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JOURNAL FOR ANCIENT HISTORY

29



CENTRO DE HISTÓRIA DA UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
2020



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ESTUDOS
ARTICLES

THE ANTHROPOID WOODEN COFFIN OF DIDYME FROM GRECO-ROMAN EGYPT

O ATAÚDE ANTROPOMÓRFICO DE DIDÍME DO EGIPTO GRECO-ROMANO

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Abstract: The Greco-Roman coffin of Didyme was found in Middle Egypt during the 1980's. It offers a unique decorative program, showing the integration of Egyptian and Greco-Roman motifs. In this paper we examine the decorative program of the coffin with a view to identify its provenance and dating.

Keywords: Coffin; Greco-Roman Egypt; Tuna El-Gabel.

Resumo: O ataúde greco-romano de Dídima foi encontrado no Médio Egito na década de 1980. O objeto apresenta um programa decorativo singular, revelando a integração de motivos egípcios e greco-romanos. No presente artigo, analisamos o programa decorativo do ataúde de modo a estimar a sua proveniência e datação.

Palavras-chave: Ataúde; Egito Greco-Romano; Tuna El-Gabel.

1. Introduction

During the late 1980s, a coffin of a woman was accidentally found by the Egyptian Police, near the village of Zawiyat Sultan, in Minia governorate, where it was kept in the possession of antiquities dealers. The coffin was then the object of judicial litigation until it was eventually included in the collections of the Minia Museum, within the group of Sayed Khashaba, receiving the inventory number 501. The coffin is currently kept in the museum's storerooms at Bahnasa.

On the footboard, a Greek inscription provides the identity of the deceased:

ΔΙΔΑΜΗ Η ΚΑΙ ΘΑΤΡΗΧ ΦΙΒΙΩΝΟ

Didyme who is named Thérèse the daughter of Fibiono.

Despite a brief mention by Dieter Kurth,¹ the object remains unpublished to this date. The coffin was crafted in sycamore wood, covered with plaster and paint. Additionally, the head, breasts and hands have been molded in plaster.

It measures 180 cm in length, 38 cm in width, and presents a maximal height of 73 cm. The object is very well preserved. The wooden structure is intact. A few cracks affect the headboard, where plaster was used more intensively. The painted decoration is in good condition.

Body containers are normally crafted with a case designed as a box in order to contain the mummy within. However, in Didyme's coffin the case is reduced to a flat floorboard, while the vaulted lid envelops the body above (Fig. 1). Given this unusual structure, the decoration is entirely located on the lid (Fig. 9).

In this paper we will focus on the iconographic decoration of the coffin in order to estimate a possible provenance and dating.²

¹ Kurth 1990, 33-37.

² The inscriptions of this coffin will be dealt with in a future publication. Consistent with this option, the drawing presented in this paper reproduces the iconographic decoration only.

2. Description

The edge of the floorboard is decorated with a single multicolored block-frieze. Despite the overall anthropoid shape, the lid is arranged in several sections, presenting distinct pictorial areas. We will describe the lid according to the following “topography”:

- Front side. This area comprises the full depiction of the deceased after the resurrection. It is divided in three sections. On the upper section it shows the tridimensional portrait of the deceased in Roman guise, while on the middle section several registers with Egyptian motifs are shown. The lower section shows the feet of the deceased.
- Long sides corresponding to the proper left and right sides, each one displaying two registers.
- Short sides forming the headboard and the footboard.

Front side

Upper section

The upper section depicts the deceased in Roman fashion (Fig. 2). The head, breasts and hands are molded in plaster. The head is slightly raised, as is common to see in contemporary funerary masks. The overall layout of the upper section indeed suggests a strong resemblance with such an object, as if it was designed to provide an imitation of a funerary mask.

The deceased wears a Roman *tunic* in purple,³ with the head partially covered under a scarf of the same color, revealing an elaborate hairstyle. The hair is carefully arranged in small curls, forming an inverted V over the forehead. Two long tresses are beautifully rolled on the top of the head, forming a “crown” of hair.

3 In Latin, *Tunic* is known as *Tunica*, meaning a shirt that covers the body. Roman tunic was used by gods and humans on funerary art in Roman Egypt, where tunics were popular for men and women. Tunics could be long or short, and made use of several types of sleeves (long, short or sleeveless). Several fabrics were used, mostly linen, but woven wool was also employed. The tunic usually consisted of one long piece of linen folded in the middle piece or it involved two pieces of rectangular fabric that were sewn together along the shoulders. See Croom 2000, 29-32.

The face is full and rounded, and the eyebrows are executed with detail. The expressive eyes are inlaid with blue paste (contour), white stone and black paste (the left pupil is missing). The nose is long and slightly sharp, the mouth is delicate and the lips are thin, painted in red. The face is yellow with the cheeks slightly colored in pink. The ears are large and partially hidden under the curls of hair, showing a round golden earring. The neck is surprisingly thick showing creases on the throat.

Two *clavi*⁴ hang down from the shoulders along the length of the tunic. On the shoulders, *gammadia* signs are visible. The chest is decorated with a long necklace, with alternating beads, oblong or spherical, painted in black and yellow, hence suggesting different materials.

The hands rest over the abdomen in transversal position. They are molded in plaster. The fingers are long, delicately carved and outlined in red. The left hand shows two golden rings. On both wrists a beautiful gilded bracelet is visible, designed in the form of a double twisted serpent.

Lower section

This partition covers the abdomen down to the feet (Fig. 3). It is arranged in four registers showing a repertoire clearly borrowed from the pharaonic tradition, showing Egyptian deities, all of them in animal form. The resulting design reminds the cartonnage pieces that were used during the Ptolemaic period to decorate the outer wrappings of the mummy. The background of these vignettes is red.

In the first register figures a *naophorm* pectoral showing the sacred ibis, the avian form of the god Thoth. He wears the lunar disk and grasps a feather. Behind, figures a winged disk with a cobra.

The second register shows the falcon god Horus, with the *ankh*-sign at his feet. Behind figures a winged disk with a cobra.

The third register shows again the Hermopolitan god Thoth, featured in his baboon form. On his head he wears the sun disk.

4 The tunic is interspersed with two decorative *Clavi* bands running from the shoulders to the feet, sometimes reaching only to the waist. The second type: the narrow shape or *Augusti Clavi*, which is specific to the cavalry class, and was restricted to men only, but these tapes lost their significance when they were used by common people in the Roman states. After the first century AD, the use of these decorative elements spread among both men and women. During the first and second centuries AD they were black with golden edges, but from the beginning of the third century they became purple, red, dark brown or green. See Croom 2000, 33-34.

The fourth register shows Anubis in jackal form, with a *nekhakha*-scepter at his feet.

These registers are bound by patterns showing floral motifs and stars. Below, the fifth register is entirely formed by three bands decorated with geometric patterns and floral motifs.

Footboard

This area shows the feet of the deceased depicted against a red background (Fig. 4). The feet are slightly molded in relief and painted in light pink, with the nails elegantly outlined in red. The deceased wears anklets and sandals.

Above the feet of the deceased, in reversed direction, Isis pours sacred water from *heset*-vessels on two *ba*-birds. The goddess wears an elaborate winged dress and a long feathered mantle on her shoulders. The *ba*-birds rest on pedestals, receiving the sacred water in their hands. They wear *atef*-crowns and headbands.

Left side

Upper register

The motifs are depicted over a light blue background. Next to the footboard, one sees a divine barque carrying a divine mummy. The bow and stern of the barque are designed as open papyri with rising sun disks, while the paddle is falcon-shaped. Two squatted mummiform gods grasping feathers seem to welcome the barque.

The next scene shows the divine mummy lying on his tomb. The mummy is wrapped in linen bands and three squatted mummiform gods watch over it: a male deity, a baboon-headed god, and a goddess.

Separated from the other deities by three *khokeret*-motifs, figures the god Osiris wearing the *atef*-crown and two other deities, a god and a mouse-headed deity, each holding a *was*-scepter. The scene is interrupted due to the intrusive depiction of the ophidian bracelet worn by the deceased on the upper section of the front side.

Lower register

The motifs are depicted over a vivid red background. From the footboard to the headboard the following scenes are detected (Fig. 6):

Scene 1

A human legged-snake god stands with a *nekhakha*-sceptre at his back.

Scene 2

The scene depicts the judgement of the dead. The deceased is presented in the Hall of Judgement. She is flanked by two goddesses. The deceased stands with her arms along her body. Her long hair is left loose and together with the dress showing two *clavi*, it suggests a Greek rather than an Egyptian attire. The goddesses raise her arms towards the deceased. Behind this group stands an altar provided with a lake from which lotus flowers and blossoms rise. This motif alludes to the Nile flood and thus to rebirth.

The divine Ammut oversees the balance, resting on a podium shaped as an altar. The monster is entirely shaped in the form of a lion, with its tongue hanging out from its mouth. It wears two feathers on her head and has a knife at its feet.

Next to Ammut, stands a four-cornered altar. The balance used in the weighing of the heart is composed of a stand and two scales. The scale is headed by a baboon, alluding to the god Thoth. The heart of the deceased rests on one of the scales, while on the other one stands a black silhouette representing the shadow of the deceased. Horus and Anubis grasp the pending plates.

The four Sons of Horus witness this operation. They stand in mummiform guise. The group is headed by Qebehsenuef (with a hawk head), followed by Hapi (baboon head), Duamutef (jackal head) and Imsety (human head).

The scene is completed with the depiction of the enthroned Osiris. He wears the *atef*-crown and a feathered garment. The throne is interestingly decorated with the *udjat*-eye. Osiris is escorted by Isis who, together with a priest, presents him with cloth.

Right side

Upper register

Next to the footboard, one sees a mummy lying on the ground wrapped in linen. Above, the winged solar disk is shown flying over the mummy.

The next scene shows a symmetrical composition featuring jackals flanking a *Ta-ueret*-totem. Two cobras rise from the sides of the pillar.

Another symmetrical scene shows the solar barque flanked by four squatting guardian deities. On the left figures a lion-headed deity and an entirely human-shaped god, while on the right two cobra-headed gods are shown. All of them are shaped as mummiform deities. The barque is equipped with two paddles with falcon-headed terminals. The sacred shrine is adorned with feathered motifs. The *per-wer* shrine is headed by an upright *iaret*-cobra, with the sun disk.

As on the opposite side, the scene is interrupted due to the intrusive depiction of the ophidian bracelet worn by the deceased. The frieze is concluded with a falcon and a vulture.

Lower register

Scene 3

A cow-headed goddess, possibly Hathor, holds a cloth and a key to open the gate of the underworld (Fig. 7). She wears a tight dress and shows a sun disk between her horns. This scene is separated from the remaining ones by a column of text (“Words spoken by Osiris, twice great god”).

Scene 4

The deceased, flanked by two deities, is escorted before a sacred tree. The male god brings a *nn*-vessel and a cloth, while, on the opposite side, a lioness-headed goddess is shown holding a bunch of flowers. At the center, Didyme raises her arms in adoration. She is now clad in Egyptian fashion, wearing a long dress and a mantle. Leading this group, the god Thoth, entirely depicted in human shape, records the name of the deceased inside a small band of text next to the sacred tree. Thoth holds a papyrus scroll and wears a feathered garment.

Scene 5

The deceased is presented before Osiris. This long scene begins with an offering table provided with abundant food supplies, such as bread, ox and fowl, onions, and unguent jars. Interestingly, two amphora vessels are shown under the table.

Next to the table, a priest is shown carrying an *urnula*⁵ sacred vase. On his shoulders he wears a robe with *cilia* covering the arms and hands, holding his hands hidden so to assure the purity of the sacred vessel. The sacred vessel has a sloping beaker adorned with an upright cobra.

In front of the priest stands Horus offering two *mw*-vessels to his father, Osiris. His robe is similar to the other male gods' depicted in the previous scenes. In front of Horus there are two offering stands.

Finally, Didyme is escorted by Anubis. The deceased is clad in Egyptian dress, but no longer shows her mantle. She is presented before Osiris. The god wears the *atef*-crown and grasps the *nekhakha*-scepter. His mummiform body is decorated with feathered motifs. The throne is decorated with feathered motifs and the *sema-tany*, the motif alluding to the union of the Two Lands.

Behind Osiris stands Isis wearing a long dress. She raises her right hand to Osiris and holds a cloth with the left hand.

Short sides

Headboard

Directly behind the head of the deceased there are two registers: the upper one shows a winged scarab carrying the sun disk with the upper legs (Fig. 5).

In the lower register figures a large vulture with its wings outstretched towards both sides of the coffin. The vulture goddess wears the *atef*-crown.

The vulture is flanked by a symmetrical composition. On the proper left side stands a falcon-headed mummiform god, with the sun disk on his head. Behind him, the avian manifestation of the deceased, the *ba*-bird, is shown with the sun

5 The first known depictions of the *urnula* vessel date back to the first century AD, especially to the Augustus Period. These objects are well attested in southern Italy where the mystery cult of Isis is widespread. See Knauer 1995, 2-3.

disk on his head and a divine beard. On the right side, a similar scene is repeated, this time featuring an entirely human-shaped mummiform god protected by the avian manifestation of the deceased.

Footboard (reverse side)

The short side located under the feet of the deceased is decorated with a scene featuring the resurrected Osiris (Fig. 4 – right). He is standing in mummiform guise, with a feathered garment enveloping his body. The god wears the *atef*-crown, equipped with ram horns, and grasps the royal scepters. His long mantle is profusely decorated with flower motifs.

At his feet figures a libation stand with an *urnula* sacred vessel similar to the vase held by the priest on the right side (scene 3).

This panel is delimited above by a large band inscribed with Didyme's name in Greek characters.

The area above is decorated with a large winged solar disk with two pending *iaret*-cobras, one wearing the crown of Lower Egypt and the other the crown of Upper Egypt.

3. The multicultural character of the coffin

The coffin makes use of motifs borrowed from the pharaonic tradition and from the Greco-Roman culture.

The Egyptian elements

The sides are designed to hold important scenes borrowed from the Egyptian funerary belief system, showing both the solar journey of the sun and the Osirian initiation of the deceased. These motifs are carefully arranged forming coherent units.

The upper registers of the long sides are clearly differentiated from the remaining decoration. On the right side, the scenes show the solar barque, the Osirian *Ta-wer*-totem, and the winged solar disk flying over the mummy. This

composition is clearly an allusion to the union of Re and Osiris, a revered mystery described in the pharaonic Books of the Amduat.

On the left side, the scenes show a divine mummy carried on a barque, then lying on the tomb escorted by several guardian deities and Osiris. The guardian deities here depicted again suggest association with the imagery of the Book of the Amduat,⁶ the Book of the Gates⁷ and the Book of the Dead,⁸ where they protect the solar god from various dangers during his nightly journey in the underworld.⁹

The same solar imagery is found in the decoration of the headboard showing the winged scarab rising above the vulture mother goddess. Although not exactly common in this particular pictorial context, the association of the solar scarab with the vulture is highly meaningful, alluding to the role performed by the mother goddess in the sun's rebirth. Moreover, the rising of the sun from the netherworld alludes to the Twelfth Hour of the night, when the sun god, in the shape of the scarab Khepri, the god of the rising sun, pushes the sun disk to the light.¹⁰ With this meaning, this motif was often depicted above the head of the deceased, especially on anthropoid coffins dating from the Late Period.¹¹ The same motif is also found in the superstructure of the Tomb of Petosiris, in the nearby necropolis of Tuna El-Gebel, to depict the rebirth of the sun god.¹²

On the reverse side of the footboard, the resurrected Osiris is shown. Taken together all these elements form a "symbolic ring" around the mummy alluding to the association of the deceased with the rebirth of the sun god and with the resurrection of Osiris.

The scenes depicted on the second register of the long sides are strictly Osirian, showing the introduction of the deceased in the realm of the Duat. The left side is entirely dedicated to the weighing of the heart, involving several sub-scenes.

6 They are also mentioned in the Book of Amduat during the Second Hour. Hornung 1999, 43.

7 Hornung 2007, 31-61. The guardian deities are mentioned in the Second Hour, the Tenth Hour, and Twelfth Hour. Hornung 1999, 67-77.

8 In Chapters 144 and 147 their role is clear in protecting the gates of the Iaru fields and the realm of Osiris. Lucarelli 2010, 87.

9 Meeks 2001, 375.

10 Assmann 1995, 33-56.

11 Stadler 2001, 71-83.

12 Daumas 1960, 63-80.

The deceased is shown before the scale, attended by two goddesses. At her feet there are two pear-shaped motifs.¹³ As is usual in these scenes, the weighing of the heart is carried out by Horus and Anubis, under the vigilance of the devourer of the dead, Ammut, who wears two feathers on her head.¹⁴ Interestingly, the scene is here reinterpreted showing the scale measuring the heart (left plate) against the shadow of the deceased (right plate) and not against the feather of Maat. The scene is completed with the depiction of Osiris and the four Sons of Horus, who watch over the operation. It is interesting to note that Didyme is here depicted in Greek fashion, while on the opposite side she already wears an Egyptian attire. The coffin thus shows her introduction to Osiris, a process through which she is “egyptianised”.

The right side shows two main scenes. Next to the footboard, the deceased is escorted by a group of deities headed by Thoth before the sacred tree. She is now clad in Egyptian fashion, perhaps suggesting that she was accepted in the Osirian realm. The scene combines features from two distinct vignettes, the judgement scene, where typically the god Thoth writes down the result of the operation, and the scene alluding to the tree goddess.

The second scene shows the presentation of the deceased before Osiris. The scene follows the general layout of the traditional repertoire of these vignettes. The innovation is detected in the addition of a priest holding a sacred vessel, named *urnula*, which we will comment later on in this paper.

The lower section of the front side shows several vignettes featuring typically Egyptian motifs, which are borrowed from the repertoire of the cartonnage pectorals that used to decorate the mummy wrappings during the Ptolemaic and early Roman period.

In addition to the vignettes alluding to the Egyptian gods, such as Thoth, Horus and Anubis, there is a geometric frieze displaying two bands of triangular motifs attached to a floral frieze. This type of decoration appeared during the second half of the first century AD, and it was used until the middle of the second

13 Probably alluding to the *tkmw* ritual, a funerary ritual referring to the deceased's placenta. The *tkmw* is pear-shaped and it was depicted from the Middle Kingdom down to the late Roman Period. Metawi, 2008, 179-87.

14 Riggs 2005, 104 (fig. 42).

century AD. Other parallels are known from Tuna el-Gebel dating back to the early second century AD, where the same decorative elements are used.¹⁵

Next to Didyme's feet, figures the life-giving goddess Isis pouring water to the *ba*-birds of the deceased. This is a usual scene in Egyptian funerary art and continued during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The graphic placement of the scene, above the feet of the deceased, has a special significance, as it watches over the deceased herself, providing her with new life.

Finally, it is clear that most of the deities depicted in the coffin wear feathered garments, following a long-established traditional design (Fig. 7).¹⁶

Greco-Roman motifs

The mummy mask from the Fayum provides an interesting parallel to Didyme's coffin. (*cf.* Fig. 9).¹⁷

The hairstyle, in particular, can be very helpful to date the coffin,¹⁸ as it shows a distinctive form, with curly lumps forming a pointed "crown" hairstyle. The tufts of hair would be fixed by small metal supports, so as to maintain its stability for a long time.¹⁹ The tiny curly lumps resemble a beehive, which is a distinctive feature during the Flavian dynasty (69-96 AD) until the beginning of the second century AD.²⁰ It can be compared with the hairstyle of a portrait of a woman from Hawara dating back to the end of the first century AD.²¹ It represents a young woman, her hair stylized to the top of the head like a crown. It has circular tufts of hair like a beehive, and is tied to the back in the form of a bowl or bun.

The jewelry depicted in Didyme's portrait provides further information that can help us date the object. On her left hand, the deceased wears single rings on the index and on the middle finger. On the ring finger and on the pinky, she wears golden double rings, which are welded together. This type of ring is not Roman

15 Parlasca 1999, 309.

16 On divine garments of the Roman period see Kurth (1990, 52-53).

17 The Roman portraits of the Fayum derive from the same association with the funerary mask (Walker 2000).

18 Bartman 2001, 10.

19 Haas 2008, 528.

20 Haas 2008, 528.

21 This portrait was found in Hawara and is currently preserved at the National Museum of Scotland, number A.1951.160. Manley et al. 2010, 135.

in origin, but is derived from Asia Minor and Syria, and has spread since the last quarter of the first century AD.²²

The deceased also wears on each hand a bracelet in the form of opposing snakes. This type of bracelets consists of two snakes wrapped around the wrist, forming a zigzag line, with their heads facing opposite to each other. Higgins refers to the spread of this kind of bracelet in the Mediterranean basin, especially in Greece from the eighth and seventh centuries BC. It spread widely during the Hellenistic period until the beginning of the Roman period. Despite the snake's association with ancient Egyptian civilization, this kind of bracelets did not appear in Egypt before the Ptolemaic period, and continued to spread widely during the Roman era until the end of the first century AD. It became less apparent in the second century AD, but reappeared at the end of the second century and the beginning of the third century AD.²³

The deceased wears a long necklace with cylindrical beads. This type of necklaces spread widely from the last quarter of the first century until the end of the second century AD, normally using gemstones.²⁴

Other Hellenizing features can be abundantly found throughout the pictorial decoration of the coffin. This is the case of the depiction of a priest holding an *urnula* vessel, the sacred vase of Osiris, with his hands hidden under a ritual coat, a typical aspect of the Hellenized cults of Isis and Sarapis. The shape of the vessel depicted in Didyme's coffin follows the typical shape of the jug: it has a wide and long handle up to the middle of the length of the vessel, and a long faucet resembling the beak of the ibis bird. Moreover an upright cobra is normally figured on top of the *urnula* vessel.²⁵ A parallel of this scene²⁶ can be found on a mummy cartonnage of a man, kept at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.²⁷

Other Hellenizing objects can be found in the coffin. For example, the weighing of the heart includes a typically Greco-Roman artifact: an altar adorned

22 Ogden 1990, 129-30.

23 Higgins 1980, 181.

24 Ogden, 1990, 216.

25 Knauer 1995, 3-4.

26 This mummy is currently preserved in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, No. CG 33220, with a length of 68 cm, and a width of 17 cm, and is likely to be from Tuna El-Gabel, dating back to the first quarter of the second century AD.

27 Corcoran 1995, 150-1.

with horns in the four corners. It was called βωμος κεροχος. These altars were widespread in the Near East, and played an important role in domestic worship, by burning incense for the Roman goddess Vesta, Laris and others.²⁸ In Egypt, during the Greco-Roman Period, large stone altars can be found in the courtyards of temples or tombs,²⁹ as the horn altar standing before the Tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel (Fig. 10).³⁰ The scene in Didyme's coffin thus may have had this particular type of altars as model. Identical motifs can be found in other coffins from El-Bahnasa.³¹

Regarding the divine garments, there is an interesting occurrence: on the right side, Isis is featured once wearing a roman tunic decorated with *clavi*, instead of the usual feathered garment (Fig. 6).

Finally, a compelling evidence of Greco-Roman motifs in Egyptian iconography is found in Scene 3, showing the cow-headed goddess Hathor performing a rite (Fig. 7). In Egyptian scenes she would be depicted with a fumigation stick, but here this object seems to have been replaced by the key of the Gates of the Underworld, a motif introduced by the Greek imagery of death.

The depiction of the deceased as a living person

One of the most striking aspects of this type of coffins is the depiction of the resurrected deceased. Despite the fact that she is clad in Roman fashion, the origins of this type of depiction are found in the Egyptian tradition itself, dating back to the 18th Dynasty.³² It is noteworthy the presence of details typically found in these coffins, such as creases on the throat,³³ or the feet. Interestingly enough, the way the feet are depicted, wearing Roman sandals, suggests a Hellenizing arrangement when, in fact, the model for such layout is Egyptian.

The depiction of the deceased as a living person remains of the most striking features of these coffins/funerary masks, suggesting that funerary workshops from Greco-Roman Egypt were highly versed in the pharaonic traditions of old

28 Soukiassian 1983, 323.

29 Soukiassian 1983, 324.

30 Lefebvre 1923, 13.

31 See the coffin dating to the 1st century AD and preserved in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin with the number VÄGM 16-83. Riggs 2005, 104 (fig. 42).

32 Sousa 2018, 32-37.

33 Van Walsem 2014.

and were able to adapt it in such a sophisticated way that their Hellenized audience could perceive it as «Greek».

4. Conclusion

The coffin of Didyme is a fine specimen of a rare type of coffins that were designed as “domes” rather than boxes. In this structure, the decoration is almost entirely located over the lid which is designed to reproduce the actual decoration of a mummy, equipped with a funerary mask, a cartonnage cover, and a painted shroud. In this scheme, the deceased, clad in Greek garments, figures as if standing within an Osirian shrine, entirely decorated with egyptianising scenes.³⁴

Regarding the Egyptian elements, it is clear that they were not gathered randomly but, on the contrary, they form a learned reinterpretation of the funerary repertoire of old, using a coherent sample of images. The coffin thus provides a meaningful selection of some of the most important scenes typically used in Egyptian visual culture.

Even in this highly egyptianising context, unexpected features do occur, such as the inclusion of Hellenizing features and motifs, resulting from the reinterpretation of the pharaonic pictorial tradition by a highly Hellenized audience. Most interesting is the inclusion of the *urnula* vessel showing that the Roman cults of Isis and Sarapis were closely associated with the autochthonous cult of Osiris.

A bilingual coffin like this one supposes a highly Hellenized context and yet a sound knowledge of the local traditions. Several clues are consistent with a provenance from Tuna el-Gabel. The general layout of the headboard of Didyme's coffin can be compared to the funerary-mask of a woman from Tuna El-Gabel, who until recently was kept in the Mallawi Museum in Minia.³⁵ The hairstyle

34 During the Roman period this could be actually seen in the use of funerary cabinets that held the mummy within. Some of them were decorated (Vandenbeusch 2019, 135).

35 This mummy was located in Hall 2 of the Mallawi Museum under No. 119, and was discovered in Tuna El-Gabal, dated at the end of the first century AD, where the head of plaster and the chest of cartonnage. Unfortunately, this mummy was destroyed during the theft and destruction of the Mallawi Museum, as a result of the looting of the city on August 14, 2013, and most of the museum's contents were stolen, and

showing the lateral tufts below the ears³⁶ was in use from the Flavian Dynasty (69-96) AD, until the beginning of the second century AD. Other similarities can be found, such as the use of glass to mold the iris of the eyes, the thick black eyebrows, large ears and round golden earrings.

Didyme's coffin is also similar to the coffin of Teüris from Tuna el-Gabel both in terms of craftsmanship and iconographic program.³⁷

The workshop that crafted this coffin was clearly very well versed in the Egyptian tradition, a feature that stands out in the decoration of the Greco-Roman mummy's masks and tombs of Tuna el-Gabel.³⁸

It is thus possible that the coffin had been found in Tuna El-Gabal, during illegal excavations of the Greco-Roman necropolis.

As to the craftsmanship of the coffin, the unusual structure consisting in a vaulted lid resting on a flattened floorboard might have been borrowed from the contemporary rectangular coffins, which similarly comprised a floorboard and a cover with a vaulted top.³⁹ Such coffins, most of them found in Thebes, date from the early II century AD.

The craftsmen used this basic structure and adapted it to the anthropoid shape, creating a highly innovative result. Moreover, the layout of the coffin replicates the general appearance of contemporary Greco-Roman mummies decorated with a mask, and with cartonnage/linen covers. Such burials had been found in the area of Tuna El-Gabel and show striking similarities with the decoration of Didyme's coffin.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, our team was not allowed to open the coffin and see the interior. All the evidence found in the coffin thus suggests that the coffin of Didyme can be dated from the end of the first century to the early second century AD, specifically between the end of the Flavian Dynasty and the beginning of the Trajan period.

huge stone monuments that could not be transferred by thieves were destroyed. Fortunately, the researcher photographed some of the museum's contents well before this date. Including this unique piece.

36 Mueller 2015, 133, fig. 73.

37 This coffin is now kept at Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam No. 7069APM. See Kurth 1990, 1-66.

38 For more about the funerary houses and the funerary context in Tanah al-Jabal, see *Venit* (2016, 109-33).

39 Coffin of Soter (British Museum, 6705). From the same tomb see the coffin of Padiimenipet in Grajetzki (2003, 130).

40 See funerary cover and mask E 32634, kept in the Louvre Museum.

Despite adopting the Egyptian funerary rites, it is highly possible that Didyme considered herself a Greek citizen, rather than Egyptian. In fact, she is depicted in fully Roman guise, while the Egyptian motifs are mainly used to describe her *initiation* in the realm of Osiris in the hereafter. In this respect, it is telling that she is first shown clad in Greek fashion, and only after the weighing of the heart she is dressed as an Egyptian justified goddess.

Moreover, it is also important to point out that her Greek name is only reported by the Greek inscription, which is also telling about how she perceived her own identity. Moreover, she presents herself as a daughter of Fibiono, which is also a Greek name. It is thus likely that Didyme belonged to the Hellenized elite that lived in Hermopolis during the transition to the second century AD.

One last remark should be added regarding the original placement of the coffin. As we have mentioned, the reverse side of the footboard shows the resurrected Osiris. The layout of the scene reminds a votive stele, as if the entire coffin was summarized by this single image. It is therefore possible, that this type of coffin was produced to be inserted in a niche, with the footboard designed to work as a funerary “stela”. The relatives of Didyme could thus periodically visit her funerary niche, probably carved in a collective burial ground, and address her through her “stela”.

These clues strongly suggest that by the time this coffin was produced, Egyptian and Greek traditions were so intimately associated that, in practical terms, they formed a distinct cultural phenomenon.

A - PICTURES



1. General view (left). Photo by Ahmed Derbala.



2. Front side. Upper section. Photo by Ahmed Derbala.



3. Front side. Lower section. Photo by Ahmed Derbala.



4. Footboard. Front side (left) and reverse (right). Photo by Ahmed Derbala.



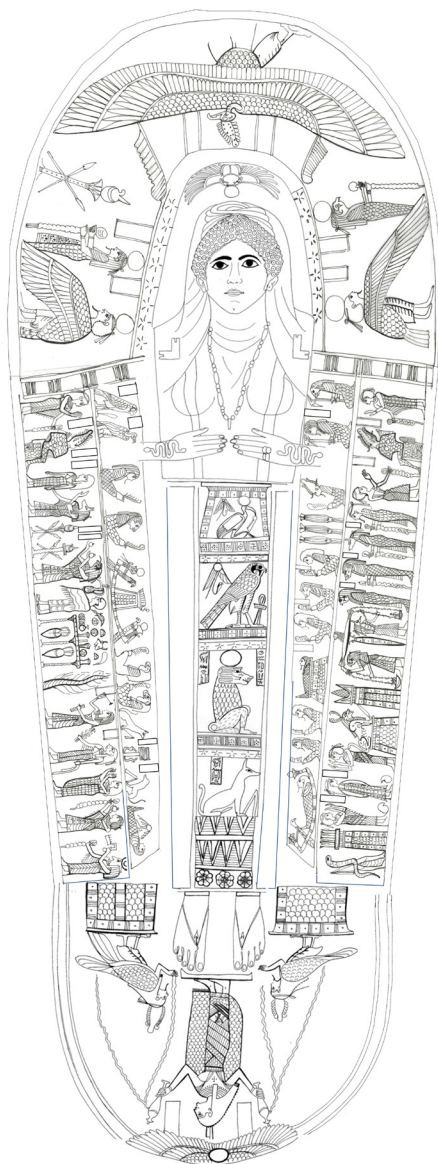
5. Headboard. Photo by Ahmed Derbala.



6. Left side (second register). Photos by Ahmed Derbala.



7. Right side (second register). Photos by Ahmed Derbala.



8. Decoration of the lid (Iconography). Drawing by Rogério Sousa.



9. Funerary-mask of a woman from Tuna el-Gabel, formerly kept in the Mallawi Museum in Minia (now destroyed). Photo by Ahmed Derbala.



10. Horned altar before Petosiris Tomb at Tuna el-Gebel. Photo by Rogério Sousa.

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