended in Imperial times and cannot be considered specifically Christian: “Be brave, nobody is immortal”.41 This expression is common in epitaphs, not only from Egypt, but also Cyprus and Syria. Its interpretation is, not surprisingly, controversial. The first to analyze it was M. Simon,42 who claimed it referred to the dangers that the departed had to face when travelling to the World of the Beyond and compared it to the initiation rites of the cult of Osiris.43 The related expression, οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος, refers to the ineluctable fact that we all have to die.44

In general, there is some dissension about Simon’s interpretation especially in the relationship with the cult of Osiris. For example, in a convincing interpretation, R. Joly45 has instead suggested that this is related to the mysteries of Eleusis. The most recent analysis, that of J. S. Park,46 suggests that instead of seeing this as the promise of life after death, we should see it as a formula of consolation in view of the universality of death, but it is certainly reasonable to understand exhortations to have courage or be brave as expressions of consolation and comfort.

In spite of its ‘pagan’ origin, I would venture to propose that in the funerary context of late antique Egypt this expression became a favourite of Christian practice. Mummy labels do not feature the expression θάρσει or θάρρει,48 which

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41 J. S. Park, Conceptions of Afterlife in Jewish inscriptions: with special reference to Pauline literature, Tübingen, 2000, pp. 47-63.
43 He compares it to Firmicus Maternus, De errore profanarum religionum 22: θαρρεῖτε, μόνοι τοῦ θεοῦ σεωσμένου, έσται γάρ ἡμῖν ἐκ πόνων σωτηρία. “Be brave, initiated of the saved god, your salvation will lie in the sufferings”. He also claims that the promise of salvation and the Egyptian idea of post mortem sufferings are confirmed by the use of farewell expressions in Alexandrine epitaphs as εὐψύχει together with representations of Isis and Osiris. See Simon, Θάρσει, p. 203.
44 M. Simon, Θάρσει, p. 196, even sees in contexts like IG XIV 1806 = IGUR II 743: εὖ-φύχι / Μίδων, / οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος / καὶ ὁ Ἡ-ρακλῆς / ἀνέβας-νε, “Farewell, Midon, nobody is immortal, even Herakles died”, that the reference to a hero means that there is hope of resurrection or some kind of life after death.
46 Park, Conceptions, pp. 47-63.
47 Taken from R. A. Lattimore, Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs, Urbana-Champaign, 1962, pp. 252-256, as also SEG VI 140.
48 For this see the forthcoming article, by my colleague Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, “«Trust the God»: Tharsein in Ancient Greek Religion”, whom I thank for letting me read the unpublished manuscript and for his useful commentaries on this article.
appears instead in epitaphs and condolence letters. But we do find variants of οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος, ‘nobody is immortal’, preceded by an expression of comfort, μὴ λυπής, ‘do not be sad’, instead of the above mentioned ‘be brave’. This expression appears almost exclusively in Christian epitaphs, and in a reduced number of mummy labels, in which we also find an addition ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, which might point to some kind of hope of life after death, especially in the expression ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ, so frequent in funerary stelae.

SB I 3514, C.Étiq.Mom. 231, TM 40311: Σενπαμ[...] -θῆς τε [...]/ ἐτῶν [...] / μὴ λυπής, ‘do not be sad’. Nobly is immortal in the world”.


SB I 3992, T.Berl. Möller 82, TM 40407: Σεράβαν Καυερ άπο Τερκθ( ). / μη λυπής. ουδείς ἀθ-ἀνατος. τῆς θ ἰνδικτιωνος. “Strabo Cauer (?) from Terk().” Do not be sad, nobody is immortal. Ninth indiction”.

SB I 5715, C.Étiq.Mom. 527, TM 40585: Σενελυπία Πλήνιοι Μέμνονος, ἐβίωσεν ἐτῶν βα. μη λυποῦ, οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἀθάνατος ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. “Senalyopia daughter of Plenios, son of Memnon, lived 55 years. Do not be sad, since nobody is immortal in the world”.

SB X 10483 (SB I 5751), C.Étiq.Mom. 532, TM 16767 (after 4th cent. CE): Καμεντεβονχ / ἐβίωσεν ἐτῶν/ νε. μη λυποῦ, οὐδεὶς/ γὰρ ἀθάνατος ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. “Kamantebonch lived 55 years. Do not be sad, since nobody is immortal in the world”.

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50 The funerary inscription SB V 8695 (= SB III 6090), C.Étiq.Mom. 644, TM 40715 Σεμνή Μενάν-. /δου, χρηστή καὶ / ἅλυς, χαῖρε, where the deceased is referred to as ἅλυς, ‘free from pain and sorrow’, can help understand these expressions of comfort as addressed to the by-passers (who read the epitaphs) or the family of the deceased, and not to the deceased himself, who is free of sorrow.

51 The innumerable references to inscriptions carrying this expression are easily accessible through databases. Let one illustrative example suffice, that of Θῆβας ἀπὸ Σύνε 238, TM 88861, from Aswan: μη λυπής ἰακώβ, / οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἀθάνατος ἐν τῷ βίῳ τοῦ-τω. ΧΜΓ. “Do not be sad, Jacob, since nobody is immortal in this life. Mary gave birth to Christ”.

This expression also appears in condolence letters of probable Christian character:

\[\text{P.Princ. II 102, ll. 10-15, Chapa, Letters of Condolence 10, TM 32798 (4th cent. CE): } \text{δὲ τὸ/ ἀνθρώπων φέρει} \text{τοιγαρὸν/ ἀπόθου τὸ λυπηρὸν τοῦ ἀνθρω-/πίνου πτάσιματος καὶ ἀπόβλε-/ψον ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἐν ἀνθρώπωι ἀθά-/νατος εἰ μή ὁ υἱὸς θεοῦ, “Therefore, put away the grief of human fault and think that nobody among men is immortal, but only the son of God”.} \]

\[\text{SB XVIII 13946, ll. 14-15, CPR VI 81, Chapa, Letters of Condolence 8, TM 30997 (3rd-4th cent. CE Hermoupolis Magna?): } \text{οὐδεὶς γὰρ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀθάνατος, “nobody of the simply born is immortal”.} \]

The sign of the cross, the chrismon, and the adoption by Christians of the ankh-sign, meaning ‘life’ in Egyptian, is a clear marker of Christianity. Less evident, and perhaps contestable, is the use of the ear of corn as a sign of the eucharist, already pointed out by Scott-Moncrieff in mummy labels, among other funerary manifestations.\(^5^4\) Examples of this are \text{T.Berl.Möller 105 (SB I 1211, C.Étiq.Mom. 116, TM 40176), 121 (SB I 1182, C.Étiq.Mom. 96, TM 40152), 124 (SB I 1204, C.Étiq.Mom. 112, TM 40169) and SB I 3508 (C.Étiq.Mom. 225, TM 40305), although T.Berl.Möller 25 (SB I 1203, Short Texts 2 847, C.Étiq.Mom. 111, TM 50891) is a Demotic label and features a stylized ear of corn. Since the ear of corn also represents Osiris, it is difficult to disambiguate this symbol and assign it to Christian practice.

**Conclusion**

Mummy labels were distinctly Egyptian objects that briefly entered the world of early Christian burial practices, together with mumification and other related aspects of Egyptian funerary tradition. Mumification, as has recently been proven by the analysis of bodies recovered in excavations, was gradually transformed into a different technique, perhaps as a consequence of new ideas concerning the preservation of corpses, or due to the decline over time of ancient practices.

Mummy labels served a very practical purpose in funerary custom, that of identification of the bodies. They survived and acquired typically Christian marks (such as the sign of the cross, and perhaps the ear of corn) as well as expressions of Christian character (such as \(\text{ἐν Κ(υρίῳ), εἰς τὴν λαμπρὰν ἀπήλθεν, and as I claim here, οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ). The Coptic language, too, serves as an}

\(^{53}\) In the case of this last text, the Christian character is doubtful, according to Juan Chapa, with whom I agree.

\(^{54}\) Scott-Moncrieff, *Paganism and Christianity in Egypt*, p. 126.
identifying factor. The few Coptic labels we know of feature texts very close to those of funerary stelae, and appear in a format much larger than the traditional, suggesting that a shift in their purpose has taken place.