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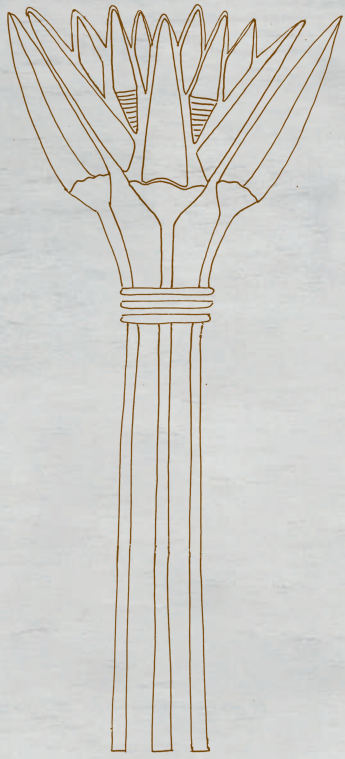
NYMPHAEA

A VISUAL SURVEY ON ANCIENT EGYPTIAN YELLOW COFFINS

Rogério Sousa



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Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

11 FOREWORD
Abir Enany

15 PREFACE

19 INTRODUCTION
19 1. Yellow coffins: studies and concepts
39 2. The rise of yellow coffins: a brief overview

49 CHAPTER I – ORNAMENTAL ELEMENTS: FRIEZES AND PATTERNS
49 1. Floral patterns
56 2. Hieroglyphic friezes
57 3. Text bands
60 4. Limits and edges
68 5. Commentary

71 CHAPTER II – LID: DESIGN AND LAYOUT
72 1. Upper section
131 2. Central section
173 3. Lower section
208 4. Footboard

221 CHAPTER III – BOX: EXTERIOR DECORATION
221 1. Basic scheme
242 2. Classical scheme
313 3. Complex scheme

365 CHAPTER IV – BOX: INTERIOR DECORATION
366 1. Outer boxes: the Djed-pillar
388 2. Inner boxes: the cosmic mother goddess

429 CHAPTER V – ARCHAIZING LAYOUTS
429 1. Lid
442 2. Box: Exterior decoration
453 3. Box: Interior decoration
459 4. Reverse sides

471 CHAPTER VI – TYPOLOGY AND IRREGULAR LAYOUTS
471 1. The yellow corpus: an art historical typology
480 2. Typological profiles and their application: some examples
487 3. Irregular layouts

509 CHAPTER VII – VISUAL NARRATIVES IN THE YELLOW CORPUS
512 1. The transversal axis: the dimension of space
515 2. The longitudinal axis: the dimension of time
520 3. Unifying the narratives

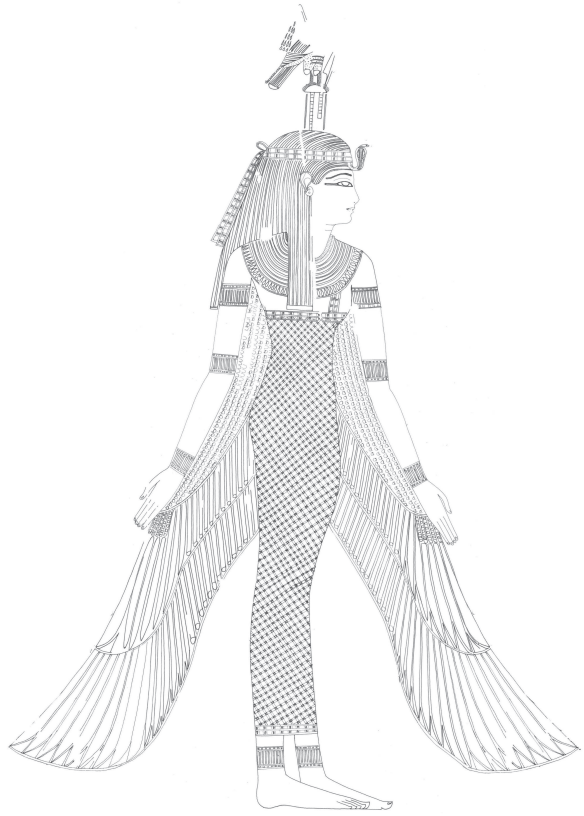
555 CHAPTER VIII – COFFINS, WORKSHOPS, AND POWER STRUCTURES
555 1. Yellow coffins and workshop practices
574 2. Workshops, innovation, and power

582 BIBLIOGRAPHY

596 LIST OF SOURCES

607 INDEX OF SOURCES

For the beautiful Lady of the West.



FOREWORD

This book represents a notable addition to the study of ancient Egyptian coffins, especially given the difficulties that scholars investigating ancient Egyptian yellow coffins of the 21st Dynasty encounter. The diversity of the topics and the complexity of symbols covering the coffins' surface are exceptional and hence present various challenges.

Nevertheless, in this book, Sousa follows the principles of modern physics and adds the fourth dimension to the yellow coffins, transforming them into a four-dimensional space-time continuum. As he delves through the images, symbols, and the meanings behind them, he enables the reader to dive through the realm of the dead into the *Duat*. By intertwining layers of funerary beliefs and sociopolitical aspects with religious and artistic development, Sousa enables us to share his interpretation of the yellow coffin as a sacred space, or rather an amalgam of sacred spaces.

From the minute I opened the book for the first time, I was captivated by Sousa's choice of title *NYMPHAEA, A Visual Survey on Ancient Egyptian Yellow Coffins*, that relates to the deceased's resurrection via the images of the yellow coffins. As he himself explains: "images empower the object, and so the deceased". Throughout the work, Sousa emphasizes the supremacy of the image during the 21st Dynasty as opposed to the dominance of texts in preceding eras. However, according to the ancient Egyptian mindset, both texts and images were meant to magically materialise the intended concepts.

The book reflects various revolutionary approaches; starting by redefining what can be classified as yellow coffins, introducing new terminology for the sections and the compositions of the iconography of the yellow coffins, then redefining the phases of the yellow coffin while using a meticulous comparative approach and the seriation method. This dating technique was enhanced by the painstaking observation of tiny details that Sousa classified and used as dating criteria. The outcome is the identification of three main phases that produced three distinctive schemes of yellow coffins, thus recategorizing the yellow coffins and creating a new taxonomy for their classification. The thorough seriation classification that Sousa applies in this work brings to mind the pottery sequence dating of William M. F. Petrie.

To achieve this, Sousa takes us from one section or register to another, and from one scheme to another, analysing the development of style and iconography through time. He reflects on how the sociopolitical changes reshaped the yellow coffins to what they have become and leads us to observe how the standardized schemes of the yellow coffins grew gradually over time. Sousa follows the development of funerary concepts represented on the yellow coffins from as early as the Pyramid Texts, proceeding to focus on the effect of the Amarna, post-Amarna, and the Ramesside periods. He highlights that the yellow coffins are not only a reflection of their contemporary sociopolitical and religious environment but also an accumulation of earlier reflections.

While acknowledging previous work on Egyptian funerary beliefs, art, and coffins, Sousa challenges some of the previously assumed concepts regarding the yellow coffins such as the concept of *horror vacui*. He bases his interpretation on iconographic examination and analysis of coffin decoration as well as the gradual development revealed through his use of the seriation method, a technique that enables him to detect the tidal movement of the scenes and vignettes as they gain or lose importance through time. This new classification is of remarkable value for future studies as it incorporates the semantic aspects, thus not only studying the choice of scenes and vignettes but also analysing the manner in which they are displayed in what Sousa calls "topography of the yellow coffins".

Sousa's vision through the book is reflected in many perspectives. Through the chapters, he reflects on the visualization of the symbols and iconographical features into a realm of their own to enable the dead to journey from their coffins into an eternal Duat through the "heavenly gate" of coffin decoration reflecting the coffin's role as "a magical container that embodies the Duat". His reading of the yellow coffins emphasises the development of the Solar-Osirian union and the incorporation of solar attributes in the iconography of Osiris and the 'Osirification' of coffin decoration during the 21st Dynasty.

This book is hence an accumulation of Professor Rogerio Sousa's expertise in the funerary art of the 21st Dynasty that can be considered a "lexicon" or a "thesaurus" for an art historical comprehension of the yellow coffins providing deep insight to the ancient Egyptian beliefs. In this book, Sousa turns the darkness of the coffins into light enabling the reader to visualise the deceased in his perpetual journey.

Abir Enany
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PREFACE

My involvement with the yellow corpus started in 2003, at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, where I was documenting heart amulets and their representations. It was there that I first encountered the magnificent collection of yellow coffins found in the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, which revealed an exceptionally rich repertoire of scenes depicting the heart amulet. This contrasted sharply with the relatively scarce use of this object in the broader Egyptian pictorial tradition. These unusually rich references to heart imagery sparked my interest in this exceptional corpus of coffins which led me to explore the collections of yellow coffins housed at the Louvre Museum, and at the Museo Egizio in Turin as well.

Already at that moment, it became clear to me that although rooted in the Ramesside pictorial tradition, the iconographic repertoire depicted in the yellow corpus presented strongly innovative elements, particularly regarding the imagery of the heart amulet.[1]

In 2009, when I began studying the Eighth Lot of antiquities from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun kept at the Geographical Society of Lisbon, the focus of my work eventually became centred on yellow coffins. This study led me to establish the Gate of the Priests Project in 2013, aimed at conducting a systematic and comprehensive approach to the study of funerary materials from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, with a special focus on coffins. In 2018, I published the preliminary results of the iconographical study of the yellow

1 Sousa 2011, 44-45.

corpus in the book *Gleaming Coffins*, published by the Coimbra University Press. This book was focused on the layout and composition of the lids and mummy boards, and was intended to be the first volume of a work that would later be completed with another volume dedicated to the boxes.

After moving to the University of Lisbon in 2019, I decided to publish the results of my research on the decorative schemes of the boxes alongside those previously released on the elements of the lids, so that both could be better perceived as a unit. Thanks to the additional experience I gained in studying the yellow corpus, as well as the generous feedback from colleagues who kindly provided suggestions and remarks, I introduced several changes to the methodological approach I proposed in my earlier publications. I would like to thank in particular the reviewers of this volume for their generous critical contributions, which greatly improved my work.

The results published in this book are only possible due to the collaborative work with a vast network of museums that has been developed over the years in the context of the Gate of the Priests Project. I am particularly indebted to the generous collaboration of all the curators who have supported my research and transformed my documentation missions into unforgettable and enriching experiences of discovery. This acknowledgement is extended to all the scholars and colleagues working in this multidisciplinary field who have transformed it into an unrivalled forum for scientific debate.

I could not finish these words without expressing my appreciation to the Centre for History, and to its Director, José Horta, for the encouragement it has always provided to this project. This book would never have come to fruition without its ongoing support. Finally, I would like to thank Nuno Simões Rodrigues for having enthusiastically welcomed the idea of publishing this volume as a supplement to *Cadmo*, the journal of ancient history housed at the Centre for History.

After so many years contemplating the visual culture embedded in yellow coffins, I hope that the work published in this book can pay justice to the achievements accomplished by the ancient craftsmen from Thebes and that it may be useful for all working on this fascinating and ever challenging field of

research. This book seeks to provide theoretical insights as well as practical tools to stimulate researchers in exploring yellow coffins by themselves, providing a method to understand the significance of a given coffin within the broader context of the yellow corpus, and ultimately, to help the reader to unravel the many stories embedded in each coffin.

Lisbon, 21st December 2024,

Rogério de Sousa

INTRODUCTION

1. Yellow coffins: studies and concepts

Egyptian yellow coffins from the 21st Dynasty are multi-layered objects bearing fundamental evidence for the study of materials, craftsmanship techniques, political concerns, socioeconomic patterns, and religious speculation, thus forming an outstanding documental corpus, particularly as regards iconography and visual elements. Indeed, to some extent, images have always been used in Egyptian anthropoid coffins to empower the object, and by extension, the deceased. However, the manner by which such visual resources were used in the yellow corpus is unprecedented, marked by extraordinary intricacy and complexity. While the academic community has long recognised the exceptional richness of visual elements on these coffins, Egyptology has traditionally prioritised textual analysis, leaving these objects largely underexplored in terms of their visual narratives.

A noteworthy exception is provided by Danish Egyptologist Valdemar Schmidt who conducted a pioneering study on Egyptian coffins in the early 20th century, published in 1919. His work, *Levende og Dode I det Gamle Aegypten*, published in two volumes, offers a systematic overview of body containers from the origins of Egyptian civilization down to Greco-Roman times. This outstanding visual synthesis continues to be an exceptional resource to this day, largely due to the vast corpus of documents inventoried by the author, most of which are accompanied by photos or line drawings, as well as to his insightful observations. Of particular note is his effort to reference not only the mummies

but also other funerary artefacts included in the funerary assemblages of a given period. This monumental work was published in Danish and, regrettably, did not reach a wider scientific audience. However, it has recently been translated into English by Ziff Jonker in a volume edited by Jonathan Elias and Peter Lacovara.[1] Regarding yellow coffins, Valdemar Schmidt provides a comprehensive analysis, drawing on various sources, namely catalogues of coffins from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, published by Émile Chassinat. He pays special attention to the collection of yellow coffins from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun that was integrated into Lot XVI, donated to Denmark in 1893 by the Khedive Abbas II Hilmi. Schimdt's analysis links the visual elaboration of yellow coffins to a corresponding reduction in tomb decoration,[2] a connection that has since become well-established in scholarly research.

Schmidt visited Lisbon in 1902 and published an interesting account of the collection of coffins housed at the Geographical Society, which had also been donated to Portugal in 1893 as part of the VIII Lot of Antiquities from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun. In this text, Schmidt already draws attention to the unusually high levels of usurpation and re-use detected in these coffins,[3] as well as to the anonymous character of most of them.[4] Interestingly, Schmidt refers to these objects as 'cercueils peint multicolores', highlighting the density of their decoration which he views as an expression of *horror vacui*,[5] a concept commonly used in art history studies and later closely associated with yellow coffins.

In the 1980s, Andrzej Niwiński conducted the first systematic overview of the yellow corpus, listing almost 450 coffin sets. For the first time, the author formally defined the corpus and proposed a thorough typology, both of which represent foundational steps in the study of yellow coffins. In his definition, Niwiński identifies four essential features that characterise yellow coffins:

1 Schmidt 2022.
2 Schmidt 2022, 32.
3 Schmidt 1902, 3.
4 Schmidt 1902, 5.
5 Schmidt 1902, 4.

- Multi-coloured decoration on yellow ground on the exterior walls.
- Multi-coloured interior decoration against a yellow or reddish background.
- A coating of yellowish varnish.
- Sculpted representations of the hands.[6]

Niwiński's definition does not distinguish between the yellow coffins from the 21st Dynasty, the early Ramesside corpus, or the so-called 'stola corpus' from the 22nd Dynasty. His exhaustive examination of the yellow corpus led to the creation of a typology designed to deal with the lids/mummy boards, and the exterior and interior decoration of the boxes. This typology is based on the layout of the object as a whole and the formal arrangement of the scenes, with the primary goal of dating the objects as precisely as possible. As a result of this method, the author proposed seven stages in the evolution of the yellow corpus, though the distinctions between these stages are often somewhat blurred or artificial.[7]

In line with Valdemar Schmidt, Niwiński also acknowledged the role of *horror vacui* in the density of the decoration. He observed that 'when there is a high degree of density in the decorative elements the *horror vacui* phenomenon occurs'.[8] In addition, he associated the use of 'space-fillers', or non-specific symbols used to increase the density of decoration, with this concept. Through these two ideas, Niwiński described the increasing complexity of the decoration from a strictly formal perspective, without delving into questions of meaning. Over the years, Andrzej Niwiński has complemented this formal approach by studying the meaning of the yellow corpus iconography, particularly as the expression of the solar-Osirian unity.[9]

In the 1990s, René van Walsem offered a different perspective by focusing on a single coffin set – that of Djedmonthuiufankh, housed at the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden. This coffin belongs to the stola

6 Niwiński 1988, 7.
7 Niwiński 2024.
8 Niwiński 1988, 66.
9 Niwiński 1987-1988.

corpus dating back to the 22nd Dynasty. Unlike Niwiński, René van Walsem concentrated on the compositions displayed on these coffins and, for the first time, applied Panofsky's[10] iconological approach to coffin decoration. His thorough descriptive analysis of the iconography laid the groundwork for an iconological reading of the symbols, identifying different areas of the coffin that served various roles and meanings. Van Walsem also introduced the concept of 'architectonisation',[11] whereby the coffin is seen as displaying different symbolic spaces. This work remained unfinished but nevertheless it became a sound methodological reference in our own efforts to develop an iconological approach to the yellow corpus.

Although focused primarily on the 22nd Dynasty coffins, John Taylor significantly contributed to the integration of coffin studies within broader cultural and political frameworks. His work is deeply rooted in a genealogical perspective on coffin craftsmanship and has been instrumental in tracing the transmission of forms and understanding how they were received and re-interpreted over time. This genealogical view has proven crucial for understanding the symbolism and meaning behind the variations adopted in coffin decoration. Taylor's contribution to combining this evolutionary view of coffin craftsmanship with textual and iconographical sources has greatly influenced the semantic approach to coffin decoration, to which we owe so much.

More recently, coffin studies have been launched through various lenses. Kara Cooney examined yellow coffins with a view to understanding the 'anomalous' phenomenon of re-use which has intrigued scholars and archaeologists since the discovery of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun. Her study, based on a material examination of a considerable number of coffins, incorporates considerations of coffin craftsmanship into socioeconomic models, underlining the strong political significance of these objects.[12]

In the past few decades, museums have channelled their efforts towards conducting material studies on yellow coffins, in particular on aspects such

10 Panofsky 1983.
11 Van Walsem 1997, 359.
12 Cooney 2024.

as carpentry, pigments, and workshop practices. Multidisciplinary studies at institutions like the Vatican Museums,[13] the British Museum,[14] the Fitzwilliam Museum,[15] the Museo Egizio in Turin, the Leiden Museum of Antiquities in Leiden,[16] and the Louvre Museum,[17] have unveiled valuable information on coffin materiality and the dynamism of ancient workshops, particularly regarding the woodwork and the use of pigments.

1.1. An art historical approach to the yellow corpus

Despite the immense wealth of visual elements displayed on 21st Dynasty yellow coffins, a systematic survey of this material has yet to be undertaken. Our prior research on the yellow corpus from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun revealed the importance of a comparative approach when dealing with objects from such an extensive documental corpus. While the formal aspects of coffin decoration are undeniably important, our approach is semantical in scope. Like Taylor, we believe that a genealogical approach is essential to address meaning. Moreover, it uncovers the hidden dynamics behind the transmission and re-interpretation of visual materials.

Our approach to iconography seeks not only to map the use of visual resources in coffin decoration, but also to understand their meaning and acknowledge their agency, recognising their magical, political and socioeconomic roles in Theban society. Moreover, this book aims to explore this phenomenon from an art historical perspective, where an inventory of iconography serves as a fundamental step in uncovering the cultural significance of the objects. This will open a semantic field that may help unravel the layers of meaning embedded in the imagery on yellow coffins – a vital step towards grounding future iconological studies on the 21st Dynasty funerary imagery.

The first four chapters of this book present a visual survey on the yellow coffin type, focusing on iconography and the layout of the scenes. In each

13 Amenta and Guichard 2017.
14 Serpico and White. 2001.
15 Dawson 2018.
16 Weiss 2018.
17 Niwiński and Rigault-Deon 2024.

chapter we will trace the inventory of the scenes typically displayed on the lids and mummy boards (Chapter II), on the exterior walls of the box (Chapter III), and in the interior of the boxes (Chapter IV). In Chapter I we focus on the ornamental elements used to arrange the pictorial space. The aim of this survey is to map the iconographical repertoire in use in the yellow corpus. Although this inventory often attempts to approach iconology, it is primarily concerned with offering holistic readings of the scenes and establishing their potential relationships within the depicted space.

This inventory forms the basis to analyse the phenomenon of archaization (Chapter V) and for the typology presented in Chapter VI, which is designed to address the multiplicity of pictorial compositions displayed on yellow coffins, including the irregular layouts. This typology is not an end in itself. Rather, the typological profile that emerges reveals the dynamic approach employed by workshops to create a given object, providing a 'fingerprint' of the workshop's production. In this regard, even low-quality coffins can reveal very interesting insights into the use and re-interpretation of the mainstream canon, often displaying traces of what can be considered a 'sub-culture'. In other cases, the typological profile clearly illustrates how a coffin was transformed over time, being selectively redecorated by different craftsmen, according to the evolving expectations and values associated with these objects.

In our approach we aim at an integrative reading of the figurative elements in the yellow corpus. In its final form, the yellow coffin embodied what may be considered a semiotic representation, e.g., a system of signs encapsulating the cultural and socioeconomic framework of Theban society at a specific moment in time, where both cultural and economic factors were deeply intertwined.[18] Of course a more in-depth iconological inquiry will eventually involve comparisons with papyri and other archaeological sources but, for this volume, the use of these materials remained as limited as possible. Chapter VII outlines the approach used to integrate the visual narratives displayed on yellow coffins, through which the religious meaning of coffin decoration unfolds, as well as its supernatural

18 Bryson, Holly and Moxey 1994.

agency. This interpretative reading is the natural development of the analytical examination carried out in the previous chapters.

Inevitably, the dynamism detected in the transmission and re-interpretation of the visual resources displayed on yellow coffins provided significant insights into understanding the impact of visual culture within the artisan communities responsible for their craftsmanship. Consequently, Chapter VIII features informal observations that we have been collected over the years on carpentry, painting procedures, and the organisation of the funerary workshops' workforce. From the integration of these different aspects, becomes increasingly clearer the interaction between the Theban religious landscape and coffin decoration.

This approach highlights the agency attained by visual culture during the 21st Dynasty and how it was used to shape the social identities of priests and artisans, not only strengthening their political roles but also expanding their own experience of the cosmos. As mentioned by Kara Cooney, 'to study coffins is to resurrect a materialized social system,'[19] thereby reviving an entire cultural system embedded within these objects. Consequently, understanding coffin decoration through the lens of art historical studies is crucial to revealing the intense negotiation of visual and material resources behind the creative phenomenon detected in the yellow corpus.

Definition

First and foremost, when dealing with such a vast corpus as the yellow coffins, it is essential to clearly define the object of study. When considering the yellow corpus as defined by Niwiński, we soon became uncomfortable with considering the early Ramesside objects and the stola-corpus of the 22nd Dynasty under the same artistic phenomenon that produced the coffins from the end of the 20th Dynasty to the end of the 21st Dynasty.

The ongoing association between these objects largely stems from their shared colour scheme, considered their primary feature.[20] As noted by Aidan Dodson, the increased use of this colour scheme in coffins is closely related to

19 Cooney 2024, 17.
20 Taylor 2001, 170.

the prevalence of polychrome in royal tombs.[21] However, this criterion alone is insufficient to capture the overall complexity involved in the decoration of these objects, spanning from the late 18th Dynasty to the 22nd Dynasty. Recognising this limitation, John Taylor proposed distinguishing two phases: the first phase (19th-20th Dynasties), continuing the tradition of the black type, and the second phase (21st-early 22nd Dynasties), during which the coffin assumed the symbolic role of the tomb,[22] a phenomenon René van Walsem termed as 'architectonisation'.[23]

Upon further examination of these coffins, it became increasingly clear that a different definition for the yellow corpus was necessary. In our view, despite some similarities with the coffins of the 21st Dynasty, the early Ramesside corpus and the stola corpus are rooted in very distinct art historical phenomena, and equally distinct socioeconomic and political contexts. These differences are such that they cannot simply be regarded as different phases, but as entirely distinct artistic phenomena. As a result, the following criteria were adopted to distinguish the 21st Dynasty yellow corpus from the early Ramesside coffins:

- The yellow coffin set includes a **mummy board**, i.e. a full-length board featuring the deceased as a resurrected god. This object is a distinctive feature of the yellow corpus. In contrast, the early Ramesside corpus typically comprises either an open-work board and mask set, or a full-length plank featuring the deceased as a living being. The purpose of each category of objects is distinct and should not be conflated.
- The defining feature of the yellow type is its decoration **scheme**:
  - The lid/mummy board features a prominent depiction of the deceased extending across the upper section. Below the torso of the deceased, three independent tableaux are arranged: the central section, the lower section and the footboard.[24] Each tableau is designed to recreate a specific sacred space. Proto-yellow coffins already exhibit some of these compositions but, unlike the yellow coffins, their layout is inconsistent.

21 Dodson 2000.
22 Taylor 2001.
23 Van Walsem 1997, 359.
24 On coffins dated later, one of these sections may be omitted.

- The exterior walls of the box are adorned with a variety of scenes revolving around the afterlife. As a rule, the long sides are divided into an upper section (at shoulder height) and a lower section (along the legs), with the deceased often integrated into these scenes. In the proto-yellow type, the box is always designed after the black type scheme.
- The interior of the box is decorated, showing a large deity of the netherworld: Osiris/Djed-pillar or a cosmic goddess. In the proto-yellow type it is typically coated in black pitch.

These features contrast so sharply with those of early Ramesside coffins, that we felt compelled to categorise the latter as 'proto-yellow coffins', treating them as an independent corpus in its own right,[25] a concept already suggested by John Taylor.[26]

The stola corpus from the 22nd Dynasty exhibits many additional subtleties which we will explore in future research. Although they display strong affinities with the yellow corpus of the 21st Dynasty, the stola coffins are embedded in a very different political and socioeconomic context. In this corpus, the style is highly standardized, miniaturized, and significantly more sketch-like, particularly on the exterior walls. The selection of subjects, as well as the ownership and commission patterns, reveal unique characteristics that must be considered independently, rather than confused with the phenomenon detected in the yellow corpus.

The corpus

The large number of objects included in this corpus,[27] most of them unpublished, presents a major research challenge in itself due to their wide dispersion around the world and the difficulty in accessing them. Moreover, ongoing excavations in Thebes continue to uncover new interments, as well as

25 Sousa 2020.
26 Taylor 2001.
27 The inventory by Andrzej Niwiński has 450 entries, many of them with two coffins and one mummy board (Niwiński 1988).

a considerable number of yellow coffin fragments, which remain unpublished and difficult to document and study.[28] Despite the resources available to contemporary researchers, an exhaustive study of the entire yellow corpus remains an impossible task. Therefore, our approach is necessarily focused on a sample of the broader corpus. Given the highly innovative visual culture of the yellow corpus, our approach remains open to new inputs and discoveries.

The objects included in this study are listed in the 'List of sources'. Although we aimed to include as many coffins as we could access in this study, our primary focus of the yellow corpus was on the materials from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun. This corpus, documented in the archives of the Gate of the Priests Project, forms the basis for our visual survey. We refer to the objects in the footnotes when they support our observations. Due to the extensive nature of the corpus, these mentions are merely indicative, and we cannot provide an exhaustive analysis. References to these objects in the footnotes are abbreviated and should be complemented with the bibliographical information included in the 'List of Sources' at the end of this volume. Bibliographical references for each coffin, whenever available, are included therein, but in many cases, the objects remain unpublished, and our photographs are frequently the only available sources. Unfortunately, readers may still experience challenges accessing this documental corpus but we hope to make the archives on the iconography of the Gate of the Priests Project available to researchers in the near future.

Terminology and methodology

In our study of the yellow coffins from the 21st Dynasty, the acknowledgement of distinct pictorial compositions is fundamental to ground our methodology. First and foremost, this recognition led us to establish a consistent terminology that can be used to isolate the different compositions

28 See yellow coffin fragments from TT 99 (Strudwick 2021, 92). Francesco Tiradritti found fragments of yellow coffins in the area of the Ramesseum, some of them showing evidence of having been consumed by fire (personal communication, 2021). Stéphane Fetler reported to have found fragments of 22 lids and mummy boards in the inner courtyard (VH 2) of K93.12a in Dra Abu el Naga (personal communication 2021). José Ramon Perez-Accino found fragments of yellow in the area adjacent to TT 320 (personal communication, 2022). José Galan found remains of yellow coffins in the courtyard of the tomb of Djehuti in Dra Abu el-Naga (Galán 2015).

and to examine their evolution. Unlike other terminological systems, which are based on the material components of the objects, our terminology is grounded on the pictorial compositions themselves, aiming to enhance their autonomy and independence. The goal of this terminology is to study the compositions as independent entities rather than the material structure of the coffin. In this respect, our terminology is based on a topographical view of each object, where each section recreates a sacred space.

The lids are arranged in four main sections. In the yellow corpus, the lid typically depicts the deceased in a mummiform guise, either fully (Fig. II) or partially (Fig. I). This is the primary depiction displayed on the lid, with secondary representations displayed over it.[29]

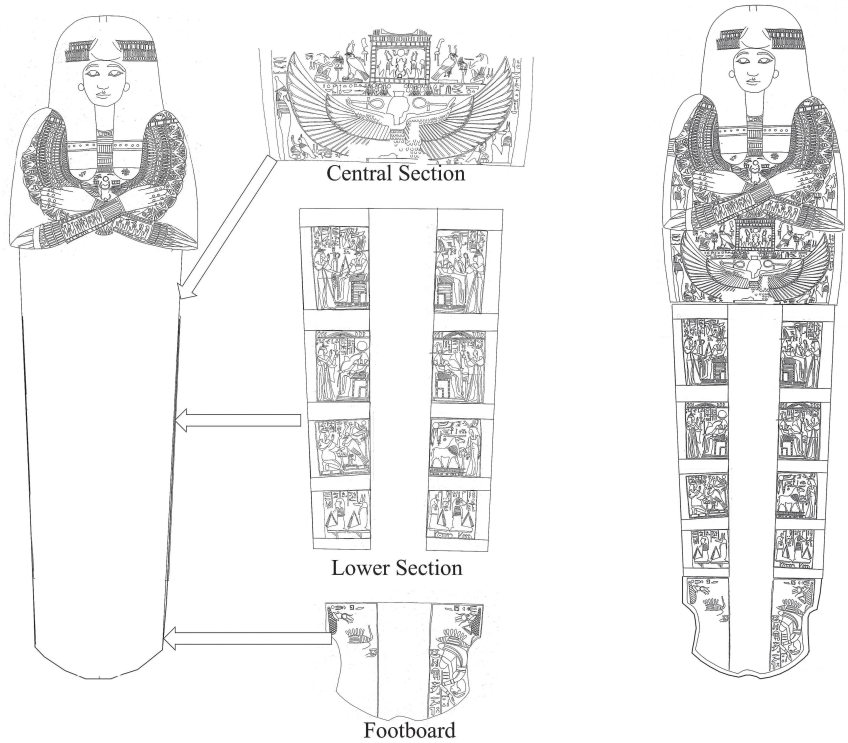


Fig. I. Primary depiction of the deceased in ceremonial attire and related secondary compositions in the first half of the 21st Dynasty.

29 On this distinction, see Bettum 2012, 51.

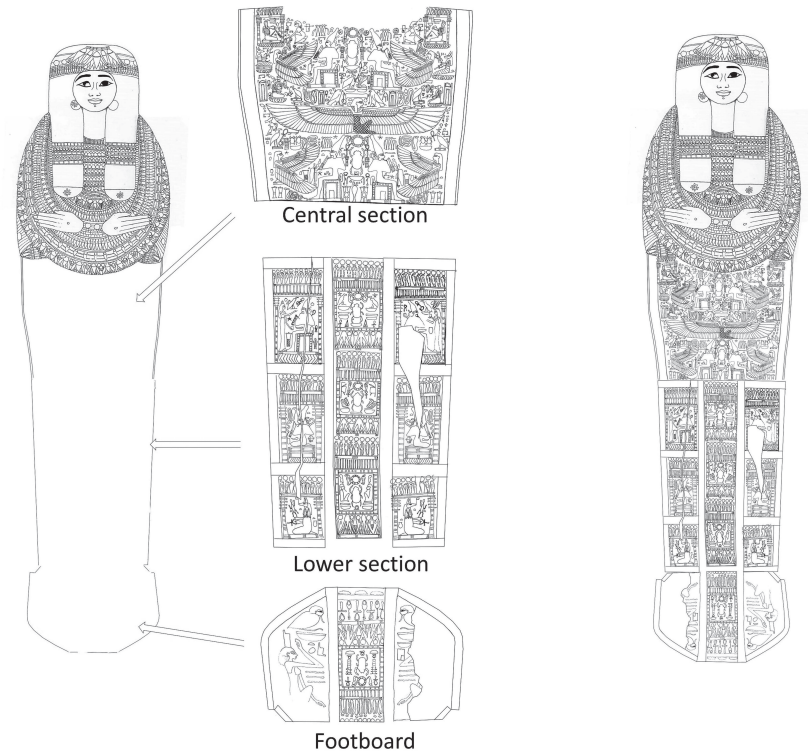


Fig. II. Primary depiction of the deceased in mummiform guise and related secondary compositions in the second half of the 21st Dynasty.

In the resulting layout of the lid, four sections can be detected (Fig. III):

– **Upper section** – This section shows the head and torso of the deceased.[30] In early versions of the yellow type, the deceased appears as a living being clad in festive garments emerging from the mummy wrappings. This is especially evident in the mummy boards, where the entire lower part of the object is either left blank or decorated with a beaded net, resembling more closely a mummiform figure. In the second half of the 21st Dynasty, the lid shows the deceased in fully mummiform guise.

30 In previous publications we have considered the headboard as an autonomous section (Sousa 2018), but the assessment of the variability detected in this section does not provide sufficient evidence to suggest that the ancient artisan acknowledged it as an autonomous pictorial area. It seems now more plausible for us that the upper section was designed as a whole, including the headboard.

– **Central section** – This tableau presents at least two registers.[31] Its solar significance is clear, revolving around the imagery of the solar god's rebirth.
– **Lower section** – This section presents two or three longitudinal partitions, alluding to the symbolism of a sacred gate.
– **Footboard** – The footboard has three partitions displayed in reversed direction, typically with Osirian significance. On the main surface, scenes are often reversed and allude to Osiris's mourning. On the reverse side, a joyful goddess is featured.

The exterior walls of the boxes are arranged in four main sections (Fig. III):

– **Headboard** – This is composed of a tripartite panel, where the central panel covers the crown of the head, and the side panels are displayed along the sides of the head.
– **Upper section** – One or two vignettes are displayed along the curved area formed at the level of the torso. Until the mid-21st Dynasty it is normally here that the largest scenes of the box are found.
– **Lower section** – This section extends from the elbows to the footboard, typically featuring a variety of scenes, though several layouts are possible. From the mid-21st Dynasty onwards a single long vignette extending to the full length of the long side becomes increasingly frequent.
– **Footboard** – This area is progressively left undecorated as the 21st Dynasty draws to a close.

Unlike the other settings of the assemblage, the interior of the box tends to form an indivisible visual unit, particularly in the early stages of the yellow corpus. However, from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, there is an increasing

31 During the 21st Dynasty, the decoration of the central panel became increasingly complex. In the most elaborate objects, it reached a remarkable level of complexity with a varying number of registers. Its dimensions are highly variable, and in the most extreme examples, it may cover the entire surface of the lid below the upper section.

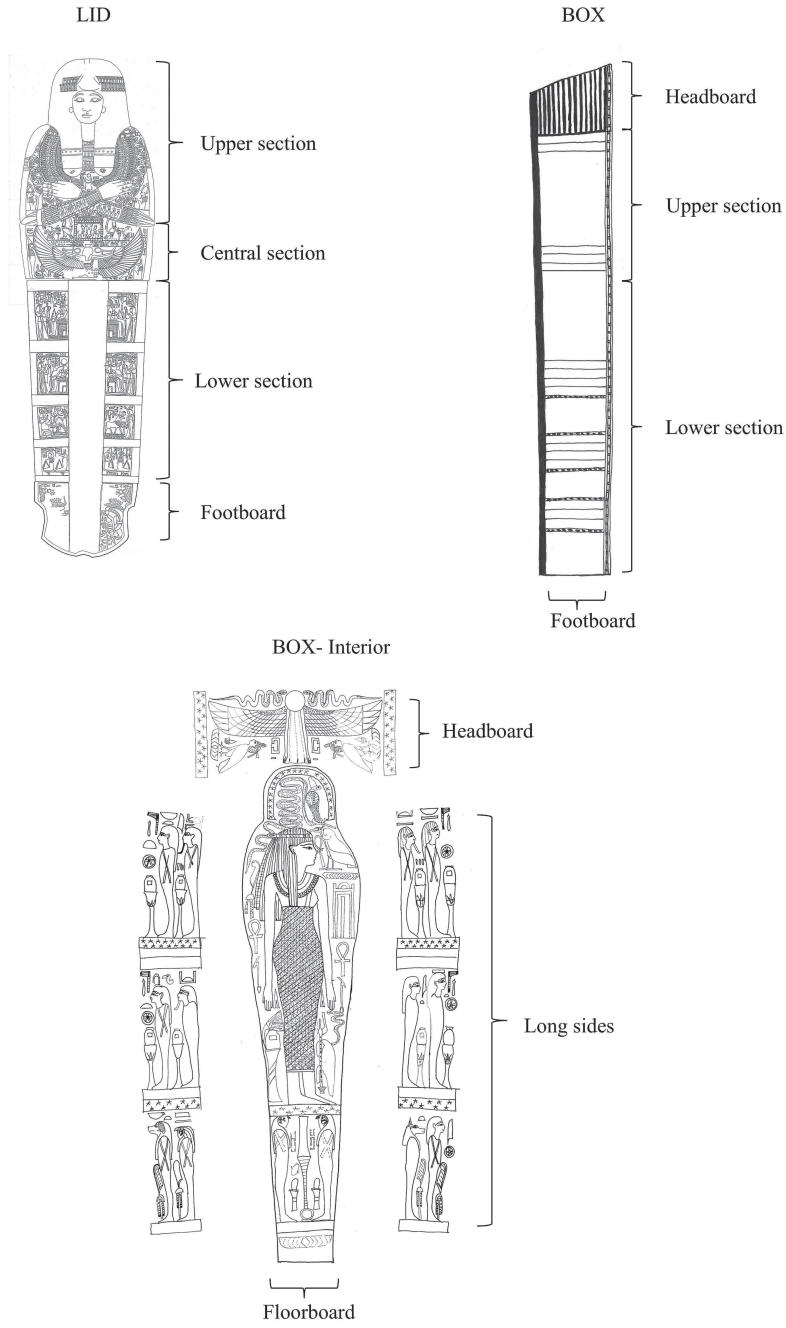


Fig. III . Topography of a 'yellow' coffin.

differentiation of this composition, allowing the following sections to be isolated within the box's (Fig. III):

- **Headboard** – This section features a winged deity, typically the *ba*-bird, protecting the head of the mummy.
- **Long sides** – The decoration involves several registers suggesting the layout of the sidewalls of a shrine.
- **Floorboard** – A large iconographic composition depicts a goddess, a mummiform god, or a Djed-pillar. This section is decorated like the rear wall of a shrine and may be doubled with a scene painted or outlined on the underside of the mummy board/lid.[32] Exceptionally, a simpler composition may be positioned over the reverse side of the floorboard, a practice observed in the highest elite objects from the end of the 21st Dynasty.[33] Otherwise, the reverse side remains undecorated.
- **Footboard** – Usually left undecorated and simply washed over in red, the footboard may occasionally feature cryptographic compositions.

Isolating these pictorial units was a crucial step for us to study one section at a time. This focus on compositions led us to prioritise line drawings as our primary documentation tool, instead of photographs, which are often inadequate tools for documentation purposes in the yellow corpus: in objects like coffins, photography often creates large blind spots, distorted effects created by perspective, and makes it difficult to perceive the compositions as pictorial units. Drawing, on the contrary, isolates the compositions and, by doing so, enhances the perception of the fundamental layout of each one. Given the extent of the visual repertoire of yellow coffins, selecting which compositions to include in this book proved to be a challenging endeavour. We have prioritised the objects we have been able to study over the years in several museums, as well as those that remain unpublished or insufficiently published.

32 These motifs, however, are not part of the iconographic repertoire of the mummy-cover/lid integrating the decoration scheme supposed to protect the interior of the case.
33 TT 320: coffin set of Nesikhonsu. A.151: coffin set of Tjanefery.

Another fundamental aspect of our approach is the comparative examination of the compositions. The comparative approach uses the seriation method, which is applied section by section. In practical terms, the seriation of the compositions is based on their level of complexity. Since in this corpus the degree of complexity largely results from a genealogical process, this approach has the significant advantage of revealing the evolution of compositions over time, providing valuable clues for dating. This dating system is, of course, relative. Given the high rates of re-use detected on these coffins, relying on contextual archaeological information, such as historical references to high priests on mummy braces, can be highly misleading.[34] We preferred to adopt a relative dating system.[35]

Moreover, the seriation method aligns with our semantic approach, as it can be exceedingly helpful in accessing meaning. For example, this method allowed us to view the so-called 'space-fillers' from a slightly different angle than that proposed by Niwiński: instead of seeing them as meaningless signs used to fill in the space, the seriation method clearly shows their origins and development, revealing that they were employed as sacred symbols whose role was to establish a magical link with the sacred atmosphere inside the coffin.[36] Therefore, the term 'liminal elements' is used to label these symbols, whose purpose is not simply to 'fill in' the pictorial space but to break the boundaries between the inner and outer areas of the coffin, bringing the sacred atmosphere from the interior to the exterior walls.[37] Thus, the use of liminal elements reflects the sacralization of the coffin as a sacred space,[38] and plays a decisive role in achieving the degree of complexity observed in yellow coffins from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards.

The seriation method, therefore, forms the foundation of our dating system. Unlike Niwiński's proposal of seven overlapping stages, our method enabled us to isolate simply three stages, which are intuitive and can be defined

34 Niwiński 1988.
35 Based on a different standpoint, Kathlyn Cooney expressed a similar viewpoint on typology, showing that re-use was often selective, focusing on particular sections of the coffin. The practical result is the impossibility of producing a typology based on the holistic design of the object. See Cooney 2018, 74.
36 Sousa 2014.
37 Sousa 2018, 108.
38 Liptay 2017, 259-262.

from a formal point of view. We have labelled these stages as 'basic scheme', 'classical scheme' and 'complex scheme'. In general, the basic scheme is found from the late Ramesside period to the early second quarter of the 21st Dynasty, the classical scheme is dated from the second quarter to the early third quarter of the 21st Dynasty, and the complex scheme is dated from the second half of the 21st Dynasty.

These stages are consistently associated with specific layouts and styles observed in the compositions (Fig. IV):

- **Basic scheme**. At this stage, the style is naturalistic and expressive, recalling the Ramesside pictorial tradition, with large figures clad in white pleated garments. The density of the decorative elements is low, and liminal elements are not used. The resulting composition is lighter, with empty spaces between the figures or short label-inscriptions. As for the exterior of the box, the panels of the headboard are striped, and the vignettes displayed over the long sides are narrow, usually containing one single deity. The interior of the box is either left undecorated or decorated only on the floorboard.[39]
- **Classical scheme**. On the lid, the classical scheme introduces a new repertoire on the lower section where the avian form of Sokar plays an important role. In the central section of the lid, liminal elements begin to appear.[40] The repertoire of liminal elements used in the classical scheme typically includes cobras, vultures, *shetyt*-shrines, mummiform gods and hieroglyphs such as the *ankh*, *djed*, and *tjet*. On the exterior walls of the box, the vignettes become larger, and the side panels of the headboard begin to receive figurative decoration.[41] The scene repertoire expands, sometimes borrowing subjects from the Book of the Dead.[42] The interior decoration of the box extends to the sides, creating a tableau where the several elements are integrated into a single

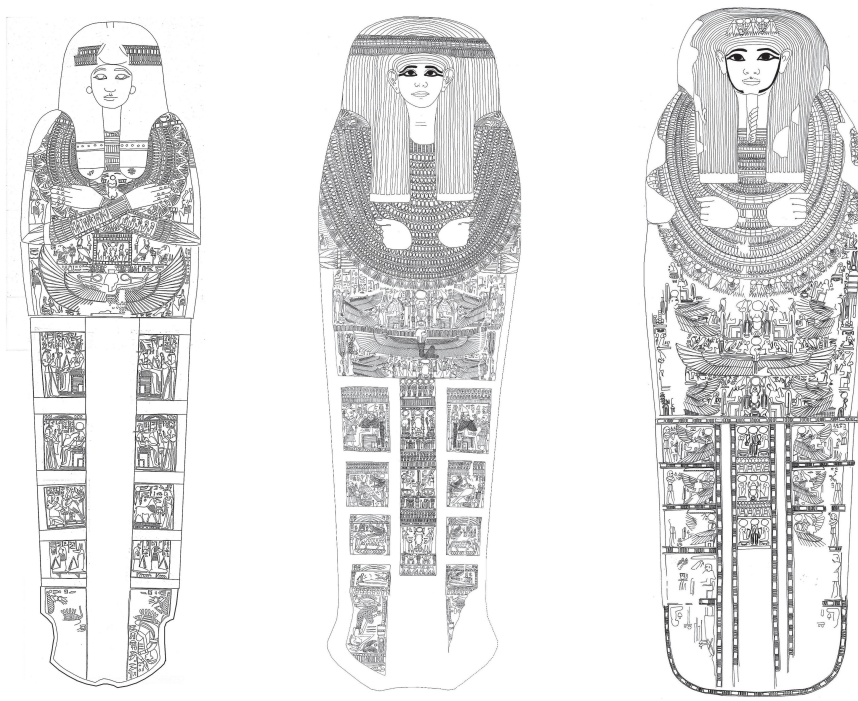
39 Niwiński 2019, 61
40 Liminal elements are symbols originally displayed in the interior of the box. They include a vast repertoire of images comprising *shetyt*-shrines, vultures, cobras, falcons, mummiform gods, and hieroglyphs. Their goal is to intensify the sacredness of the coffin (Sousa 2018a, 108).
41 This observation was previously advanced in Niwinski 2019, 61.
42 Niwiński 2019, 62.

pictorial unit. The style remains naturalistic, but rapidly changes after the introduction of liminal elements.

– **Complex scheme**. As the density of the decorative elements increases, the main figures became smaller and highly standardized. The style becomes schematic and rigid, lacking the graceful contours typical of the earlier stages. Often, this results in blurred, almost impressionistic figures, particularly when the painting quality is low. Gradually, the depiction of the deceased also shifts from white garments to dark, tight clothing. The decorative density is high, and the liminal elements play a dominant role, permeating all the compositions on the lid and becoming almost as large as the main figures. In the later forms of the yellow type, the liminal elements eventually become the dominant elements of the main compositions on the lid. Their repertoire expands to include mummiform deities, *ba*-birds, falcons, frogs, bull heads, royal cartouches, ritual objects (unguent vases, libation vessels, *shemsu*-signs, etc), trios of sacred scarabs, and hearts, among many others. Most of these motifs were already widely used in the decoration of temples and tombs during the Ramesside period, especially on ceilings, friezes and footers. The prevalence of liminal elements in coffin decoration is a clear indication that the sacralization of the coffin as a sacred space had reached its peak.[43] On the lid, both the upper section and central sections expand. However, the box's exterior walls are not so affected by liminal elements. Here, the lower section often extends to the full length of the long sides, complementing the phenomenon observed on the lids. Inside the box, the layout is now designed as a shrine. In many ways, the coffin is now decorated as a cult place.[44]

Once applied to the different compositions of the coffin, the seriation method allows for an understanding of the overall economy of coffin decoration,

43 Liptay 2017, 262.
44 Liptay 2017, 262. Sousa 2018, 203.



Basic scheme Classical scheme Complex scheme

Fig. IV. The stages of the yellow type:
a) Basic scheme. Lid of Tabasety (Antikmuseet in Aarhus).
b) Classical scheme. Lid of Nesipanebimakh (A.12).
c) Complex scheme. Anonymous outer coffin (A.56).

namely which sections were more valued at a particular time and how their perceived value evolved.

The seriation method was also fundamental in developing an iconographical survey for each composition. Thanks to this comparative approach, it became easier to identify the key-features of each composition and understand how they developed over time. On the lids and mummy boards, this approach proved to be a practical means of dealing with the diversity of layouts.[45] However, when we shifted our focus to the boxes, a slightly different

45 Sousa 2018.

scenario emerged. Here, not only did the different compositions show far greater interdependency, but this interdependency also increased as we moved closer to the interior space of the box. Therefore, we had to adopt a slightly different methodology to study these different spaces.

Our iconographical examination of the documental corpus progressed to establish a typology consistent with our conceptual framework. As mentioned above, Niwiński's typology aims mainly to provide a method for strictly dating purposes. Our goal, however, was to provide a qualitative tool for art historical studies, focusing on the compositions and their evolution over time. We based our typology for the lid on the key-features that govern each composition.[46] These key-features are essential to grasp the meaning of the compositions and to unravel their role in the overall economy of the object. For the box, we adapted our typology to the visual repertoire of these objects. Here, we do not encounter complex compositions like those on the lid; instead, the main focus of the vignettes is semantic: the layout of the box is determined by the choice of scenes rather than by their layout. Our typology for the box follows this approach and is based on semantic aspects.

The resulting output of this approach is a 'typological profile' that highlights the contrasts in the levels of complexity within the same coffin set. The consistency – or lack thereof- provides important insights into the dynamics of coffin decoration within a particular set.

This is particularly important due to another important phenomenon observed in the yellow corpus, known as 'archaization'.[47] During the second half of the 21st Dynasty, compositions typically found in earlier models were selectively re-introduced, resulting in an archaizing trend characterised by the intention to produce objects that would 'look older' to an ancient beholder. This trend first appeared among the coffins of the highest elite, such as in the burial set of Pinedjem II, presenting a clear contrast with the contemporary layout of coffin decoration, which had evolved towards increasing levels of complexity and innovation. This archaizing revival of older models poses significant challenges,

46 Sousa 2018a, 171-174.
47 Niwiński 1988, 79.

particularly when attempting to date an object. In archaizing objects, most compositions may point to an early dating, but others may reveal inconsistencies, indicating a later dating. Ultimately, the combination of elements obtained from examining the formal features of different compositions, along with the assessment of stylistic differences, enabled us to distinguish between a coffin dating from the early 21st Dynasty, an archaizing object, or even a re-used one.

2. The rise of yellow coffins: a brief overview

Before delving into the yellow corpus, it is important to outline a few defining concepts that we have developed over the years on the evolution of body containers, which ultimately led to the creation of yellow coffins.

The missing coffins

During the reign of Akhenaten, a new vision of the afterlife was advanced. Everything in the Amarna reform revolves around light and the visibility of natural phenomena. Hence, unsurprisingly, the rich imagery related to the Book of the Amduat was absent from the royal tomb of Amarna. In the high elite private tombs, funerary iconography was entirely focused on the daily existence of the inhabitants of this city. However, this depiction of 'daily life', as shown in the tomb scenes in Amarna, does not revolve around mundane events, as it did in the private tombs until the reign of Amenhotep III, but rather focuses on divine festivals and royal events.[48] Although there is no explicit discourse on this subject, it is likely that the afterlife in Amarna was seen as an ongoing existence in Akhetaten, literally the 'Horizon of the sun disc', where light and life were continuously celebrated.

Given this new mindset, body containers in Amarna had to be entirely re-designed. Unfortunately, archaeological evidence in this regard is particularly scarce. The short time span of the city's necropolis, the extensive destruction that

48 Davies 1905.

followed, and the lack of interest shown by modern excavators all contribute to this gap. Recently, fragments of body containers have been found in the South Tombs Cemetery of Amarna, providing a glimpse into the burial customs of the city's inhabitants. These fragments belonged to rectangular coffins painted black, with figures outlined in yellow, simply depicting scenes without featuring deities. This 'godless' decoration clearly shows that new designs were emerging in Amarna, in line with the theological values of the period.[49]

The highest elite tombs from Akhetaten provided no evidence in this regard, however their scenes may shed light on the shape and form of contemporary coffins. In the Royal Tomb itself, the king and queen are shown mourning Princess Meketaten. The deceased princess is depicted lying on a funerary bier, her arms alongside her body, showing the corpse as if suspended over a raised platform (Fig. V-a).[50] As noted elsewhere,[51] this scene, typically interpreted as a depiction of the corpse, may actually represent the type of coffin used for the highest elite of Amarna, showing the lid designed to resemble the living image of the deceased, while the box remained undecorated. Similar examples are known from other iconographic sources. Fragments of the sarcophagus of Djehutimes show the deceased both upon the funerary bier and standing. In the latter scene, the deceased is mourned by a widow squatted at his feet, in the same manner that black coffins are depicted in mourning scenes (Fig. V-b).[52]

With the lid shaped in the likeness of the living image of the deceased, this new type of coffin was probably designed as a hollow statue, featuring the deceased attired to attend the sacred festivals in the Temple of Aten. Given the association with the solar cult, it is possible that the use of colour and varnish was introduced at this stage.[53]

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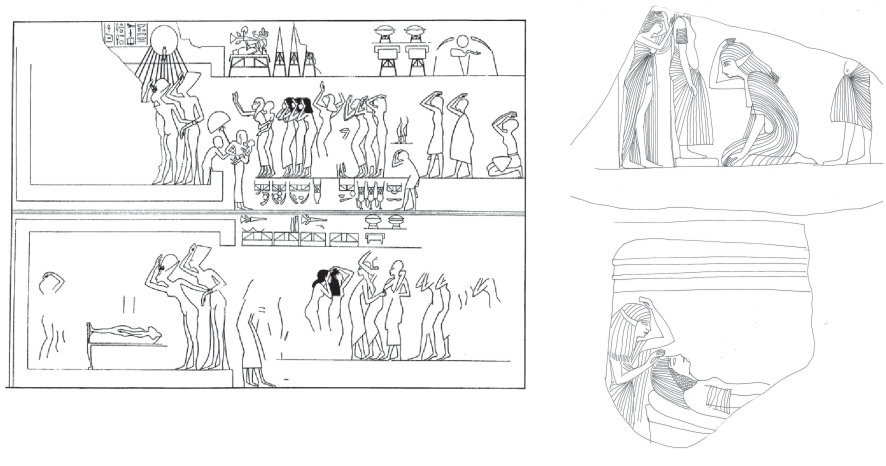
49 Stevens 2018, 155. Anna Stevens also notes that in the same necropolis fragments with traditional deities had been found. The fact that coffins were a rare commodity in Amarna may explain the persistence of the old schemes.
50 Martin 1989.
51 Sousa 2018, 33–37. Sousa 2019, 114–115. Sousa 2020a. Grajetsky and Sousa (forthcoming).
52 Sarcophagus of Djehutimes (Kaiser Wilhelms-Universität, Strasbourg, no. 1393, Museo Camposanto, Pisa, 2) in Grajetsky and Sousa (forthcoming).
53 Taylor 2001, 170.



a b

Fig. V. Scenes showing the coffin designed in line with the festive dress type.
a) Royal tomb of Amarna (Room γ).
b) Fragments of the sarcophagus of Djehutimes (Kaiser Wilhelms-Universität in Strasbourg and Museo Camposanto in Pisa).

Gender differentiation of the coffins, which would persist thereafter, was likely introduced with these coffins.[54] As for the box, it was probably simply painted white. The only known example of a 'pure' coffin of the festive dress type is that of Prince Amenemhat, found in Deir el-Bahari and now housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Inv. no. 19.3.207a–b). The lid displays a highly simplified representation of festive linen garments: no drapery of the festive pleated garment is shown, and the surface is merely painted white, the same treatment applied to the box. This stylized treatment of the garment suggests that this is a later object, likely following an earlier model.

54 Gender differentiation is episodically identified in Middle Kingdom funerary masks, but this appears to be the result of local innovations and is not likely to have played a role in the mainstream of coffin production: cartonnage masks of a woman and a man from Asyut, 11th Dynasty (Pelizaeus Museum, Hildsheim, no. 6227/6226) in Eggebrecht 1996, 44-45. Gender differentiation of coffins is observed in the rishi corpus, particularly in the royal context: coffin of Queen Ah-hotep (Egyptian Museum, Cairo, no. CG 28501) in Hornung, Bryan 2002, 108-109. Again, this remained an exceptional feature.

Body containers from the reign of Tutankhamun

After the Amarna period, the traditional Osirian archetype used in the black type of coffins was back in favour.[55] However, in a small corpus of high elite anthropoid sarcophagi from the late 18th Dynasty, a mixture of features taken from previous types of body containers is observed: the lid exhibits a full length depiction of the deceased in festive attire, but the box is entirely designed in line with the black type.[56] This layout had lasting consequences thereafter, with the lid and box becoming formally independent and decorated as two completely independent pieces. The unity between the lid and the box of the body container was definitively broken.[57]

These developments are first seen in Saqqara, where most of the courtiers of Tutankhamun, previously based in Amarna, were eventually buried. In this small corpus, the decoration of the box follows the usual layout of black coffins, showing the Sons of Horus, Thoth and Anubis, while the lid's decoration scheme combines the festive dress layout with elements borrowed from the black type. The sarcophagus of Djehutihotep (Louvre Museum) displays the simplest composition of this corpus (Fig. VI-a). The box follows the black coffin style, while the lid presents the deceased wearing a pleated ceremonial garment, a long braided wig, and bare feet.

By the late 18th Dynasty, anthropoid sarcophagi already displayed significant contamination of the black type on the lid: the bare feet of the deceased were no longer shown, being replaced by the usual footboard of the black type, and bands of texts were displayed over the legs (Fig. VI-b).[58] In some objects, the typical iconographic repertoire of the black type was eventually reintroduced onto the lid, with the effigies of Nephthys, Nut, and Isis depicted over the crown of the head, chest and feet, respectively (Fig. VI-c).[59] The result was the progressive concealment of the festive dress layout within the mummiform shape of the lid.

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55 Sousa 2014.
56 Grajetzki and Sousa (forthcoming); Sousa 2020a, 5-7.
57 Taylor 1989, 39.
58 Sarcophagus of Khay (National Museum of Egyptian Civilization, Cairo, JE 36454 [lid]; 36525 [box]) in Grajetzky and Sousa (forthcoming).
59 Sarcophagus of Senqed (Egyptian Museum, Cairo, unknown number) in Grajetzky and Sousa (forthcoming).

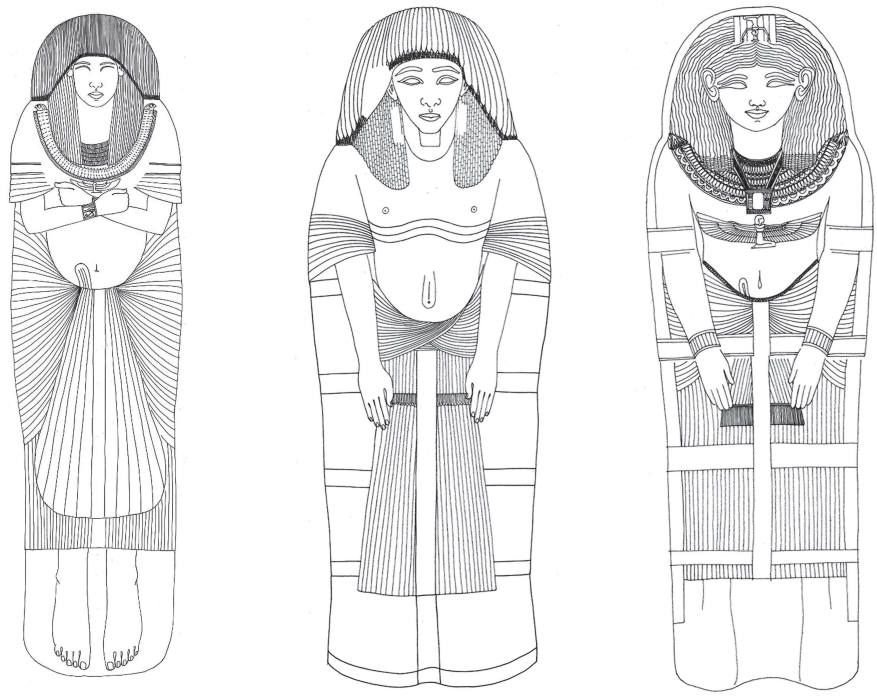


Fig. VI. Lids of sarcophagi designed in line with the festive dress type (late 18th Dynasty).
a) Sarcophagus of Djehuti (Louvre Museum).
b) Sarcophagus of Nia (Louvre Museum).
c) Sarcophagus of Senqed (Egyptian Museum).

Proto-yellow coffins

The integration of both models progressed even further in the Ramesside period, eventually giving rise to a new type of body container, which we refer to as 'proto-yellow coffins.' Strictly speaking, these coffins represent what can be considered a typological oddity. Due to the yellow colouration of the background, they are normally grouped together with the 21st Dynasty yellow coffins.[60] Based on the same criterion, even objects dating from the 18th Dynasty,

60 Niwiński 1988, 12–13.

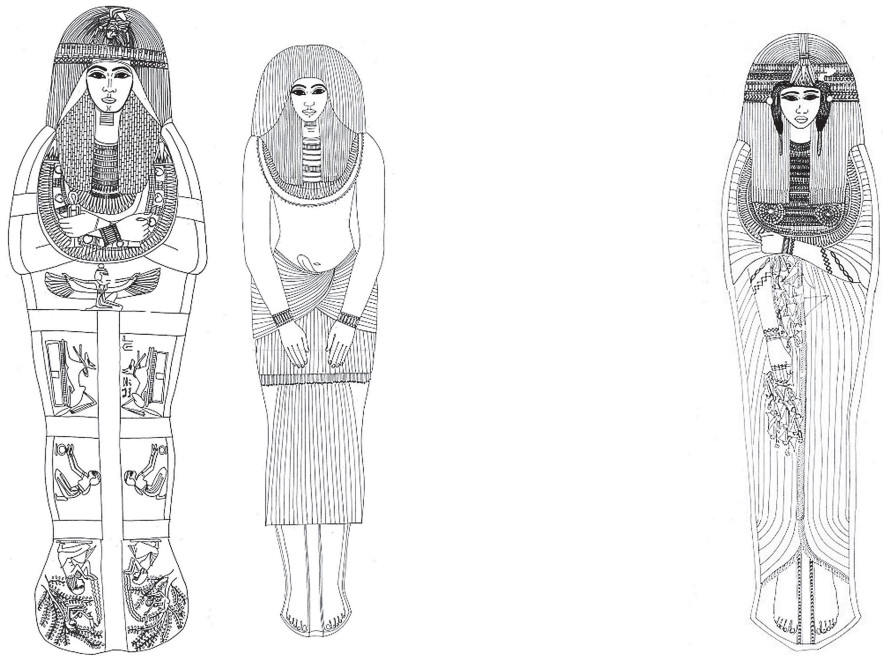
which clearly show features of the black type have been misidentified as belonging to the yellow type.[61]

In our view, this is an oversimplified way of looking at these objects as a cultural phenomenon. The fact that the box continues to follow the black coffin scheme, with the background painted in yellow to imitate gilded foil, suggests that early Ramesside coffin decorators regarded these objects as genuine 'gilded' black coffins.

The innovative inputs detected in this corpus do not follow a consistent trend, implying an unstable design-concept, where different degrees of interrelation of the festive dress layout with the traditional black type can be found. Thus, we classify these objects as an intermediate category, actually closer to the black type than to the yellow corpus itself.[62]

By examining the proto-yellow corpus, it was possible to isolate the activity of different groups of artisans. Some groups, apparently settled in Deir el-Medina, reveal a direct influence from the North, probably resulting from the arrival of new settlers in Deir el-Medina during the reign of Seti I. It is within these groups that the full depiction of the deceased in festive garments is displaced from the lid to an inner funerary plank covering the mummy.[63] The lid of the coffin, however, was designed entirely in the black style, showing the deceased again in Osirian guise, with only the braided wig as a faint reminder of the festive dress code (Fig. VII). Yet it is within this context that the most innovative features are found: vignettes borrowed from the repertoire of the Book of the Dead are depicted along the lower section of the lid. These scenes provide the first recorded instances of the deceased being portrayed as a living being (and not in mummiform guise) in the iconographic repertoire of coffins. The coffin of Sennedjem, from TT 1, is the first to display such scenes, exactly as they appear painted on the walls of his burial chamber which uses an abundant repertoire of texts and vignettes of the Book of the Dead. Integrating the depiction of the deceased as a living person into the iconographic repertoire of coffin decoration

61 Coffin of Teti (Brooklyn Museum of Art, 37.14E). See Dodson 2000.
62 Sousa 2018, 37–42. Sousa 2020a, 5–7.
63 Coffin set of Sennedjem (TT 1).



1 2

Fig. VII . Coffins from TT 1 (National Museum of Egyptian Civilization)
1.Lid and full-length plank of Sennedjem.
2. Lid of Aset.

had significant consequences, triggering an association with the repertoire of the Book of the Dead, and allowing the scenes previously featured on tombs to be transferred, quite literally, onto the coffin's walls.[64] This process was further developed in the coffins of Sennedjem's wife and son, also found in his tomb.

Other workshops working for the Theban high elite used open-work boards to cover the mummy instead of full-length depictions of the deceased. In these mummy boards, the deceased is depicted in adoration scenes carved in open-work. These objects were used together with extended masks portraying the deceased as a living being, as if they were abbreviated versions of the full-length planks described previously. The coffins themselves closely follow the

64 Sousa 2018, 40.

black type, but the lids already display the division into four distinct sections. These groups seem to adhere more closely to the local Theban tradition of coffin decoration, exhibiting less skilled pictorial work.[65]

By the mid-20th Dynasty, there appears to have been a unification of these groups: the masks and open-work board had merged into a single object, giving rise to the mummy board used in the yellow corpus. Visibly, the resulting design also shaped the layout of the lid. At the same time, the box ceased to reproduce the layout of the black type and began to feature vignettes showing the deceased as a living being. Altogether, these transformations created the first *true yellow coffins.*

The yellow type thus clearly results from the synthesis of both contexts. The design of the lid and mummy board is clearly derived from the traditional workshops of the Theban necropolis, while the layout of the box seems entirely developed from the trends initiated by the Deir el-Medina workshops, which reveal a great interest in funerary compositions.

On the rise of the yellow corpus, the reign of Rames XI is usually accepted as the turning point.[66] Although the new regime introduced by Herihor during the 'Repetition of Birth' undoubtably played a crucial role in making the yellow type the official model of this regime, it is likely that, in formal terms, most of its basic features were already in place from the mid-20th Dynasty onwards (Fig. VIII).[67] This was precisely when the increasingly weaker royal patronage led to the progressive abandonment of Deir el-Medina by the royal craftsmen and their resettlement in Medinet Habu. In this new environment, these artisans had to renegotiate their skills and put them to use in a diverse context. The yellow type thus emerged from this dialogue.

65 Sousa 2024, 100.
66 Taylor 2001, 171.
67 See the mummy board of Hori (August Kestner Museum, (Inv. no. 1977.1). In Sousa and Loeben (Forthcoming).

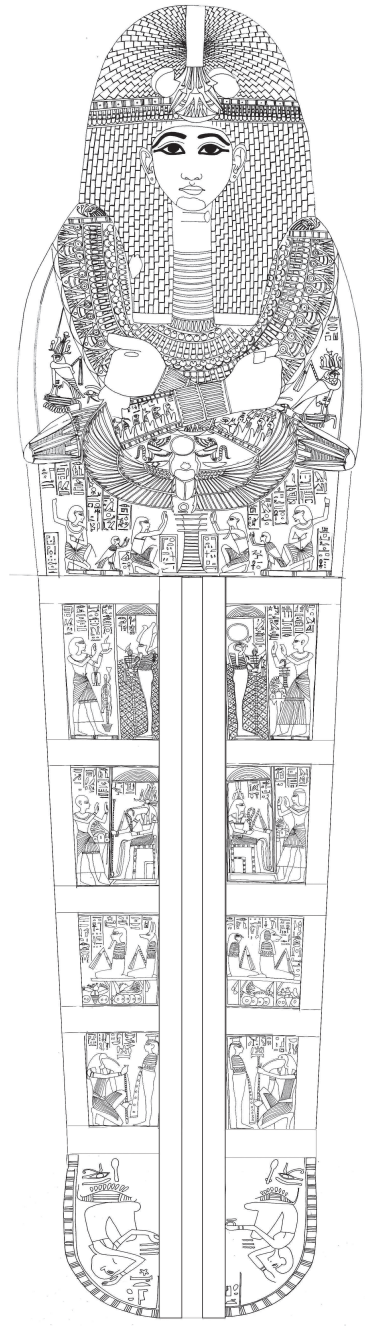


Fig. VIII. Mummy board of Hori (August Kestner Museum in Hanover).

CHAPTER I

Ornamental elements: friezes and patterns

Yellow coffins exhibit an unusually high number of compositions on a single object. This juxtaposition of scenes requires a careful arrangement on the surface, necessitating the use of a variety of patterns and bounding elements. These patterns act as framing elements and differ depending on whether they are located on the lid or the box.

1. Floral patterns

Floral patterns play a decisive role in the design of the lids and mummy boards, especially in the upper section, where, as a rule, they are used in headbands, in the binding bands of the lappets, and, naturally, in the floral collars. Some of these motifs allude to symbolic floral ornaments meant to be used by the deceased in the afterlife, such as headbands or binding bands, while others were meant to be displayed over the mummy itself, such as the floral collars.

When displayed over the central partition of the lower section, floral elements allude to jewellery, rather than to the botanical ornaments themselves, as these floral ornaments are used abundantly in royal funerary pectorals.

A relatively large sample of floral patterns is used in the floral collars. Given the stylized nature of the floral motifs, the exact identification of the botanical

species used in these collars is uncertain. While comparisons with actual floral collars may help, this identification remains highly speculative.[1] Below, a provisional identification of the floral motifs is presented, with the primary aim being to acknowledge the different visual patterns rather than to identify them:

- **Nymphaea flowers and buds** – This motif is typically found in the decoration of the exterior band of the large collar,[2] but may also appear in the ornamental bands of the lower section (central partition: Figs. 2.57/2.60/2.63). Many variations of this pattern are possible, often combining nymphaea flowers (*Nymphaea Coerula*, blue nymphaea) with other motifs such as nymphaea buds,[3] poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*),[4] represented as red triangular petals with a black dot, and cornflowers (*centaurea depressa*), depicted as blue bell-shaped motifs (Fig. 1.1).[5] Yellow circular motifs representing acacia flowers (*Acacia nilotica*) are also frequently found in this context (Fig. 1.1).[6] Composite patterns are formed by intertwining two secondary motifs: such as nymphaea flowers with rosettes (*Chrysanthemum* or *Chamomilla*)[7] or mandrake flowers (*Mandragora officinarum*), which display large multi-coloured petals (Fig. 1.1).[8] The association of nymphaea flowers with the 'reed' motif [9] is exceptional.

1 A rich collection of floral collars was found in KV 63, an embalmer's cache, clearly associated with the embalming process. See Sousa 2014b, 197-203. See also the collar from pit 54, where blue faience beads are sewn onto papyrus backing (Reeves 1990, 39).
2 Note that, exceptionally, the outer band may be decorated with other patterns, such as lotus petals (A.105: outer coffin of Userhat. A.54: anonymous mummy board), persea tree fruits (A.123: inner coffin of Direpu), sticks (Los Angeles County Museum of Art: mummy board) and 'reeds' (TT 320: inner coffin of Asetemkhebit).
3 A.74: anonymous inner coffin.
4 TT 320: mummy board of Pinedjem II. TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret. A.29: anonymous mummy board. A.68: coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub. Leeds City Museum: coffin set of Nesiamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Henuttaui. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin. Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
5 See Jacquat, Rogger 2013, 87.
6 These motifs are large circles painted yellow or orange. A.2: mummy board of Tauseretempernesu. A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti. A.54: anonymous inner coffin. A.102: outer coffin of Haes. A.110: mummy board of Djedmutiuesankh. A.142: mummy board of Nesipernub.
7 Van Walsem 1997, 116. These motifs are better depicted in the proto-yellow corpus. See TT 1: coffin of Tamaket and inner coffin of Khonsu. In the yellow corpus see A.74: Anonymous outer and inner coffin.
8 A.33: coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.53: outer coffin of Tantdjehuti.
9 Attested in a single object: British Museum: anonymous coffin.

- **Olive leaves** – Small, pearl-shaped and green, these motifs are frequently found in the short collar between the lappets.[10]
- **Nymphaea petals** – Multi-coloured (white, blue and green) nymphaea petals form the simplest and most common floral pattern, widely used in headbands and floral collars (Fig. 1.3).[11]
- **Mandrake fruits** – Mandrake fruits (*Mandragora officinarum*) feature on collars as early as the Ramesside period.[12] By the 21st Dynasty, these motifs had significantly reduced in size, resembling a red circle with a small black dot (Fig. 1.3).[13]
- **Mandrake flowers** – Dark petals[14] are often combined with motifs resembling mandrake fruits, forming a pearl-beaded design (Fig. 1.3).[15]
- **Persea tree buds** – This is a very common pattern in floral collars, particularly from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards. It is composed of small buds topped with rounded protuberances (*Mimusops Schimperi*).[16] The buds are multi-coloured typically presenting three transversal sections (Fig. 1.3).[17] This pattern tends to be heavily stylized becoming simpler and often intertwined with leaves, possibly from olive trees (Fig. 1.3), while in other cases it is displayed as a single motif. In later

10 Floral garlands found in the tomb of Tutankhamun were composed of olive leaves, cornflowers and nymphaea petals (Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2022, 287).
11 A.52: inner coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
12 TT 1: coffin set of Sennedjem and coffin of Tamaket.
13 A.12: mummy board of Nesipanebimakh. A.27: anonymous mummy board. A.47: coffin of Tenetpenheruenefer. A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui. Leeds City Museum: coffin set of Nesiamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: mummy board of Herytubekhet. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin set. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Amenhotep. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Mutemperamun.
14 A.12: mummy board of Nesipanebimakh. A.27: anonymous mummy board. A.47: coffin of Tenetpenheruenefer. A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin set. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Amenhotep. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Mutemperamun.
15 Leeds City Museum: coffin set of Nesiamun.
16 Van Walsem 1997, 116. TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret and inner coffin of Asetemkhebit. A2: mummy board of Tauseretempernesu. A.52: inner coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.74: anonymous inner coffin. A.123: inner coffin of Direpu. A.142: outer coffin and mummy board of Nesipernub. A.149: anonymous outer coffin. Leeds City Museum: mummy board of Nesiamun. Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: mummy board of Herytubekhet.
17 TT 320: mummy board of Pinedjem II. A.27: anonymous mummy board. A.68: coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin set Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Henuttaui. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Amenhotep.

coffins, this pattern is often repeated across most bands of the floral collar, forming grand yet repetitive arrangements.

- **Buds on reeds** – Composed of vertical buds positioned at regular interval, the background of the floral collar, i.e., the reeds to which the floral motifs are attached, is visible between them. This pattern became common from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards (Fig. 1.3).[18]
- **Chequerboard pattern** – This motif consists of small squares painted in alternating colours (green, black, red or white).[19] These patterns evoke the funerary coverings made from organic materials, such as papyrus or reeds (Fig. 1.3). The dots in the rectangles suggest the holes of the fastening strings, while the vertical and horizontal lines mark the edges and ribs of individual stems, with strings crossing them.[20] This pattern is typically found during the latter half of the 21st Dynasty.
- **Geometrical motifs** – Triangles[21] or circles[22] frequently adorn the bands, and these motifs often appear together.[23] They replicate the folded leaves commonly found in real floral collars (Fig. 1.3).[24]
- **Crown of justification** – Geometrical patterns are often depicted over the headdress, typically consisting of squares or rectangles (Fig. 1.3), occasionally decorated with a circle or a flower (Fig. 1.3).
- **Leaves and pendeloques** – This pattern alternates between a large pointed leaf-like motif and a bell-shaped design reminiscent of the leather pendeloques used in contemporary mummies (Fig. 1.3). This

18 TT 320: inner coffin of Asetemkhebit. A.33: coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.102: outer coffin of Haes. A.110: coffin set of Djedmutiuesankh. A.142: anonymous outer coffin. British Museum: anonymous coffin.
19 A.2: mummy board of Tauseretempernesu. A.52: inner coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.110: coffin. A.123: inner coffin of Direpu. A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare. A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
20 Van Walsem 1997, 116. A.123: inner coffin of Direpu.
21 TT 320: mummy board of Pinedjem II. Metropolitan Museum of Art: mummy board of Henuttaui. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
22 A.123: inner coffin of Direpu.
23 TT 320: mummy board of Tauheret. A.20: anonymous mummy board. A.68: coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin set of Amenhotep. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin set. Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat.Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu.
24 Floral collars actually included faience beads (Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2022, 287).

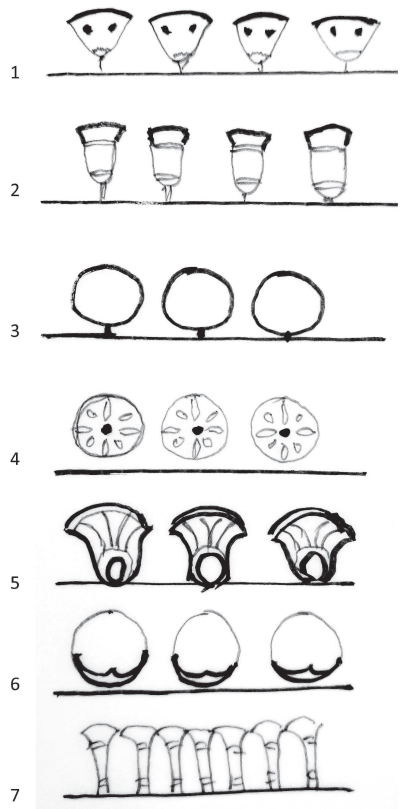


Fig. 1.1. Flowers patterns used in the yellow corpus.
(1) Poppy flowers
(2) Cornflowers
(3) Acacia flowers
(4) Rosettes
(5) Mandrake flowers
(6) Mandrake fruits
(7) Persea tree buds

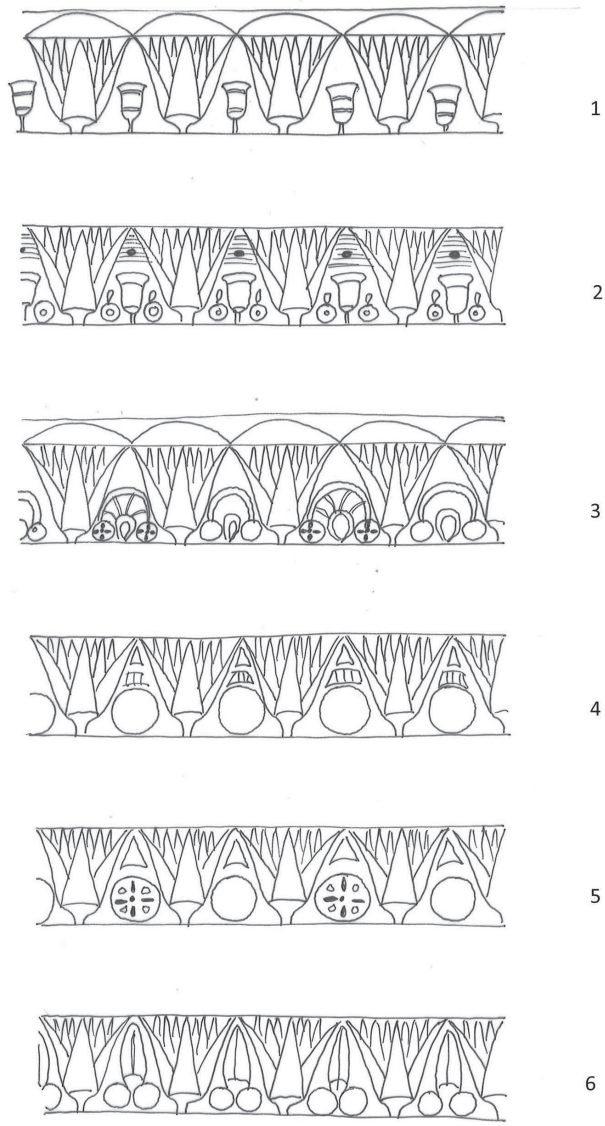


Fig. 1.2. Patterns with nymphaea flowers.
(1) Nymphaea flowers intertwined with cornflowers
(2) Nymphaea flowers intertwined with cornflowers and acacia flowers
(3) Nymphaea flowers intertwined with mandrake flowers, acacia flowers and rosettes
(4) Nymphaea flowers intertwined with acacia flowers
(5) Nymphaea flowers intertwined with rosettes and acacia flowers
(6) Nymphaea flowers intertwined with nymphaea buds and acacia flowers

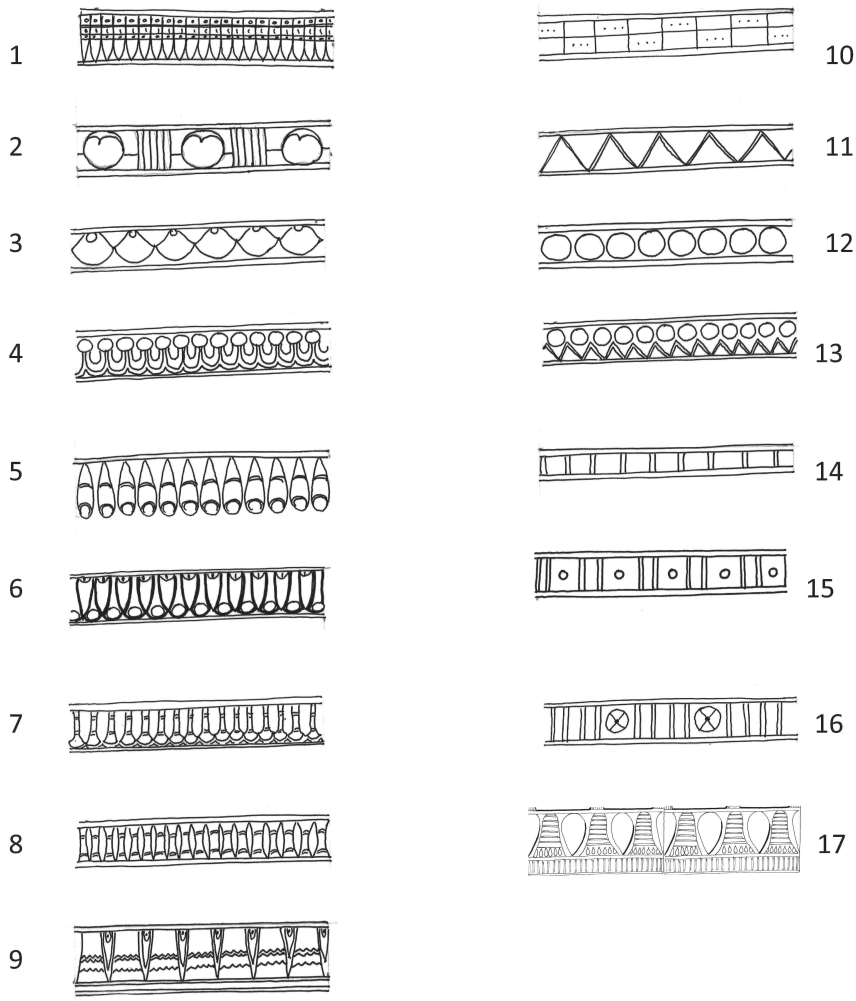


Fig. 1.3. Patterns with floral and geometric motifs identified in the 'crown of justification' and in the floral collars.

(1) Lotus petals
(2) Mandrake fruits
(3) Mandrake fruits
(4) Stylized mandrake flowers
(5) Persea tree buds
(6) Persea tree buds and petals
(7) Persea tree buds
(8) Persea tree buds
(9) Buds on reeds
(10) Chequered pattern
(11) Geometrical patterns
(12) Geometrical patterns
(12) Geometrical patterns
(14) Crown of justification
(15) Crown of justification
(16) Crown of justification
(17) Pendeloques and leaves

pattern is consistently associated with the ornamental bands of the lower section of the lid (central partition: Figs. 2.55, 2.56, 2.58, 2.59, 2.61).

These patterns are differently combined when forming the large floral collars that cover the torso of the deceased. Actual floral collars were composed in a similar way. For example, in the tomb of Tutankhamun, a floral collar was found composed of nine rows sewn on papyrus backing combining blue faience beads and plants, such as date palm fronds and winter-cherry fruits (*Withania somnifera*), willow leaves (*Salix*), pomegranate (*Punica granatum*), blue nymphae petals (*Nymphaea caerulea*), cornflowers (*Centaurea depressa*), and fruits.[25]

2. Hieroglyphic friezes

Ornamental friezes displaying hieroglyphic signs are often integrated into the layout of the lids and boxes.

Alternating Djed and Tjet friezes

The most common composition of these bands involves alternating Djed and Tjet-signs, a frieze frequently found in architectural contexts.

On the lids and mummy boards, this frieze, featuring intertwined Djed and Tjet-signs, is used in the lower section of the lid, particularly in the ornamental bands that frame the registers of the central partition (Fig. 1.4).

On the exterior walls of the box, this frieze is exceptionally associated with the decoration of the upper edge. In this context, it is not used independently, but rather associated with the cobra and feather frieze (Fig. 1.8).[26] Very rarely,

25 Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2022, 288.
26 A.26: outer coffin usurped from Ankh-khenesu.

this frieze is also found decorating the lower edge of the box.[27] The large amount of space required for this frieze likely restricted its use, keeping it relatively rare.[28]

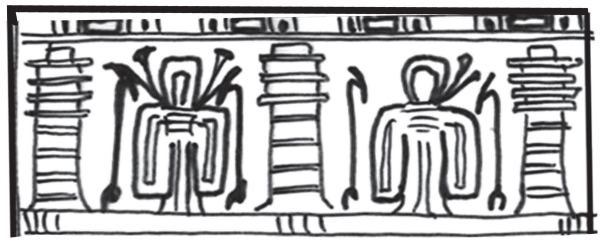


Fig. 1.4. Ornamental frieze with alternating Djed, Tjet and Was-signs. Coffin of Nesipanebimakh (A.12).

3. Text bands

Lids and mummy boards

Text bands play a key role in organising the decorative space on the lids and mummy boards. Their usage is quite flexible, often varying significantly from one object to another.

On the lids and mummy boards, the arrangement of text bands is primarily linked to the layout of the lower section:

– In the basic scheme, the principal text bands run down the centre of the lid, usually grouped into three columns of text (Fig. 1.5). The vignettes on the lateral partitions of the lower section are framed by transversal text bands. Earlier coffins present the texts of these transversal text bands aligned with the box. Typically, the edges of the lids are bordered by longitudinal text bands. The direction of writing of these inscriptions is also aligned with the box. On mummy boards, this feature is typically absent, with block-friezes displayed instead.

27 A.52: inner coffin of Shedkhonsu.
28 A.26: outer coffin of Nesiniutitaui.

- In the classical scheme, the central partition of the lower section is usually flanked by text bands. Transversal text bands continue to frame the vignettes over the lateral partitions and the edges continue to display longitudinal text bands. However, the direction of writing of all these inscriptions now aligns with the longitudinal axis of the lid (Fig. 1.5).
- In the complex scheme, the use of the text bands displays considerable variation, particularly when the central section extends down to the footboard, inscriptions may almost disappear entirely (Fig. 1.5). If the lower section is preserved, the layout of the text bands becomes highly unstable, with transversal bands becoming shorter or even entirely omitted. The footboard gains importance as a primary location for inscriptions, with its central partition exclusively used for this purpose.

In general, text bands are yellow with multi-coloured inscriptions, outlined in red, and with details painted in blue and green. By the late 21st Dynasty, especially on the lids, text bands often feature a dark background, over which inscriptions are outlined in yellow. Block friezes sometimes flank the text bands, and may occasionally take the form of the so-called 'chain-motif' (Fig. 2.67).[29]

Boxes

The exterior walls of the boxes are often adorned with a large repertoire of scenes, requiring framing elements to contain them within clearly defined spatial limits.

Typically, these vignettes are contained within columns of text, usually grouped in pairs. The role and significance of these text columns in the global economy of the decorative space of the box evolved considerably, providing useful dating criteria for coffins, although not in absolute terms.

29 A.123: inner coffin of Direpu. This motif will play a key role in the stola corpus (Van Walsem 2017).

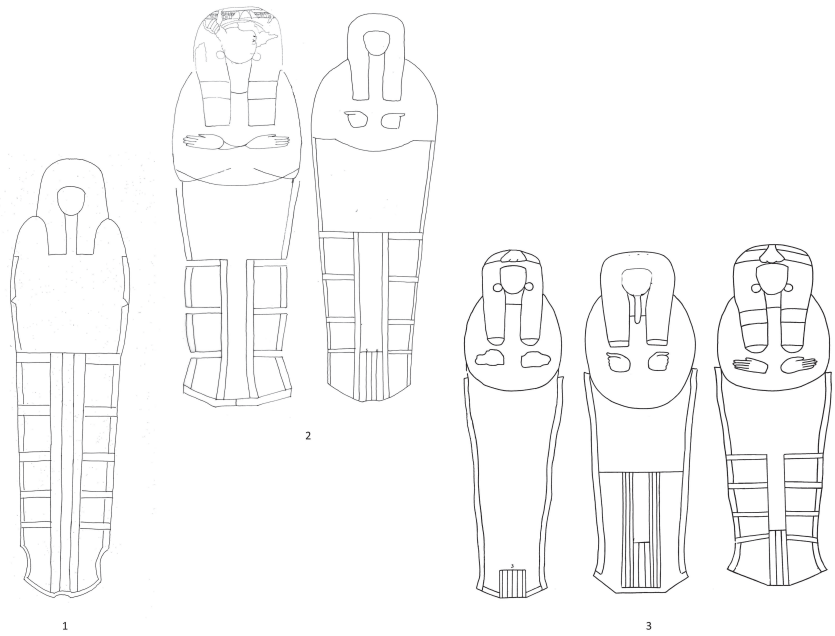


Fig. 1.5. Layouts of the text bands on lids: Basic scheme (1), Classical scheme (2), Complex scheme (3).

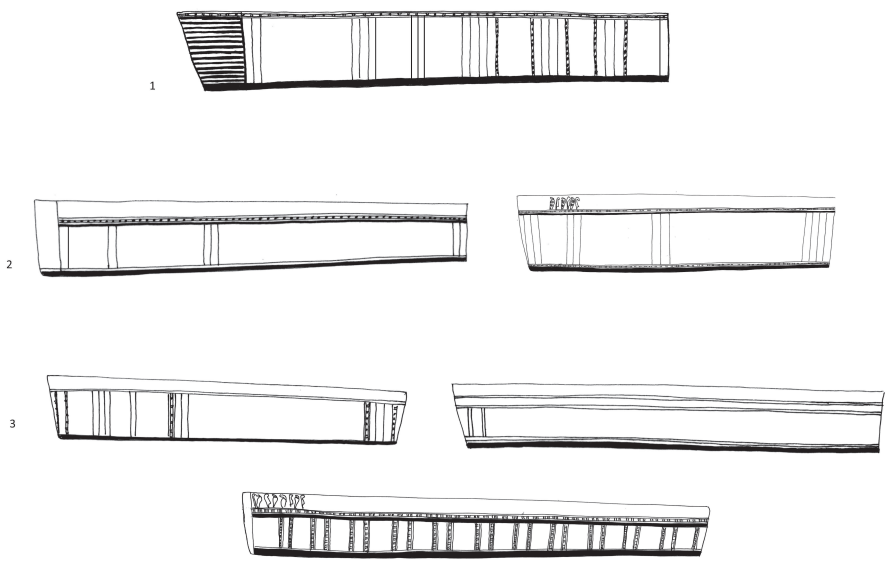


Fig. 1.6. Layouts of the text bands on boxes: Basic scheme (1), Classical scheme (2), Complex scheme (3).

- In the basic scheme, the vignettes displayed on the box are smaller in size, resulting in a higher overall number, which in turn requires a greater number of text columns (Fig. 1.6).
- In the classical scheme, as the vignettes increase in size, the number of text columns displayed along the box decreases (Fig. 1.6).
- In the complex scheme, the vignettes may increase to fully cover the lower section, or even extend along the full length of the sides (Fig. 1.6). This naturally leads to a drastic reduction in the number of text columns. In low elite coffins, even when text bands are abundantly used, the inscriptions tend to be increasingly deprived of a meaningful structure, often becoming random. Block-friezes tend to be added to the text columns.

4. Limits and edges

Ornamental friezes play a highly important role in the boxes, where a wide variety of patterns can be found.

Upper edge

In the earliest yellow coffins, most of which date from the late 20th Dynasty, no decorative band is displayed along the upper edge.[30] The absence of such a decorative frieze can be taken as a relatively reliable dating criterion for early coffins.[31] However, this criterion should always be applied with caution, as coffins following the classical scheme may also display this feature, albeit rarely.[32]

30 A.9: Coffin of Nesitanebetaui. A.19: coffin of Taiuheret. Leeds City Museum: Coffin of Nesiamun. Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich: coffin of Heritubekhet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui, coffin of Iotefamun and coffin of Anresenmes. Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna: coffin of Susawerkhonsu.
31 Sousa 2022, 441.
32 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut.

Block frieze

The first observed attempts to decorate the upper edge involved the introduction of a block frieze, usually accompanied by a thick black line running parallel to it.[33] This feature is consistently associated with boxes designed in the basic scheme and it can be used as a sound dating criterion. Block friezes remained in use throughout the 21st Dynasty, though they were often combined with other elements described below.

Band of inscriptions

The block frieze was soon associated with a longitudinal band of text running along the upper edge of the box. This text band appears above the block frieze,[34] and in later objects may be flanked by block friezes on both sides.[35]

In earlier objects, the texts extend from the upper section down to the footboard,[36] but it soon became standard practice for the inscriptions to also extend to the headboard. In this layout, the text bands meet at the centre of the headboard where an ornamental hieroglyphic composition is placed. This nuclear composition normally consists simply of an *ankh*-sign,[37] or a Djed-pilar (Fig. 1.7).[38] Alternatively, more elaborate compositions may include several hieroglyphs, such as:

- An *ankh*-sign flanked by a *was* and *wedjat*-sign (Fig. 1.7);
- An *ankh*-sign flanked by *nefer* and *wedjat*-signs (Fig. 1.7);[39]
- A Tjet-sign flanked by Djed-signs (Fig. 1.7).[40]

Text bands are frequently employed in the basic scheme, and continue to appear in the classical scheme throughout the first half of the 21st Dynasty. In the

33 A.46: outer coffin of Senu. Antikmuseet in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety. Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Tanetheret. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Pahereniset.
34 A.13: coffin of Ruru. A.111: outer coffin of Mashasekebt. A.114: outer coffin of Padiamun. Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Sutimes.
35 A.11: coffin of Paennesittaui. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Louvre Museum: Outer coffin of Paser. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun.
36 A.11: coffin of Paennesittaui. A.111: outer coffin of Mashasekebt. A.114: outer coffin of Padiamun.
37 A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer. A.unknown: outer coffin of Ikhy (Vatican Museums). Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny.Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori.
38 A.15: outer coffin of Djedmutiuesankh.
39 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
40 A.83: outer coffin of Djedkhonsuiuesankh.

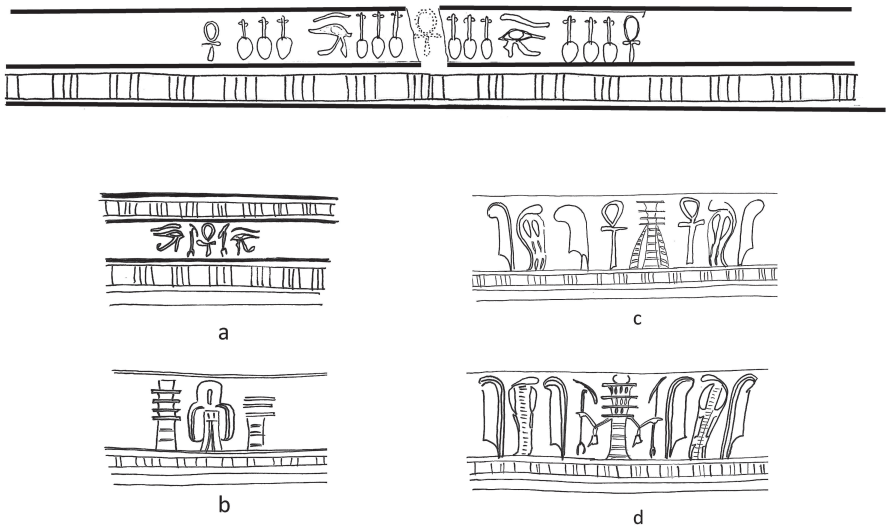


Fig.1.7. Ornamental hieroglyphs (Headboard of the box).
Upper frieze: coffin of Shedsutauepet (A.110)
a) Outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet (Brooklyn Museum).
b) Outer coffin of Djedkhonsuiuesankh (A.83).
c) Inner coffin of Khonsumes (A.121).
d)Inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet (A.120).

complex scheme, these bands are commonly found in association with coffins where inscriptions play an important role in the overall decorative scheme of the object.

Cobra and feathers frieze

The frieze of alternating cobras and *maat*-feathers was introduced in the late 20th Dynasty[41] and used throughout the 21st Dynasty, making it the most distinctive ornamental frieze used on the box.

In the earliest coffins, this frieze is interrupted at the headboard,[42] but it was later extended along the entire length of the upper edge.[43] In Theban

41 A.41: anonymous coffin. A.131: Anonymous inner coffin. British Museum: anonymous coffin (EA 24907).
42 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Nauny. A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. A.150: Outer box of Djedmutiesankh.
43 A.121: Outer coffin of Khonsumes. TT 320: Outer coffin of Tauheret.

workshops, these elements always face the headboard, meeting at its centre, ornamental hieroglyphs are used as a focal element of both friezes. This is particularly common in the cobra and feather frieze. An *ankh*-sign, or the Djed-pilar[44] are the most frequent motifs, but other compositions may also appear, such as:

- A Djed-pillar with human arms holding *was*-signs (Fig. 1.7).[45]
- A Djed-pillar flanked by *ankh*-signs (Fig. 1.7).[46]

Variations of this frieze were produced by introducing subtle changes, such as adding solar disks either to the cobras,[47] or even to the feathers.[48] More elaborate versions of the frieze show the feather as an attribute of a falcon-deity, possibly the avian manifestation of the god Ptah-Sokar (Fig. 1.8).[49]

In the Book of the Dead, this frieze is used as an attribute of the Hall of the Two Maats, represented as a shrine or chapel where the judgement of the dead takes place. In these vignettes, the frieze is displayed along the roof, supported by columns, showing *maat*-feathers and uraeus cobras, sometimes alternating with hieroglyphic signs for 'fire'. This frieze is used to repel the unrighteous, and its depiction may be a graphic rendering of the textual description of the hall itself, which is said to have walls of living uraei and a ceiling of fire.[50] Such a frieze is already present in the decoration of Ramesside sarcophagi.[51]

The significance of this frieze is thus closely related to protecting the coffin as a sacred space, defining it as a place of righteousness and justice. Sometimes, the frieze excludes the *maat*-feathers and only features cobras.[52] This version appears to be associated with high elite sets and tends to be found in inner boxes.[53] It is

44 A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui. A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh. Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels: outer coffin. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Khonsumose.
45 A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet.
46 A.121: coffin of Khonsumes.
47 TT 320: outer coffin of Nesikhonsu.
48 A.52: inner coffin of Shedkhonsu. Van Walsem 2014, 22.
49 A.52: inner coffin of Shedkhonsu.
50 Taylor 2010, 215.
51 Sarcophagus of Pashed from TT 3 in Deir el-Medina (Bettum 2012, 219).
52 TT 320: inner coffin of Masaharta. A.30: outer coffin of Shedsuamun. A.38: inner coffin of Ankhsenmut. A.105: inner coffin of Userhat. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Tabakenkhonsu.
53 TT 320: inner coffin of Masaharta. A.38: Inner coffin of Ankhsenmut. A.105: inner coffin of Userhat. A.151: inner box of Tjanefer. Fitzwilliam Museum: inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.

possible that this layout might have had its own significance, potentially viewed as offering enhanced protection of the sacred space. However, its use in outer coffins is rarely attested.[54]

Eventually the cobra and feather friezes were combined with longitudinal text bands. As usual, a variety of designs was possible. Typically, the cobra and feather frieze is displayed above the band of inscriptions, with a block frieze running between them,[55] or flanking the inscription on both sides. Combined, these elements can cover a considerable portion of the coffin, reaching up to one third of the total height of the wall. This layout is consistently associated with the complex scheme, thus in objects dating from the second half of the 21st Dynasty, and is also present in archaizing objects.

Exceptional friezes

Some friezes are rarely found and appear to have been short-lived experiences, typically associated with the complex scheme and therefore dating from the late 21st Dynasty.

The following motifs can be observed:

- Cobras, falcons and *was*-signs (Fig. 1.8).[56] This frieze may have been used as a more elaborate version of the cobra and feather frieze, as the falcon is sometimes represented with a feather at its feet. This frieze can be combined with the band of inscriptions and the customary block frieze.
- Mummiform squatted gods grasping a feather (Fig. 1.8).[57] This is a highly elaborate version of the feather and cobra frieze. The complexity is further enhanced by a vast repertoire of deities, often animal-headed, reminiscent of the Litany of Re.
- Apophis pierced by knives. This motif is exceptionally found as a replacement for the text band running along the upper edge of the box

54 A.30: outer coffin of Shedsuamun.
55 A.6: inner coffin of Nesitanebettaui. A.10: outer coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.91: outer coffin of Tadimut.
56 A.55: inner coffin of Pinedjem. A.52: inner coffin of Shedkhonsu.
57 A.16: outer coffin of Ankhefenmut.

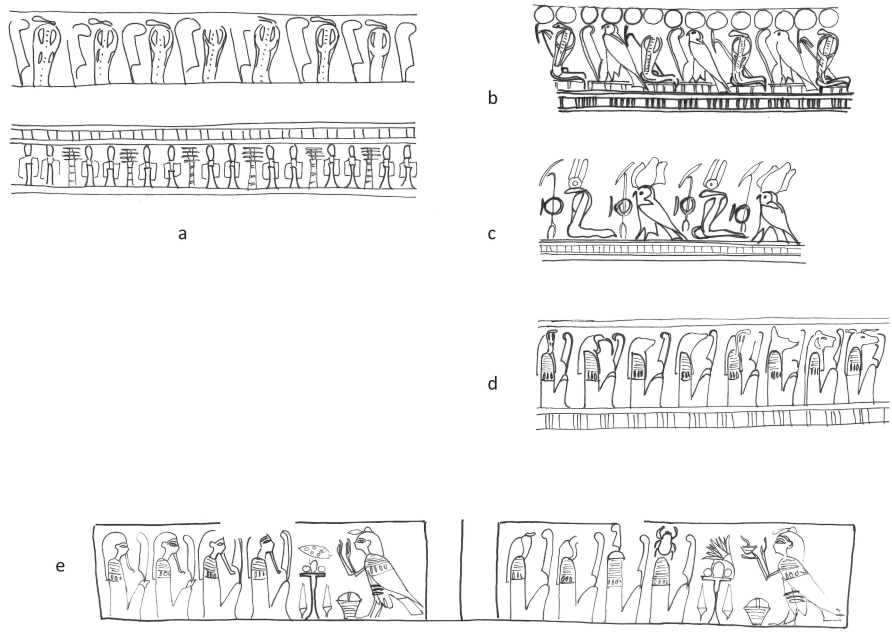


Fig. 1.8. Exceptional friezes (Upper edge of the box).
a) Triple frieze with a cobra and feather frieze, a text band and a frieze with alternating Djed and Tjet-signs. Outer coffin of Nesiniutitaui (A.26).
b) Frieze with alternating cobras and falcons. Inner coffin of Shedkhonsu (A.52).
c) Inner coffin of Pinedjem (A.55).
d) Frieze with mummiform gods. Outer coffin of Ankhefenmut (A.16).
e) Frieze with mummiform gods. Coffin of Khonsumes (Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne in Marseille).

and is employed in conjunction with the feather and cobra frieze.[58] This motif clearly shows its defensive purpose.

– Secondary registers used as friezes (Fig. 1.9). Relatively large scenes can be repeatedly depicted along a secondary register, forming highly elaborate friezes. This exceptional feature is found in high elite coffins. Some examples are listed below:

58 Niwiński 2021, 371 (Fig. 17).

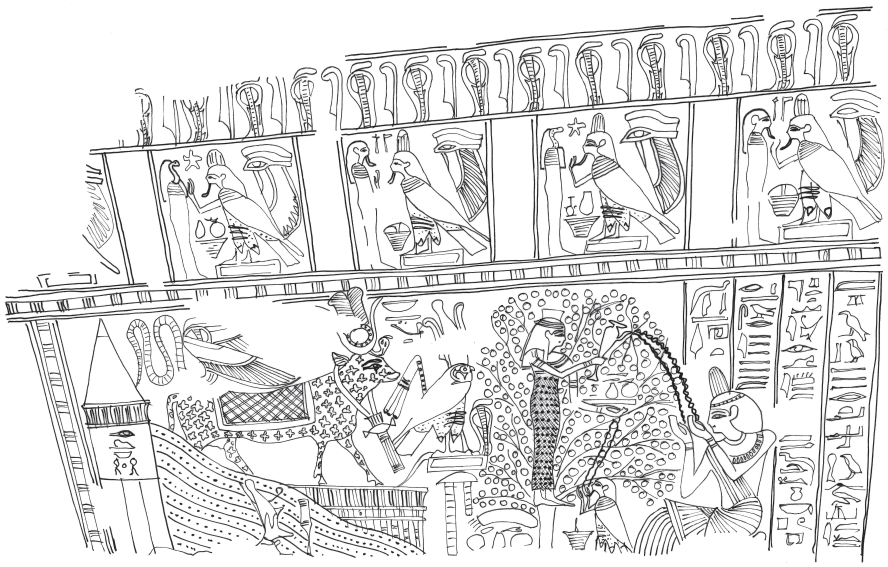


Fig. 1.9. Secondary register arranged as a frieze. Coffin of Amenemhat (Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid).

- The earliest of such friezes is found in the exceptional set of Sutimes, now housed in the Louvre Museum.[59] The outer box is entirely designed with a double register, where the lower one displays a variety of small vignettes, each showing a standing mummiform deity, a layout visibly borrowed from the Litany of Re. The upper register is secondary, featuring an exceptional design where the deceased is repeatedly depicted before a succession of deities in sphinx form. The repetition of the scenes suggests that this register was designed as a frieze, one that was exceptionally elaborated and enlarged.
- Another highly developed ornamental frieze is found in the coffin of Amenemhat, housed in the Museo Arqueologico in Madrid. In this example, the upper register resembles the layout of Sutimes' coffin,

59 The ensembles of Sutimes in Paris and Seramun in Besancon, coinciding approximately with the reign of Psusennes I in Tanis and the pontificate of his brother Menkheperre in Thebes, show the Litany of Re. Bettum 2012, 212.

showing the repeated representation of the deceased portrayed before underworld deities. However, instead of sphinxes, the deceased is depicted as an avian manifestation adoring a standing mummiform god, who is alternately shown as a serpent-headed deity or a fully human god. From a formal point of view, this upper register acts again as a figurative frieze, running parallel to the usual cobra and feather frieze. Like Sutimes' coffin, this is also an object designed for the highest elite.

- Perhaps from the same period, the coffin of Khonsumes, housed in the Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne in Marseille, exhibits a similar layout. The lower register follows the classical scheme, while the upper register functions as a larger decorative frieze, featuring several vignettes along the upper edge. Each of these vignettes shows the *ba*-bird of the deceased adoring groups of squatted mummiform gods.

Boxes: Lower edge

Contrary to the upper edge of the box, the design of the lower edge remained relatively stable. In the majority of cases, the only decoration in this area is a thick black band,[60] which is almost universally found in boxes from all periods.

Block frieze

Another common feature in this area is the block frieze often displayed above the black band.[61] It appears in the basic scheme, and continues to be used throughout.

60 Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich: coffin of Heritubekhet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes.

61 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. A.11: coffin of Paennesittaui. A.111: outer coffin of Mashasekebt.

Band of inscriptions

By the late 21st Dynasty, another band of inscriptions is sometimes associated with the black band running along the lower edge.[62] This text band may be flanked on both sides by block-friezes.[63] This feature can be found, albeit rarely, in archaizing objects.

Boxes: thicknesses

The thicknesses of the box walls may be plain or double, the latter meaning the width is divided into two, creating a stepped surface where one part is slightly higher than the other, functioning as part of a mechanism to lock the lid in place.

These thicknesses of the boxes are typically painted yellow, indicating an exterior space, while the interior of the box is usually painted red.

In the highest elite coffins dating from the early 21st Dynasty, the thicknesses are exceptionally inscribed with text bands,[64] seemingly to create a protective ring around the interior space of the box.

5. Commentary

On the box, the frieze of uraei and *maat*-feathers stands out as the most important ornamental element. It appears to have been borrowed from the vignettes of Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead, where the motif is often associated with the decoration of the Hall of the Two Maat.[65] This frieze is an intrinsic architectural feature, converting the exterior walls of the box into a magical space closely linked to the divine manifestation of the deceased as a *maa-kheru*, a justified god.

Moreover, all the ornamental elements displayed along the upper edge of the box seem to have been used with the magical purpose of protecting the

62 A.6: outer coffin of Nesitanebettaui. A.28: inner coffin of Padiuamun. A.55: outer coffin of Pinedjem. A.40: outer coffin of Bakenmut. A.56: anonymous outer coffin. A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
63 A.133: outer box of Heretenureb.
64 TT 320: inner coffin set of Tauheret. Louvre Museum: coffin set of Sutimes.
65 Van Walsem 2014, 19.

interior space. During the first half of the 21st Dynasty, block friezes, inscriptions and other decorative friezes were often applied to the interior walls of the box.[66] The increasing use and importance of these same features on the exterior walls, coupled with their removal from the interior, suggests that the defensive role of these elements was transferred to the exterior of the coffin. The growing prominence of these decorative elements appears to aim at enhancing the identification of the coffin as a sacred space.

The cumulative addition of ornamental elements on both the upper and lower edges significantly reduced the space available for the main scenes. The result is an increasing resemblance of the box to a temple wall.

Conversely, the role of the text bands diminishes considerably throughout the 21st Dynasty, both on the lids and boxes. Since many of these inscriptions refer to the performance of rituals, the role of the coffin as a ritual interface seems to have been greatly diminished.

In contrast, floral patterns became increasingly valued throughout the 21st Dynasty, particularly in the upper section of the lid, where they were used to cover the deceased and symbolise his/her connection to the realm of the Duat.

66 TT 320: inner coffin set of Tauheret. A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun. A.144: inner coffin of Tawedjatre. Fitzwilliam Museum: inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt. Louvre Museum: coffin set of Sutimes. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Butehamun.

CHAPTER II

Lid: design and layout

Lids and mummy boards share a similar layout, although the latter are typically designed as simplified versions of the former. The design of both categories of objects is heavily determined by the juxtaposition of several compositions. The primary design of these objects is shaped by the depiction of the deceased, which has its roots in the late Ramesside mummy boards that illustrate the living manifestation of the deceased rising from the mummy wrappings (Fig. 7.11).[1] In these objects, the deceased is shown with the forearms crossed over the chest, wearing festive garments, while the lower part of the object is shaped as a mummy. By the mid-21st Dynasty, the forearms became hidden, suggesting a complete association of the deceased with the deities of the underworld.

Overlaying this basic form, three distinct compositions are juxtaposed on these objects, each referring to particular cosmic settings (Fig. I): the central section, the lower section and the footboard. The final layout of the lid is determined by the manner in which these several sections are combined.

1 In these objects the deceased is featured by blending two images: the torso shows the deceased in ceremonial garments while the lower part suggests an identification with a *sah*, a mummiform god. These objects derive from the full-length depiction of the deceased as a living being, observed in the Ramesside corpus of anthropoid coffins (Sousa 2024).

1. Upper section

The upper section displays the primary depiction of the deceased, showing the head and torso. This section includes two main types of representations: those related to bodily elements, and those associated with ritual objects.[2]

Bodily elements

Face

The faces are painted yellow,[3] although the occasional use of gold can be detected, particularly in burials of the highest elite. Gold is used to depict the deceased as an illuminated god, radiating sunlight from his own body. With few exceptions,[4] most gilded coffins have been plundered in Antiquity, resulting in the faces being ripped out.[5] Occasionally, the skin is depicted in red, a feature reminiscent of the colour scheme used in the Ramesside 'festive dress' style.[6]

The eyes are carved but the use of inlaid-stone eyes is exceptional.[7] Cosmetic lines are painted black, as are the eyebrows. The iris is painted black, against a white,[8] or yellow background. It is noteworthy that sometimes the eyes are painted without regard for the previous sculptural work, a feature often found in later objects.[9]

An interesting feature of the yellow corpus is the depiction of anatomical details with a red outline. This is particularly common in the following details:

– The eyelid is suggested by a thin red line traced between the eye and the eyebrow (Fig. 2.11).[10]

2 Due to the specific features of this section, we have chosen not to follow the standard approach adopted in the subsequent sections of the lid, which are organised according to the stages of evolution of their overall layout. In the upper section, the variety of elements precludes such a holistic approach; therefore, our analysis focuses on addressing the variety of motifs separately, aiming to be as comprehensive as possible.
3 Few exceptions are known such as A.149 (anonymous outer coffin).
4 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta, outer coffin of Maatkare, and mummy board of Pinedjem II. A.143: coffin set of Hori. Louvre Museum: coffin set of Tamutneferet).
5 TT 320: coffin of Nedjemet, inner coffin of Masaharta, inner coffin and mummy board of Maatkare, and inner coffin and mummy board of Nesikhonsu. A.142: coffin set of Nesipernub. A.147: outer coffin and mummy board of Menkhepere. A.151: coffin set of Tjanefery.
6 August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of Hori. Louvre Museum: Mummy board of Panebmontu.
7 TT 320: coffin of Nedjemet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Tabakmut.
8 A.114: coffin set of Padiamun. A.115: inner coffin of Paharu.
9 A.4: anonymous coffin. A.27: anonymous mummy board.
10 A.27: anonymous mummy board. A.91: inner coffin of Taditumut. A.149: anonymous inner coffin.

- The nostrils are outlined in red, especially when the sculptural work is not deeply defined (Fig. 2.9).[11]
- The ears are depicted but only in male coffins. Regardless of the quality of the sculptural work, the anatomical details of the ears are always outlined in red.[12] Generally, the ears are shown as pierced (Fig. 2.8).
- The throat is typically decorated with a double horizontal line depicting creases (Fig. 2.12).[13] This feature may have been intended to signify aging.[14]
- The naturalistic rendering of the lips is exceptional[15]; in most objects, the lips are crudely carved[16] and summarily outlined in red.[17] Shadow effects are created with small circles painted at the corners of the mouth (Fig. 2.12).[18] Very rarely, the lips are decorated with a striped pattern in red, possibly to suggest the use of cosmetics.[19]

Female coffins feature polychrome domed earrings. Typically yellow or gilded, they are often adorned with rosettes (*Chrysanthemum* or *Chamomilla*) similar to those depicted on the breasts and floral collars, usually displaying seven or eight petals (Fig. 2.14). These earrings are crafted separately and attached to the headboard, although they are occasionally painted directly onto the flattened surface of the wig.[20]

Black straps painted along the face of male figures represent a short beard,[21] typically used in conjunction with a long curled divine beard (Figs. 2.15/19).[22]

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11 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui, and coffin of Anresenmes. A.19: mummy board of Taiuheret. Compare with coffin of Hori (Museo Egizio in Turin).
12 A.29: anonymous mummy board. A.68: lid and mummy board of Ankhefenmut.
13 Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Henuttaui. A.68: Lid and mummy board of Ankhefenmut. A.87: mummy board of Padiamun. A.93: coffin of Padiamun.
14 Van Walsem 2014b, 288-289. This feature was introduced during the reign of Amenhotep III.
15 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Tabakmut. A.87: mummy board of Padiamun. A.123: inner coffin of Direpu. A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
16 A.27: anonymous coffin set. A.97: inner coffin and mummy board of Horpeshi. Michael Carlos Museum: anonymous mummy board.
17 A.27: anonymous mummy board. A.47: coffin of Tenetpenheruenefer. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun.
18 A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
19 A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
20 Gasse 1996, pl. XXIII. This is often evidence of a reused coffin, as in A.22, a male coffin recycled for a female burial.
21 A.23: outer coffin of Nesipakaef. A.55: coffin set of Pinedjem. A.108: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
22 A.55: coffin set of Pinedjem. A.56: outer coffin of an anonymous man. A.131: outer anonymous coffin.

These beards are carved separately and attached to the chin. Occasionally, they are carefully decorated with incisions suggesting braiding motifs, [23] however, in most cases, this effect is achieved simply by outlining these features in yellow against a dark blue background.[24] Short square beards are used occasionally,[25] especially on mummy boards, reminiscent of the festive dress style.[26] Royal beards – long and square – are quite rare.[27]

Wig

Reflecting the progressive shift in the depiction of the deceased, there is a change in the design of the wig. During the late 20th Dynasty, wigs still exhibit the naturalistic appearance typical of the 'festive dress' type, with great attention paid to the braiding motifs, which are carefully moulded in plaster or carved in relief.[28] These wigs depict the deceased as a living being, resembling how they would appear in a sacred festival. Female coffins rarely display festive wigs,[29] while male coffins typically show the so-called ceremonial 'duplex' wig,[30] featuring two different braiding motifs.

Another trend eventually replaced the festive wig with the divine tripartite wig, which was still decorated with braiding motifs moulded in plaster (Fig. 2.8/11).[31] Stylised versions of this type of wig became increasingly common during the 21st Dynasty, often simply painted blue.

Gender markers are abundantly used to decorate the wig.[32] On male coffins (Fig. 2.8/12), the lappets display terminals (yellow or gold),[33] while geometrical

23 Museo Egizio in Turin: Inner coffin of Butehamun.
24 A.93: coffin of Padiamun. A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: Coffin.
25 Museo Egizio in Turin: Coffin of Hori.
26 TT 320: mummy board of Pinedjem II. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Khonsuhotep. Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna: mummy board Nesipaherentahat. See also Goff 1979, 92.
27 A.99: outer coffin of Padiamun.
28 Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet. Leeds City Museum: coffin set of Nesiamun. Louvre Museum: mummy board of Panebmontu.
29 TT 320: coffin set of Tauheret. The limited use of this feature in early yellow coffins stands in clear contrast to its abundant use in proto-yellow coffins, where women are consistently represented with long braided wigs.
30 Taylor 2001, 170.
31 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun. August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of Hori. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori. Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat.
32 Goff 1979, 92.
33 A.68: lid and mummy board of Ankhefenmut. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Yutefamun.

(Fig. 2.9-10) or floral bindings (Fig. 2.17) adorn the lappets of female coffins.[34] In exceptional cases, both features may be used together, usually by women of high-rank.[35] The floral bindings worn by women are decorated with the same patterns found in the collars and headbands and can serve as a dating criterion. These binding bands may consist of a single horizontal band (more common in earlier coffins), or several bands (more typical in later coffins). Very occasionally, they are embellished with elaborate vignettes[36] or even liminal elements, all signalling the end of the 21st Dynasty.[37]

Several types of wigs can be detected:

- **Braided wigs.** Braiding motifs carved in relief can still be found in the yellow corpus, usually associated with objects dating from the late 20th Dynasty. The occurrence of braided wigs during the 21st Dynasty is very rare, and is consistently associated with high elite burials (Fig. 2.8/11).[38]
- **Plain blue wigs.** This type is observed in both male and female coffins from the beginning of the 21st Dynasty onwards. Plain blue lappets (without bindings or terminals) are uncommon.[39] Female coffins may have further decoration, such as large tresses flanking the face (Figs. 2.9/24),[40] flowers (Figs. 5.1-2),[41] or a wavy pattern suggesting natural curls (Fig. 2.23).
- **Striped wigs.** Alternating black and yellow stripes are typically found in male coffins (Figs. 2.12/15-16/19). This pattern derives from earlier models dating back to the 18th Dynasty (the 'black' coffins). Yellow terminals and the so-called 'crown of justification' are consistently

34 TT 320: coffin set of Maatkare. A.52: coffin set of Butherkhonsu.
35 TT 320: inner coffin and mummy board of Asetemkhebit.
36 A.74: anonymous outer coffin.
37 Such as vultures, *shetyt*-shrines or scarabs. A.74: anonymous inner coffin.
38 TT 320: coffin of Nedjemet, coffin set of Maatkare, and coffin set of Tauheret. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori. Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu. Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat.
39 A.52: outer coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.54: anonymous coffin set. A.132: mummy board of Maatkare.
40 These motifs are reminiscent of the braided wigs. A.4: anonymous coffin. A.19: mummy board of Taiuheret. A.119: coffin set of Tjenetipet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
41 A.74: anonymous coffin set.

associated with this type of wig (Figs. 2.12/16,[42] but it is also possible to find objects without any form of headdress (Fig. 2.15).[43]

– **Chequered wigs.** This decoration consists of vertical stripes of alternating yellow and black squares (Fig. 2.14).[44] Typically found in female coffins dating from the second half of the 21st Dynasty, chequered headdresses appear to have evolved as a stylisation of golden hair rings encircling individual tresses.[45] When depicted in a naturalistic style, the rings are suggested with small yellow dots (Fig. 2.20).[46] Typically these wigs only feature a headband[47] and floral bindings are rarely used.

Hands

As in many other aspects, the depiction of hands changes slightly during the 21st Dynasty. In the first half of this period, the position of the hands is slightly raised, adopting a V-shape position together with the forearms (Figs. 2.8-10).[48] In later objects, the hands protrude through the floral collar and are arranged transversally (Figs. 2.16-24).[49]

The hands are usually painted yellow[50] or covered with gold foil. Gilded hands were systematically plundered, typically along with the face.[51] As a rule,

42 TT 320: outer coffin of Pinedjem II, outer coffin of Masaharta. A.95: coffin of Pameshem. A.114: coffin set of Padiamun. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Nesipanebu. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun.Kunsthistorishes Museum in Vienna: mummy board Nesipaherentahat.

43 A.33: coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.

44 Manley, Dodson 2010, 41.

45 An example of this type of hair ring can be found among the treasure of the Asiatic princesses who were married to Thutmose III. On the treasure of the three princesses, see Hayes 1959, 132-134.

46 A.27: anonymous mummy board. A.74: anonymous coffin set.

47 A.10: inner coffin and mummy board of Tabaekkhonsu. A.53: outer coffin of Tantdjehuti. A.91: outer coffin of Taditumut. A.102: Outer coffin of Haes.

48 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin and mummy board of Henuttaui, coffin of Anresenmes, and mummy board of Tabakmut. A.18: anonymous coffin. A.15: anonymous inner coffin. A.19: mummy board of Taiuheret.

49 A.5: anonymous coffin. A.12: mummy board of Nesipanebimakh. A.23: outer coffin of Nesipakaef. A.29: anonymous mummy board. A.149: anonymous outer coffin.

50 Only rarely is this rule broken, such as in the anonymous outer coffin of A.149.

51 TT 320: inner coffin and mummy board of Maatkare, inner coffin and mummy board of Masaharta, coffin set of Tauheret. A.133: inner coffin of Heretweben. A.142: coffin set of Nesipernub. A.147: mummy board of Menkhepere. A.151: coffin set of Tjanefery. Museum of Fine Arts in Boston: coffin of Henuttaui.

the hands are carved from wood and attached to the lid using pegs,[52] which makes them highly vulnerable. Careless handling of these objects in antiquity, particularly when coffins were stored on top of each other, as seen in the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, [53] often resulted in damage.

In the yellow corpus, clenched fists are a distinctly male attribute (Figs. 2.8/11/15-16/19). They refer to the hieroglyph D 49 (*ḫefa*) which expresses concepts relating to grasping and holding, but also alludes to action, creation, and latent creative power. The clenched hand is a distinctive feature of the *henu*-gesture of praise and rejoicing (A 8). In the Eleventh Hour of the Book of Gates, sacred baboons are depicted with clenched fists, illustrating the statement 'It is they who announce Re in the Eastern Horizon of Heaven. They announce this god who has created them with their arms.'[54] The gesture, thus, carries a solar significance associated with the praise of the sun at dawn.

Open hands are exclusively used on female coffins.[55] John Taylor suggests that this gesture can be associated with the ritual role of women as musicians. Indeed, open hands are depicted on ivory clappers, which had a strong apotropaic role. Open hands are also depicted in the gesture of adoration, known as *duá*.

This use of hands as gender markers is so significant that, even when the objects are hastily recycled for reuse, the hands are usually modified according to the gender of the new owner.[56] Only in rare cases is this rule deliberately broken, such as in the coffins of Maatkare,[57] the daughter of the High Priest Pinedjem I,

52 The hands are carved separately and then attached to the lid, a technique that remained in use until the beginning of the 22nd Dynasty. In earlier models, however, the hands were carved in relief, providing much greater stability to this feature. A.18: Anonymous mummy board. A.43: outer coffin of Nesipakashuti. Museo Egizio in Turin: Anonymous coffin.

53 Daressy 1907.

54 Wilkinson 1992, 55.

55 The use of hands as a gender marker gradually developed in the proto-yellow corpus of coffins. The earliest examples display a combination of fists and outstretched hands in female burials (Group A of the Ramesside corpus), while male burials feature open hands (Group B of the Ramesside corpus). See Sousa 2014, Plates 12-13.

56 The coffin set of Khonsumes (A.22) originally crafted for a man, was hastily repurposed for a female burial. The fists were removed from both the lid and the mummy board, and open hands were subsequently added to the latter. The inner coffin and mummy board of Padiamun (A.84) offer a remarkable example of a male coffin set equipped with open hands, which were introduced when the coffin set was recycled for a female burial.

57 TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare.

who held the title of God's Wife of Amun. In her coffins, gilded fists are shown as a bold statement of her unrivalled status as Divine Adoratrice of Amun.[58]

Occasionally, male clenched fists are used with attributes such as the Djed-pillar and the Tjet-sign, often playing a complementary role (the former in the right hand and the latter in the left).[59] In other coffins, the deceased grasps wooden replicas of a rolled-up document known as *imyet-per*, or 'title to property'.[60] These instances appear to carry social significance and are consistently associated with exceptional craftsmanship.[61] The deceased may also grasp other attributes, such as a *maat*-feather,[62] or the *ankh*-sign (Fig. 2.15).[63] All these symbols are typically carved in wood and are consistently linked with high elite burials. Even more exceptional is the depiction of iconographic motifs on the fists themselves,[64] suggesting a tattooed motif.[65]

Female hands tend to display a meticulous rendering of the fingers.[66] Particularly in earlier coffins, the fingers are outlined in red, with detailed anatomical features such as lines and nails,[67] which are sometimes painted in a contrasting colour.[68] As male hands usually conceal the fingers, rings are, of course, a common feature on female coffins. Generally, every finger is adorned with rings (sometimes two or even three per finger). The thumbs are usually left undecorated,[69] although any combination is possible, ranging from multiple rings on each finger (Fig. 2.10),[70] to the complete absence of rings (Fig. 2.17).[71]

58 For further information on Maatkare see Dodson 2012, 54-55.
59 TT 320: outer and inner coffin of Pinedjem II. August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of Hori. Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet. Louvre Museum: mummy board of Panebmontu. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Butehamun. It is also possible to find just one of these signs: A.115: inner coffin of Paharu. A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun.
60 Hayes 1953, 417-419. See also Van Walsem 1997, 120-121.
61 TT 320: coffin set of Maatkare. A.147: coffin set of Menkhepere.
62 Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Butehamun.
63 A.33: coffin set of Ankhefenkhonsu.
64 Fragment from a coffin (Fitzwilliam Museum, E.GA.2861.1943) see Dawson and Strudwick 2016, 193.
65 On ritual tattoos from the Ramesside period see Austin, Gobeil 2017.
66 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin and mummy board of Henuttaui.
67 Metropolitan Museum of Art: mummy board of Henuttaui. A.19: mummy board of Taiuheret.
68 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes. A.19: mummy board of Taiuheret.
69 A.19: coffin of Taiuheret. A.136: mummy board of Henuttaui. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin and mummy board of Henuttaui, and coffin of Anresenmes.
70 A.10: mummy board of Tabaekkhonsu. A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti. A.53: outer coffin of Tantdjehuti.
71 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Tanatnektahat. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu.

The use of such jewellery seems to represent the feminine equivalent of the attributes of power featured on male coffins.

Forearms

The full rendering of the forearms remains a distinctive feature of coffins dating from the late Ramesside period to the mid-21st Dynasty (Figs. 2.8-13). This feature is consistent with a naturalistic style of decoration. From the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, the floral collar increased in size, and the depiction of the forearms was progressively reduced[72] until it eventually disappeared behind the large floral collar (Fig. 2.24).[73]

The proper right forearm is always positioned above the left one, on both male and female coffins.[74] Typically, the decoration of the forearms includes the following motifs:

– **Large nymphaea flower over the elbows**. The use of the nymphaea flower at this location is one of the most distinctive features of the yellow corpus. The motif is entirely absent from objects of the Ramesside proto-yellow corpus, and first appears with the initial examples of the yellow type, indicating its strong identification with this emerging coffin style. Its significance, of course, parallels the use of the nymphaea flower over the forehead of the deceased. The positioning of the flower over the elbows irresistibly suggests the rising of the deceased from the primeval nymphaea flower, in full identification with Nefertum. Moreover, the placement of these flowers creates a triangle within which the living form of the deceased is contained. It should be noted that even when the depiction of the forearms diminished by the end of

72 TT 320: inner coffin of Pinedjem II. A.29: anonymous mummy board. A.53: outer coffin of Tantdjehuti. A.54: anonymous coffin set. A.109: outer coffin of Tjenetimentether A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui. A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub. A.149: outer coffin. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Amenhotep. Metropolitan Museum of Art: mummy board of Tabakmut.

73 A.4: anonymous coffin. A.5: anonymous coffin. A.12: mummy board of Nesipanebimakh. A.54: anonymous inner coffin. A.74: anonymous outer coffin. A.133: mummy board of Heretweben. British Museum: anonymous coffin (EA 24907). Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Tabakmut.

74 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. A.68: mummy board of Ankhefenmut. Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet. Leeds City Museum: coffin set of Nesiamun. Louvre Museum: coffin set of Sutimes, and coffin and mummy board of Panebmontu. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Henuttaui.

the 21st Dynasty, the flowers over the elbows were retained (Fig. 2.14-19). This feature likely mirrors the actual use of nymphaea flowers among the wrappings of 21st Dynasty mummies. Sometimes entire nymphaea plants, including the flower and stalk, were attached to the wrappings along the lower part of the body, as if the deceased were rising from these flowers.[75]

– **Plain yellow skin.** Occasionally, the forearms are simply painted yellow and varnished, vividly reproducing the shape of the deceased as a living being shimmering with 'gilded' light.[76]
– **Feathered patterns.** The feathered pattern is a subtle reminiscence of the *rishi*-coffins (Fig. 2.12). This motif alludes to the avian manifestation of the deceased as a *ba*-bird and is associated with divine power to go forth by day.[77]
– **Bracelets.** The following types of bracelets are evocative of actual funerary objects that were, at least in theory, commonly used in mummification:
    • Geometrical patterns. Bracelets with striped patterns have Osirian significance and are frequently featured in this context (Figs. 2.8-13).[78] Such bracelets were common in the high elite mummy equipment from the 12th Dynasty,[79] though their occurrence in the interments of the 21st Dynasty, including the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, remains unattested. The depiction of these objects on lids and mummy boards thus seems intended to supply the mummy with an otherwise missing object.

75 Elliot Smith 1906.
76 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: mummy board of Herytubekhet.
77 TT 320: inner coffin and mummy board of Tauheret. A.19: mummy board of Taiuheret. A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. A.88: inner coffin of Nesitanebetaui. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: mummy board. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Khonsumose and mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu. Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet.
78 A.136: mummy board of Henuttaui. Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Tanatnektahat. These motifs can be found in actual funerary bracelets. See, for example, bracelets of Ah-hotep (Egyptian Museum in Cairo) in Saleh, Sourouzian 1987, Nº 125. See also bracelet of Tutankhamun (Egyptian Museum in Cairo), in Stierlin 1993, 62.
79 These objects would refer to the hour vigil (Wolfram 2018, 235).

- Bracelets with multiple *wedjat*-eyes. These bracelets feature small *wedjat*-eyes strung together, usually arranged in several rows (Fig. 5.2).[80] Actual bracelets with small *wedjat*-eyes were found in mummies from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, suggesting that this depiction reflects the real equipment of the mummy.
- Bracelets with ornamental hieroglyphs. In larger bracelets, the *wedjat*-eye is used in combination with other hieroglyphs, such as the *neb* and *nefer*-signs, forming the expression: 'Lord of Beauty and Healing',[81] as commonly seen in Ramesside funerary bracelets.
- (Winged) sacred scarab.[82] Some bracelets feature the sacred scarab rising from the nymphaea flower,[83] the *neb*-basket (Fig. 2.12),[84] or sailing on the solar boat.[85] The scarab is often flanked by other motifs,[86] such as *wedjat*-eyes,[87] or mummiform deities.[88] A variation includes the use of the solar disc,[89] sometimes shown sailing in the solar bark.[90] These bracelets were clearly designed to equip the deceased with objects missing from their actual burial equipment.
- Avian manifestation of Sokar. The sacred falcon is typically depicted with the *wedjat*-eye and/or winged cobras (Fig. 2.12).[91]

80 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes. Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne de Marseille: mummy board of Tentamun.
81 A.68: mummy board of Ankhefenmut. These are fairly realistic depictions of funerary bracelets: Bracelet of Sheshonk I found in Tanis (Egyptian Museum in Cairo), in Stierlin 1993, 192. Bracelet of Tutankhamun (Egyptian Museum in Cairo), in Stierlin 1993, 63.
82 TT 320: Inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Nesipanebu. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Butehamun. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
83 A.16: Inner coffin of Ankhefenmut.
84 A.22: Coffin of Khonsumes.
85 Louvre Museum: mummy board of Panebmontu. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin.
86 Actual bracelets have been found showing the winged scarab flanked by cobras. See bracelet of Psusennes I in Robins 1997, 196. See also Stierlin 1993, 163-169.
87 TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare. Metropolitan Museum of Art: mummy board of Henuttaui and coffin set of Yutefamun
88 A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. In this coffin, Shay ('Destiny') and Osiris are depicted.
89 A.16: coffin of Ankhefenmut. Actual bracelets have been found showing a solar child. See bracelets of Nimrod in Robins 1997, 200.
90 Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
91 A.19: coffin of Taiuheret. A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt. A.113: mummy board of Nesiamenemope. A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Fitzwilliam Museum: Mummy board of Nesipawershefyt. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Nauny, and inner coffin of Henuttaui. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori.

Other bracelets are longer and feature sacred scenes or even groups of deities:

- Mummiform gods. Groups of squatted mummiform deities, often including the Sons of Horus, Anubis, Thoth,[92] or deities from the Heliopolitan Ennead[93], are depicted (Fig. 2.8/10). The identity of this divine assembly is not always clear[94], but the depiction serves to assure the protection of the deceased, identified with Osiris.
- Osirian scenes. These scenes may range from simple depictions of a squatting mummiform god[95] flanked by winged deities (sometimes a *ba*-bird)[96] to more elaborate vignettes showing Osiris[97] lying on the funerary bier (Fig. 2.11),[98] or seated, receiving offerings.[99] The depiction of the Ta-wer totem is also attested in this area.[100] These scenes reinforce the identification of the deceased with Osiris, interestingly echoing the typical iconographic repertoire of the yellow corpus.

Arms

When the floral collar is short enough, a triangular area formed by the elbows and the arms becomes visible.[101] This area eventually disappeared with the increasing size of the floral collar from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards.

Several motifs are consistently associated with this area:

– Straps suggesting pleated linen garments, used as a reminder of festive dress styles (Fig. 2.9/15).[102]

92 August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of Hori.
93 Leeds City Museum: mummy board of Nesiamun. Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu.
94 TT 320: inner coffin and mummy board of Masaharta, mummy board of Nesikhonsu. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: coffin of Herytubekhet. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun.
95 A.115: inner coffin of Paharu. Louvre Museum: coffin set of Paser.
96 Kunsthistorishes Museum in Vienna: mummy board Nesipaherentahat.
97 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
98 Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat. A.18: anonymous coffin. A.95: coffin of Pameshem. A.114: mummy board of Padiamun.
99 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
100 TT 320: outer coffin of Pinedjem II. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin set of Khonsuhotep.
101 Leeds City Museum: mummy board of Nesiamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Louvre Museum: mummy board of Panebmontu.
102 A.19: ‚mummy board of Taiuheret. A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: mummy board of Herytubekhet.

- Feathered patterns, used to recall the *rishi*-coffins (Fig. 2.12).[103]
- Beaded patterns, alluding to the type of funerary covering often associated with the Hathor cow.[104]
- Iconographic compositions. These are typically depicted against a striped background or a plain yellow background. The following subjects are most frequently found:
  - Hieroglyphic compositions involving *wedjat*-eyes, *nefer*-signs, and *neb*-baskets alluding to the 'Lord of Beauty and Healing', e.g. Osiris. Other symbols, such as the totem of the West, provide similar identification.[105]
  - Adoring *ba*-bird[106] before Osiris (Fig. 2.11).[107] Variations of this vignette include the depiction of the Benu-bird,[108] or the avian form of Ptah-Sokar,[109] instead of the *ba*-bird. All these forms are associated with light, symbolising the ability of the deceased to rise and shine.[110] The Ta-wer totem may be depicted instead of Osiris.
  - Mummiform gods standing[111] or squatting (Fig. 2.15).[112]
  - Cobra or feather (Fig. 2.14). These motifs are more common in later objects where this section became increasingly smaller.

103 TT 320: mummy board of Maatkare. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu and coffin of Pahereniset. A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. A.68: lid and mummy board of Ankhefenmut. Fitzwilliam Museum: mummy board of Nesipawershefyt. However, coffins from the late 21st Dynasty may also include this motif in an attempt to achieve an archaizing layout. TT 320: mummy board of Pinedjem II and mummy board of Nesikhonsu.
104 Metropolitan Museum of Art: mummy board of Henuttaui.
105 Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: coffin of Herytubekhet.
106 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes.
107 Metropolitan Museum of Art: mummy board of Henuttaui, and mummy board of Nauny. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun. Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu. Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat.
108 A.114: Mummy board of Padiamun.
109 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of Hori. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin set of Khonsuhotep.
110 The name Benu likely derives from the word *weben*, 'rise' or 'shine' (Wilkinson 1992, 91).
111 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Nesipanebu. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Butehamun.
112 A.136: outer coffin and mummy board of Henuttaui. Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus: coffin set of Tabasety. Kunsthistorishes Museum in Vienna: mummy board of Nesipaherentahat.

Breasts

Breasts remain one of the most significant female gender markers in the yellow corpus, alluding to the hieroglyph D 27 (*menedj*), which carries connotations related to fecundity, eroticism and childbirth.[113] The nipples are always represented as rosettes. Breasts are depicted below the ends of the wig, forming raised circles modelled in plaster and decorated with rosettes. Rosettes (*Chrysanthemum* flowers) may be rendered in a naturalistic style (Fig. 2.10/17/22), displaying eight,[114] or twelve[115] petals painted alternately in black or red. Rosettes may also be depicted with a geometrical design, resembling irregular circles divided into eight sections (Fig. 2.13-14),[116] featuring an outer section painted in black and a red area surrounding a central black disc. Both versions were borrowed from motifs used in jewellery.[117]

Occasionally, rosettes serve as the central element in a symmetrical composition involving cobras and *wedjat*-eyes (Fig. 2.7-3).[118] These compositions suggest motifs tattooed on the breasts. Even more exceptional is the depiction of a nymphaea flower on each breast.[119]

In some instances, the breasts are directly painted on the flattened board[120] or covered with gold foil.[121]

Ritual objects

Headdress

Blue wigs are typically adorned with a headband, accompanied by a cluster of inverted nymphaea flowers and buds positioned over the forehead. Striped

113 Wilkinson 1992, 47.
114 A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt.
115 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Nauny.
116 A.136: mummy board of Henuttaui. British Museum: anonymous coffin. Vatican Museums: Anonymous mummy board.
117 See the treasure of the Asiatic wives of Thutmose III. Hayes 1059, 133. The second type of rosette is found in the gold circlet with gazelle heads.
118 A.10: coffin set of Tabaekkhonsu. Depictions like these may, in fact, allude to tattooed motifs.
119 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: inner coffin of Gautseshen.
120 A.136: mummy board of Henuttaui.
121 TT 320: coffin of Nedjemet, and coffin set of Asetemkhebit.

wigs, commonly used on male coffins, adopt a different pattern, using either the headband[122] or the cluster of nymphaea flowers.[123]

Nymphaea flowers and buds

In most coffins, a cluster of nymphaea flowers and buds is placed on the crown of the head, extending down over the forehead. This motif first appears in the high elite burials at Saqqara during the late 18th Dynasty, likely associated with sarcophagi designed in the likeness of the deceased, possibly dating from the reign of Tutankhamun. The earliest instance of the nymphaea flower placed on the head of the deceased is found on the anonymous funerary mask now held at the Musées royaux d' Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (Fig. 2.1).[124] Although this motif was certainly used with an anthropoid sarcophagus carved to resemble the living image of the deceased,[125] it is not attested in contemporary Memphite sarcophagi (Fig. VI), suggesting a strong association of this symbol with the mummy itself. This connection is rooted in the cosmogonical significance of the primeval nymphaea flower, from where Nefertum, the solar child, arose to create light and the cosmos. Hence, positioned in this context, the nymphaea flower likely symbolises a form of rebirth, with the deceased manifesting as the living image of Nefertum, the creator god.

It is only in Ramesside coffins that the nymphaea flower became a common attribute in the headpieces of the festive dress type (Fig. VII). Thus, the nymphaea flower is closely associated with the rise in this new coffin style, embodying the imagery of these objects and symbolling the rebirth of the deceased in a realm of light. In the early examples of the yellow type, the nymphaea flower seems to have been used as an alternative to the 'crown of justification', suggesting an equivalence between the two symbols. Eventually, both symbols came to be used together.

122 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta, and outer coffin of Pinedjem II. A.93: coffin of Padiamun. A.115: inner coffin of Paharu. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Louvre Museum: coffin set of Paser. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin set of Khonsumose, and outer coffin of Butehamun.
123 A.28: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.55: mummy board of Pinedjem. A.99: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.131: outer anonymous coffin. A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
124 Inv. E.6884 (Delvaux and Therasse 2015, 68).
125 Sousa 2014, 99.

In the yellow corpus, the cluster of nymphaea flowers and buds may have the following compositions (Fig. 2.2):

- A single nymphaea flower flanked by buds.[126]
- Three nymphaea flowers.[127]
- Three nymphaea flowers intertwined with buds[128] or other motifs.[129]

The arrangement of the flower clusters may follow different styles:

- The stalks of the plants are left unbound.[130]
- The stalks of the plants are grouped and tied together.[131]
- The stalks of the plants are attached to a transverse band on the crown of the head.[132]

126 Leeds City Museum: coffin set of Nesiamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
127 A.74: anonymous inner coffin.
128 A.74: anonymous outer coffin. A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet. A.149: anonymous coffin. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
129 A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui.
130 TT 320: coffin of Nedjemet. A.74: anonymous outer coffin. A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet. Leeds City Museum: Coffin of Nesiamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui, and coffin of Anresenmes. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
131 A.10: coffin set of Tabaekkhonsu. A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui.
132 This is typically a male motif. A.23: coffin of Nesipakaef. A.28: Coffin of Padiamun. A.99: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.131: anonymous coffin set. A.149: anonymous coffin set. Occasionally, it may also be found in female coffins. A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh.

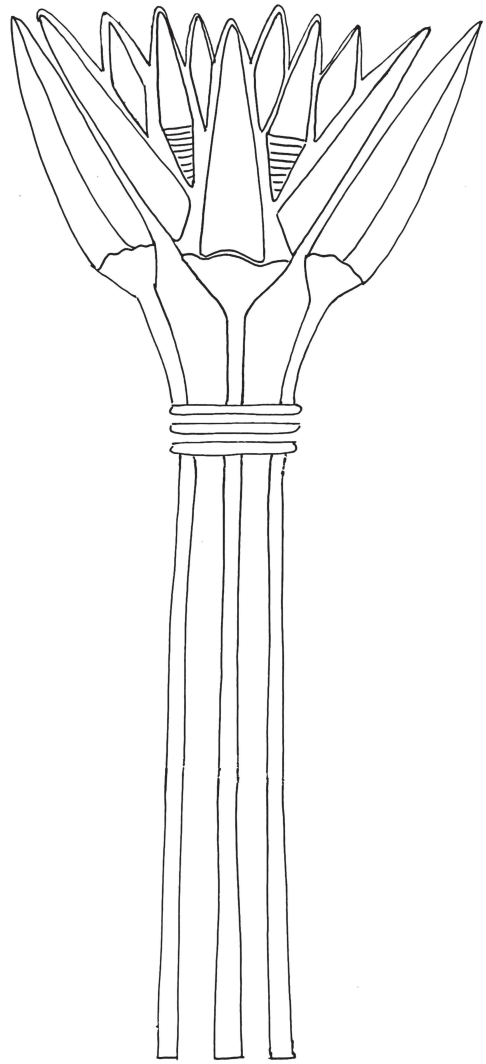


Fig. 2.1. Nymphaea bunch with flower and buds. Detail of an anonymous funerary mask (Musée royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels, Inv. E.6884).

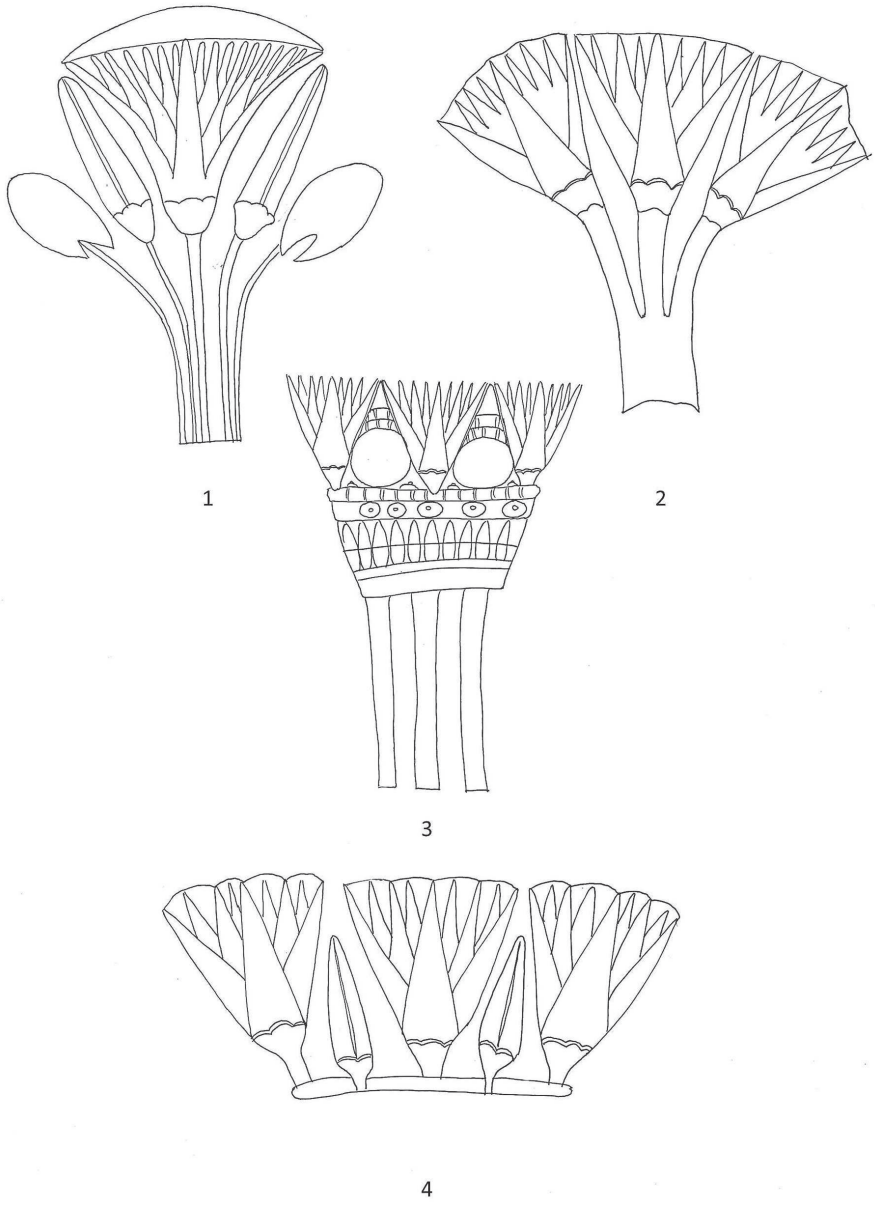


Fig. 2.2. Types of nymphaea bunches depicted on the crown of the head.

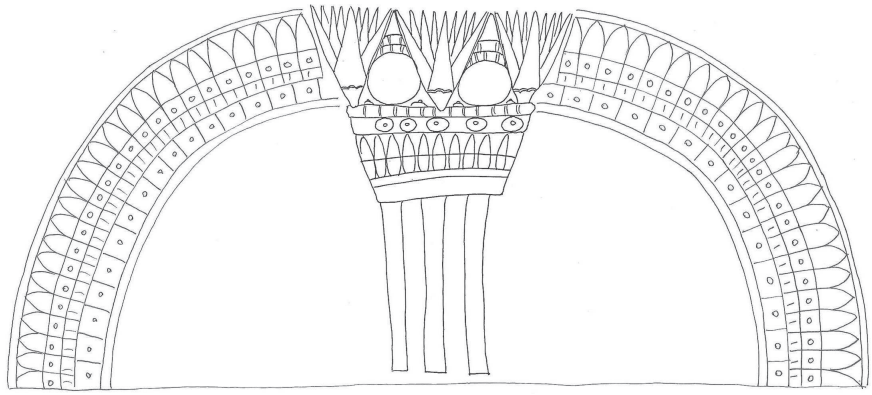


Fig. 2.3. Floral headband (seen from the crown of the head).

Headband

The headband, or fillet, appears to originate from female statuary of the New Kingdom.[133] The headband is explicitly referred to as the 'crown of justification' in Chapter 19 of the Book of the Dead, where it is given to the deceased as a reward for a positive outcome in the judgement of the dead.[134]

During the 21st Dynasty, these fillets evolved from a single band (Fig. 2.11-12),[135] sometimes entirely gilded,[136] to a double (Fig. 2.8-9)[137] or even triple band (Fig. 2.16/22).[138] Various decorative patterns can be identified:[139]

– **Geometrical patterns** – Typically, alternating depictions of red and blue rectangles are featured (Fig. 2.11).[140] Occasionally, each rectangle is decorated with a yellow circle[141] or a rosette.[142] This type of headdress

133 Van Walsem 1997: 110. The famous polychrome bust of Nefertiti in Berlin makes use of one of these decorated bands.
134 Taylor 2010, 215.
135 A.68: mummy board of Ankhefenmut. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Henuttaui. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Butehamun.
136 TT 320: mummy board of Pinedjem II.
137 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin and mummy board of Hori.
138 A.114: inner coffin and mummy board of Padiamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Tabakmut.
139 A.10: coffin set of Tabaekkhonsu. A.26: coffin of Nesiniutitaui. A.52: coffin set of Butherkhonsu. A.74: anonymous coffin set.
140 TT 320: Outer coffin of Masaharta. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
141 A.93: coffin of Padiamun. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin set. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin set of Khonsuhotep. Kunsthistorishes Museum in Vienna: mummy board Nesipaherentahat.
142 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.29: anonymous mummy board. A.68: lid of Ankhefenmut. A.95: coffin set of Pameshem.



Fig. 2.4. Headboard. Outer coffin of Maatkare (A.132).

is consistently associated with male coffins, usually accompanied by striped wigs. However, this geometrical headband was soon adopted by male and female owners alike, often in combination with additional bands (featuring floral[143] or geometrical designs[144]) and inverted nymphaea flowers on the forehead, particularly on female coffins (Fig. 2.10).[145] Geometrical patterns incorporating circles, triangles,[146] or block-friezes are also common and frequently combined.[147]

- **Persea tree buds** (*Mimusops Schimperi*) – This is one of the oldest patterns attested in the yellow type. It is composed of buds with rounded terminals[148] and can be used on a single horizontal band or combined with secondary bands decorated with petals, geometrical motifs or mandrake fruits (Figs. 2.8-10).[149]
- **Nymphaea petals** – This motif is typically used with other bands displaying geometrical or floral decorations (Figs. 2.14/17).[150]
- **Mandrake fruits or flowers** – This rare pattern consists of small 'pearls' protruding from semicircular motifs.

Regardless of the type of wig, the crown of the head is usually painted dark blue. The only exception to this rule is the striped wig, where this area is decorated with stripes.[151] When viewed from above, the crown of the head forms a semicircle resembling the hieroglyph *kha* (N28), meaning 'appear in glory', which is typically associated with the rising sun (Fig. 2.3).

143 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Tabakmut.
144 A.114: inner coffin and mummy board of Padiamun. A.115: inner coffin of Paharu. Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Paser.
145 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.77: outer coffin of Nesinebtaui. A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt.
146 A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet.
147 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui, and coffin of Anresenmes. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu
148 TT 320: coffin of Nedjemet. Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu.
149 A.19: mummy board of Taiuheret. A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Henuttaui.
150 A.10: outer coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.123: inner coffin of Direpu. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Amenhotep.
151 As a rule, striped wigs maintain this pattern on the crown of the head, although the top of the crown is occasionally painted in dark blue. A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui.

Vulture-headdress

This attribute first appears in the royal *rishi* coffins dating from the 17th Dynasty or early 18th Dynasty.[152] As a divine attribute of Mut, this headdress was an emblem of royal women during the New Kingdom.

In the 21st Dynasty, this motif is adopted in the coffins of Maatkare (TT 320). Notably, this includes one of the few instances of the royal *uraeus* in the yellow corpus.[153]

The headdress is sporadically observed in high-ranking female burials from the late 21st Dynasty (Fig. 2.4).[154] Originally, the headdress may have held political significance, possibly marking the deceased as a member of the high priest's family or referring to a particular priestly role. By the 22nd Dynasty, the headdress had become a typical feature of female burials in stola-coffins.[155] It is usually depicted together with a headband and a cluster of nymphaea flowers.[156]

Central markers of the chest

During the first half of the 21st Dynasty, the chest became literally the focal point of the upper section. In earlier forms of the yellow type, this area was lef yellow, simulating the bare skin of the chest. However, in the latter half of the 21st Dynasty, this area became progressively covered by the floral collar.

The following motifs can be found in this area:

– **(Winged) scarabs.** The winged scarab is typically depicted against a yellow background, as if the pectoral ornament were lying on the bare chest of the deceased (Fig. 2.10). In the first half of the 21st Dynasty, this is the predominant motif in this setting. The core composition features the scarab holding the solar disc with its forelegs, with a *shen*-ring between its hind legs (Fig. 2.5-1). This block can be endlessly repeated along the longitudinal axis of the lid in various contexts,

152 Inner coffin of Queen Merytamun (National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo).
153 TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare. The *uraeus* is missing, but given the shape of the headband, it is likely that a vulture's head flanked by *uraei* was originally part of the composition.
154 A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti. A.132: coffin set of Maatkare.
155 Vleeshuis Museum: coffin of Nesikhonsu. See Taylor 2017, 546.
156 Vleeshuis Museum: coffin of Nesikhonsu.

such as in the central section and in the central partition of the lower section. However, on the chest, this motif is highlighted, representing the climax of the sacred scarab's ascent along the lid. The following variations may be observed:

- Scarabs with outstretched wings**.** Sometimes ram-headed,[157] the scarab is explicitly associated with the nightly journey of the sun. It spreads its wings across the chest of the deceased. Hieroglyphic signs[158] (*wedjat*-eyes, *nefer*-sign, *heb*-bowl),[159] or cobras[160] flank the solar disc, alluding to the solar rebirth (Figs. 2.10-12). The area below the scarab may also be decorated with hieroglyphs (*neb*[161] and *nub* signs,[162] Tjet-sign,[163] lamp).[164] It is not uncommon to find the depiction of a necklace holding the pectoral in place (Fig. 2.9/12), recalling the funerary necklaces holding the heart scarab used during the New Kingdom.[165] Sometimes the winged scarab is part of a wider and more complex composition flanked by winged cobras,[166] jackals or heron-headed mummiform gods,[167] alluding to the sunrise. With this same significance, the *shen*-ring held by the hind legs of the insect may also be replaced by the *akhet*-sign ('horizon') (Fig. 2.5-2).[168]
- Scarabs. The scarab, sometimes depicted with a ram's head,[169] is usually simple (Fig. 2.13), but may serve as the centrepiece of more elaborate compositions:
  - Scarab flanked by winged cobras and *wedjat*-eyes.[170]

157 A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. Fitzwilliam Museum: mummy board of Nesipawershefyt.
158 TT 320: coffin set of Masaharta.Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Pahereniset. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: mummy board.
159 Leeds City Museum: coffin set of Nesiamun. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin.
160 Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori.
161 Los Angeles County Museum of Art: mummy board.
162 Michael Carlos Museum: mummy board.
163 A.68: mummy board of Ankhefenmut.
164 TT 320: mummy board of Nesikhonsu.
165 A.68: mummy board of Ankhefenmut. A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: mummy board. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin set of Khonsuhotep. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Khonsumose.
166 A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. A.109: inner coffin of Tjenetimentether.
167 A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet.
168 A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet.
169 TT 320: mummy board of Maatkare. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.
170 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. TT 320: mummy board of Maatkare.

- Scarab flanked by *ba*-birds (Fig. 2.20).[171]
- Scarab (sometimes positioned on a Djed-pillar) flanked by mummiform gods.[172] This composition alludes to the sunrise and recalls the vignette of Chapter 16 of the Book of the Dead featuring the rebirth of the sun god.

Depictions of winged deities other than scarabs are extremely rare. However, the chest may feature a vulture,[173] a winged cobra,[174] or even a winged solar disc.[175] In more complex compositions, all these motifs appear at the top of the central section. A squatting winged goddess may also occupy this area, sometimes is association with the scarab (Fig. 2.11).

– **Heart amulets.** In the second half of the 21st Dynasty, heart amulets became associated with winged scarabs, eventually replacing them as the main central marker. On the chest, the heart amulet is depicted either directly against the floral collar (Fig. 2.18)[176] or, less commonly, against a yellow background.[177] It is typically painted blue or black and sometimes inscribed with the name of Osiris (Fig. 2.7-2, 24),[178] as would be expected in actual amulets. It is interesting to note that several types of heart amulets are depicted in this setting,[179] including the vase heart amulet,[180] the solar-headed heart,[181] and the seed heart amulet.[182]

171 A.10: mummy board of Tabaekkhonsu. A.27: anonymous mummy board.
172 British Museum: anonymous coffin. A.5: anonymous coffin.
173 TT 320: inner coffin of Maatkare.
174 A.74: anonymous outer coffin.
175 A.74: anonymous mummy board.
176 A.2: mummy board of Tauseretempernesu. A.4: anonymous coffin. A.102: mummy board of Haes. A.108: coffin set of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.147: coffin set of Menkhepere.
177 A.87: mummy board of Padiamun.
178 A.4: anonymous coffin. A.74: anonymous inner coffin. A.114: mummy board of Padiamun.
179 For the typology of heart amulets see Sousa 2011.
180 A.87: mummy board of Padiamun. A.114: inner coffin and mummy board of Padiamun. TT 320: mummy board of Pinedjem II.
181 A.2: mummy board of Tauseretempernesu. A.43: inner coffin of Nesipakashuti. A.148: coffin set of Nesiamun. A.unknown: coffin set of Ikhy (Vatican Museums).
182 A.74: anonymous inner coffin. A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui.

Occasionally, the amulet is flanked by nymphaea flowers[183] but a plethora of other funerary symbols can be found:

- Heart amulet hanging from the vulture goddess (Fig. 2.7-1). Only one depiction is known but it finds parallels with royal jewellery[184] alluding to the idea of rebirth.[185]
- Heart amulet flanked by the Benu-bird (Fig. 2.6-3, Fig. 5.4). In these compositions, the heart amulet is central to an elaborate scene involving winged cobras, *wedjat*-eyes, scarabs, Benu-birds and squatting mummiform gods.[186] Occasionally, the amulet is associated with the *akhet*-sign navigating on the solar boat.[187] Simpler variations of this scene may occur,[188] but ultimately they allude to the sunrise and solar rebirth. It is noteworthy that a number of heart amulets from this period bear depictions of a Benu-bird, reinforcing that the formerly described representations are associated with the magical significance of the amulet.[189]
- Solar-headed heart amulet flanked by cobras (Fig. 2.22/23). This composition holds particular significance, first appearing in the 18th Dynasty in royal contexts, where it symbolises the 'illumination' of the Pharaoh's heart, e.g., the manifestation of the supreme god in one's conscience (Fig. 7.7).[190] In coffin decoration,[191] the composition adheres to this royal archetype and becomes associated with the mystery of the solar-Osirian union.
- (Winged) scarab rising from the heart amulet (Fig. 2.6). These rare, elaborate compositions are associated with high elite burials[192] and appear to have developed as an extension of the earlier depictions of

183 A.52: inner coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
184 A pectoral with a similar vulture was found in the mummy of Tutankhamun. See Stierlin 1993, 66-67. This pectoral was actually found on the chest of the king. See Reeves 1990, 112.
185 Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne de Marseille: mummy board of Tentamun.
186 A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun.
187 A.115: inner coffin of Paharu.
188 TT 320: mummy board of Pinedjem II.
189 See JE 5280/CG 5235; JE 5738/CG 5231 in Reisner 1907, 4.
190 Sousa 2007.
191 A.148: coffin set of Nesiamun. A.unknown: coffin set of Ikhy (Vatican Museums).
192 A.87: mummy board of Padiamun. A.114: mummy board of Padiamun. A.151: outer coffin of Tjanefery.

> the solar-heart amulet. The winged scarab holding the sun disc, rises from the heart, alluding to the three aspects of the supreme god.[193] This imagery reflects the actual use of heart amulets in the funerary equipment of mummies. In the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, an intriguing collection of these amulets was found, some bearing representations of a scarab and inscribed with versions of Chapter 30 of the Book of the Dead, referring to the weighing of the heart.[194]

The representations of the heart amulet frequently reference Chapter 29B, known as the 'spell for a heart amulet of *seheret*-stone', intended to ensure the deceased could go forth into the light:

> I am the *benu*, the *ba* of Re, who guides the gods to the netherworld when they go forth. The *baw* on earth will do what they desire, and the *ba* of the deceased will go forth at his desire.[195]

This imagery is further developed in a group of funerary papyri, again found in the mummies of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, where the main topic is the heart amulet (Fig. 5.6). Here, the deceased is depicted before the heart amulet, usually inscribed with Chapter 30 and surrounded by the same symbols seen on the chest of the lids (Benu-bird, scarab, mummiform gods, etc). The papyri contain references to the nightly journey of the deceased in the netherworld, featuring guardian deities, caves, sacred paddles, the seven cows and the Mountain, from which the cosmic god rises holding the newborn sun god in his arms.[196] These papyri can be truly considered descriptive extensions of the iconographic compositions displayed on the chest of the lids. The heart amulet thus encapsulates the nightly journey of the deceased, culminating in their own solar rebirth.

193 The scarab might even be crowned with the Osirian *atef*-crown. A.87: mummy board of Padiamun.
194 The following amulets were found in the Tomb of the Priests of Amun: CG 12127, CG 12128 in Reisner 1907, 121-122.
195 Taylor 2010, 174.
196 Sousa 2008.

– **Mummy braces.** Mummy braces, also known as *stolae*, were introduced into coffin decoration during the late 21st Dynasty (Figs. 2.22/24). Depictions of the braces allude to actual objects used in the wrappings of contemporary mummies.[197] In the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, a large collection of these objects was found.[198] Typically, these objects were made of red-dyed leather straps, ending in tabs of undyed leather, which were also used to border the straps.[199] These braces often display engravings showing the high priest making offerings to a deity, indicating their strong political significance. As will be discussed further in Chapter 7, mummy braces were applied to the mummy once it was considered 'restored', marking it as sanctified and thus inaccessible for re-use. In the yellow corpus, the mummy braces reflect this practice, signalling the deified status of the deceased. They are depicted over the floral collar, frequently alongside the heart amulet.[200]
– **Other adornments.** Objects from the late 21st Dynasty occasionally feature rare central markers on the chest. Among these symbols, one may find the nymphaea flower,[201] the lily-flower,[202] or even a bull's head adorned with a solar disc,[203] all of which are allusions to rebirth and sunrise. Counterpoises are also occasionally attested.[204]

197 Van Walsem 1997, 117.
198 Prada 2017.
199 Van Walsem 1997, 117.
200 A.4: anonymous coffin. A.52: inner coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.55: mummy board of Pinedjem.
201 A.10: outer coffin of Tabaekkhonsu.
202 A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare. A.133: mummy board of Heretweben.
203 A.133: outer coffin of Heretweben.
204 A.91: outer coffin of Taditumut.

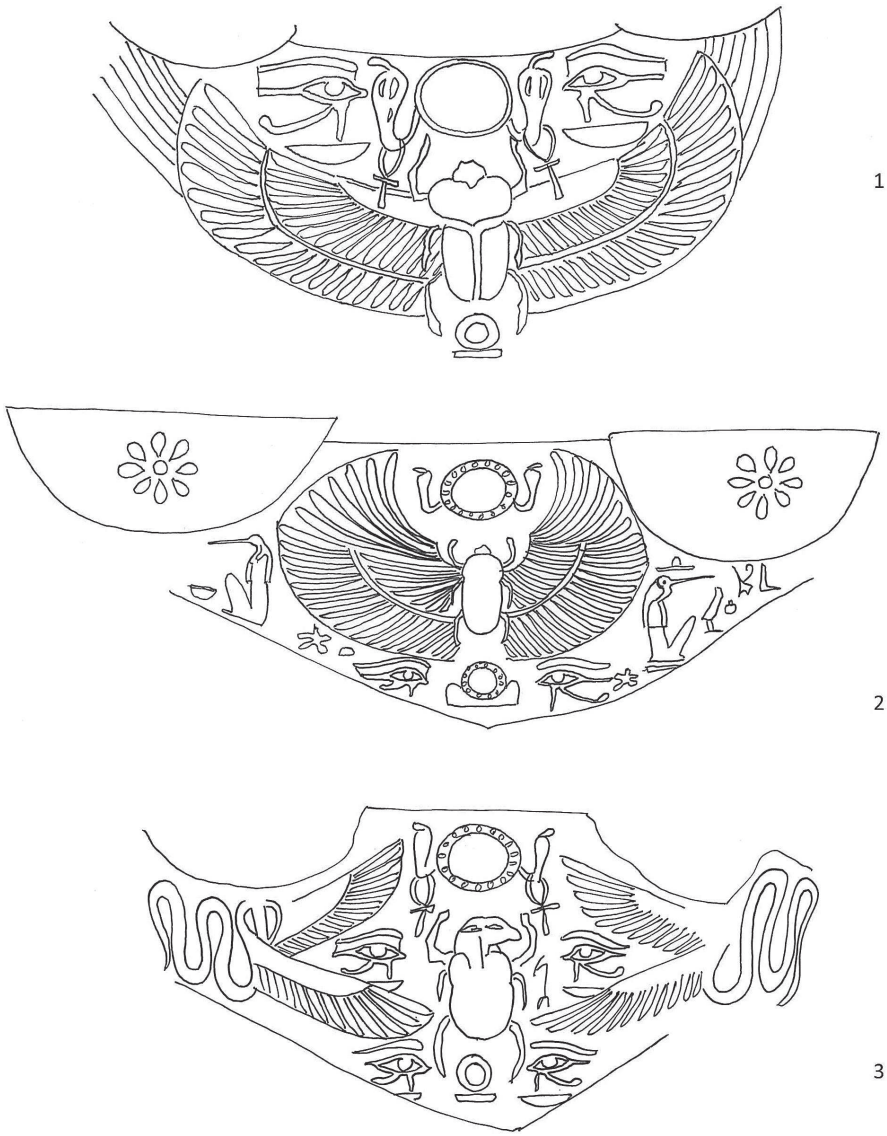
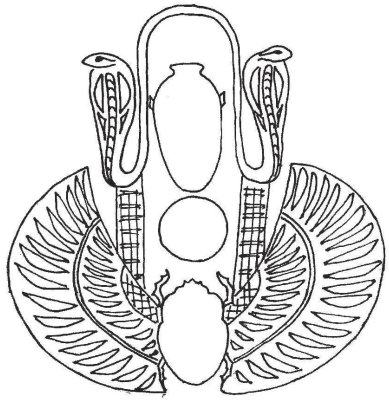


Fig. 2.5. Central marker: (Winged) scarabs.
(1) Mummy board of Nesiamun (Leeds Museum).
(2) Inner coffin of Tjenetipet (A.119).
(3) Mummy board of Maatkare (TT 320)



1



2



3

Fig. 2.6. Central marker: Winged scarabs and heart amulets
(1) Mummy board of Padiamun (A.114).
(2) Coffin of Khonsumose (Museo Egizio in Turin).
(3) Mummy board of Padiamun (A.87).

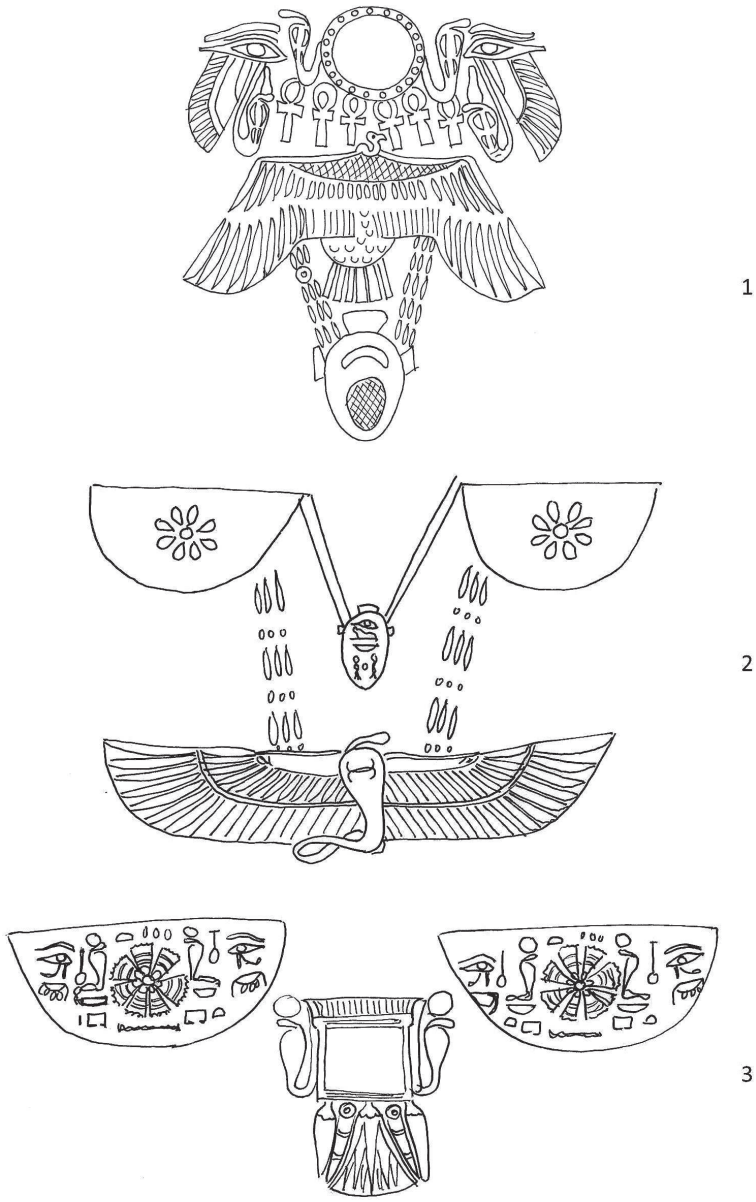


Fig. 2.7. Central marker: Heart amulets and other motifs

(1) Mummy board of Tentamun (Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne de Marseille).
(2) A.74: anonymous inner coffin.
(3) Outer coffin (A.10)

Short collar

The area between the lappets of the wig is typically decorated with a short collar composed of small horizontal bands attached to a long string, forming a U-shaped necklace.[205]

The bands of the short collar display various patterns:

- Monochromatic bands: red, yellow and black horizontal bands are alternated.[206]
- Geometrical or floral bands: motifs depicting the Persea tree buds (*Mimusops Schimperi*) are prevalent. Geometrical patterns (triangles,[207] sometimes combined with circles),[208] mandrake fruits and flowers,[209] or a combination of several patterns are also found.[210]
- Feathered bands: this is a rare motif, attested especially in later coffins.[211]
- Vignettes: exceptionally, small vignettes may appear in this context. Only one known example features a sacred scarab (Fig. 2.20).[212]

Short collars may include an outer band decorated with olive tree leaves (almond-shaped petals).[213] Occasionally, they are depicted as extensions of the

205 Previously, the area between the lappets was decorated with the bands of a larger *usekh*-collar. Short collars of this type are archaeologically attested, sometimes entirely woven from organic materials. Some of these funerary garlands are made from persea leaves and leather. They are also depicted on temple walls, where they appear as divine offerings.

206 TT 320: coffin set of Maatkare, coffin set of Pinedjem II, and inner coffin of Tauheret. A.19: mummy board of Taiuheret. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: mummy board of Herytubekhet. Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet.

207 A.87: mummy board of Padiamun. A.113: mummy board of Nesiamenemope. A.115: inner coffin of Paharu.A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet.

208 A.68: lid of Ankhefenmut. A.105: outer coffin of Userhat. A.114: mummy board of Padiamun.

209 A.47: inner coffin of Tenetpenheruenefer. A.74: anonymous inner coffin. A.110: mummy board of Djedmutiuesankh. A.123: inner coffin of Direpu. A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Mutemperamun.

210 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.136: mummy board of Henuttaui. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Nesipanebu. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin set. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Amenhotep.

211 A.131: outer anonymous coffin. A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare. A.147: inner coffin and mummy board of Menkhepere.

212 A.27: anonymous mummy board.

213 TT 320: inner coffin of Masaharta. TT 320: inner coffin of Pinedjem II. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Butehamun. Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: coffin of Herytubekhet .

large collar,[214] displaying a similar design, sometimes including an outer band of nymphaea flowers and buds (Fig. 2.17).[215]

In some cases, the short collar is omitted entirely, leaving the chest undecorated to highlight the symbols displayed on the chest: the mummy braces and the heart amulet (Fig. 2.22).[216]

Large collar

Initially, the floral collar only covered the shoulders and the chest. By the mid-21st Dynasty, the collar had expanded to cover most of the forearms and sometimes extended down to the abdomen. As the collars grew larger, new decorative patterns were introduced. Later coffins featured a wider sample of patterns, often combined in a variety of different ways.

Until the mid-21st Dynasty, large floral collars were adorned with clasps (Figs. 2.8-13). Ramesside proto-yellow coffins display clasps decorated with either a hawk's head or a nymphaea flower.[217] In the yellow type, these two motifs were eventually merged within the same vignette.[218] Occasionally, additional elements such as poppies, mummiform gods and offerings may also appear.[219] The significance of the clasps is related to these symbols. The raptor alludes to the loving embrace of Isis and Nephthys, in their avian form. As kites, these goddesses are depicted as mourning deities whose loud cries are believed to bring Osiris back to life. The nymphaea flower, on the other hand, alludes precisely to the awakening of Osiris. In the latter half of the 21st Dynasty, the depiction of clasps fell into disuse (Fig. 2.14-15/17-24).[220]

214 TT 320: inner coffin and mummy board of Asetemkhebit. A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.26: coffin set of Nesiniutitaui. A.123: outer coffin of Direpu. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui. A.149: anonymous inner coffin of A.149.

215 A.16: outer coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.18: anonymous coffin. A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Tabakmut.

216 A.52: outer coffin of Butherkhonsu.

217 TT 1: coffin of Sennedjem, outer coffin of Khonsu from TT, coffin of Tamaket.

218 TT 320: mummy board of Pinedjem II. A.114: mummy board of Padiamun. A.136: mummy board of Henuttaui. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin set. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: mummy board of Herytubekhet. Mummy board of Henuttaui (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 25.3.182–.184). Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun. Mummy board Nesipaherentahat (Kunsthistorishes Museum in Vienna, ÄS 231).

219 A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.

220 A.2: mummy board of Tauseretempernesu. A.10: coffin set of Tabaekkhonsu. A.26: outer coffin of Nesiniutitaui. A.47: coffin of Tenetpenheruenefer. A.52: inner coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.55: mummy board of Pinedjem. A.74: anonymous coffin set. A.91: outer coffin of Taditumut. A.102: outer coffin of Haes.

The number of floral bands in these collars is highly variable, ranging from 4 (in the earliest coffins) to 16 (in the latest coffins). A variety of combinations can be found, from just two repeated patterns along the collars[221] to alternating sequences of five or six different motifs.

Mummy boards from the late Ramesside period and early 21st Dynasty show a distinctive large red strap framing the large floral collar.[222] Most likely not accidentally, in the embalming cache of Tutankhamun (KV 54), floral collars were found with a red cloth framing the edges.[223] This feature thus mirrors the ritual practice involving the actual floral collars displayed over the mummy. In the mummies from the Tomb of the Priest of Amun and the Royal Cache, the outer wrappings of the mummy were frequently adorned with identically extended collars.

Commentary

The headboard depicted in anthropoid coffins derives from the shape of the funerary mask, which on itself aims to manifest the deceased as a resurrected god, alluding to Chapter 151 of the Book of the Dead. However, in the yellow type, this resurrected god is no longer exclusively seen as a chthonian deity, as was customary before the Amarna period. Other features of the headboard, such as the beard, ears, earrings, and headdresses serve as gender markers and portray the deceased in living form. In the yellow corpus, striped wigs are consistently associated with male coffins, while chequered wigs are specifically used for women. The blue wig is used interchangeably for both men and women.

The emphasis on gender differentiation is rooted in the festive dress type and reflects a new perception of the afterlife as an eternal interaction with the gods. As this interaction mirrors the rituals of the temple, the deceased is admitted

A.110: coffin set of Djedmutiuesankh. A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub. A.149: anonymous inner coffin. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Hori.

221 A.27: anonymous mummy board. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Tabakmut.

222 Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus: mummy board of Tabasety. August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of Hori. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: mummy board of Herytubekhet.

223 Metropolitan Museum of Art (09.184.216, 09.184.214–216, 09.184.214, 09.184.215).

in the afterlife according to their rank in temple service. Hence the careful use of gender markers defines the deceased's membership in the corresponding priestly group. The deceased is thus depicted both as a justified god and as a performer of rituals.

The attention to anatomical details is also a legacy of the festive dress type. In the yellow corpus, features such as the lines of the eyelid, throat creases, nostrils, ears, and lips are outlined in red, thus resulting in a naturalistic and less idealised 'portrait' of the individual, as if the body itself was intended to be depicted in the coffin.

A nymphaea cluster is depicted lying on the forehead on the crown of the head. Ramesside tomb decorations provide a numerous examples of scenes featuring a nymphaea cluster on the headboard of standing coffins, suggesting its close connection with the Opening of the Mouth ritual,[224] possibly alluding to the rebirth of the deceased. The pictorial repertoire of the yellow corpus abounds with depictions of the deceased wearing nymphaea buds on their head, indicating divine status. On yellow coffins, this motif is so frequently depicted on the headboard of lids and mummy boards that its broader significance risks being overlooked.

Despite this abundance, the motif of the nymphaea flower only became widespread after the Amarna period. In the burial equipment, the first attested occurrence of this motif is found on an anonymous funerary mask held at the Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (Inv. E.6884), an object bearing the stylistic features of the Saqqara interments from the late 18th Dynasty. This motif appears to have been used as an attribute for the innermost objects, as it is absent from the sarcophagi and coffins of the period. The motif was later adopted in Theban coffin decoration during the Ramesside period, becoming integrated into the floral headband.

Thus, the inclusion of nymphaea flowers in coffin decoration is a later development, closely linked to the emerging type of anthropoid coffin, which depicts the deceased in ceremonial attire. Given the Memphite origin

224 Tomb of Userhat (TT 51).

of this motif, it is plausible that it was integrated as an attribute of Nefertum: its longitudinal depiction over the forehead likely results from the aspective interpretation of the flower, which would otherwise appear rising from the crown of the head. This imagery, suggesting rebirth, when depicted over the funerary mask, would resemble the famous statue of Tutankhamun depicted as the newborn Nefertum, rising from the primordial lotus.

The symbolic role of the nymphaea flower is also firmly rooted in the visual imagery of the Book of the Dead, particularly in Chapter 81A, which describes the transformation of the deceased into a sacred nymphaea flower:

> Chapter for being transformed into a nymphaea flower: I am this pure nymphaea flower which went forth from the sunshine, which is at the nose of Re. I have descended that I may seek it for Horus, for I am the pure one who issued from the marshes.[225]

The association of the nymphaea flower with the imagery of solar rebirth and the creation of light is grounded in its natural characteristics, as the flower opens and closes its petals with the rising and setting of the sun.[226] In the Book of the Dead, this spell is integrated in the so-called transformation spells (Chapters 76-88), which are often grouped together, as if forming a book in its own right. These spells allowed the deceased to assume various forms (a golden falcon, a heron, a swallow, a snake, a crocodile, a lotus flower, a living *ba*, a *benu*-bird, among others). These texts are particularly concerned with the notion that the deceased should be able to travel back and forth repeatedly between the realm of the living and the dead, after the daily cycle of the sun.[227]

It is likely that this primary meaning influenced the introduction of the nymphaea flower in coffin decoration. This sacramental interpretation builds upon the significance of the nymphaea flower as a liminal symbol, evident as early as the Old Kingdom.[228] The flower thus symbolises not only the rebirth of the deceased but also their going forth into the light, through their identification with Nefertum, the primeval god of light creation.

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225 Book of the Dead of Ani.
226 Shaw and Nicholson 1995, 164.
227 Taylor 2010, 166.
228 Liptay 2014, 69.

As for the headband, or 'crown of justification', it is an important attribute of yellow coffins. The 'crown of justification', also known as the 'fillet', was symbolically given to the deceased during the Opening of the Mouth ritual. Its use appears to derive from the Osiris mysteries at Abydos performed during the Wag-festival in the territory of U-Peker and the Festival of Sokaris. The fillet therefore directly refers to the whole range of Osiris rites at Abydos, ensuring the deceased's revivification.[229] Moreover, this feature alludes to Chapters 19-20 of the Book of the Dead, which concern the ritual associated with the 'crown of justification', also called the 'wreath of vindication', a visible sign that the deceased had been acclaimed as victorious in the judgement of the dead.[230]

All these features suggest that the headboard not only depicted the deceased as a justified god, as it performed an important role during the funerary rituals, especially those related to the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. During these ceremonials, the lid would be positioned upright in order to celebrate the deceased's triumph over Seth and to acclaim them as a justified god.

Traditionally, the decoration of anthropoid coffins was consistently limited to visible ornaments on the mummy, such as the mask, collar, and bead girdle.[231] The depiction of hands and forearms marks a departure from this convention, as these attributes were actually not visible on mummies but were used in coffin decoration to allude to the deceased as a 'living image', a topic explored further in Chapter 7.

The positioning of the hands, in particular, shifts the deceased's status from an inert mummified god into a god empowered with royal authority. The clenched hand (D 49) was associated with concepts of power such as 'grasp' or 'seize' but also with the gesture of praise and rejoicing in the so-called *henu*-gesture.[232] In this context, it seems plausible that both meanings were associated with fists, which in the yellow type remained a strict male prerogative. The symbols grasped by the deceased are tied to the Osirian imaginary, defining them as a justified god. The feather, in particular, is allusive to Maat and refers to the

229 Van Walsem 1997: 110.
230 Taylor 2010, 215.
231 Hayes 1953, 310-311.
232 Wilkinson 1992, 55.

weighing of the heart and to the acclamation of the deceased as a justified god. Certain vignettes from Chapter 125 depict the deceased holding feathers, as a gesture of triumph.

Open hands are depicted on female coffins, possibly with Hathoric significance, resembling the ivory clappers used in rituals dedicated to this goddess.[233] This attribute could then refer to the Hathoric title 'Hand of God,' which was held by royal women and priestesses, alluding to the role of the goddesses Iusaas and Nebethetepet as agents who stimulated the sexual desire of the god Atum.[234]

Another important female gender marker is the depiction of breasts. The inclusion of this motif emphasised the woman's capacity for childbearing, but it may also carry an erotic association with Hathor.[235] The nipples are always rendered as rosettes. This motif was used in Ramesside sculpture with erotic connotations[236] but had long been used with a funerary meaning: gilded bronze rosettes were found sewn onto a dark linen cloth laid over the funerary shrines of Tutankhamun, suggesting the starry sky.[237] Similarly, rosettes are painted on the funeral leather canopy of Asetemkhebit, found in TT 320.[238] In this context, rosettes carry Hathoric symbolism related to regeneration and rebirth and may have been used in coffin decoration to convey the divine status of women through their identification with the goddess of the necropolis, who presided over regeneration, sexuality and rebirth, analogous to the depiction of divine beards symbolising the identification of men with Osiris.

Gender markers play an important role in the yellow corpus, as they allude to the social status of men and women within the priesthood of Amun. The perception of status conveyed by these symbols explains some atypical uses of gender markers. In the burial assemblage of Maatkare, open hands are observed only on the mummy board, while her coffins display fists. Furthermore, she is also not depicted with breasts. The omission of these crucial female gender markers

233 Taylor 2017, 544.
234 Taylor 2017, 544.
235 Taylor 2017, 544.
236 Torso of Merytamun (Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 31413). See Saleh, Sourouzian 1987, Nº 208
237 Reeves 1990, 101.
238 Goff 1979, Fig. 55-57

on her coffins is a powerful statement of her status. Other female coffins are also known to have omitted the depiction of breasts.[239] In most cases, the absence may have resulted from the re-use of male coffins. However, it is possible that the decision to exclude this motif when recycling the coffin set was intentional.[240]

Regarding the depiction of forearms, it clearly originates from the festive dress type but is re-interpreted following royal archetypes, portraying the deceased as an active and empowered god, capable of performing rituals and moving freely in the netherworld. It is noteworthy that the crossed forearms do not reflect the actual position of the mummies, whose arms were placed along the body. Thus, this image refers to the triumph of the deceased over death. Some bracelets feature motifs borrowed from actual funerary objects, while others allude to the Solar-Osirian mysteries and the deification of the deceased. Feathers and linen straps are often found on the arms, subtly referencing the *rishi* and festive dress types.

On the chest, a pectoral symbolises the heart, to the judgement of the dead and subsequent rebirth. Until the mid-21st Dynasty, the most common pectoral motif in this area was a (winged) scarab, an allusion to the heart scarab, which was believed to grant a positive outcome in the weighing of the heart and the identification of the heart with the rising sun, as the scarab represents Khepri.[241] These pectorals likely served as markers for the recitation of Chapters 26-30 of the Book of the Dead.[242] In fact, the vignettes of these texts clearly illustrate the use of these pectorals in rituals related to the Opening of the Mouth.

The use of the heart amulet in this context appears much later, first seen in objects from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards. These objects must be related to the scenes of the weighing of the heart painted on the sides of the boxes, where the deceased receives this amulet as the result of the positive outcome obtained in the weighing of the heart. In these vignettes the deceased raises their arms,

239 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.19: coffin set of Taiuheret. A.52: inner coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.54: anonymous coffin set.
240 A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
241 Van Walsem 1997, 149. Goff 1979, 209-220.
242 Sousa 2011.

holding feathers in a gesture of joy[243], clearly indicating that the heart amulet, when used in this context, was regarded as a reward bestowed by the court of Osiris, designating the deceased as a *maa-kheru*, a justified god.[244]

The decorative scheme of the upper section thus includes a powerful set of symbols resembling amulets that played an important role in funerary rituals. Although some of these amulets were actually found in the mummies, most were included in the coffin decoration simply as a more straightforward means of providing the mummy with the necessary magical protection.

Given the association between amulets and rituals, it is likely that when those rituals were performed, the lid would be raised in an upright position, as depicted in Ramesside tomb paintings.

The focal point of the upper section is the bare chest of the deceased.[245] The yellow background of the scenes in this area is intended to represent the skin of the deceased, shimmering with the divine light radiating from their body. The same symbolism applies to the yellow background on the forearms, although this area was usually decorated with bracelets before being concealed by the large floral collars.

The chest thus emanated gleaming light, burning the boundaries between the corpse and the coffin, with the body of the deceased gradually emerging from behind the layers of figurative elements depicted on the lid. The amulets and pectorals adorning the chest, typically part of the mummy's decoration, are thus displayed as if worn by a living being. In this context, the iconographic arrangements around these pectorals, mainly composed of *wedjat*-eyes, *nefer*,

243 This gesture is often depicted in mythological papyri dating from the 21st Dynasty. Mythological Papyrus of Khonsumes (Kunsthistorisches Museum). See Piankoff Rambova 1955, pl. 147. Papyrus of Nesipakachuti (E 17401, Louvre Museum) in Piankoff Rambova 1955, pl. 104 and Papyrus Nesitanebetaui (SR 40017, Cairo Egyptian Museum). The same gesture is also depicted on the 21st Dynasty coffins, where this theme is highly common. A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.93: coffin of Padiamun. A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun. A.115: inner coffin of Paharu.

244 In the vignettes depicting the weighing of the heart, the presentation of the deceased to the god Osiris is the natural outcome of a positive judgement. Usually, the amulet is bestowed upon the deceased before the scene of adoration of Osiris. Although couples may be depicted, it is always the men who wear this amulet. This is evident in the tomb of Rai and his wife, Nebetaui, (TT 255) where the amulet appears to be connected with the weighing of the heart.

245 A.27: anonymous mummy board. A.136: inner coffin and mummy board of Henuttaui. Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety.

and *neb*-signs[246], should be understood as tattos. Compositions featuring (winged) *iaret*-cobras are also common[247], and *Wedjat*-eyes and *iaret*-cobras can also be found on the breasts themselves.[248] Initially, this profusion of iconographic compositions might seem to result from a particular mindset described in Egyptological literature as *horror vacui,*[249] or fear of empty space, leading to the use of randomly chosen signs to fill the area. However, we believe these compositions are far more deliberate, alluding in this particular case to ritual tattoos. Indeed, this same repertoire of symbols has been found on a tattooed mummy from Deir el-Medina.[250] Studies by Anne Austin and Cédric Gobeil on the torso and arms of a single woman revealed 30 small tattoos, some difficult to discern. The most prevalent motifs were *iaret*-cobras and *wedjat*-eyes, sometimes combined with *nefer*-signs, forming the exact hieroglyphic compositions seen in coffin decoration. Whether this practice was reserved for special individuals or widespread is unknown, as tattoos are difficult to detect on mummified bodies without proper imaging tools. It is possible that such evidence has gone unnoticed, particularly in the mummies of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, which are currently inaccessible. Austin and Gobeil suggest that these tattoos played an important role in the life of this particular woman, both enhancing her ability to perform magical rituals and elevating her social status within the community itself.[251] The same meaning likely applies to the small compositions of symbols 'tattoed' on the chest, forearms, hands, and breasts of the deceased depicted on the yellow coffins, empowering them with magical strength and knowledge. In this way, the yellow coffin displays the gleaming (tattoed) torso of the deceased, adorned with pectorals, amulets, bracelets, mummy braces and floral collars as if the linen wrappings had been completely removed.

As for the floral collars, both long and short, they replicate the shape and composition of the actual objects used during the New Kingdom. Due to their

246 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet.
247 Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Khonsumose.
248 A.10: coffin set of Tabaekkhonsu.
249 Niwiński 1988, 99.
250 Austin, Gobeil 2017.
251 Austin, Gobeil 2017.

magical powers, they were employed in the funerary rites themselves,[252] playing a crucial role during mummification. The boldness of this role is evident in the creation of embalming caches, particularly in the Valley of the Kings, where these objects were stored, alongside other waste materials from royal mummification.

In the embalming cache of Tutankhamun (KV 54), floral collars were found remarkably well preserved. The examination of these objects revealed their craftsmanship: alternating rows of flower petals and buds, leaves, berries, and blue faience beads were sewn onto a papyrus backing.[253] Olive leaves, cornflowers, and poppies are some of the species used in the Tutankhamun collars.

A substantial collection of floral collars was discovered in another important embalming cache (KV 63), also dating from the late 18th Dynasty.[254] Some of these collars incorporated gold leaves intertwined with petals. A wide range of species was used, including persea tree flowers.

It is also noteworthy that floral motifs and patterns had a widespread use in material funerary culture and are visible in the decoration of almost every funerary object or building.[255] In fact, the patterns on the floral collars depicted on coffins resemble those depicted in friezes decorating the tombs of the Theban necropolis. In the Tomb of Amenemheb (TT 278), the painted wall scenes are framed by block friezes and monochromatic bands.[256] Floral bands adorn the upper edges, featuring nymphaea petals,[257] rosettes, bunches of grapes and persea tree flowers. Similar floral friezes are also seen in the decoration of tomb ceilings.[258] Overall, these floral motifs allude to the protection provided by the heavenly mother goddess and were used in coffin decoration with the same symbolism, assimilating the lid with the heavenly realm. Moreover, in temple contexts, alternating sequences of various floral patterns (rosacea, alternating nymphaea flowers, and buds, petals) appear in painted ceilings,[259] alluding to the same Hathoric imaginary. The association between Hathor's funerary

252 Sousa 2014b, 197.
253 Metropolitan Museum of Art (09.184.216, 09.184.214–216, 09.184.214, 09.184.215).
254 Sousa 2014b, 202.
255 Dodson, Ikram 2008, 126.
256 Tomb of Amen-heb (D'Abbadie 1954, Pl. XXVI). Tomb of Hay (Valbelle 1975, 7).
257 Tomb of Userhat (TT 51).
258 Tomb of Nefer-hotep (Wild 1979, Pl. 2).
259 Hölscher 1951, Pl. 24.

manifestation and these plants is clearly suggested in the vignettes of the Book of the Dead, featuring the shrine of the divine cow on the Theban hill, surrounded by a forest of papyrus, nymphaea, and lily flowers.

In general terms, the flowers used in the floral collars are life-giving emblems, alluding to the rebirth bestowed by the heavenly mother, with the nymphaea in particular being a symbol of resurrection.[260] However, some of the fruits and flowers used in these collars might have played specific roles, likely related to their healing properties. Some of these plants, such as the blue nymphaea or the mandrake, are known to be hallucinogenic, and it is possible they were used during mummification for specific 'healing' purposes.[261]

The increasing prominence of these collars in coffin decoration is evident in their progressively larger size. The role associated with these garlands is similar to that of the floral headbands. The same names (*mah* and *wahu*)[262]were used interchangeably for both categories of objects, and both were linked to the ritual of the 'crown of justification' alluded to in Chapter 19 of the Book of the Dead. In later coffins, the size of the collars expanded significantly, making the upper section the longest area of the lid.

The introduction of mummy braces, or stolae, during the late 21st Dynasty, is consistent with this trend. The earliest example of mummy braces actually found on a mummy dates from the reign of Ramses XI, but they were commonly used on the mummies from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun.[263] These red mummy braces likely derived from ritual scarves used in association with the Osirian cult in Abydos.[264] Ritual scarves are attested during the Old Kingdom, where they symbolised rejoicing and protection.[265] However, from an iconographic standpoint, this motif is consistently associated with mummiform deities, such as Amun, Min, Ptah or Osiris.[266] The origin of these objects appears to be related to temple cults, where they were used on divine images.[267] A notable

260 Van Walsem 1997, 116.
261 Jacquat and Rogger 2013, 84-88.
262 Jacquat and Rogger 2013, 85.
263 Van Walsem 1997, 117.
264 Kaper 2017, 308.
265 Brovarski 2017, 269-273.
266 Van Walsem 1997, 119. This motif dates back to the beginning of the 12th Dynasty.
267 Prada 2017, 379.

representation in this respect is the Hathor cow advancing from the necropolis cliffs, adorned with a crossed or 'parallel' (not crossed) red *stola*, instead of the usual *menat* around its neck.[268]

Another interpretation of the *stola* "may be inferred from its shape, which often resembles the *sa*-sign, meaning 'guard' or 'protect'. This symbol appears to have been a mat used by herdsman around their necks, crossing the chest obliquely. It should be noted that in two-dimensional scenes, figures of kings and deities are often accompanied by the inscription *sa haf*, ('protection behind him'), corresponding precisely to the way the *sa* is carried by herdsmen. Regardless of its origin, this stylised object was eventually adapted, as leather straps, for use on real human mummies (enhancing their divinity), and was also depicted on the lids of coffins."[269]

Such protection was ultimately reinforced by the association with the high priest, under whose authority the mummy had been sealed.

In essence, when depicted on the coffin, the stola conferred an unequivocal divine status[270] on the deceased, an attribute that was enhanced by the increasingly large floral collars.

268 This likely finds its precursor in the frequent representations in Ramesside tombs of the Anubis jackal with a crossing or parallel *stola* around its neck. In Van Walsem 1997, 117.
269 Van Walsem 1997, 119.
270 Van Walsem 1997, 349.

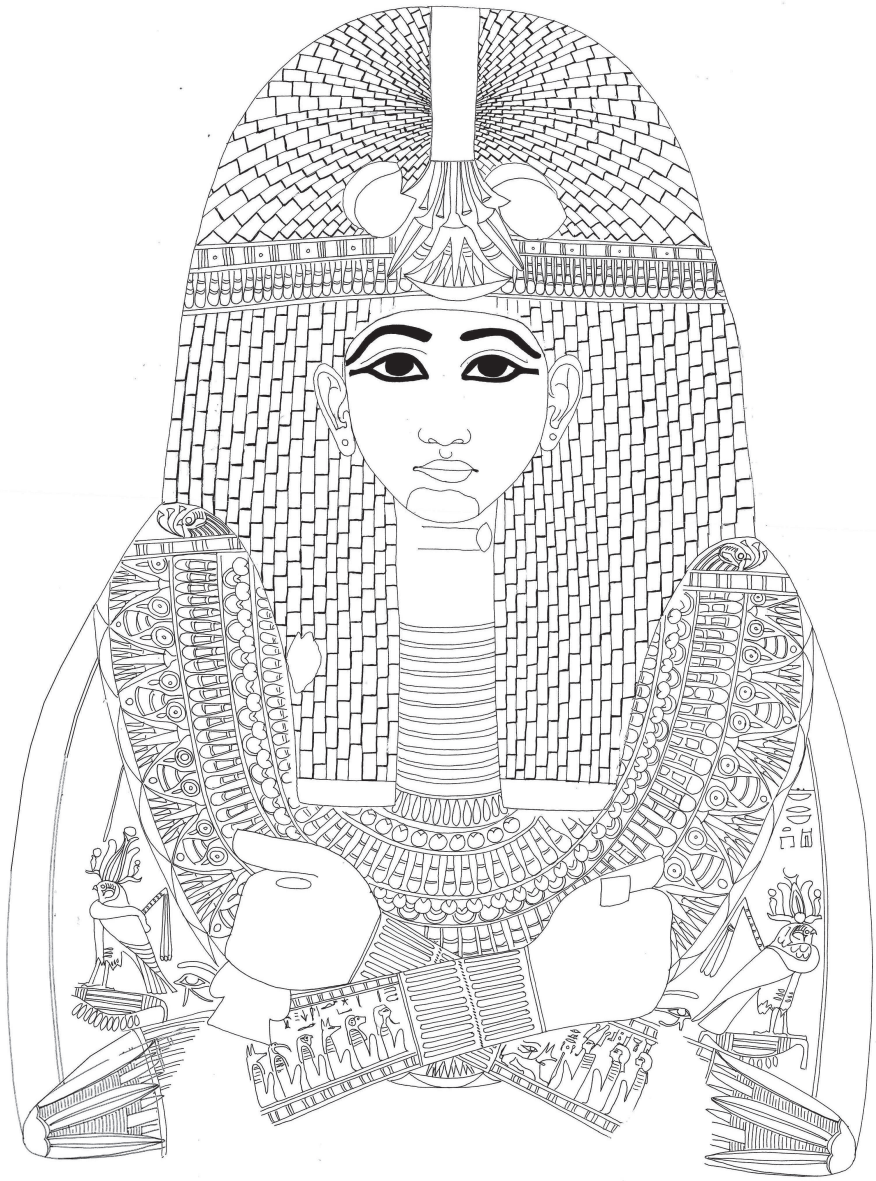

Fig. 2.8. Upper section. Mummy board of Hori (August Kestner Museum).

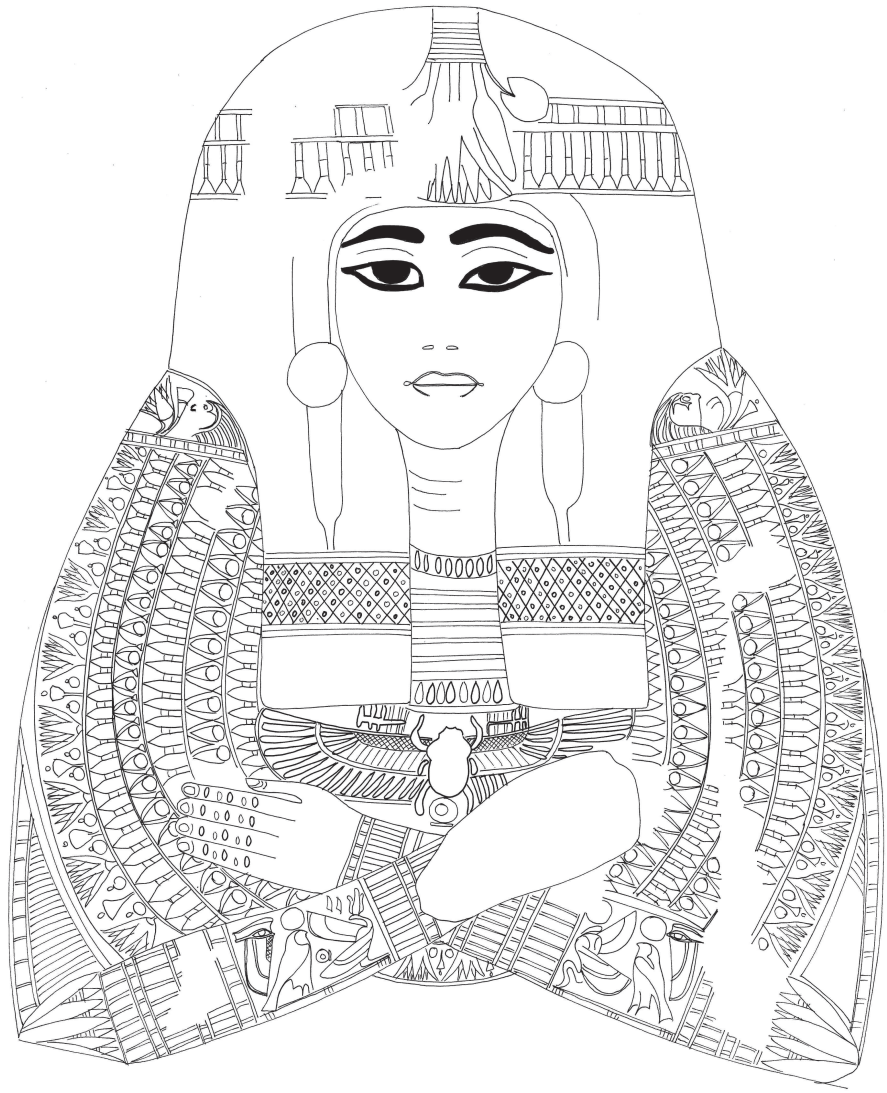

Fig. 2.9. Upper section. Coffin of Taiuheret (A.19).



Fig. 2.10. Upper section. Coffin of Tabasety (Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus).



Fig. 2.11. Upper section. Coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

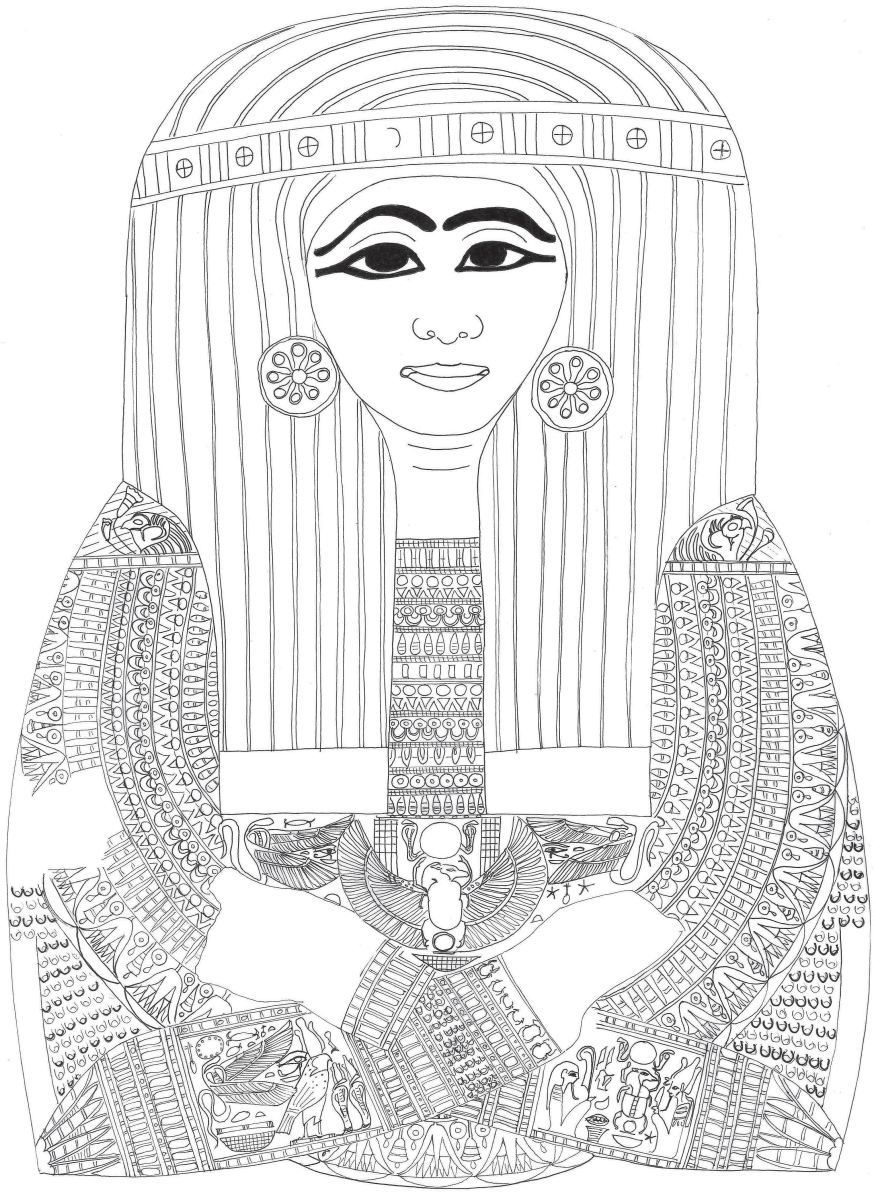

Fig. 2.12. Upper section. Coffin of Khonsumes (A.22).

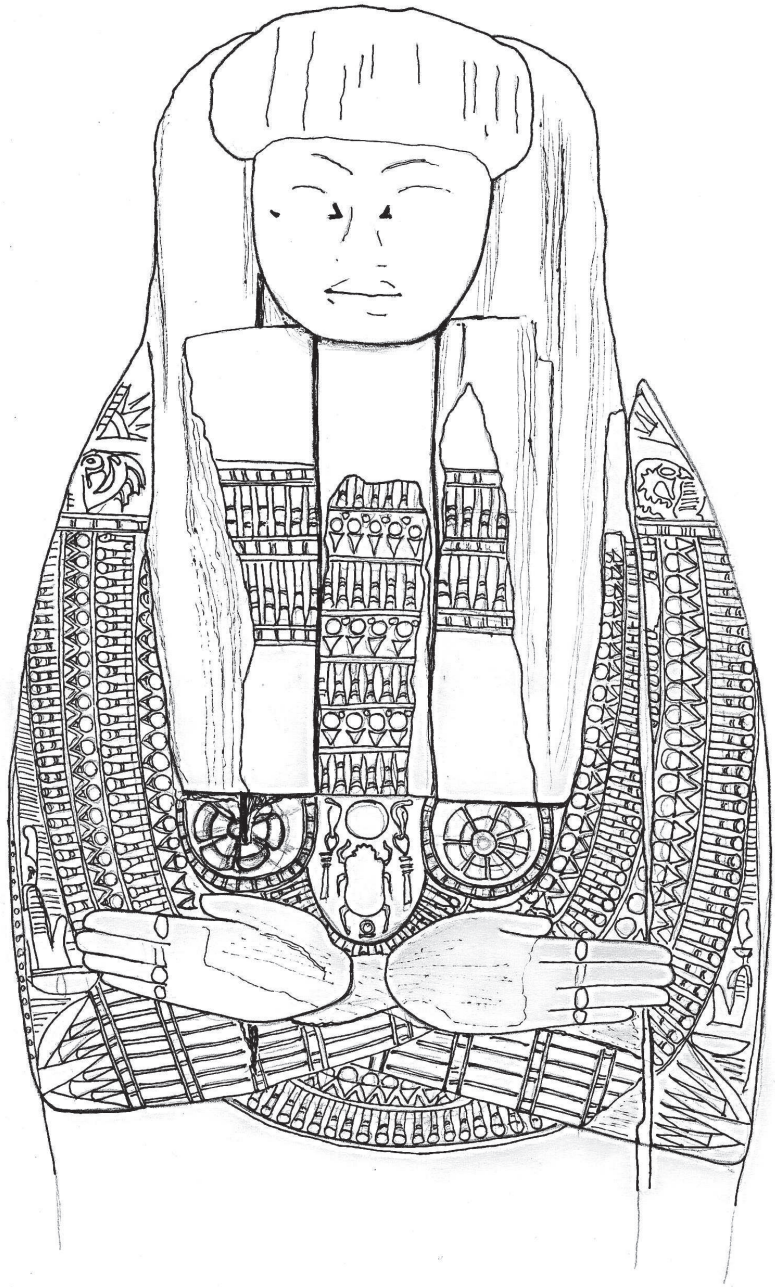

Fig. 2.13. Upper section. Mummy board of Henuttaui (A.136).

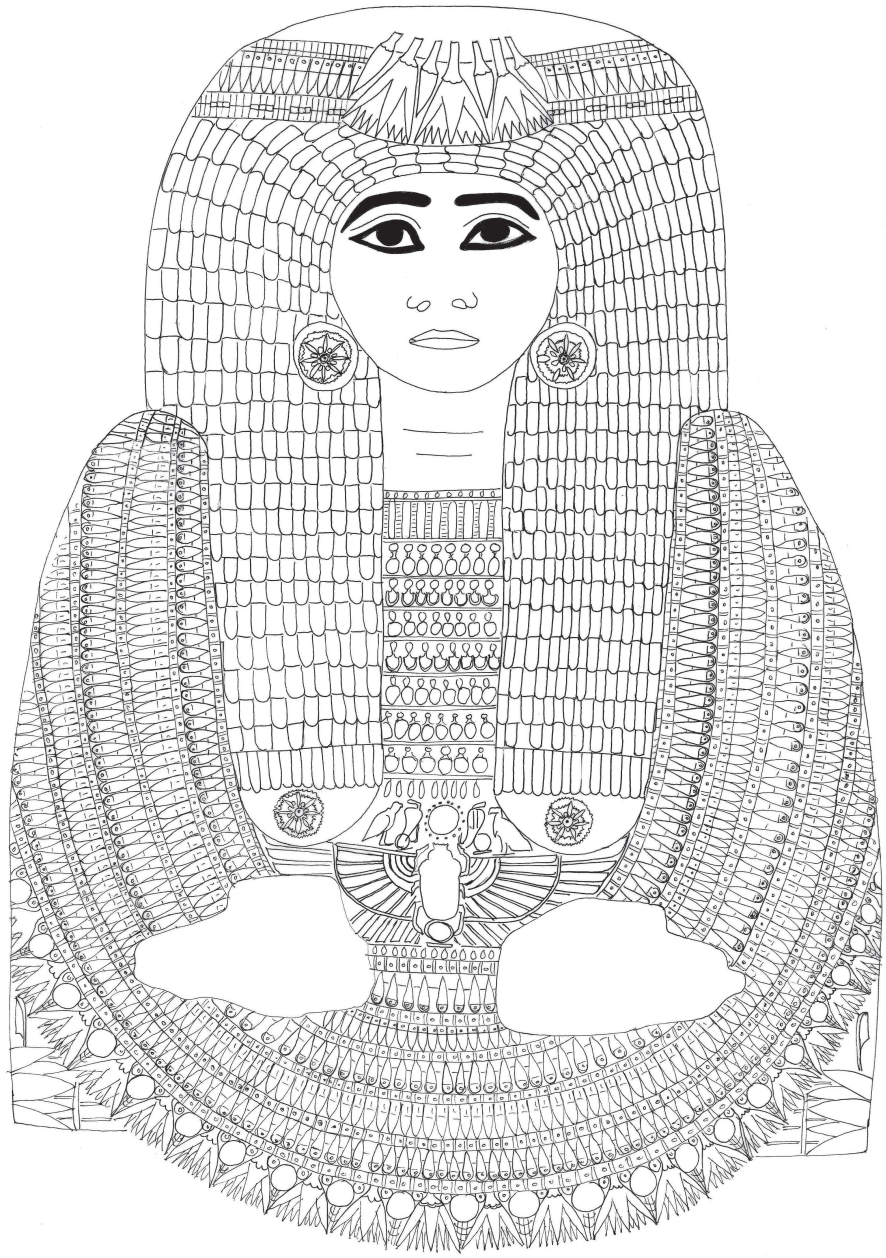

Fig. 2.14. Upper section. Anonymous mummy board (A.15).

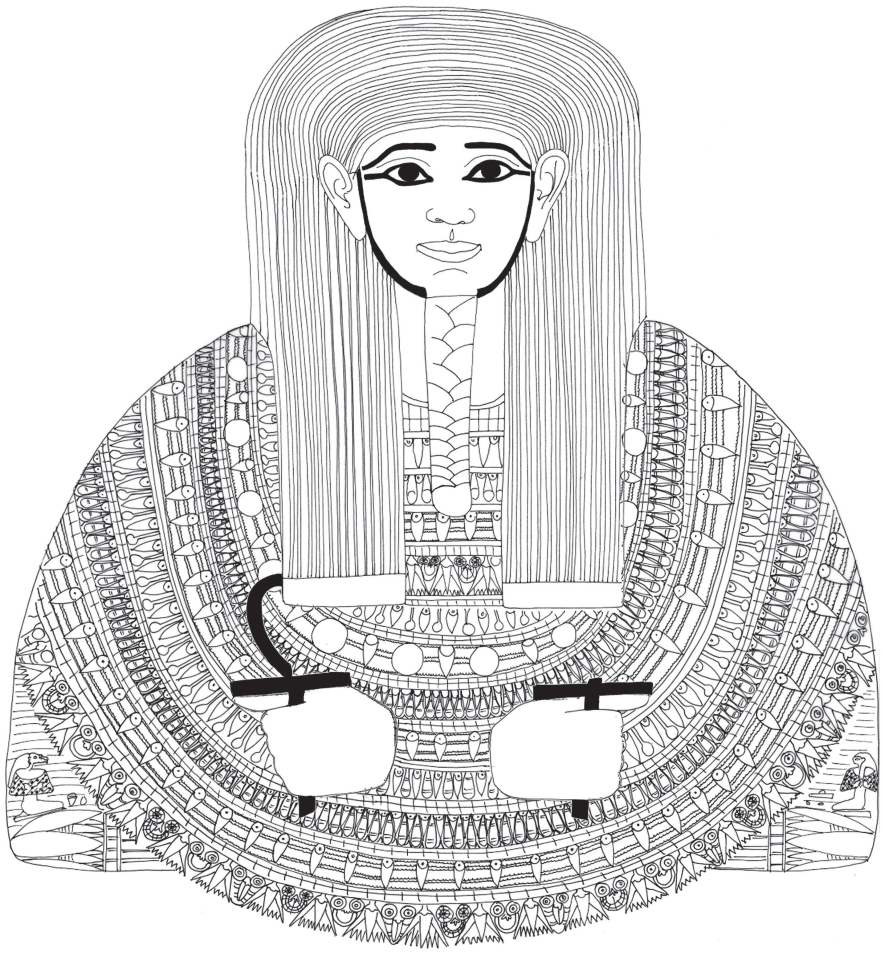

Fig. 2.15. Upper section. Coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu (A.33).

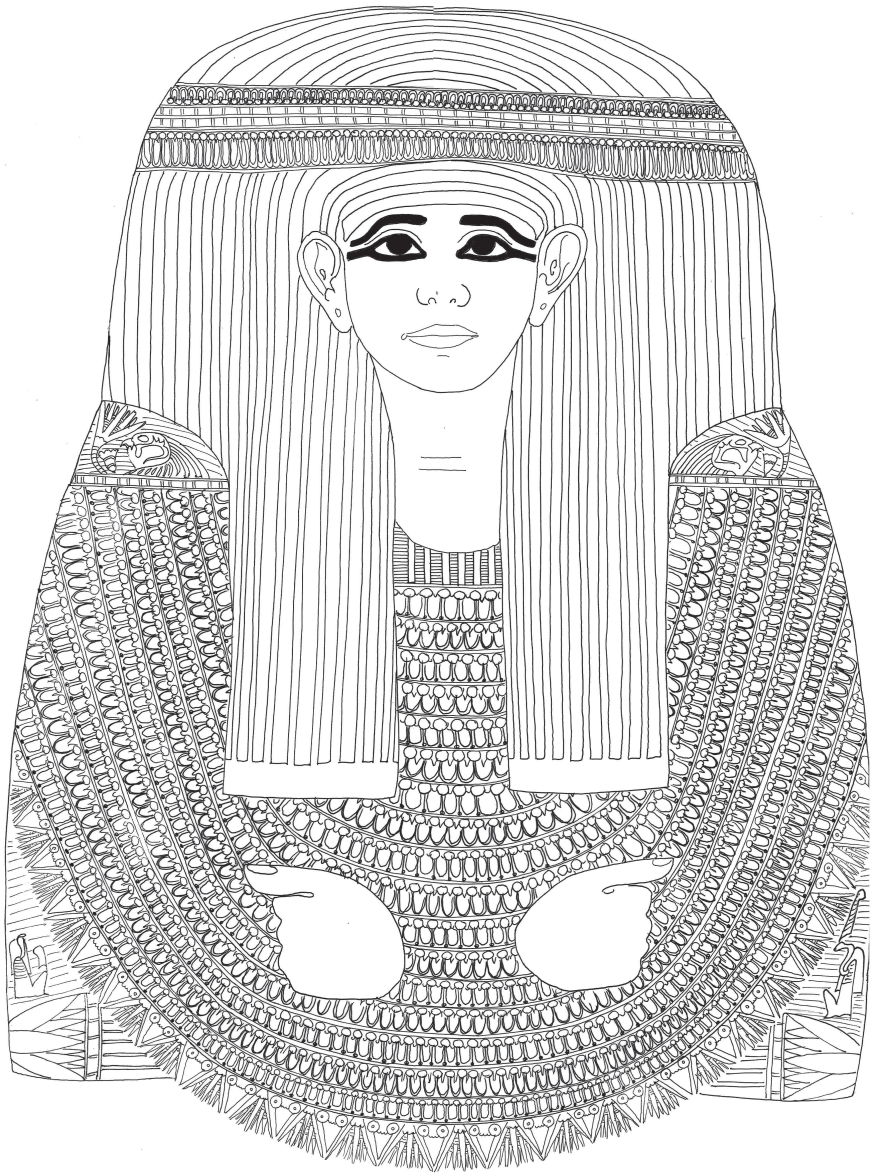

Fig. 2.16. Upper section. Coffin of Nesipanebimakh (A.12).

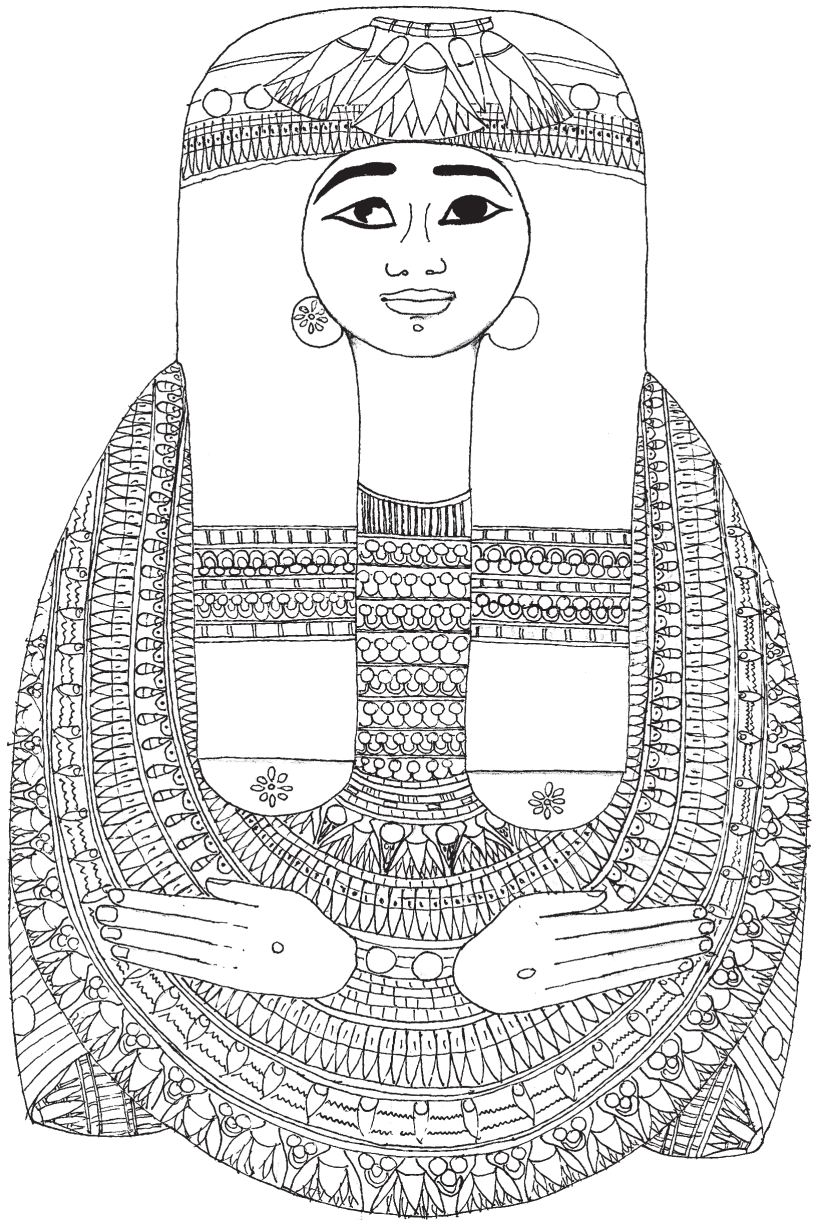

Fig. 2.17. Upper section. Coffin of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

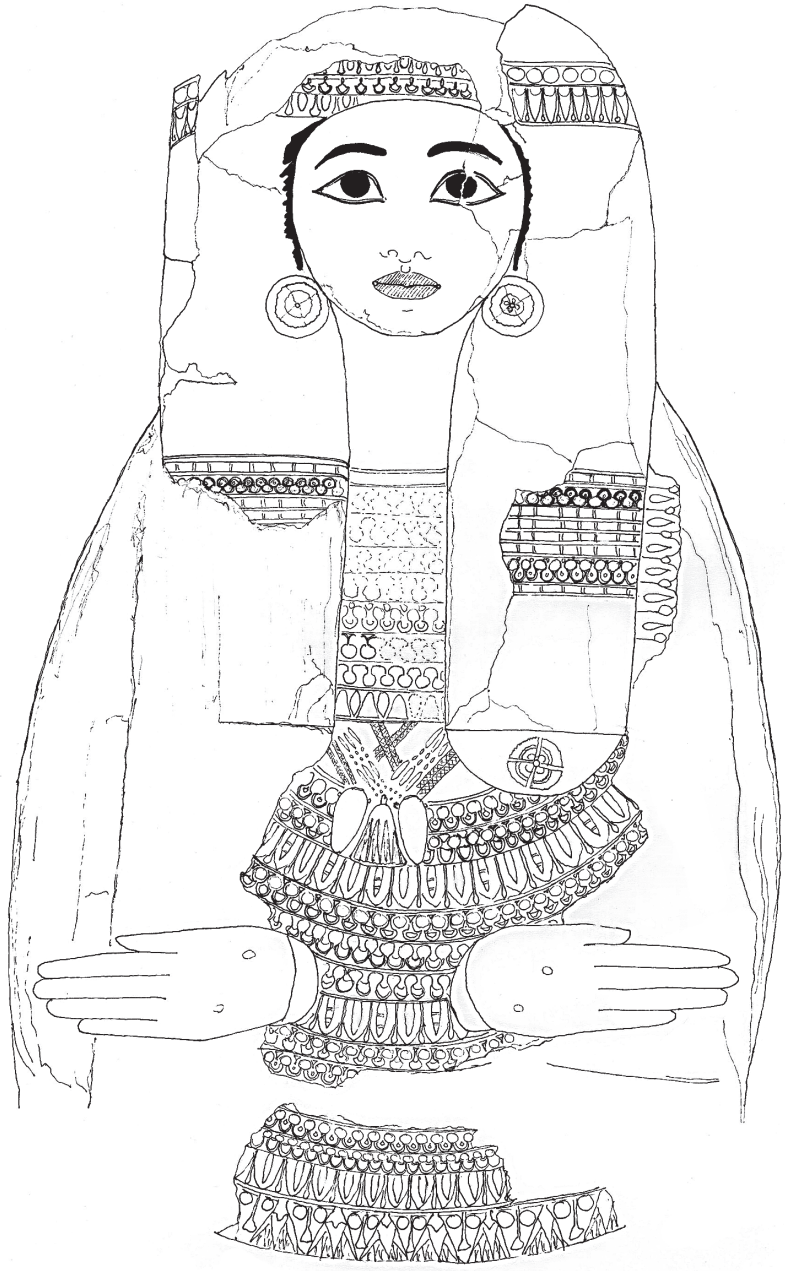

Fig. 2.18. Upper section. Inner lid of Henuttaui (A.136).



Fig. 2.19. Upper section. Outer coffin of an anonymous man (A.56).

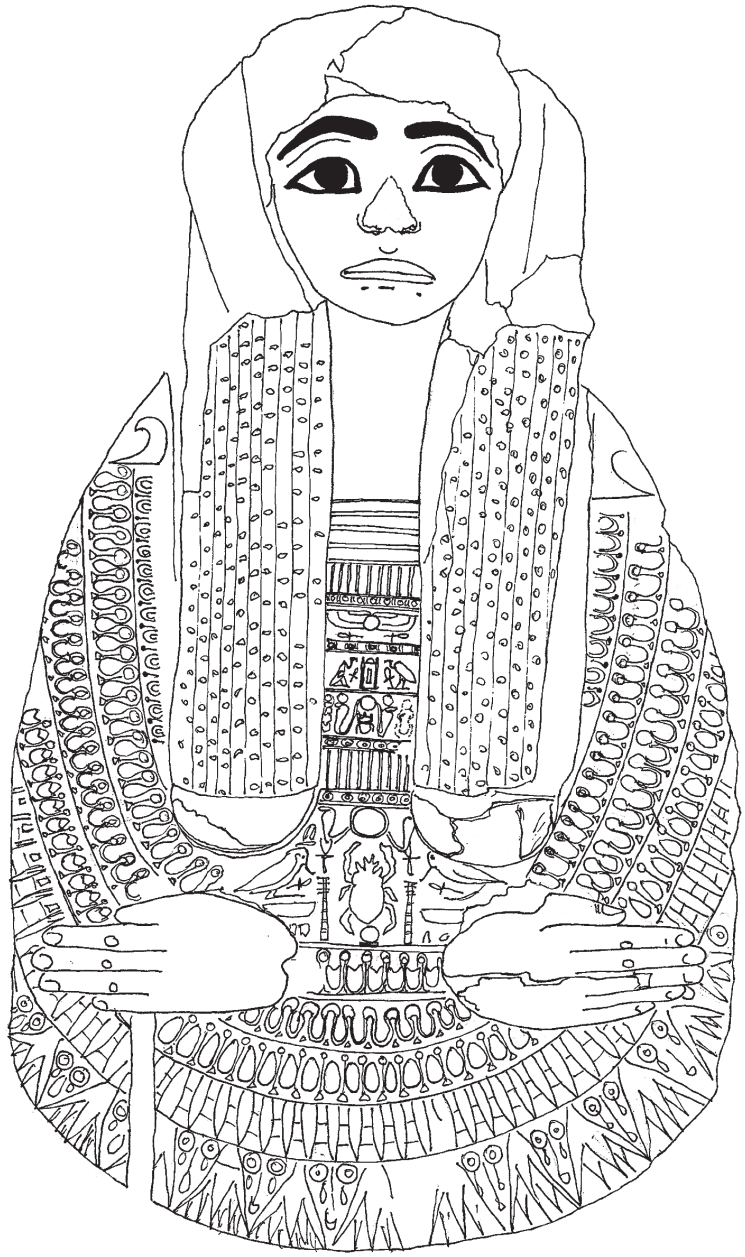

Fig. 2.20. Upper section. Anonymous mummy board (A.27).

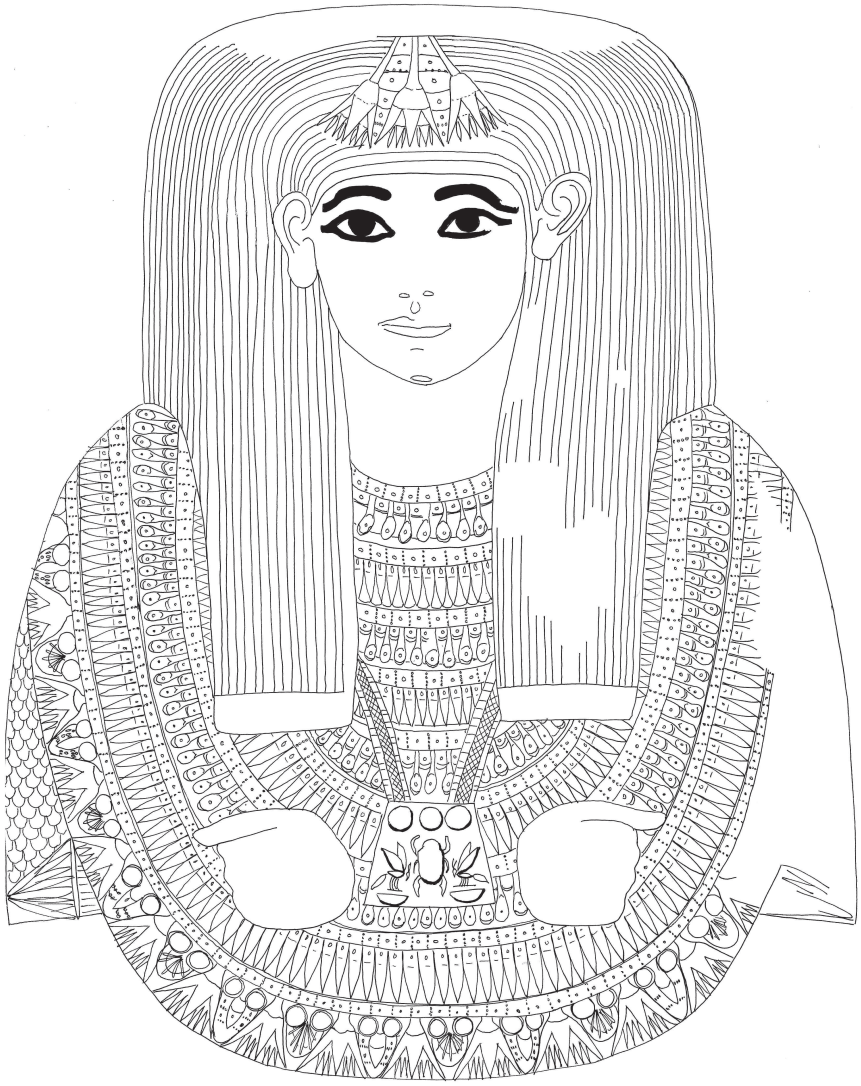

Fig. 2.21. Upper section. Outer coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu (A.33).



Fig. 2.22. Upper section. Outer coffin of Butherkhonsu (A.52).

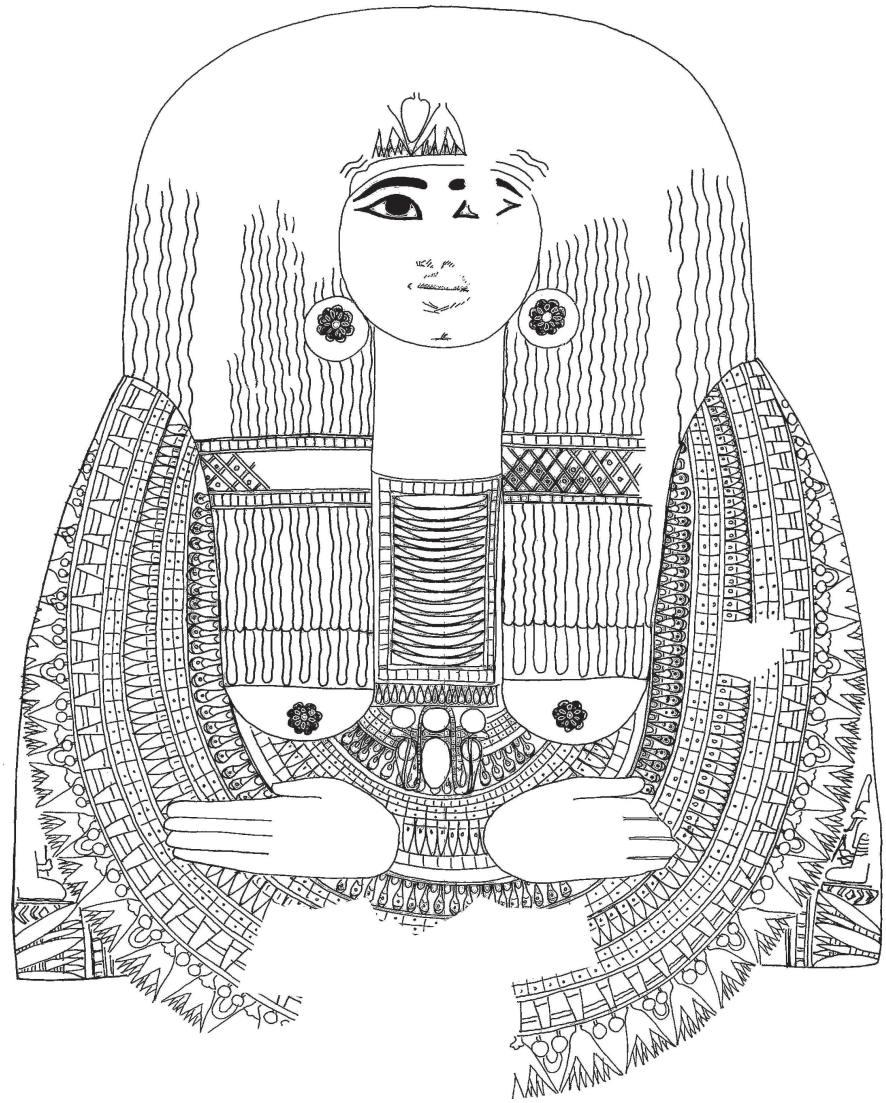

Fig. 2.23. Upper section. Outer coffin of Henuttaui (Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich).



Fig. 2.24. Upper section. Anonymous coffin (A.4).

2. Central section

From a formal standpoint, the central section is the most elaborate composition of the lid, playing a decisive role in the layout and symbolism of the coffin as a whole. This panel evolved from a simple image of the winged goddess Nut displayed over the abdomen of black coffins. The earliest occurrences of the central section are already attested in proto-yellow coffins,[271] formed when a solar pectoral was added to the winged goddess.[272] The central section thus results from associating the heavenly mother goddess with her son, the newborn sun-god, and revolves around the imagery of the sun-god's rebirth.

Basic scheme

The simplest compositions feature two registers, forming what is referred to as the 'basic scheme'. This layout is typical of the late Ramesside period and the first half of the 21st Dynasty. These compositions exhibit a lower density of decoration and reflect the naturalistic softness and sensuality characteristic of the Ramesside style. When depicted, the deceased is shown wearing white festive garments (Fig. 2.28/30).

The basic scheme was also employed during the late 21st Dynasty when workshops aimed for an archaic style.[273] However, the style of these later objects is highly schematic, with far denser compositions displaying a great number of liminal elements.[274] In these later versions, when the deceased is depicted, they are shown wearing dark, tight-fitting clothes.

The first register of this tableau consists of a symmetrical composition flanking a nuclear block, usually a pectoral (Figs. 2.25-27) or a (winged)

271 Coffin set of Henutmehyt (British Museum, EA 48001).

272 Originally this pectoral was depicted in the upper section; however, in the proto-yellow type, it was integrated into the central section, possibly to associate the solar significance of this object with the winged goddess. This transition can be observed in the proto-yellow corpus, comparing the coffin of Katabet (British Museum), with those of Tamutneferet (Louvre Museum, N 2631, N2571, N 2623, N 2620), and the coffins of Henutmehyt (British Museum).

273 During the second half of the 21st Dynasty, compositions typically seen in earlier models were selectively reintroduced, creating an archaizing trend in coffin decoration. Consequently, coffins of a later period may display a central section with only two registers, which is characteristic of earlier coffin designs. A.unknown number: outer coffin of Ikhy (Vatican Museums).

274 A.91: outer coffin of Taditumut.

scarab (Figs. 2.30). This symmetrical arrangement involves centripetal and/or centrifugal blocks, each employing its own repertoire. The second register depicts the winged goddess with U-shaped wings. Secondary motifs can be found above and below the wings of the goddess. This simple layout can be summarised as follows:

centripetal block + centrifugal block + **nuclear block** + centrifugal block+ centripetal block
_____(dividing line)_____
winged deity

Despite the sophistication of the composition, the components of each block can be easily isolated, and the symbols used in each section can be inventoried.

Symmetrical register: The nuclear block

The nuclear block truly governs the composition of the entire central section, giving rise to different variations. The following motifs are commonly depicted in this context:

– **Naos-shaped pectoral.** The pectoral often includes a beaded necklace hanging from the floral collar (Figs. 2.25-27). Typically, the *naos* depicts a scarab holding a sun-disc with a *shen*-ring between its hind legs.[275] The solar god is frequently escorted by groups of mummiform deities (Figs. 2.27).[276] Other variations include the solar scarab flanked by avian gods (Figs. 2.25-26),[277] winged goddesses[278] or *wedjat*-eyes. Some of these motifs can actually be found in royal pectorals.[279] The

275 The *akhet*-sign may appear alone. TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. This sign can also be displayed within wider compositions which may include the *wedjat*-eyes: Leeds City Museum: mummy board of Nesiamun. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun.

276 TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare. TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. A.81: coffin of Ameniutenakht. Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet. The earliest depictions of the solar barque on the pectoral may be observed in the Ramesside Period: coffin set of Henutmehyt (British Museum).

277 Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Paser.

278 Leeds City Museum: mummy board of Nesiamun.

279 Pectoral of Sheshonk II. See Montet 1951, pl. XXVI; Stierlin 1993, 169. Pectoral from the reign of Tutankhamun, see Reeves 1990, 151. This motif is also common in the decoration of the shrines of the sacred barque of Amun. See also the pectoral of Psusennes I in Hornung, Bryan 2002, 130.

solar significance of the pectoral is usually highlighted by depicting the *akhet*-sign,[280] or the solar disc[281] above it. The magical significance of these pectorals is rooted in the imaginary of the Sed Festival, aiming at providing eternal rebirth.[282] However, another layer of meaning may be associated with the personal piety phenomenon, where the heart was interpreted as the inner temple housing the supreme god. In this light, the *naos* pectoral symbolises the rebirth of the sun-god within the deceased's inner *sanctum*.

– **Solar barque.** This is again an allusion to funerary pectorals depicting the solar barque (Fig. 2.28). When the solar disc is shown, it often features the enthroned god Amun-Re,[283] or the solar child.[284] The divine crew includes the god Heka and Maat,[285] or Thoth.[286] The barque navigates over the *pet*-sign, sometimes flanked by the totems of the East and the West.[287] Another variation consists of the depiction of the winged (ram-headed)[288] scarab navigating on the solar barque. Royal funerary jewellery often included pectorals of this kind, suggesting that these motifs were inspired by such objects.[289] These depictions directly reference the royal Book of the Amduat, featuring the main motif, e.g. the solar barque, and can be considered a *pars pro toto* allusion to the 12th Hour.
– **Pectoral with a (winged) scarab.** The pectoral is suspended from a beaded necklace (Fig. 2.29).[290] Floral elements (nymphaea flowers and

280 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: coffin of Herytubekhet. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun.
281 The solar disk is encircled by cobras. TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare. A.81: coffin of Ameniutenakht.
282 Van Walsem 1997, 121.
283 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.
284 TT 320: mummy board of Maatkare.
285 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
286 TT 320: mummy board of Maatkare. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.
287 A.49: mummy board of Diukhonsuiry. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.
288 A.68: lid of Ankhefenmut. A.151: outer coffin of Tjanefery.
289 Pectoral from Tutankhamun's tomb, in Stierlin 1993, 69. Pectoral from the mummy of Sheshonk II, in Stierlin 1993, 195. See also Hornung, Bryan 2002, 131.
290 A.68: mummy board of Ankhefenmut. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.

buds) adorn the lower fringe of the pectoral.[291] These motifs reproduce the features of funerary pectorals actually used in royal mummies.[292]

– **Sacred scarab**. This is the simplest variation, consisting of the plain depiction of the sun-god as a scarab holding the solar disc with its forelegs (Fig. 2.30).[293]

Regardless of the specific type of pectoral depicted in the nuclear block, the (winged) scarab is typically associated with secondary motifs:

– The sacred scarab rises from the *nwb*-sign,[294] the *heb*-bowl, the Djed-pillar,[295] the nymphaea flower,[296] and the even the heart.[297] In some depictions, the scarab is elevated by a goddess (Fig. 2.30).[298]
– The sacred scarab is frequently flanked by hieroglyphic signs (*ankh*, *was*, and *djed*) hanging from the *iaret*-cobras encircling the solar disc. Occasionally, other motifs are included in the nuclear block, such as squatting gods,[299] or the *ba*-bird making offerings before its own mummy.[300]

Symmetrical register: Lateral compositions

The nuclear block is flanked by symmetrical compositions featuring centrifugal and/or centripetal blocks.

Centrifugal blocks. Mummiform gods (squatting[301] or seated on a throne) such as **Osiris** (Fig. 2.29)[302] or the falcon-headed god **Ptah-**

291 A.68: mummy board of Ankhefenmut. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
292 Pectoral of Sheshonk II: See Stierlin1993, 188. Pectoral of Psusennes I: See Montet 1951, pl.CXV.
293 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Amenhotep. A.86: mummy board of Shebti. A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt. A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes. See Van Walsem 1997, 149. Goff 1979, 209-220.
294 TT 320: inner coffin and mummy board of Tauheret.
295 A.19: mummy board of Taiuheret. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin set of Tabakenkhonsu. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin.
296 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Khonsuhotep.
297 TT 320: outer coffin of Pinedjem II.
298 A.28: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt. A.151: outer and inner coffin of Tjanefery. Fitzwilliam Museum: mummy board of Nesipawershefyt.
299 Maat and Horus. A.19: coffin of Taiuheret.
300 Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin.
301 A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
302 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.

Sokar (Figs. 2.27)[303] are the most common motifs depicted in this sector. Occasionally, these gods may be represented as royal ancestors.[304] The enthroned god is typically escorted by standing (winged) goddesses (sometimes identified as Isis and Nephthys) or by a winged Djed-pillar (Fig. 2.32).[305] In more elaborate compositions, the centrifugal block (consisting of the enthroned god and protective female deities) is entirely depicted within a richly decorated shrine (Fig. 2.30).[306]

Centripetal blocks: **(Winged) goddesses**[307] protect the *ba*-bird (Fig. 2.29)[308] or the Sons of Horus.[309] These goddesses are usually identified as Isis and Nephthys.[310] On some occasions, these goddesses wear the monogram of Neith[311] even if the adjacent label-inscriptions identify them as Isis or Nephthys. These compositions can be abbreviated by simply using winged cobra goddesses[312] identified as manifestations of Neith. These goddesses 'represent protection as well as provision with the breath of life'.[313] It is noteworthy that symmetrical depictions of winged deities are common in royal sarcophagi from the reign of Tutankhamun onwards,[314] specifically to restore the vital powers of the royal mummy – seen as the embodiment of Osiris. The goddesses of the central section reproduce this decorative scheme.

303 Leeds City Museum: mummy board of Nesiamun. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: coffin of Herytubekhet. Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu.
304 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Khonsuhotep. On this topic see Shazly 2015.
305 A.60: anonymous inner coffin.
306 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
307 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
308 TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare and inner coffin of Masaharta. A.114: outer coffin of Padiamun. Louvre Museum: mummy board of Tanethereret and coffin set of Paser. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
309 TT 320: outer coffin of Pinedjem II. Metropolitan Museum of Art: mummy board of Nauny.
310 Louvre Museum: mummy board of Panebmontu. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Khonsuhotep.
311 A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt.
312 A.68: mummy board of Ankhefenmut. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: mummy board.
313 Van Walsem 1997, 146
314 The earliest occurrence of this motif is found on the sarcophagus of Akhenaten, where Nefertiti is depicted at the four corners of the object. The winged goddesses were subsequently introduced into this decorative context on the rectangular stone sarcophagus of Tutankhamun, and this scheme was maintained by his immediate successors, Ay and Horemheb. See Ikram, Dodson 1998, 260.

An alternate scheme involves **offering scenes**, clearly inspired by temple decoration (Fig. 2.27). In these blocks, the god Thoth performs rituals (offering the *wedjat*-eye),[315] sometimes followed (or replaced) by the deceased.[316]

When space is limited – especially on mummy boards – the centripetal block is frequently juxtaposed to the nuclear block, forming a composition typically found in the decoration of shrines.[317]

Dividing line

In the basic scheme, a dividing line frames the two main registers.[318] This line varies subtly according to the motifs depicted in the first register:

- If the nuclear block of the first register is a pectoral, this line is traced along the lower edge of the pectoral.[319]
- In most compositions, the registers are framed by a long *pet*-sign,[320] sometimes decorated with stars (Fig. 2.28-30).[321] This is particularly common when the nuclear block is a solar barque. Aquatic connotations of the sky are emphasised with the depiction of a fish emerging from the water,[322]which also alludes to the ord *besy*, meaning 'introduction' or 'emergence', with implications of heavenly ascent.[323]
- Occasionally, when enthroned gods are depicted in the centrifugal blocks, the dividing line may be absent and long mats are positioned

315 Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu.
316 TT 320: inner coffin of Masaharta. Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne de Marseille: mummy board of Tentamun. These scenes are rooted in the motif of the *wedjat*-eye flanking the nuclear block of the first register, as observed in the proto-yellow corpus. See the coffin set of Henutmehyt (British Museum, EA 48001).
317 This composition displays two winged goddesses flanking a solar scarab, a scheme also identified in the decoration of the divine barque of Amun-Re. The winged goddesses are also abundantly attested in the decoration of both divine and funerary shrines. Funerary shrines from Tutankhamun's tomb: Piankoff 1952, Pl. III, X, XII, XV, XVII.
318 In this context, this feature became very common and was only rarely absent: A.114: outer coffin of Padiamun.
319 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: mummy board of Herytubekhet.
320 A.49: mummy board of Diukhonsuiry. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
321 A.68: lid of Ankhefenmut. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu
322 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
323 See Kruchten 1989, 163-167. See also Sousa 2009, 32.

beneath the thrones (Fig. 2.33). In such cases, the dividing line is interrupted at the centre of the composition.[324]

Winged goddess

In most compositions, the goddess Nut is the central protagonist, although occasionally the winged goddess wears the monogram of Neith.[325] The goddess is shown squatting, facing left[326] and wearing a divine dress knotted with a long belt. She wears a headband[327], a modium[328], or a royal crown adorned with cobras,[329] sometimes accompanied by a sun disc.[330] The goddess holds feathers,[331] *ankh* or Djed-signs[332]. Typically, large U-shaped wings extend from her open arms.

Winged goddess: The upper composition

The U-shaped wings of the goddess[333] frame short inscriptions referring to her name and titles (Fig. 2.29),[334] frequently combined with depictions of *wedjat*-eyes.[335] The goddess is referred to as:

- Nut, the great one on the horizon.[336]
- Nut, the great one who gives birth to Re, the lady of the Amentet.[337]
- Nut, the great one who gives birth to the gods, may she give offerings.[338]

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324 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Amenhotep.
325 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Butehamun. A.19: coffin of Taiuheret. A.38: inner coffin of Ankhsenmut. A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
326 The early Ramesside inner coffin of Khonsu from TT 1 is a remarkable exception to this rule, where the goddess is facing right (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 86.1.1-2).
327 Louvre Museum: coffin set of Tamutneferet.
328 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
329 A.68: lid of Ankhefenmut.
330 A.68: lid of Ankhefenmut.
331 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. A.46: outer coffin of Senu. Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Paser.
332 A.68: mummy board of Ankhefenmut.
333 Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet.
334 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. Louvre Museum: coffin set of Tamutneferet. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: coffin set of Herytubekhet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttauiu.
335 A.49: mummy board of Diukhonsuiry. Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
336 Inner coffin of Khonsu from TT 1 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 86.1.1; 86.1.2).
337 Collection Harris: mummy board of Khaemopet.
338 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta.

- Nut, the great one, mother of gods, daughter of Re, who is in the House of Life (Per-Ankh), lady of the House of Embalming (Per-Nefer), may she grant all things.[339]

Short spells invoking Nut are sometimes included:

- Words spoken by Nut, the great one. Words spoken by Isis, the mother of gods.[340]
- Words spoken by Nut, the great one who gives birth to the gods, who conceived Re, lady of the Amentet, may she grant all good and pure things.[341]

Winged goddess: The lower composition

In earlier objects, the area below the wings of the goddess is left undecorated (Fig. 2.25).[342] Over time, this area was used to display centrifugal compositions featuring *wedjat*-eyes (Fig. 2.26),[343] the god Anubis (Fig. 2.29),[344] Osiris,[345] (winged[346]) cobras (Fig. 2.31),[347] or the *ba*-bird (Fig. 2.27).

The transition towards the classical scheme

Some attempts to introduce innovative arrangements in the central section led to the creation of new registers. The first attempts to expand this tableau involved adding a small register above the first register, typically achieved by relocating the (winged) scarab to that location, which then became the dominant element of the entire tableau (Fig. 2.31).[348]

339 A.68: mummy board of Ankhefenmut.
340 Die Städtische Galerie Liebieghaus in Frankfurt: coffin set of Takayt.
341 Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu.
342 A.49: mummy board of Diukhonsuiry. Leeds City Museum: mummy board of Nesiamun.
343 Louvre Museum: coffin set of Tamutneferet.
344 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui. Louvre Museum: mummy board of Tanetherert. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu
345 Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety.
346 TT 320: inner coffin of Masaharta. A.68: lid of Ankhefenmut.
347 Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Khonsuhotep.
348 A.53: outer coffin of Tantdjehuti. A.95: mummy board of Pameshem. Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Tanatnektahat. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny.

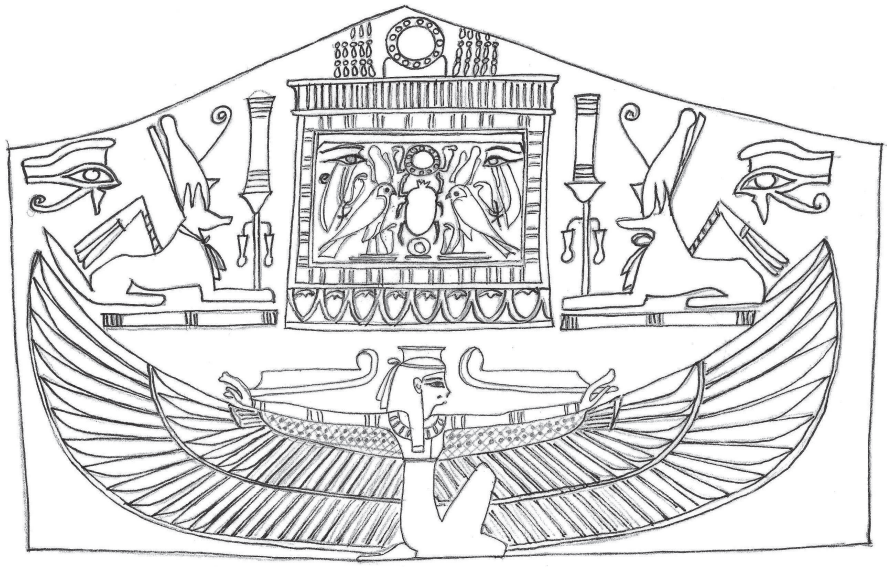

Fig. 2.25. Central section. Outer coffin of Henuttaui (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

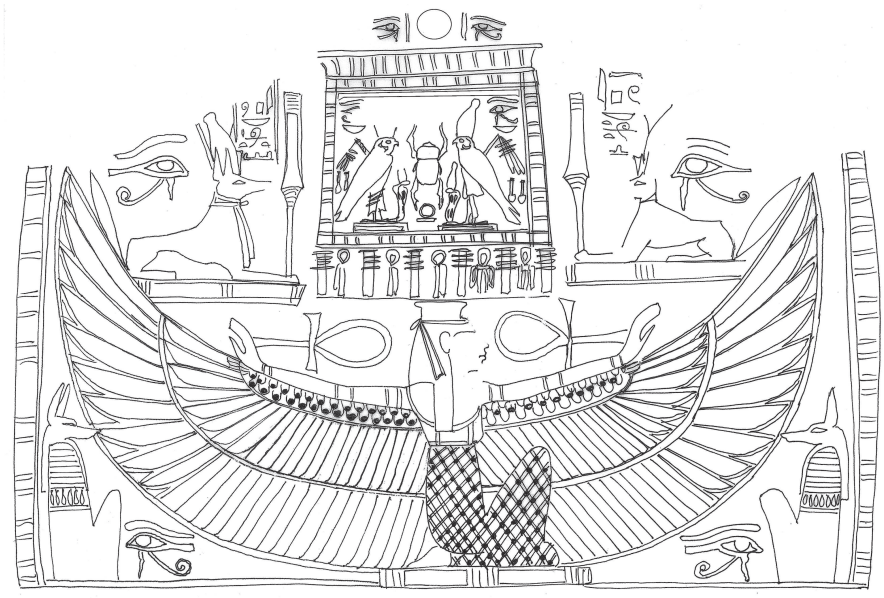

Fig. 2.26. Central section. Mumy board of Tabasety (Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus).

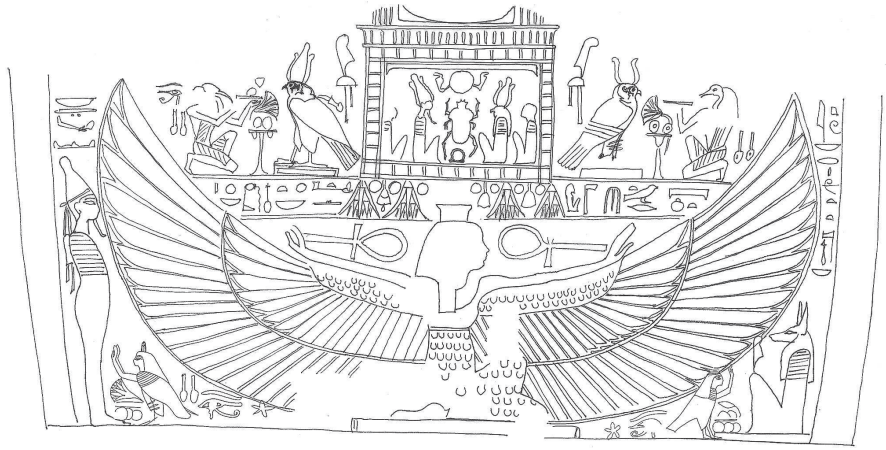

Fig. 2.27. Central section. Coffin of Tabasety (Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus).

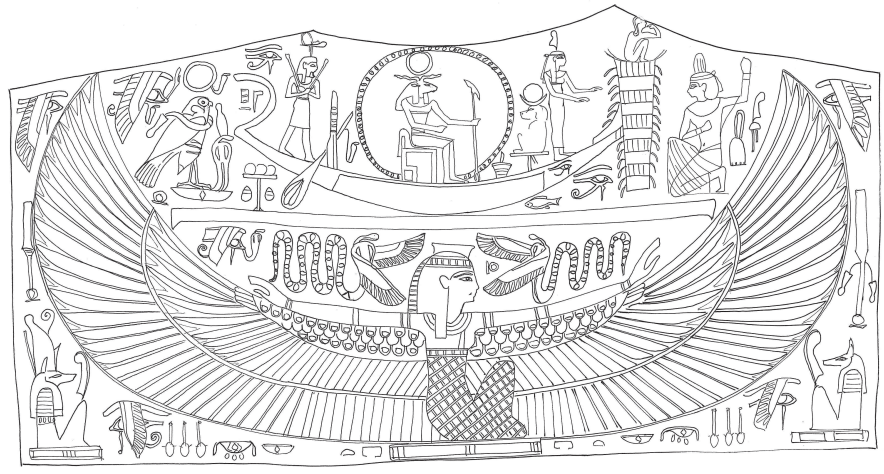

Fig. 2.28. Central section. Outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet (Brooklyn Museum).

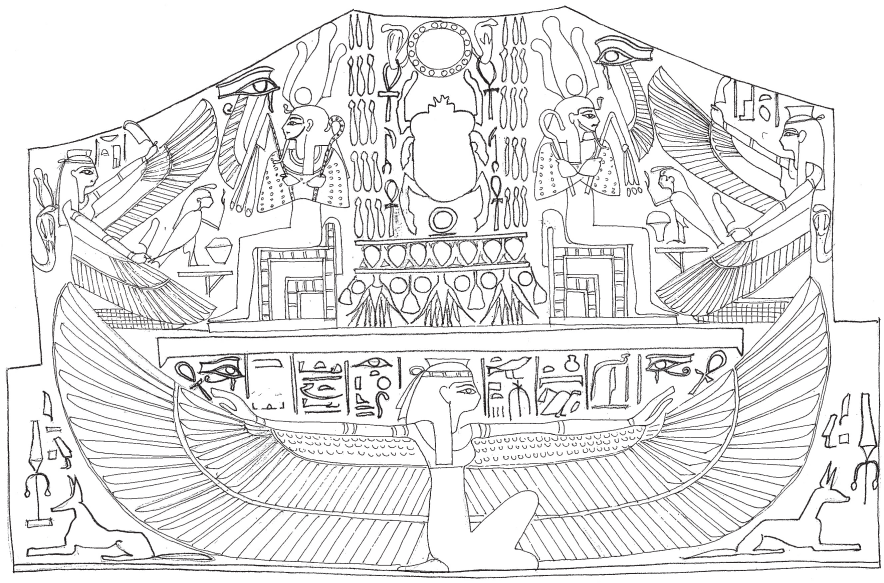

Fig. 2.29. Central section. Inner coffin of Henuttaui (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

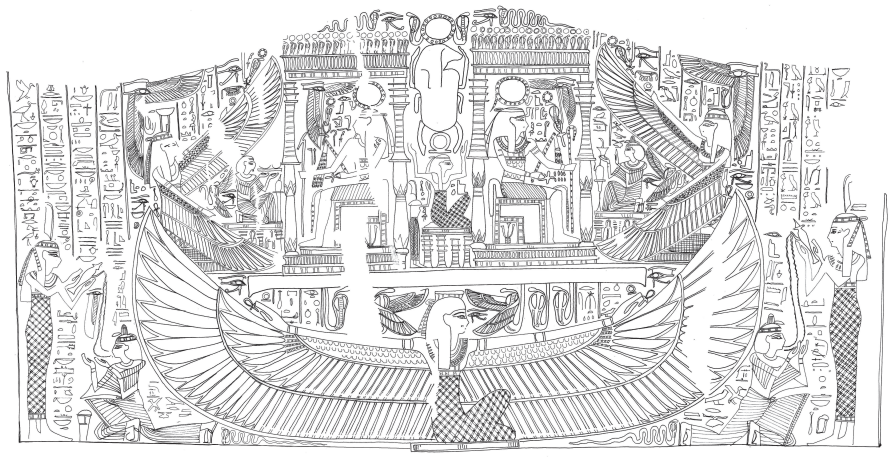

Fig. 2.30. Central section. Inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

A bolder approach played a more significant role in redefining the layout of the central section, focusing on the winged goddess. The motifs depicted below her wings increased in both size and in number, [349] eventually forming an autonomous register.[350] Several coffins found in the Tomb of the Priests of Amun show the progression of this process:

- In the inner coffin from A.60, the third register features an intriguing composition: two frogs flank a nymphaea flower, spitting water towards the avian manifestation of the deceased (Fig. 2.32).
- In the coffin from A.18, four squatting mummiform gods flank a falcon god resting on the sign of the West, while the deceased adores two other mummiform deities (Fig. 2.33).
- In the inner coffin from A.96, the nuclear block is formed by the god Shu who rises from the ground, holding up a basket in which the winged goddess is squatting. This central figure is flanked by the *ba*-bird adoring Anubis.

These compositions clearly show that, at this stage, the structure of the third register was not yet standardised. The arrangement of this register is so innovative that it sharply contrasts with the more standardised elements of the rest of the composition. However, an increasing interdependence between the first and third registers is progressively observed. In the lid of Nesipanebimakh,[351] most of the motifs in the third register are atypical but centripetal winged goddesses introduce vertical symmetry with the first register (Fig. 2.35).

The mummy board from A.29 shows a further stage in this process, with the third register displaying minor differences, mostly focused on the nuclear block (Fig. 2.34). The scheme of the third register was eventually defined when the same standardised structure of the first register was adopted, forming what is referred to as the 'classical scheme' of the central section[352].

349 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: anonymous coffin.
350 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.60: anonymous inner coffin. A.96: inner coffin of Nesitawadjatakh.
351 See a similar process in the mummy board of Nesipanebu (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden).
352 A.142: mummy board of Nesipernub. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Khonsumose. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Hori.

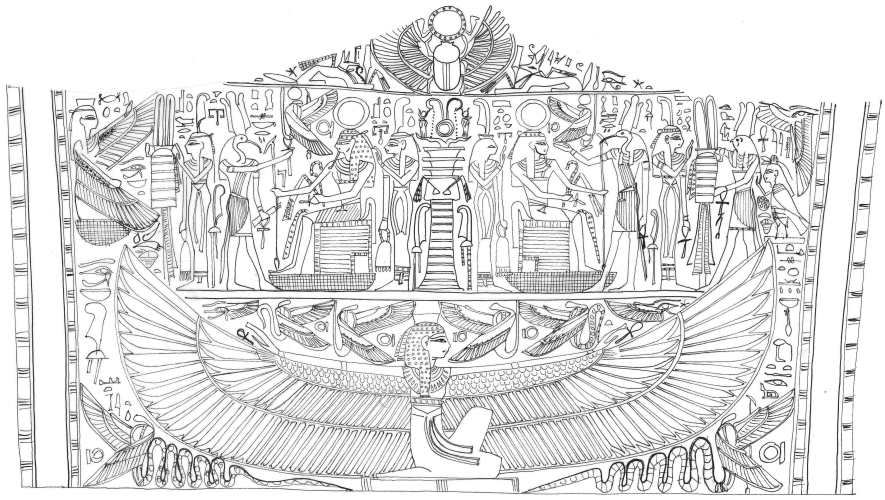

Fig. 2.31. Central section. Inner coffin of Nauny (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

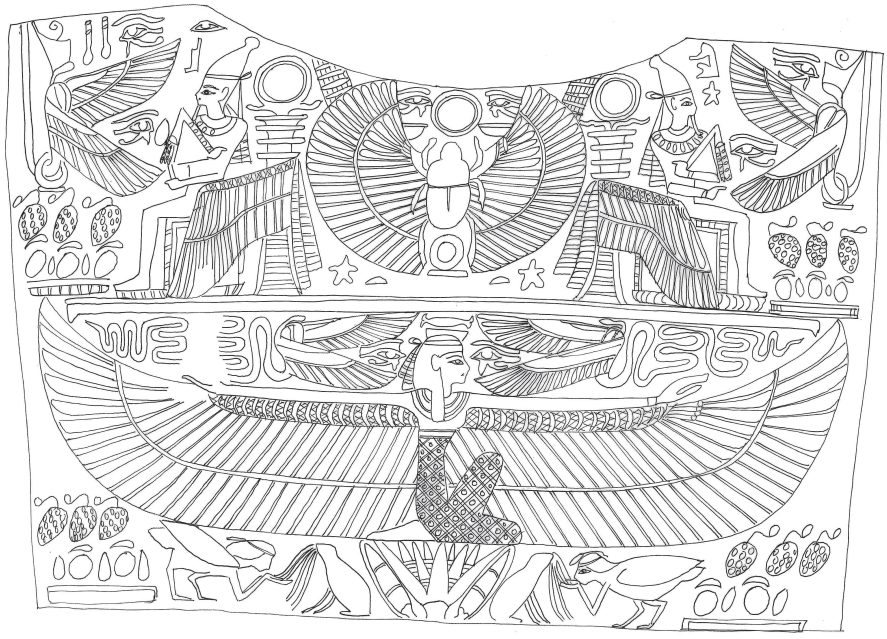

Fig. 2.32. Central section. Anonymous inner coffin (A.60).

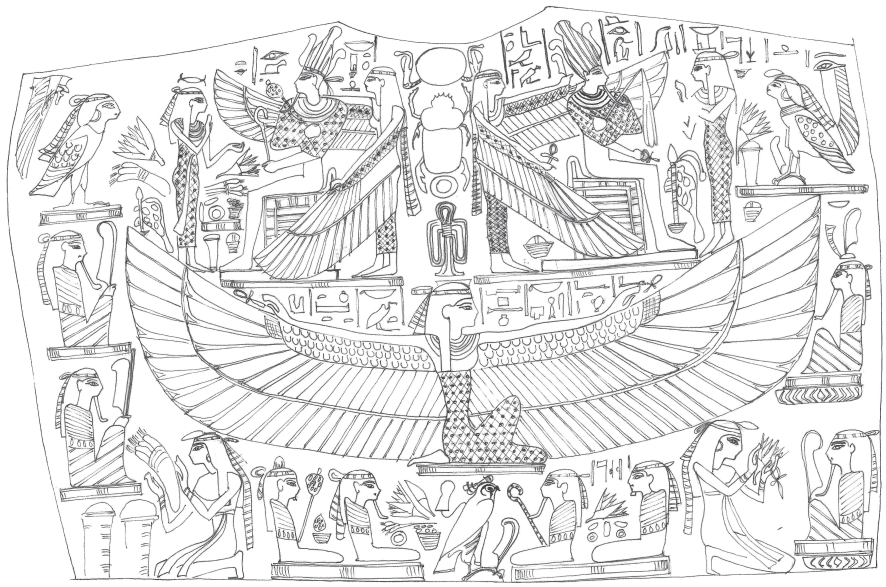

Fig. 2.33. Central section. Anonymous coffin (A.18).



Fig. 2.34. Central section. Anonymous mummy board (A.29).

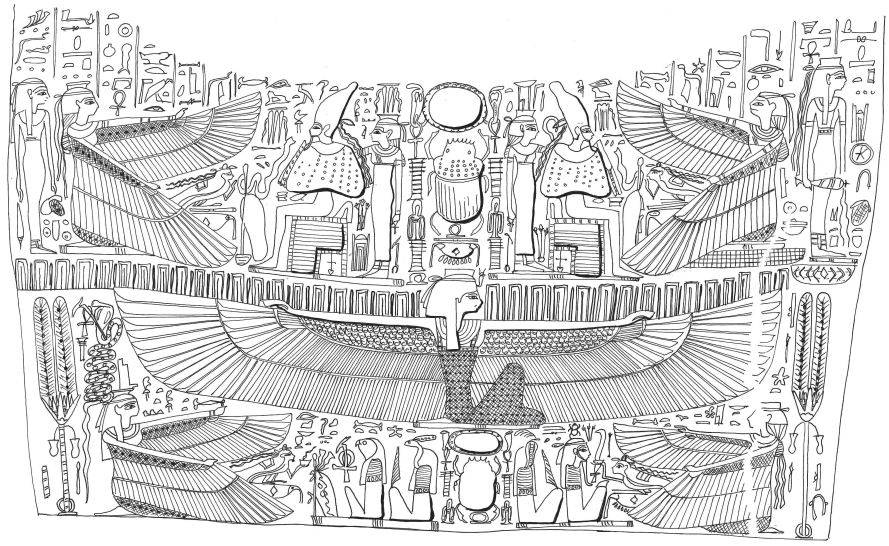

Fig. 2.35. Central section. Mummy board of Nesipanebimakh (A.12).

Classical scheme

By the mid-21st Dynasty, the layout of the central section had evolved considerably in complexity. Not only was a new register added to the tableau, but the decoration itself became more elaborate, with the addition of secondary motifs, which we term 'liminal elements', making the overall composition denser and heavier. The style also became more schematic and standardised. Moreover, greater emphasis was placed on the three-dimensionality of the composition, with key-features (scarabs, solar discs and enthroned gods) moulded in plaster, creating a relief effect, particularly noticeable along the central axis of the composition.

The classical layout of this tableau presents a very stable scheme, displaying three registers. The first and third registers share a symmetrical structure, while the second register continues to depict the winged goddess (Figs. 2.36-40).

Symmetrical registers

Typically, the symmetrical registers are composed of a nuclear block, usually embodied in a (ram-headed) scarab,[353] flanked by centrifugal and centripetal blocks. Beyond this sequence, additional blocks are juxtaposed. These blocks commonly depict squatting mummiform gods,[354] sacred animals (such as the jackal god),[355] or a variety of cult scenes.[356] The Ta-wer totem[357] frequently appears at the edges of the composition.[358]

In general, complete symmetry between the first and third registers was sought,[359] however subtle differences were introduced using various methods:

353 Inner Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.
354 A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.110: coffin set of Djedmutiuesankh. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
355 A.131: outer anonymous coffin.
356 A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh.
357 A.108: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
358 This feature was previously depicted on the arms, but it was gradually transferred to this section as the floral collar began to cover this area.
359 A.12: mummy board of Nesipanebimakh. A.23: outer coffin of Nesipakaef. A.33: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.40: outer coffin of Bakenmut. A.44: outer coffin of Tjenetehenef. A.108: inner coffin and mummy board of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. A.131: anonymous coffin set. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui. A.149: anonymous coffin set. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin set of Hori, coffin of Khonsumose, mummy board of Mutemperamun and coffin of Bakenkhonsu. Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Pashedkhonsu.

– altering the sequence of the centrifugal/centripetal blocks.[360]
– changing particular motifs (Figs. 2.37-38).[361]
– removing certain motifs[362] or entire blocks.[363]

Winged goddess

The most notable change in this register is the arrangement of the wings of the main goddess, which are now fully stretched horizontally to accommodate the increasing number of symbols displayed on her arms (Fig. 2.37).

The liminal elements

The classical scheme reveals a keen interest in depicting small signs, which include:

– **Vultures**. Although this bird is the heraldic symbol of Nekhbet, the goddess of Upper Egypt, in this context it likely refers to Mut, the mother goddess of Thebes.
– **Cobras**. Typically associated with the goddess Wadjet, heraldic goddess of Lower Egypt, in this context they appear to stand as a manifestation of Neith regarded as the goddess embodying the coffin itself. These ophidian representations of Neith sometimes spring from line registers,[364] thus highlighting their association with the coffin, from which they appear to protect its sacred space.
– **Scarabs**. As solar symbols, scarabs allude not only to the nightly journey of the sun but also to regeneration, rebirth, and rejuvenation as manifestations of Khepri ('He who came forth' or 'He who came into being').[365]

360 The order of the centrifugal and centripetal blocks may be changed. TT 320: inner coffin and mummy board of Nesikhonsu.
361 See outer coffin of Nesikhonsu (TT 320), where the nuclear block of the third register is depicted without wings. See also A.110: mummy board of Djedmutiuesankh (here the Osirian god was interestingly changed by the Ta-wer totem).
362 A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui. Here the Osirian gods are squatting (instead of enthroned), the goddesses are shown in their ophidian manifestations, the *ba*-birds and the imiwt-totems have been removed.
363 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Khonsumose (here the third register does not have centrifugal blocks and in the nuclear block the solar boat has been removed. This process is frequently used as there is usually less space available in the lower areas). See also A.142: mummy board of Nesipernub.
364 A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin set of Butehamun.
365 Wilkinson 1992, 113.

- ***Shetyt*-shrines**. During the New Kingdom, these shrines were associated with the gods of the netherworld, such as Sokar, alluding to the protective role of the coffin as a magical container embodying the Duat. This type of shrine was also frequently used to house *shabti*-statuettes; in this context, however, it symbolises the coffin itself.[366]
- **Hieroglyphs**. A variety of small hieroglyphs are loosely displayed throughout the available space, typically referencing the Duat, such as stars (*duat*), *netjer*, *nefer*, *wedjat*-eyes, and *heb*-bowls. They are inscribed as labels identifying the neighbouring deities.

These elements are unspecific and, thus, are often labelled as 'space-fillers', based on the assumption that their primary role is merely occupy empty space, a result of the phenomenon known as *horror vacui*. [367] However, an iconographic examination of coffin decoration reveals that this particular repertoire of symbols also appears in the interior decoration of the box, where they are depicted on a larger scale and in close association with the mother goddess depicted on the floorboard (Figs. 4.15/17-20). These symbols were therefore intimately connected with the sacredness of the coffin's interior, which was evidently perceived as representing the Duat itself.

The use of these symbols in the central section suggests an intention to convey the sacred atmosphere of the coffin's interior to its exterior. Initially, they were depicted along the wings of Nut, forming centripetal compositions flanking her head. In this manner, they created a 'fluid' magical protection, establishing a link between the interior and exterior of the coffin. From our perspective, the increasing importance of these elements in the central section can be attributed to their ability to extend the magical protective influence of the mother goddess to the exterior areas of the coffin. In short, liminal elements should be regarded as an extension of the protective role of the heavenly mother goddess depicted on the interior of the box. The designation we propose, 'liminal elements,' aims

366 Shabti-box of Khabekhenet (Louvre Museum, E 27149) in Étienne 2009, nº 215.
367 Schmidt 1902, 4.

to describe the transitional role of these motifs, which goes unnoticed under the label 'space-fillers'.

The liminal elements quickly expanded towards the outer boundaries of the central section and were inserted between the main registers of the tableau.[368] Their symbolic significance was so important that they continued to increase in both number and size.[369] The friezes of liminal elements eventually integrated other motifs, such as falcon gods, long twisted cobras, and mummiform gods alongside their respective shrines.[370] The depictions of gods became larger and, in some cases, they appear fully enthroned,[371] forming self-contained cult scenes (Fig. 2.36).[372]

The increasing importance of the liminal elements eventually led to the progressive miniaturisation of the central section.[373] Miniaturist panels still display three registers but have wider interstitial areas, resulting in the figures of the main registers being reduced in size to accommodate the extensive liminal compositions (Fig. 2.40). In the finest examples, the composition evolved into a meticulous tableau, presenting a strong sense of geometry and unity despite the multitude of blocks included in the liminal areas.[374]

Complex scheme

During the latter half of the 21st Dynasty, the central section attained a new level of complexity. The style became even more schematic, and the density of depiction heavier. At least four distinct layout types can be identified from this period, typically displaying more than three registers.

368 The importance of these elements is evident on the upper edges of the central section, which became wider when the depiction of the forearms fell out of use. This change alone created new pictorial areas within the section, which were subsequently decorated with liminal elements. A.18: anonymous coffin. A.83: outer coffin of Djedkhonsuesankh. These areas were also decorated with additional blocks allusive to cult scenes: A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Pashedkhonsu.

369 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Hori. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Khonsumose. A.10: coffin set of Tabaekkhonsu. A.83: outer coffin of Djedkhonsuesankh. A.99: outer coffin of Padiamun.

370 A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh.

371 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.33: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.40: outer coffin of Bakenmut. A.142: inner coffin of Nesipernub.

372 A.32: coffin set of Taahuti.

373 A.26: outer coffin of Nesiniutitaui. A.149: anonymous outer coffin. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer and inner coffin of Tabakmut.

374 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Tabakmut.

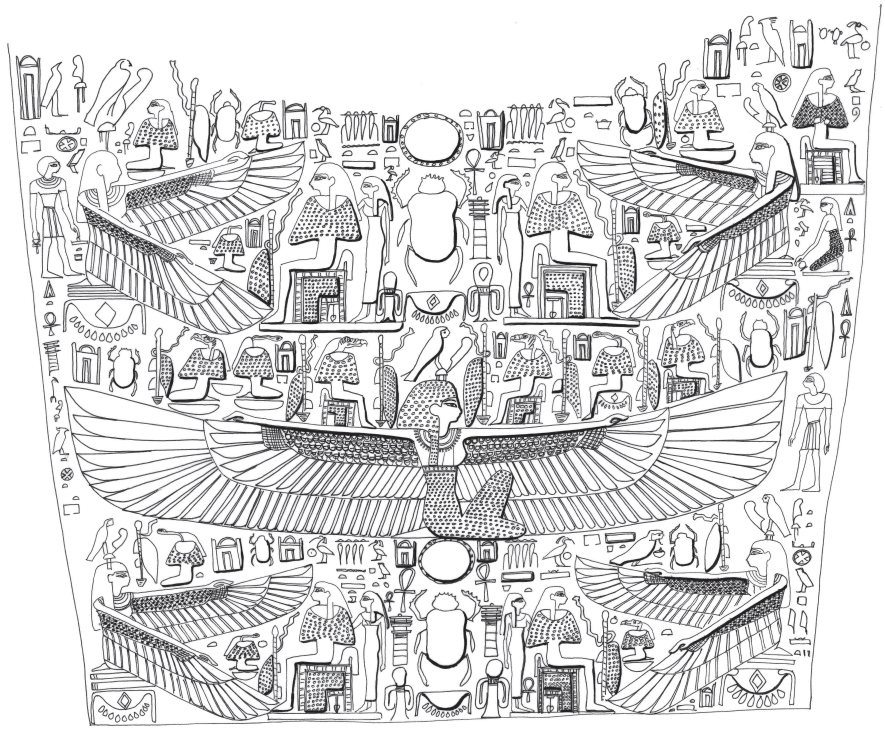

Fig. 2.36. Central section. Inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu (A.33).

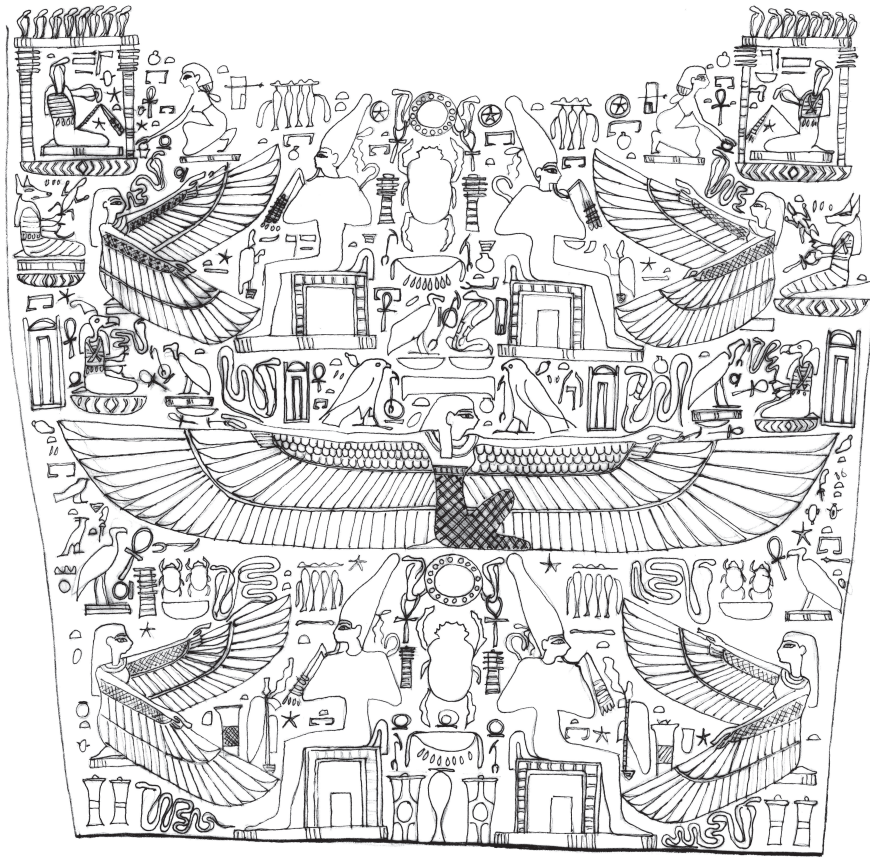

Fig. 2.37. Central section. Coffin of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

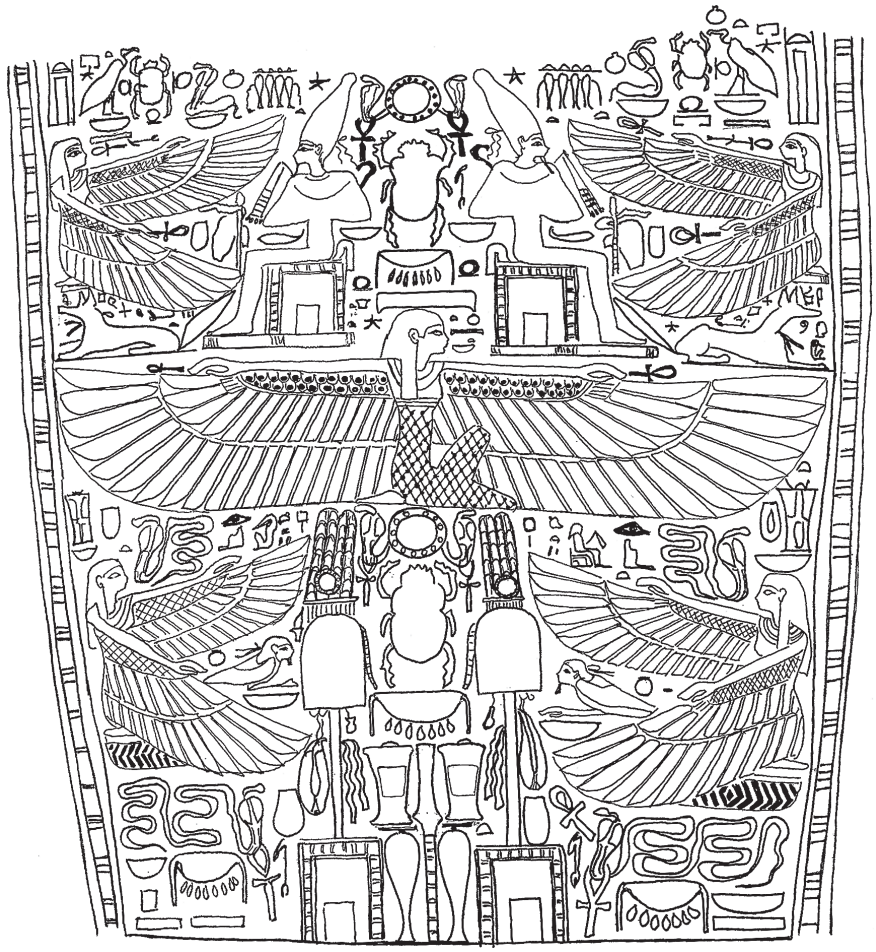

Fig. 2.38. Central section. Mummy board of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

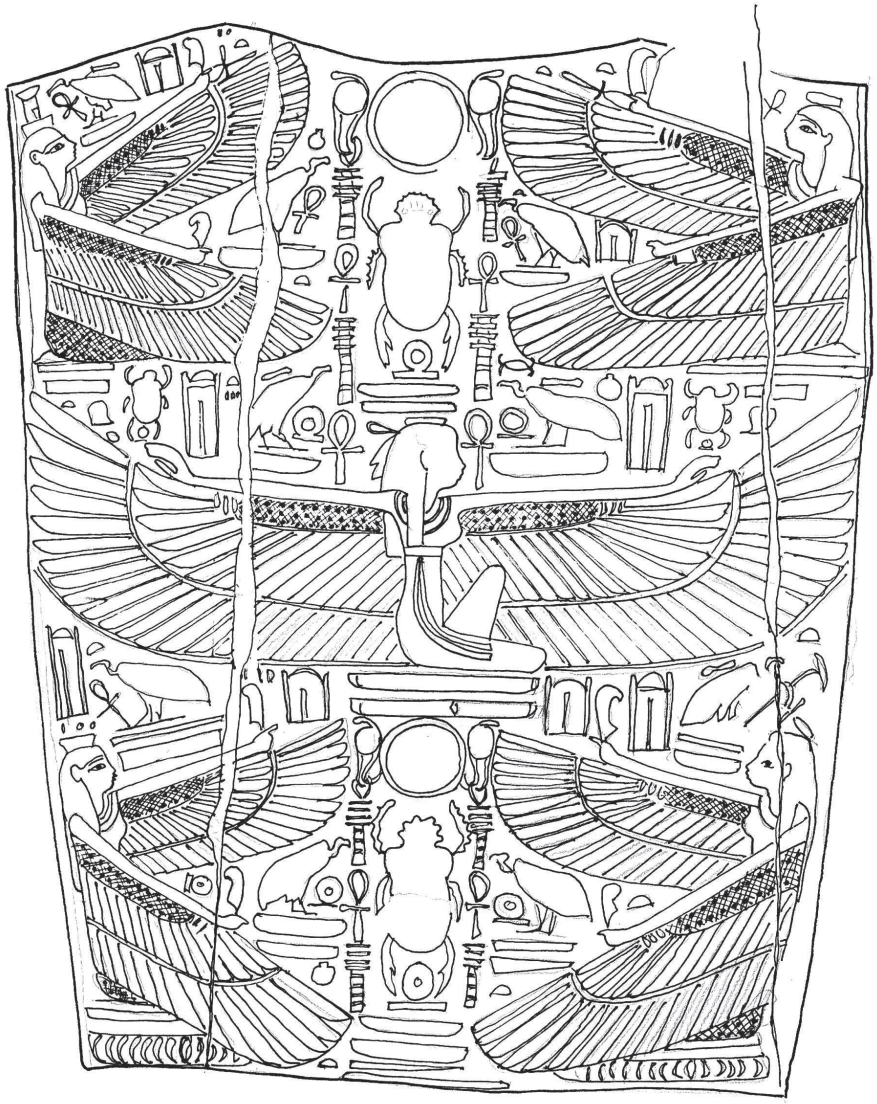

Fig. 2.39. Central section. Anonymous mummy board of Henuttaui(A.136).

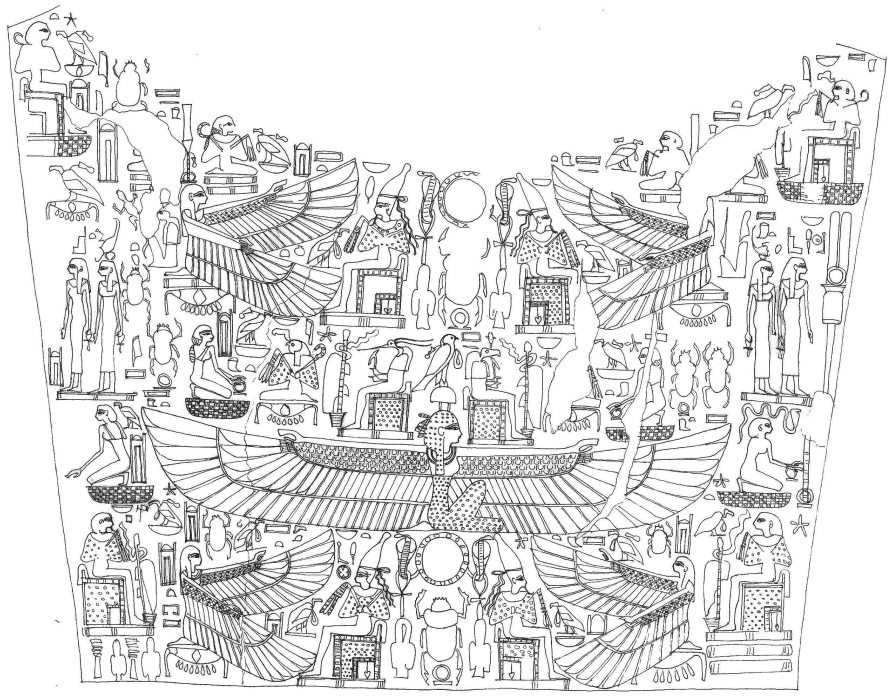

Fig. 2.40. Central section. Outer coffin of Bakenmut (A.40).

Panels headed by a solar scarab

These compositions are usually considerably extended, with some of them fully covering the lower section and extending down the footboard (Fig. 2.41).[375] The classical tripartite scheme of the central section is retained but new registers are added.[376] In these cases, several processes can be observed:

- The first three registers maintain the standard layout of the classical scheme. The lower registers continue the alternating sequence between the symmetrical registers and the winged deity[377] The main goddess is frequently replaced by a raptor[378] or winged sun disc.[379] As the composition approaches the footboard, the symmetrical registers are increasingly simplified. An interesting procedure is the omission of the centrifugal block and the winged goddesses from the centripetal block, retaining only the *ba*-bird and the *wedjat*-eye (from the centripetal block).[380]
- Beyond the first three registers, the sequence of additional registers becomes unpredictable. Sometimes, only symmetrical registers are displayed.[381] In others, the sequence includes winged deities, symmetrical registers, and friezes, without any discernible order.[382] The use of friezes composed of *djed* and Tjet-signs is typically included in these compositions, as well as the abundant use of liminal elements. Occasionally, very unusual motifs, such as serpent-headed recumbent gods,[383] are included.

375 A.29: anonymous inner coffin set. A.41: anonymous coffin set. A.143: coffin set of Hori. Occasionally, the central section is extended but the lower section is preserved. In the mummy board of Asetemkhebit (TT 320) the central section displays six registers.
376 A.124: anonymous outer coffin.
377 A.20: anonymous coffin. A.41: anonymous coffin set.
378 A.66: inner coffin of Isety. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin set of Tamutmuef.
379 A.136: mummy board of Henuttaui. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: inner coffin and mummy board of Gautseshen.
380 A.20: anonymous coffin: compare the 5th and the 7th registers.
381 A.124: anonymous outer coffin. Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire: anonymous mummy board.
382 A.6: mummy board of Nesitanebetaui. A.143: coffin set of Hori. Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts: coffin of Amuniuesankh.
383 Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts: coffin of Amuniuesankh.

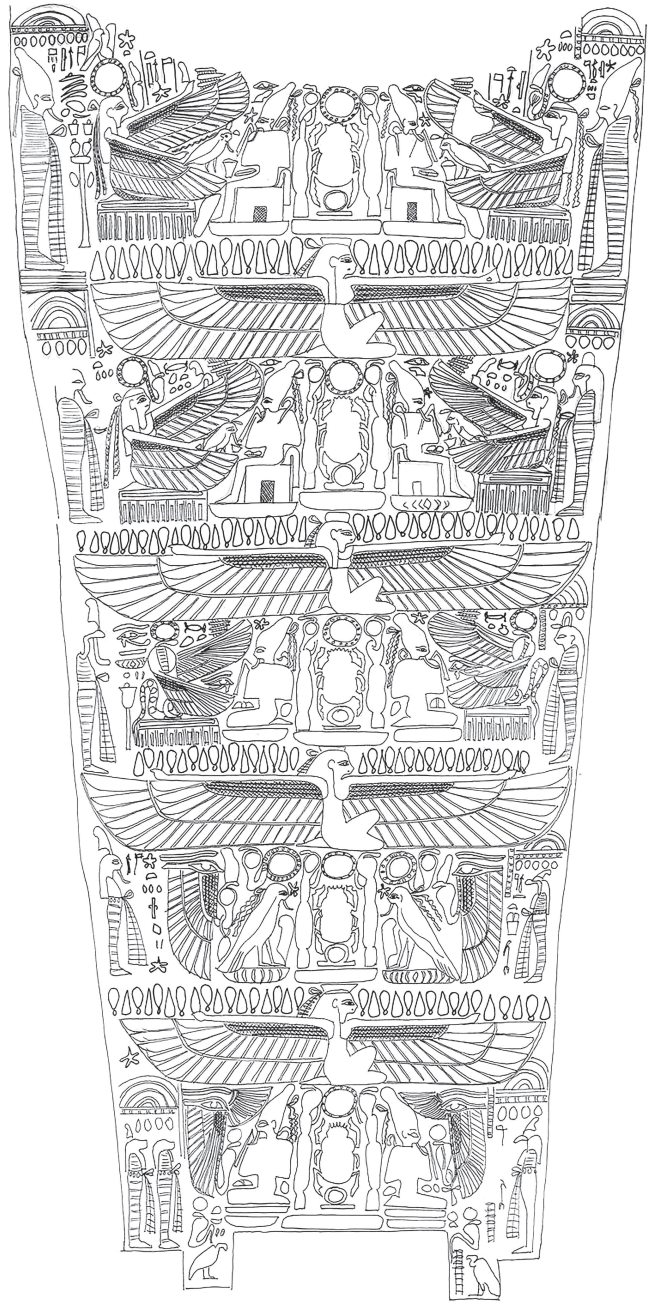

Fig. 2.41. Central section. Anonymous inner coffin (A.15).

This extended layout results from a deliberate departure from the expected longitudinal arrangements of the lower section. In some cases, where the lower section was removed and the central section was fully extended down to the footboard, a block-frieze breaks the tableau in two, as if acknowledging the expected division between the central and lower sections.[384] Even more interesting is the decision to extend the central section down the footboard only along the central partition of the lower section.[385] In this situation, the vignettes of the lateral partitions are simply juxtaposed with those of the central section, and this process is not always immediately apparent to the observer. The complementary method is also used: the registers of the central section extend down to the footboard along the lateral partitions, leaving the central partition of the lower section with its usual decoration.[386]

Panels headed by the winged sun disc

From a formal standpoint, the most important feature of these compositions is the addition of a winged solar disc at the top of the panel (Fig. 2.42). The number of registers in these compositions is highly variable.

Usually, the winged sun disc is juxtaposed with a composition of the classical type,[387] although the basic type can also be seen.[388] A typical sequence might be structured as follows[389]:

- 1st register: Winged solar disc;
- 2nd register: Symmetrical register;
- 3rd register: Winged goddess (or a raptor);
- 4th register: Symmetrical register;
- 5th register: Avian deity.

384 Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire: anonymous mummy board (Inv. E.5907).
385 A.unknown: inner coffin of Gautseshen.
386 A.47: inner coffin of Tenetpenheruenefer. This is clear from the 5th register down to the 10th register.
387 A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti. A.52: inner coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.54: anonymous inner coffin. A.55: outer coffin of Pinedjem. A.91: inner coffin of Taditumut. Museo Egizio in Turin: anonymous mummy board (CGT 10118). Museo Egizio in Turin: anonymous coffin (CGT 10117).
388 A.27: anonymous mummy board. A.43: outer coffin of Nesipakashuti.
389 A.54: anonymous inner coffin. A. 147: inner coffin of Menkheperre. British Museum: anonymous coffin.

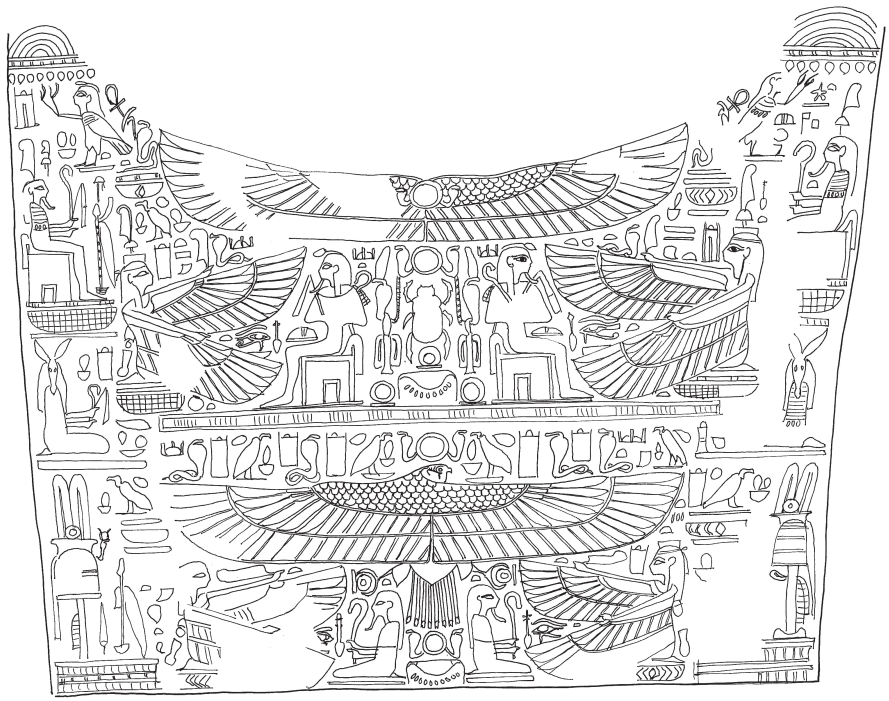

Fig. 2.42. Central section. Anonymous outer coffin (A.15).

Panels headed by a vulture

These panels feature a large depiction of a vulture with its wings outstretched across the width of the lid (Fig. 2.43-44).[390] The number of registers of these compositions is highly variable. In smaller panels, the layout follows the classical scheme, framed by a vulture in the upper and lower registers.[391] In longer compositions, the design extends down to the footboard (Fig. 2.43).[392] Even in these objects, the classical tripartite scheme of the central section is usually observed. However, beyond the fourth register, the composition of each register becomes rather loose, with the design heavily influenced by transversal compositions, with little if any formal relationship between them. This effect is highlighted by the use of transversal border markers to separate the registers, such as starry *pet*-signs, hieroglyphic friezes (Djed and Tjet-signs, scarabs, cobras, royal cartouches) or block-friezes (Fig. 2.43). The structure of the symmetrical registers is selectively preserved, with some registers observing the traditional rules of composition. However, others show significant deviations regarding the nuclear block, displaying rather unusual motifs, such as the recumbent Osiris,[393] the god Heh,[394] and even liminal elements, such as frogs or bees.[395] The centripetal and centrifugal blocks may also be composed using loose liminal elements. In this arrangement, the 'architectural' layout characteristic of the classical scheme is almost entirely absent.

This is precisely the situation that can be observed on the lid of an anonymous inner coffin from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, which features eight registers (Fig. 2.43).[396] The composition is headed by a serpent-headed vulture with its wings fully outstretched towards both sides of the composition. Oddly enough, the depiction of the vulture is shown from above, as if the entire panel were positioned directly beneath its wings.

390 A.40: Inner coffin of Bakenmut. A.54: anonymous outer coffin. A.74: anonymous coffin. A.85: anonymous coffin set. A.85: anonymous coffin set. A.143: outer coffin of Hori.
391 A.74: anonymous inner coffin.
392 A.40: Inner coffin of Bakenmut. A.85: anonymous coffin set. A.143: outer coffin of Hori.
393 A.74: anonymous outer coffin. A.85: anonymous coffin set.
394 A.143: outer coffin of Hori.
395 A.40: inner coffin of Bakenmut.
396 A.40: inner coffin of Bakenmut.

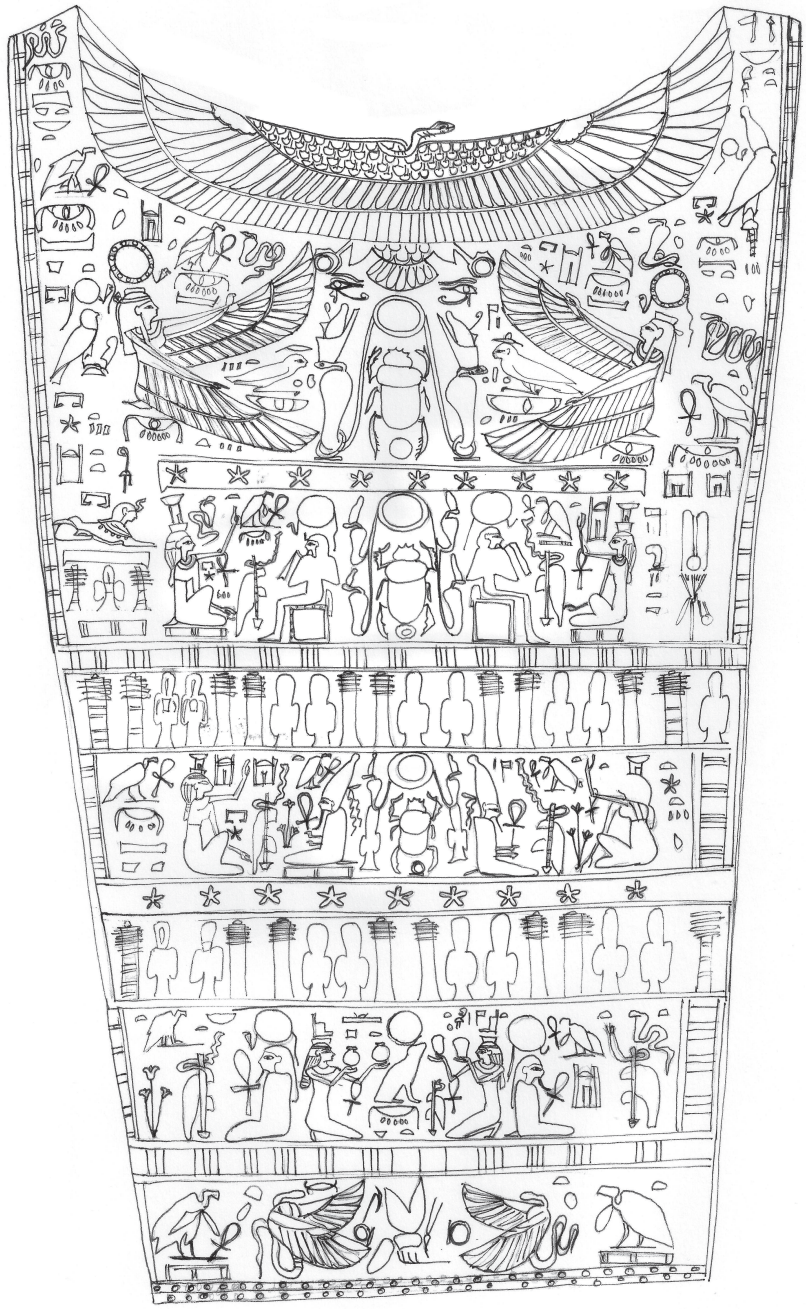

Fig. 2.43. Central section. Inner coffin of Bakenmut (A.40).

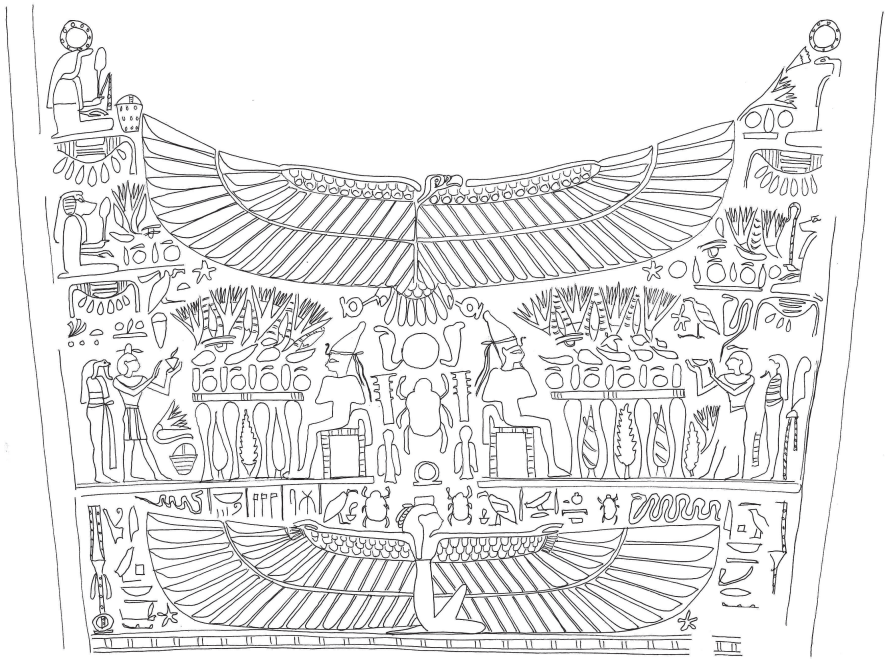

Fig. 2.44. Central section. Outer coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu (A.33).

Panels with liminal elements as nuclear blocks

A distinct type of panel is formed by using liminal elements as nuclear blocks of the symmetrical registers. Compositions of this type do not have a predictable structure. They may be fully extended down to the footboard,[397] or consist of only three registers.[398] Regardless of the number of registers, the sequence and structure of these compositions may retain many features of the classical scheme.[399] The main difference lies in the composition of the nuclear blocks where a variety of unusual symbols, such as a triple set of solar scarabs (Fig. 2.46)[400] or heart amulets (Fig. 2.45) may be found.

The coffin set of Direpu (A.123) offers some of the most accomplished compositions of this type. In the outer coffin, the panel is headed by a pectoral decorated with a *ba*-bird flanked by hearts-*ib*, followed in the second register by a winged solar disc (typically depicted in the first register) and by a winged goddess in the third register. The remaining decoration makes use of loose additional blocks and liminal elements. Different types of liminal elements can be seen in the nuclear block: Tjet-signs, cartouches, Osirian gods, the god Heh[401], the *ba*-bird, the jackal form of Anubis, the heart-*ib*[402] are among the possibilities.

The inner coffin of Direpu displays a highly irregular composition, using liminal elements (squatting gods and goddesses) as nuclear blocks in the third and fifth registers (Fig. 2.47). At first glance, the composition seems to observe the usual rules guiding this tableau, namely the succession of symmetrical registers and winged deities, but only the composition of the second register adheres to this scheme. The other registers are formed by an orderly juxtaposition of liminal elements. The mummy board of the same burial set exhibits a similar process, with an even weaker observance of the traditional layout of the panel.

The prevalence of liminal elements in these panels is evident not only in their number and size but also in the sophisticated and subtle role they play within the overall composition.

397 A.55: inner coffin of Pinedjem.
398 A.52: outer coffin of Butherkhonsu.
399 A.32: outer coffin of Taahuti.
400 A.52: coffin set of Butherkhonsu. A.55: mummy board of Pinedjem.
401 A.55: inner coffin of Pinedjem.
402 A.32: outer coffin of Taahuti.

The tableau depicted in the outer coffin from A.32 is particularly striking, with its five registers integrating enthroned gods as liminal elements, alongside numerous gods and goddesses surrounding the main motifs, effectively transforming the lid into a sacred mural (Fig. 2.45).

In the outer coffin from A.52, the goddess Neith is featured as the sole liminal element, repeatedly depicted engaged in several ritual actions (Fig. 2.46). This approach transforms the typical structure of the composition into a dynamic design, with Neith becoming the central figure, literally traversing all areas of the lid and animating it with her all-encompassing divine presence.[403]

The prevalence of the liminal elements is also detected even when the general layout is regular. This prevalence may take the form of adopting a frieze of Tjet and Djed signs instead of the usual structure composed of centrifugal and centripetal blocks (Fig. 2.48) or extending the number of liminal elements into such a proportion that the layout of the composition becomes rather loose (Fig. 2.49).

*

* *

In all these types of layouts, most of the decoration is rendered in black, including feathered motifs and liminal elements, giving the lid a significantly darker appearance than in the basic scheme. The weight of liminal elements is such that the background is often difficult to discern. This effect is not only the result of the prolific depiction of secondary motifs, but also of their increasing size. The repertoire of symbols now includes new motifs such as bees,[404] scarabs, cartouches,[405] sun discs,[406] stylised geometrical motifs,[407] mummiform *ba*-birds,[408] squatting mummiform gods[409] and even fully enthroned gods.[410] Compiling a

403 A remarkable example of this use is found in the A.52: outer coffin of Butherkhonsu. The goddess Neith is repeatedly depicted in ritual scenes forming secondary compositions that function as liminal elements.
404 A.unknown: inner coffin and mummy board of Gautseshen.
405 A.6: mummy board of Nesitanebetaui. A.unknown: inner coffin and mummy board of Gautseshen.
406 A.unknown: inner coffin and mummy board of Gautseshen.
407 A.20: anonymous coffin set. A.unknown: inner coffin and mummy board of Gautseshen.
408 Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tamutmuef.
409 TT 320: outer coffin of Asetemkhebit.
410 A.32: outer coffin of Taahuti.

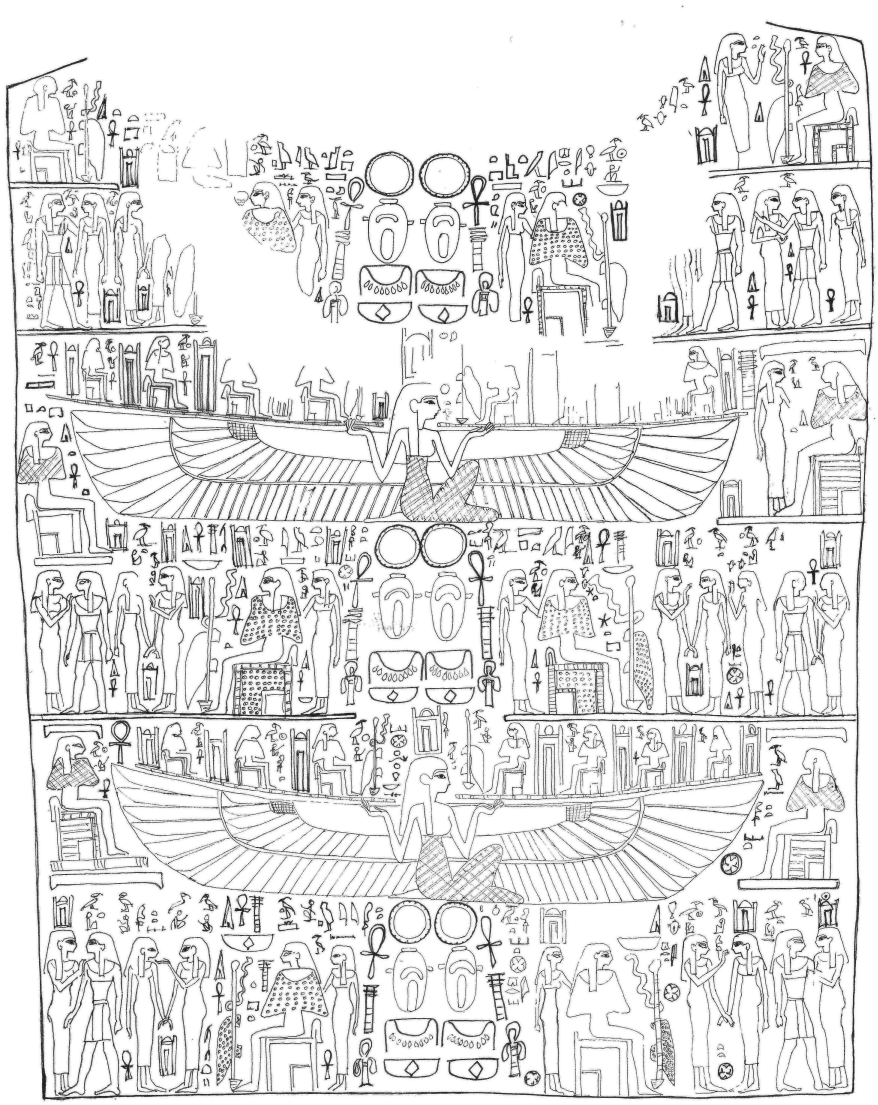

Fig. 2.45. Central section. Outer coffin of Taahuti (A.32).

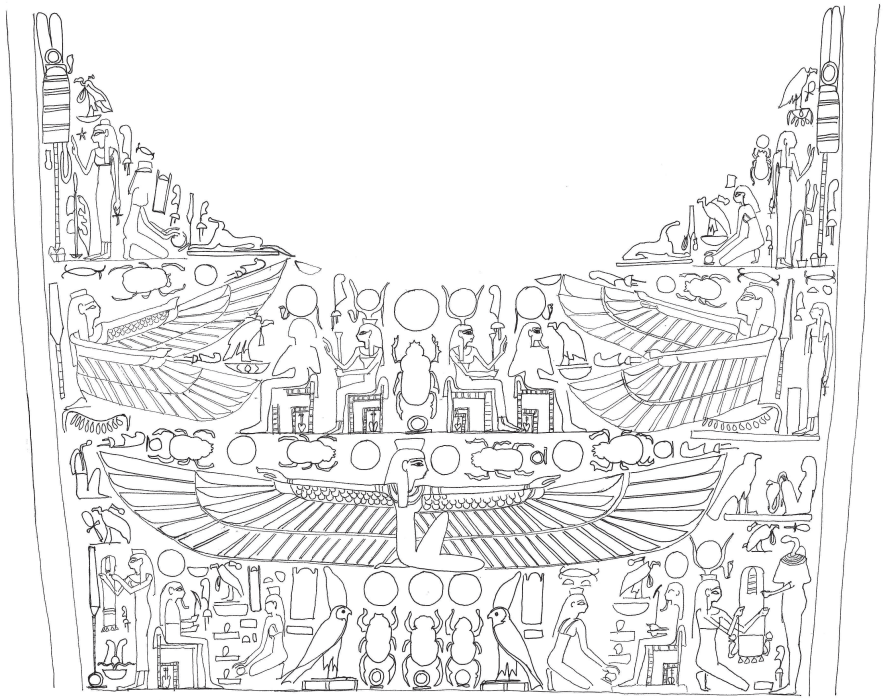

Fig. 2.46. Central section. Outer coffin of Butherkhonsu (A.52).

complete inventory of these symbols is virtually impossible. The role of these symbols became so important that it severely disrupted the traditional structure of the symmetrical registers. Instead of the expected sequences, we often find endless representations of gods used as liminal elements.[411] The increasingly bold use of divine depictions as liminal elements led to remarkable achievements in terms of composition.

Commentary

In terms of pictorial work, the central section demonstrates an increase in complexity made possible by the establishment of a precise set of rules and key features governing its composition. The seriation of these compositions clearly shows the evolution of the tableau, which originated from a central motif: the winged deity. This depiction was initially used as a visual extension of the text:

> Oh, my mother Nut, spread yourself over me, so that I may be placed among the Imperishable Stars and may never die.[412]

The image of the goddess thus represents the personification of heaven and the coffin itself,[413] alluding to her ability to grant rebirth to the deceased. The subsequent development of the tableau is rooted in this idea and underwent several stages:

– The first stage of this development consisted of the association of the winged goddess with the *wedjat*-eyes. The origin of this motif can be traced back to the eye panel traditionally depicted on the left side of rectangular troughs.[414] However, as early as the black coffin type, the *wedjat*-eyes were already depicted on the left shoulder of the lid.[415] In the proto-yellow type, this motif 'migrated' to the central section. This shift is extremely significant for the subsequent development of the

411 TT 320: inner coffin of Asetemkhebit.
412 This text itself was borrowed from the Pyramid Texts, in which the goddess is regarded as the king's mother through the deceased's identification with Osiris (son of Nut). Taylor 1989, 11.
413 In texts of the Old Kingdom, the term for the chest of a sarcophagus is *mwt* (mother) – a clear allusion to this concept. Taylor 1989, 11.
414 Anthropoid sarcophagi dating from the late 18th Dynasty display the eye panel on the left side of the case. See, for example, the inner sarcophagus reused by Psusennes I, in Montet 1951, Pl. XCVI
415 Coffin of Henutudjebu (Washington University Gallery of Art).

central section's layout. It should be noted that the eye panel is usually associated with the false-door motif, which symbolises the passage between the world of the living and the realm of the dead. As a result of the migration of the *wedjat*-eyes from the coffin case to the central section of the lid, the symbolism of passage was transferred to this area, transforming the central section into a threshold between the world of the living and the Duat.[416]

– The second stage of the development of the central section was achieved by integrating the *naos*-shaped pectoral. With this motif, the central section established a link with the interior of the coffin, identified with the *naos* of a temple, where the sun god's regeneration took place.[417] The pectoral thus strengthened the architectural aspect[418] of the central section by adopting a layout borrowed from architectural settings. Indeed, many of the motifs in the symmetrical registers are borrowed from temple or tomb decoration. This adaptation led to the complete identification of the central section with the magical territory of the Duat. The alternating depiction of the winged mother goddess and her son, the sacred scarab, suggests an upward movement towards the light. Note that, in some coffins, the rising sun heads the entire composition, depicted either within the *akhet*-sign (basic scheme), thus alluding directly to the sunrise, or as an imposing winged sun disc (complex scheme), suggesting the identification of the central section with the horizon from which the sun rises each morning.[419]

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416 Interestingly – much like the case of the *wedjat*-eyes – the architectonisation of the lid progressed hand in hand with the inclusion of symbols used in mummification or funerary rites (amulets and pectorals). Indeed, these pectorals depict actual funerary objects, whose existence is archaeologically attested. An important collection of funerary pectorals involving sacred scarabs was discovered among the wrappings of the mummy of Tutankhamun and in the royal tombs of Tanis. Notably, these objects were apparently absent from the wrappings of the mummies of Bab el-Gasus, which may suggest that the pectorals depicted on yellow coffins may have had a substitutive role, intended to provide the magical protection of an object that was likely no longer part of the mummy's funerary equipment. Daressy 1907, 3-38.

417 In fact, most of the pectorals depicted on yellow coffins include scenes allusive to solar rejuvenation and rebirth. See Van Walsem 1997, 121.

418 On the concept of architectonisation of coffins see Van Walsem 1997, 361.

419 The association of the *ba*-bird with the central section is also not accidental, as it likely corresponds to the area of the mummy where the union of the *ba*-bird with its own corpse was believed to take place. In fact, in the scenes depicted on the central section, the *ba*-bird is shown witnessing the mysteries of the Duat: the regeneration of the sun-god and his union with Osiris.

- The third stage involved the creation of symmetrical registers with Osirian significance, alluding to the Solar-Osirian union that occurred in the secrecy of the Duat. This significance was further enhanced by the multiplication of registers and the creation of the classical scheme.
- The fourth stage saw the creation of liminal elements. These important symbols first appeared on the lid in close association with the winged goddess and subsequently spread throughout the composition. Over time, these elements became so important that they began to define the layout of the central section from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, ultimately becoming its most prominent feature. Initially, the repertoire of symbols was limited, including *shetyt*-shrines, sacred vultures, and cobras, endlessly repeated throughout the composition. The origin of these symbols lie in the interior decoration of the box, where they are closely associated with the mother goddess. By the end of the dynasty, the repertoire had expanded considerably to include hieroglyphic signs, a variety of sacred animals, mummiform gods and even gods and goddesses as important as Neith. The liminal elements thus magically connect the central section with the interior of the coffin itself, providing not only a 'passage', as in earlier layouts, but also a full visualisation of the hidden realm of the Duat. In its final stages, the central section fully alluded to the sacred and magical atmosphere that surrounded the deceased as they were fully embraced by the mother goddess in her heavenly realm.

From a symbolic standpoint, the central section alludes to the magical realm of the Duat and its mysteries, standing out as one of the defining compositions of the yellow type. It effectively recreates the iconographic elements expected in the burial chamber. The overabundance of wing motifs in these compositions is a distinctive feature, alluding to the protective embrace of the mother goddess.

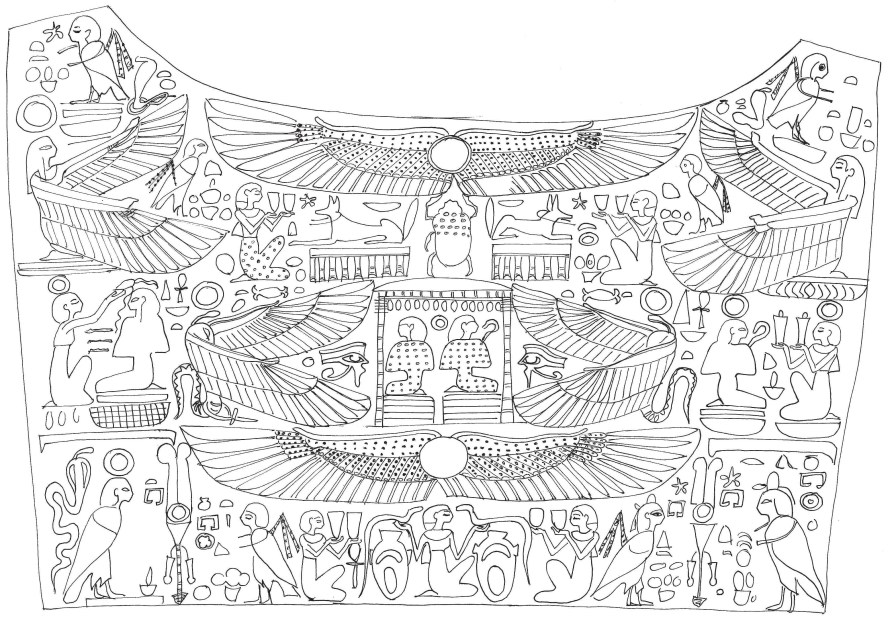


Fig. 2.47. Central section. Inner coffin of Direpu (A.123).

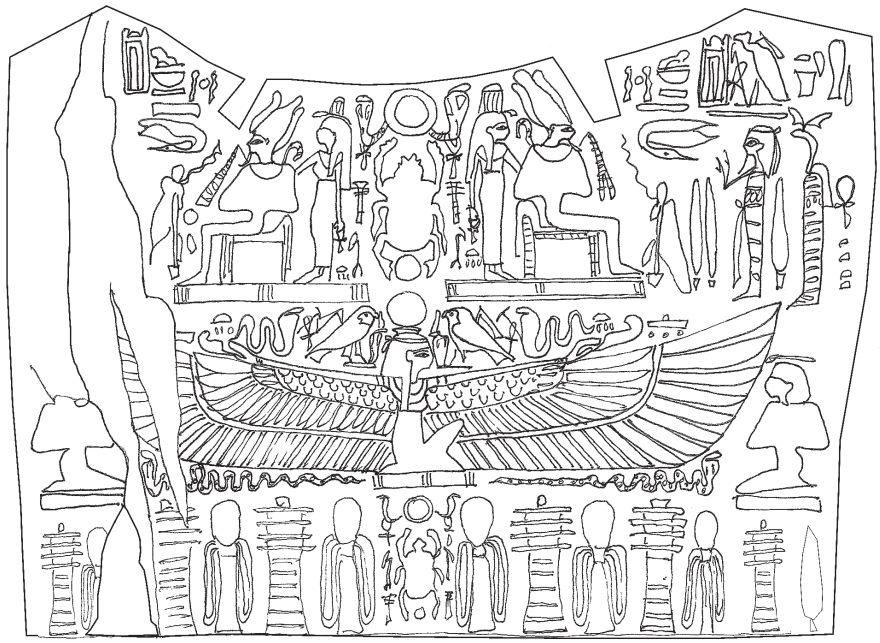


Fig. 2.48. Central section. Anonymous coffin (A.4).

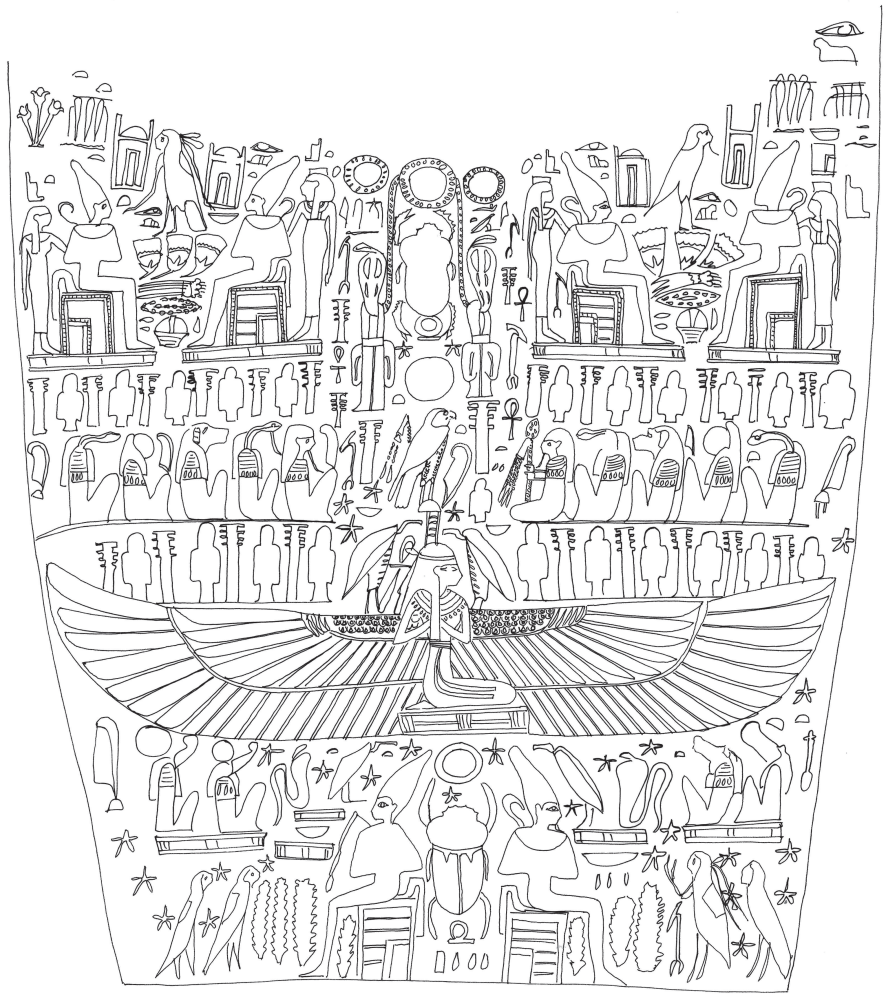


Fig. 2.49. Central section. Anonymous coffin (A.41).

3. Lower section

In the black coffin type, the lower part of the lid was simply decorated with a longitudinal band of inscriptions running down the centre. During the Ramesside period, this band was flanked by lateral partitions decorated with vignettes. By the mid-21st Dynasty, a new layout for the lower section was introduced. The longitudinal band of inscriptions was replaced by a longitudinal band of vignettes, which we refer to as 'central partition'.[420] Due to space constraints, this element is often absent in mummy boards.[421] As a rule, the lateral partitions are decorated with depictions of deities and cult scenes, while the central partition features solar motifs alluding to the nightly journey of the sun. The composition of these areas changed considerably during the 21st Dynasty.

Lateral partitions

Basic scheme

In the basic scheme, the lateral partitions display a simple sequence, usually including Osiris/Ptah Sokar and the Sons of Horus. This scheme is found in coffins dating from the end of the Ramesside period to the first half of the 21st Dynasty.[422] It is consistently associated with other early features, such as a naturalistic style and the bipartite layout of the lower section.

This sequence typically includes three registers:

– The first register displays a standing or enthroned Osiris. It is not uncommon to find the solar god Ptah-Sokar or Re-Horakhty depicted in one of the lateral partitions, playing a complementary role with Osiris.[423] In this register, the deceased is often shown in festive

420 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.95: coffin of Pameshem. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
421 Mummy boards decorated with the central partition are not common. TT 320: coffin set of Tauheret, coffin set of Nesikhonsu, and Asetemkhebit. A.102: coffin set of Haes. A.133: coffin set of Heretweben. A.84: coffin of Padiamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Gautseshen.
422 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
423 Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: coffin set of Herytubekhet. August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of

garments, either in adoration or making offerings.[424] The layout of this scene recalls the layout of the introductory vignettes of the Book of the Dead (Fig. 2.51).[425]

– The second register is decorated with the Sons of Horus (two gods on each partition) (Fig. 2.52).
– In the third register, a secondary deity is included. Common motifs include the jackal form of Anubis,[426] the Hathoric cow,[427] or the god Thoth performing a ritual or opening the sky (Fig. 2.52).[428]

Variations of this sequence are often formed with additional registers featuring the god Benu (Fig. 2.51),[429] the enthroned god Thoth,[430] the Ta-wer totem,[431] or the god Heka.[432] Mythological motifs can also be included in these sequences, such as a triad over a serpent,[433] or even guardian deities.[434]

Classical scheme

The classical scheme typically comprises at least three registers featuring Osiris, the avian form of Ptah-Sokar, and mummiform gods (Figs. 2.53-57). This is by far the richest sequence, and is often challenged in a variety of ways, resulting in vivid and beautifully designed compositions. This scheme is associated with coffins dating from the first half of the 21st Dynasty and appears to be a variation

Hori.

424 Given the shape of the lid, the upper vignette is broader than the lower ones, allowing for the depiction of more elements. See the Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.

425 In the 21st Dynasty a new tradition of funerary manuscripts became predominant in Thebes. Elite burials now included a pair of papyrus rolls, one a short version of the Book of the Dead, often comprising only a few spells. These documents frequently begin with a vignette depicting the deceased in adoration to Osiris. Taylor 2010, 72.

426 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui.

427 A.115: inner coffin of Paharu.

428 Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: mummy board of Herytubekhet. Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus: mummy board of Tabasety. In these scenes, Thoth faces inwards, which is an exception to the rule observed in these coffins, where the main deities always face outwards.

429 Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu.

430 August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of Hori. A.115: inner coffin of Paharu.

431 TT 320: outer coffin of Pinedjem II. A.54: anonymous inner coffin. A.113: outer coffin of Nesiamenemope. A.114: inner coffin and mummy board of Padiamun. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Nesipanebu. Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.

432 A.114: mummy board of Padiamun.

433 A.109: outer coffin of Tjenetimentether.

434 A.114: mummy board of Padiamun.

of the basic sequence.[435] It is commonly linked with a naturalistic style [436] and excellent levels of craftsmanship. The transitional character of these sequences is evident in their association with either the bipartite design (Figs. 2.53-54)[437] of the lower section or a tripartite layout (Figs. 2.55-57).[438]

Typically, this sequence includes three registers, one of which features the avian form of Ptah-Sokar:[439]

- The first register displays the enthroned Osiris.
- The second register features the avian-form of Ptah-Sokar.[440]
- In the third register, one the following subjects may be depicted:
  - Mummiform gods (Osiris,[441] Sons of Horus,[442] funerary triad standing on a serpent,[443] unnamed mummiform gods).[444]
  - Guardian deities.[445]
  - *Wedjat*-eye.[446]

The avian form of Ptah-Sokar is a defining feature of these compositions, referencing Chapter 185, a hymn addressed to Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, Lord of the Secret Place (*shetyt*-shrine):

> Praising Osiris, Foremost of the Westerners, Wennefer dwelling in Abydos, by the vindicated Osiris Ani
>
> Oh my Lord who passes eternity repeatedly, (...) Those who never existed, behold, they are in your presence, (...) so that, assembled together, they might make

435 While in the former sequence, both Osiris and Ptah-Sokar were depicted on the first register; however, in this scheme, the enthroned Osiris is featured in the first register, while Ptah-Sokar appears in the second register. It is therefore likely that this sequence evolved from the basic scheme. TT 320: outer coffin of Pinedjem II.
436 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
437 A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun.
438 A.88: coffin of Nesitanebetaui. This scheme can also be found in later coffins displaying an archaizing layout. See TT 320: outer coffin of Pinedjem II.
439 TT 320: outer coffin of Pinedjem II. A.19: coffin of Taiuheret. A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
440 Occasionally, this god can also feature in mummiform guise. A.95: mummy board of Pameshem.
441 A.54: anonymous outer coffin.
442 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Khonsuhotep.
443 A.88: coffin of Nesitanebetaui. A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt. Fitzwilliam Museum: mummy board of Nesipawershefyt .
444 A.2: mummy board of Tauseretempernesu.
445 Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu.
446 A.20: anonymous coffin.

> supplication to your Ka, those who come in millions and millions, reaching and mooring with you. And they who are in the womb, they too have their faces towards you, for a tarrying (forever) in the Beloved Land shall never happen. (...) May he allow a going forth and a re-entry from the God's Domain without hindrance at the gateway of the Duat.[447]

Additional registers often appear below the three main registers, displaying squatting gods[448] or enthroned gods.[449] Other subjects, such as the jackal,[450] the cow-goddess,[451] or the recumbent Osiris[452] can also be found in this context.

Two notable variations of this sequence are formed by an additional register. As will be seen below, beyond the vignette showing the avian form of Sokar, these sequences may feature other subjects, such as the sacred ram. Both the avian form of Sokar and the sacred ram seem to reinforce the references to Osiris and Sokar in the upper registers, possibly reflecting Theban developments of cults that originated elsewhere, such as in Saqqara and Mendes.

Variation with the sacred ram

The sequence includes a sacred ram, arranged as follows (Figs. 2.55-57):

- The first register displays an enthroned god. Usually, Osiris is featured on both sides.[453]
- The second register features the avian-form of Ptah-Sokar.
- The third register is decorated with the sacred ram,[454] typically depicted on a shrine[455] (var.: *nwb*-sign[456] or a divine standard[457]). Variations of this scheme may include the sacred ram in one partition and the avian

447 Book of the Dead of Any.
448 A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt.
449 TT 320: mummy board of Pinedjem II.
450 A.88: coffin of Nesitanebetaui.
451 A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes.
452 A.151: outer coffin of Tjanefery.
453 However, Osiris can be shown in one partition and Sokar on the other. See TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Khonsumose. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.
454 A.105: outer coffin of Userhat. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin set of Khonsumose.
455 A.77: outer coffin of Nesinebtaui.
456 A.12: mummy board of Nesipanebimakh.
457 Coffin and Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Amenhotep.

form of Ptah-Sokar in the opposite partition.[458] The sacred ram is rarely identified, but when a label is added it refers usually to Osiris,[459] Ptah-Sokaris,[460] or generically to *nb Dd.w*, 'Lord of Mendes'.[461] The association with the latter bears a solar reading, evident in inscriptions on the neighbouring text bands, such as 'Great god, the one who illumines the earth',[462] or 'Great Ba, who shines in his sun disc'.[463] The sacred ram may also be simply referred to as 'Ba'.[464]

– Additional vignettes may include a wide range of motifs, such as the Sons of Horus, the Ta-wer totem,[465] the Anubis jackal,[466] standing mummiform gods,[467] squatting gods,[468] enthroned deities (such as Hathor,[469] Osiris,[470] Thoth,[471] or the god Benu),[472] the recumbent Osiris,[473] or the funerary triad standing over a coiled cobra.[474]

The significance of the sacred ram is open to various interpretations. Its most immediate significance is linked to Chapter 9 of the Book of the Dead, which shows the deceased adoring the Ba in the form of a ram.[475] The text itself alludes to Osiris in his manifestation as a victorious Ba over Seth.[476] The representation of Osiris as a divine ram, which is also a symbol of Amun in the Theban tradition, appears to have resulted from an association with the tradition from

458 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. A.12: mummy board of Nesipanebimakh. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety.
459 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
460 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.
461 We are indebted to Luca Miatello for this reference, for which we are very grateful.
462 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny. The translation is by Luca Miatello.
463 Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.
464 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret.
465 Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat.
466 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
467 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
468 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.113: mummy board of Nesiamenemope. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin set of Khonsuhotep. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Yutefamun.
469 Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.
470 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. A.95: coffin of Pameshem.
471 Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety.
472 Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Tanatnektahat.
473 Coffin of an anonymous woman (Vatican Museums). Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Sutimes.
474 Museum of Fine Arts in Boston: coffin of Henuttaui.
475 The choice of this image was influenced by the wordplay: the words for "soul" and "ram" were phonetically similar. Taylor, 2010, 37.
476 Wilkinson 2003, 192.

> Mendes, a city in the Delta where the sacred ram was identified with Banebnedjet ('Ba of the Lord of Mendes'). It is possible that at this stage such association was influenced by the solar significance of Banebnedjet, a phenomenon better documented in the Late Period. The solar significance of Banebnedjet, which combines elements from the Osirian and solar cults, was crucial for the integration of solar attributes in the iconography of Osiris, becoming increasingly evident during the second half of the 21st Dynasty. This solarisation of Osirian attributes should not be confused with the solar-Osirian theological synthesis associated with the solar circuit described in the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings.
>
> This vignette became widespread by the second quarter of the 21st Dynasty, although it is already present in much earlier coffins.[477]

Variation with the ba*-bird*

Another important variation of the classical scheme features the depiction of the *ba*-bird, typically following the scheme described below:[478]

- The first register shows the enthroned Osiris.
- The second register displays the avian-form of Ptah-Sokar.
- The third register features the *ba*-bird.
- Additional registers may include:
  - *Wedjat*-eye.
  - Mummiform god.

This sequence appears slightly later. The depiction of the *ba*-bird in this context likely stems from the representation of the sacred ram (also meaning '*ba*'). A notable feature of this motif is the depiction of the *ba*-bird in the centrifugal block, as opposed to the depiction of the deceased, who is always shown in the centripetal block. Thus, the *ba*-bird fully enjoys a divine status superior to that

477 Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.

478 TT 320: inner coffin and mummy board of Tauheret. A.38: inner coffin of Ankhsenmut. A.60: anonymous mummy board. A.88: mummy board of Nesitanebetaui. A.147: mummy board of Menkhepere. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin set.

of the deceased.[479] The iconography reinforces the divine status of the *ba*-bird, featuring this motif resting on a false-door[480] or a divine standard,[481] and being adored by the deceased.[482]

This scheme is sometimes complemented by an additional register depicting mummiform gods[483] or *wedjat*-eyes.[484] Occasionally, more complex vignettes appear, such as three mummiform gods over a coiled cobra.[485]

Complex scheme

In the complex scheme, all the registers depict deities of the underworld, most of them in a mummiform guise (Figs. 2.58-62). These sequences are typically found in coffins dating from the second half of the 21st Dynasty. The style is highly schematic, and the layout of the vignettes is heavily standardised.[486] Such sequences are consistently found alongside other late features, such as the tripartite arrangement of the lower section.

Mummiform gods[487] may be depicted enthroned, standing, squatting or in a recumbent position.[488]

The number of registers is highly variable, but three registers form the more common sequence,[489] usually composed as follows:

- The first register displays the deceased before the enthroned Osiris;
- The second register features a mummiform god (enthroned, squatting or standing);
- In the third register, one of the Sons of Horus is depicted.

479 It is noteworthy that instances of the *ba*-bird are frequent in the afore-mentioned sequences, where they feature in the centripetal blocks, the usual setting for the manifestations of the deceased –as a living being, a mummy or a *ba*-bird. TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret.
480 A.38: inner coffin of Ankhsenmut. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin set.
481 Michael Carlos Museum: mummy board.
482 A.38: inner coffin of Ankhsenmut.
483 A.147: mummy board of Menkhepere. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: mummy board.
484 A.29: anonymous mummy board. A.60: anonymous mummy board. Michael Carlos Museum: mummy board.
485 A.88: mummy board of Nesitanebetaui.
486 A.2: mummy board of Tauseretempernesu. A.54: anonymous outer coffin.
487 Exceptionally, these gods might be depicted as living deities: TT 320: outer coffin and mummy board of Maatkare. A.33: outer coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun.
488 A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub.
489 Up to five registers might be found, but this situation remains exceptional. TT 320: inner coffin of Asetemkhebit. A.26: mummy board of Nesiniutitaui. A.84: inner coffin of Padiamun.

Variation with ritual scenes

In later coffins, the area allocated to the lower section is usually reduced, yet the number of registers remains consistent (typically three registers). The Osirian gods are still the main focus of the vignettes, but elaborate cult scenes are now added, showing the deceased escorted by a group of deities (Fig. 2.63).[490]

The composition of each register is slightly similar, presenting a cult scene involving the deceased and other gods before the Osirian shrine.

It is noteworthy that decorative friezes featuring Djed and Tjet-signs are now used to frame the vignettes instead of the traditional transverse text bands.[491]

The importance of the cult scenes is such that at times they are duplicated within the same register.[492] In these scenes, the divine agents of the cult take precedence, and the deceased may be entirely omitted.

These cult scenes usually take the form of offering rituals. However, on rare occasions, royal rituals recalling the Heb Sed festival are depicted.[493]

Variation with liminal elements

By the end of the 21st Dynasty, very irregular sequences can be observed. Besides mummiform deities, other motifs are introduced, creating sequences without any predictable pattern.[494] One has the impression that these motifs are used as liminal elements, thus depicted in a loose style.

Central partition

In the basic scheme, the central partition is absent, with a longitudinal band of inscriptions running down the centre of the lid. Although a variety of texts can be found, the main inscription associated with this band is dedicated to the goddess Nut in her role as the heavenly mother. In the classical scheme,

490 A.52: outer coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.60: anonymous outer coffin.
491 A.52: outer coffin of Butherkhonsu.
492 A.52: outer coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.123: outer and inner coffin of Direpu.
493 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Tabakmut. We thank Janice Kamrin for having indicated to us the ritual scenes in the inner coffin of Tabakmut. See Kamrin, Ikram (forthcoming).
494 A.123: inner coffin of Direpu: Three *ba*-birds (1st register), squatted gods (2nd register), standing gods (3rd register), Anubis jackal (4th register).

the central partition was introduced as an iconographic rendering to the solar significance of this longitudinal band of text.

This development gave the central partition of the lower section a common root with the central section of the lid, as the latter was also designed to celebrate the solar rebirth provided by the heavenly mother.

In many respects, the central partition of the lower section can be regarded as an extension of the central section. This is also reflected in the iconography used in the central partition, which revolves around funerary pectorals. This focus is mainly due to the rearrangement of the layout of the central section. In the basic scheme, the layout of the central section was centred on pectorals and other funerary objects. However, in the classical scheme, this tableau evolved towards a more conceptual imagery, illustrating the cosmological space associated with the interior of the coffin. The key images associated with funerary pectorals were thus transferred to the central partition of the lower section, where a sequence of pectorals is arranged longitudinally, as if placed over a (royal) mummy.

Classical scheme

In the classical scheme of the central partition, the different vignettes consist of alternating scenes featuring solar scarabs and sacred objects, such as the Ta-wer and the *sekhem*-sceptre (Fig. 2.50). Less frequently, all vignettes depict winged scarabs.[495]

In vignettes showing the solar scarab, it is always the primary element, holding the solar disc with its forelegs and the *shen*-ring with its hind legs. This composition serves as an extension of the nuclear blocks of the central section. The following compositions are prevalent:

- **Winged scarab on a solar barque.**[496] This scene may display elaborate details, such as the solar child squatting at the prow of the barque, or fish emerging from below as if surfacing from the water.[497]

495 A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
496 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu . Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
497 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.

- **Winged scarab hanging from a necklace**, flanked by:
  - Squatting mummiform gods.
  - *Wedjat*-eyes.[498]
- **Winged scarab** flanked by outward-facing cobras;[499]
- **Scarab** flanked by:[500]
  - Mummiform (standing[501], enthroned[502] or squatting[503]) gods;[504]
  - *Ba*-birds;[505]
  - Avian form of the god Ptah-Sokar;[506]
  - Outward-facing solar cobras;[507]
  - Ta-wer totems.[508]
- **Solar disc** rising from a nymphaea flower (sometimes with a ram's head depicted within).

All these motives derive from the depiction of pectorals in the basic scheme versions of the central section.

It should be noted that vignettes displaying sacred objects are not framed formally. They include the following motifs:

- **Ta-wer totem,** typically flanked by:
  - Mourning goddesses (Nephthys and Isis).[509]

498 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin. Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Tanatnektahat.
499 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Pahereniset.
500 One of the few exceptions to this rule is found on the A.28: outer coffin of Padiamun.
501 A.77: outer coffin of Nesinebtaui.
502 Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Tabakmut.
503 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.15: anonymous outer coffin. A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare. A.151: outer coffin of Tjanefery. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
504 Usually, the scarab is flanked by two deities, but occasionally four gods may be seen.
505 Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Nauny.
506 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret.
507 A.95: mummy board of Pameshem.
508 A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub.
509 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu and outer coffin of Pinedjem II. A.2: anonymous coffin. Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Tanatnektahat. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.

- (Winged) cobras.[510]
- Avian deities (Ptah-Sokar,[511] *ba*-birds[512]).
- Mummiform gods.[513]
- Liminal elements (vultures, *shetyt*-shrines, cobras, etc.).[514]

- ***Sekhem*-sceptre,**[515] depicted with the Anubis jackal and a pile of offerings,[516] flanked by:
  - Mourning goddesses, Isis and Nephthys.[517]
  - *Wedjat*-eyes and (winged) cobras.[518]
  - Avian deities (*ba*-birds,[519] Ptah-Sokar,[520] vultures[521]).
  - Mummiform gods.[522]
- ***Djed-pillar*** (with solar headdress), flanked by:
  - *Wedjat*-eyes and (winged) cobras.[523]

The solar vignettes are heavily framed by ornamental elements, such as cornices, block friezes and a wealth of floral patterns. Some of these patterns, featuring nymphaea flowers and buds, explicitly replicate the layout of royal funerary jewellery. These motifs are combined with a pattern used only in this context, that resembles the shape of leather pendeloques found in contemporary

510 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. A.54: anonymous inner coffin. A.68: lid of Ankhefenmut. A.unknown number: outer coffin of Ikhy.Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat.
511 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret.
512 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Nauny.
513 Carnegie Museum of Natural History: anonymous coffin.
514 A.15: anonymous outer coffin. A.133: mummy board of Heretweben. A.147: inner coffin of Menkhepere. A.148: mummy board of Nesiamun.
515 The *sekhem*-scepter, meaning 'the powerful', is a shaft shaped like a papyrus flower and stem, used as a symbol of authority. The ritual context depicted in the scenes could also refer to the *aba*-scepter, a similarly portrayed object held by the officiant presenting the offerings. However, the paramount role of this symbol makes clear that its significance extends well beyond its ritual function, alluding to rebirth. Gilbert, Holt, Hudson 1977, nº 52.
516 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.
517 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. A.12: coffin of Nesipanebimakh. A.142: inner coffin of Nesipernub. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Nauny. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Pahereniset.
518 A.105: outer coffin of Userhat. Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
519 TT 320: coffin set of Tauheret.
520 A.68: lid of Ankhefenmut.
521 A.74: anonymous inner coffin. A.133: mummy board of Heretweben. A.147: inner coffin of Menkhepere. A.148: outer coffin and mummy board of Nesiamun.
522 A.4: anonymous coffin. A.74: anonymous outer coffin. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Tabakmut.
523 A.60: anonymous inner coffin.

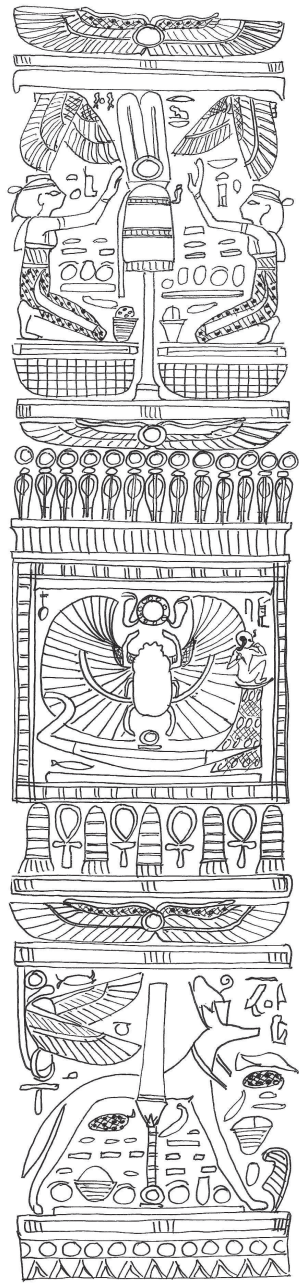


Fig. 2.50. Lower section (central partition). Coffin of Amenhotep (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden).

mummies. It should be noted that the specific use of this frieze in the central partition of the lower section clearly associates this area with the imagery of mummy wrappings.

In contrast, scenes depicting ritual objects appear to have a practical ritualistic function. This is always the case when a *sekhem*-sceptre is involved, in our view, suggesting a ritual action. These scenes tend to have a more informal layout, often lacking a formal framework.

This pattern is consistently associated with lateral partitions featuring the classical sequence.[524] In objects from a later dating, this diversity is reduced, [525] and only one of the totems is included: either the Ta-wer totem[526] or the *sekhem*-sceptre.[527]

Complex scheme

In these sequences, all the vignettes display solar motifs. This arrangement is typically found from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards and is associated with lateral partitions featuring the complex sequence. These coffins exhibit a schematic style, with a highly standardised decoration.

The vignettes in the central partition feature the sacred scarab (var.: solar child[528]) as the nuclear block of a centripetal composition (Fig. 2.59-60). The solar motif rises from a nymphaea flower,[529] a *nub*-sign,[530] or a *neb*-basket.[531]

524 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret. A.16: coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.68: lid of Ankhefenmut. A.105: outer coffin of Userhat. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Henuttaui. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu. Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Nauny.

525 As usually, exceptions can always be found: TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. A.148: outer coffin of Nesiamun.

526 TT 320: outer coffin of Pinedjem II. A.54: anonymous inner coffin. A.102: mummy board of Haes. A.133: inner coffin of Heretweben. A.148: outer coffin of Nesiamun. A.unknown: outer coffin of Ikhy..

527 A.4: anonymous coffin. A.12: mummy board of Nesipanebimakh. A.74: anonymous coffin set. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Tabakmut.

528 A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare.

529 A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare.

530 A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub.

531 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Tabakmut.

Centripetal blocks flank the central solar motif, always using liminal elements such as *shetyt*-shrines,[532] vultures,[533] cobras,[534] and mummiform gods (enthroned,[535] squatting[536] or standing[537]) or goddesses (Fig. 2.60).[538]

Variation with liminal elements as nuclear blocks

In the late 21st Dynasty, liminal elements were eventually used as nuclear blocks in these compositions. The most common motifs include:

- Tjet-sign, flanked by (Fig. 2.63):
  - Scarabs,[539] West-signs,[540] Djed-pillars,[541] mummiform gods[542] or cobras.[543]
- Djed-pillar flanked by Tjet-signs.[544]
- Heart-*ib* flanked by (Fig. 2.65/67):
  - Enthroned mummiform gods,[545] bees,[546] or Tjet-signs.[547]
- Royal cartouche flanked by cobras.[548]
- *Ankh*-sign flanked by bees.[549]
- *Ba*-bird flanked by:
  - *Shetyt*-shrines.[550]
  - Sacred cobras.[551]

532 A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui.
533 A.10: mummy board of Tabaekkhonsu. A.27: anonymous coffin. A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh.
534 A.10: mummy board of Tabaekkhonsu. A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui. A.131: anonymous coffin set. A.149: anonymous inner coffin. A.151: outer coffin of Tjanefery.
535 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.33: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Tabakmut.
536 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.60: anonymous outer coffin. A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub. A.151: outer coffin of Tjanefery. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Tabakmut. British Museum: anonymous coffin.
537 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Hori.
538 A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare.
539 A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui. A.52: outer coffin of Butherkhonsu. British Museum: anonymous coffin.
540 A.2: mummy board of Tauseretempernesu.
541 Náprstkovo Museum: anonymous coffin.
542 A.56: outer coffin of an anonymous man. A.131: anonymous coffin set. A.149: outer coffin.
543 A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui.
544 Náprstkovo Museum: anonymous coffin.
545 A.32: outer coffin of Taahuti.
546 A.123: outer coffin of Direpu.
547 A.123: inner coffin of Direpu.
548 A.54: anonymous outer coffin.
549 A.123: inner coffin of Direpu.
550 A.123: outer coffin of Direpu.
551 A.123: outer coffin of Direpu.

- Squatting mummiform god flanked by liminal elements[552];
- Avian form of the god Ptah-Sokar.[553]

The variety of liminal elements increases, and secondary motifs may include falcons, bees,[554] *ba*-birds,[555] winged *wedjat*-eyes or hieroglyphic signs (Tjet-sign,[556] Djed,[557] *shemsw*, *ankh*).

These vignettes may appear alongside more conservative motifs,[558] or be arranged exclusively with other vignettes featuring hieroglyphic compositions.[559]

The increasing prominence of liminal elements in the central partition highlights the close association between this tableau and the composition of the central section.

Commentary

In the basic scheme, the lower section is designed as a 'diptych', formed by two lateral partitions. The main subjects depicted on this diptych are chthonian gods such as Osiris and Ptah-Sokar, alongside solar gods, including Benu and Re-Horakhty. Variations of this sequence include sacred images borrowed from the cultic context of the Theban necropolis, such as the avian form of Ptah-Sokar, occasionally depicted along with the sacred ram and other underworld deities. Each of these deities is portrayed within its own shrine. The overall layout of this diptych irresistibly suggests the decoration of a sacred door, which here must be interpreted as a heavenly gate opening to the interior of the coffin, e.g., the Duat itself. This significance is highlighted by the iconographic programme. The depiction of the god Thoth is explicitly related to his association with the imagery of the gates of heaven. The vignette showing the sacred ram alludes

552 Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Pashedkhonsu.
553 Metropolitan Museum of Art: mummy board Gautseshen .
554 A.18: anonymous coffin.
555 A.5: anonymous coffin. A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Khonsumose.
556 A.10: mummy board of Tabaekkhonsu. A.123: inner coffin of Direpu. A.149: anonymous inner coffin of A.149.
557 A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh.
558 A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui. A.54: anonymous outer coffin. British Museum: anonymous coffin.
559 A.32: outer coffin of Taahuti. A.123: outer coffin of Direpu. Náprstkovo Museum: anonymous coffin.

to Chapter 9 of the Book of the Dead, which also carries connotations of the symbolism of passage:

> Spell for opening the cave (Chapter for going out into the day after opening the tomb). 'O you, Soul, greatly majestic, behold, I have come that I may see you: I open the Duat that I may see my father Osiris and drive away darkness, for I am beloved of him'.[560]

The imagery of the lateral partitions revolves thus around the idea of passage. This passage appears to be intended for the deceased so that they may go forth. The first register of the lateral partitions shows the deceased before Osiris, which strongly recalls the opening of a funerary papyrus. The scene is used at this location specifically to introduce the idea of a new beginning for the deceased, i.e., the going forth into the light. The reading then progresses to the lower registers of the lateral partitions, and it seems to continue onto the side-panels of the headboard of the box, where the introductory scene of the deceased before Osiris is repeated. In the classical scheme, the side-panels of the headboard often bear the same motifs as those featured on the lateral partitions of the lid. This reading suggests that the deceased 'comes forth' from the lid and progresses towards the box.

Regarding the central partition, its introduction transformed the lower section into a 'triptych'. In the classical scheme, the central partition alludes to solar pectorals intertwined with sacred objects of solar-Osirian significance (Ta-wer totem, *sekhem*-sceptre). In the complex scheme, the central partition became exclusively associated with solar symbols, clearly becoming a solar axis of an otherwise heavily Osirian composition. It is noteworthy that there is a marked contrast in the dynamic 'flow' of the central partition compared to that of the lateral partitions. The sun god is symbolically depicted as traversing the netherworld, effectively creating a 'solar path' suggesting an 'ascent' from the lower registers up to the upper levels, culminating at the central section. In this

560 Taylor 2010, 51.

layout, the central partition of this 'tryptic' extends the solar symbolism of the central sections downwards.

The triptych of the lower section thus presents a sharp contrast between solar and Osirian subjects. In this layout, the central partition became exclusively associated with solar symbols, while the Osirian motifs dominated the lateral partitions. This contrast is not accidental and serves a specific purpose.

The tryptich of the lower section provides an aspective representation of an open shrine, with the lateral partitions depicting the doors of the shrine and the central partition illustrating its interior. What we see is the line of solar pectorals, as if arranged along the outer wrappings of the mummy. Thus, the Duat is equated with the mummy, as it is along its wrappings that the nightly journey of the sun takes place.

It should be noted that the overall arrangement of the lower section is heavily influenced by the architectural layout created by the wealth of shrines depicted along the lateral partitions. This also seems highly intentional, as from the classical scheme onwards, the coffin came to be equated with a shrine. The paramount role played by the avian form of Ptah-Sokar in coffin decoration alludes to Chapter 185 of the Book of the Dead, a hymn addressing the 'Lord of the *shetyt*-shrine'. The avian form of Sokar thus establishes a connection between the coffin and a *shetyt*-shrine, e.g. a secret sacred place. This correspondence profoundly influenced coffin decoration from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards.

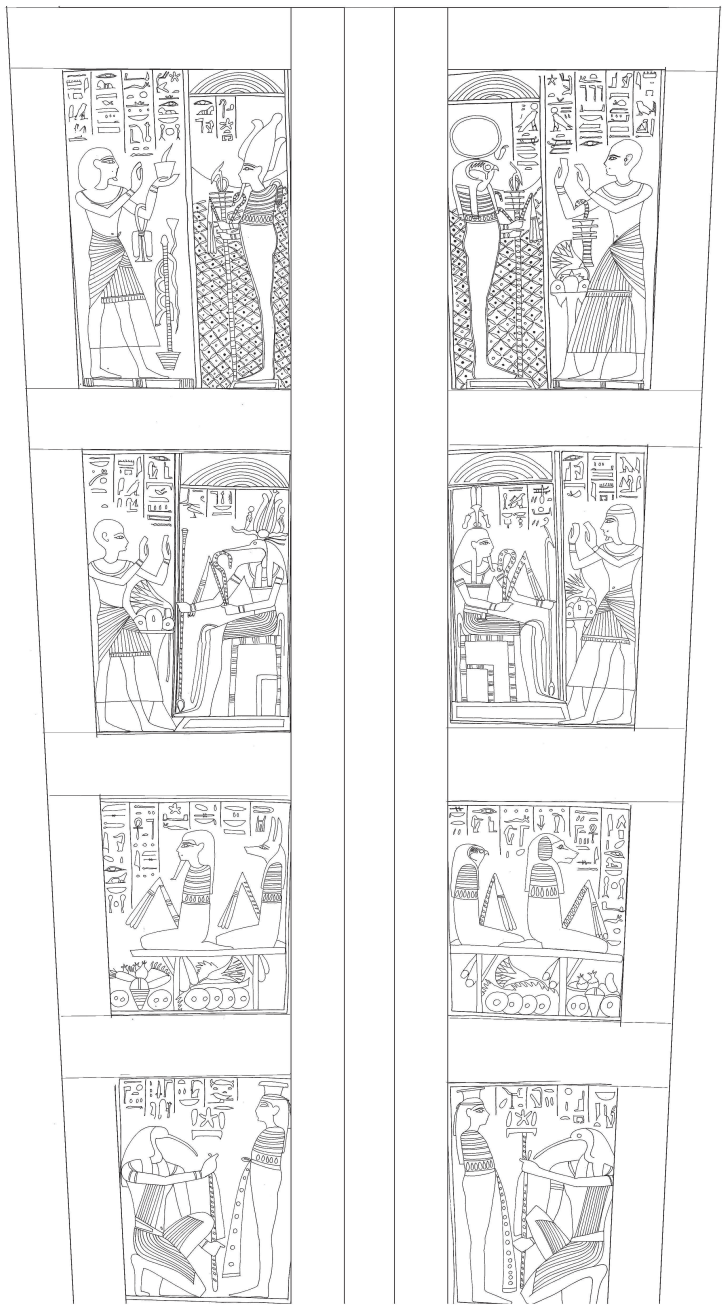


Fig. 2.51. Lower section. Mummy board of Hori (August Kestner Museum in Hanover).

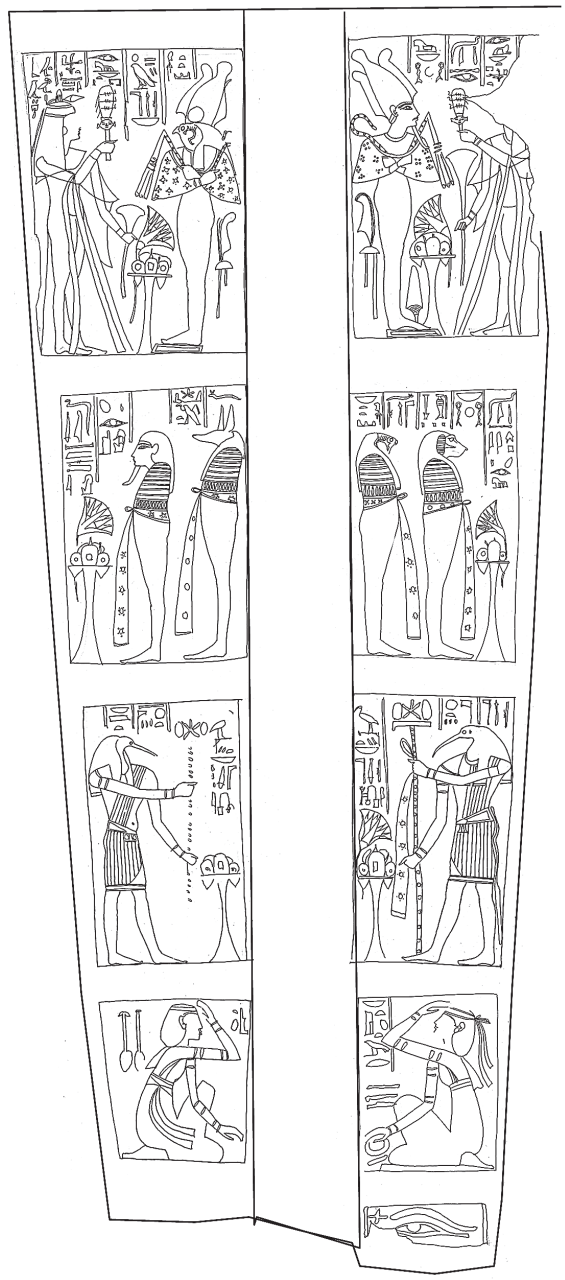


Fig. 2.52. Lower section. Mummy board of Tabasety (Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus).

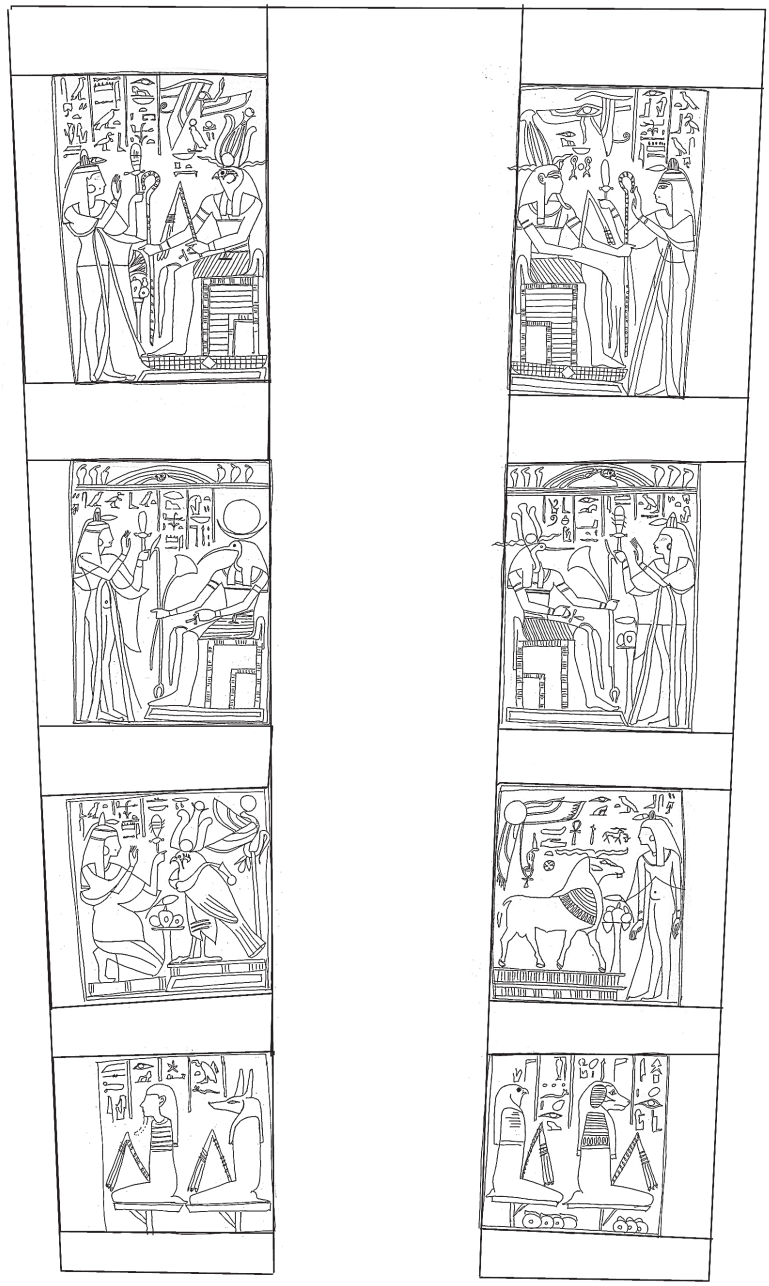


Fig. 2.53. Lower section. Coffin of Tabasety (Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus).

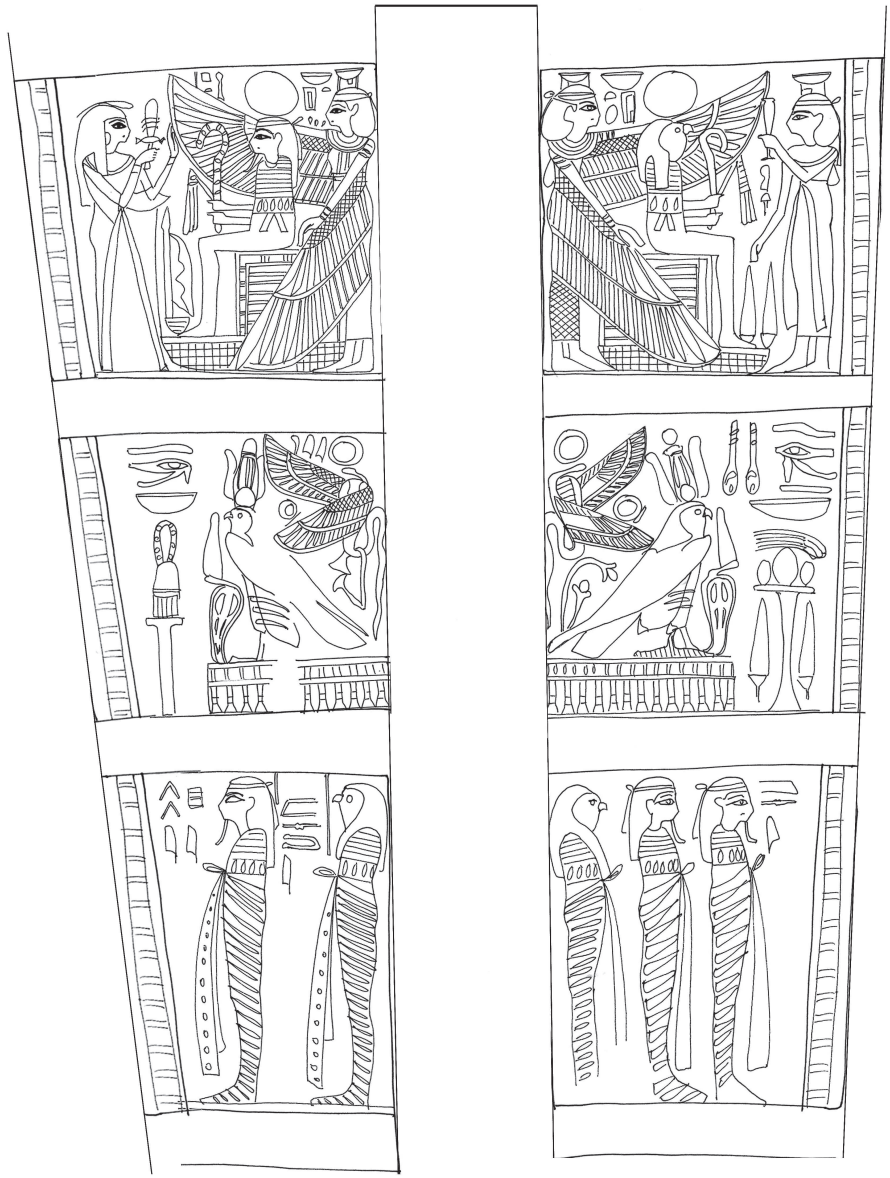


Fig. 2.54. Lower section. Mummy board of Taiuheret (A.19).

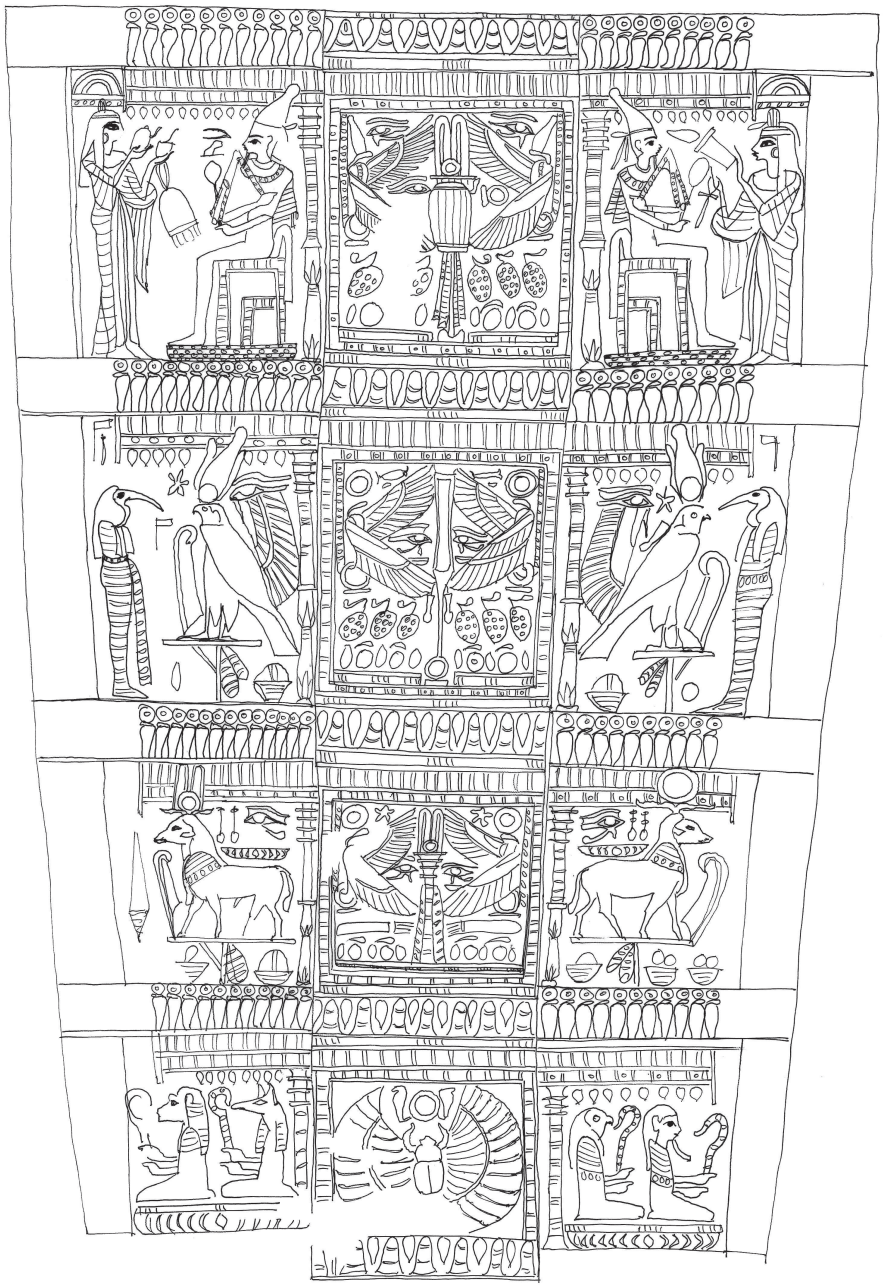


Fig. 2.55. Lower section. Anonymous inner coffin (A.60).

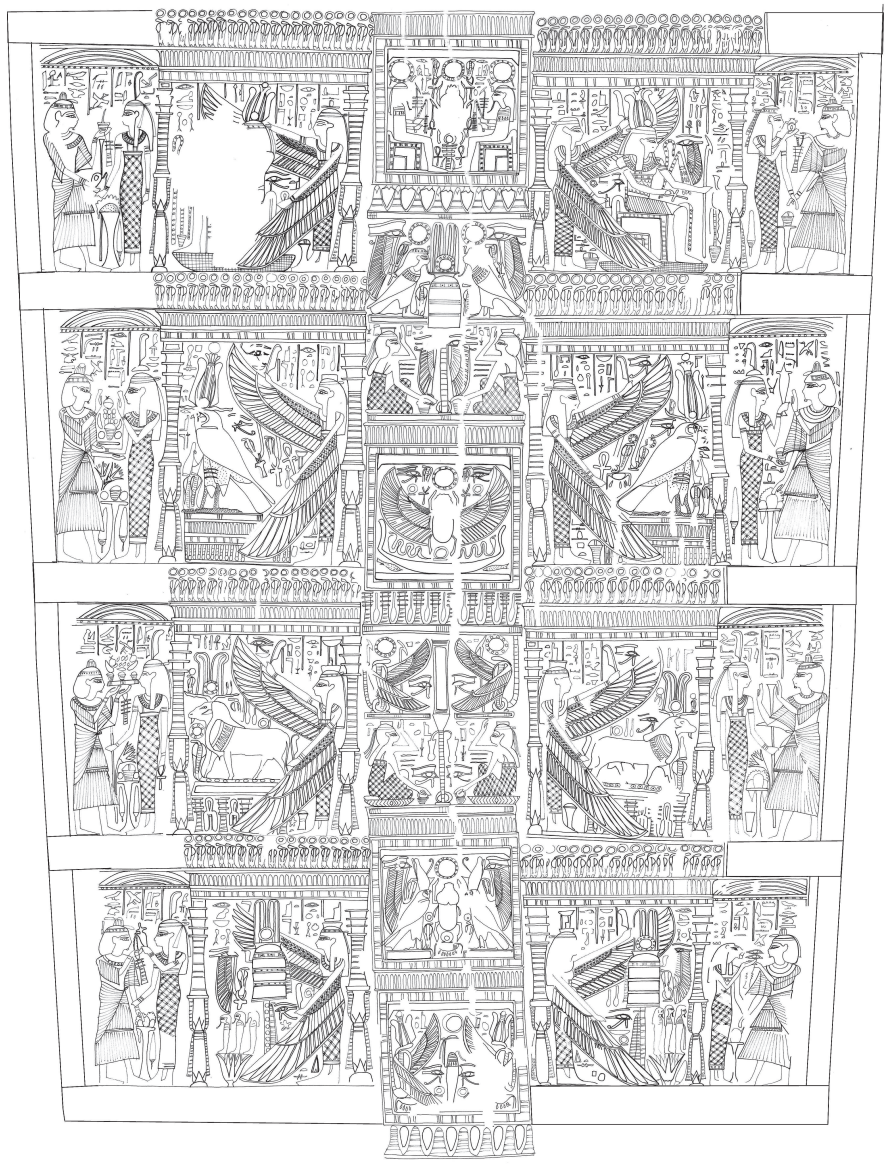


Fig. 2.56. Lower section. Inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

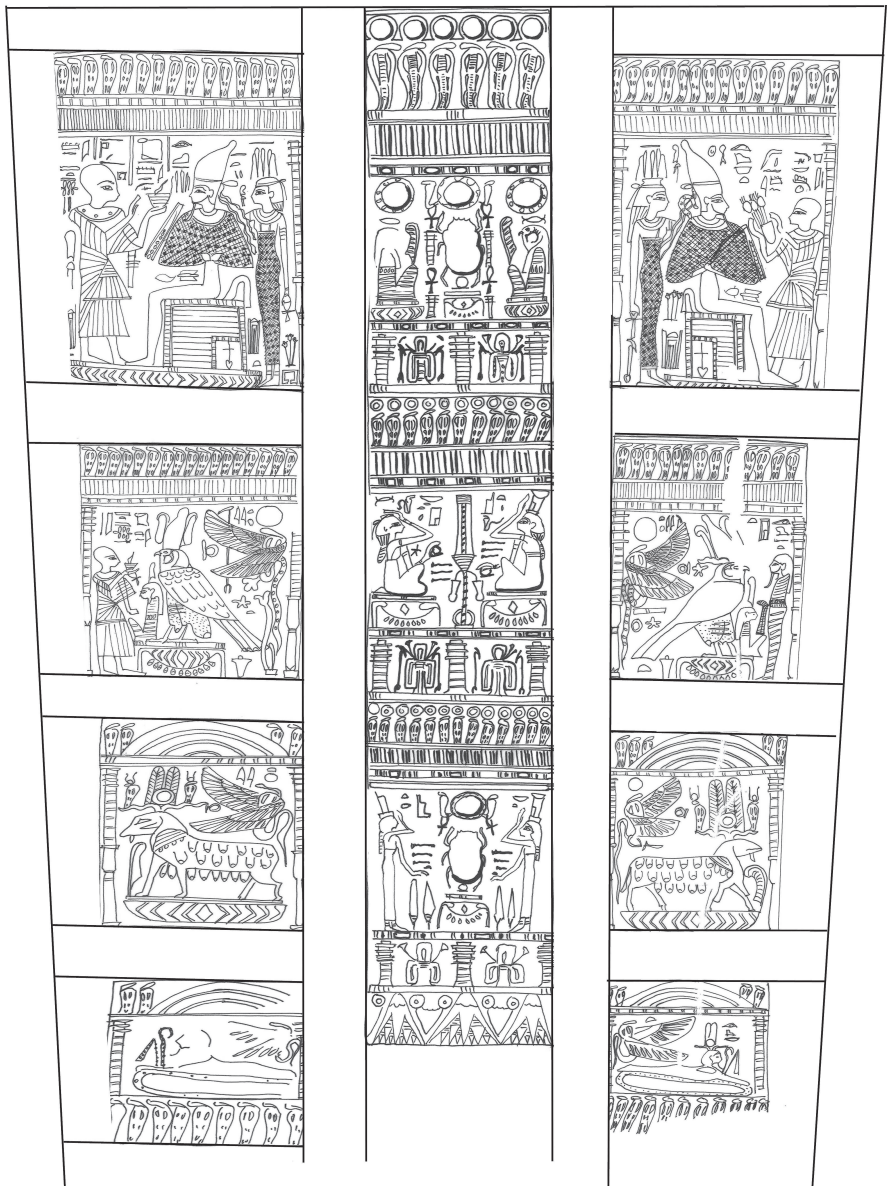


Fig. 2.57. Lower section. Coffin of Nesipanebimakh (A.12).



Fig. 2.58. Lower section. Outer coffin of Henuttaui (A.136).

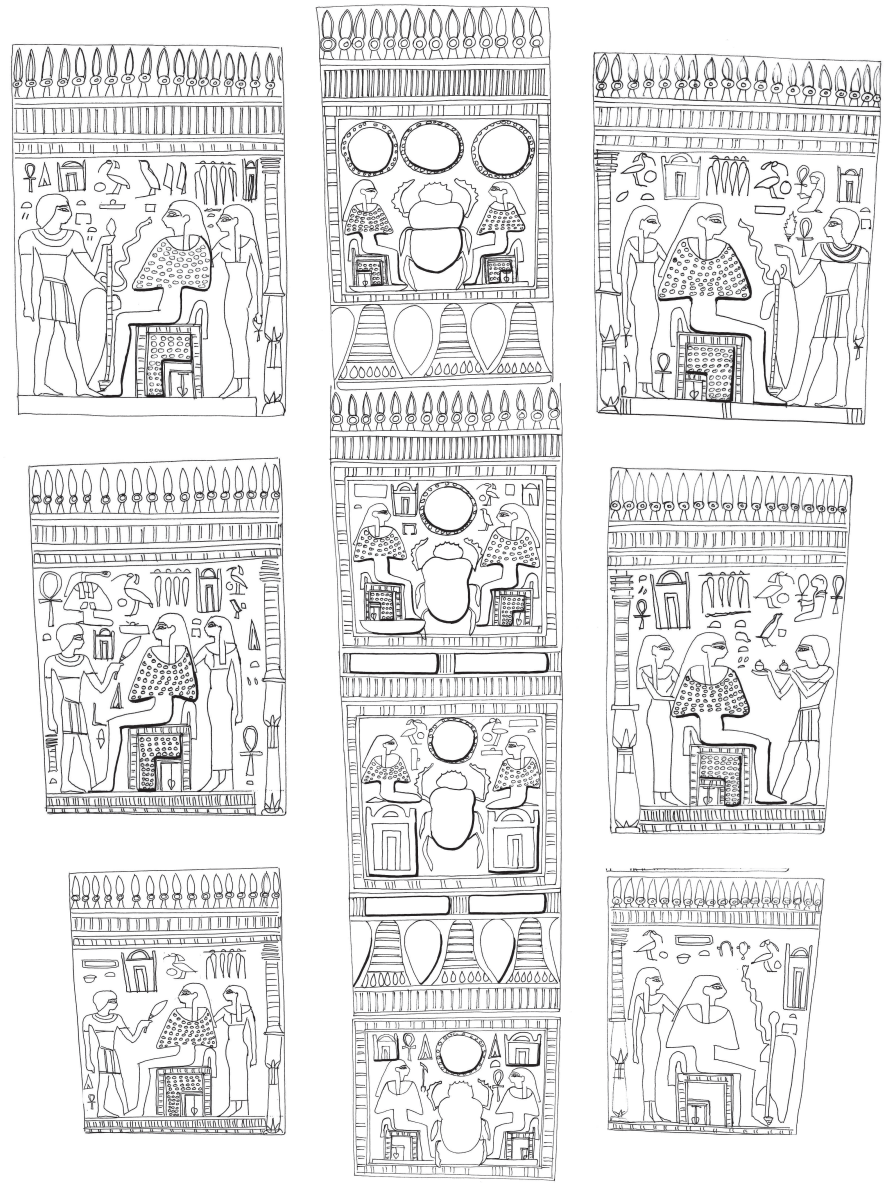


Fig. 2.59. Lower section. Inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu (A.33).

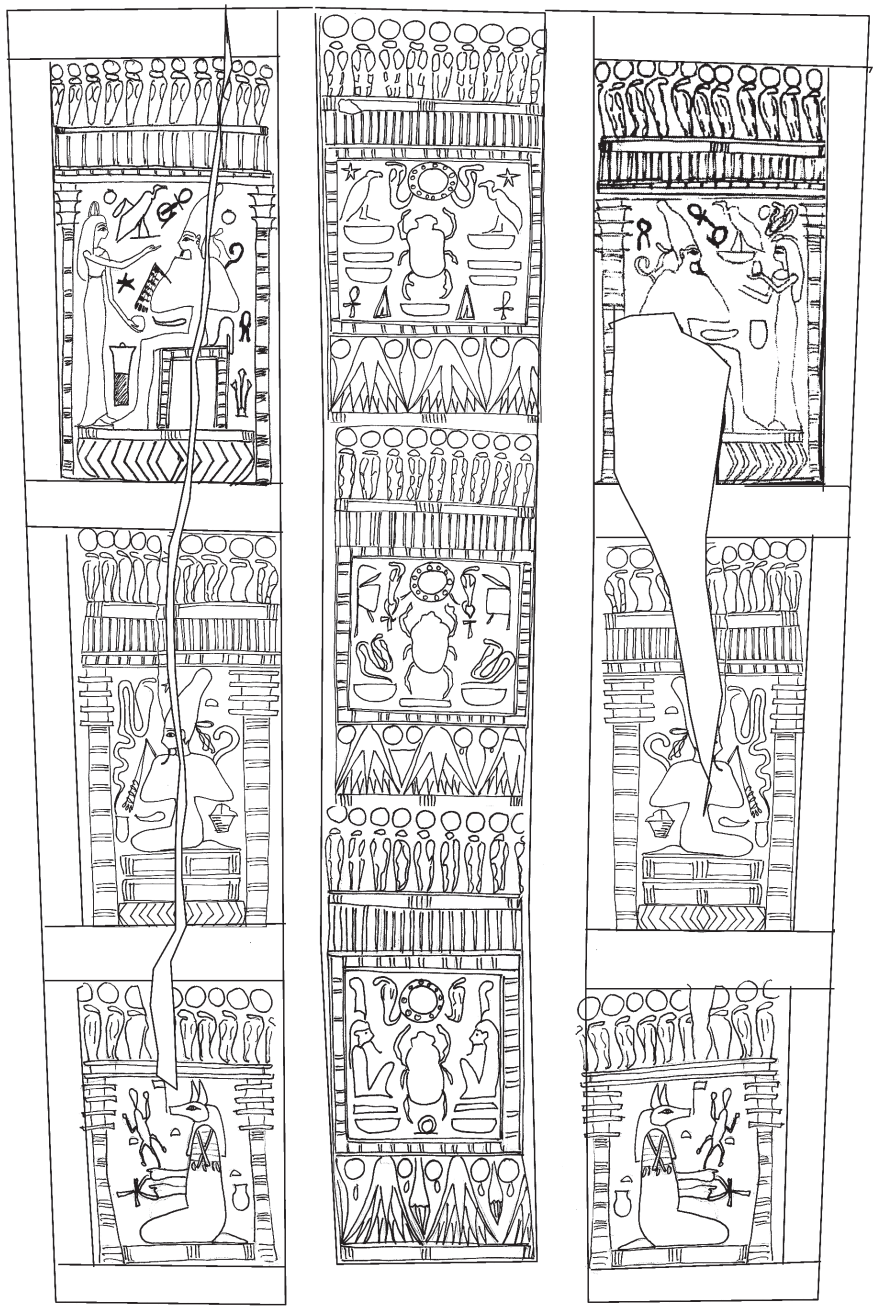


Fig. 2.60. Lower section. Coffin of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

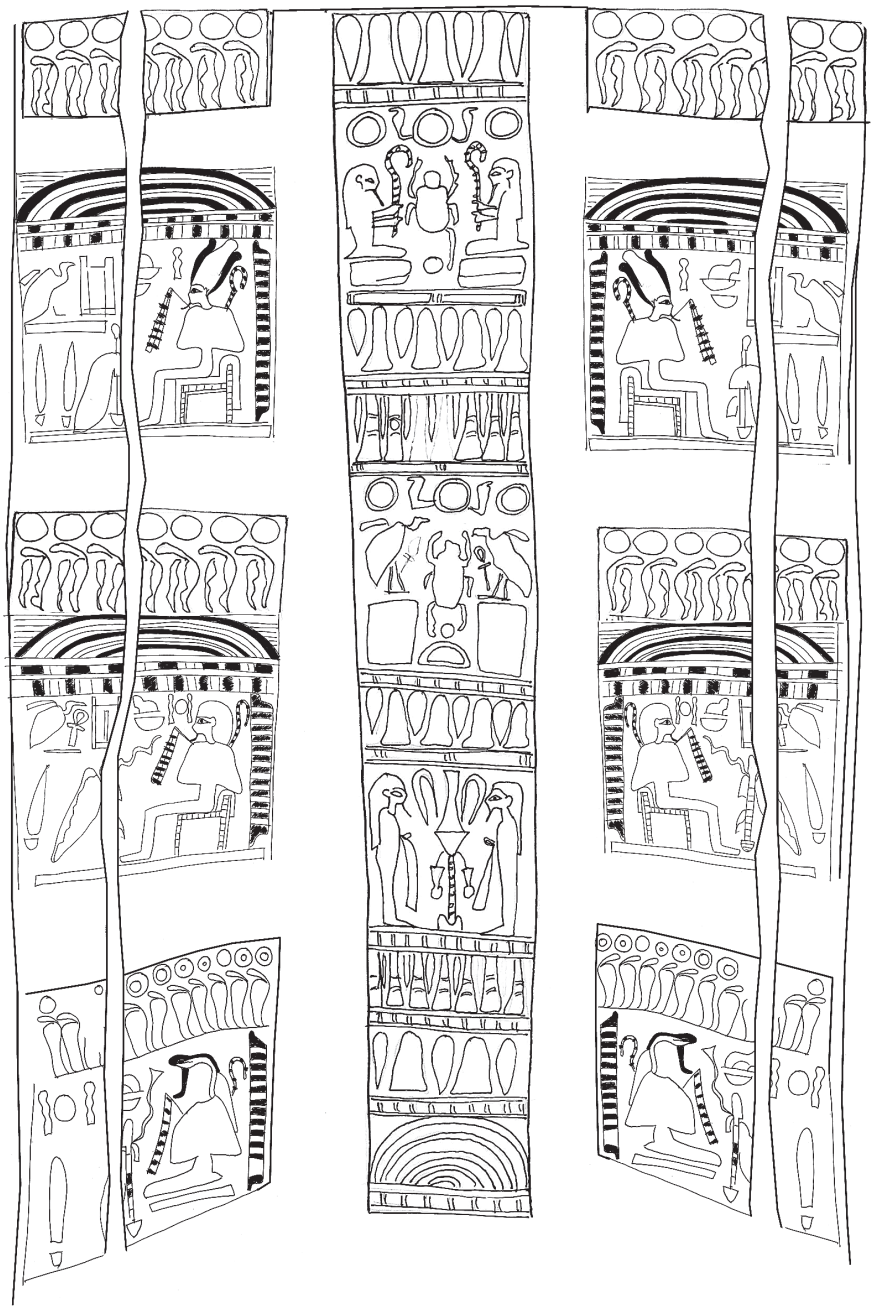


Fig. 2.61. Lower section. Anonymous coffin (A.4).

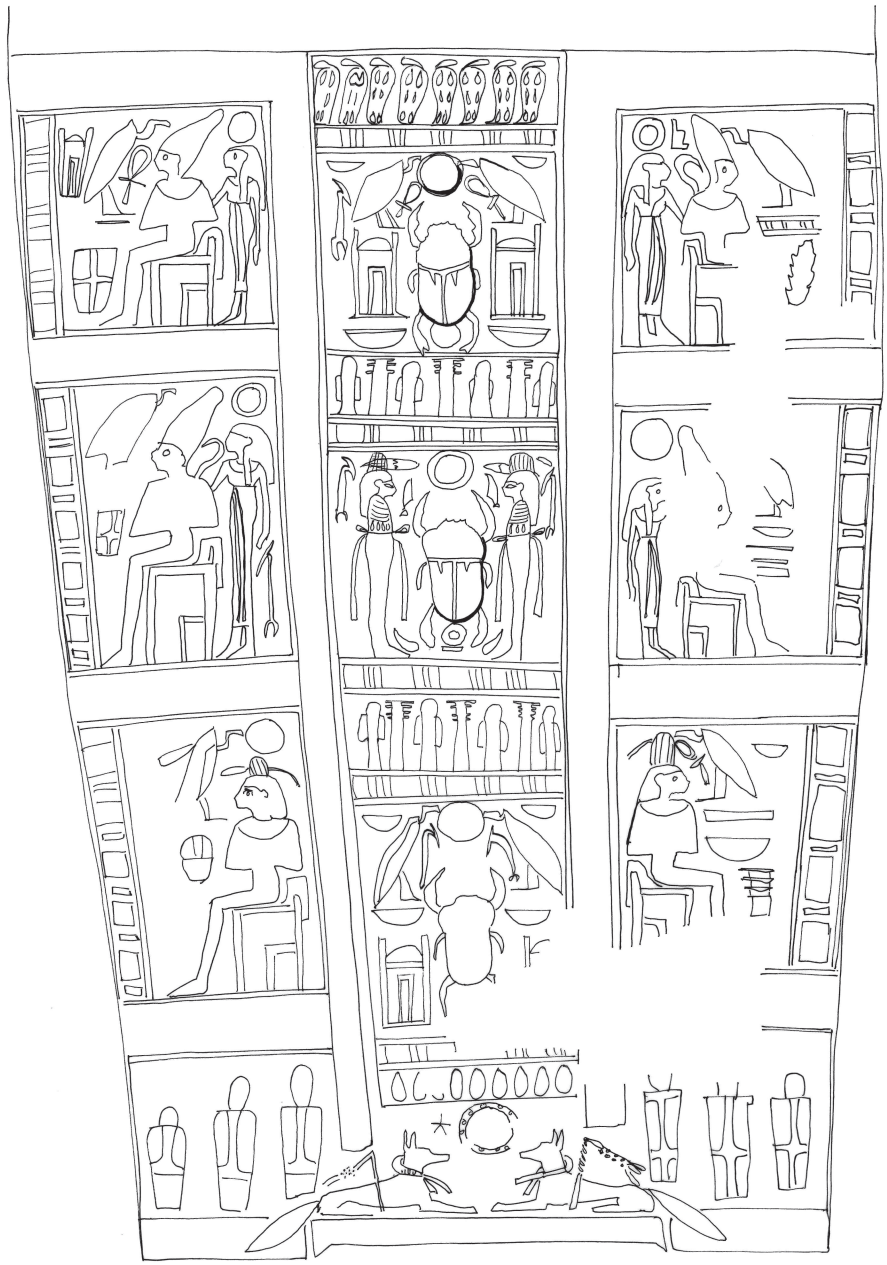


Fig. 2.62. Lower section. Anonymous coffin (A.41).

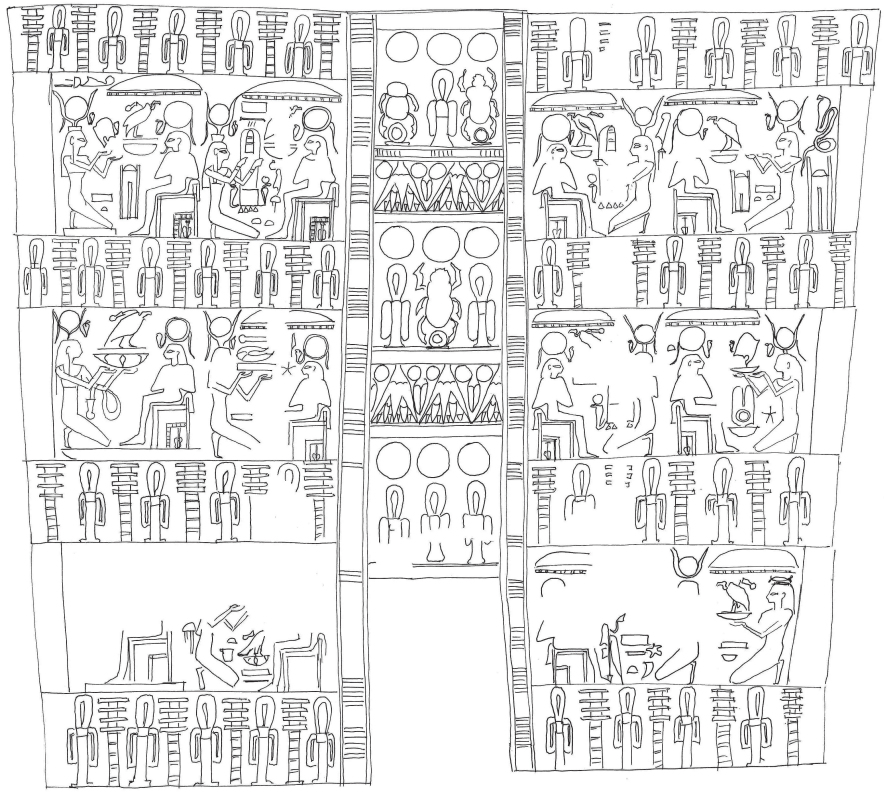


Fig. 2.63. Lower section. Outer coffin of Butherkhonsu (A.52).

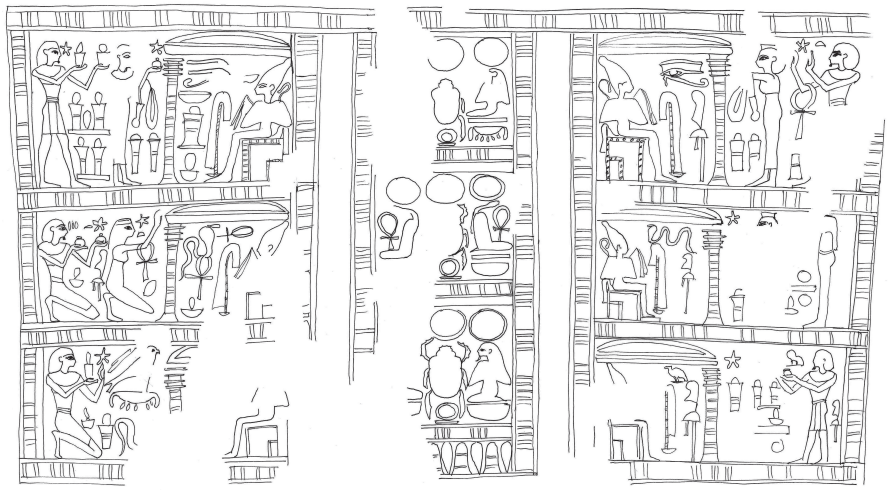


Fig. 2.64. Lower section. Anonymous outer coffin (A.60).

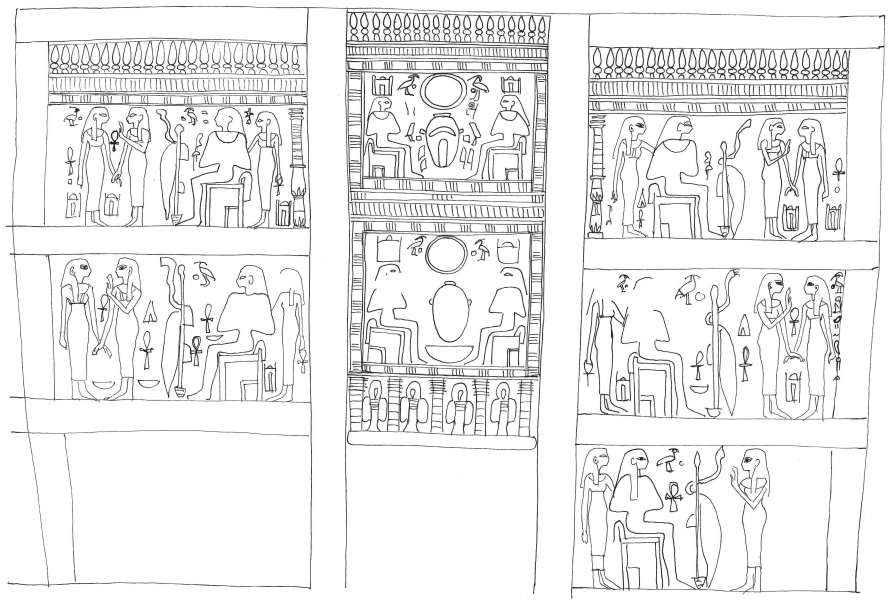


Fig. 2.65. Lower section. Outer coffin of Taahuti (A.32).

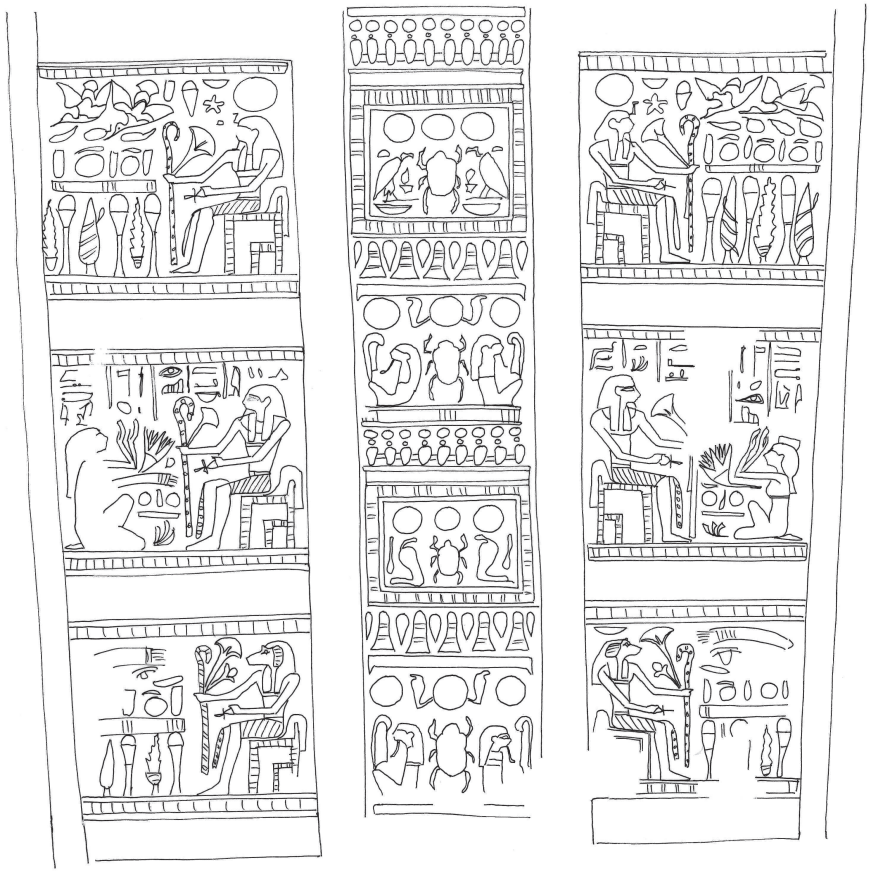


Fig. 2.66. Lower section. Outer coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu (A.33).

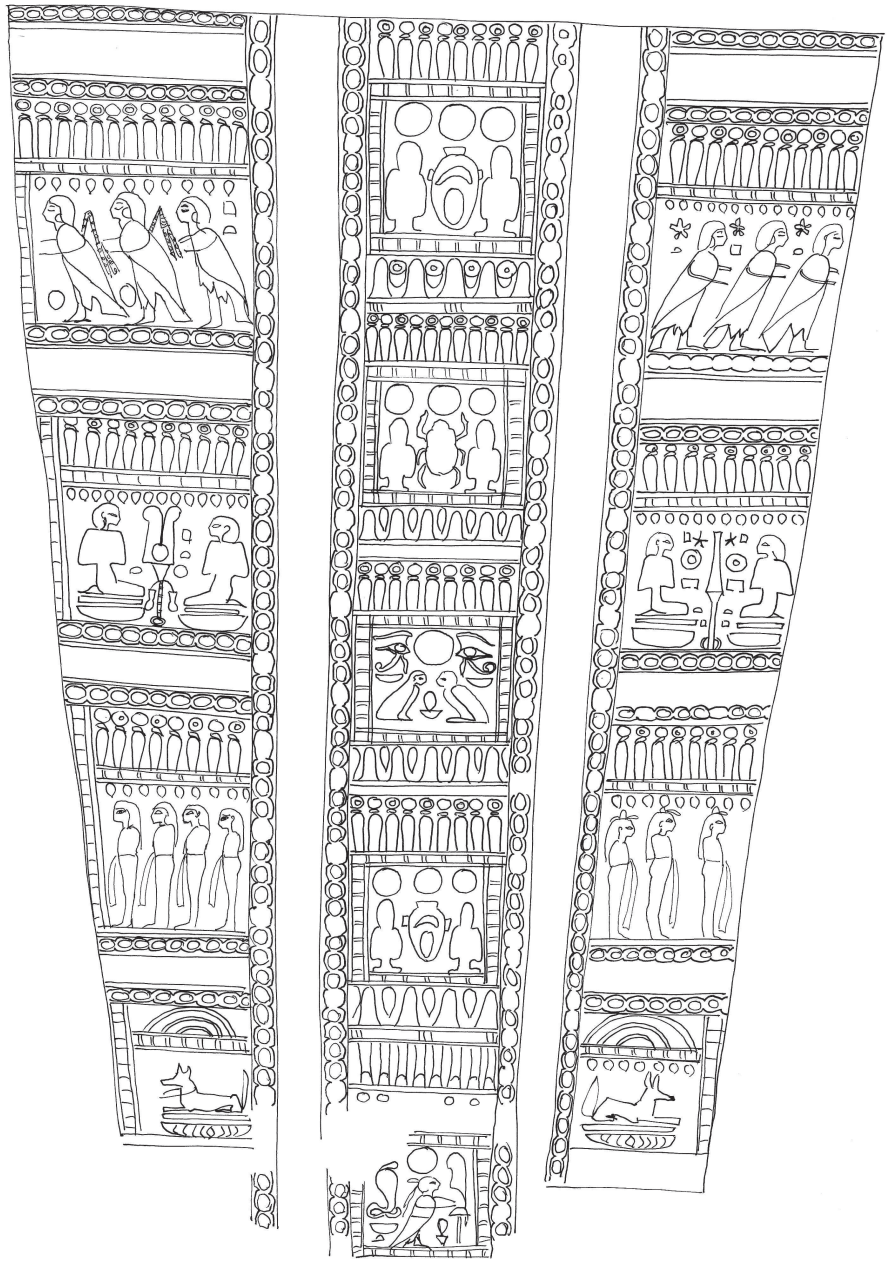


Fig. 2.67. Lower section. Inner coffin of Direpu (A.123).

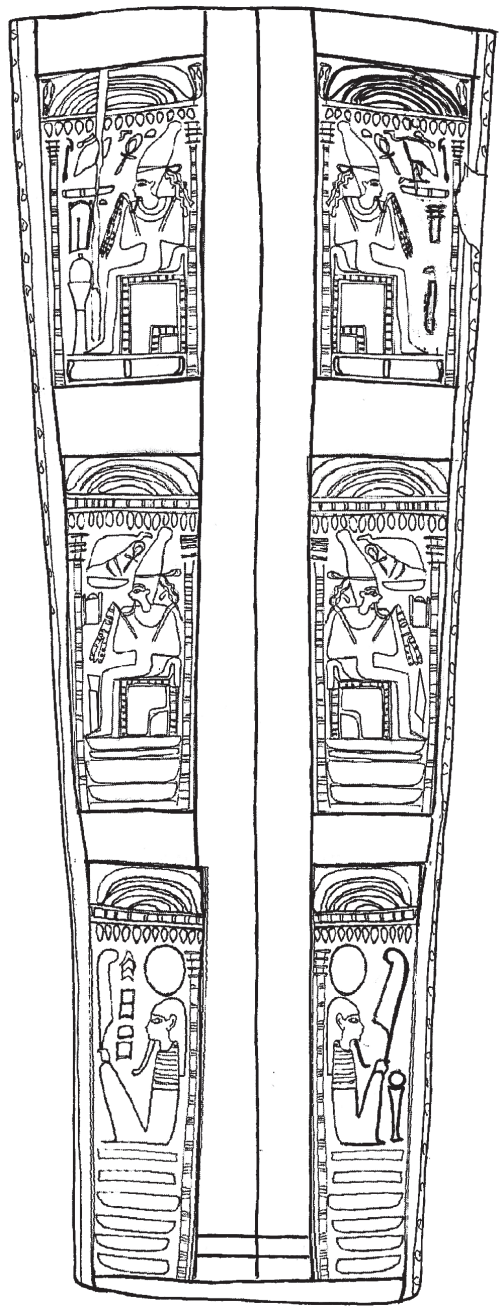


Fig. 2.68. Lower section. Mummy board of Henuttaui (A.136).

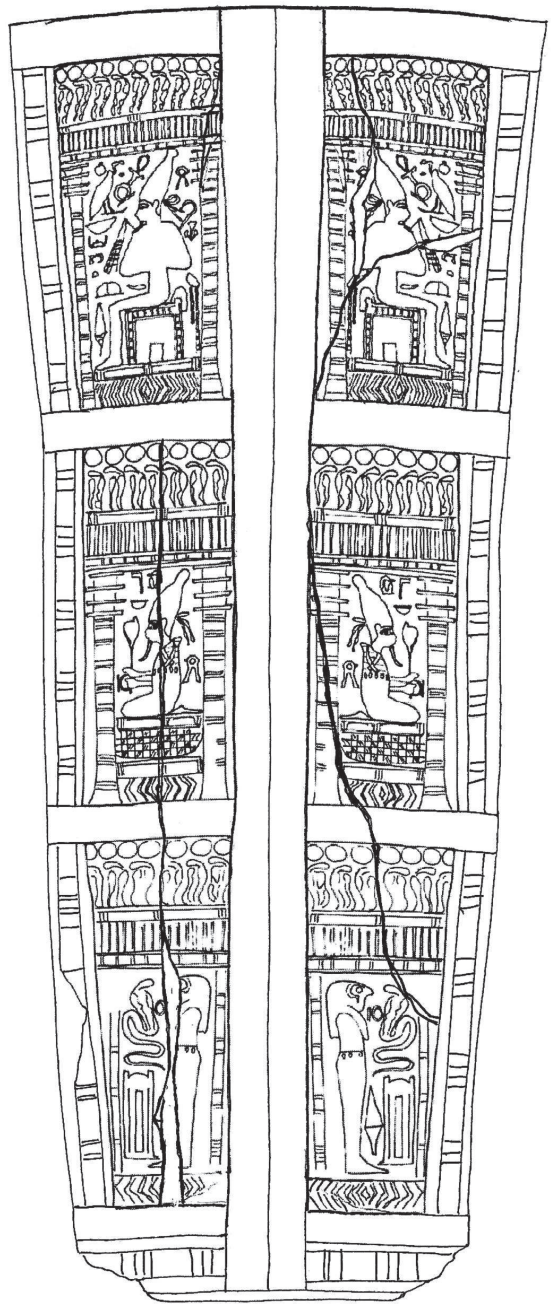


Fig. 2.69. Lower section. Mummy board of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

4. Footboard

The most common arrangement of the footboard consists of a tripartite layout, with the lateral partitions displayed in reverse direction, while the central partition is typically reserved for inscriptions. On earlier coffins, this central band is inscribed with texts running down the centre of the lid,[561] whereas on later objects the inscriptions are restricted to the footboard itself.[562]

Basic scheme

The depiction of the mourning goddesses is a typical motif found in coffins from the first quarter of the 21st Dynasty or those with an archaizing style (Fig. 2.70-71).[563] In most cases, the style is naturalistic.

These vignettes portray the mourning goddesses facing inwards.[564] Nephthys tends to be depicted on the left partition, while Isis appears on the opposite side. The mourning goddesses are depicted squatting (sometimes over *nwb*-signs),[565] with one hand raised and the other resting downwards. A wide range of symbols is included in the scene. The simplest versions include short inscription labels identifying each goddess.[566] These deities are repeatedly referred

561 TT 320: inner coffin of Pinedjem II, coffin set of Masaharta, and inner coffin of Maatkare. A.93: coffin of Padiamun. Louvre Museum: coffin set of Paser.

562 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu and outer coffin of Pinedjem II. A.26: outer coffin of Nesiniutitaui. A.18: anonymous coffin. A.28: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.52: outer coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.54: anonymous outer coffin. A.77: outer coffin of Nesinebtaui. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep . Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Tanatnektahat.

563 TT 320: outer and inner coffin of Tauheret and mummy board of Maatkare. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Henuttaui. August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of Hori. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: coffin set of Herytubekhet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Butehamun. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun. Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: coffin.

564 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of Hori. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: coffin of Herytubekhet . Occasionally, the mourning goddesses face the central partition. A.95: mummy board of Pameshem. A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. In rare cases, the mourning goddesses face outwards. A.87: mummy board of Padiamun. A.123: inner coffin of Direpu.

565 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Butehamun. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.

566 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Die Städtische Galerie Liebieghaus in Frankfurt: coffin set of Takayt.

to as goddesses of the 'heavenly waters',[567] as well as goddesses of 'Beauty and Healing', referencing the mummification process. The *ba*-bird of the deceased is also commonly featured in this section.[568] The West-sign[569] and the Anubis-jackal[570] may also appear among the motifs included in the scene.

Mummy boards display interesting variations of these vignettes. Despite the formal absence of a footboard, it is not uncommon to find a similar decorative scheme on the lower register. However, on mummy boards, these vignettes are not presented in reversed direction.[571] Nonetheless, the goddesses are depicted in the same manner: facing inwards, displaying mourning gestures, and surrounded by the same basic iconography (water, *wedjat*, and offerings). This scene is often considerably shortened and reduced to the simple depiction of *wedjat*-eyes,[572] Tjet-signs,[573] and even cobras.[574]

The portrayal of these goddesses is directly derived from the repertoire of Chapter 151 of the Book of the Dead.

Classical scheme

These vignettes are more likely to occur in objects dating from the mid-21st Dynasty[575] or in archaizing objects[576]. The style remains naturalistic.

567 August Kestner Museum in Hanover: mummy board of Hori. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: coffin of Herytubekhet.
568 A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Khonsumose. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.
569 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Butehamun.
570 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret. A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun. Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu.
571 TT 320: mummy board of Maatkare, and mummy board of Masaharta. A.12: mummy board of Nesipanebimakh. A.55: mummy board of Pinedjem. A.95: mummy board of Pameshem. A.113: mummy board of Nesiamenemope. Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich: mummy board of Herytubekhet. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Khonsumose. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Amenhotep.
572 A.29: anonymous mummy board. A.147: mummy board of Menkhepere. Museo Egizio in Turin: mummy board of Tabakenkhonsu. Michael Carlos Museum: mummy board.
573 A.53: mummy board of Tantdjehuti.
574 A.10: mummy board of Tabaekkhonsu. Metropolitan Museum of Art: mummy board of Tabakmut. A.unknown: anonymous mummy board (25022).
575 TT 320: inner coffin of Maatkare, and coffin set of Masaharta. A.93: coffin of Padiamun. Louvre Museum: coffin set of Paser. Michael Carlos Museum: coffin of Tanatnektahat. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
576 TT 320: Outer coffin and mummy board of Pinedjem II. A.28: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.77: outer coffin of Nesinebtaui.

These vignettes depict the mourning goddesses squatting before a standing (or squatting[577]) effigy of Osiris (Fig. 2.73). The mummiform god stands on a pedestal,[578] a *neb*-basket,[579] or a *heb*-bowl,[580] wearing the *atef*-crown[581] (or merely a wig),[582]a long belt and holding sceptres. At his feet appears an *imiwt*-totem,[583] alongside many of the symbols mentioned earlier: offerings,[584] the *wedjat*-eye,[585] and the 'water' determinative.[586] Occasionally, the mummiform god is falcon-headed.[587]

Variation with the Ta-wer totem

A variation of the former scheme features the depiction of the Ta-wer totem instead of Osiris (Fig. 2.72). These vignettes appear to have been used during the same span of time, occurring in objects from the early to mid-21st Dynasty. The decorative style transitions from naturalistic in earlier objects to schematic in later objects.

These vignettes depict the mourning goddesses before the Ta-wer totem,[588] including basically the same repertoire previously described. However, in this variation, the goddesses are squatting before the sacred totem, which stands on a podium (sometimes decorated with a typical recessed panel)[589] or above the sign of the horizon, *djw*. A long belt is attached to the totem.[590] Other

577 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Tabakmut.
578 TT 320: inner coffin of Maatkare and outer coffin of Masaharta. A.54: anonymous outer coffin.
579 A.93: coffin of Padiamun.
580 TT 320: outer and inner coffin of Pinedjem II. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu
581 TT 320: inner coffin of Maatkare, and coffin set of Masaharta. A.54: anonymous outer coffin. A.77: outer coffin of Nesinebtaui. A.93: coffin of Padiamun. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep .
582 A.18: anonymous coffin. A.52: inner coffin of Butherkhonsu. A.102: outer coffin of Haes. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Louvre Museum: coffin set of Paser. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Nesipanebu.
583 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. A.77: outer coffin of Nesinebtaui. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: mummy board of Nesipanebu. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.
584 A.102: outer coffin of Haes.
585 A.93: coffin of Padiamun.
586 TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta. A.18: anonymous coffin. A.77: outer coffin of Nesinebtaui. A.93: coffin of Padiamun. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
587 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
588 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Yutefamun. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat.
589 A.108: coffin set of Ankhefenkhonsu.
590 A.38: coffin set of Ankhsenmut. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Museo Arqueologico Nacional in Madrid: coffin of Amenemhat. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny.

expected symbols include the *imiwt*-totem, piled offerings, the *wedjat*-eye and the 'water' determinative.

Complex scheme

By the late 21st Dynasty, this scene features a bolder depiction of the god Osiris, who is typically shown without the mourning goddesses.[591] The style is sketchy and highly schematic, with smaller vignettes.

In these vignettes, Osiris appears enthroned[592] or standing, always facing outwards. Although the mourning goddesses are included, their importance decreases (Fig. 2.74-75), and they eventually disappear.

The size of the vignette tends to decrease to half the length of the footboard,[593] and sometimes the number of registers involved in the decoration of the footboard frequently increases (Fig. 2.75).

However, the vignettes can be far more elaborate, sometimes presenting an entire cult scene, featuring a priest performing rites before Osiris.[594] Regularly featured elements include offerings, the *ba*-bird[595] and the *wedjat*-eye.[596]

Reverse side

The reverse side of the footboard typically remains undecorated. However, some coffins exhibit a briefly sketched panel.

Rejoicing goddess

Coffins from the first half of the Dynasty tend to include a sketchy depiction of Isis (Fig. 2.77). The goddess Isis is portrayed squatting on the *nwb*-sign, raising her arms in joy, occasionally with *ankh*-signs hanging from her arms.

591 A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui. A.91: outer coffin of Taditumut. A.123: outer coffin of Direpu. A.131: anonymous coffin set. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Tabakmut.
592 TT 320: inner coffin of Asetemkhebit. A.33: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.131: anonymous coffin set. A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
593 TT 320: inner coffin of Asetemkhebi. A.91: outer coffin of Taditumut. A.131: anonymous coffin set. A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
594 A.149: anonymous outer coffin. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Tabakmut.
595 A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui.
596 A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu.

West-signs flank the composition.[597] Occasionally the scene may be completed with deities of the underworld (Fig. 2.78).

Tjet-sign

Coffins from the first half of the dynasty sometimes feature a large, crudely sketched Tjet-sign (Fig. 2.79). The Tjet-sign is the nuclear block of a symmetrical composition, flanked by West-signs, sometimes with human arms raised in adoration.[598]

Commentary

The 'festive dress' type introduced the depiction of feet in coffin decoration. This trend was short-lived but had significant consequences. From then on, the footboard became an autonomous section of the lid for the first time. The autonomy of this section is highlighted by the reversed direction of its decoration.

The footboard is designed as a triptych, with the central partition inscribed with several columns of text,[599] while the lateral partitions depict the mourning goddesses.

In the basic scheme, during the first quarter of the 21st Dynasty, this section became consistently associated with the mourning scenes.[600] Later, in the classical scheme, more elaborate versions of this vignette display the mourning goddesses before the Ta-wer totem or even before the standing mummy of Osiris. This layout is based on similar vignettes displayed on the exterior of the box.[601]

In later objects, the mourning goddesses are no longer depicted on the footboard of the lid, and only Osiris is included, either standing or enthroned, always facing outwards. The layout of these vignettes is consistently associated with the Osirian sequences depicted on the lateral partitions of the lower section.

597 Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety.
598 Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety.
599 Only one object was found presenting the scene facing the central partition- A.110: lid of Djedmutiue-sankh.
600 For the use of mourning scenes in the yellow corpus, see Kucharek 2018, 87-89.
601 A.19: coffin of Taiuheret.

This later development is telling of the osirification of coffin decoration during the second half of the 21st Dynasty.[602] Interestingly, by the late 21st Dynasty, this motif may occasionally reappear in the interior of the box,[603] indicating a permeability between the decoration of the lid and the interior of the box.

The decoration of the footboard strongly suggests an association with the imagery of Osirian mourning rituals and resurrection. The reversed direction of this tripartite panel implies that the depicted motifs – Isis and Nephthys – were intended to be raised when the coffin was lying in a horizontal position. The footboard thus provides the deceased with a vision of his divine mourners, likely linking this particular section with rituals related to Chapter 151 of the Book of the Dead.

The chief function of the goddesses is to find, protect and revive the murdered Osiris. Mourning always implies protection and revivification.[604]

Conversely, the rejoicing Isis featured on the reverse side alludes to the resurrection of Osiris and may have played an important role in rituals involving the elevation of the lid. When upright, the lid would convey an image of Osiris in triumph.

Another subtle interpretation is suggested by the shape of the footboard, resembling the sign of the horizon (*djw*), thereby associating the coffin as a whole with the territory of the Duat, where the regeneration of the sun and the resurrection of Osiris took place. A similar cosmic reading can be applied to the layout of the headboard, as its floral headdress resembles the rising sun when viewed from the crown of the head (Fig. 2.3). From the footboard to the headboard, the entire journey of the sun through the netherworld is suggested, mirroring the journey of the deceased's *ba*-bird as it rises each morning, going forth into the light.

602 TT 320: inner coffin of Asetemkhebit. A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui. A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti. A.91: outer coffin of Taditumut. A.131: anonymous coffin set. A.149: anonymous outer coffin. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Tabakmut.
603 A.6: inner coffin of Nesitanebettaui.
604 Kucharek 2018, 81.

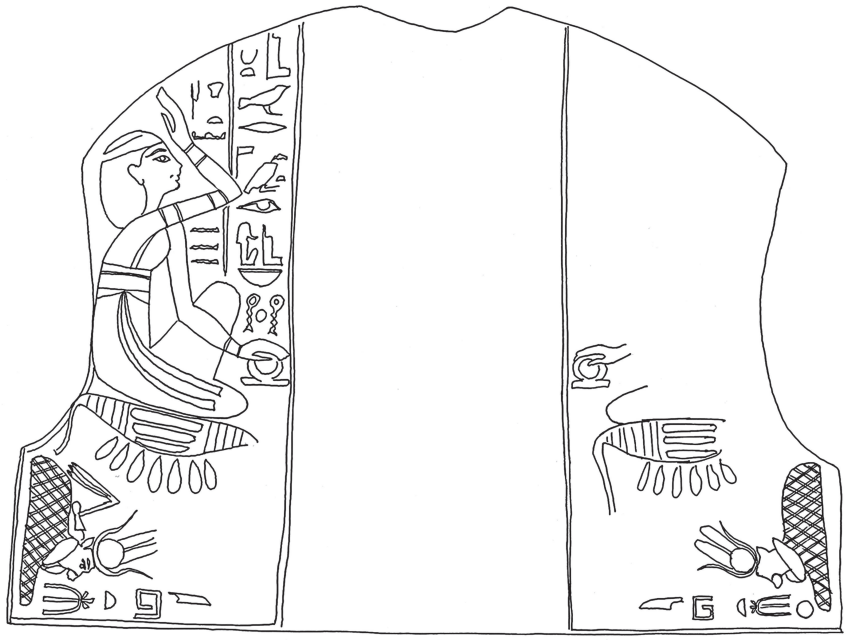


Fig. 2.70. Footboard. Coffin of Tabasety (Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus).

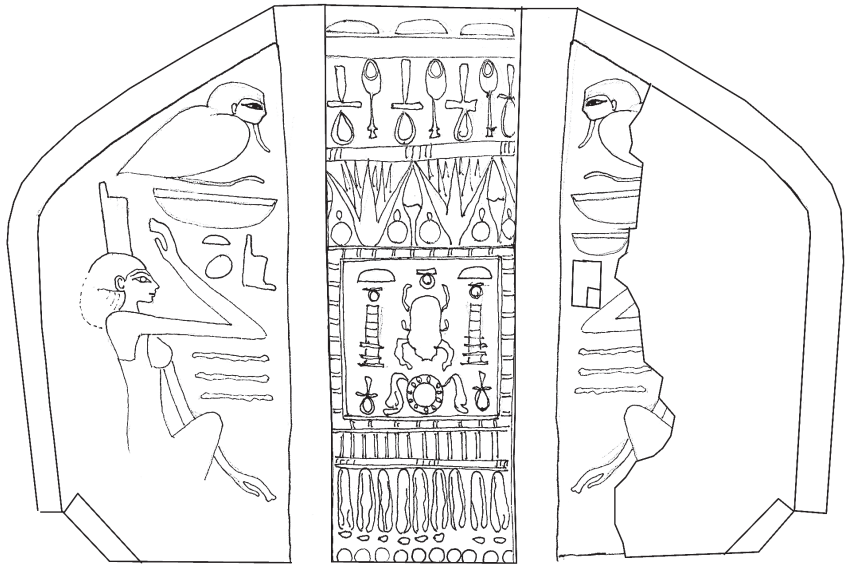


Fig. 2.71. Footboard. Coffin of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

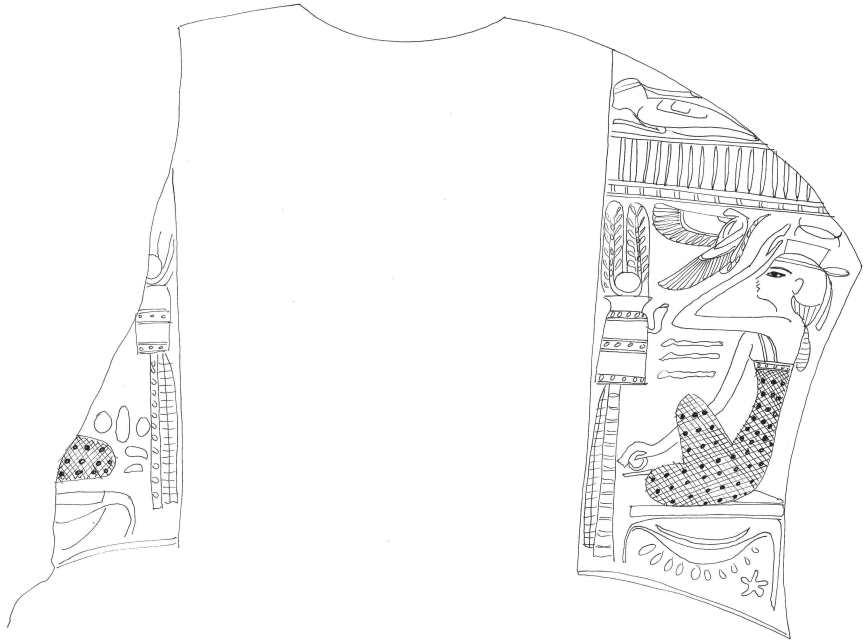


Fig. 2.72. Footboard. Inner coffin of Nesipanebimakh (A.12).



Fig. 2.73. Coffin of Padiamun (A.93).

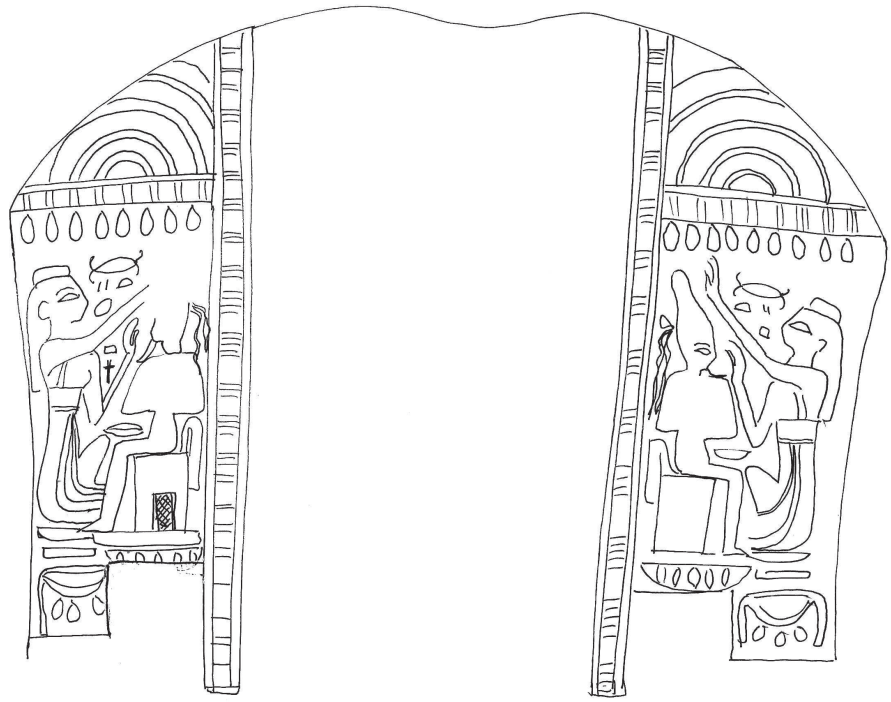


Fig. 2.74. Footboard. Inner coffin (A.15).

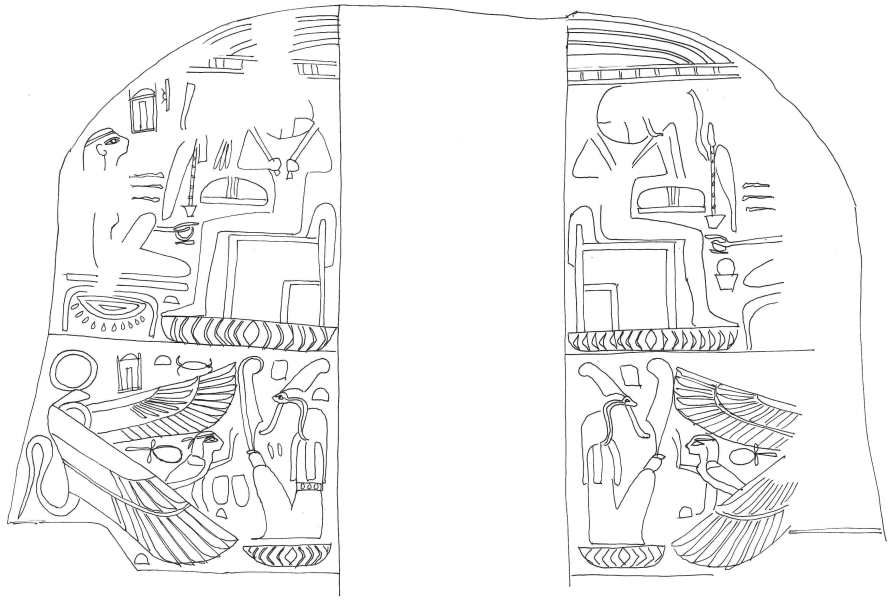


Fig. 2.75. Outer coffin of Ikhy (Vatican Museums)

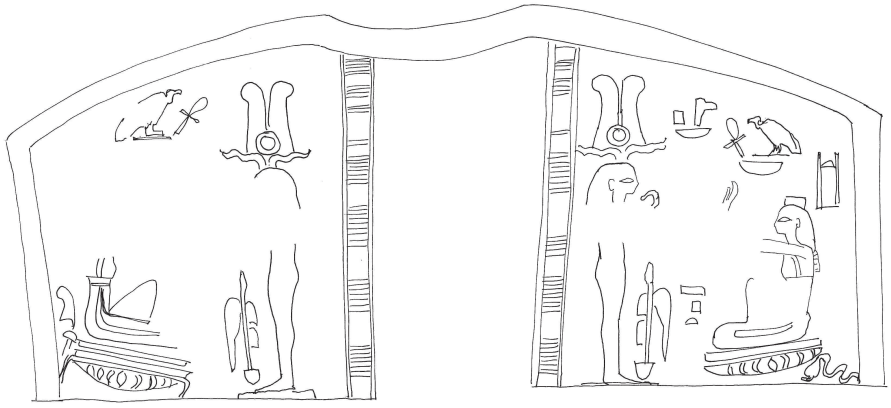


Fig. 2.76. Footboard. Outer coffin of Butherkhonsu (A.52).

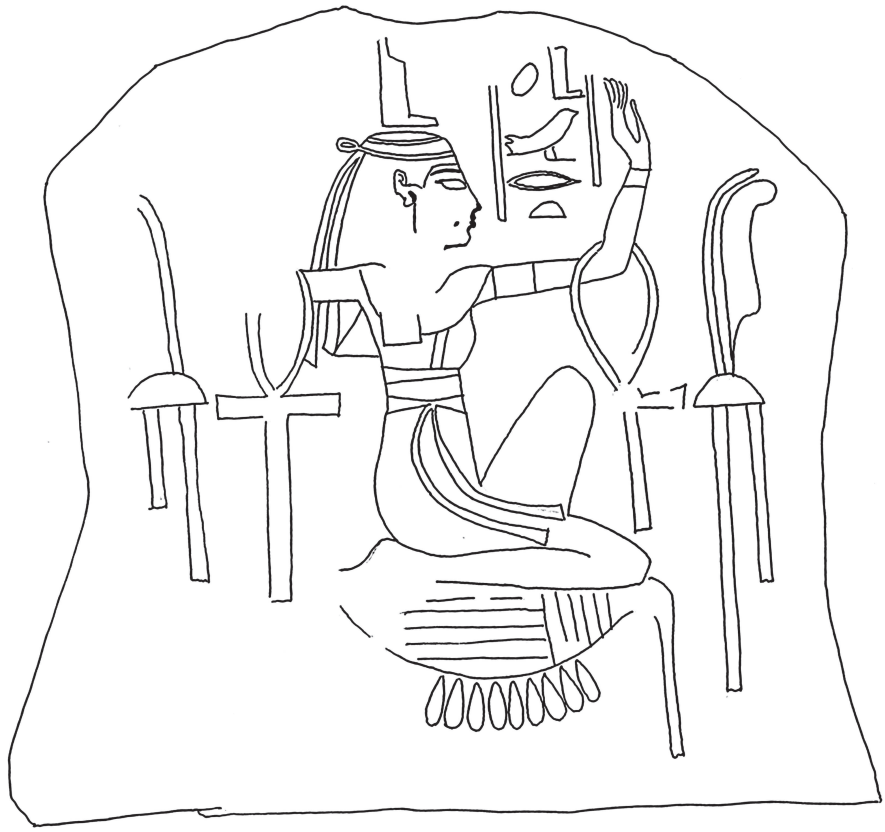


Fig. 2.77. Footboard. Coffin of Tabasety (Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Aarhus).

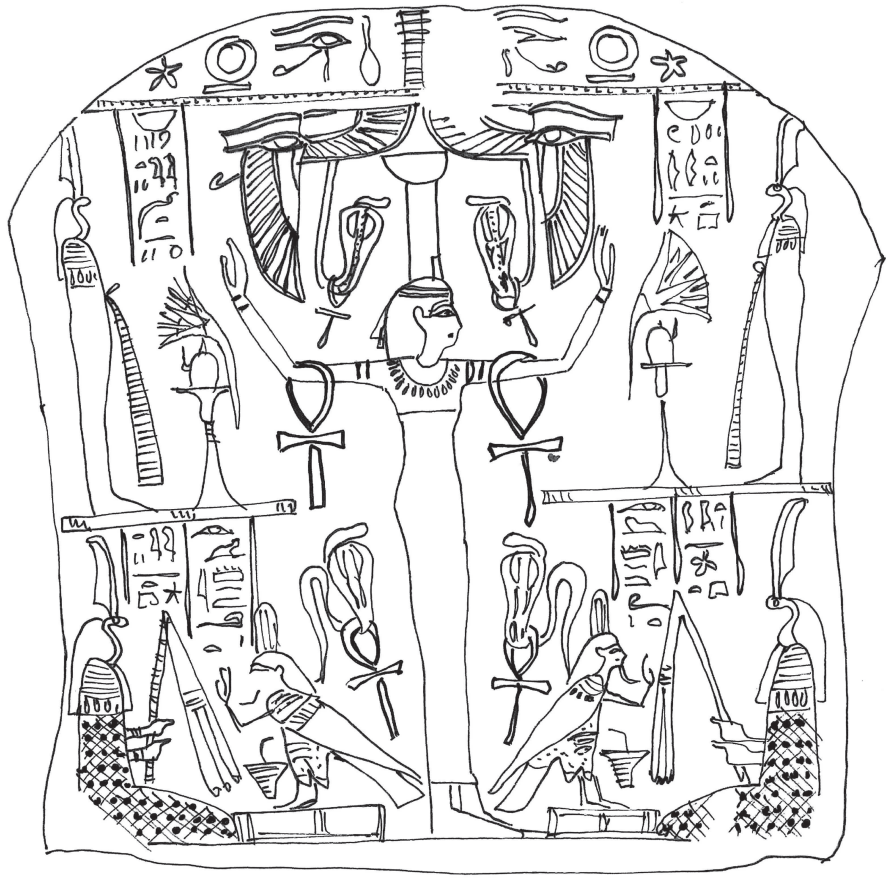


Fig. 2.78. Footboard. Lid of Amenemhat (Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid).

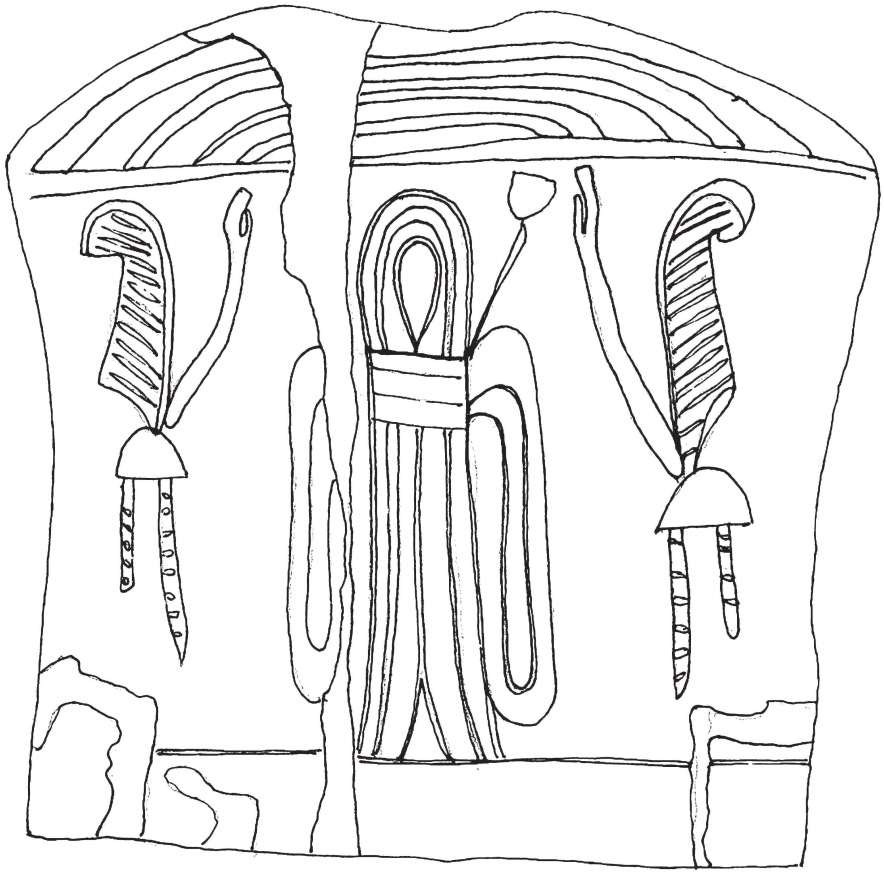


Fig. 2.79. Footboard. Outer lid of Henuttaui (A.136).

CHAPTER III

Box: Exterior decoration

In the box, the layout is fully determined by secondary compositions designed simply as vignettes. These scenes are displayed on the walls following a specific 'topographical' pattern, where each section is assigned its own repertoire of vignettes. The importance of each section varies and is frequently subject to negotiation. Unlike the lid, where the importance of the lower section diminishes as we approach the late 21st Dynasty, in the boxes, the role of the lower section increases, frequently extending across the entire length of the wall.

1. Basic scheme

The layout of the basic scheme was established during the late 20th Dynasty when the features that were loosely displayed on the black-type boxes became organised into distinct pictorial areas. The earliest examples of the yellow type thus reveal a strong dependence on the features of the black type. During the first quarter of the 21st Dynasty, the compositions of the basic scheme were gradually replaced by the new proposals introduced by the classical scheme. However, the subjects depicted over the lower section (Sons of Horus) were often revisited, particularly in the archaizing trends of coffin decoration.

Headboard

In the yellow type, the headboard features a tripartite composition comprising a central panel flanked by side panels with a striped pattern.

Side panels

At this stage, the side panels of the headboard typically display black stripes on a yellow background (Fig. 3.1).[1] This pattern is derived from the decoration seen on the striped wigs depicted on black coffins during the 18th Dynasty. However, in this context, these motifs are presented without any apparent intention to evoke the wig of the deceased. The number of stripes on each side tends to vary loosely from 12 to 14, though in rare cases it can exceed 20 stripes.[2]

Central panel

In the basic scheme, the main motif of the central panel is the goddess Nephthys, who may be depicted either squatting or standing:

- **Standing goddess**. The deity is flanked by the totems of the West (Fig. 3.3), with upraised arms holding *ankh*-signs suspended from the elbows (Fig. 3.4).[3]
- **Squatting goddess**. The deity[4] is shown squatting over a *nub*-sign, with upraised arms and wings fully extended upwards. The scene is usually flanked by the totems of the West and by *wedjat*-eyes (Fig. 3.1).[5] Occasionally, the Sons of Horus may appear (Fig. 3.2).[6]

Both scenes were used during the same time frame. This repertoire features consistently on both modest and high elite objects, and all examples

1 Antikmuseet in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
2 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Nauny.
3 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Nauny.
4 In rare cases, Isis may be depicted. Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.
5 Antikmuseet in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Butehamun.
6 Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.

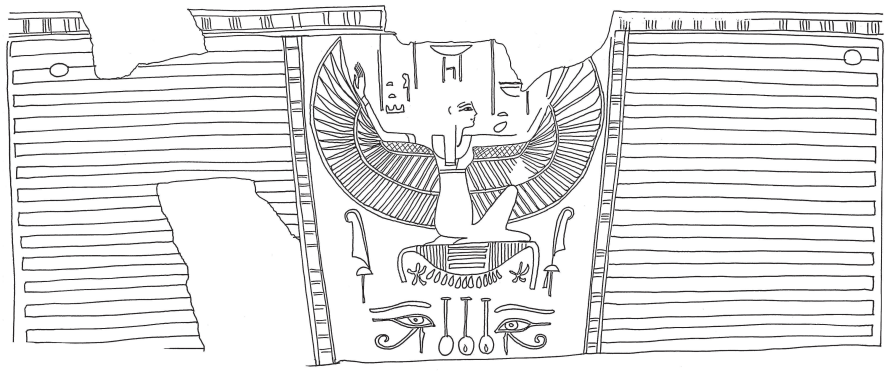


Fig. 3.1. Headboard. Coffin of Tabasety (Antikmuseet in Aarhus)



Fig. 3.2. Headboard (central panel). Inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

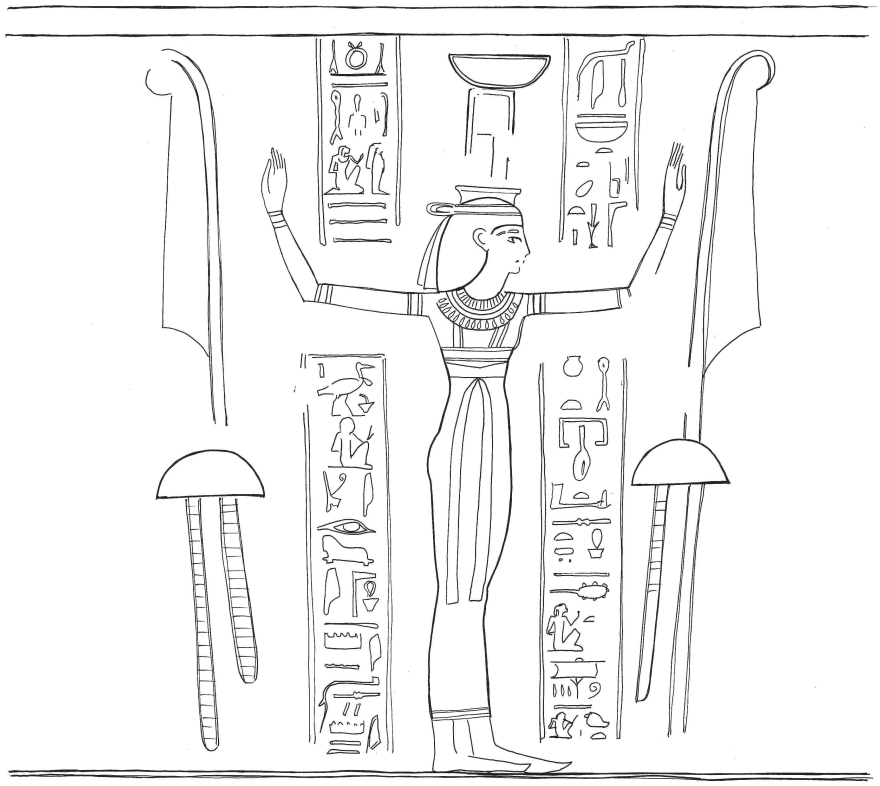


Fig. 3.3. Headboard (central panel). Outer coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).



Fig. 3.4. Headboard (central panel). Inner coffin of Anresenmes (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

seem to date from the end of the Ramesside period through to the early 21st Dynasty. By the late 21st Dynasty, these scenes were re-introduced in coffins that adopted an archaizing layout.

Upper section

In the basic scheme, the scenes depicted on the upper section of the box are clearly related to the layout of the black type. On the boxes of these earlier objects, the shoulder area is adorned with the figure of Thoth opening the Gates of Heaven. Alternatively, this scene may be entirely replaced by the depiction of a large *wedjat*-eye displayed above a schematic representation of the tomb, perhaps carrying the same meaning: the *wedjat*-eye alluding to Thoth, and the tomb likely identified with the Gates of Heaven. This motif is also associated with the traditional depiction of the eye-panel, another significant symbol denoting the passage between worlds.

In the basic scheme of the yellow type, different scenes can be identified, all seemingly deriving from this same root. These scenes can be categorized as follows:

1. Thoth standing before the *wedjat*-eye

The scene is composed of two distinct vignettes, one depicting Thoth and the other the *wedjat*-eye (Fig. 3.5).

- *Thoth*. The god is shown facing the footboard, typically depicted beneath a vaulted ceiling. The deity is frequently represented in mummiform guise, with a long belt tied around his waist.[7] Occasionally, an offering table is positioned at his feet.
- Wedjat-*eye over the tomb*. The sacred eye, sometimes in a winged form, is depicted alongside the usual plethora of symbols associated with it: *neb*-basket, *nefer*-sign, *iaret*-cobra, and food offerings.[8] In rare cases,

7 A.1: outer anonymous coffin. A.111: outer coffin of Mashasekebt. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Yutefamun.
8 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Yutefamun.

the ibis is associated with the *wedjat*-eye (Fig. 3.5).[9] Meanwhile, the tomb is sketched in a simplistic manner, showing only a cornice and a door. Exceptionally, the tomb may exhibit a more intricate design, with geometric patterns and details such as latches.[10]

This scene is commonly found on coffins dating from the late Ramesside period to the early 21st Dynasty. However, it also appears in later objects, particularly when an archaizing layout is desired. The depiction of the *wedjat*-eye over the tomb is a characteristic feature of the vignette of Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead.[11]

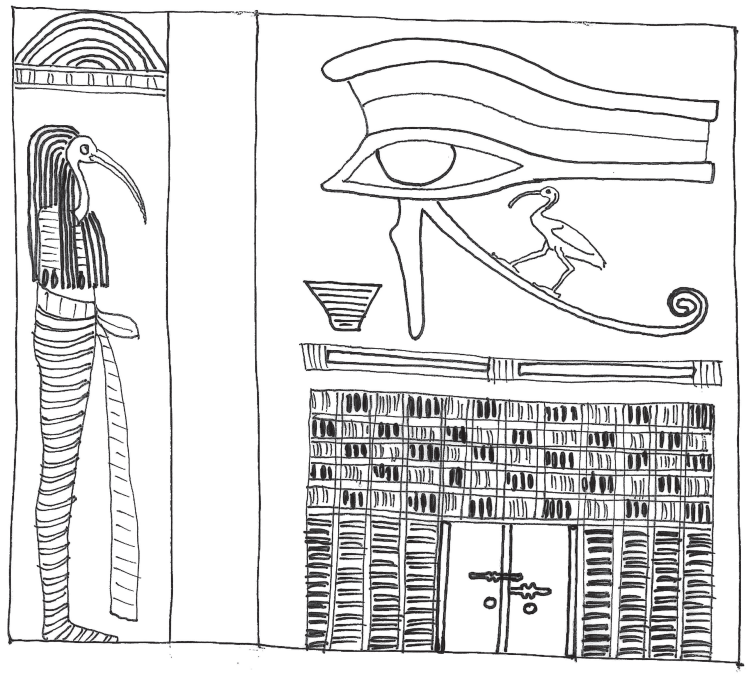


Fig. 3.5. Upper section. Outer coffin of Mashasekebt (A.111)

9 A.111: outer coffin of Mashasekebt.
10 A.111: outer coffin of Mashasekebt.
11 Taylor 2010, 51.

2. Thoth standing before the jackal form of Anubis

As with the previous scenes, this scheme is composed of two distinct vignettes.

- *Thoth*. The god is depicted facing the footboard, though he is only rarely shown in mummiform guise.[12] As a rule, he is featured under a vaulted ceiling, with his usual iconographic repertoire: as an ibis-headed god, wearing a divine kilt, a priestly *sash*-band and a bull's tail attached to his waist, while holding a long staff adorned with the monogram of the West. This design appears to reinterpret the motif featuring Thoth opening the Gates of Heaven, as seen on black coffins.[13]
- *Jackal form of Anubis*. The animal is shown crouching under a vaulted ceiling. It may be resting on a shrine or a divine standard. The jackal is painted black, wears the double crown, and holds the *sekhem* and the *nekhakha* sceptres. The *wedjat*-eye is usually included in the vignette. As for the shrine, it often resembles the object found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, displaying decorative friezes and sometimes inscriptions.

The scene is associated either with an early dating or with an archaizing layout.

3. Thoth standing before an Osirian god

Formally speaking, two variations of this scene can be identified. One variation depicts the scene as a juxtaposition of two distinct vignettes, following the structure of previously discussed scenes.[14] The other variation presents one single vignette with both motifs combined within it (Fig. 3.6).[15] Evidently, the

12 A.114: outer coffin of Padiamun.
13 Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich: coffin of Herytubekhet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
14 A.9: coffin of Nesitanebetaui. Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Tanethereret.
15 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret. A.88: outer coffin of Nesitanebetaui. A.120: outer coffin of Khonsuemrenepet. A.152: outer coffin of Gatseshen. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Nauny.

latter layout appears to be derived from the former. Despite this distinction, the representation of the different motifs remains similar across both variations.

- *Thoth*. The deity is depicted under a vaulted ceiling as an ibis-headed god, always holding the West-staff. The use of other attributes, such as the *atef*-crown, is rare.[16] Occasionally, Thoth is portrayed in fully human guise.[17] In some instances, Thoth may be replaced by other deities, such as Horus (Fig. 3.7).[18]
- *Enthroned Osirian god.* The deity is usually identified as Osiris, but Sokaris (or Sokar-Osiris) is also referenced. This god may appear in mummiform guise,[19] or as a living deity, wearing a short kilt and a corselet.[20] Typical attributes of Osiris, such as the *atef*-crown, royal sceptres, or the *imiwt*-totem, are frequently included. The deity is shown beneath a vaulted ceiling or inside a shrine adorned with a cobra-frieze. A winged *wedjat*-eye is almost always depicted, perhaps serving as a subtle reminder of the same motif previously associated with this area. The god is typically escorted by goddesses (such as Isis, Nephthys, or Maat) standing behind him. Occasionally, the figure of Osiris is replaced by the Ta-wer totem.[21] Solar deities such as Re-Horakhty (Fig. 3.8),[22] or Khepri,[23] may also feature in this setting, either replacing Osiris, or complementing him, particularly when depicted on opposing sides of the box.

Both versions of this scene (with Thoth in a separate vignette[24] or within the same vignette as Osiris[25]), remained in use even as other sections of the coffin

16 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Nauny.
17 A.24: outer coffin of Padiuamun. A.13: outer coffin of Ruru.
18 A.9: coffin of Nesitanebetaui.
19 A.9: coffin of Nesitanebetaui. A.88: outer coffin of Nesitanebetaui. A.120: outer coffin of Khonsuemre-nepet.
20 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret. A.152: outer coffin of Gatseshen. Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Tanethereret. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Nauny.
21 A.13: outer coffin of Ruru.
22 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret.
23 TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare.
24 A.60: anonymous coffin. A.29: anonymous coffin.
25 A.38: outer coffin of Ankhsenmut. A.150: outer coffin of Djedmutiesankh.

adopted the classical scheme layout, and when new scenes began to be added to the upper section,[26] which is telling of its significance.

Variations of the scene:

- Osiris is depicted as a falcon-headed god (Fig. 3.9).[27]
- Osiris is replaced by the Ta-wer totem. The schemes described above can be used replacing the enthroned image of Osiris with the Ta-*wer* totem. Like Osiris, the totem is protected by a (winged) goddess,[28] or goddesses.[29] Thoth may appear as previously described,[30] or be replaced by a mourning goddess.[31] In the classical scheme, the scene is later included in the repertoire of the lower section (Fig. 3.52).
- The god Thoth is replaced by the deceased. This rare variation depicts the deceased presenting offerings to an Osirian god (identified as Osiris, or Ptah-Sokar) in a single vignette.[32] The deceased takes the position usually occupied by Thoth, facing the footboard. In rare cases, the deceased is depicted alongside Thoth.[33] As is typical in scenes of the basic scheme, the deceased is shown wearing white pleated garments and a festive wig.
- Very rarely, this Osirian scene is associated with the scale of the weighing of the heart, marking the earliest known occurrences of this subject in the yellow type.[34] The weighing of the heart scene, however, was later more closely associated with the lower section, and its depiction in the upper section was discontinued.

26 See, for example, the inner box of Khonsumose (Museo Egizio in Turin), where the proper right side features Thoth before Osiris, while the left side is decorated with the cosmological scene of Geb and Nut. A similar arrangement can be observed on the anonymous coffin housed at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
27 A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
28 A.7: outer coffin of Ankhesenmut. A.19: coffin of Taiuheret.
29 A.18: anonymous coffin.
30 A.7: outer coffin of Ankhesenmut. A.18: anonymous coffin.
31 A.19: coffin of Taiuheret.
32 A.121: outer coffin of Khonsumes. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
33 TT 320: inner coffin of Masaharta.
34 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Butehamun. Musée de Beaux Arts in Grenoble: coffin of Hatshepsut. Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels: outer coffin of Butehamun.

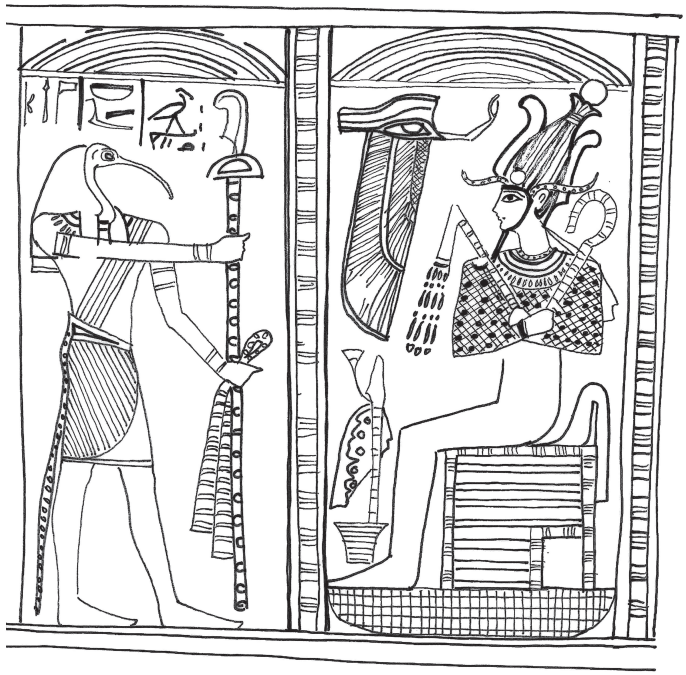


Fig. 3.6. Upper section. Coffin of Paennesittaui (A.11: Egyptian Museum in Cairo)

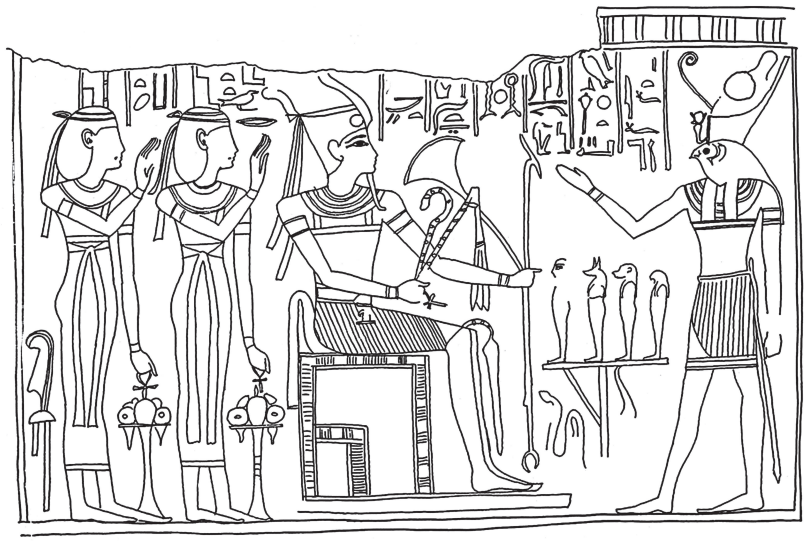


Fig. 3.7. Upper section. Coffin of Tabasety. (Antikmuseet in Aarhus)



Fig. 3.8. Upper section. Coffin of Tabasety (Antikmuseet in Aarhus)

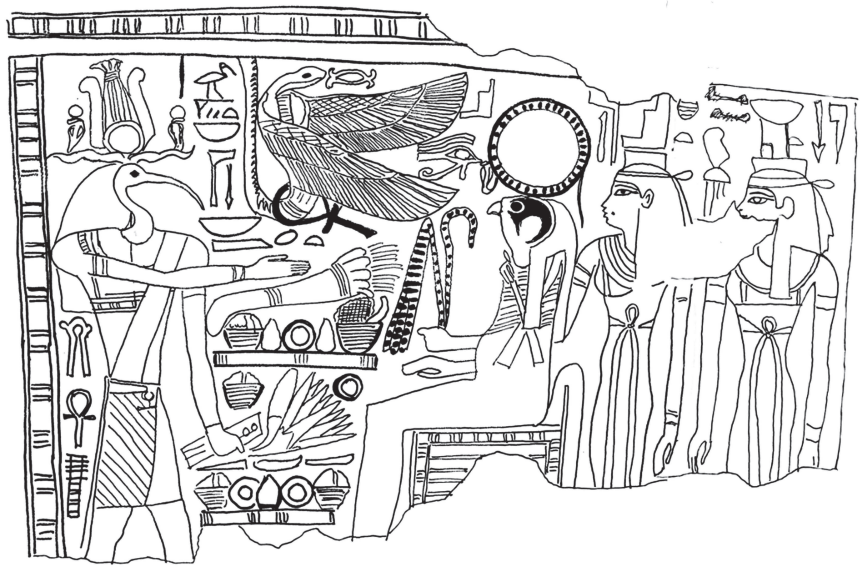


Fig. 3.9. Upper section. Outer coffin of Henuttaui (A.136)

These scenes seem to be directly derived from vignettes featuring Thoth and an Osirian god, suggesting that they were later additions to the repertoire of the basic scheme. They are typically dated to the beginning of the 21st Dynasty.

Lower section

Since the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, the Sons of Horus played a paramount role in the decoration of the box. They were introduced in the white type coffins and their prevalent role remained unchallenged until the emergence of the yellow coffins.

Like the preceding pictorial units, the scenes depicted in the lower section of the yellow coffins are directly inspired by the decorative schemes of the black type. In the basic scheme of the lower section, the imagery of the Sons of Horus remains prevalent. However, as we will see, the reference to the Sons of Horus frequently carries a subtle association with the Litany of Re. The following layouts can be identified:

1. Litany of Re

In high elite burials dating from the late Ramesside period, an exceptional layout borrowed from the Litany of Re is observed. This composition, depicted at the entrances of royal tombs during the New Kingdom,[35] also appears in high elite burials of this period. By the late Ramesside period, the original 75 mummiform forms of the sun god were adapted to fit into the limited space available in the coffin. The corpus of coffins featuring this layout is extremely small. For instance, in the coffin of Nesiamun, 7 deities are figured on each side,[36] while in the inner box of Butheamun, 15 deities are depicted on the left side, and 9 on the right.[37] Interestingly, the Sons of Horus are included in the repertoire of these deities in the latter example. Although heavily simplified, references to

35 Tomb of Seti I (KV 17) in Hornung 1991, 16-17.
36 Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.
37 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Butehamun.

the Litany of Re can even be detected in low elite coffins dating from the late Ramesside period.[38]

2. Sons of Horus

The simplest layout of the lower section features the four Sons of Horus, each depicted in their own vignette and protected under their own vaulted ceiling. In earlier examples, the Sons of Horus are frequently depicted in mummiform guise, adorned with a long belt tied around the waist.[39] This mummiform depiction of the deities is rather exceptional and seems to deliberately evoke the Litany of Re. In later examples, the same gods are depicted as living deities, adhering to the customary tradition (Fig. 3.10).[40]

The following variations can be identified:

- *Sons of Horus and other male deities*. Among the oldest variations in the corpus, this layout includes additional deities such as Nefertum,[41] Bennu[42] (or Bennu-Khepri),[43] Geb,[44] Anubis,[45] or Thoth (Fig. 3.11). Except for the latter, who is positioned next to the footboard, following precisely the same scheme detected in the black type,[46] these deities typically precede the Sons of Horus and are generally not mummiform.
- *Sons of Horus and female deities*. This variation includes female deities such as Maat,[47] or Isis (in mummiform guise),[48] Nephthys,[49] and Neith,[50] who are typically positioned next to the footboard. These

38 A.19: coffin of Taiuheret.
39 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Yutefamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. A.1: outer anonymous coffin.
40 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret. A.152: outer coffin of Gatseshen. TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare. TT 320: inner coffin of Pinedjem II.
41 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret. A.120: outer coffin Khonsuemrenepet.
42 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret. A.81: inner coffin of Ameniutenakht.
43 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
44 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Anresenmes.
45 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret.
46 Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich: coffin of Herytubekhet.
47 Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Tanethereret.
48 A.120: outer coffin of Khonsuemrenepet.
49 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Yutefamun.
50 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Nauny.

goddesses may appear in mummiform guise,[51] as they do in the Litany of Re, [52] or as living figures.[53]

- *Sons of Horus and sacred symbols*. These variations incorporate large versions of the Tjet-sign[54] or the Djed-pillar,[55] usually positioned next to the footboard.
- *Deceased and the Sons of Horus***.** The layout of the lower section becomes slightly more elaborate when the deceased is added to the Sons of Horus (Figs. 3.12/13). Again, each figure is depicted in its own vignette. Unlike the deities, who face the headboard, the deceased faces the footboard, thus addressing the other gods, who are always featured as living entities here. In many of these compositions, it is not uncommon to find the Sons of Horus depicted in fully human guise, without their customary animal attributes.[56]

This layout is consistently found in association with objects dating from the late Ramesside period to the early 21st Dynasty. The same design may also be employed in archaizing objects.

It is not uncommon to find depictions of the deceased and the Sons of Horus associated with the boxes of outer coffins, where these figures are often set against a white background. This layout is frequently revisited in later objects, either when an archaizing layout is desired, or when it is simply combined with other motifs.

51 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Yutefamun.
52 Also in this case, we are presented with a remnant of the Litany of Re. However, it is important to note that a similar motif (mummiform goddess) is already depicted on the boxes of the black type.: Outer coffin of Yuya (KV 46 – Egyptian Museum in Cairo, CG 51002, CG 51003-4).
53 Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Nauny.
54 A.111: outer coffin of Mashasekebt.
55 A.114: outer coffin of Padiamun.
56 A.9: inner coffin of Nesitanebetaui. A.11: inner coffin of Paennesittaui. A.13: outer coffin of Ruru. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.

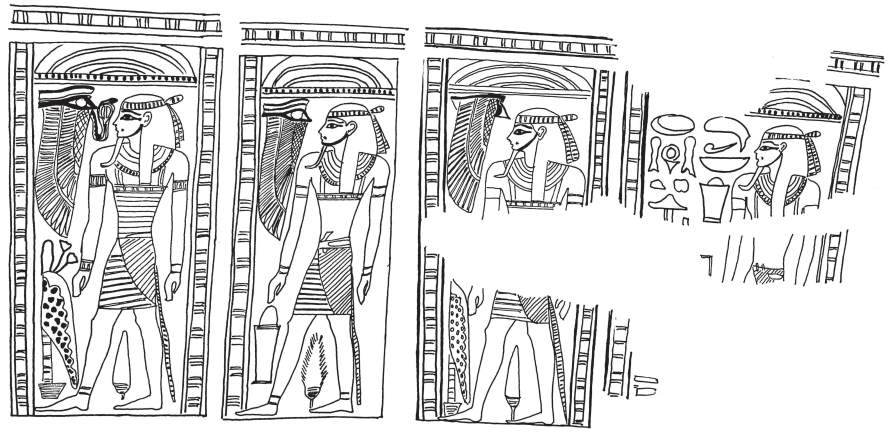


Fig. 3.10. Lower section. Outer coffin of Henuttaui (A.136)



Fig. 3.11. Lower section. Coffin of Tabasety (Antikmuseet in Aarhus)

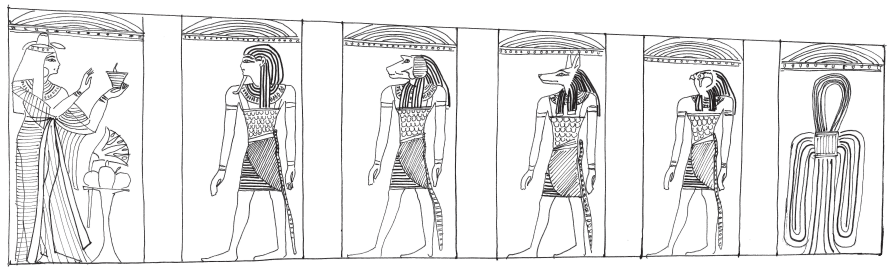


Fig. 3.12. Lower section. Outer coffin of Mashasekebt (A.111)

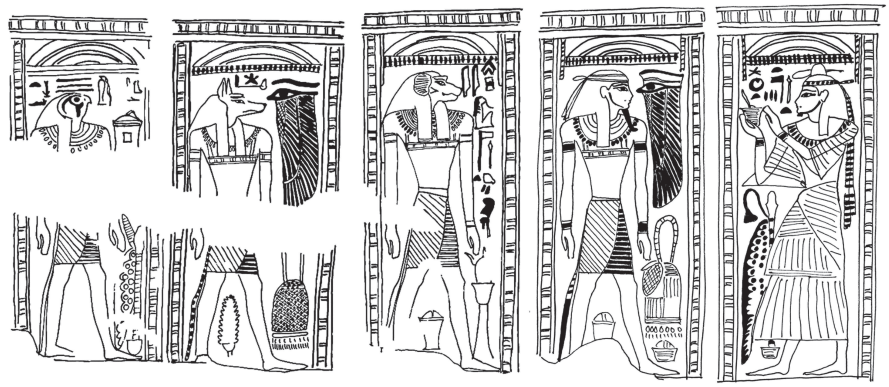


Fig. 3.13. Lower section. Outer coffin of Henuttaui (A.136)

Footboard

The footboard is generally left undecorated. However, occasionally, it displays figurative decoration. Two types of layout can be identified:

– ***Djed*-pillar**. The divine object can be shown as a single element (Fig. 3.14) or as a double motif (Fig. 3.15). In both instances, it is typically depicted with long red belts. Occasionally, it is shown with upraised arms, wearing a solar disc. This motif is clearly borrowed from the layout of the black type. The pillar is often flanked by the poles of the West (Fig. 3.16) and, in high elite objects, by the goddesses Isis and Nephthys.[57] The subject is commonly found in Ramesside objects, where the execution is excellent. However, its use declines sharply at the beginning of the 21st Dynasty. The depiction of the Djed-pillar in this location is frequently interpreted as the place of sunset.[58]

– ***Tjet*-sign**. This depiction is rare and may be accompanied by upraised arms, as observed in the headboard. The execution of this motif is typically rough, contrasting with the attention to detail observed in the remaining decoration (Fig. 3.17).

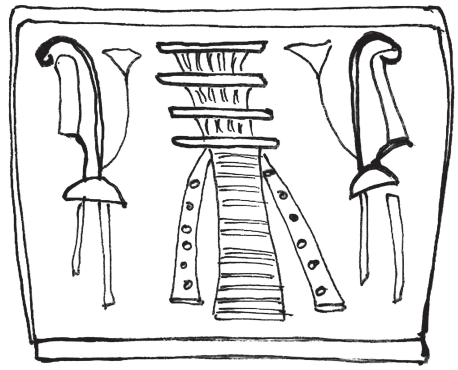


Fig. 3.14. Footboard. Inner coffin of Anresenmes (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

57 Leeds City Museum: coffin of Nesiamun.
58 Liptay 2014, 72. Niwiński 2018, 38.

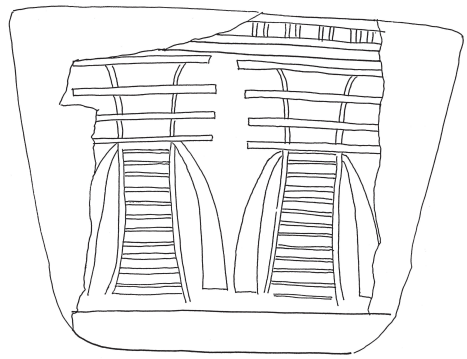


Fig. 3.15. Footboard. Coffin of Tabasety (Antikmuseet in Aarhus)



Fig. 3.16. Footboard. Inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet (A.120).

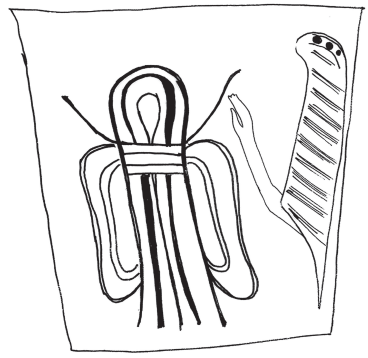


Fig. 3.17. Footboard. Inner coffin of Henuttaui (A.136).

Commentary

The black coffins produced during the 18th Dynasty were conceived as symbolic Osirian burial chambers. The decoration displayed along the sides of the box alluded to the deities that protected the mummy of Osiris (the deceased). The Sons of Horus protected the sides, two on each side, together with Anubis, with the Djed-pillar positioned nearby. These elements, deriving from Chapter 151 of the Book of the Dead, are complemented by the inclusion of the god Thoth opening the Gates of Heaven. Despite innovative inputs observed on the lids, Ramesside anthropoid coffins retained this same layout to decorate the boxes, underscoring its significant role in funerary rituals.

The yellow type eventually broke with the stability of this scheme, defining the exterior walls of the box into well-established areas. The main features of each of these areas were initially rooted in the scheme of the black type. The distinction lies in the arrangement of these elements, which form different tableaux rather than merely positioned at specific points along the box.

On the headboard, the joyful depiction of Nephthys, borrowed from the black type, became the main motif of the central panel. A distinctive feature of the basic scheme is the striped decoration of the side panels. Both the stripes and the figure of Nephthys[59] directly derive from the black type scheme.

In the yellow type, the footboard is typically undecorated. However, in the earliest examples, the Djed-pillar remains a common motif, following the decorative tradition of the black type. Eventually, this motif was replaced by the Tjet-sign, also featured in the central panel of the headboard. Therefore, in some cases,[60] this symbol appears at both the head and feet of the box, evoking the protection of the joyful goddesses Isis and Nephthys for the resurrected Osiris. However, from the 21st Dynasty onwards, the footboard was commonly left undecorated, possibly reflecting an intentional practice to leave the coffin 'unfinished', and symbolically 'open' to a dynamic flow of the regenerative powers of the Duat.

59 On black coffins, Nephthys is often found at the crown of the head (over the lid or on the box).
60 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.

On the long sides, two main compositions were displayed. The layout of the upper section features Thoth before the *wedjat*-eye, or the jackal form of Anubis. These elements were also borrowed from the layout of the black type, but are re-interpreted here to form independent tableaux, alluding to the passage to the West. Slightly later, the vignette featuring Thoth before Osiris emerged, marking the first iconographic innovation distinct from the black type. This scene signified the initial development of the iconographic elaboration characteristic of the classical scheme.

As for the lower section, the basic scheme was grounded in the depiction of the Sons of Horus, as seen in the black type. The prevalence of this motif explains its adoption in the decoration of the ceiling of the Ramesside burial chambers, where its arrangement may have inspired the layout in yellow coffins.[61]

Moreover, in the earliest examples of the yellow corpus, the Sons of Horus took on a new significance through their implied association with the Litany of Re, serving as visual 'summary' of the latter. This association proved particularly appealing, and was expressed with varying degrees of accuracy regarding the original royal compositions. Occasionally, a small group of other deities was depicted alongside the Sons of Horus, such as Bennu, Nefertum, Geb, or Isis. The resemblance to the Litany of Re was sometimes enhanced by depicting these deities in mummiform guise. In other cases, the group of gods depicted was considerably larger, approximating the original design of the composition. Niwiński described this trend as the iconographic counterpart of *onomastica*, promoting a theology that emphasised the many faces, names and forms of the divine as emanating from a single creator, 'The Great God', unequivocally identified with Amun-Re.[62]

Taken together, the upper and lower sections of the box offered complementary readings, with the former leading to Osiris and the latter symbolising the many forms of the sun god, particularly in his journey through the underworld.

61 Tomb of Penbui (TT 10 B). Bruyère 1952, Pl. XIV.
62 Niwiński 2019.

The depiction of the deceased in the scenes on the box represents a breakthrough in the yellow corpus. However, this integration was far from immediate and some boxes designed in accordance with the basic scheme make no reference to the deceased.[63]

The depiction of the deceased appears to have been introduced first in the lower section, in association with the solar imagery of the Sons of Horus. The deceased is consistently portrayed in cult scenes, thus engaging in sacred contexts and performing rites. This agency enables the deceased to move in the netherworld among the gods. Thus, the imagery of the box, particularly that of the lower section, vividly evokes the concept of ritual movement and passage. This idea was heightened when the deceased was depicted more than once on each side of the coffin.[64] While various minor trends can be detected,[65] the depiction of the deceased in the upper section appears to have followed their integration in the lower section.

Initially, the roles of Thoth and the deceased are well-defined: the former veils over Osiris in the upper section, while the latter addresses the deities involved in the nightly cycle of the sun in the lower section. When the deceased was incorporated into the upper section, a subtle identification with Thoth was established. Like the deceased, Thoth is the only deity facing the footboard, and, when not depicted in mummiform guise, also exhibits agency not granted to other gods. Both figures could be depicted together, but the deceased could also replace the figure of Thoth.

Due to the formal autonomy of the pictorial settings on the box, variations may be found within the same coffin. While the earliest yellow coffins adhere consistently to the basic scheme across their exterior walls, later examples mix motifs from the basic and classical schemes. Even in the late 21st Dynasty, typical

63 Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich: coffin of Herytubekhet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of Henuttaui. A.1: outer anonymous coffin. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Yutefamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: outer coffin of coffin of Nauny. TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret. A.46: outer coffin of Senu.

64 A.121: outer coffin of Khonsumes, left side. A.13: outer coffin of Ruru, right side. TT 320: inner coffin of Masaharta.

65 The depiction of the deceased only in the upper section is rare. Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.

motifs of the basic scheme, such as the Sons of Horus, are sometimes reproduced alongside new subjects.[66]

To further complicate matters, later stages of the yellow type saw a revival of the archaizing taste, leading to a return to the basic scheme. As a result, a 'pure' basic scheme style may appear in coffins of much later dating. Only by examining all the compositions on an object can archaization be identified with certainty.

2. Classical scheme

The layout of the classical scheme became predominant during the first half of the 21st Dynasty. It is characterised by an explosion of figurative decoration and a wide range of subjects, many of which are novel within the iconographical tradition related to the afterlife. Despite this highly innovative momentum, the style remained heavily influenced by Ramesside aesthetic values. By the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, this scheme was replaced, and sometimes intermingled with the new trends that dominated the second half of the 21st Dynasty.

Headboard

In the classical scheme, the layout of the central panel of the headboard is simplified when compared to its design in the basic scheme. The most important transformation occurred on the side panels, which became painted with figurative decoration instead of the striped patterns characteristic of the basic scheme.

Side panels

At this stage, innovations are particularly focused on these compositions. The following designs are the most frequently attested in the classical scheme:

66 A.140: outer coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.126: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit A.24: outer coffin of Padiuamun. A.44: inner coffin of Tjenetehenef.

– **Ptah-Sokar in avian form**. This is the simplest and probably the earliest motif introduced in the side panels. The earliest versions are often minimalistic, depicting the sacred falcon resting on a divine standard and wearing the *atef*-crown. The deity is protected by a winged cobra (Fig. 3.18) or a winged *wedjat*-eye hovering over its back (Fig. 3.20).[67]
More elaborate versions of the composition feature the deity resting on a tomb decorated with floral (Fig. 3.18/19),[68] geometrical motifs,[69] or even the *sema-tawy* motif.[70] In these renditions, the winged *wedjat*-eye is replaced by a winged cobra[71] or by a winged goddess standing behind the god.[72] In rare cases, the deceased is depicted presenting offerings to the god.[73] Notably, these scenes bear remarkable similarity to corresponding vignettes featured in the lower section of the lid in the classical scheme, where the motif is also frequently attested at this stage (Figs. 2.53/56),[74] suggesting a symbolic continuity between the lower section of the lid and the headboard of the box. The subject also frequently appears in the Ramesside tradition of the Book of the Dead, where the falcon god is associated with Chapter 16, alluding to the rising sun.
The earliest objects display a symmetrical arrangement of the side panels, where the same scene is featured on both sides, with the avian deities facing the centre of the composition. In later objects, this subject is often combined with others, resulting in an asymmetrical composition, with one side panel depicting the avian form of Ptah-Sokar and the other featuring one of the motifs listed below.[75]

67 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut. A.60: anonymous inner coffin. A.7: outer coffin of Ankhesenmut.
68 A.14: coffin of Isetemkheb. A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet.
69 A.29: inner coffin. Museum of Fine Arts in Boston: inner coffin of Henuttaui. A.106: inner coffin of Nesineferher .
70 A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefery.
71 A.29: inner coffin. A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet. Sometimes both motifs are depicted, one at one side, and the other on the opposite side of the headboard: A.14: coffin of Isetemkheb.
72 Los Angeles County Museum of Art: anonymous coffin. Museum of Fine Arts in Boston: inner coffin of Henuttaui. The motif eventually evolves to depict wingless goddesses. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Tabakenkhonsu. A.38: inner coffin of Ankhsenmut.
73 A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer. Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet (proper left panel).
74 See the layout of the lower section (first register of the lateral partitions) in the previous chapter.
75 Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. A.18: anonymous coffin. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Khonsumose.

– **Ptah-Sokar as a living deity**. A slightly more elaborate version of the earlier motif is given in vignettes where this deity is featured as a falcon-headed god[76] or even in fully human guise.[77] The god is shown enthroned or standing, clad in divine garments (short kilt and corselet) and crowned with the same *atef*-headdress as his avian form. He is typically depicted within a shrine and is often escorted by a goddess standing behind him. In these scenes, the deceased is usually shown presenting offerings to the god. This composition is commonly found in high elite coffins, either in symmetrical arrangements or combined with other scenes.[78]
– **Osiris and the Djed-pillar** (or the Ta-wer totem). References to Ptah-Sokar are gradually replaced by representations of Osiris and/or his sacred symbols, such as the Djed-pillar or the Ta-wer totem. Initially, these symbols would have appeared alongside the avian form of Ptah-Sokar,[79] but they soon occupied both side panels either in symmetrical arrangements featuring the Djed-pillar,[80] or the Ta-wer totem,[81] or in asymmetrical compositions, depicting Osiris on one side, and the Djed-pillar,[82] or the Ta-wer totem on the other (Fig. 3.21/22).[83] Asymmetrical compositions with the Djed-pillar on one side and the Ta-wer totem on the other are rare.[84]
– **Vignettes from the Book of the Dead**. By the second quarter of the 21st Dynasty, vignettes borrowed from the Book of the Dead began to appear on the side panels of the headboard, significantly expanding the repertoire of this section. Earlier motifs, such as the Djed-pillar, already formed part of the repertoire of the Book of the Dead – for example, the Djed-pillar is an important motif associated with Chapter

76 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanethereret.
77 Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori.
78 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: coffin of Itiamun.
79 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Khonsumose.
80 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser.
81 A.96: outer box of Nesitawadjatakh.
82 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret.
83 Michael Carlos Museum in Atlanta: coffin of Tanatnektahat. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
84 A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut.

16, alluding to the rising sun.[85] However, these new compositions introduced a broader range of subjects, shifting the focus away from Ptah-Sokar and Osiris. Among the most commonly depicted subjects are the following:

- **Sunrise**. The sun god is portrayed as a ram-headed deity within a solar disc,[86] which rests atop a cow[87] (or a nymphaea flower),[88] positioned between the lions of the horizon (Fig. 3.23).[89] This scene is typically associated with Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead.
- **Solar barque**. The solar god, depicted as a falcon or a falcon-headed figure, is shown travelling on the solar barque, navigating the heavens (Fig. 3.24).[90]
- **Deities of the underworld**. The diversity of subjects included at this stage is such that it defies an exhaustive repertoire. These exceptional and highly original motifs are often attested in only a single occurrence. These deities may assume fairly diversified forms, ranging from the shape of a falcon resting on the symbol of the West (a symbol of the Theban necropolis frequently depicted in Chapter 16),[91] to cobra-headed gods represented as living deities.[92] Within this spectrum, the heron-headed god Bennu may also appear,[93] as well as the well-known depiction of the Osirian Triad standing over a serpent,[94] or even goddesses such as Maat,[95] and Isis.[96] However, the frequency of such depictions remains exceptionally rare.

85 Taylor 2010, 247.
86 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut.
87 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
88 A.18: anonymous coffin.
89 A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub. This is an interesting occurrence as the remaining decoration of the coffin is of the complex scheme. However, the headboard was designed in accordance with the classical scheme.
90 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny.
91 A.86: inner coffin of Shebti.
92 A.100: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit.
93 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu.
94 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
95 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh.
96 A.119: outer coffin of Tjenetipet.

Despite the diversity of the repertoire observed in the decoration of the side panels, most of these motifs appear to be derived from the repertoire of the classical scheme used in the lateral partitions of the lower section of the lid. As already mentioned, this is the case of the avian form of Ptah-Sokar, but also of Osiris and his sacred objects. The inclusion of underworld deities, such as the Osirian Triad, the god Bennu, or even the sacred cows, also aligns with the repertoire of the lid's lateral partitions.[97]

The depiction of the solar barque and the rising sun, however, is more challenging to explain, as these motifs are absent from the earlier repertoire. Nevertheless, their significance is undeniable, as they are often found in Ramesside burial chambers, particularly in association with the entrance or ceiling of the burial chamber.[98]

In a broader sense, vignettes showing Ptah-Sokar or Osiris being adored by the deceased are also used as opening scenes in papyri, and their use on the side panels of the headboard seems to serve a similar symbolic purpose.

Central panel

Unlike the side panels, the decoration of the central panel of the headboard is notably simplified. The main motifs are essentially two:

– **Tjet-knot**. This large Isiac symbol is typically rendered with rough outlines, even when the overall quality of the pictorial work is high (Fig. 3.25).[99] It may feature poppies sprouting from the central motif,[100] and occasionally upraised arms are shown.[101] The scene can also be flanked by the totems of the West,[102] or by snakes.[103]

97 See in the precedent chapter the layout of the lower section (lateral partitions).
98 Burial chamber of Sennedjem (TT 1). Bruyère 1959, Plate XVIII. The scene appears in other burial chambers associated with the ceiling: Tomb of Neferabu (Vandier 1935, Pl. XVI), TT 2 (Bruyère 1952, Pl. III.
99 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Tabakenkhonsu. A.29: anonymous coffin.
100 A.121: outer coffin of Khonsumes. A.1: outer anonymous coffin.
101 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
102 Brooklyn Museum: outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Tabakenkhonsu. A.20: coffin of Tauhenut.
103 A.29: anonymous coffin.

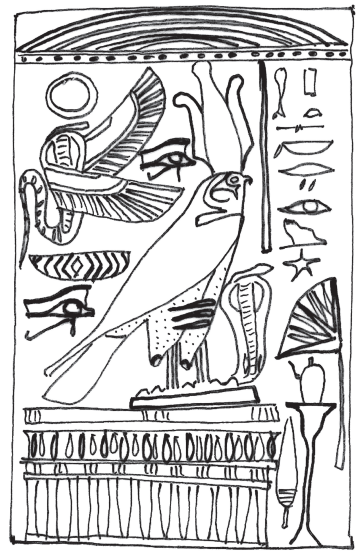


Fig. 3.18. Headboard (side panel). Inner box of Khonsumose (Museo Egizio in Turin).



Fig. 3.19. Headboard (side panel). Inner box of Khonsuemrenepet (A.120).



Fig. 3.20. Headboard (side panel). Outer coffin of Henuttatui (A.136).



Fig. 3.21. Headboard (side panels). Inner coffin set of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).



Fig. 3.22. Headboard (side panels). Outer coffin set of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

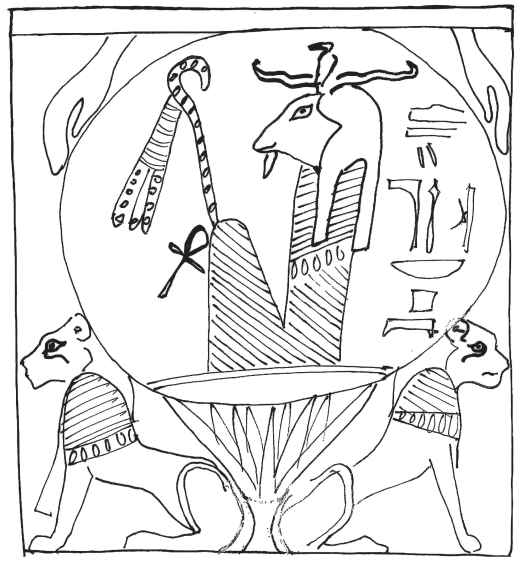


Fig. 3.23. Headboard (side panel). Anonymous coffin (A.18: Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels).



Fig. 3.24. Headboard: Solar barque scene. Inner coffin of Nauny (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

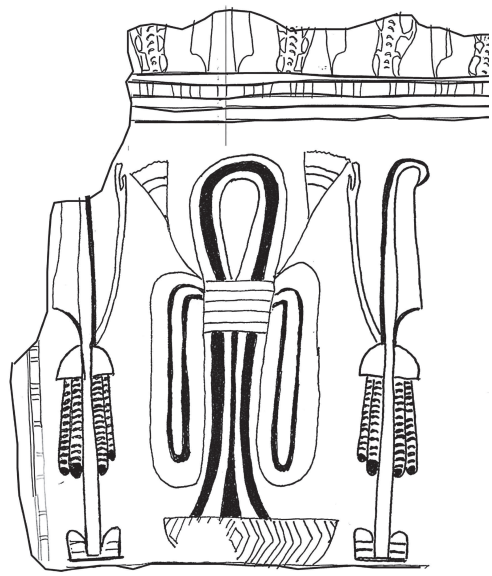


Fig. 3.25. Headboard (central panel). Outer coffin of Henuttatui (A.136).

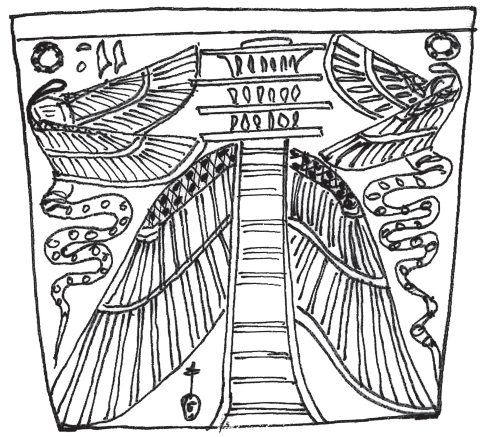


Fig. 3.26. Headboard (central panel). Inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet (A.120)

– **Djed-pillar.** Although rarely used, this motif seems to have been introduced during this period. Unlike the Tjet-sign, it is depicted with high standards of execution and is sometimes illustrated with wings (Fig. 3.26).[104] It may also be flanked by winged cobras[105] or serpent-headed mummiform gods.[106]

These motifs appear in coffin decoration at a very early stage. The stark contrast between the innovative approaches applied to the central panel and those used for the side panels highlights the independent treatment of these tableaux.

Upper section

As outlined in the basic scheme, the scenes depicted in the upper section derive from the imagery of the god Thoth associated with the Gates of Heaven, representing the transition between worlds. In the basic scheme this transition is interpreted sequentially: first as the passage from the exterior to the interior of the coffin (*wedjat*-eye scenes), then from the necropolis to the tomb (Anubis scenes), and finally from the earthly realm to the netherworld (Osirian scenes). In all these interpretations, the god Thoth, occasionally replaced by the deceased himself, is the leading figure in opening the ways to the West.

With the classical scheme, a new repertoire of images, most of them unprecedented in the Egyptian pictorial tradition, is introduced into this section. These scenes can be categorised as follows:

1. Thoth before the resurrected Osiris

A limited number of highly original scenes depict the god Osiris lying on a funerary bed, with his head and chest raised, symbolising his resurrection.[107]

104 A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet.
105 A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet.
106 Inner box (Vatican Museums, Inv. N.: 25016.2.1-2).
107 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut.

Despite the originality of the subject, the vignette follows the layout established in the basic scheme, comprising two distinct segments that can appear as individual vignettes (Fig. 3.27).

- *Thoth*. The god is depicted facing the footboard, holding the poles of the West[108] or the East.[109] He may also appear as a mummiform god,[110] or in fully human form.[111] In the later versions of the vignette, the depiction of the god tends to be omitted.[112]
- *Rising Osiris.* The god is shown lying on the funerary bed, with his head and torso slightly raised, suggesting that he is rising from sleep. His mummiform body is painted in a dark pigment. He wears a collar and a *hedjet*-crown with floating streamers. Occasionally, a *nemes*-headdress is depicted.[113] The funerary bier features lion-shaped legs and a row of objects displayed beneath it. In this context, the presentation of regalia is standard: *heka* and *nekhakha* sceptres, maces, *hedjet*-crown, *desheret*-crown, *khepresh*-crown, *atef*-crown can all be found in this area.[114] Offerings and canopic jars[115] are also depicted here,[116] and occasionally, a large fan is shown above Osiris.[117]

Although these scenes are very rare, they are attested at the beginning of the 21st Dynasty.[118] The emergence of important vignettes such as the stepped throne of Osiris and of the Geb and Nut scene (see below) likely contributed to the motif's disappearance during the first half of the 21st Dynasty, but it was revived in later stages (Fig. 3.28).[119] The scene likely evolved from the vignettes used in the basic scheme, showing the enthroned Osiris, or the Ta-wer totem,

108 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut (upper section: left side).
109 A.20: coffin of Tauhenu (upper section: right side).
110 A.73: coffin of Iuesankh.
111 A.24: inner coffin of Padiuamun.
112 A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
113 A.73: coffin of Iuesankh.
114 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut.
115 A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
116 A.73: coffin of Iuesankh.
117 A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui. A.123: inner coffin of Direpu.
118 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut.
119 A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui. A.123: inner coffin of Direpu.

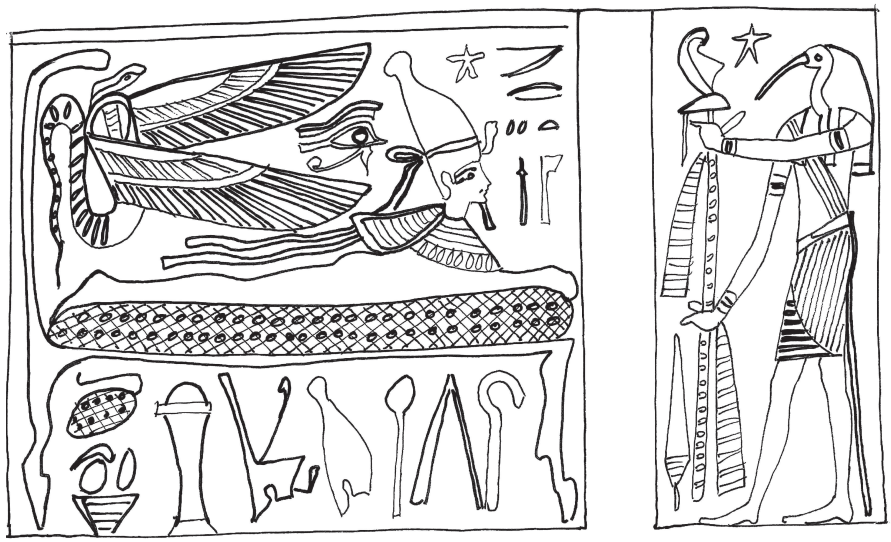


Fig. 3.27. Upper section: Rising Osiris. Coffin of Tauhenut (A.20)

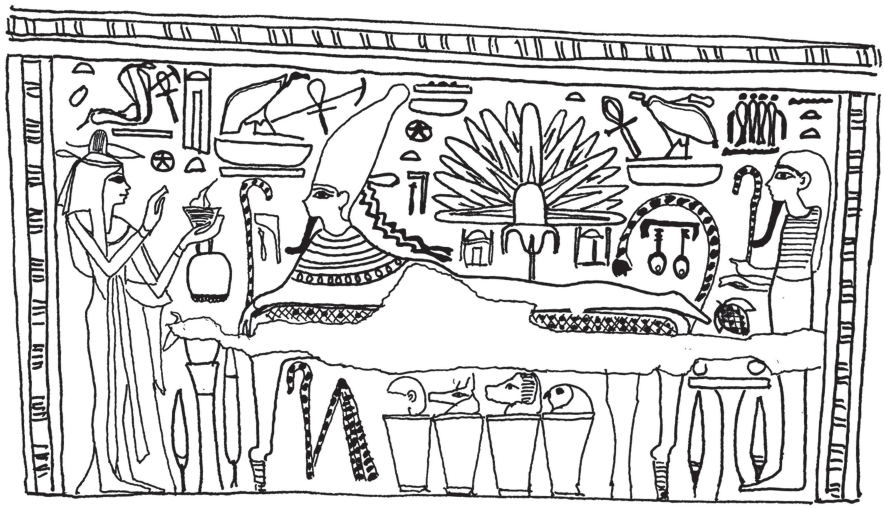


Fig. 3.28. Upper section: Rising Osiris. Inner coffin of Henuttatui (A.136).

protected by winged goddesses. However, unlike those motifs, which were well-established and employed both in tomb decoration and funerary papyri, the depiction of the resurrected Osiris finds its roots in Ramesside royal tombs.[120] In the version of the Tomb of Ramses VI, the god is referred to as the 'intact awakened one' (*res-wedja*), alluding to the creator god at the moment of his rebirth.[121]

2. Thoth standing before the Osirian stepped throne

Even in its simplest forms, this scene is elaborate and often features numerous figures. Despite its innovative layout, the arrangement follows principles established in the basic scheme, with the figure of Thoth represented in a separate vignette or fully integrated into the main scene. Regardless of the arrangement, the representation of Thoth and the Osirian throne adheres to a consistent scheme:

- *Thoth*. The god is shown facing the footboard and is typically depicted under a vaulted ceiling (Fig. 3.29). The deity appears as a living god, wearing a short kilt and a priestly *sash*-band, with a bull's tail hanging from his waist.[122] He is almost always shown holding the pole of the West, though on occasion, he holds a scribal palette.[123] The *atef*-crown is rarely used in these scenes (Fig. 3.29). The deceased may appear next to Thoth (Fig. 3.30) or even replace him (Fig. 3.31).[124] In instances where the deceased replaces Thoth, the god is often relocated into the main scene, positioned next to the Osiris's throne.
- *Osirian stepped throne.* The mound is usually painted in a dark pigment and features various motifs inside it. From the simplest versions to the most elaborate, a combination of the following elements may be found:

120 Liptay 2014, 76.
121 Liptay 2014, 76.
122 A.1: outer anonymous coffin. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Yutefamun. A.111: outer coffin of Mashasekebt.
123 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh.
124 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser.

- Stars and lamps.[125]
- Vulture and cobra goddesses with the *sema-tawy* motif and/or cosmological elements such as the sun disc or *pet*-sign (Fig. 3.29).[126]
- *Sekhem*-sceptres and liminal elements.[127]
- A mummy lying on the ground with an anthropomorphised[128] solar disc rising above (Fig. 3.33).[129]
- Hieroglyphic motifs, such as *wedjat*-eyes, *nefer*-signs, *maat*-feathers, *nub*-signs and *sema-tawy* motifs.[130]

A defining feature of this scene is the depiction of an exceptionally long serpent, the 'Great Serpent',[131] which spans the mound, supporting the whole platform upon which Osiris's throne rests. Early versions of the vignette omit this feature (Fig. 3.30), but its later inclusion likely carries esoteric significance, possibly referencing the serpent from the 12th Hour of Book of the Amduat. This serpent may symbolise the entirety of the Duat, under the *pars pro toto* principle. It is occasionally depicted with a divine beard.[132]

Osiris is shown seated on the throne in a mummiform guise, wearing the *atef*-crown[133] or a long wig,[134] sometimes with a solar disc.[135] In the most elaborate versions (Fig. 3.29), he is escorted by the god Heka, and goddesses such as Maat, Isis and Nephthys,[136] while being greeted by figures such as Hornejditef,[137] Thoth[138] or even Khepri.[139] In simpler renditions, he may be accompanied only by Isis and Horus (Fig. 3.33)

125 Inner A.14: coffin of Isetemkheb.
126 A.16: inner and outer coffins of Ankhefenmut. A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh.
127 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: inner coffin of Amenhotep.
128 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Bakenkhonsu.
129 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes. A.95: inner coffin of Pameshem.
130 A.86: coffin of Shebti. Egyptian Museum in Cairo: inner coffin.
131 Niwiński 2018, 37.
132 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
133 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.
134 A.22: coffin of Khonsumes.
135 A.95: coffin of Pameshem.
136 A.150: coffin of Djedmutiesankh.
137 A.86: coffin of Shebti.
138 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret.
139 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Tabakenkhonsu.

or Maat and Heka (Fig. 3.30). The representation of the deceased next to Osiris is highly exceptional (Fig. 3.32).

At the base of the mound, a composite creature resembling Ammut often appears.[140] This figure is typically labelled as Shay (Fig. 3.30) and/or 'Renenet' (Fig. 3.29), deities often associated with the weighing of the heart. Overseeing the scene is the fearful goddess Hepet, depicted in various forms: serpent-headed (Fig. 3.31),[141] lioness/crocodile-headed (Fig. 3.33),[142] or as a serpent/crocodile-headed.[143] Hepet wields knifes to protect the space from intruders. In exceptional instances, she is associated with depictions of the underworld gates, recalling compositions from the Book of Gates (Fig. 3.29).[144]

The scene is found in coffins dating to the early 21st Dynasty,[145] but it also features in later objects, particularly when an archaizing layout is desired.[146] Andrzej Niwiński interprets this scene as representing the lower hemisphere of the world.[147]

In the classical scheme, it is almost always paired with the cosmological scene of Geb and Nut, which occupies the upper section of the opposite side of the box. In some cases, it may also be associated with scenes featuring the solar barque, especially in later coffins produced under an archaizing layout.[148] Regardless of the pairing, the upper section consistently conveys a solar-Osirian reading of the upper section, with one wall associated with the Osirian realm and the other depicting the solar circuit in the heavens. The Osirian mound scene, alluding to the netherworld, is typically placed on the proper right wall, though this is not a strict rule.

140 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret. Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser.
141 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh.
142 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
143 A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefery.
144 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser.
145 Antikmuseet in Aarhus: coffin of Tabasety. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser.
146 A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefery.
147 Niwiński 2018, 37.
148 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh.

Formally, the scene evolves from depictions of the enthroned Osiris featured in the basic scheme, but introduces several innovations. The inclusion of Shay/Renunet and the goddess Maat in early versions suggests a strong link to the imagery of the weighing of the heart. The stepped throne itself may have originated from depictions of the judgement hall of Osiris in the Book of Gates (Fifth Hour), where the god is shown on a stepped platform.[149] Similarly, the guardian goddess Hepet and the long serpent that crosses the vignette are likely derived from the Book of Gates. The strong connection between these innovative elements and the production of funerary papyri likely influenced the development of this scene.



Fig. 3.29. Upper section: Osirian stepped throne scene. Inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

149 Hornung 1999, Fig. 34.

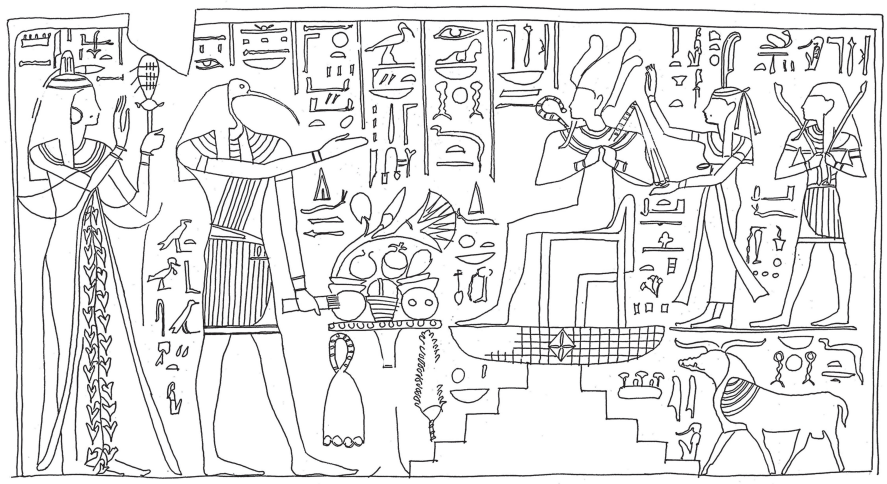


Fig. 3.30. Upper section: Osirian stepped throne. Coffin of Tabasety (Antikmuseet in Aarhus)



Fig. 3.31. Upper section: Osirian stepped throne scene. Outer coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

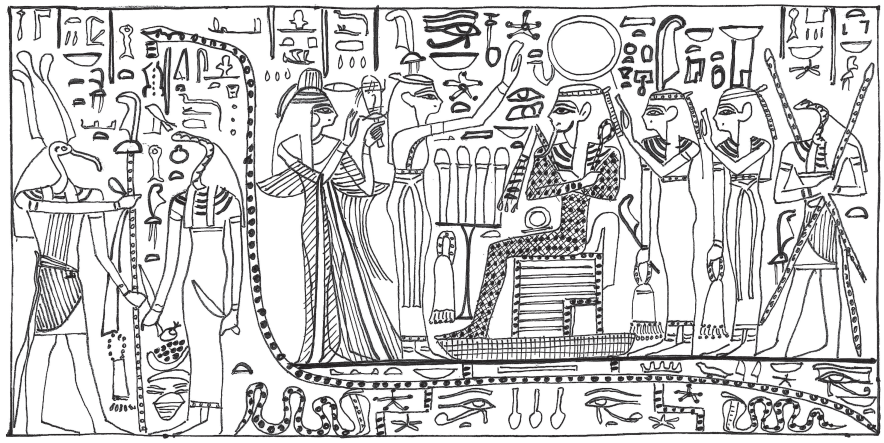


Fig. 3.32. Upper section: Osirian stepped throne scene. Inner coffin of Nauny (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

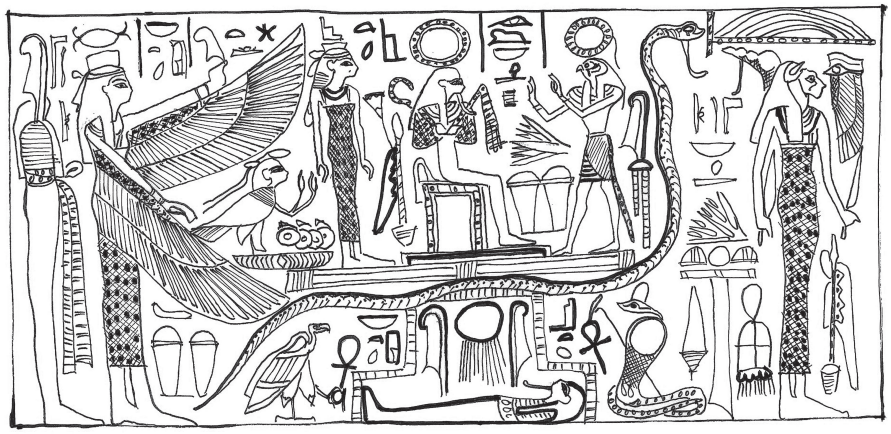


Fig. 3.33. Upper section: Osirian stepped throne scene. Inner coffin of Khonsumes (A.121).

3. Thoth standing before Geb and Nut

As in the previous scenes, this composition consists of two distinct segments that can either be depicted as separate vignettes,[150] or combined into a single tableau (Fig. 3.34).[151]

– *Thoth*. The god is shown facing the footboard, bearing his usual iconographic attributes. He is holding a long staff, typically featuring the monogram of the West,[152] though in exceptional cases, he is holding the staff of the East.[153] Occasionally, he appears in fully human form[154] or he may also be replaced by the deceased.[155] In later versions of the vignette, depictions of the god are often omitted (Figs. 3.36-40).[156]

– *Geb and Nut*. The main subject of the vignette is the imposing figure of Nut, with her naked body displayed as a vault lifted by Shu. Geb is always lying on the ground. Each of these figures is depicted according to their respective iconographic conventions.

- Geb lies on the ground, facing downwards. His skin is usually green, his hair long, and he wears an *usekh*-collar and has a divine beard.[157] In archaizing interpretations of the scene, the body of Geb is outlined with feathers (Figs. 3.41/5.12).[158] Occasionally, his genitals are outlined (Figs. 3.39-40), though he more commonly wears a phallic sheath (Fig. 3.38),[159] a kilt, or a corselet.[160]
- Shu wears a short kilt, a corselet (often feathered),[161] and a bull's tail hanging from his waist. His skin is red and his monogram (a feather) is placed on his head,[162] sometimes within a solar disc.[163]

150 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: inner coffin of Amenhotep.
151 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Tabakenkhonsu.
152 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Khonsumose.
153 British Museum: inner box (EA 29591).
154 A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun.
155 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser. A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh.
156 A.100: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit. A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefery.
157 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Khonsumose and inner coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
158 A.96: outer coffin of Nesitawadjatakh. A.93: coffin of Amenempermut.
159 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Tabakenkhonsu.
160 A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
161 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.
162 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
163 A.119: outer coffin of Tjenetipet.

Occasionally, this is replaced by the *renepet*[164]symbol (the hieroglyph for "year") or a folded scarf (Figs. 3.37-38),[165] associated with the imagery of the going forth by day. His collar is frequently rendered as a full circle (Figs. 3.36-37),[166] possibly with esoteric significance. Very rarely, a sun-disc is shown above his head.[167]

- The body of Nut is simply featured naked, with long hair and her pubic triangle painted in dark blue.[168] Her face is often hidden behind her arms (Fig. 3.36), which also appears to hold esoteric significance. In archaizing interpretations of the scene, the body of Nut is adorned with stars[169] and streams of water (Fig. 3.41).[170] It is not uncommon for her hair to fall to the ground (Figs. 3.37-38),[171] an exceptional feature associated with dancers during the New Kingdom.[172]

Although necessarily taken in relative terms, the use of separate vignettes for Thoth and the main scene suggests an early dating, likely from the beginning of the 21st Dynasty. Other chronological markers include motifs depicted between Geb and Nut. From the earliest to the latest, the following motifs may be found:

- Human-headed *ba*-birds (Fig. 3.34). These figures flank the body of Shu, assisting him in the task of lifting the heavenly body of Nut.[173]
- Ram-headed *ba*-birds (Fig. 3.38).[174] These are often found in scenes where Thoth is integrated into the same vignette, which suggests a

164 A.105: Inner coffin of Userhat.
165 A.96: outer coffin of Nesitawadjatakh. A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne in Marseille: coffin of Khonsumes.
166 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
167 A.105: Inner coffin of Userhat.
168 A.119: outer coffin of Tjenetipet.
169 A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.
170 A.96: outer coffin of Nesitawadjatakh.
171 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: anonymous coffin. A.22: coffin of Khonsumes.
172 See the famous ostracon showing a dancer in an acrobatic pose in Bonacini 2015, 119.
173 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Khonsumose.
174 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. A.14: coffin of Isetemkheb. Michael Carlos Museum in Atlanta: coffin of Tanatnektahat. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Tabakenkhonsu. A.95: inner coffin of Pameshem.

slightly later dating. They may also appear in scenes designed with an archaizing layout.[175]

- Ram-headed gods (Fig. 3.35).[176] These deities, which are embodiments of the celestial *baw*, stand alongside Shu, supporting his arms. They are sometimes labelled as manifestations of Khnum, the god creator of life.[177] At this stage, other elements may be introduced, such as human-headed *ba*-birds, the jackal form of Anubis, and *wedjat*-eyes, among others. These features typically appear during the second quarter of the 21st Dynasty.

Between Shu and Nut, hieroglyphs identify Shu, with phrases such as: 'Shu, son of Re, great god, lord of heaven, lord of Maat, his arms raise the heaven', 'Shu, son of Re'[178], 'Great god, lord of heaven'.[179]

Later versions of the scene, where Thoth is omitted, are often enriched with additional motifs. Some are introduced between Shu and Nut:

- *Wedjat*-eyes and stars.[180]
- *Pet*-sign.[181]
- Solar barque (Fig. 3.40).[182]

Other motifs are introduced above the body of Nut, also in the later versions of the scene:

- A sun-disc rising over the horizon.[183] A ram's head is depicted within the disc.

175 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh. A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefery.
176 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret. A.106: inner coffin of Nesineferher. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: coffin of Itiamun. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser.
177 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny.
178 A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut.
179 A.96: outer coffin of Nesitawadjatakh.
180 Los Angeles County Museum of Art: anonymous coffin.
181 Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
182 A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut. A.96: coffin set of Nesitawadjatakh.
183 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut.

- Solar barques, sometimes featuring a simple sun disc,[184] while other examples show the *wedjat*-eye (Fig. 3.36),[185] or the ram's head within the sun disc (Fig. 3.37-38).[186] A baboon may sit on the prow, sometimes holding a *wedjat*-eye. On occasions, three barques holding the sun disc are depicted (Figs. 3.39-40)[187], with images alluding to the supreme god inside the sun disc. Sometimes a falcon-headed mummiform god is depicted, representing the different manifestations of the sun god during the day (Fig. 3.39).[188] At times, these manifestations are even better expressed by adding different monograms: the scarab (Khepri), sledge (Atum), and sun disc (Re) (Fig. 3.40). In addition to these motifs, a fish monogram (Fig. 3.40) may also appear, likely an esoteric symbol.[189]

Finally, the scene is completed with secondary motifs displayed on the sides of the composition. The typical elements are as follows:

- Sacred rams.[190]
- Hieroglyphic signs, such as:
  - *Wedjat*-eyes.
  - Cobras.[191]
  - Heraldic plants of Upper and Lower Egypt.[192]
- Cardinal poles. These poles can take various forms, such as the pole of the West (Fig. 3.34), the pole of the East (Fig. 3.36), or the pole of the Theban necropolis, which features a falcon atop the West symbol (Fig. 3.39).[193] Occasionally, the poles are anthropomorphised, depicted with human arms raised in adoration (Fig. 3.40).[194] In all these cases,

184 A.105: Inner coffin of Userhat.
185 A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
186 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
187 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh.
188 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu.
189 A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut.
190 A.100: outer box of Asetemakhbit.
191 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Khonsumose.
192 Los Angeles County Museum of Art: anonymous coffin.
193 A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Tabakenkhonsu.
194 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.95: inner coffin of Pameshem. A.105: Inner coffin of Userhat.A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefery.

they refer to the horizon where the sun disc rises or sets. At times, these poles are shown in association with the sun disc held by the god Nun (Fig. 3.39). A more extreme example of anthropomorphism occurs when the poles are rendered as monograms placed above the heads of deities with raised arms, expressing adoration. These deities are personifications not only of the East and West[195] but also of the horizon (Fig. 3.37).[196]

- Divine standards. Often bearing various beings, such as:
  - *Ba*-birds (which may also rest on the cardinal poles).[197]
  - Avian form of Sokar.[198]
  - Sacred rams.[199]
- Divine adorers. These figures are typically male and can be depicted either squatting or standing (Fig. 3.35).[200] They may bear labels such as: 'The lords of Manu', 'Anubis, lord of the Duat', 'This great god'. Additionally, deities such as Maat, Isis and Nephthys may appear in this context.[201]
- Standing mummiform gods. These figures are sometimes labelled as 'Imsety'.
- The deceased (Fig. 3.39).[202]

The scene of Geb and Nut is among the most frequently documented in the repertoire of the classical scheme. From the first quarter of the 21st Dynasty to the mid-21st Dynasty, it is consistently associated with the vignette depicting the stepped Osirian throne, combining with it a solar-Osirian symbolism. Andrzej Niwiński interprets this scene as representing the upper hemisphere of the world

195 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
196 A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut.
197 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret. A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui. Michael Carlos Museum in Atlanta: coffin of Tanatnektahat.
198 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh.
199 A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun.
200 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: coffin of Itiamun. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser. Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
201 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu.
202 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser.

– the space between the surface of the earth (symbolised by Geb) and Nut (the sky), filled with light and air (symbolised by Shu).[203]

In the complex scheme, which came into use during the second half of the 21st Dynasty, the scene was frequently included in the repertoire of the lower section and eventually associated with other scenes.

The scene tends to be positioned on the proper left wall, traditionally linked to sunrise, though this placement cannot be considered a strict rule.

In formal terms, the scene clearly derives from the Book of the Heavenly Cow as featured in the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings. However, significant differences distinguish the scenes of the yellow corpus from these royal archetypes. The main difference lies in the representation of Nut, who is always depicted in human form and not as a cow. The iconography of the goddess is borrowed from the Book of Nut, which appears on the ceilings of royal burial chambers in the Valley of the Kings. By contrast, the role of Shu and his 'assistants' as supporters of the sky is directly derived from the Book of the Heavenly Cow.

The depiction of Geb, while deeply rooted in the royal compositions, derives more directly from the mythological account described in the Book of the Heavenly Cow rather than from its original iconographic tableau. This myth provides what can be considered the Egyptian account of the 'fall' of humankind. In primeval times, humans and gods coexisted, and heaven and earth were united in a state of grace. When humans plotted against Re, the creator god initially resolved to destroy them but ultimately decided to spare humanity.[204] However, due to the 'fall' of humankind, humans and gods could no longer coexist, leading to the separation of heaven and earth. From that moment, humans inhabited the earth, while the gods retreated to heaven. In this context, the scene of Geb and Nut illustrates this fall, with Geb depicted explicitly as a 'fallen' god, showing the deity lying on the ground, resembling depictions of individuals injured from a fall. A comparison with the famous scene from the Tomb of Ipwy (TT 217) ,

203 Niwiński 2018, 37.
204 Hornung 1999, 149.

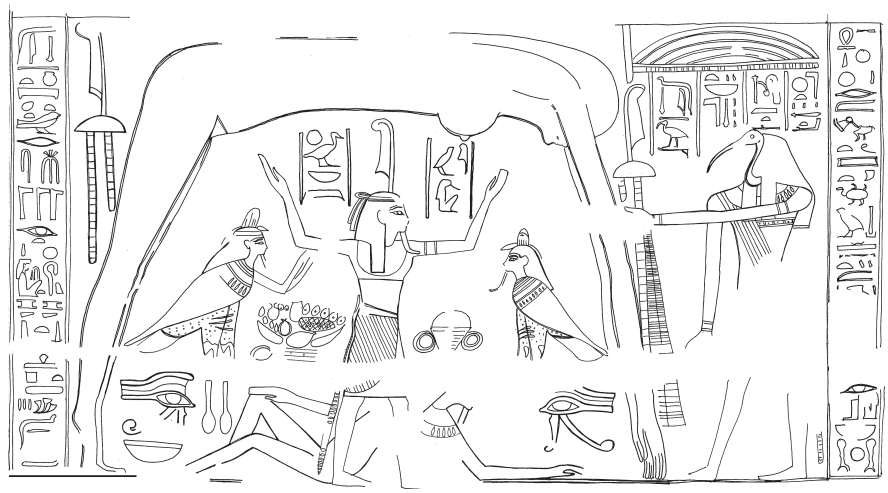


Fig. 3.34. Upper section: Geb and Nut scene. Outer coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

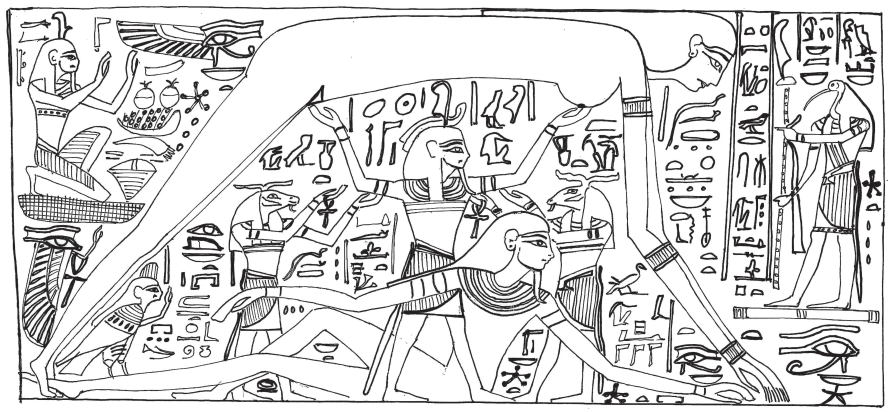


Fig. 3.35. Upper section: Geb and Nut scene. Inner coffin of Nauny (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

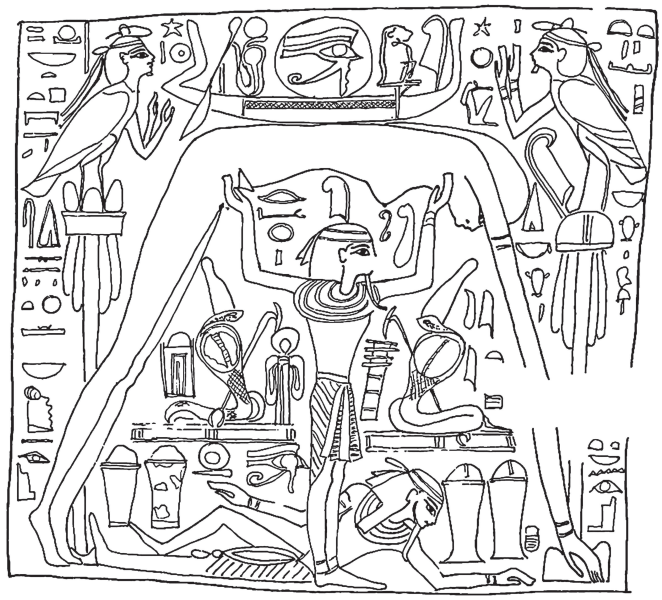


Fig. 3.36. Upper section: Geb and Nut scene. Outer coffin of Henuttatui (A.136).

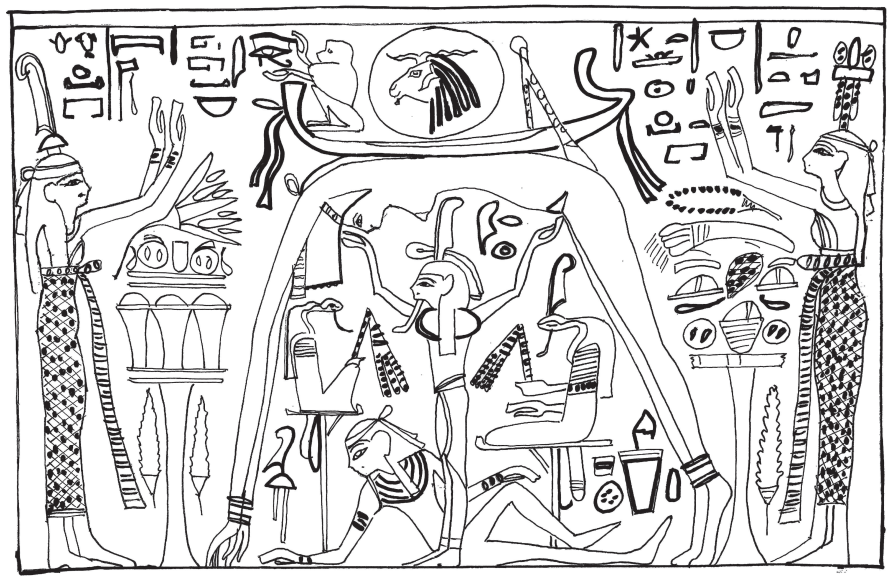


Fig. 3.37. Upper section: Geb and Nut scene. Inner coffin of Khonsumes (A.121).

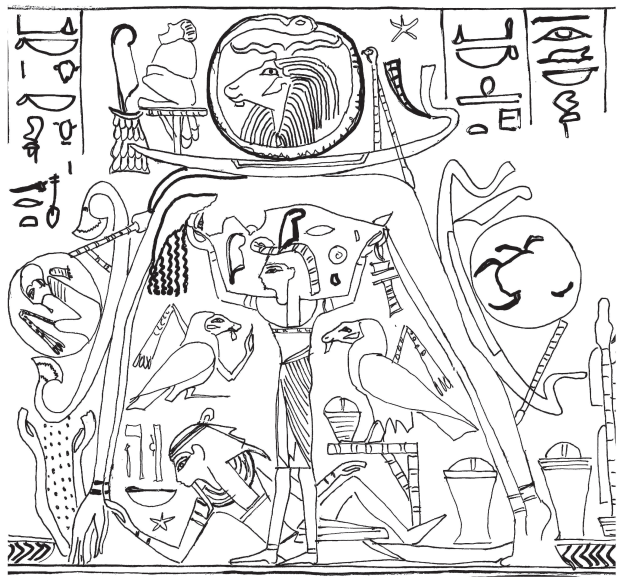


Fig. 3.38. Upper section: Geb and Nut scene. Inner coffin of Nesikhonsu (TT 320).



Fig. 3.39. Upper section: Geb and Nut scene. Inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh (A.150)

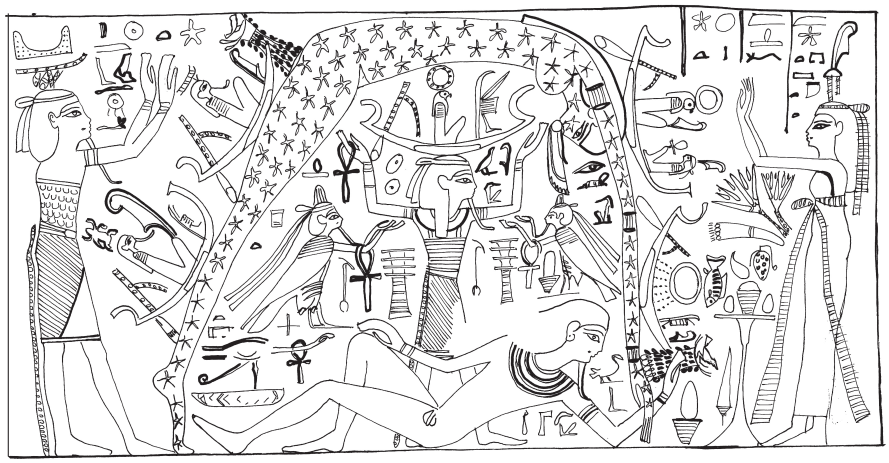


Fig. 3.40. Upper section: Geb and Nut scene. Inner coffin of Amenempermut (A.93)

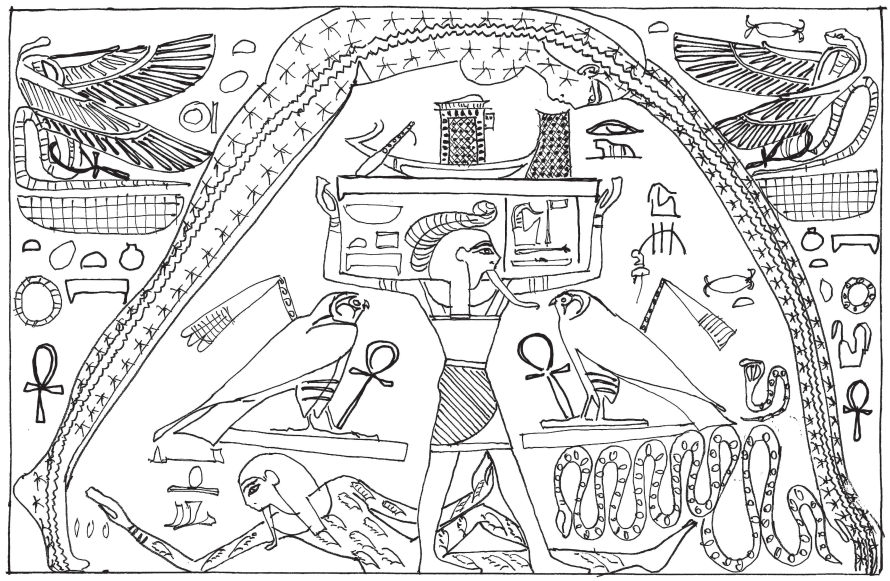


Fig. 3.41. Upper section: Geb and Nut scene. Outer coffin of Nesitawadjatakh (A.96).

which shows an injured worker, clarifies this interpretation of the figure of Geb.[205] In the scene, the worker is depicted lying on the ground, his legs in disarray, and his elbow supporting his body. Geb's depiction takes this further: one hand lies on the ground to cushion his fall, his face is always turned downwards, and one leg is raised, as though he is still in the process of falling (Figs. 3.36-38). This portrayal of Geb is both deliberate and highly esoteric, encapsulating the fall of humanity and the earthly realm itself.

Ultimately, the symbolism of this scene largely transcends the daily movement of the sun across the sky, encoding a sophisticated theological reading elaborated during the 21st Dynasty. This theological framework is rooted in the mythological narrative of the Book of the Heavenly Cow. In this esoteric reading, Shu plays a central role as the pillar uniting heaven and earth. It is no coincidence that the deceased is commonly depicted in this scene as a *ba*-bird or as a living figure clad in sacred garments.

The integration of these innovative elements required collaboration with the creators of funerary texts. As a pictorial tableau, the scene was used for a relatively short period, becoming so exclusive that it eventually disappeared from the repertoire of coffin decoration.

Lower section

In the basic scheme, the lower section of the long sides of the box displayed the deceased performing ritual activities before the Sons of Horus. However, with the classical scheme, a new and diversified corpus of vignettes was introduced into the repertoire of the lower section, relegating the Sons of Horus to a secondary motif.

Despite the importance and variety of this expanded repertoire, the most distinctive feature of the classical scheme is the depiction of the deceased and the ways in which they are integrated into the overall layout of the composition. The presentation of the deceased can be categorised into the following typologies:

205 Nunn 1996, 57.

Classical Scheme – Layout A

In this arrangement, the lower section retains the structure established in the basic scheme, with the deceased positioned on the edge of the composition, adjacent to the upper section, and facing the footboard (Fig. 3.42). The deceased is always shown in isolation, placed in a vignette of their own, and separated from the remaining scenes by columns of text. Two or three additional vignettes are displayed along the lower section in front of the deceased.[206]

The vignettes adjacent to the footboard are of particular significance. As a rule, one of the following scenes appears in this location:

- Theban mountain with the sacred cow (Fig. 3.64).[207] This scene is highly consistent, and is almost always depicted on coffins following the classical scheme. It is often complemented on the opposite side of the box by either the tree goddess scene[208] or the weighing of the heart scene.
- Tree goddess (Fig. 3.60).[209] When the weighing of the heart is featured on one side, the tree goddess is typically paired with the sacred cow.[210]
- Weighing of the heart (Fig. 3.55). In this configuration, the throne of Osiris is always positioned directly adjacent to the footboard, symbolising direct contact with the netherworld.[211]

Between this scene and the depiction of the deceased, one or two additional vignettes are added, typically selected from the following repertoire:

- Osirian Triad standing over a serpent (Fig. 3.49).
- Solar barque (Fig. 3.45).
- Solar god.
- Osiris or Osirian symbols (Ta-wer or *sekhem*-sceptre) (Fig. 3.52).
- Groups of gods (Fig. 3.51).

206 A.20: coffin Tauhenut. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
207 TT 320: coffin set of Tauheret. A.7: outer coffin of Ankhesenmut. Although from a much later dating: A.15: outer coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. Los Angeles County Museum of Art: anonymous coffin. A.unknown: outer coffin of Ikhy (Vatican Museums).
208 A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun.
209 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut.
210 A.60: anonymous coffin.
211 A.60: anonymous coffin.

The first two subjects are clearly the most dominant and frequently used in these compositions. The remaining scenes are included for the sake of variation, and their occurrence is therefore highly unpredictable. The deceased is rarely included in these additional vignettes.

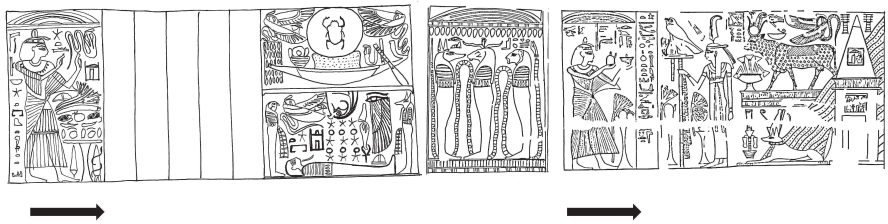


Fig. 3.42. Lower section: Classical Scheme – Layout A

Classical Scheme – Layout B

In this scheme, the lower section is divided into two halves, with the deceased depicted at the centre, moving in several directions (Fig. 3.43). Adjacent to the upper section is now an Osirian scene integrating the deceased. This scene closely resembles the depiction in the upper section of the basic scheme, where the deceased is shown before the enthroned Osiris. The primary distinction lies in the orientation: in this context, the deceased faces the headboard.

The second half of the lower section comprises the usual vignettes (sacred cow, tree goddess) with the deceased now oriented towards the foot end. This arrangement creates a twofold movement, where the deceased transitions from the centre to opposite directions. Although the significance of this arrangement remains unclear, it appears to have held sufficient symbolic importance to establish a consistent decorative pattern, which is slightly later in date than that described previously.

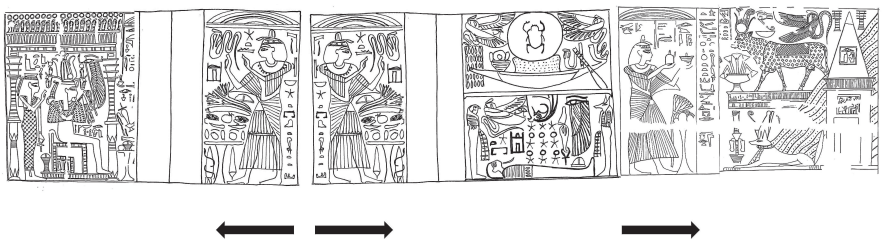
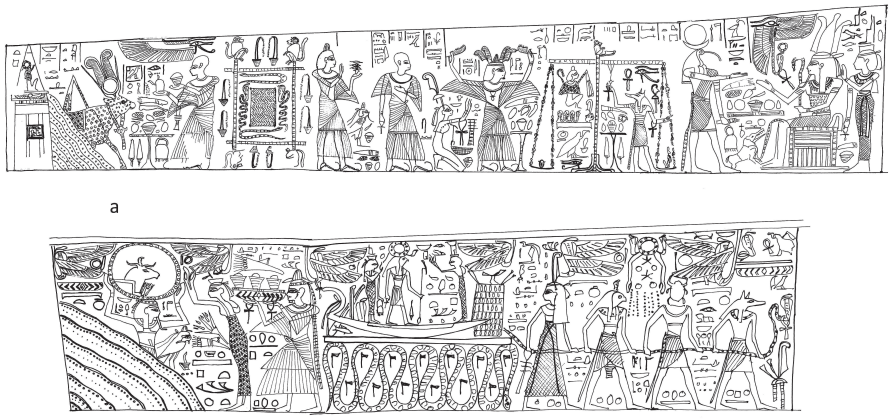


Fig. 3.43. Lower section: Classical Scheme – Layout B

Classical Scheme – Layout C

The lower section is entirely arranged as a single vignette. This scene can be regarded as an extension of the Osirian vignette from the Classical Scheme – Layout B. While the representation of Osiris remains almost identical, the scene is expanded to incorporate the weighing of the heart. This layout represents the latest development within this group. Two distinct types of arrangements are identifiable:

- Monothematic vignettes. In these cases, the vignette typically comprises an elongated scene depicting the weighing of the heart (Fig. 3.44). The throne of Osiris is positioned here, adjacent to the upper section, thus oriented in the reverse direction compared to the weighing of the heart scenes described in Classical Scheme – Layout B. The deceased is consistently depicted facing the headboard. A notable feature of these vignettes is the occasional inclusion of the sacred cow emerging from the mountain,[212] or the addition of underworld deities.[213]



a

b

Fig. 3.44. Lower section: Classical Scheme – Layout B
a. Monothematic scene.
b. Multithematic scene.

212 A.86: inner coffin of Shebti. A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Tabakenkhonsu.
213 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut.

- Multi-thematic vignettes. These vignettes present a loosely structured assemblage of subjects, lacking formal boundaries between them. They exhibit significant similarities to the so-called 'mythological papyri'.[214]

These varied arrangements of the scenes provide valuable criteria for the relative dating of coffins. Having established the main trends in the layout of the lower section, we will now examine the overall structure of the most significant vignettes integrated into the repertoire of the classical scheme.

1. Solar vignettes

In the compositions of the Classical Scheme – Layout A, this vignette normally precedes the others, forming a pictorial unit with the deceased, who is featured next to the upper section. The solar imagery is normally expressed by using the solar barque, but the sun-god can also be manifest without it.

Solar barque

The solar barque scene is consistently formed by the vertical juxtaposition of two scenes within a single vignette.

The following variations can be identified:

– *Solar barque over the crypt of Osiris* (Figs. 3.45-47). The solar barque is depicted navigating the sky, with one or two fish leaping from the water below (Fig. 3.47),[215] probably a cryptic reference to the word *besy* ('initiation' or 'introduction') which is written using exactly the same monogram and alludes to the phenomenon of rising to the realm of light.[216]

Emerging from the *pet*-sign is a large, inverted falcon head, symbolising the god Sokar.[217] Below, a mummy lies on the ground, flanked by two standing mummiform deities bearing the attributes of the Sons of

214 Michael Carlos Museum in Atlanta: coffin of Tanatnektahat (left side). A.22: coffin of Khonsumes. A.14: coffin of Isetemkheb. A.105: Inner coffin of Userhat.
215 A.29: anonymous coffin. A.38: outer coffin of Ankhsenmut.
216 Kruchten 1989.
217 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Khonsumose.

Horus.[218] The mummy is illuminated by rays of light emanating from the falcon's head. This scene includes some of the earliest instances of liminal elements in the repertoire of the lower section: a cobra and a vulture hover over the mummy (Fig. 3.47), alongside stars, dark circles and *shetyt*-shrines (Fig. 3.45).[219] These elements may also be replaced by mourning goddesses[220] or winged cobras (Fig. 3.46).[221] The upper scene is typically simpler, featuring the solar barque and the sun god, who may be represented in various forms:

- (Winged) scarab.[222]
- Scarab emerging from the solar disc.[223]
- Solar disc containing a scarab (Fig. 3.45).[224]
- A large falcon head, symmetrically complementing the inverted head of Sokar below).[225] This is a visual reference to Chapter 136 B of the Book of the Dead.[226]
- A sacred ram depicted within the sun disc, rising or setting above a bovine head flanked by the lions of the horizon (Fig. 3.46).[227] This imagery references Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead.
- A ram-headed god steering the solar barque, escorted by a divine crew, including Maat, Khepri, the god Heka or Thoth, among others (Fig. 3.47).[228] This variation aligns more closely with royal archetypes found in the Book of the Amduat.

– *Solar barque over Apophis* (Fig. 3.48). The solar barque is shown navigating the sky, with the lower portion of the vignette featuring the coiled body of a serpent immobilized by knives,[229] or *netjer*-signs.[230] In

218 A.60: anonymous coffin.
219 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Khonsumose. A.29: anonymous coffin.
220 Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
221 A.7: outer coffin of Ankhesenmut.
222 A.60: anonymous coffin.
223 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Khonsumose.
224 A.29: anonymous coffin.
225 Los Angeles County Museum of Art: anonymous coffin.
226 Taylor 2010, 167.
227 A.7: outer coffin Ankhesenmut.
228 TT 320: coffin set of Tauheret.
229 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut.
230 A.120: coffin of Khonsuemrenepet.

these versions, while the lower area remains stable, the upper portion varies, presenting the sun god in different forms:

- Winged scarab.[231]
- Falcon-headed god (Fig. 3.48).[232] In these scenes the crew may involve gods such as Maat and Heka, or *ba*-birds, a baboon and a cobra.
- Ram-headed god.[233] In these depictions, the sun god appears as a green-skinned primeval deity, portrayed naked and wearing a phallic sheath.[234] Label inscriptions identify this deity as Re or Re-Horakhti. Occasionally, Horus is shown standing at the prow of the barque, fighting Apophis.[235]

The solar barque often features a folded nest at the prow with a swallow perched upon it.[236] In this position, the swallow alludes to the nightly journey of the sun god announcing dawn. As Abir Enany notes in her observations of funerary papyri,[237] the prow of the solar barque is consistently associated with the east, symbolising its movement towards sunrise. Alternatively, a naked solar child wearing a heart amulet may be depicted squatting in this location.[238]

The barque may also include a pavilion housing the sun god, following the archetype of the solar barque established in the Book of the Amduat.[239] Under this influence, the barque is sometimes shown as being pulled by black jackals,[240] primeval beings,[241] or other deities using ropes (or an elongated serpent).[242]

231 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
232 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Nauny. A.30: outer coffin of Shedsuamun.
233 TT 320: inner coffin of Masaharta.
234 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanethereret.
235 Coffin (Egyptian Museum in Cairo, CG 6046)
236 A.86: coffin of Shebti. Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanethereret.
237 Enany 2022, 19.
238 Coffin (Egyptian Museum in Cairo, CG 6046). A.30: outer coffin of Shedsuamun.
239 A.30: outer coffin of Shedsuamun. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanethereret.
240 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanethereret.
241 Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori.
242 A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet.

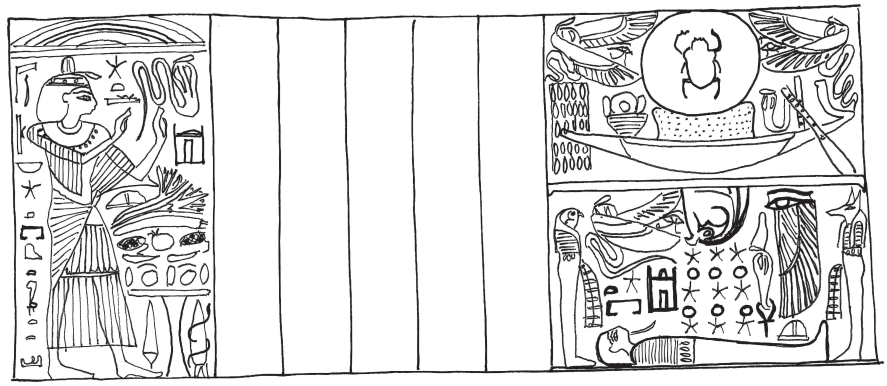


Fig. 3.45. Lower section: Solar barque scene. Anonymous coffin (A.29).

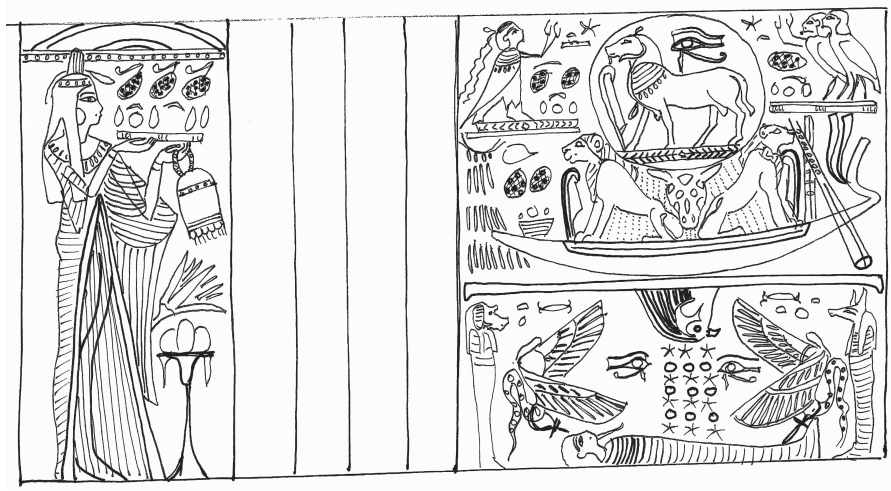


Fig. 3.46. Lower section: Solar barque scene. Outer coffin of Ankhesenmut (A.7)

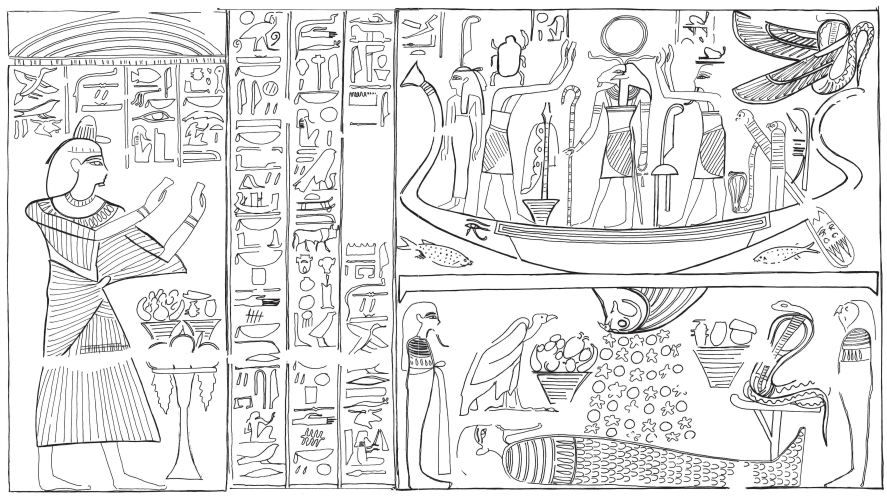


Fig. 3.47. Lower section: solar barque scene. Inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

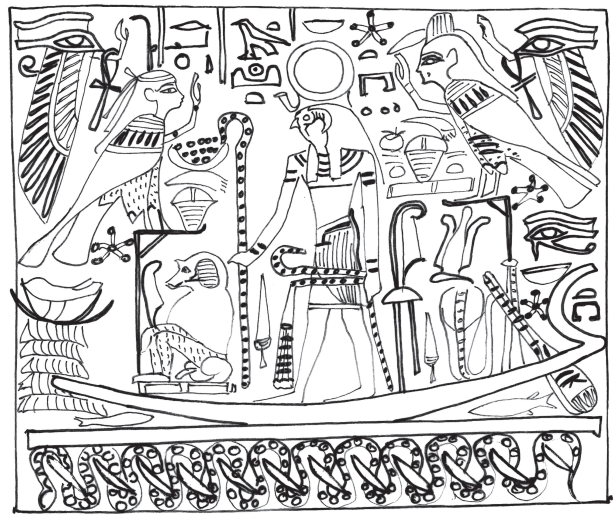


Fig. 3.48. Lower section: Solar barque scene. Inner coffin of Nauny (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

Occasionally, the sun god is featured without any association with the solar barque. As in the latter scenes, he may be depicted as a falcon-headed enthroned god,[243] or as a ram-headed primeval deity.[244] Such scenes were highly exclusive and seem to have been reserved for a very restricted elite.

The representation of the solar barque is among the most frequently depicted vignettes in the classical scheme. It serves as a powerful image to convey the dynamic movement of the sun's journey through the netherworld. Moreover, it incorporates a rich imagery that combines references to the sacredness associated with the Osirian resurrection and the ongoing cosmic combat with Apophis. These vignettes allude to the solar journey and visually render the spells of the Book of the Dead that address the deceased's admittance to the sun god's barque and their ability to travel in his company. Chapters 100 and 102 facilitate the deceased's boarding of the barque of Re, their navigation of it, and their defence against the hostile Apophis. Chapters 19-31 and 133-6 are variations of these texts.[245]

However, over time, visual references to the royal Book of the Amduat became increasingly explicit in these scenes, namely by using details borrowed from royal contexts. This shift began with subtle allusions, such as the design of the solar barques. The expansion of the solar crew and the addition of jackals and groups of deities pulling the barque reflect a more explicit integration of imagery from the Book of the Amduat. These elements represent the early stages of the appropriation of royal Amduat imagery, a process that became central to the complex scheme.

2. Osirian vignettes

The Osirian vignettes are clearly predominant in the repertoire of the lower section. The variety of the subjects and abundance of scenes far surpass

243 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret.
244 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanethereret. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori.
245 Taylor 2010, 238.

all the others. Below, we examine some of the most frequently featured Osirian vignettes.

Osirian Triad

This scene shows a funerary triad comprising three mummiform deities standing over a coiled serpent (Figs. 3.49-50). At the centre stands a ram-headed god, flanked by a lioness-headed goddess and a jackal-headed god. In some vignettes, these deities are labelled as Osiris, Isis and Horus,[246] with the latter identified as 'great of manifestations, sovereign of the West.'[247] The triad is depicted beneath a vaulted ceiling, and its overall design remains relatively stable. Variations primarily involve the heads of the gods, which may also take the form of a falcon,[248] a man,[249] or a front-facing jackal.[250] Minor variations include liminal elements, such as cobras and vultures positioned between the deities, though this practice remained rare.[251] Exceptionally, in later versions dating from the end of the 21st Dynasty, the central god is replaced by a sun disc, while one of the accompanying gods is depicted as a feathered-headed deity,[252] all manifesting the impact of the imagery of the Amduat compositions.

This vignette is particularly common in the Classical Scheme – Layout A, where it is placed in the middle of the lower section, between the solar vignette and the closing scene.[253] It is also well-attested in the multi-thematic vignettes characteristic of the Classical Scheme – Layout C.[254]

The Osirian Triad vignette represents an innovative creation of the 21st Dynasty and may have been borrowed from the repertoire of contemporary mythological papyri. While its precise significance is difficult to ascertain, the prominence of cult-related imagery in the lower section suggests it may be connected to a local cult of Osiris.

246 A.95: coffin of Pameshem.
247 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret. A shorter version is found in the coffin of Khonsumose (Museo Egizio in Turin).
248 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.
249 A.86: coffin of Shebti.
250 A.38: coffin of Ankhsenmut.
251 A.29: anonymous coffin.
252 A.106: coffin of Nesineferher.
253 A.60: anonymous coffin.
254 A.14: coffin of Isetemkheb.

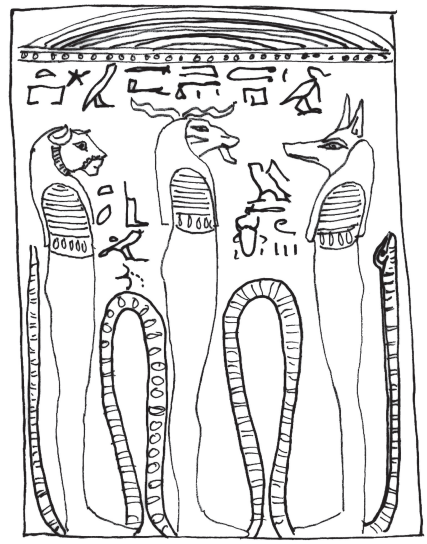


Fig. 3.49. Lower section: Osirian triad. Inner box of Khonsumose (Museo Egizio in Turin).

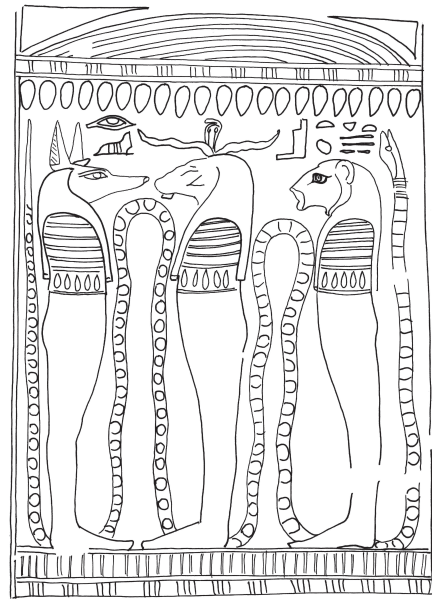


Fig. 3.50. Lower section: Osirian triad. Inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

Groups of mummiform deities

The scene depicts a group of mummiform deities (Fig. 3.51). Usually, these deities are arranged in two registers, either squatting[255] or enthroned.[256] Occasionally, the animal attributes of the Sons of Horus are included,[257] though they are commonly represented in fully human guise.[258] While their identities are rarely explicitly stated, the association with the Sons of Horus is generally implied.

This scene is among the most frequently represented in the classical scheme, exhibiting minimal variation. Exceptionally, some versions depict six representations of the goddess Maat.[259]

Despite its resemblance to the basic scheme, where the Sons of Horus play a paramount role, the layout of these scenes is fundamentally different, with the deities grouped together in the same vignette and displayed in two registers.

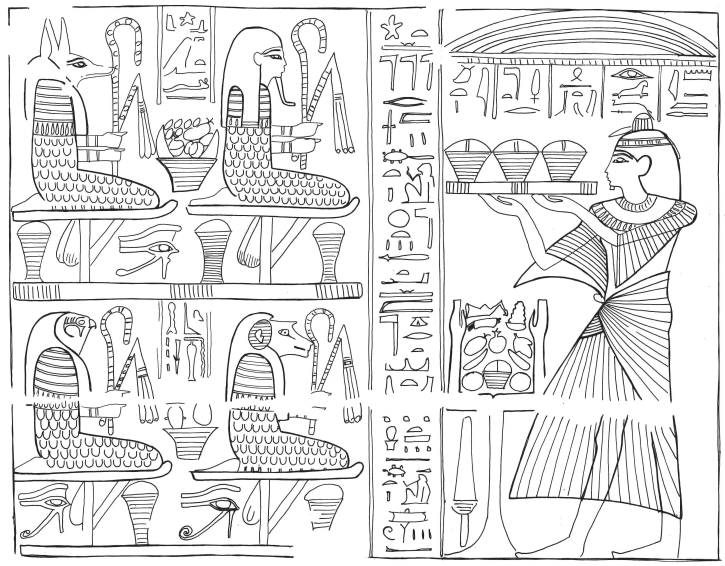


Fig. 3.51. Lower section: Sons of Horus. Inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

255 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
256 Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
257 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: coffin of Itiamun.
258 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny.
259 A.22: coffin of Khonsumes.

Osirian sacred objects

Another set of relatively simple vignettes depicts sacred objects typically used in the Osirian cult, such as the Ta-wer totem, the Djed-pillar, and the *sekhem*-sceptre.

- *Ta-wer totem*. This sacred object is flanked by the (winged) goddesses Isis and Nephthys,[260] who are occasionally replaced by winged cobras.[261] More complex scenes are rare but do occur; in these, the totem is guarded by Horus, Isis and Nephthys (Fig. 3.52).[262] The deceased is seldom depicted in such scenes.[263]
- Djed-*pillar*. The object is flanked by *imy-wt* totems and winged *wedjat*-eyes.[264] This vignette is exceptionally rare in this context.

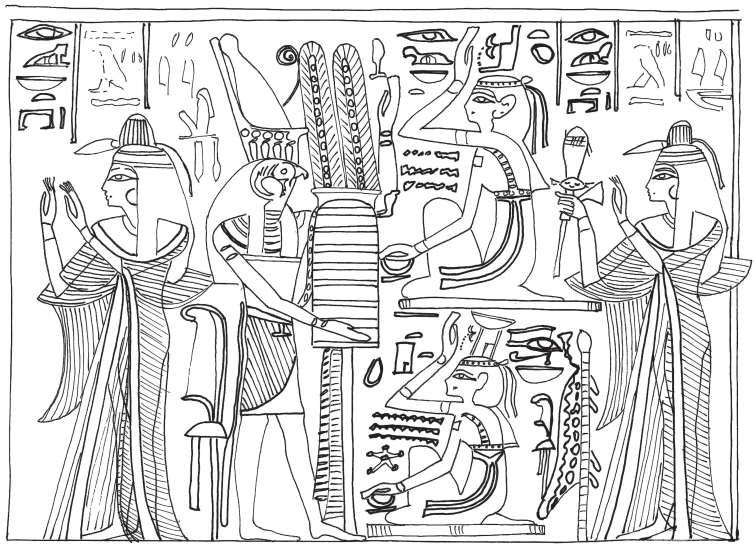


Fig. 3.52. Lower section: Ta-wer totem scene. Inner coffin of Nauny (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

260 TT 320: inner coffin of Masaharta. A.38: coffin of Ankhsenmut.
261 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut.
262 (Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny. In this version the subject is used in archaizing layouts (A.119: outer box of Tjenetipet).
263 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny. A.119: outer box of Tjenetipet.
264 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: anonymous coffin.

– *Sekhem*-sceptre. This is a very simple vignette showing the sacred object flanked by winged *wedjat*-eyes.[265] Like the Djed-pillar vignette, it is extremely uncommon in this setting.

It is noteworthy that, at this stage, both the Ta-wer totem and the *sekhem*-sceptre are abundantly used on the lid, particularly within the central partition of the lower section. The vignettes reproduced in the lower section of the box largely follow a similar layout.[266] The exception lies in scenes of the Ta-wer totem with Horus, which were further developed in the box design.

Adoration of Osiris

This vignette features the deceased adoring or making offerings before Osiris. The god may be depicted in mummiform guise (Fig. 3.54),[267] but his portrayal as a living deity, wearing a short kilt and a corselet, is more common (Fig. 3.53).[268] Typical attributes of Osiris, such as the *atef*-crown, royal sceptres, or the *imiwt*-totem, frequently appear.[269] However, alternative attributes include a sun disc[270] or simply a divine wig.[271] Exceptionally, the god Ptah-Sokar-Osiris is represented either as a falcon-headed deity[272] or in fully human form,[273] and he is labelled as 'Lord of the *shetyt*-shrine'. The god is typically escorted by goddesses, such as Neith, Maat, or Isis, who stand behind him.

Osiris is frequently shown within an elaborate shrine featuring columns and a cobra-frieze.[274] In some depictions, the doors of the sanctuary are rendered as open, revealing the god to the deceased.[275] Alternatively, the shrine may be implied through the inclusion of a vaulted ceiling.[276]

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265 A.73: coffin of Iuesankh.
266 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny. In this version the subject is used in archaizing layouts (A.119: outer box of Tjenetipet).
267 A.86: coffin of Shebti.
268 A.14: coffin of Isetemkheb. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Nauny. Coffin of Itiamun (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond).
269 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Nauny.
270 Coffin of Itiamun (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond).
271 A.14: coffin of Isetemkheb.
272 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
273 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Nauny.
274 Coffin of Itiamun (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond).
275 A.14: coffin of Isetemkheb. A.86: coffin of Shebti. A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
276 Metropolitan Museum of Art: inner coffin of Nauny.

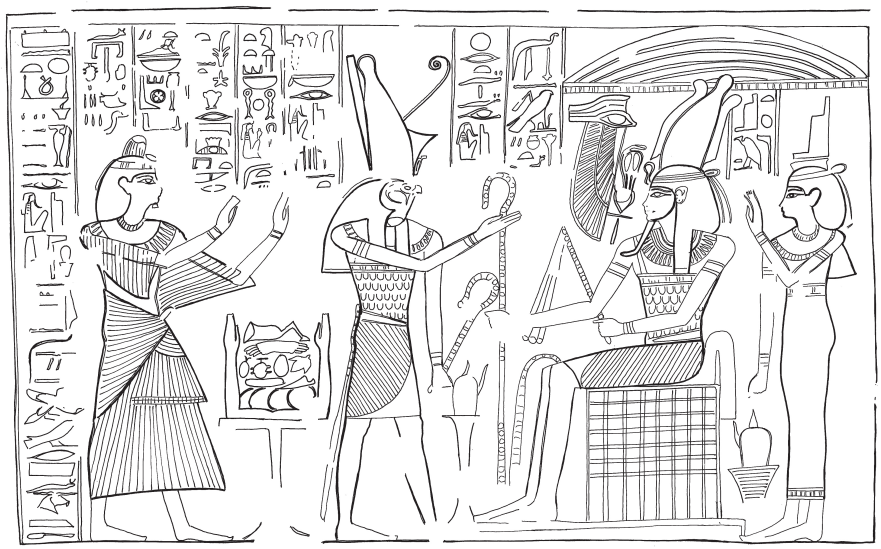


Fig. 3.53. Lower section: Osirian scene. Outer coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

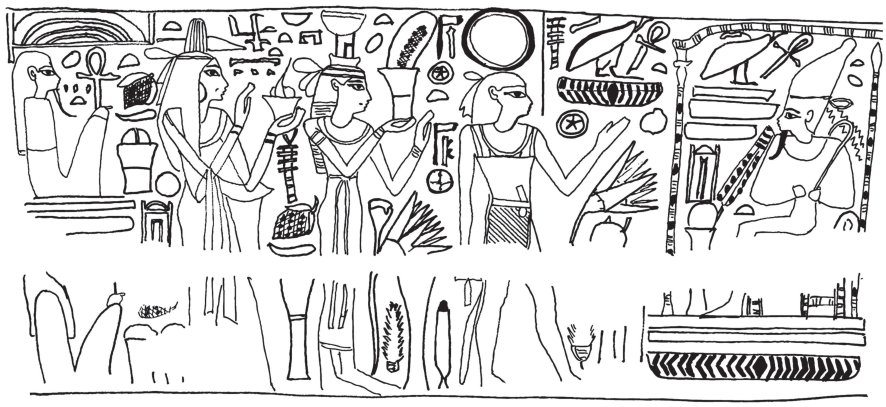


Fig. 3.54. Lower section: Osirian scene. Inner coffin of Henuttatui (A.136).

Unlike other previously mentioned scenes, this vignette is not particularly innovative. Similar depictions were already used in the upper section of the box in both the basic and classical scheme. They are often found on the side panels of the headboard, with little variation. Across these contexts, the scene appears to convey the idea of introduction and a new beginning for the deceased's life in the netherworld.

In the Classical Scheme – Layout B, the vignette is conspicuously displayed in a reversed direction, showing the deceased 'going back' towards the headboard. While the significance of this reversal is unclear, it was evidently of considerable importance.

Weighing of the heart

The scene is, by far, the most elaborate vignette in the repertoire of the classical scheme. However, its level of elaboration varies significantly depending on the pictorial context in which it is depicted.

– In the **Classical Scheme – Layout A**, the scene is placed adjacent to the footboard and is paired with the vignette of the sacred cow, which is located on the opposite wall of the box. These are the earliest examples of this type of scene, characterised by the depiction of the throne of Osiris positioned near the footboard (Fig. 3.55). The layout frequently echoes the compositions found in the Ramesside Theban funerary chapels. In its simplest form, the judgement involves only Hornedjitef shown standing beside Osiris,[277] with the Ammut monster resting at his feet. Hornedjitef is depicted as a falcon-headed god wearing the double crown.[278] The divine scale occupies the centre of the vignette, with the god Anubis positioned beneath its arms.

  The area beneath the scale's arms introduces some of the scene's most innovative elements. One such element is a squatting mummiform figure, occasionally seated above the sign of the horizon. This figure

277 A.29: anonymous coffin. A.60: anonymous coffin.
278 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Khonsumose.

may wear feathers on its head and a label inscription bearing the name of the deceased.[279] This intriguing element, introduced during the 21st Dynasty, represents the deceased identified with Osiris. Alongside this motif is an anthropomorphised *meskhenet*-brick, featured with a female head wearing a feather. Label inscriptions refer to this goddess as Maat.[280] Occasionally, it is depicted as a chest,[281] another innovation of this period.

The deceased is shown beside the scale, with arms upraised in jubilation. In this context, the deceased is associated with the hieroglyphic determinative A 28 (*hay*, 'rejoice'), symbolising triumph in the Hall of Judgement.[282] Near the deceased, a pole of the West is typically depicted.[283]

Additional elements were gradually incorporated into this basic framework. Thoth, conspicuously absent in earlier depictions,[284] is eventually included, either standing beside the deceased (Fig. 3.55)[285] or positioned beneath the scale.[286] In most scenes, the deceased appears only once, but is occasionally depicted twice, either being escorted by deities or beside the scale.[287] In this arrangement, the scale acts as a framing element, separating the deceased from Osiris. On one side of the scale, closer to the headboard, the deceased and accompanying deities are depicted, while Osiris, Hornedjitef, and Ammut are on the opposite side.[288]

– In the **Classical Scheme – Layout B**, the adoration of Osiris is occasionally interpreted as a simplified version of the judgement

279 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret.
280 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Khonsumose.
281 Museum of Fine Arts in Boston: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
282 Wilkinson 1992, 27.
283 A.29: anonymous coffin.
284 A.60: anonymous coffin. A.29: anonymous coffin.
285 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Khonsumose. A.88: inner box of Nesitanebetaui.
286 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret.
287 Museum of Fine Arts in Boston: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
288 Michael Carlos Museum in Atlanta: coffin of Tanatnektahat. This object is an exception, clearly reflecting some influence from more recent models of the scene.

scene, featuring only some of its figures, such as the deceased, Thoth, Ammut,[289] or Maat.[290]

– In the **Classical Scheme – Layout C**, the scene plays a crucial role in the monothematic vignettes that cover the full length of the lower section (Figs. 3.57-58). This location eventually became the preferred setting for the display of the weighing of the heart scene. The vignette is organised as a long composition focused on the weighing of the heart. A key distinction from the scenes in the Classical Scheme – Layout A is the position of the throne of Osiris, which is consistently depicted next to the upper section. Consequently, the movement suggested in the scene progresses towards the headboard.

  Another contrasting feature of the Classical Scheme – Layout A is the paramount role played by Thoth. The god is here consistently depicted next to Osiris, recording the results of the judgement, and may even appear twice within the same scene.[291] Conversely, Hornedjitef tends to be overlooked in these scenes.[292] A notable aspect of these vignettes is the prominent role attributed to the deceased, who is often represented more than once, with one depiction next to Osiris. The different schemes for portraying the deceased are as follows:

  - The deceased is depicted twice, flanking the scale. This configuration creates a symmetrical arrangement,[293] representing the simplest form of the scene. Its simplicity appears intentional, highlighting the triumph of the deceased.[294]
  - The scene is presented in a narrative format. In this arrangement, the deceased is shown at different stages of the judgement process. Typically, this layout illustrates the judgement as a transition, with

289 A.150: outer coffin of Djedmutiesankh. Coffin of Itiamun (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond).
290 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
291 A.95: coffin of Pameshem. Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne in Marseille: coffin of Khonsumes.
292 The god is frequently absent. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanethereret. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori. Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne in Marseille: coffin of Khonsumes.
293 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanethereret. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori.
294 Occasionally this layout is also observed in funerary papyri. See Papyrus of Tawedjatre in Piankoff and Rambova 1955, Pl. 15.

the deceased depicted both next to the scale and before Osiris, representing sequential moments in time.[295]

These features are also observed in contemporary funerary papyri, suggesting an input from these sources in the layout of the coffin scenes.[296]

In later objects, additional deities are introduced, particularly near the footboard, thus on the opposite side of the Osirian throne. These deities usually take the form of small groups, initially as two goddesses: Maat and a serpent-headed 'Lady of the West', or Neith.[297] Over time, this group is expanded to include serpent-headed mummiform gods, either enthroned or squatting, likely representing a funerary assembly of gods witnessing the event.[298] The deceased may appear as a *ba*-bird, adoring these deities. Ultimately, this area became decorated with the sacred cow emerging from the Theban Mountain, maintaining its persistent association with the footboard (Fig. 3.57).[299] Additional elements of the Book of the Dead were eventually added, such as the Lake of Fire (Fig. 3.58).[300]

In all these scenes the deceased is depicted in three distinct attitudes:

– With upraised arms: The deceased raises their arms in triumph, adopting a gesture of joy while holding feathers and wearing feathers on their head. This gesture is most commonly depicted next to the scale,[301] but occasionally appears next to Osiris.[302] It is the earliest gesture associated with the judgement scene.

295 A.86: coffin of Shebti. Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. A.16: coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.18: Anonymous coffin. A.95: coffin of Pameshem. Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne in Marseille: coffin of Khonsumes. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amehotep.
296 See Papyrus of Nesitanebtaui (Piankof and Rambova 1955, Pl. 8). Papyrus of Nesipakashuty (Piankof and Rambova 1955, Pl. 9). Papyrus of Khonsumes (Piankof and Rambova 1955, Pl. 16-17). Papyrus of Bakenmut (Piankof and Rambova 1955, Pl. 20).
297 Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne in Marseille: coffin of Khonsumes.
298 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.18: anonymous coffin. A.95: coffin of Pameshem.
299 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Tabakenkhonsu. A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut. A.86: coffin of Shebti. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser. Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
300 A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut.
301 A.86: coffin of Shebti. A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.95: coffin of Pameshem.
302 Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne in Marseille: coffin of Khonsumes.

- Holding the heart: This rare gesture is significant as it expresses the idea of owning one's own heart, representing the positive outcome of the weighing of the heart. Being able to own one's heart equates to the ability to be reborn.
- Offering the eyes and heart: In this gesture, the deceased holds their eyes and heart as in an offering scene. Occasionally, the mouth is also included (Fig. 3.56/58). This act is always depicted near the scale, suggesting the deceased is presenting these organs as evidence of their thoughts (heart), actions (eyes), and words (mouth), demonstrating alignment with *maat*.[303]
- Bowing before Osiris: This gesture, typically performed before an authority, shows the deceased leaning forward while grasping their own arm or shoulder.[304]

Exceptionally, some vignettes depict the deceased in all three attitudes (Fig. 3.58).[305] Despite the subtle differences described above, these vignettes share a common structure, differing primarily in their degree of sophistication, which reaches its peak in the monothematic vignettes of the Classical Scheme – Layout C. Even though the weighing of the heart scene was abundantly used in Ramesside tomb decoration, the scenes depicted in the yellow corpus exhibit a significantly higher level of elaboration and complexity, integrating a vast repertoire also seen in contemporary funerary papyri.[306]

Another compelling feature of the deceased's representation in these scenes is the inclusion of the heart amulet, a reward for a favourable outcome in the judgement of the dead. This significance of the object follows a royal archetype, as prior to the reign of Amenhotep III, it was a royal decoration embodying wisdom, which, in traditional Egyptian literature, entails the ability

303 Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne in Marseille: coffin of Khonsumes. Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser.
304 A.95: inner coffin of Pameshem. A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.93: coffin of Amenempermut. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Tabakenkhonsu.
305 A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut.
306 Piankoff and Rambova 1955, Pl. 8, 9, 15, 16-17 and 20.

to follow the guidance of one's own heart.[307] By listening to the heart, one achieves success in earthly life and cosmic integration, as the heart is what understands *maat*. Following the Amarna period, the bold political role of the object led to its integration in the imagery of Osirian justification.[308] The boldness of its meaning is reflected in the fact that it is the one of the few amulets included in the repertoire of the scenes of the box. By the Ramesside period, the heart had come to represent the inner temple where the supreme god manifests himself in one's life.[309] Consequently, the significance of the heart amulet expanded its meaning to embody the deceased's divine conscience, fully identified with Osiris.[310]

Interestingly, when first depicted in weighing of the heart scenes, the object was also included in the repertoire of the upper section of the lid, positioned over the chest, thus replacing the scarab (Figs. 2.22-24). The importance of the heart amulet is further corroborated by its association with high elite burials, as evidenced in the funerary equipment of contemporary mummies.



Fig. 3.55. Lower section: Weighing of the heart scene. Coffin of Khonsumose (Museo Egizio in Turin).

307 Sousa 2011.
308 Sousa 2007.
309 For the 'Theory of the Heart' see Assmann 2003, 229-231.
310 Sousa 2011.

3. Liminal vignettes

This category encompasses vignettes displayed near the footboard, strongly associated with the idea of passage through the netherworld. Three main types of vignettes fall under this category.

The tree goddess

Despite its simple structure, this scene constitutes one of the most aesthetically striking corpora of the classical scheme, comprising the sacred tree, the goddess, and the deceased.

The goddess, almost universally identified as Nut, may also be labelled as Neith.[311] Even in cases where Neith is specified, adjacent inscriptions often refer to 'Nut, who gave birth to the gods'.[312] She may also be described using epithets such as 'Lady of *shetyt*-shrine',[313] 'Lady of the West', or 'Khefethernebes' (She who faces her lord),[314] a personification of the Theban necropolis. She may be depicted wearing the feathered headdresses of Sopdet and of Hathor, the monogram of Maat, or the pole of the West. She is typically shown holding a table of food and pouring water from a *heset*-vase. Small bushes frequently appear at the base of the tree, and the tree itself is occasionally rooted in the sign of the horizon. A circular enclosure, suggesting a garden, may also surround the tree.

Two main layouts of the scene are identifiable:

– Naturalistic layout. The tree is depicted with a graceful, naturalistic layout, showing the brunches and trunk outlined in red, while the leaves are individually painted in green (Figs. 3.59-60). Occasionally, fruits are included and painted in red, and a swallow may perch on the treetop. In these depictions, the goddess and the sacred tree are frequently juxtaposed, appearing almost as a single entity,[315] with the name of Nut

311 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
312 A.93: coffin of Amenempermut. A.95: coffin of Pameshem. A.30: outer coffin of Shedsuamun.
313 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep.
314 Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
315 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut. A.30: outer coffin of Shedsuamun. A.86: coffin of Shebti. A.95: coffin of Pameshem. A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh. Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaieni-

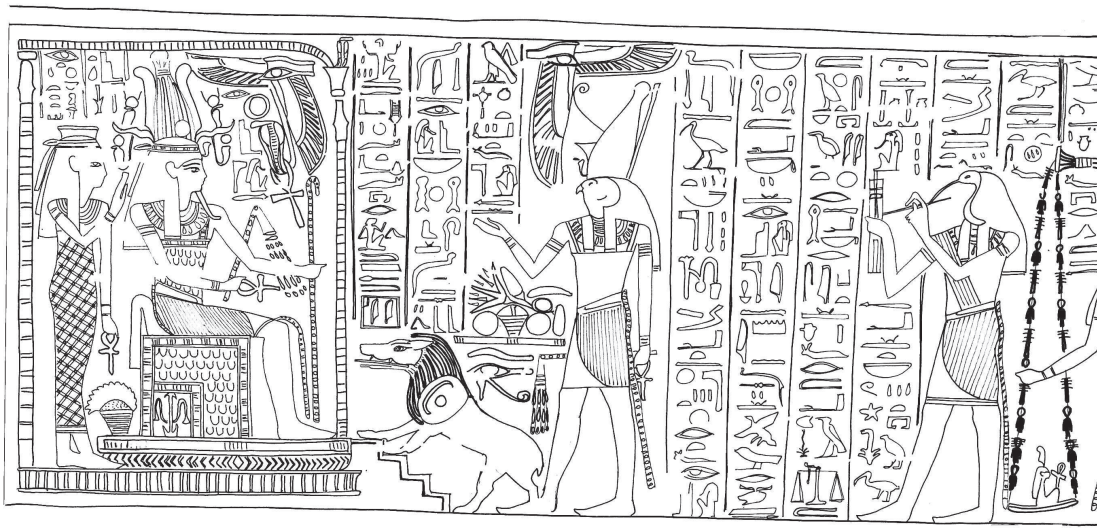


Fig. 3.56. Lower section: weighing of the heart scene. Inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

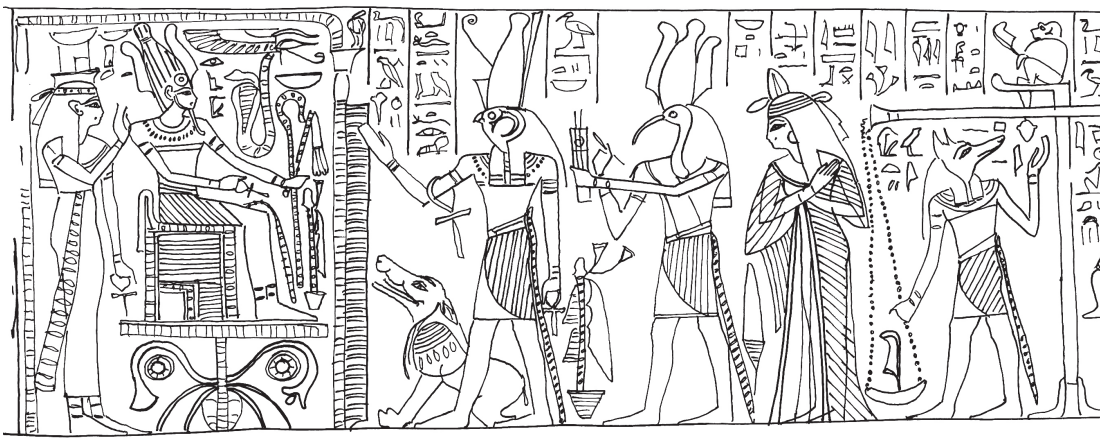


Fig. 3.57. Lower section: weighing of the heart scene. Coffin of Shebti (A.86).

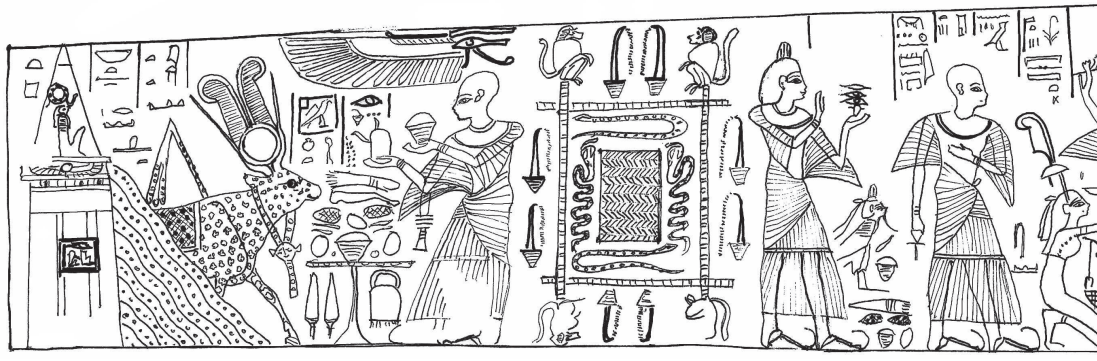
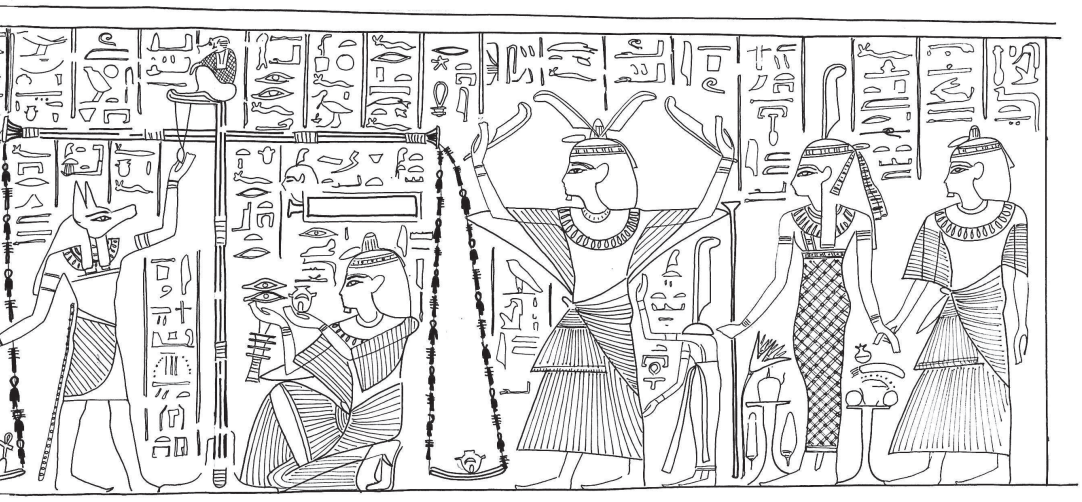
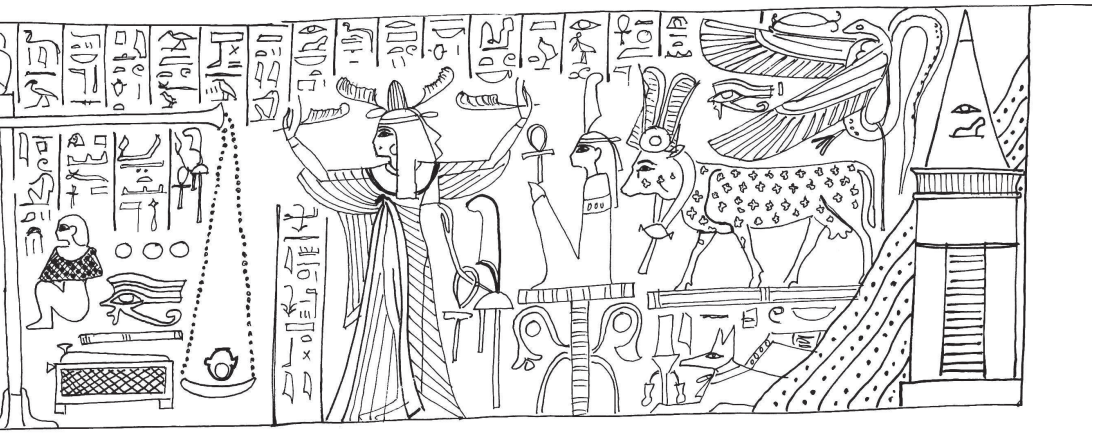
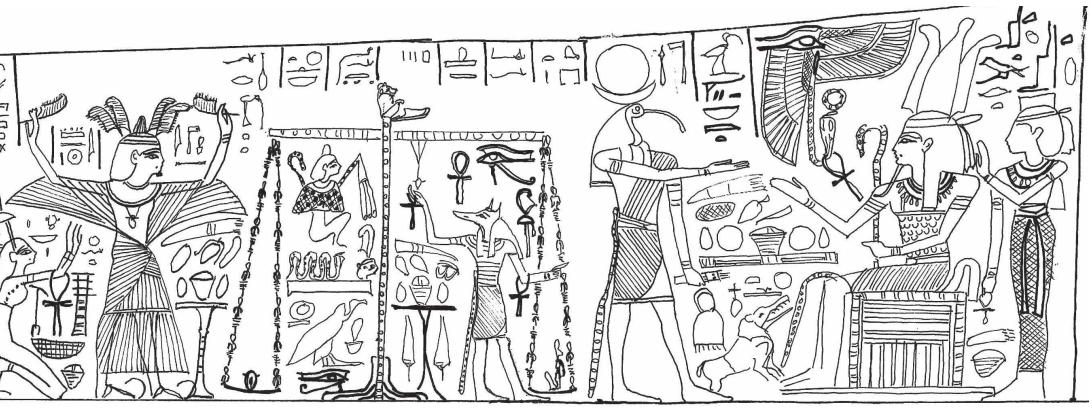


Fig. 3.58. Lower section: weighing of the heart scene. Inner coffin of Amenempermut (A.93)







frequently inscribed on the tree trunk. In these naturalistic versions of the vignette, the deceased is consistently depicted kneeling, raising their hands to their face to drink the water poured by the goddess, recalling the tomb scenes from Deir el-Medina (Figs. 3.59-60).[316] The deceased may also be escorted by the goddess of the West, again labelled as 'Khefethernebes'.

– Schematic layout. Over time, the scene becomes increasingly schematic (Figs. 3.61-62). This is particularly evident in the depiction of the tree, where the leaves form geometric patterns, lacking the earlier natural spontaneity. In these versions, the goddess is repositioned and depicted standing before the tree,[317] usually without the table of food, though still pouring water. The representation of the deceased also evolves. In these vignettes, the deceased is shown standing, transforming the scene into a more ritualistic tableau, with the deceased offering burning incense or food to the goddess. The *ba*-bird rests at the feet of the deceased, drinking from the same water poured by Nut. In some cases, the *ba*-bird is duplicated, shown perched on the tree's branches, resting on a pile of offerings, or drinking from a nearby pond.[318] Simpler versions of the vignette exclude the deceased entirely, featuring only the goddess and the *ba*-bird.[319]

The vignette is borrowed from the repertoire of the Book of the Dead, alluding to Chapter 59, which allows the deceased to eat and drink, fed by the goddess of the sycamore.[320] The association of this scene with the footboard led to its complementary pairing with the sacred cow vignette. These two scenes are

pet. Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Nauny. Coffin of Itiamun (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond). A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope. A.93: coffin of Amenempermut.

316 Tomb of Sennedjem (TT 1) (Bruyére 1959, Pl. XXIV). Tomb TT 211 in Bruyère 1952, Pl. XXIV.

317 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. A.38: outer coffin of Ankhsenmut. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. Inner A.38: coffin of Ankhsenmut. A.18: anonymous coffin. A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.

318 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu. A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes. A.18: anonymous coffin.

319 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut.

320 Taylor 2010, 165.

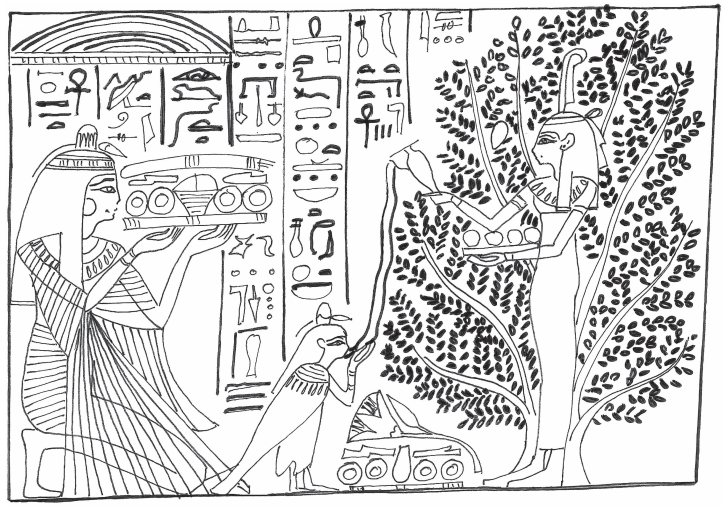


Fig. 3.59. Lower section: Tree goddess scene. Inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh (A.150)

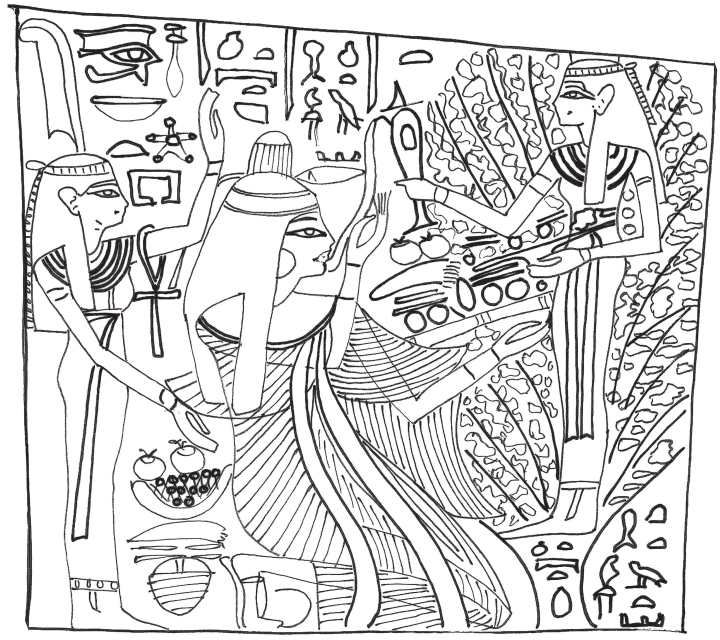


Fig. 3.60. Lower section: Tree goddess scene. Inner coffin of Nauny (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

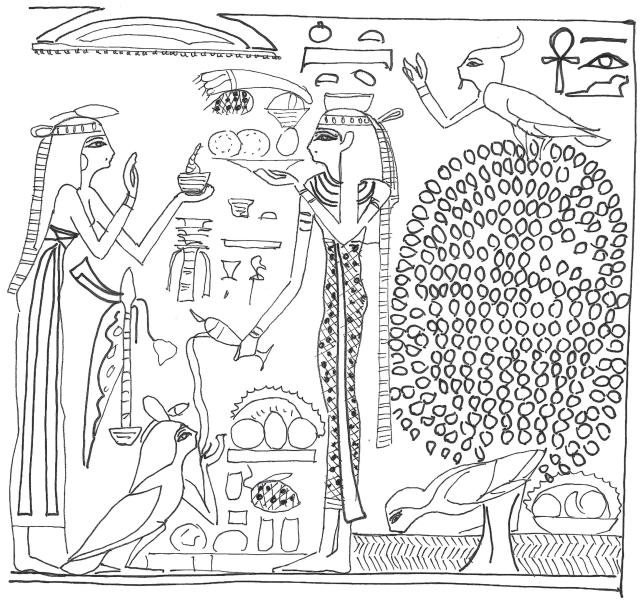


Fig. 3.61. Lower section: Tree goddess scene. Inner coffin of Nesikhonsu (TT 320).



Fig. 3.62. Lower section: Tree goddess scene. Inner coffin of Henuttatui (A.136).

often depicted on opposite sides of the box or, in some cases, on the same side, either juxtaposed or merged, as will be seen below.

The sacred cow

In its simplest form, the vignette shows the sacred cow resting on a pedestal embedded in the desert mountain slope, where the funerary chapel is built (Fig. 3.63). The cow is almost universally featured with a spotted skin, adorned with the feathered headdress of Sopdet, a sistrum or a *menat*-necklace hanging from its neck, and a beaded blanket draped over its back.[321] The goddess is frequently rendered emerging from the mountain, partially hidden by the mountain slope, emphasising the liminal nature of the scene.[322] She is rarely shown in a squatting position.[323]

Label inscriptions identify the goddess as 'Hathor', often referencing her epithets: 'Lady of the West', 'Lady of the necropolis', 'Mistress of the Mountain', or even as Khefethernebes.

At the goddess' feet is a Hathoric ritual vessel adorned with nymphaea flowers.

An offering stand, often placed before the goddess, holds food and nymphaea flowers. Above this area, a winged *wedjat*-eye hovers, and additional symbols, such as a falcon perched on a pole, symbolising the Theban necropolis, may be included.

The sacred podium is decorated with floral elements or, alternatively, shown as a single register line beneath which a crouching Anubis is depicted in jackal form, with the *sekhem*-sceptre at its feet.[324] The animal may appear partially hidden by the mountain slope (Fig. 3.63) or represented as if the mountain were transparent (Fig. 3.64). The lower register may also feature piles of offerings.

The mountain slope is decorated with undulating straps decorated with dots to suggest desert sand. The tomb itself is shaped as a tall, corniced gate with a small pyramid on top, an aspective representation of New Kingdom tomb

321 A.7: outer coffin of Ankhesenmut.
322 Liptay 2014.
323 A.20: coffin of Tauhenut.
324 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Nauny.

architecture, including the chapel and pyramid. Inscriptions, typically brief, are placed on the gate or pyramid, referring to 'Osiris'. Exceptionally, a full stela with a lengthy inscription may be included.[325]

Initially, the deceased is depicted in a separate vignette presenting offerings to the sacred cow (Fig. 3.64).[326] Over time, the deceased is increasingly incorporated into the same vignette, appearing beside the offering stand (Fig. 3.65).[327] The *ba*-bird is rarely depicted but may appear at the offering table or on the desert slope. At times, the avian form of the deceased is shown being suckled by the cow goddess (Fig. 3.65). Another rare occurrence features the deceased as a standing mummiform deity.

This scene is among the most frequently represented in the classical scheme and is displayed in almost every coffin from this period. It is clearly borrowed from the vignette of Chapter 186 of the Book of the Dead, where it often serves as the closing scene in funerary papyri. Thus, the placement of this vignette next to the footboard is consistent with its position in the Book of the Dead papyri.

The sacred cow and the tree goddess

As previously noted, the vignettes featuring the sacred cow and the tree goddess were originally depicted separately on both sides of the box near the footboard. However, due to spatial constraints, these scenes were often merged into a single composition.

In the combined scenes, the tree goddess is placed between the deceased and the sacred cow. The block corresponding to the sacred cow retains the same features as those described above, showing Hathor emerging from the mountain with the tomb in the background. When the jackal form of Anubis is included, he is depicted hidden beneath the platform of the goddess or the mountain itself.

325 A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope.
326 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin of Nauny. A.18: anonymous coffin.
327 A.95: inner coffin of Pameshem. A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope. A.119: outer coffin of Tjenetipet.



Fig. 3.63. Lower section: Hathor scene. Inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

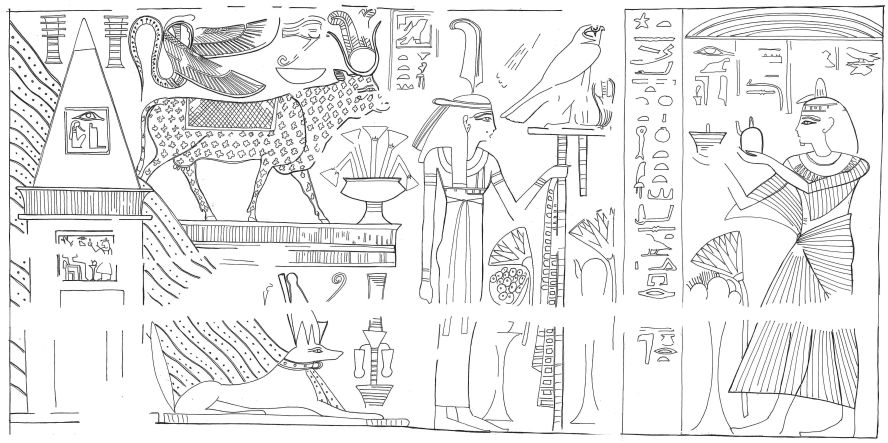


Fig. 3.64. Lower section: Hathor scene. Outer coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

As for the tree goddess, often labelled Khefethernebes, her representation varies significantly in this context. She may be featured with[328] or without the tree,[329] though in both cases, she continues to feed the deceased, who appears before her either in human form or as a *ba*-bird. The goddess may wear the monogram of Neith, but the sign of the West,[330] sometimes abbreviated to a feather, is most prevalent. Occasionally, she is portrayed as a West-headed deity.[331] Another interesting detail is provided by her association with the symbol of the Theban necropolis, a falcon perched on the pole of the West. She may wear it as a monogram,[332] or it may be used as a large emblem standing beside her.[333]

All these symbols reinforce the liminal role of both goddesses, representing them as embodiments of the sacred mountain.



Fig. 3.65. Lower section: Hathor scene. Inner coffin of Henuttatui (A.136).

The sunset

In a select group of vignettes, consistently located near the footboard, the sunset is featured, showing the solar disc resting on the mountain of the West, with a ram's head depicted within (Figs. 3.66-68). In these depictions, the disc is held aloft by the upraised arms of the god Nun, who guides the sun disc into the

328 A.29: anonymous coffin. A.60: anonymous coffin.
329 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. A.106: inner coffin of Nesineferher. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Khonsumose. TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret.
330 A.106: inner coffin of Nesineferher.
331 A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet.
332 A.29: anonymous coffin.
333 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret.

netherworld. In the coffin of Khonsumes, a neighbouring inscription reads: 'You give your face over the Beautiful West'.[334]

This scene is occasionally featured alongside the sacred cow. A particularly striking example is found in the inner coffin of Nesikhonsu, where the sun disc is shown resting on the mountain, partially obscured by the desert slope (Fig. 3.68).[335]

The detailed portrayal of the goddess Hathor in these vignettes suggests an association with the sacred geography of Thebes. The inner coffin of Nesikhonsu offers a particularly detailed scene: the goddess Hathor is standing on a barque resting on a sledged platform. The divine image is enclosed within a shrine covered by a beaded net and placed on a floral platform embedded in the mountain. The tomb, on the other hand, is displayed on the mountain slope, positioned as if it were elevated.[336] This Hathoric shrine likely refers to a specific temple at Deir el-Bahari, as suggested by Andrzej Niwiński.[337] Similar scenes in Ramesside tombs depict a king protected beneath the sacred cow, evoking the cult statue of Thutmose III in Deir el-Bahari.[338] However, this detail is absent in the vignettes featured on the yellow coffins, which may indicate that by this time, the shrine in question had shifted to another location and no longer depicted the king. It is noteworthy that in the shrine of Thutmose III at least in theory the statue of the goddess could slide out the cave to be fully or partially exposed, exactly as she is shown in the vignettes.

José Ramon Perez-Accino proposes that near TT 320 an important Hathoric shrine might have been established.[339] References to the tree and cow goddesses, as well as the sunset, while clearly linked to the rich imagery of the goddess in Chapters 59 and 186 of the Book of the Dead, must also be considered in conjunction with material cult practices in the Theban necropolis and the sacred mountain itself. The imagery of the Book of the Dead and the sacred landscape of the necropolis were thus closely interrelated.

334 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
335 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu.
336 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu.
337 Niwiński 2019, 63.
338 Foucart 1935, Pl. IX.
339 Pérez-Accino, Vivas Sainz and Muñoz Herrera 2023.

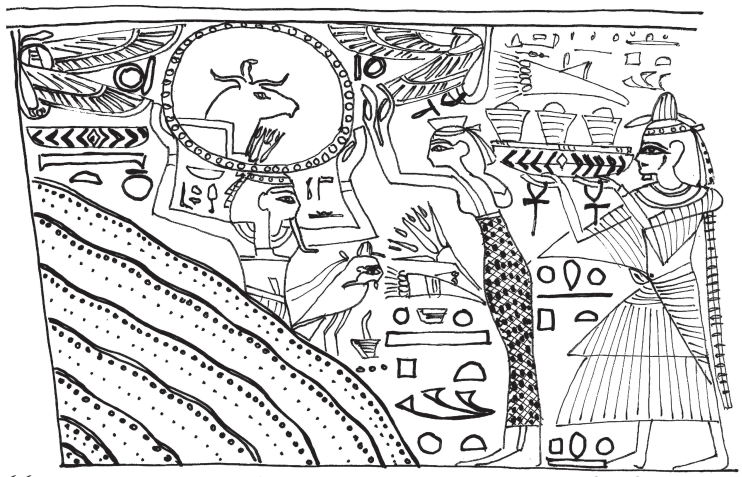


Fig. 3.66. Lower section: Liminal scene showing the sunset. Inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet (A.120).

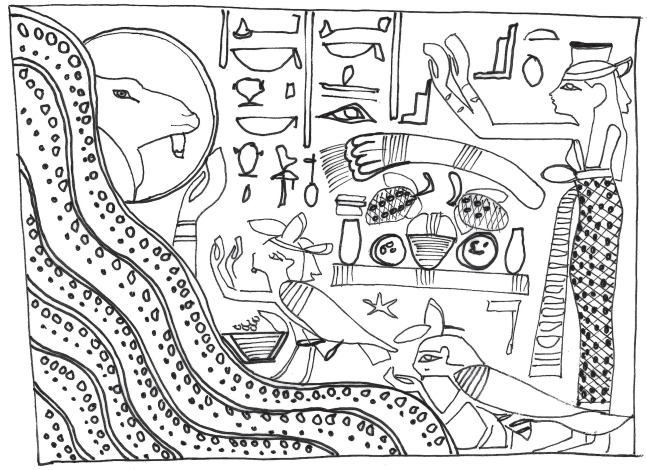


Fig. 3.67. Lower section: Liminal scene showing the sunset. Inner coffin of Khonsumes (A.121).

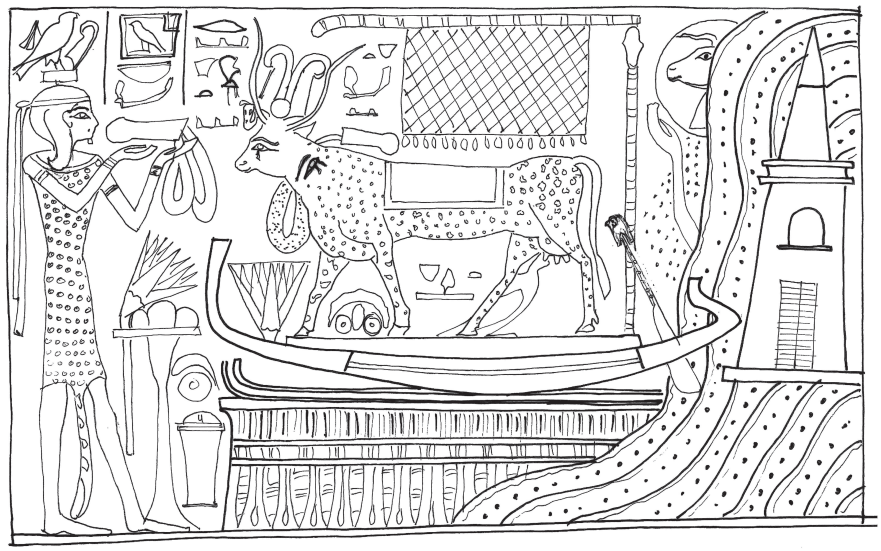


Fig. 3.68. Lower section: Hathor scene. Inner coffin of Nesikhonsu (TT 320).

Footboard

In the classical scheme, there is an increasing tendency for the footboard to remain undecorated. However, particularly in high elite objects, it can display a rather elaborate figurative decoration.

- **Goddess**. The deity, either Nephthys or Isis, is flanked by the following elements:
  - Totems of the West (or West-headed mummiform gods) and serpents, depicted with upraised arms (Fig. 3.69).[340]
  - Sons of Horus.
  - Djed and Tjet-signs, occasionally anthropomorphised (Fig. 3.70).
- **Djed**-pillar flanked by elaborate figurative elements, such as goddesses (Fig. 3.71).[341]

340 Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.
341 A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet.



Fig. 3.69. Footboard. Outer coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

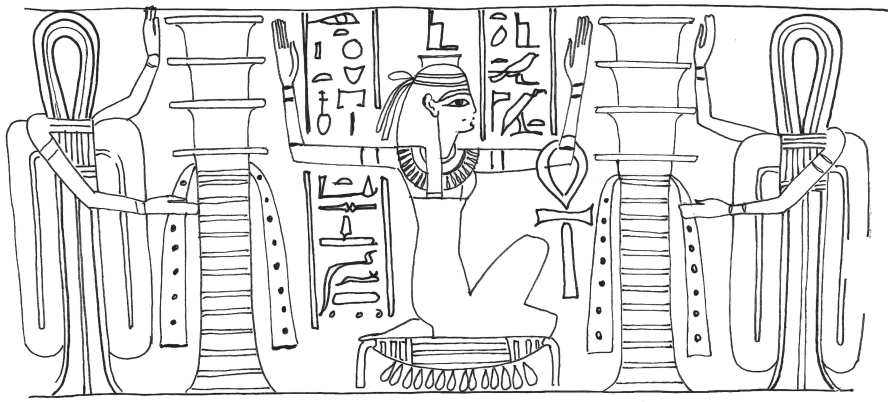


Fig. 3.70. Footboard. Coffin of Hori (Museu Nacional do Rio de Janeiro).

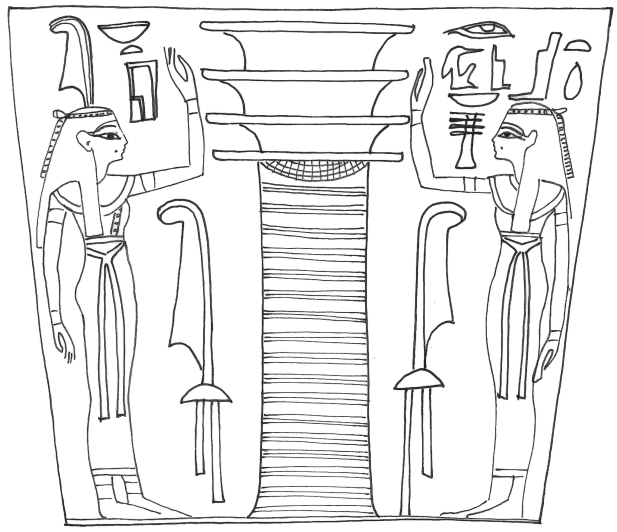


Fig. 3.71. Footboard. Inner coffin of Nauny (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

Commentary

The emergence of the classical scheme by the end of the first quarter of the 21st Dynasty is marked by an outstanding flowering of creative inputs in coffin decoration.

On the short sides, the most notable innovation is found in the decoration of the side panels of the headboard, which for the first time receive figurative compositions. Some of the most common vignettes in this area, such as the avian form of Ptah-Sokar, align with new elements introduced in the lower section of the lid, suggesting an intentional symbolic continuum from one object to the other. A similar connection can be observed in Osirian adoration vignettes, which also appear on the lid and, like contemporary funerary papyri, function as opening scenes. The use of vignettes from Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead reflects the same intent, mirroring Ramesside practices of depicting these scenes near the entrances to burial chambers.[342] Simultaneously, they subtly imply the association of the headboard with sunrise, while reinforcing the association of the footboard with sunset.

In some form or another, the imagery of the headboard, for the first time, transcends the ritual setting traditionally associated with Isis and Nephthys, which continues to be referenced on the central panel of the footboard. Instead, it becomes linked to the idea of introduction into a sacred space or, more broadly, to the necropolis.

The decoration of the long sides continues to be arranged in two sections. The upper section retains a strong connection to the imagery of Thoth, rooted in the black type, but now incorporates themes related to the opening of the Gates of Heaven. Osirian vignettes integrated into the upper section of the basic scheme, such as the stepped throne, are now reimagined with creative new arrangements. Together with the Geb and Nut scene, these motifs dominate the upper section, each representing a distinct cosmic dimension, which Niwiński labels as upper and lower hemispheres.[343]

342 Tomb of Senedjem (TT 1) in Bruyère 1959.
343 Niwiński 2018, 38-39.

Both the stepped throne and the Geb and Nut scene are highly innovative compositions, likely produced early in the 21st Dynasty. They draw on royal compositions used in the Valley of the Kings during the New Kingdom, such as the Book of Gates and the Book of the Heavenly Cow. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that both compositions encode esoteric meanings tied to the symbolism of passage. Thus, the upper section alludes to the transcendent dimensions of space, heaven and the netherworld, united through the movement of the sun.

In these compositions, the deceased plays a secondary role, depicted as being introduced or initiated into the realm of Osiris or the going forth by day. These scenes are not merely topographical references, but rather allusions to mythological and transcendent spaces.

The repertoire of the lower section, by contrast, explores the idea of liminality, representing a journey through the sacred geography of the necropolis. This imagery may allude to actual shrines, as Niwiński suggests,[344] portraying the deceased moving through the necropolis towards the Theban Mountain, the site of regeneration. This rich sacred geography is expressed through a variety of vignettes, many borrowed from the Book of the Dead. In the basic scheme, the lower section associates the deceased with the journey of the sun through the netherworld. However, in the classical scheme, the lower section serves to reveal the sacred landscape of the necropolis, where the deceased is portrayed as the agent of a dynamic movement. In its several variations, the lower section revolves around spatial movement. This movement is initially formulated (Classical Scheme – Layout A) as a one-way path from the headboard to the footboard, symbolising the transition from the earthly realm of the living to the netherworld.

However, this movement soon came to be expressed as a twofold path, with the headboard pointing to earthly life. It is plausible that this orientation, associated with Osirian scenes in the Classical Scheme – Layouts B and C, refers to the justified identity of the deceased, reflecting their behaviour during their earthly life. Consequently, the deceased faces the headboard as though confronting their own earthly life.

344 Niwiński 2019.

The lower section consistently depicts the deceased provided with an agency that allows them to engage in ritual activities and establish direct contact not only with Osiris and the gods of the necropolis, but also with the sun god, in his various manifestations, including that of a primeval deity. Together, these scenes compose a sacred topography of the necropolis. The selection of scenes is highly variable from coffin to coffin, combining solar and Osirian references in a variety of ways: from a balanced use of both to the exclusive dominance of one, usually the Osirian element. Although anchored in the imagery of the Book of the Dead, these coffins cannot be regarded as functioning as such. The key reason lies in the selection of the subjects themselves: the repertoire of scenes on these coffins omits a vast array of Book of the Dead imagery, such as the Fields of Iaru (Chapters 110, 109, 149), the mounds (Chapter 149), the gates of the underworld, [345] and the dangerous animals that inhabit the netherworld (Chapters 7, 31-7, 39 and 40).

The scenes displayed along the lower section may function as symbolic references to actual shrines in the necropolis. If this interpretation holds, the iconographic programme of the classical scheme allows for the reconstruction of the following sacred topography:

- Solar shrine. This is associated with both Osirian resurrection and the victory over Apophis described in Chapter 39. There is also reference to the cult of Re as a primeval deity.
- Osirian temple. Numerous depictions reference Osirian cults, potentially dispersed throughout the necropolis or concentrated within a specific sacred precinct. These cults can be identified as follows:
  - Osirian Triad. This is a funerary triad composed of Osiris, Isis and Horus, all depicted in mummiform guise over a coiled serpent, which cannot be confused with Apophis and appears to play a positive, protective role.
  - Sons of Horus. Arranged in groups of four, these deities are displayed enthroned or squatting on standards, depicted as if housed within a shrine.

345 Taylor 2010, 138.

- Osirian sacred objects: the Ta-wer totem, *sekhem*-sceptre, the Djed-pillar are repeatedly quoted along the vignettes of the coffins, and can easily be linked to sacred objects receiving cultic worship in Osirian temples.
- Judgement Hall. Represented by the weighing of the heart scene, as this may suggest an Osirian shrine specifically related to the judgement of the dead imagery. While there is no direct evidence of such a shrine, the Ptolemaic temple of Hathor, in Deir el-Medina, despite its later dating, may indicate a local tradition. The focal point of these scenes is the throne of Osiris, even when depicted alone, which likely references this shrine.

– Sacred tree cult. Illustrating the association with a mother goddess, these vignettes are clear references to a necropolis-based cult likely connected to Hathor, mentioned below.
– Mountain shrine of Hathor. Vignettes featuring the sacred cow of Hathor explicitly reference the cult of the goddess and its connection to the mountain. Archaeological evidence confirms the existence of numerous Hathoric shrines carved in the mountain, reflecting the relationship between the king and the divine mother venerated in the local cult.[346] The most prominent examples of such shrines are found in the main temples of the Deir el-Bahari area, notably the Hathoric sacred caves built by Hatshepsut in her Temple of Millions of Years[347] and the Hathoric shrine of Thutmose III. The latter, in particular, offers a literal depiction of a sanctuary carved in the mountain, where the image of the cow may have been periodically dragged outside, as depicted in the vignettes. This shrine may also be linked to other Hathoric mountain shrines located along the Theban cliffs. During the 18th Dynasty, this subject was transformed into a private votive context, with the representation of the cult statue of the goddess becoming more stylized, representing her as a 'divine emanation'.[348]

346 Liptay 2014, 74.
347 This is also the interpretation provided by Niwiński (2019:64).
348 Liptay 2014, 74.

The resurrection of Osiris is curiously absent from this repertoire. The subject, however, is approached in the solar scenes showing the solar barque navigating above the crypt of Osiris, which may once again provide a clue suggesting the location of the solar shrine within the precinct of Osiris.

The dynamic flow depicted in the lower section converges towards the footboard, which is now imbued with significant liminal symbolism. It marks the passage to the realm of the beyond, which is metaphorically represented by the interior of the box. This liminality is expressed through the identification of the foot end of the long sides with the Theban Mountain, e.g., the horizon where the sun sets to be regenerated and reborn. This passage is protected by the goddess Hathor, who appears either in bovine form, representing her cult in the necropolis, or as a sacred tree, symbolising her embodiment as Nut, the cosmic mother goddess who provides rebirth. Within the mountain, represented by the interior of the box, the deceased is held by the cosmic goddess, entering her womb to be reborn. The liminal significance of the scene is emphasised by depicting the goddess's partial concealment by the mountain slope, alluding to the transition from earthly to otherworldly realms.[349]

While the upper and lower sections generally employ distinct repertoires, exceptions frequently occur. As in the papyri of the Book of the Dead, there is no single path or ultimate goal; the scenes can be assembled in varied configurations.[350] However, the final destination of this journey consistently converges on the mountain shrine of Hathor.

Once this new repertoire was integrated into coffin decoration, the basic scheme layout rapidly declined, reflecting the considerable interest generated by this new imagery. The richness of the classical theme's new decorative patterns demonstrates the vitality of the Theban priestly community during the 21st Dynasty and its close collaboration with coffin painters. The strong affinity between coffin imagery and that of funerary papyri is evident. While rooted in Theban tomb decoration traditions, the repertoire used in the classical scheme reflects a reinvention likely linked to the production of funerary papyri.

349 Liptay 2014, 73.
350 Taylor 2010, 238.

3. Complex scheme

In terms of iconography, the most notable feature of the complex scheme is the predominant use of Osirian and/or netherworld deities, a feature we label as 'osirification' of coffin decoration.[351] This osirification is accompanied by changes in style and composition. The style becomes increasingly impersonal, standardised and schematic, with human figures crudely sketched and often lacking anatomical details. Regarding the depiction of human figures, the white festive garments traditionally worn by the deceased in the basic and classical schemes are no longer represented. Instead, women are clad in long, dark blue dresses with exposed breasts, while men are portrayed in divine garments (corselet and short kilt), predominantly green. Additionally, certain groups of coffins display an increasing use of liminal elements in the vignettes on the box.

The complex scheme reflects a profound redefinition of the decorative space, particularly on the exterior walls of the box. The well-established layout of the basic and classical schemes, with the long sides carefully divided in upper and lower sections, is now challenged. For the first time, these areas are decorated without a clear topographical division, employing one of two approaches:

- Unification of the long sides: A single vignette extends from the headboard down to the footboard.[352]
- Segmentation of the long sides: The opposite phenomenon consists of the creation of several small vignettes juxtaposed along the sides in a linear arrangement, disregarding the distinction between upper and lower sections.[353]

This change, however, is progressive and it is common to find a variety of layouts within the same object. In some cases, only one long side is decorated in

351 Sousa 2018, 205.
352 Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich : outer coffin of Henuttaui. A.33: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
353 A.41: anonymous coffin. A.4: anonymous coffin. British Museum: anonymous coffin (EA 24907).

this new style, while the other retains the conventional division between upper and lower sections.

Headboard

The complex scheme introduces a variety of changes to the layout of the headboard, both in terms of iconography and composition, particularly on the side panels, where symmetry is no longer the norm. The central panel remains somewhat more conservative, but even here, there is evidence of a marked departure from earlier patterns. In most cases, the headboard's composition is no longer designed as a unit, and its several tableaux are composed independently.

As we approach the late 21st Dynasty, the redefinition of space results in the complete absence of the side panels in some cases. Similarly, the central panel becomes increasingly sketchier,[354] and by the end of the 21st Dynasty, it may even disappear entirely.[355]

Side panels

Side panels are only found in boxes that retain the traditional division of decorative spaces. Within this context, the following motifs are frequently found:

- **Enthroned mummiform gods (Osiris or Sokar)**. These are the earliest subjects introduced in the complex scheme (Fig. 3.72). They typically depict Osiris, but the falcon-headed god Sokar also appears regularly.[356] It is not uncommon to find these vignettes used in conjunction with fully avian depictions of Sokar.[357] Occasionally, Osiris is shown wearing the Heb Sed robe (Fig. 3.72).[358] The vignette may simply feature the enthroned god alone or accompanied by various entities:

354 A.128: anonymous coffin. A.10: outer coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.12: coffin of Nesipanebimakh.
355 A.4: anonymous coffin. A.40: inner coffin of Bakenmut. A.unknown: inner coffin of Takhybtiat. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Tabakenkhonsu.
356 A.15: anonymous outer coffin. A.unknown: outer coffin of Ikhy.
357 A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: anonymous coffin. A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun.
358 A.149: anonymous inner coffin.

- The deceased, either performing rites before this deity (Fig. 3.72) or one of his sacred objects (Fig. 3.74),[359]or shown in mummiform guise.[360]
- A goddess conducting rituals before the enthroned god.[361]
- A mummiform god of the netherworld, often serpent-headed.

– **Mummiform deities of the netherworld**. These deities, typically serpent-headed, may also feature baboon-heads or even the Sons of Horus.[362]

– **Guardian deities of the Amduat**. These vignettes are characterised by animal-headed deities, never shown in mummiform guise, holding an elongated serpent. This motif evokes the deities of the royal compositions of the Book of Gates (Fig. 3.73). The deceased is often shown before these deities, performing offerings.[363]

– **Solar scenes**. These scenes are rare and highly irregular, lacking consistent patterns. Some scenes are borrowed from the Amduat compositions, showing the solar barque and the divine oarsmen.[364] Simpler designs may feature a winged scarab greeted by flocks of *ba*-birds,[365] while more elaborate compositions include the sun disc, the monogram of the Theban necropolis (a falcon perched on the pole of the West), adored by baboons and *ba*-birds.[366] All these scenes allude to the sunrise.

Despite the different subjects observed on the side panels, these compositions identify the headboard with the boundary of the netherworld.

359 A.54: anonymous inner coffin.
360 A.unknown: coffin of Takhybtiat.
361 A.149: anonymous inner coffin. A.44: outer coffin of Tjenetehenef.
362 A.96: inner coffin of Nesitawadjatakh. A.128: anonymous coffin. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden: coffin of Amenhotep. A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui. A.12: coffin of Nesipanebimakh.
363 A.58: coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.131: anonymous coffin. TT 320: coffin set of Nesikhonsu. A.126: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit.
364 Musée de Beaux Arts in Grenoble: coffin fragment of Tanakhtentahat.
365 A.7: anonymous coffin.
366 A.10: coffin set of Tabaekkhonsu.

This idea is expressed through increasingly explicit allusions to the deities of the Amduat.

Central panel

Even when the side panels disappear, the central panel of the headboard is typically preserved. In these cases, the composition of the headboard is confined to the central panel.[367] Despite the significant changes affecting the decorative programme of the box, the layout of the central panel remains relatively stable. The following motifs, established since the introduction of the yellow type, are commonly found in this group:

- **Tjet-knot** flanked by mummiform figures and liminal elements.[368] Rarely, the central motif is flanked by other Tjet-signs.
- **Djed-pillar** flanked by mummiform deities,[369] or Tjet-signs.[370]
- **Goddess** flanked by Tjet-signs, or mummiform gods,[371] with some of them displaying conspicuous features borrowed from the imagery of the Book of the Amduat.
- **Solar scenes.** Particularly in later coffins lacking side panels, compositions on the central panel may present exceptional features, often with solar significance. These solar motifs demonstrate that solar scenes became increasingly explicit in their association with the imagery of the royal compositions of the Book of the Amduat. Examples include:
  - Tjet-sign surmounted by the solar disc (Fig. 3.75).[372]
  - Djed-pillar surmounted by the solar disc (Fig. 3.76).[373]

367 A.15: anonymous inner coffin. A.3: coffin of Pairusekher. A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
368 A.15: anonymous outer coffin. A.unknown: outer coffin of Ikhy.
369 Vatican Museums: anonymous coffin.
370 A.71: coffin of Meritamun.
371 A.58: coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
372 A.131: anonymous inner coffin.
373 A.126: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit. A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub.

- Anthropomorphised Djed-pillar surmounted by the solar barque (Fig. 3.77). This motif appears to have evolved from the depiction of the sun disc over the sacred pillar.[374]
- Solar barque.[375]
- Allusions to the Book of the Amduat. Although rare, the use of a *netjer*-sign combined with the solar disc is a quotation from the 10th Hour of the Book of the Amduat (Fig. 3.78).[376]

Running parallel to these major innovations is a trend towards very sketchy compositions on the headboard.[377] Moreover, this panel may be left unfinished or even entirely undecorated.[378] The unfinished nature of these compositions is particularly striking, and does not appear to be accidental. Another interesting fact, likely related to the above, is the increasing number of heavily eroded compositions in this specific area. Evidence suggests that liquids were poured over this part of the coffin, likely in a ritual context.[379] These factors indicate that a new ritual use of the box emerged during the late 21st Dynasty.



Fig. 3.72. Headboard (side panels). Anonymous inner coffin (A.149)

374 A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare.
375 A.15: anonymous inner coffin.
376 A.133: inner coffin of Heretenureb.
377 A.41: anonymous coffin. A.56: anonymous outer coffin.
378 A.4: anonymous coffin. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Tabakenkhonsu. A.unknown: coffin of Takhybtiat. A.40: inner coffin of Bakenmut.
379 A.33: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.

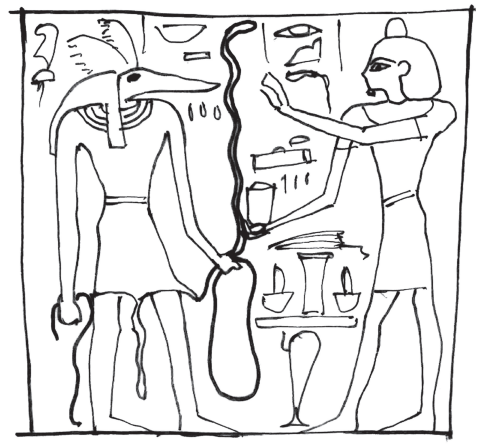


Fig. 3.73. Headboard (right side panel). Anonymous inner coffin (A.131).



Fig. 3.74. Headboard (central panel and side panels). Coffin of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

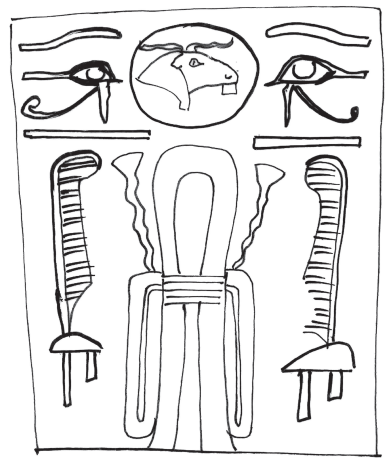


Fig. 3.75. Headboard (central panel). Anonymous inner coffin (A.131).

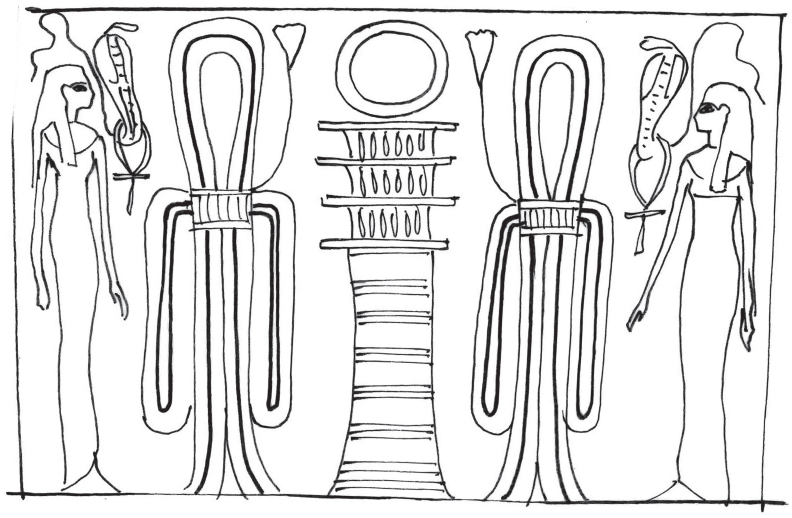


Fig. 3.76. Headboard (central panel). Outer coffin of Asetemakhbit (A.126).

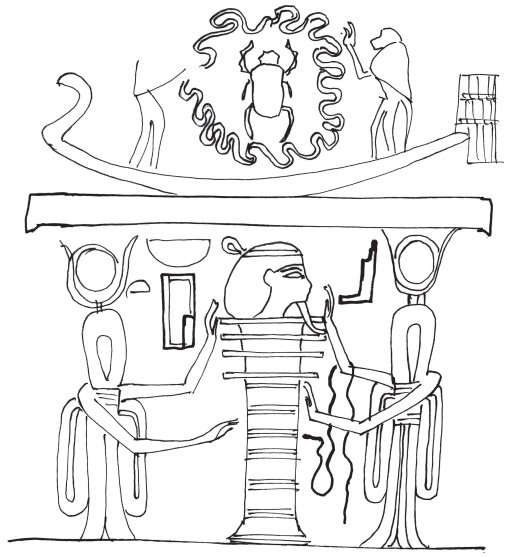


Fig. 3.77. Headboard (central panel). Outer coffin of Maatkare (A.132)

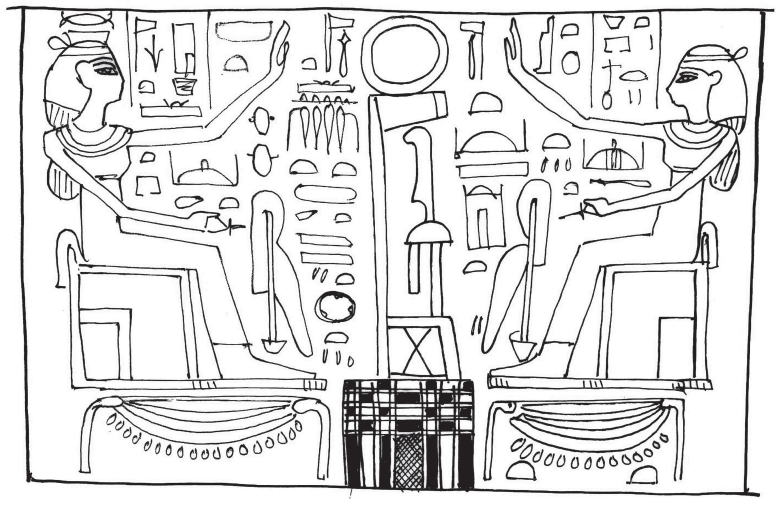


Fig. 3.78. Headboard (central panel). Inner coffin of Heretenureb (A.133).

Upper Section

In this analysis, we will first examine the objects that adhere to the conventional division between the upper and lower sections before moving to the new arrangements, where the long sides are fully decorated as a single composition.

The rich imagery used in the classical scheme's upper section is replaced in the complex scheme by monotonous scenes, most of which have Osirian significance.

These scenes can be categorised as follows:

1. Symmetrical scene with Osiris

In the complex scheme, the most frequently displayed scene in the upper section consists of a symmetrical depiction of Osiris (Fig. 3.79). Contrasting with the diverse repertoire of the classical scheme, these vignettes exhibit highly uniform compositions with minimal variation. These scenes portray a sacred shrine depicted symmetrically, [380] designed as a throne room where Osiris is presented as the king of the netherworld. The throne is typically positioned on a *neb*-basket or a *heb*-bowl.[381]

The nuclear element of the symmetrical composition is composed of the following elements:

- *Sekhem*-sceptre (Figs. 3.79-81)[382] or the Ta-wer totem.[383] These sacred objects symbolise Osiris's dominion over the realm of the dead.
- Columns or inscriptions. Frequently, these scenes feature Osiris within shrines set on a platform. The centre of these compositions is dominated by the column(s) of these shrines.[384] The layout closely resembles temple decoration, an effect further enhanced by the addition of hieroglyphs along the axis of the composition.[385]

380 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Tabakenkhonsu.
381 A.110: coffin of Shedsutauepet.
382 A.110: coffin of Shedsutauepet.
383 A.60: anonymous outer coffin. A.33: outer coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
384 A.126: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit. A.91: outer coffin of Tadimut.
385 A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.51: outer coffin of Ankhfenamun.

The main focus of these scenes is Osiris himself, who is featured enthroned or standing, sometimes accompanied by a goddess. As a rule, the deity is portrayed in mummiform guise, typically wearing the *hedjet*-crown, or the *atef*-crown.

Occasionally, the god is represented in a fully human form. In such vignettes, the god may wear the sun disc, combined with two ostrich feathers, reminiscent of the headdress of the primordial deity Tatenen.[386] This solar manifestation of Osiris is rare.

For the first time, the depiction of Thoth as the opener of the Gates of Heaven is entirely absent in the upper section.[387] On the other hand, the deceased is often shown performing priestly roles, giving offerings of burning incense, ointment vessels, food, or libations (Fig. 3.79).[388] Less frequently, the deceased is depicted in mummiform guise (Fig. 3.80).

The role played by the deceased tends to diminish in significance, with many scenes omitting their representation entirely. In these cases, Osiris is frequently accompanied by goddesses such as Isis, Nephthys, Selkit, and goddesses bearing the cobra monogram (possibly an embodiment of Meretseger), animal-headed goddesses of the netherworld, or divine personifications of the *ba*,[389] or the Theban Mountain.[390]

Royal Osirian scenes

A very important set of symmetrical Osirian scenes includes the depiction of explicit royal elements. This is particularly evident when Osiris, enthroned within an enclosed shrine on a high platform, is depicted with steps and decorative friezes of *djed* and *tjet*-signs (Fig. 3.82).[391] Sometimes a winged sun disc is shown above the Osirian shrine. This display is clearly modelled on royal archetypes, recalling the representation of the king on the double throne of

386 A.44: outer coffin of Tjenetehenef.
387 The depiction of Thoth is exceptional. In the inner coffin of Padiuamun (A.24) Thoth is depicted alongside Horus, to complete the symmetrical arrangement.
388 A.unknown: coffin of Takhybtiat. A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub.
389 A.10: outer coffin of Tabaekkhonsu.
390 A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu.
391 A.126: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub. A.102: outer coffin of Haes.

Egypt. It resembles Heb Sed scenes where two thrones under royal pavilions are placed back-to-back,[392] allowing Pharaoh to manifest himself as king of Upper and Lower Egypt.[393]

The grandeur of the scene is further enhanced by the inclusion of the royal *serekh*,[394] or the royal cartouches rising from the *sema-tawy* motif (Fig. 3.83).[395] Once again, these motifs are inspired by temple iconography. Osiris himself may wear the double crown.[396]

Royal imagery is also enhanced in a small group of vignettes, where Osiris is depicted wearing the ritual robe typically used by the king during the Heb Sed. These symmetrical representations typically show Osiris standing in this large, dark garment,[397] protected by goddesses and receiving offerings from the deceased.

A few exceptional vignettes subtly integrate royal motifs into the traditional Osirian framework. In some cases, the symmetrical representation of the throne of Osiris includes elements of the Heb Sed ritual, such as the King's ceremonial race.[398] These compositions sometimes echo the visual rhetoric of royal scenes, showing the king wearing the double crown, holding a long paddle and a libation vessel.[399]

One particularly unique example is found in the anonymous inner box of A.131. Here, the central motif is a nymphaea sceptre being anointed by the deceased.[400] On one side, the deceased escorts the god Osiris, who is shown wearing the large ritual robe of the Heb Sed. Scenes of this nature, which depict Osiris in the Heb Sed garment, are deeply cryptic, reinterpreting royal iconography through the lens of Osirian resurrection. This theme will be revisited when discussing the scenes of the lower section.

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392 A.6: outer coffin of Nesitanebettaui.
393 Frankfort 1978, 85.
394 A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu.
395 A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu.
396 A.91: outer coffin of Tadimut.
397 A.54: outer anonymous coffin. A.132: inner coffin of Maatkare. A.149: anonymous inner coffin. A.131: anonymous inner coffin.
398 This race was performed in a sacred precinct dedicated to the gods, where the king crossed the piece of land both lengthwise and breadthwise in a manner akin to a fast walk. Frankfort 1978, 85.
399 The exceptional character of this royal scene is conveyed by its size, which is twice as long as its usual dimensions. A.24: outer coffin of Padiamun.
400 A.131: anonymous inner coffin.

2. Symmetrical scenes with other deities

Far less common than the Osirian vignettes, these tableaux often complement the Osirian compositions, maintaining an identical symmetrical structure. The most frequently depicted deity is Ptah-Sokar, portrayed as a falcon-headed mummiform god (Figs. 3.84-85).[401] Serpent-headed mummiform deities may also appear sporadically in this context.[402] As with the Osirian scenes, these vignettes often include the deceased in priestly roles.

Another rare occurrence features an enthroned goddess bearing the monogram of a sacred cobra and labelled as Isis, likely in her manifestation as Meretseger.[403]

3. Solar scenes

These scenes appear to have evolved from the solar imagery in the Geb and Nut vignette used in the repertoire of the classical scheme. The following variations are observed:

- Sun disc rising from the solar barque and greeted by baboons and a flock of *ba*-birds (Fig. 3.86).[404]
- Winged scarab. The god may rise from a *neb*-basket[405] or, more frequently, from the sky triumphing over Apophis, depicted as a coiled serpent immobilised by knives.[406]
- Solar god navigating the sky.[407] The solar god may be shown as a falcon-headed deity, a fully human figure, or a ram-headed god,[408] echoing the iconography of the Book of the Amduat. The sacred barque is

401 A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Hori. A.12: coffin of Nesipanebimakh. A.143: inner coffin of Hori.
402 Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon: coffin of Padikhonsu.
403 A.132: inner coffin of Maatkare.
404 A.12: coffin of Nesipanebimakh.
405 A.91: inner coffin of Tadimut.
406 A.97: inner coffin of Horpeshi . A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti. A.128: anonymous coffin.
407 A.47: coffin of Khonsuiri.
408 A.71: coffin of Meritamun.

occasionally pulled by jackals[409] and flocks of *ba*-birds,[410] referencing the Book of the Night[411] and the Book of the Gates,[412] respectively.

– Osiris navigating the solar barque (Fig. 3.87).[413] In these unusual vignettes, Osiris awkwardly replaces the solar god in the solar barque. The deity is escorted by the deities of the netherworld who pull the barque, as seen in the Book of the Amduat.[414]

The involvement of the deceased in solar scenes is far less significant than in the Osirian vignettes: either they are entirely omitted or depicted in a passive role, merely witnessing to the sun god's passage. Moreover, solar scenes tend to be more frequently associated with the avian representation of the deceased, such as the *ba*-bird,[415] rather than their fully human manifestation. This contrasts sharply with the active role of the deceased in Osirian scenes, where they are typically shown engaging in ritual activities.

All these scenes reveal an abundant use of liminal elements, ritual objects, and ornamental hieroglyphs. Solar compositions are crafted to enhance their resemblance to the esoteric depictions of the Amduat painted on the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings.

As mentioned earlier, the depiction of Thoth as the opener of the Gates of Heaven, once common in the basic and classical schemes, is now entirely absent from the decoration of the upper section. This omission suggests a shift in the symbolic meaning of this area. It is no longer associated with the idea of passage, whether to the interior of the coffin (as in the basic scheme) or to the transcendent dimensions of space (as in the classical scheme). The upper section is now defined as the netherworld itself, specifically identified with the throne room of Osiris, where he is acclaimed as the king of the netherworld. On a limited number of coffins, the upper section is associated with the movement of the solar barque

409 A.6: outer box of Nesitanebettaui.
410 A.140: outer coffin of Ankhefenmut.
411 Twelfth Hour (Hornung 1999, 134).
412 Ninth Hour (Hornung 1999, 74).
413 A.48: inner coffin of Nesimut. A.61: inner coffin of Pinedjem. A.71: coffin of Meritamun.
414 Osirian barque scenes can be seen in Ramesside tomb decoration: Tomb TT 2 (Bruyère 1052, Pl. III).
415 A.71: coffin of Meritamun.

through the underworld. However, unlike the scenes of Geb and Nut, which illustrate the daily circuit of the sun god, these solar scenes are clearly allusive to the nightly journey of the sun. In some vignettes, the navigation of the solar barque is re-interpreted for Osiris, who often replaces the sun-god in his nightly journey. These scenes clearly document the phenomenon of the solarisation of Osiris, which should not be confused with the solar-Osirian union. The latter is the focus of royal compositions such as the Book of the Amduat or the Book of Gates, where the identities of Re and Osiris remain distinct. On the contrary, in the solarisation of Osiris, his identification with the sun god blurs the distinctions between their identities. Such representations are deeply embedded in esoteric knowledge, much of which remains elusive and difficult to fully comprehend today.



Fig. 3.79. Upper section: Osirian symmetrical scene. Coffin of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

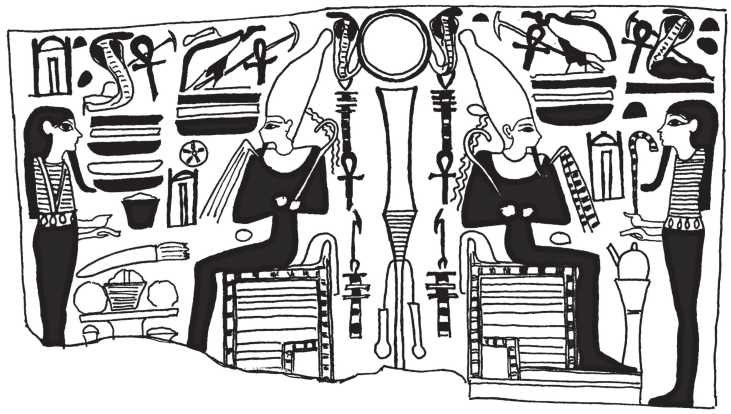


Fig. 3.80. Upper section: Osirian symmetrical scene. Inner coffin of Henuttatui (A.136).

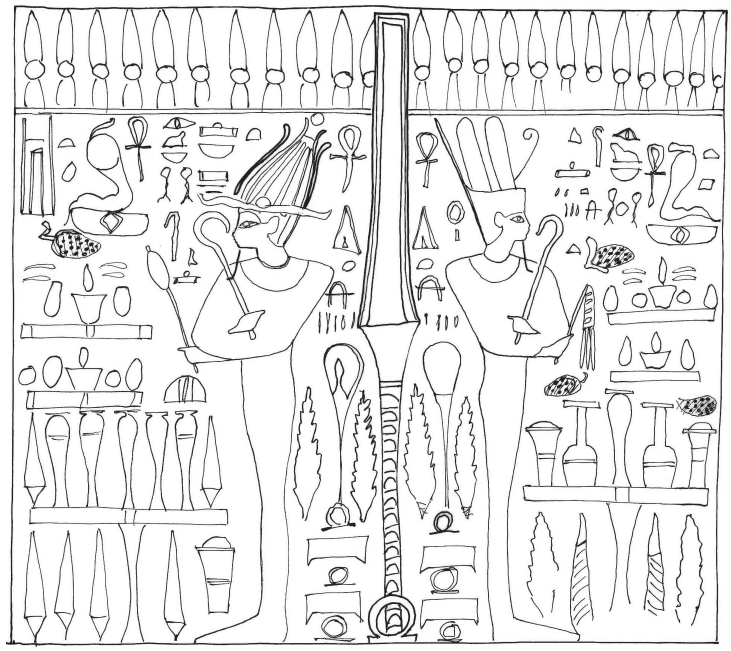


Fig. 3.81. Upper section: Osirian symmetrical scene. Outer coffin (Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne in Marseille)

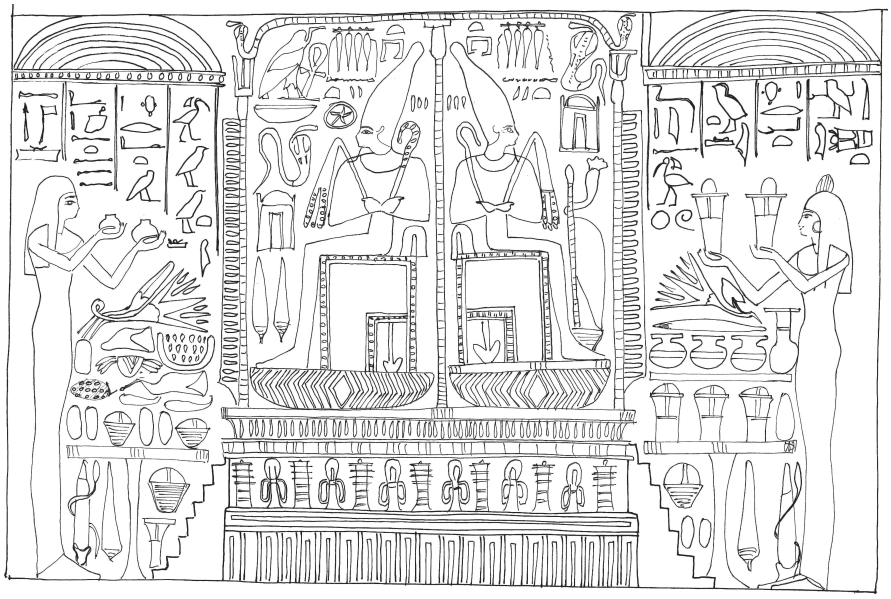


Fig. 3.82. Upper section: Osirian symmetrical scene. Outer coffin of Asetemakhbit (A.126)



Fig. 3.83. Upper section: Osirian symmetrical scene. Inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu (A.10)



Fig. 3.84. Upper section: Symmetrical scene with a falcon-headed god. Coffin of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

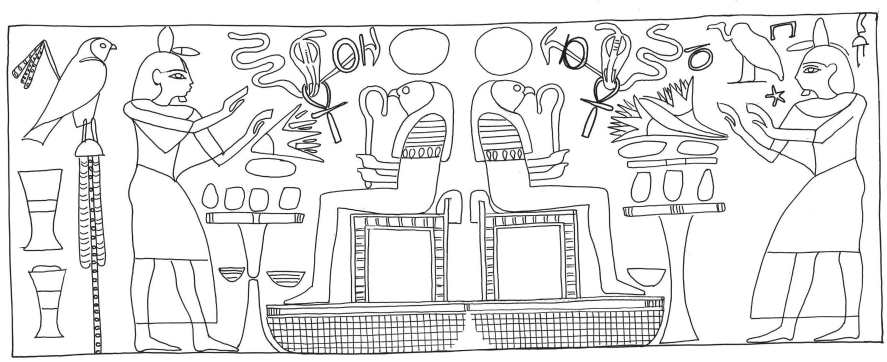


Fig. 3.85. Upper section: Symmetrical scene with a falcon-headed god. Coffin of Nesipanebimakh (A.12)

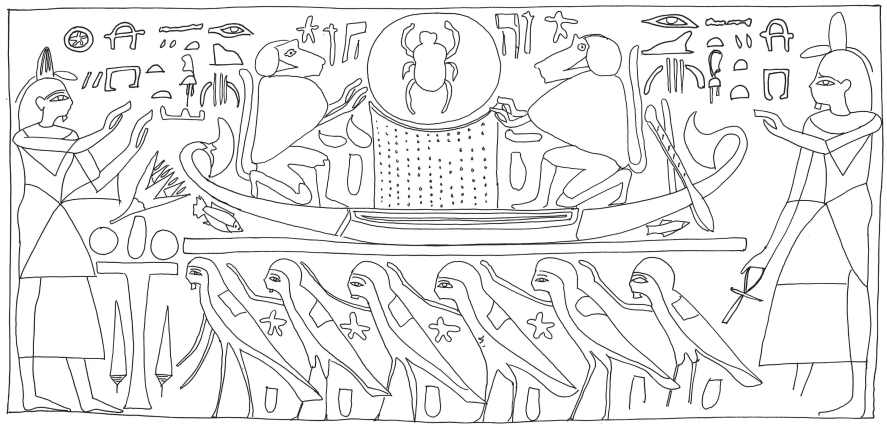


Fig. 3.86. Upper section: Solar barque scene with Amduat motifs. Coffin of Nesipanebimakh (A.12)

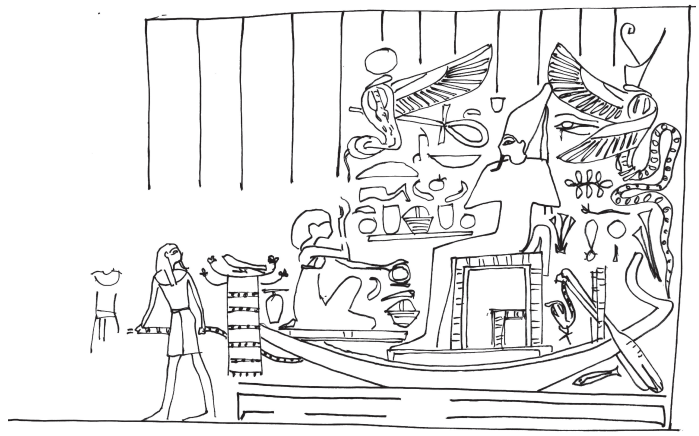


Fig. 3.87. Upper section: Solar scene with Osirian significance. Inner coffin of Nesimut (A.48).

Lower section

In the complex scheme, the lower section becomes the focus of the most significant innovations in coffin decoration. The layout of this section is heavily influenced by the kind of ritual activity being depicted. Regarding the subjects illustrated on the exterior walls of the coffin, two main groups of coffin production can be observed:

1. Corpus A: scenes with mummiform deities

This group is characterised by its preference for small vignettes featuring a repetitive repertoire typically depicting a mummiform god and making extensive use of liminal elements (Fig. 3.88). In this corpus, the vignettes are small and are bound together by columns of text. These texts are also highly repetitive and frequently incomplete. Three stages can be identified in the evolution of this layout:

1. In the earliest objects, dating to the early third quarter of the 21st Dynasty, the classical scheme is maintained, retaining its traditional scenes and vignettes. However, a preference for mummiform gods emerges. The style and arrangement of the scenes become increasingly schematic.[416]
2. During the second stage, the rich repertoire of the lower section used in the classical scheme is eventually replaced by a monotonous decorative scheme focused exclusively on the depiction of mummiform gods.[417] Occasionally, a single vignette from the classical scheme is retained as a reminder of the earlier repertoire.
3. During the third stage, the role of the liminal elements increases. By the late 21st Dynasty, liminal elements become the primary focus of these vignettes. At this stage, the vignettes may depict nothing more

416 A.54: anonymous coffin. A.66: inner coffin of Isety. Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon: coffin of Padikhonsu.
417 A.110: coffin of Shedsutauepet. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Tabakenkhonsu. Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Hori. A.27: anonymous coffin. Museo Egizio in Turin: anonymous coffin. A.140: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Tabakenkhonsu. A.7: coffin set of Ankhesenmut. A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti. A.128: anonymous coffin. A.91: inner coffin of Tadimut.

than Tjet and Djed-signs, compositions of liminal elements, or mummiform deities arranged without any apparent order.[418] In this process, the traditional division between the upper and lower section fades, and the vignettes are displayed uniformly along the long sides, as if it had become a linear surface (Fig. 3.89).[419] This stage marks the end of the 21st Dynasty and continues into the early 22nd Dynasty.

Typically, mummiform deities are depicted in individual vignettes, each positioned beneath a vaulted ceiling. This vaulted ceiling always alludes to a *shetyt*-shrine, thereby associating the coffin with such shrine. Although these mummiform deities are anonymous, they can be quite diverse in form. They may appear fully human, but more commonly, they are animal-headed, displaying features typically found in the Litany of Re or the Book of the Amduat. The vast repertoire of heads used in these compositions includes serpents, flames, mice, rabbits, vultures, feathers, and even composite forms, such as a sun disc with two serpents rising from a headless mummiform deity (Fig. 3.88).[420] The Sons of Horus, the only deities explicitly named in these compositions, are also depicted in mummiform guise.[421]

Occasionally, the deceased appears in mummiform guise, standing before a deity. However, the ritual role of the deceased is significantly diminished in this scheme, as their mummiform manifestation is essentially passive.[422] A goddess, occasionally named as Nut, may instead be shown as a ritual performer (Fig. 3.88).[423] This trend is further intensified with the complete omission of the deceased.

The resulting layout of these monothematic scenes is monotonous and highly repetitive, which is further intensified by the exact replication of the same layout on both long sides of the box.[424] This extensive standardisation in

418 British Museum: anonymous coffin (EA 24907). A.4: anonymous coffin.
419 A.41: anonymous coffin. A.97: coffin of Horpeshi.
420 A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Tabakenkhonsu.
421 A.128: anonymous coffin.
422 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin of Hori. Museo Egizio in Turin: anonymous coffin.
423 A.110: coffin of Djedmutiuesankh.
424 A.7: coffin set of Ankhesenmut.



Fig. 3.88. Lower section: Symmetrical scene with a falcon-headed god. Coffin of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

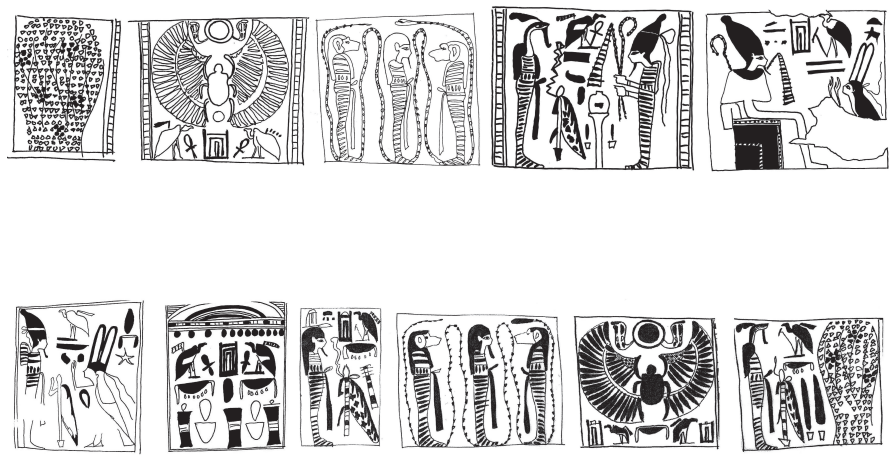


Fig. 3.89. Long sides. Anonymous coffin (A.4).

the coffin decoration superbly illustrates the impact of the osirification of coffin decoration during the second half of the 21st Dynasty.

2. Corpus B: royal mortuary scenes

Running parallel to the trend described above, another movement within coffin decoration is characterised by a diminished focus on liminal elements and an emphasis on inscriptions. In this corpus, the space between the main figures is filled with columns of inscriptions.

Unlike the coffins of Corpus A, where vignettes are small, those in Corpus B are significantly larger, often covering the entire lower section or even the full length of the long sides. This expansive design renders the accompanying columns of text somewhat redundant. Nevertheless, inscriptions are abundantly used to fill the background of the vignettes. The textual repertoire in Corpus B is far richer, more diverse, and more consistent compared to that of Corpus A.

A key distinction from Corpus A is the active role of the deceased, who is here depicted actively engaged in a variety of ritual contexts. The resulting layout recalls the design of temple scenes, and the topics represented show intriguing connections to the imagery of Theban royal funerary complexes from the New Kingdom. Thus, an increasing appropriation of royal funerary imagery in coffin decoration appears. However, this was a gradual process, initially drawing inspiration from the royal temples of the Theban cliffs possibly in Deir el-Bahari, later shifting to the royal funerary temples, and eventually focusing on the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings themselves.

2.1. Hathoric temple scenes

The earliest and by far the subtlest repertoire within this category consists of Hathoric temple scenes. These are so understated that they can easily go unnoticed and might simply be regarded as a later development of the classical scheme. The main difference from the latter is the drastic reduction in the number of vignettes, which may be reduced to just one or two. In this process,

the repertoire is focused on the cow-goddess (or tree goddess) depicted near the footboard, and Osiris, featured on the opposite side of the vignette.[425]

While this scheme is clearly similar to that of the classical repertoire, the difference lies mainly in style: the vignettes are much larger and exhibit a more lofty design. The deceased is shown wearing the typical dark garments of the complex scheme (Fig. 3.91). Moreover, there are notable iconographic nuances, such as the prominent role of female goddesses as ritual agents, such as Selkit and the goddess of the Theban Mountain (Fig. 3.90).[426]

The Osirian segment of the scene is often interpreted as a condensed version of the judgement scene, featuring the Ammut monster at the feet of Osiris. A striking feature of this group is the inclusion of a Bes-like figure, which may be depicted as a vulture-headed, hippopotamus-headed, or even serpent-headed deity (Fig. 3.90).[427]

Although these scenes bear a strong resemblance to their counterparts in the classical scheme, they introduce additional layers of iconography and symbolism to the primary layout of the Hathoric and tree goddess scene, resulting in highly cryptic compositions. In these compositions, the style is loose, and the composition is rather informal.

2.2. Royal temple scenes

This set of scenes distinguishes itself from the previous groups through the emphasis placed on ritual activity, which goes far beyond the simple presentation of offerings or adoration scenes. In this group, the deceased is repeatedly depicted engaging in ritual actions that are in some way related to the celebration of divine kingship. The following types of scenes are observed:

1. The deceased is involved in rituals where Osiris manifests himself with the royal attire of the Heb Sed festival. This group of scenes is unique in depicting Osiris transitioning from his passive mummiform guise

425 A.10: coffin set of Tabekkhonsu. A.26: outer coffin of Ankh-khenesu. A.44: outer coffin of Tjenetehenef. A.10: outer coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.91: outer coffin of Tadimut. A.44: outer coffin of Tjenetehenef.
426 A.44: outer coffin of Tjenetehenef.
427 A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu.

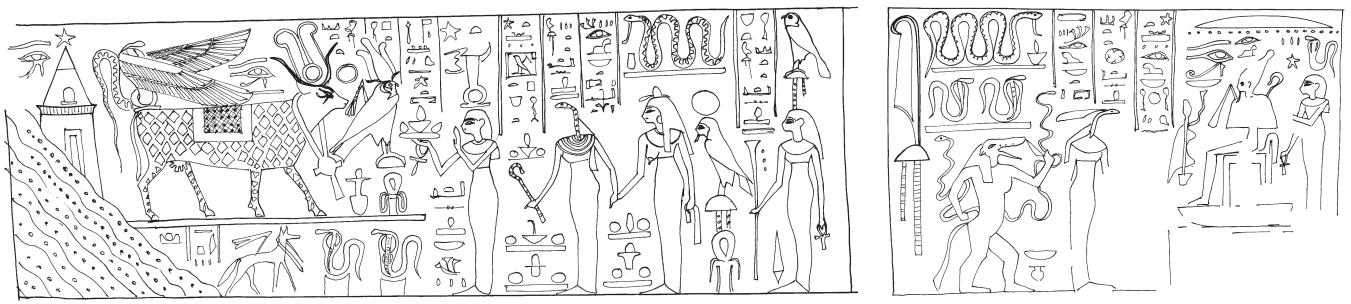


Fig. 3.90. Lower section: Cult scene. Outer coffin (Archaeological Museum in Istambul, unknown A.number)

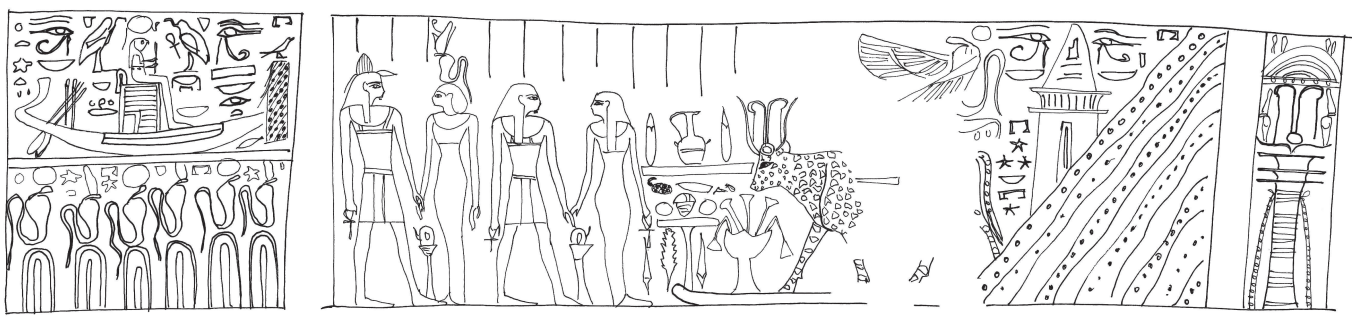


Fig. 3.91. Lower section: Cult scene. Outer coffin of Tadimut (A.91).

to his manifestation in royal attire. During this process, the deceased assists Osiris, presenting offerings such as burning incense, pouring libations, or offering ointment vessels to Osiris. These scenes are highly original, particularly within the context of coffin decoration.

2. Alongside the depiction of Osiris in the Heb Sed robe, the goddess Hathor often appears. In this context, the depiction of the sacred cow and the mountain seems intended to evoke the royal imagery of the Hathoric shrine built into the cliffs of Deir el-Bahari, both by Hatshepsut and Thutmose III.

The layout of these scenes is highly esoteric and, as such, difficult for a contemporary beholder to grasp. The central theme of these compositions is consistently the regeneration of Osiris, expressed through the imagery of royal rituals.

Each visual narrative is highly individualised, each composition must be understood as a creation in its own right. Unlike earlier scenes, which followed a generic framework, here these compositions appear to encode their own meanings. For instance, some focus on the ritual race, depicting Osiris in his long ritual robe alongside a young man, likely the deceased, running together with the sacred bull Apis, mirroring scenes from the royal jubilee (Fig. 3.92).[428]

In other coffins, the allusions to this race are integrated into a wider and far more complex ritual setting,[429] including references to the double royal throne, another central feature of the Heb Sed ritual, as well as cryptic references to the Hathoric cow and a sacred bull (Fig. 3.93). The latter references appear to concern specific sacred animals rather than generic deities. Ritual sequences in these scenes may also involve the god Khepri and the lion of the horizon, symbols of rebirth (Fig. 3.93), alongside obelisks, further alluding to temple precincts.[430] Additionally, the regalia used by Osiris, including the *hedjet*-crown, the double-feathered crown of Amun, and the *khepresh*-crown feature prominently. These

428 A.131: anonymous outer coffin.
429 A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
430 Pouring libations is also an integral part of the Heb Sed ritual. Frankfort 1978, 83.

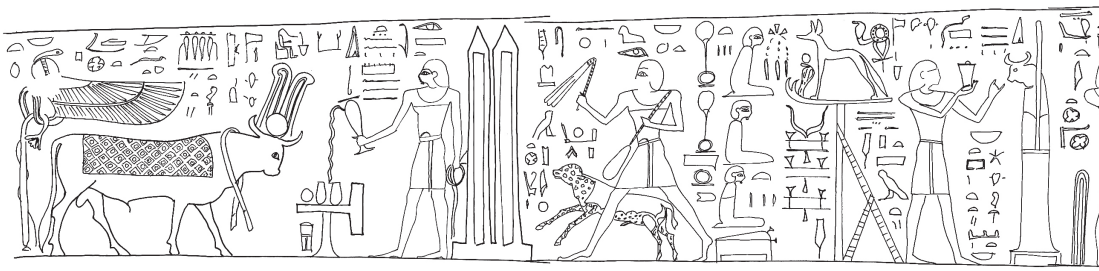


Fig. 3.92. Lower section: Royal scene. Anonymous outer coffin (A.149)

elements suggest the deceased's identification with the king as an agent of cosmic order (Fig. 3.96). The profuse use of regalia is a distinctive hallmark of the Heb Sed ceremonies.

In some cases, the decoration makes explicit references to royal temple scenes. For instance, in the anonymous inner box of A.131, Osiris, clad in the Heb Sed robe, is explicitly associated with the Hathoric shrine. He is shown approaching the divine cow, which, as usual, is depicted near the mountain, alongside a tomb embedded in it (Fig. 3.94). Alongside the goddess, a young man is portrayed squatting at her feet, symbolising the divine suckling of the king, as seen in similar representations in the temples of Deir el-Bahari. This scene explicitly connects the depiction of Osiris in Heb Sed attire with the imagery of royal initiation and regeneration by the cosmic goddess. The Hathoric shrine in Deir el-Bahari was indeed identified with Khemnis, the mythical location where Horus is transformed into a king, and where Hathor 'creates his beauty'.[431]

This example suggests that the representation of the Hathoric cow in these contexts is more closely related to royal rituals of regeneration than to the Book of the Dead.[432]

The scenes involved in this group of coffins revolve around two key royal rituals. One relates to royal initiation in Khemnis, while the other concerns the Heb Sed jubilee, traditionally associated with a ritualised death from which

431 Assman 2001, 134.
432 A similar interpretation is observed in the inner coffin of Pinedjem (A.55) where the Hathor cow is depicted alongside Osiris clad in the Heb Sed robe.



the king emerges with renewed royal powers. These rituals symbolise initiation and regeneration, contrasting phases of a king's life, and are reinterpreted here through the lens of the Osirian cult.

In this interpretation, the role of the anonymous young man in these scenes is particularly interesting. In some, he performs the ritual race with the sacred calf, while in others, he is depicted with the divine cow of Hathor. In both contexts, he appears to be identified with the deceased, embodying the regenerated form of Osiris.

The Osirian allusion to the Heb Sed thus implies a connection between the regeneration of the dead and the renewal of the king's powers, thereby conferring a royal status upon the deceased. Given this underlying association, it would not be surprising to find elaborate symbology associated with these iconographic sequences. In the inner coffin of Maatkare, for example, a rare depiction of the deceased crossing the waters of a lake in a barque is observed (Fig. 3.99).[433] This scene is situated between the sacred cow and the representation of Osiris in the Heb Sed costume, suggesting a transitional process leading to rebirth.

The same idea is implied in the anonymous inner box of A.149, which features a unique set of scenes (Fig. 3.95).[434] Here, the god Khepri crosses the lake in the solar barque, with a squatting solar child seated at the prow, alluding to the rebirth of the sun god. In the following scene, Khepri is depicted as Osiris,

433 A.132: inner coffin of Maatkare.
434 A.149: anonymous inner coffin.

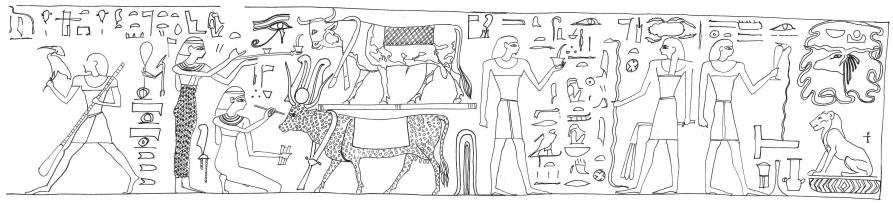


Fig. 3.93. Lower section: Royal scene. Anonymous outer coffin (A.149)

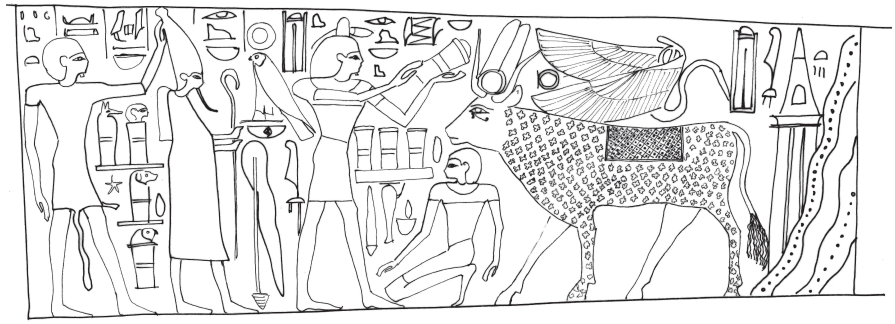


Fig. 3.94. Lower section: Royal scene. Anonymous inner coffin (A.131).

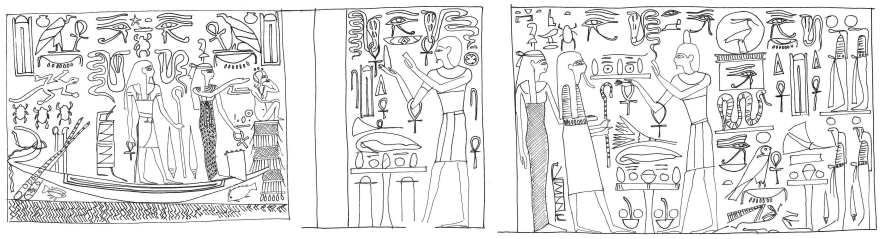


Fig. 3.95. Lower section: Royal scene. Anonymous inner coffin (A.149)

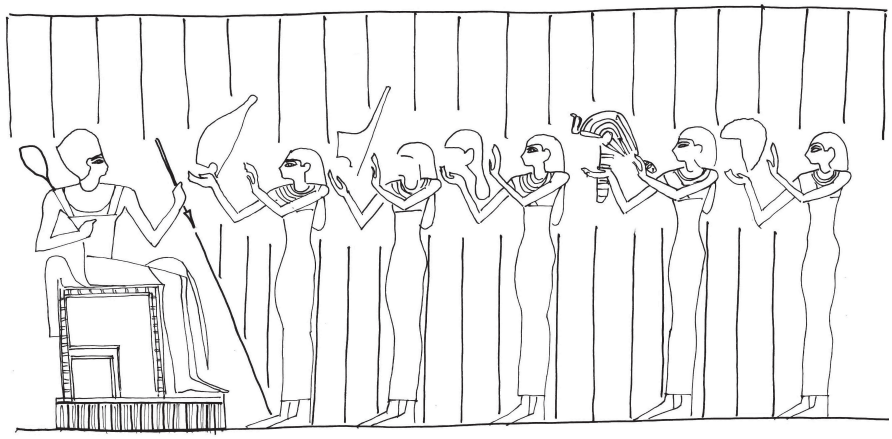


Fig. 3.96. Lower section (detail): Royal scene. Anonymous inner coffin (A.135)

wearing the Heb Sed robe, with the Benu-bird rising from a neighbouring tomb. This sequence is thus far more explicit in its esoteric reading. Implied is the idea of a regeneration that literally transforms Osiris into the rising sun. This heavily solarisation of Osiris is attested in many other scenes as it is a distinctive feature of the late 21st Dynasty. This phenomenon should not be confused with that described by Niwiński as the solar-Osirian unity, which is rooted in the royal imagery of the Amduat and in the nightly journey of the sun god, where Osiris and Re unite but keep their separate identity intact.[435]

These examples illustrate the high level of conceptual sophistication in the iconographic programmes of these compositions, even when the quality of the pictorial work itself appears relatively poor. The rough execution may suggest that such coffins were produced in workshops where the esoteric meanings of the compositions far exceeded the artistic skills of the painters. The question thus arises that in such contexts, perhaps the decoration of coffins was not carried out by mainstream professional painters involved in coffin decoration.

Another noteworthy aspect is the prevalence given to texts in these compositions, in contrast to the focus on liminal elements observed in coffins featuring mummiform gods. The profuse use of texts within the vignettes,

435 Niwiński 1987-1988.

combined with the ritual royal scenes, suggests an intentional identification of the coffin sides with temple walls. This association may explain the exclusion of professional painters from the coffin decoration process and the involvement of professional scribes instead. These scribes, who would have been priests, were surely well-versed in the funerary papyri repertoire and actively engaged in the rituals performed at the necropolis. Moreover, the rough layout observed in some coffins resembles the design of the so-called 'mythological papyri', which often display a similarly coarse style.

Regardless of the pictorial quality, these scenes established an intense association between the deceased and royal archetypes. This subtle interplay undoubtedly had a profound impact, as the explicit use of royal imagery conferred upon the deceased an implied divine status.

2.3. Funerary ritual scenes

The same tendency to use the full length of the long sides is observed in another set of scenes revolving around actual funerary rituals, such as the procession to the tomb or the Opening of the Mouth ritual. These subjects, while commonly depicted in private tomb decoration during the 18th Dynasty, were largely omitted in coffin decoration of the 21st Dynasty.

This group is characterised by several distinctive features:

– Depiction of the anthropoid coffin (Fig. 3.98): One of the most unique aspects of this group is the depiction of anthropoid coffins. Since the reign of Tutankhamun, the anthropoid coffin had vanished from pictorial traditions,[436] with the mummy itself usually depicted instead. In tomb decoration, the mummy was traditionally painted in white as though the coffins were invisible, unlike the usual conventions of the early 18th Dynasty, when the coffin was depicted with its actual features, including text bands and painted in black. This group is exceptional in depicting the actual coffin and focusing on funerary rituals rather than

436 During the reign of Akhenaten, anthropoid coffins were still depicted, but their design, intended to resemble living beings, often made them inconspicuous.

scenes of the afterlife, as most other yellow coffins do. Surprisingly, the coffin is shown again as if painted in black, a feature that does not align with the actual design of contemporary coffins. This choice appears to emphasise that the subject is indeed a coffin and not the mummy, diverging from the pictorial traditions of the yellow corpus. This detail is particularly intriguing as it provides insights into the changing colouration observed in garments, especially those worn by women, which became black during the second half of the 21st Dynasty. This shift in colour, also seen in the royal Heb Sed robes described earlier, seems to be embedded in the same root, highlighting an increasing association of coffin imagery with the underworld.

– Another reason that adds to the oddity of this group is the representation of Hathor. As mentioned above, the goddess is not shown with her mountain shrine but is instead portrayed independently, as an ordinary cow: she is featured pulling the funerary sledge (Fig. 3.97), riding on it, or being herded by the deceased alongside her calf and bull. The depiction of the bull and calf links this group to the royal temple scenes discussed earlier, where Osiris in the Heb Sed robe also appears. These associations suggest that the painters of this group of scenes were familiar with the repertoire of royal imagery described above.

This group of scenes is particularly fascinating, as many of them are unique. They often depict the funerary cortège in great detail. For instance, some scenes show a funerary tent concealing the coffin, which is pulled on a sledge by a group of men and cows.[437] These scenes include quite realistic elements. In the coffin in Brussels, the funerary vehicle carries two men dressed in leopard skins, one priest reads from a papyrus while walking ahead of the vehicle, and another pours water on the ground to make it slide better. Following the procession, four men carrying oars play an ambiguous role. They could represent the divine oarsmen depicted in the 12th Hour of the Amduat, [438] or they might symbolise

437 A.54: anonymous outer coffin.
438 Araújo Duarte 2014, 85.

the ritual oars that were positioned in the burial chamber around the coffin, as discovered in the tomb of Tutankhamun. In either case, the divine oars allude to mythological themes associated with the burial chamber occasionally depicted in mythological papyri in allusions to the regeneration process that takes place within it (Fig. 5.6).

This otherworldly atmosphere is further intensified by the inclusion of unusual details within what appears to be a conventional burial scene. In the same coffin, the bovine form of Hathor is incorporated into an ordinary group of cows, and a man wearing a red Heb Sed robe is shown preceding the vehicle.

In the anonymous outer coffin housed at the Musée d'Ethnographie in Neuchâtel (A.54), the funerary vehicle is pulled by the bovine form of Hathor. Alongside the enigmatic man clad in the Heb Sed robe, the procession is formed by men carrying the divine standards described in the Heb Sed ritual (Fig. 3.97).[439]

The inclusion of these 'odd' details is clearly purposeful. As Cássio Araújo Duarte suggests, the funerary processions scenes appear to establish an identification with the divine cortège of the Amduat, blurring the distinction between the earthly realm and the Duat.[440]

However, even when the oddity of the composition appears to be minimised, these scenes stand out for their striking allure. In the outer box of A.135, a straightforward funerary cortège is depicted (Fig. 3.98).[441] Here, the anthropoid coffin is carried on the shoulders of five men, their vivid postures conveying the effort involved in the task. The cortège again includes two men dressed in leopard skins, as well as the enigmatic man clad in a red Heb Sed robe and holding royal sceptres (he is here oddly labelled as Pa-sedjem-ash, 'He who listens to the call', the well-known title held by the pharaoh's workers from Deir el-Medina). Leading this male group is a flute-player, depicted looking backwards. At the forefront of the cortège is a large group of twelve women dressed in black and green, a colour scheme reminiscent of the group of goddesses in the 12th Hour of the Book of the Amduat. These women are divided into three distinct groups:

439 The divine standards are incorporated into the opening ceremonies of the Heb Sed, where they are carried ahead of the king. Frankfort 1978, 82-83.
440 Araújo Duarte 2014, 89-90.
441 A.135: Egyptian Museum in Cairo (No JE number).

the first four bear offerings, which are beautifully but unrealistically arranged with ducks hanging from long papyrus bundles. The next four are mourners, and the final group holds cups of burning incense. The scene is completed by a priest performing a ritual before a pile of offerings. Although there is no explicit reference to the Amduat repertoire, the linear arrangement of the scene and the sequence of different groups strongly evoke the layout of the last hour of the Amduat. The underlying intention seems to be to identify the coffin with the solar barque, reinforcing the idea of the deceased's rebirth.[442]

We cannot detail all the subtleties encoded in such compositions here, but certain motifs stand out for their striking contrast with the traditional repertoire of the yellow corpus. Such is the case of the inner box housed at the Gregorian Museum in the Vatican (Inv. N. 25021), showing a rare mourning scene and an even more unusual depiction of the deceased's relatives playing the *senet*-game, an unprecedented scene in the yellow corpus. The use of this motif is particularly ambiguous as it alludes to Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead, which symbolises the deceased's passage from this world to the next.[443] However, in such cases, the deceased's family is never depicted. Notably, in this group, the deceased is occasionally represented as a couple, an abnormal and extremely odd circumstance in the yellow corpus.

Again, these strange scenes seem deliberately inserted into the composition of this box to highlight its unconventional nature. This impression is further emphasised by adding innovative ritual scenes, such as showing a priest leaning at the feet of a cow-headed tree goddess, or kneeling before a sacred bovine triad consisting of a bull, Hathor and their calf. The otherworldly atmosphere is



Fig. 3.97. Lower section: Funerary scene. Anonymous outer coffin (A.54)

442 Araújo Duarte 2014, 89-90.
443 Taylor 2010, 157.

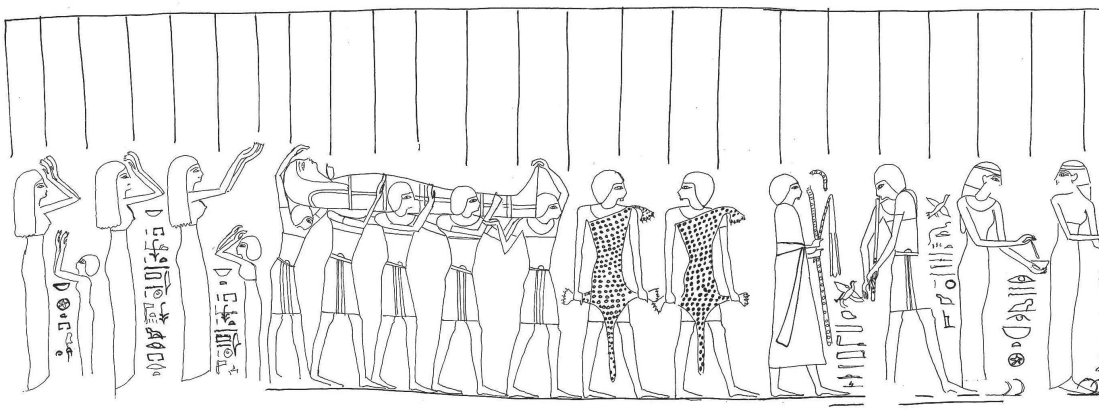


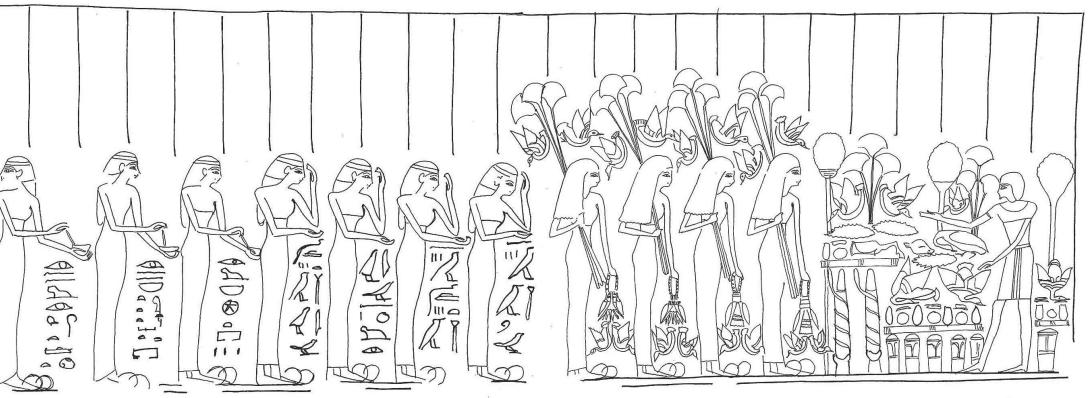
Fig. 3.98. Right side: Funerary scene. Anonymous outer coffin (A.135)



Fig. 3.99. Lower section (detail): Ritual scene. Inner coffin of Maatkare (A.132)

enhanced by adding the sun disc embraced by the emerging figure of Geb and the starry arms of Nut. Crowning this ensemble of scenes, the funerary canopy is transported to the netherworld, carried by jackals and cobras, directly alluding to the imagery of the Book of the Gates. This inclusion is particularly unusual, as the general trend described below was to use isolated motifs from royal compositions in scenes referring to the world of the living. Here, however, the opposite occurs: the funerary bier is transported to the mythological landscape of the Duat.

The overarching theme of these scenes is the idea of passage. This concept may also be reflected in the unusual depiction of the deceased as a boatman (Fig. 3.99).



2.4. Introduction to Osiris

By the third quarter of the 21st Dynasty, a distinctive group of scenes emerges, characterised by the repetitive depiction of the deceased being escorted by and introduced to various deities. This trend appears to have evolved from the scenes described in 2.1. (Hathoric temple scenes**)**, which already depict the deceased being introduced to Osiris. Three stages can be identified in the development of this layout:

1. In the earliest sequences, the Hathoric shrine is retained, shown near the footboard, while the Osirian throne is depicted on the opposite side. The main difference compared to the vignettes described in 2.1. lies in the inclusion of a long procession of underworld deities who accompany the deceased to Osiris.[444]
2. In the next stage, the depiction of the Hathoric shrine is omitted, resulting in a simpler vignette. However, the number of representations of the deceased increases, as they are repeatedly shown being escorted by several deities to Osiris (Fig. 3.100). This repetition is not entirely new, as it is actually rooted in the classical scheme, particularly in

444 A.3: coffin of Pairusekher. A.71: coffin of Meritamun.

the vignettes of the weighing of the heart.[445] As in those scenes, the repeated depiction of the deceased implies the dynamic representation of a process that the deceased undergoes.

3. In the third stage, by the end of the 3rd quarter of the 21st Dynasty, the depiction of the Osirian throne is also removed. Consequently, the scene loses its visual connection with the judgement theme and even to Osiris himself, although the Osirian context is always implied in the background. At this stage, the composition achieves an interesting dynamic quality, illustrating the deceased's journey towards reunification with the deities of the underworld. The degree of intimacy depicted in these reunions varies. In the inner box of Ankhefenkhonsu (A.33), the deceased is escorted by several male and female deities, with an increasing level of intimacy as the deceased approaches the footboard: initially, the deceased is saluted, taken by the hand by the gods, and given life. As they approach the footboard, the deceased is tenderly embraced by the deities, signifying their arrival at their destination.[446]

   In the outer box of Direpu, the gestural language of intimacy is even more pronounced (Fig. 3.101). The deceased is shown embraced by a male god, and as the figures progress along the wall, their interaction becomes increasingly intimate. This intimacy is visually expressed through the entangling of their arms, vividly suggesting a tender and loving embrace.[447]

   Occasionally, the scene extends along the full length of the long sides, enhancing the dynamic effect of the figures' movement. This is exemplified in the outer coffin of Taahuti.[448]

445 A.142: outer coffin of Nesipernub. A.91: outer coffin of Tadimut.
446 A.33: coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
447 A.123: outer coffin of Direpu.
448 A.32: outer coffin of Taahuti.

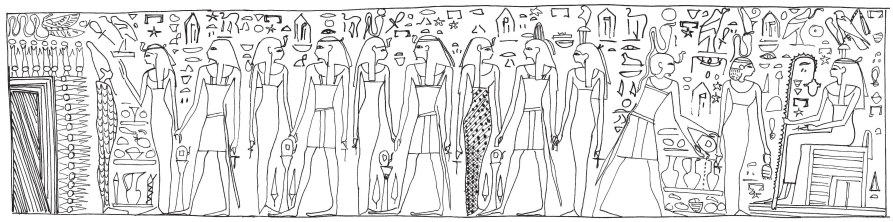


Fig. 3.100. Lower section: Introduction scene. Outer coffin of Tadimut (A.91).

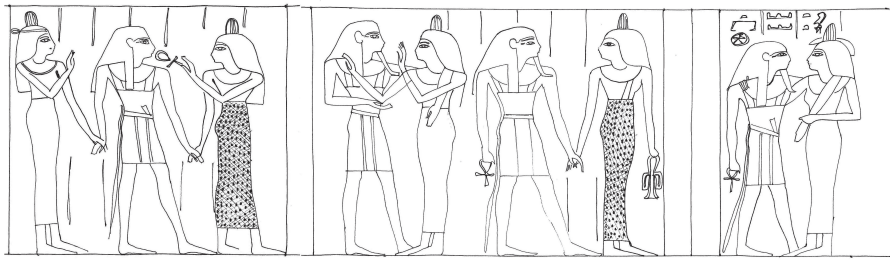


Fig. 3.101. Lower section: Introduction scene. Outer coffin of Direpu (A.123).

These highly original iconographic sequences closely resemble royal imagery of the pharaoh's introduction, where the king is welcomed by the gods with similar care and affection. In Thebes, such scenes are associated with two main contexts. In Karnak, they are found particularly in royal jubilee temples, where the king is shown tenderly embraced by Amun-Re, who welcomes him as his beloved son. Similarly, in the Valley of the Kings, some of the chambers are decorated in the exact same manner, showing repetitive sequences where the king is introduced to several deities. These deities welcome him, offer him life, and embrace him tenderly as their kinsfolk.[449] The latter context likely served as the ultimate model for the layout described in this group of scenes.

Although the king is never explicitly depicted in the coffin scenes, the layout undoubtedly conveys an implied association of the coffin as a sacred space where the deceased is united with the gods.

449 Tomb of Seti I (KV 17). These scenes may be found on the walls or pillars (Hornung 1991).

2.5. Solar scenes of the underworld

Complementing the use of the Osirian scenes previously described, and often associated with them within the same coffin, another set of vignettes focuses on the solar barque. As will be demonstrated, allusions to the solar barque are borrowed from the imagery found in the royal burial chambers of the Valley of the Kings. This subject was approached progressively, generating significant interest over time.

Visual quotes of the Amduat

The theme of the solar barque first appears through the well-known vignette from the Book of the Dead illustrating the triumph of the sun god over Apophis, which was abundantly used in the classical scheme. While conventional in nature, this scene can be linked to the imagery of the Amduat by including a group of deities pulling the barque with a rope (Fig. 3.105).

At this stage, complete visual quotations from the royal compositions of the Amduat remain absent, but become increasingly explicit over time. For example, the solar barque is often greeted by flocks of *ba*-birds, a motif drawn from the Ninth Hour in the Book of the Gates (Figs. 3.102-103).[450] A similar reading can be detected in the depiction of jackals or cobras pulling the solar barque with a rope (Fig. 3.104), [451] a motif borrowed from the concluding scene of the Book of the Day. Jackals pulling the solar barque also feature in the Twelfth Hour of the Book of the Night.[452]

The solar barque may additionally be depicted emerging from the Theban Mountain, bearing the rising sun and being pulled by the deities of the underworld, as illustrated in the Book of the Amduat (Fig. 3.102).[453] Similarly, the depiction of the sun disc raised by the arms of Nun, emerging from the Theban Mountain, recalls the last hour of the night as represented in the Book of Gates.[454]

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450 A.12: coffin of Nesipanebimakh.
451 A.24: outer coffin of Padiuamun. A.unknown: coffin of Takhybtiat.
452 See the original motif in Hornung 2001, 134.
453 A.12: coffin of Nesipanebimakh.
454 A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutytaui. For the final scene of the Book of Gates, see Hornung 1999, 77.

In other occurrences, the solar barque is absent, but an allusion to the funerary royal compositions is made through the depiction of tall, upraised serpents. These serpents stand upright, recalling those guarding the gates of the underworld in the Book of the Gates. In the outer coffin of Nesikhonsu, these motifs are simply paired with vignettes from the Book of the Dead.[455]

All these examples reflect a clear understanding of the nightly journey of the sun god as described in the Book of the Amduat. However, a sense of decorum seems to have restrained the explicit use of such imagery. Instead, these references are transposed into depictions of the daily circuit of the sun and are often combined with imagery from the Book of the Dead.

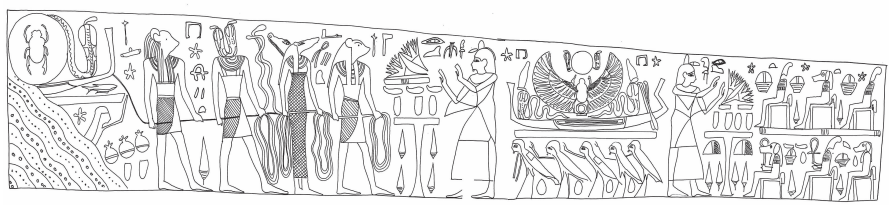


Fig. 3.102. Lower section: Solar barque scene with Amduat motifs. Coffin of Nesipanebimakh (A.12)



Fig. 3.103. Lower section: Solar barque scene with Amduat motifs. Coffin of Nesipanebimakh (A.12)

455 TT 320: outer coffin of Nesikhonsu.

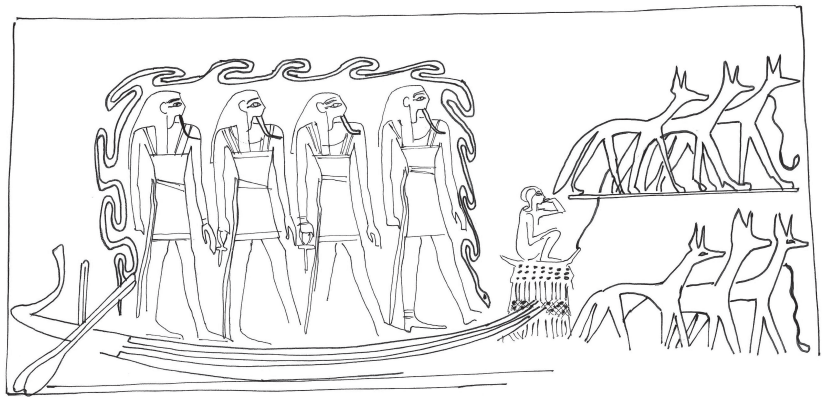


Fig. 3.104. Lower section (detail): Solar barque scene with Amduat motifs. Inner coffin of Asetemakhbit (A.126).

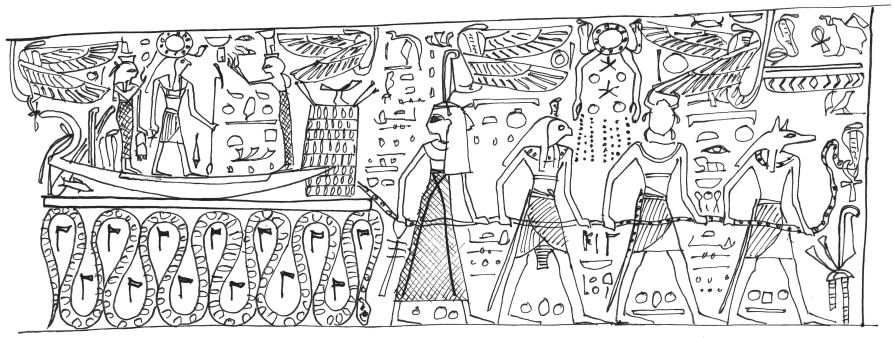


Fig. 3.105. Lower section: Solar barque scene with Amduat motifs. Inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepet (A.120).

Amduat scenes

This decorum surrounding solar imagery would eventually be challenged, and the nightly journey of the sun, illustrated in the esoteric compositions of the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings, was incorporated into coffin decoration. This inclusion appears to have occurred gradually:

- The process began with representations of the solar barque accompanied by the coiled Mehen serpent, as depicted in the Book of Gates.[456] The solar barque, pulled by deities, is shown with its cord often rendered as a living serpent, a direct reference to the Fifth Hour of the Book of Gates. Initially, the movement of the barque was still located in the earthly Theban landscape, associated with the Hathoric mountain shrine and the performance of Osirian rituals.[457]
- In the next stage, the solar scenes evolved to depict the journey of the sun god in the netherworld itself. The barque, pulled by the divine jackals as they are depicted in the Twelfth Hour of the Book of the Night, heralds the rebirth of the sun god.[458] This scene can be combined with four unnamed male deities, guarding the gates of the netherworld, subtly referencing the Book of Gates while visually resembling the Sons of Horus.
- In most of the earlier depictions, the solar god is conspicuously absent, replaced by four male deities. When the sun god was eventually depicted, this originated in truly imposing scenes covering the lower section.[459] These compositions show the sun god with his divine crew navigating the solar barque, often pulled by divine jackals or gods, some of them looking backwards (a direct visual reference to the Twelfth Hour of the Book of Gates).

456 A.60: anonymous outer coffin.
457 A.60: anonymous outer coffin.
458 A.126: inner coffin of Asetemakhbit.
459 A.131: anonymous outer coffin. A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer.

– Finally, this process evolved to include entire sequences of the royal compositions of the netherworld. Below are examples illustrating these compositions.

Examples of the use of Amduat sequences

The outer box of Henuttaui in the Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich, shows a juxtaposition of sequences taken from different parts of the Book of the Amduat.[460] The proper left side is entirely decorated with a single vignette displayed along the full length of the wall. In this composition, several motifs borrowed from the royal Book of the Amduat are included.[461] The deceased is depicted near the headboard presenting an unguent vase to a group of three green-skinned goddesses bearing snakes on their shoulders. This scene is taken from the upper register of the Twelfth Hour of the Amduat, where these goddesses drive off Apophis using fire-spitting snakes.[462] This is followed by a motif from the Eleventh Hour, showing a lion-headed mummiform god riding on a serpent that emerges from a starry sky.[463] The following scene extends down to the footboard, incorporating elements from the Twelfth Hour of the Book of the Amduat: the solar barque is depicted being pulled by eight goddesses and twelve gods, all facing backwards, alluding to the reversal of time, while walking along a gigantic serpent bearing a large *netjer*-sign and a red sun disc near its head (a motif borrowed from the Tenth Hour). [464] On the barque, the solar god is portrayed as a ram-headed deity, protected by a coiled serpent crowned with the *hedjet*-crown. The solar god is escorted by a goddess (green-skinned) and a solar scarab positioned on the prow (the closing element of the Twelfth Hour), and a god (red-skinned) on the stern. These elements are drawn from the central register of the Twelfth Hour. Behind the solar barque, a sequence of primaeval deities is depicted. This includes four male gods holding a paddle and two couples holding *uas*-staves. These couples allude to the repetition of the

460 Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
461 For the use of this motif in the iconography of the yellow corpus, see Araújo Duarte 2014.
462 Hornung 1999, 53.
463 Hornung 1999, 52.
464 Hornung 1999, 51.

original act of creation. The first male god is double heron-headed, while the second is crocodile-headed. These motifs originate from the lower register of the Twelfth Hour.[465]

As to the left side, we find the same layout composed of motifs primarily borrowed from the Eleventh Hour of the royal Book of the Amduat. The first figure depicted is an enthroned baboon-headed mummiform god holding up the *wedjat*-eye, a motif originating from the Sixth Hour.[466] The following scene features a double-headed god wearing a distinct crown on each head: the *hedjet* (painted white) faces the headboard, while the *desheret* faces the footboard. This motif is drawn from the upper register of the Eleventh Hour.[467] Following this, the god Atum is depicted with his arms upraised in an open gesture, standing beside a four-legged winged cobra.[468] This motif is also taken from the upper register of the Eleventh Hour.[469] The subsequent sequence includes goddesses adorned with monograms marked with red strokes, suggesting piles of wheat. They watch over a cavern of the underworld where four enemies of Osiris are depicted in an inverted position, walking on their hands. Additionally, seven avenging goddesses, each wielding a knife, stand guard over a cavern. This entire sequence is taken from the lower register of the Eleventh Hour.[470]

The outer box of Heretnureb (A.133) features remarkable compositions along its long sides, extending fully from the headboard down to the footboard, composed of selected motifs from the Book of the Amduat.[471] On the proper right side, the composition begins with the *ba* of Sokar, represented as a falcon perched on a double-headed and double-legged serpent, flanked by goddesses wearing the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt. This motif is borrowed from the composition of the Tenth Hour of the Book of the Amduat. Following this is a tableau depicting three avenging goddesses wielding long knives and spitting

465 Hornung 1999, 53.
466 This motif is also found in the coffin housed at the Mougins Museum of Classical Art (MMoCA489). See Araújo Duarte 2014.
467 Hornung 1999, 52.
468 This scene is also found in the coffin housed at the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrus Sammlung in Berlin (ÄM 58-3). See Araújo Duarte 2014.
469 Hornung 1999, 52.
470 Hornung 1999, 52.
471 A.133: outer coffin of Heretenureb.



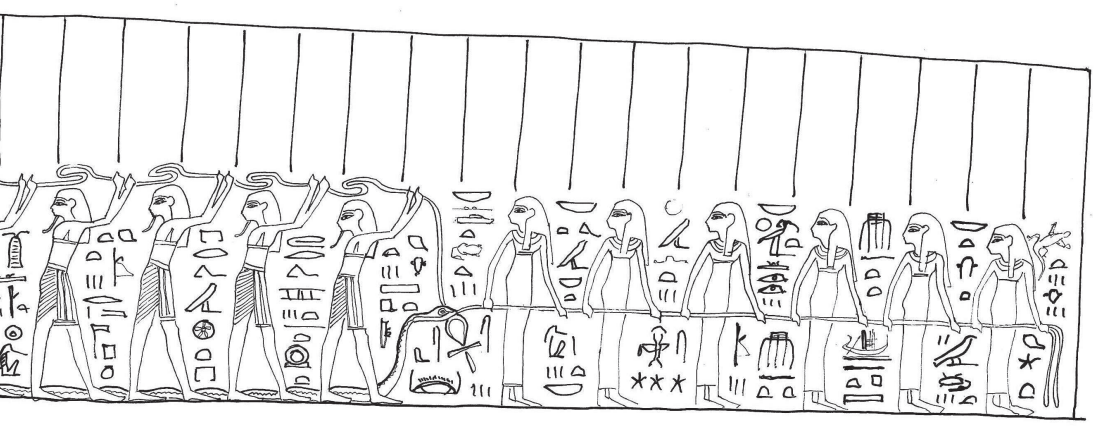
Fig. 3.106. Lower section: Amduat scene (Twelfth Hour). Outer coffin of Heretenureb (A.133)

over enclosed mounds, averting any threat to the rising of the sun. This scene is drawn from the lower register of the Eleventh Hour of the Book of the Amduat.

The area corresponding to the lower section reproduces key features of the Twelfth Hour, where the rebirth of the sun god is celebrated (Fig. 3.106). A group of five male gods and four goddesses are shown hauling the boat through the body of a lying serpent. They turn backwards, indicating the reversal of time that facilitates the sun god's rebirth, precisely as depicted in the solar disc rising from the horizon. Three oarsmen accompany the sun in safety to the sky.

On the opposite side, the composition begins with an intriguing interpretation of the god Atum standing alongside a four-legged winged cobra, an element derived from the Eleventh Hour of the Book of the Amduat.[472] Taken from the upper register of the Eleventh Hour,[473] the cobra's wings are fully extended, thus representing Atum as a winged god, who announces the

472 This scene is also found in the coffin housed at the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrus Sammlung in Berlin (ÄM 58-3). See Araújo Duarte 2014.
473 Hornung 1999, 52.



coming sunrise. Following this are four gates guarded by serpents intertwined with four goddesses, each seated on double serpents and holding a hand to her face, allusions to the Book of Gates and the Eleventh Hour of the Book of the Amduat, respectively.

Along the lower section, a similar scene reproduces the Twelfth Hour, featuring the solar barque being pulled by five male gods and four spitting goddesses hauling the boat through the body of a lying serpent. The figures turn backwards, indicating the reversal of time through which the sun god is reborn. However, the barque here appears to reverse its course, heading back towards the headboard as if returning to the netherworld. The sun disc now depicts the *ba* of the sun god as a stork, protected by the Mehen serpent. Beneath the sky, the inverted head of a falcon illuminates the underworld delimited by sphinxes. Two oarsmen and three bodyguards protect the barque.

While the elements of this composition are borrowed from the repertoire of the Book of the Amduat, their combination and reinterpretation, particularly around the sacred barque, are highly original. Despite the apparent continuity of the panels, the upper and lower sections are clearly designed as separate entities, each complementing the composition on the opposite side.

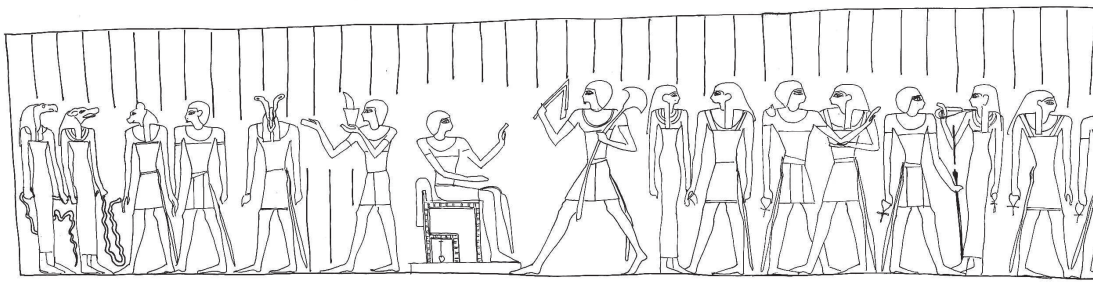


Fig. 3.107. Left side (full length): Combined sequence with royal scenes, introduction scenes and a solar scene. Anonymous inner coffin (A.135).

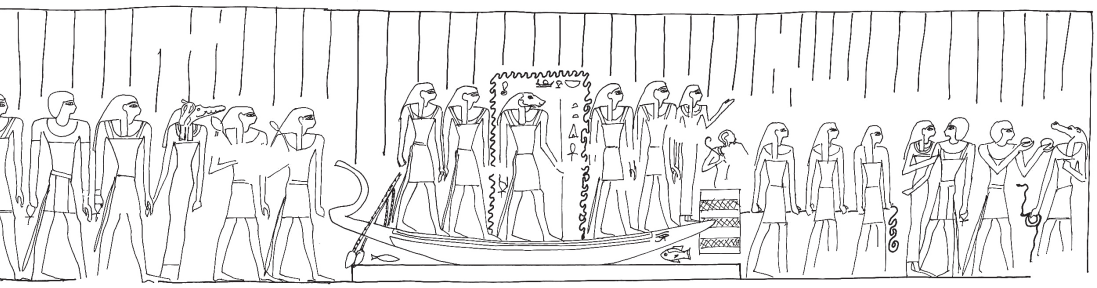
In these scenes, the depiction of the deceased is either excluded or significantly minimised.

Many other examples of such compositions could be cited, all associated with high elite burials.[474] However, these examples suffice to illustrate that scenes alluding to the Amduat are never faithful reproductions of the conventional repertoire.[475] Even when an entire section is depicted, its use follows the *pars pro toto* principle: individual motifs are presented as representative of the entire Book of the Amduat. The prominent role of these compositions is further corroborated by their extensive use in the funerary papyri used in the equipment of contemporary mummies.[476]

2.6. Integrative scenes

All the types of scenes described in this section share a common emphasis on inscriptions. Some coffins exhibit the distinctive feature of combining elements from the previously described groups of scenes, creating a mixture of introduction scenes, royal rituals and allusions to the Amduat.[477]

474 A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare. A.40: inner coffin of Bakenmut.
475 Araújo Duarte 2017, 147.
476 In Bab el-Gasus alone, 32 papyri featuring this theme were discovered. Lenzo 2021, 213.
477 A.55: outer coffin of Pinedjem. A.58: coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu. A.52: coffin of Shedkhonsu. A.135: anonymous outer coffin.



Most of these compositions are displayed in one single vignette, extending fully along the long sides of the box (Fig. 3.107). Particularly noteworthy is the highly creative integration of scenes depicting the nightly journey of the sun with other subjects alluding to the Theban necropolis. This combination reflects the diversity of symbolic and ritualistic associations tied to the funerary landscape.[478] In this context, these coffins are symbolically connected to the various components of the royal funerary complexes of the New Kingdom. They include segments that allude to the royal tomb and others referencing the funerary temple.

Footboard

Except when an archaizing layout is intended, in the complex scheme the footboard is consistently left undecorated, even in high elite objects.

Commentary

From the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, there is a profound renegotiation of the decorative space on the exterior walls of the box. From an iconographic point of view, this shift can be described as an osirification process. While this term suggests a focus on Osiris in coffin decoration, what is more evident is the

478 Araújo Duarte 2017, 144.

increasing definition of Osiris as a solar god and the interest in depicting a variety of netherworld beings.

This transformation is first observed in the upper section, where the symmetrical depiction of Osiris becomes the most recurrent scene, often replicated on both sides of the box. This prominence highlights the central role of Osiris in the layout of the complex scheme. In the basic scheme, the upper section symbolised a passage to another dimension (exterior-interior). In the classical scheme, the upper section became associated with the transcendent dimensions of space (the Osirian netherworld and the heavens, both integral to the daily circuit of the sun). The transcendent dimensions of space are strictly mythological, therefore distinct from the sacred territory of the necropolis, which is associated with the lower section. However, in the complex scheme, where the entire box is equated with the netherworld, the upper section is now aligned with the throne room of Osiris.[479]

The lower section, has remained the primary area for the display of the deceased's ritual performances. In the basic scheme, this section subtly reflected the sun's journey through the underworld, symbolised by its various manifestations. In the classical scheme, this idea evolved into a dynamic representation of the deceased moving through a series of shrines within the necropolis. In the complex scheme, the diversity of ritual activities involving the deceased increases significantly, particularly in Corpus B. Consequently, the lower section rapidly becomes a rich field for iconographic exploration. Its importance is further highlighted by its frequent expansion along the full length of the long sides, often at the expense of the upper section.

The subsequent evolution in coffin decoration seems to have been greatly influenced by whether or not liminal elements are employed. Two main trends emerge from this moment onwards:

– Workshops favouring liminal elements (Corpus A): These vignettes are typically small compositions, framed by columns of repetitive and

479 Particularly in later stages of the complex scheme, the solar barque may also be used, however this is rare.

increasingly incomplete texts. The style is highly schematic, and the subjects are monotonously focused on mummiform gods.

– Workshops favouring inscriptions instead of liminal elements (Corpus B). In these cases, the range of scenes is greatly expanded, and while there are clear roots in the classical scheme repertoire, there is an increasing association with monumental decoration, particularly from Theban royal mortuary complexes. Inscriptions are abundant, often dominating the background of the vignettes. The style is more spontaneous and sometimes sketchy, with a looser approach to organising the decorative space.

Both trends persisted until the end of the 21st Dynasty, with Corpus A predominantly associated with low elite, anonymous coffins. From an iconographic point of view, Corpus B reveals a fascinating phenomenon. The visual narratives crafted along the box are highly individualised, with each one standing as a unique creation in its own right. This contrasts sharply with the highly standardised compositions of Corpus A. In Corpus B, we find a distinctive reinterpretation of iconography from the royal funerary complexes of the New Kingdom. Initially, this process is limited to subtle allusions to royal temples in the Deir el-Bahari area, where the Hathoric cow serves as a reference to a particular royal shrine.

Over time, the imagery of royal funerary temples becomes increasingly explicit, giving rise to exceptionally original compositions that incorporate royal scenes and frequently draw on visual references to the Heb Sed ritual. Some of them make extensive use of regalia, including the large ritual robe, and ritual contexts of the Heb Sed. Notable examples include scenes showing baskets with arrows, alluding to the concluding ceremonies of the Heb Sed festival, where the king shoots an arrow towards each of the four points of the compass.[480]

The adoption of royal iconography underscores the political and religious significance coffin decoration had achieved by this period. Andrzej Niwiński

480 Frankfort 1978.

interprets this phenomenon at light of particular political events, such as the funeral ceremonies of Pinedjem I.[481] The same author further associates the emergence of royal scenes with the end of the pontificate of Menkherre, who had adopted royal titles during this time.

Without dismissing the political significance of the appropriation of royal imagery, particularly during a time when Thebes was no longer under pharaonic rule, these compositions are striking in their esoteric depth, even if the pictorial quality is often inconsistent. From our perspective, the importance of these royal scenes is perhaps related to the ceremonies carried out during the re-burials of the kings from the New Kingdom. By the time of High Priest Pinedjem II, these monarchs were put to rest in the collective tomb of TT 320. Judging by the dockets found on the royal mummies, the high priests imbued the restoration procedures with political meaning. It is therefore likely that the re-burials of these kings were accompanied by an elaborate ritual apparatus. The corpus of coffins illustrating royal scenes may echo these ritual performances, likely held in now lost structures built along the cliffs of the Royal Cache wadi (C2). The structures discovered by Pérez-Accino near TT 320 provide possible evidence for such a ritual context.[482]

Closely related to this set of scenes is another type of representation that reveals an unprecedented interest in the depiction of actual funerary rituals performed in the necropolis, with particular interest given to funerary processions. However, the striking feature of these processions is their depiction as a journey leading to the mythological landscape of the netherworld, where the boundaries between the earthly world of the living and the Duat dissolve.

From this point forward, the imagery of coffin decoration became increasingly explicit in its appropriation of royal imagery. This trend culminated in the depiction of introduction scenes, where the deceased progressively approaches Osiris and the netherworld. By doing so, these compositions drew directly from the murals of royal tombs, where the king is shown embraced by the gods.

481 Niwiński 2019, 64.
482 Pérez-Accino, Vivas Sainz and Muñoz Herrera 2023.

Eventually, even the decorum that had previously prevented the inclusion of royal compositions of the netherworld was suspended. Highly revered esoteric scenes were incorporated into coffin decoration, initially through subtle allusions blended with the standard repertoire. Over time, entire sections from the Book of the Amduat, typically referring to the last hours of the night, were included. According to Niwiński, the appearance of Amduat compositions on coffins occurred under the pontificate of Psusennes.[483] The same patterns of Amduat motifs are also observed in contemporary funerary papyri.[484] It is noteworthy that the use of Amduat iconography is consistently associated with the Theban high elite, and the pictorial execution on these objects is outstanding, thus far removed from the sketchy style often observed in most of the Corpus B coffins.

Given the importance of these iconographic achievements, it is unsurprising that the formal boundaries between the upper and lower sections of coffin decoration were erased, and the lower section was extended to cover the full length of the long sides.

Since the basic scheme, the lower section had been defined as the setting for the display of the deceased's agency in relation to the deities of the underworld. This agency implied a strong sense of movement, greatly enhanced in the classical scheme, where scenes flow along the lower section, sometimes suggesting different directions (Classical Scheme Layouts A and B), as though the area represented a liminal landscape connecting the world of the living with that of the dead. In the complex scheme, the lower section is firmly identified with the netherworld. This evolution does not diminish the dynamic flow perceived along these walls, which is eventually identified with the cyclic movement of the sun god. Through this flow, the deceased's agency is further enhanced through their acquisition of royal status.

In contrast to the flourishing iconography of the long sides, the short sides became increasingly undecorated. This is particularly clear on the footboard, which is consistently left undecorated. For the first time, even the headboard is frequently undecorated. Moreover, even when the headboard is decorated,

483 Niwiński 2019, 59.
484 Bottiglienco 2017,

the compositions are often sketchy, and many objects exhibit significant deterioration, likely due to ritual activity (possibly the pouring of liquids over these areas). The intentional undecorated character of these areas is significant, suggesting their association with contact points to the unmanifested and regenerative powers of the Duat.

CHAPTER IV

Box: interior decoration

Unlike the exterior walls of the coffins, where well-established sections had been defined since the rise of the yellow type, the interiors of the box do not follow such a linear development. This is mainly due to a different approach to defining the decorative space, which prioritised the formal unity of the interior. This unity decreases progressively during the 21st Dynasty, and distinct sections are eventually formed.

Within the interior of the box, the basic scheme is characterised by the treatment of the space as a single formal unit. One of the following features can be found:

- Undecorated or monochrome decoration.[1] The interior of the box may either remain uncoated or simply be painted in white, red or occasionally coated in black pitch.[2] This kind of procedure is associated with objects dating from the late 20th Dynasty to the early 21st Dynasty.
- Large tableau occupying the entire floorboard. Two main subjects are depicted: the representation of a large Djed-pillar (Fig. 4.1), or the figure of a cosmic mother goddess (Fig. 4.9). The former is consistently linked to the decoration of outer coffins, while the latter appears in inner coffins. The long and short sides of the box are simply treated

1 A.1: Anonymous outer coffin.
2 A.46: outer coffin of Senu.

merely as visual extensions of the floorboard and are typically painted in monochrome, usually in red, although white is also used. This layout can be found in objects dating from the early second quarter of the 21st Dynasty, or in objects attempting an archaizing layout.

The classical scheme marks a redefinition of the decorative space inside the box. The side walls are incorporated into the decorative space, and efforts are made to emphasise the formal unity of the space, as in the basic scheme. However, unlike the latter, the visual potential offered by the long sides began to be explored. Several types of layouts are identified:

- Initially, the elements displayed on the long sides form a unified composition with the central motif on the floorboard (Fig. 4.2).
- In the next stage, the long sides form a distinct space, divided into two sections, mirroring the structure of the exterior walls.

In the complex scheme, the decorative space of the interior of the boxes is fully arranged in distinct sections. Following the usual practice established for the exterior walls of the coffin, each section develops its own distinctive repertoire (Fig. 4.4).

1. Outer boxes: the Djed-pillar

Basic scheme

The number of outer boxes associated with the basic scheme is extremely limited, and one of the main reasons for this is the exceptional use of the outer coffin during the late Ramesside period and early 21st Dynasty Theban burials.

The interior composition consists of a single depiction of the Djed-pillar, painted against a red or white background. As a rule, the Djed-pillar is depicted as an anthropomorphised god, rather than as a sacred object. The deity is featured with a human torso in full frontal view, with fists grasping the royal sceptres *heka*

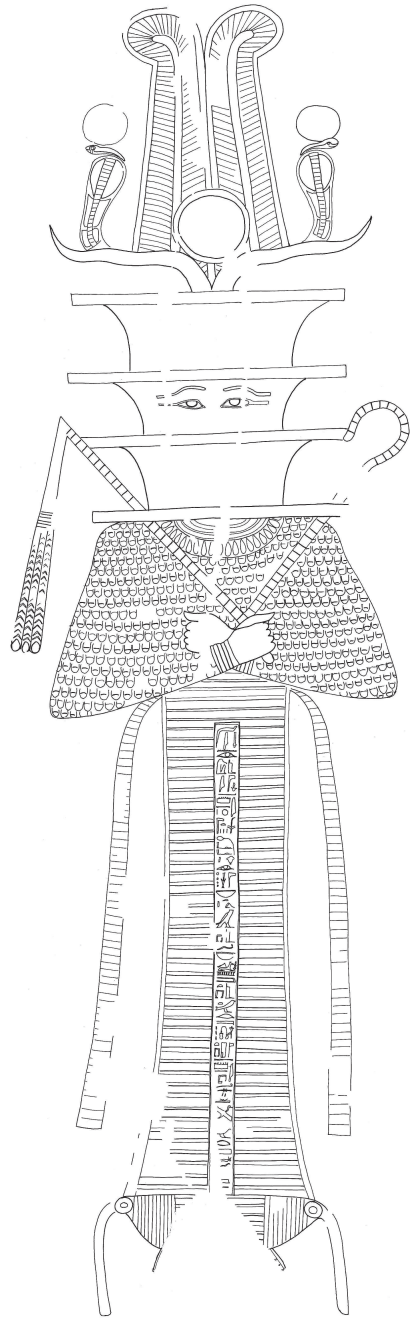


Fig. 4.1. Interior: outer box of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

and *nekhakha*, as well as human eyes placed in the middle vertebrae of the pillar (Fig. 4.1). Additional features include a long belt and a feathered coat covering the torso.[3] The deity is crowned with the double-feathered headdress (*Ka Shwty*), emphasising the role of the Djed as an *axis mundi*, a cosmic pillar that connects the netherworld and the sky.[4] Alternatively, the *atef*-crown is used. The pillar is often adorned with multicoloured transverse stripes, at times inscribed with a longitudinal band of text bearing the name and titles of the deceased. The god stands on a *nub*-sign.

The roots of the anthropoid representation of the Djed-pillar can be traced back to Ramesside tomb decoration,[5] where similar features can be found associated with the god.

Occasionally, the totem is depicted purely as a sacred object, devoid of anthropomorphised features;[6] however, this is typically the result of later work attempting an archaizing layout.

Classical scheme

The composition radiates from the central element, the large anthropomorphised Djed-pillar standing on a *nub*-sign.[7] The deity is always depicted wearing the double-feathered headdress, associated with a solar disc, ram's horns and cobras. The torso of the deity is typically adorned with a feathered pattern that covers the arms. Only the fists of the deity are exposed, crossed over the chest, grasping the royal sceptres *heka* and *nekhakha*.

The pillar itself is decorated with a striped pattern. The large size of the pillar often prevents the inclusion of other elements in the same tableau. Occasionally, a *sekhem*-sceptre flanked by mourning goddesses,[8] or *wedjat*-eyes[9] may appear below the main register.

3 A.7: outer coffin of Ankhesenmut. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Butehamun.
4 For the liminal significance of this symbol, see Liptay 2014, 71.
5 Tomb of Pashed (TT 3). In Zivie 1979, Pl. 15.
6 A.150: outer coffin of Djedmutiesankh.
7 A.88: outer coffin of Nesitanebetaui. A.120: outer coffin of Khonsuemrenepetkhered.
8 A.100: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit.
9 A.152: outer coffin of Gatseshen.

The side walls are decorated, but unlike the exterior walls, the definition of distinct spaces within the composition is absent, resulting in a relatively fluid tableau. The following types of composition may be observed along the long sides, always set against a red background:

- Standing figures of Osiris facing outwards (Fig. 4.2).[10] A cosmological depiction with liminal significance is sketched above the headboard, alluding to the sunrise: the arms of two deities, most likely Nut and Nun, rise from the floorboard, holding the sun disc, symbolising the rising sun. This layout appears to have been used during the early 21st Dynasty.
- Goddesses Isis and Nephthys in adoration, facing inwards.[11] The goddesses occupy the full length of the long sides. In other examples, they are displayed in registers, alongside the Sons of Horus and the jackal form of Anubis, thus reproducing, with the Djed-pillar, the full layout of Chapter 151 of the Book of the Dead (Fig. 4.3).[12] These compositions form a strong visual unity with the central element. This layout was employed during the first half of the 21st Dynasty.

The anthropomorphised Djed-pillar may also be depicted with large wings outstretched towards both side walls, creating a visual continuum from the floorboard to the sides. In these objects, the decoration of the long sides varies. They may be simply painted in red or feature compositions provided with several registers. These registers may include the Sons of Horus and ritual scenes, occasionally featuring the deceased.[13]

The headboard is decorated with a diverse repertoire:

- Solar disc raised by human arms (Fig. 4.2).[14] This motif alludes to the closing scene of the Book of Gates, where the god Nun raises the solar barque in his arms.

10 A.88: outer coffin of Nesitanebetaui. A.120: outer coffin of Khonsuemrenepetkhered.
11 A.139: anonymous inner coffin.
12 A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
13 Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Paser. A.16: outer coffin of Ankhefenmut.
14 A.120: Outer coffin of Khonsuemrenepet. A.88: outer coffin of Nesitanebetaui. A.16: outer coffin of Ankhefenmut.

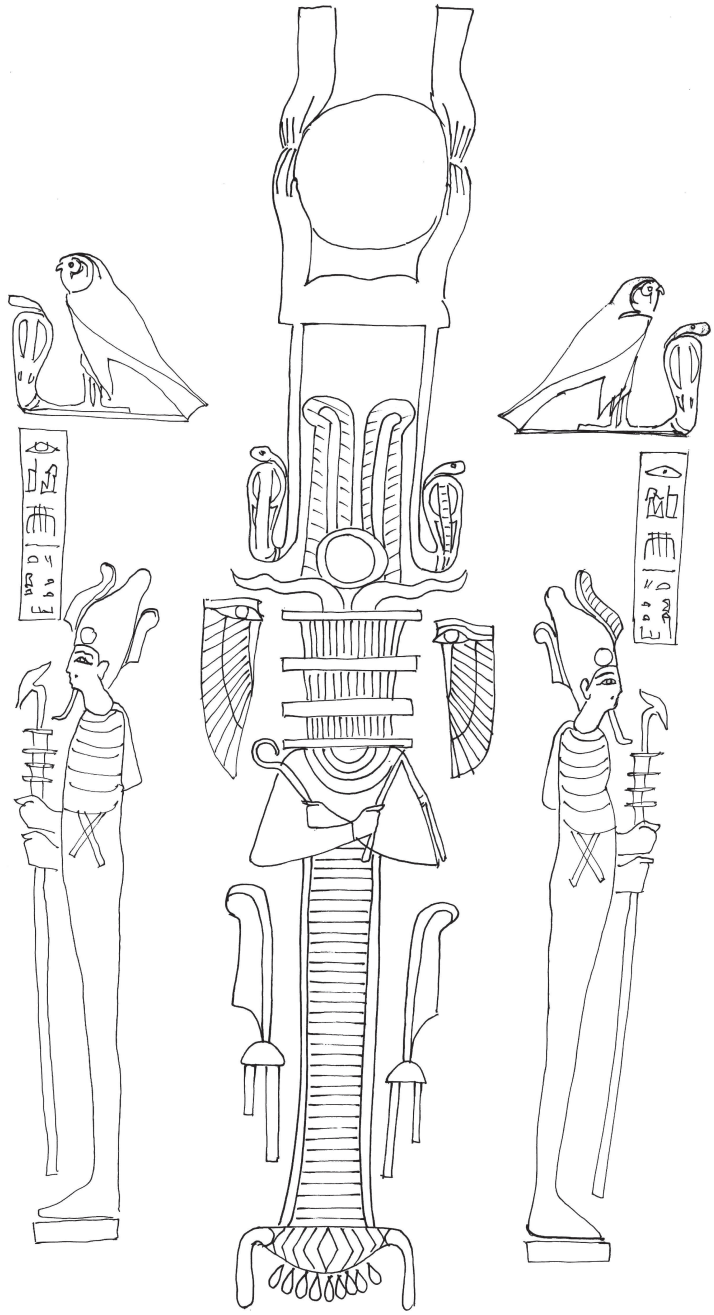


Fig. 4.2. Interior: outer coffin of Nesitanebetaui (A.88).



Fig. 4.3. Interior: outer box Henuttaui (A.136).

– Winged cobra.[15]
– Winged goddess.[16]
– *Ba*-bird.[17]
– Winged *wedjat*-eye (Fig. 4.3).[18]

Complex scheme

The background is now more varied than in earlier designs: it is typically painted in red, although yellow is occasionally used, albeit rarely.[19] In some instances, the background of the floorboard is painted with white stars.[20] The distinctive feature of the complex scheme is the autonomy of the various sections.

Floorboard

In the more simple designs, the floorboard features a single composition that spans its full length.[21] However, this section soon evolves to incorporate at least two[22] or three registers.[23] Two main trends are identified regarding the floorboard. A new trend favours the depiction of the Djed-pillar without anthropomorphised features, while others continue to explore the anthropomorphised rendering of the god, which was predominant in the early 21st Dynasty. As a result, three distinct trends can be observed:

Djed as a column

The depiction of the Djed as a column becomes the dominant theme in coffin decoration during the second half of the 21st Dynasty. The central feature of the headboard is the pillar, with human eyes typically omitted (Fig. 4.4). Another notable change is in the divine headdress: the double-feathered

15 A.114: outer coffin of Padiamun.
16 Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Paser.
17 A.139: anonymous inner coffin. A.105: outer coffin of Userhat.
18 A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
19 A.55: outer coffin of Pinedjem. A.84: coffin of Padiamun.
20 This is a rare feature in outer coffins. A.99: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.91: outer coffin of Tadimut. A.135: anonymous outer coffin.
21 A.143: outer coffin of Hori.
22 A.84: coffin of Padiamun.
23 A.143: inner coffin of Hori.

ornament, which was common in the basic and classical schemes, is replaced by the triple *atef*-crown,[24] now dominant.[25] The visual impact of the *hemhem*-crown is enhanced by incorporating a wealth of sun discs and hanging cobras. In general, the sacred pilar is adorned with an elaborate multi-coloured feathered pattern, with two long wings wrapped around it, whereas in the basic and the classical schemes, the pillar was decorated with multicoloured transversal straps. The new design is built upon the winged manifestation of the god that was used in the classical scheme, but now the wings are wrapped around the pilar instead of being open and displayed along the sides.

Typically, the pillar stands on a *nub*-sign, though some coffins depict it resting on the sky-sign.[26] Due to the size of the *hem-hem* crown, the space above the pillar may feature simple motifs, such as the heavenly vault,[27] the burial mound, a pair of *ba*-birds,[28] or simply a coiled cobra.[29] Occasionally, these elements are combined into a single scene, creating intriguing compositions, such as one showing a pair of *ba*-birds resting atop the burial mound beneath the vaulted sky with the sun rising from the tomb.[30]

Below the pillar, the decoration can vary considerably. The more simple designs involve a single register, usually depicting a *sekhem*-sceptre,[31] or the Tawer totem.[32] However, the inclusion of mummiform deities of the underworld in this area becomes increasingly dominant.[33] These motifs became so valued that the number of registers associated with them expanded, resulting in a reduction in the size of the sacred pillar itself.

This phenomenon is accompanied by the multiplication of secondary registers flanking the pillar, featuring squatting or enthroned gods.[34] The tableau

24 A.140: outer coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.122: Anonymous outer coffin. A.131: anonymous outer coffin. A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
25 An exception to this principle is seen in the outer coffin of Padiamun (A.99).
26 TT 320: coffin set of Isetemkhebit. A.24: outer coffin of Padiuamun. A.143: inner coffin of Hori. A.84: coffin of Padiamun. A.10: outer coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.91: outer coffin of Tadimut.
27 A.143: inner coffin of Hori. A.91: outer coffin Tadimut. A.126: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit.
28 A.33: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
29 A.10: outer coffin of Tabaekkhonsu.
30 A.84: coffin of Padiamun.
31 A.149: anonymous outer coffin. A.131: anonymous outer coffin. A.122: anonymous outer coffin.
32 A.55: outer coffin of Pinedjem.
33 TT 320: outer coffin of Nesikhonsu, and outer coffin of Isetemkhebit. A.33: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
34 A.84: coffin of Padiamun. A.143: inner coffin of Hori. A.33: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.

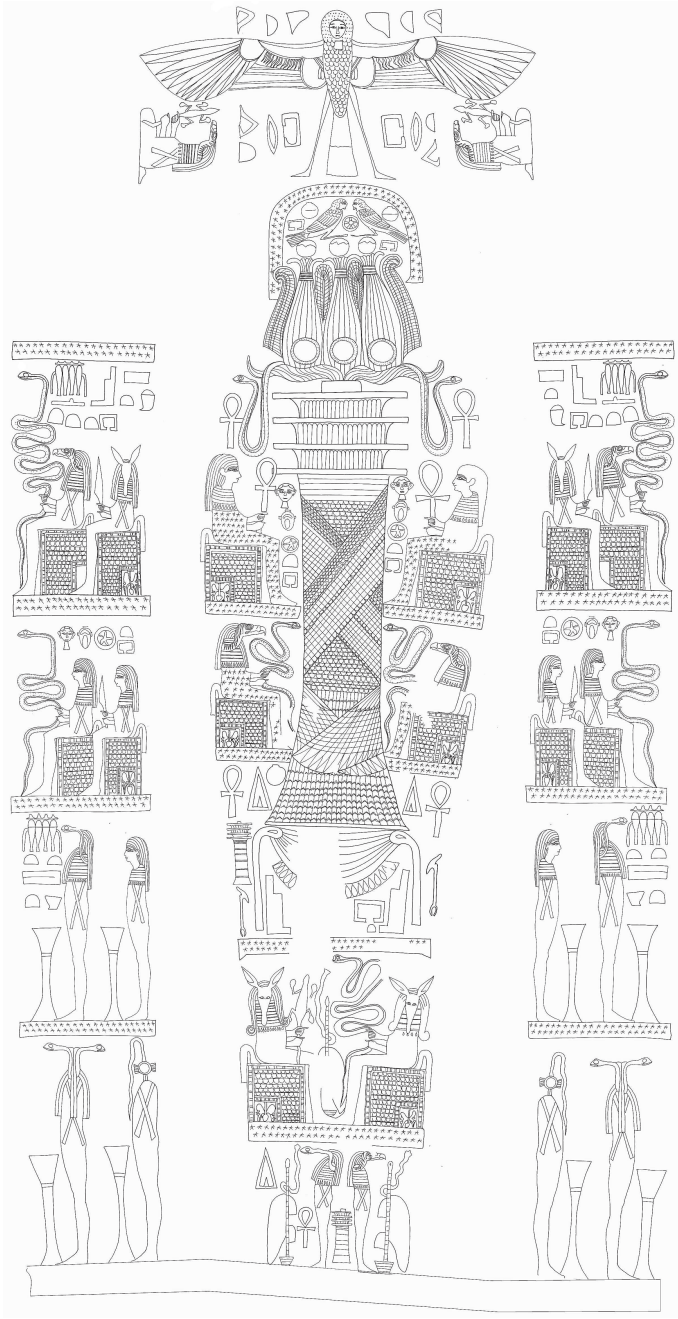


Fig. 4.4. Interior: inner box of Ankhefenkhonsu (A.33).

then becomes filled with mummiform deities, cobras, falcons, *shetyt*-shrines, which later become the archetype for the liminal elements used in the exterior areas of the coffins.

Anthropomorphised Djed-pillar

In a small group of coffins, the composition of the floorboard reintroduces the anthropomorphised depiction of the Djed-pillar, with a human torso and fists grasping the customary *regalia*, as was standard in the basic and classical schemes (Fig. 4.5). The representation of the god itself can be striking, with intricate, minute multi-coloured feathered patterns and the imposing triple *atef*-crown creating a powerful visual impact.[35] As is typical of the complex scheme, the pillar is flanked by a profusion of mummiform deities, sacred animals, or *ba*-birds, which contribute to the majestic aura of the deity.

The coffins exhibiting this feature share several other elements. The final register of the floorboard typically includes motifs explicitly borrowed from the Book of the Amduat, such as the god Atum emerging from a four legged-serpent (Eleventh Hour of the Book of the Amduat),[36] a vulture-headed god holding a serpent (likely referencing the Twelfth Hour of the Book of the Amduat),[37] or the sun disc rising from two serpents (Tenth Hour of the Book of the Amduat).[38]

The first register of the floorboard presents another cryptic composition, consistently featured across all the coffins in this group. Above the Djed-pillar is a solar tableau depicting the sun disc rising over the horizon. In most of these scenes, the sun is displayed above the head of a spotted calf, symbolising the punishment of Seth and the triumph of light over darkness. Two distinct versions of this tableau can be identified:

– In one version, the sun rises from the god Aker. Here, the sun disc contains the *ba* of the solar god, depicted as a stork, along with a lamp, and the *wedjat*-eye. The sun disc is protected beneath the coiled body

35 A.148: outer coffin of Nesiamun. A.15: outer coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. A.139: anonymous outer coffin. A.unknown: outer coffin of Ikhy (Vatican Museums). A.147: outer coffin of Menkhepere.
36 A.148: outer coffin of Nesiamun.
37 A.139: anonymous outer coffin.
38 A.147: outer coffin of Menkhepere.

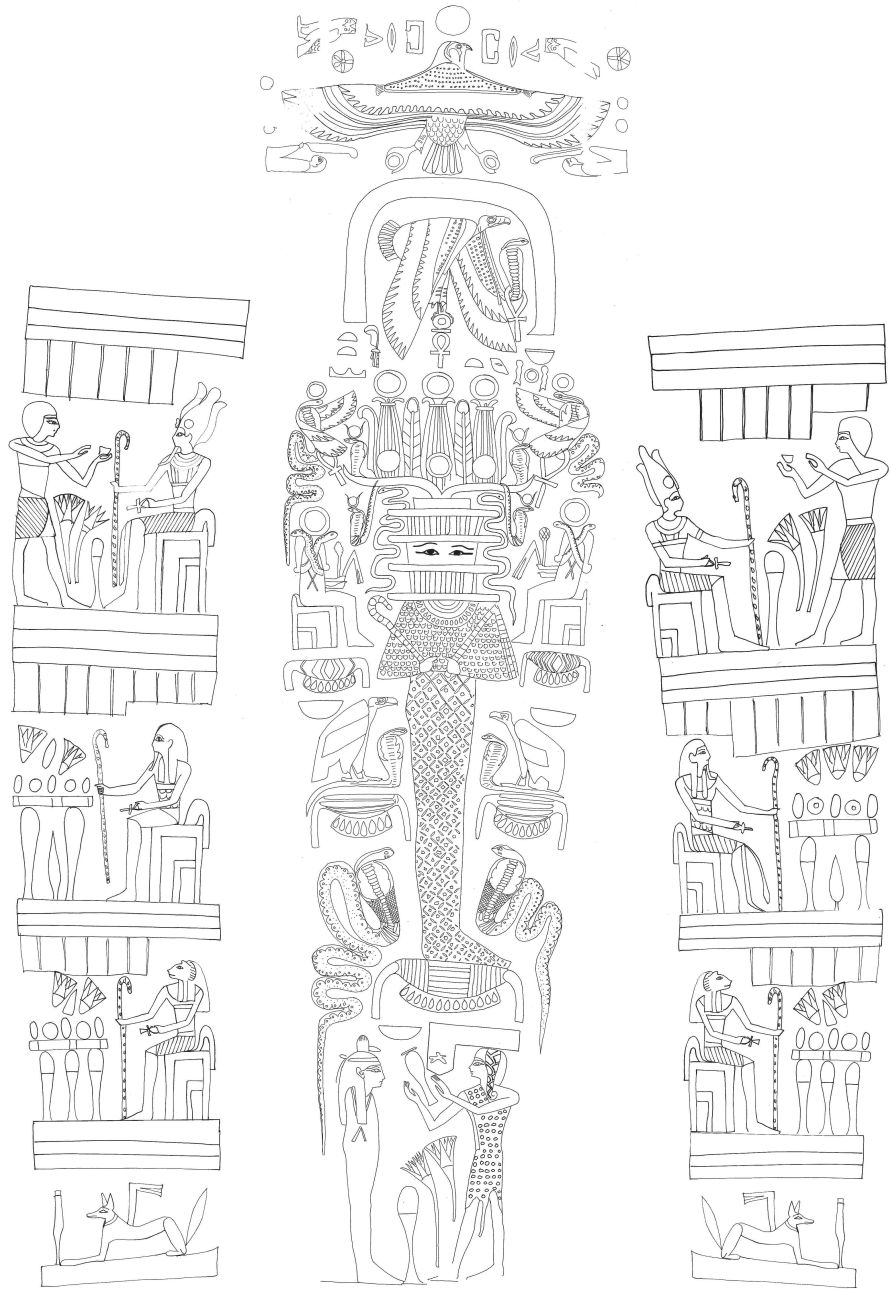


Fig. 4.5. Interior: outer box of Ankhefenkhonsu (A.33).

> of the Mehen serpent. - In the other version, the sun disc remains undecorated and rises from the lions of Yesterday and Tomorrow. It is shown beneath the vaulted dome of a starry sky and, at times, navigating the sky in the solar barque.

These versions convey slightly different interpretations: the first alludes to the Fifth Hour of the Book of the Amduat and the rebirth of the sun-god in the Duat, while the second emphasises the sunrise and the ascent of the sun god to the heavenly dome.

Although, the technical quality of the pictorial work on these coffins varies, the striking similarities in their compositions strongly suggest a shared origin, likely the same workshop.

A cryptic composition is also found on the footboard or, in rare cases, on the final register of the floorboard. This depicts the Uroborus - a serpent encircling the *wen*-sign- alluding to Wen-nefer.

Osiris depicted in human form

Another group can be identified within the context of the anthropomorphised Djed-pillar. In some of the latter tableaux, the pillar was anthropomorphised to such an extent that the upper part of the god became fully human-shaped (Fig. 4.6).[39] This eventually led to the adoption of a fully human form to represent Osiris (Fig. 4.7).[40] The god is typically featured in mummiform guise, displaying a beautiful, multi-coloured feathered design that extends across his body, echoing the patterns observed in the Djed-pillar, including the two wings wrapped around his torso. The god retains the imposing triple *atef*-crown, now combined with the *nemes*-headdress and the ram's horns traditionally associated with the god Amun.

Despite the fully human form manifested by the god, the remainder of the floorboard composition follows the same scheme described for the previous group. The lower register includes the god Atum emerging from a four legged-

39 Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
40 A.133: outer coffin of Heretenureb.

serpent (Eleventh Hour of the Book of the Amduat), while the upper register features a solar tableau that merges elements from the two versions of the solar scene previously described: the undecorated sun disc rising from the god Aker[41] or the sun disc, bearing the stork and *wedjat*-eye, rising from the lions of the horizon.[42]

The resulting composition forms an outstanding tableau imbued with a vivid sense of sacredness. This is further enhanced by the sheer size of the outer coffin itself. The meticulous pictorial work found in some of these coffins lends them an overwhelming majesty, resulting in a visual impact that is difficult to surpass.

Building on this interest in the human manifestation of Osiris, though without retaining the secondary features described above, a small number of other coffins explore this image to create beautiful and highly innovative tableaux. In these designs, the figure of Osiris often spans almost the entire length of the floorboard. The god is depicted with various attributes, such as the (triple) *atef*-crown,[43] the long divine wig (Fig. 4.7),[44] or even the royal *khepresh*-crown (Fig. 4.8).[45]

The mummiform body of the god continues to exhibit the same intricate feathered design with two long wings wrapped around the body (Fig. 4.6). Occasionally, the god is portrayed as a living deity, conspicuously clad in a grand royal Heb Sed robe adorned with the customary feathered motifs (Fig. 4.7).[46]

Liminal elements are also generously incorporated into these compositions, though with slightly greater restraint, so as not to overshadow the imposing majesty of Osiris. Below the god, typical liminal elements associated with the Duat can be found, such as falcons, vultures, and mummiform deities, but again they are used sparingly.

Solar compositions are featured over the floorboard or headboard, alluding to the sunrise. They may represent the following scenes:

41 Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
42 A.133: outer coffin of Heretenureb.
43 A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare. A.40: inner coffin of Bakenmut.
44 A.23: outer coffin of Nesipakaef.
45 A.55: inner coffin of Pinedjem.
46 A.43: outer coffin of Nesipakashuti.

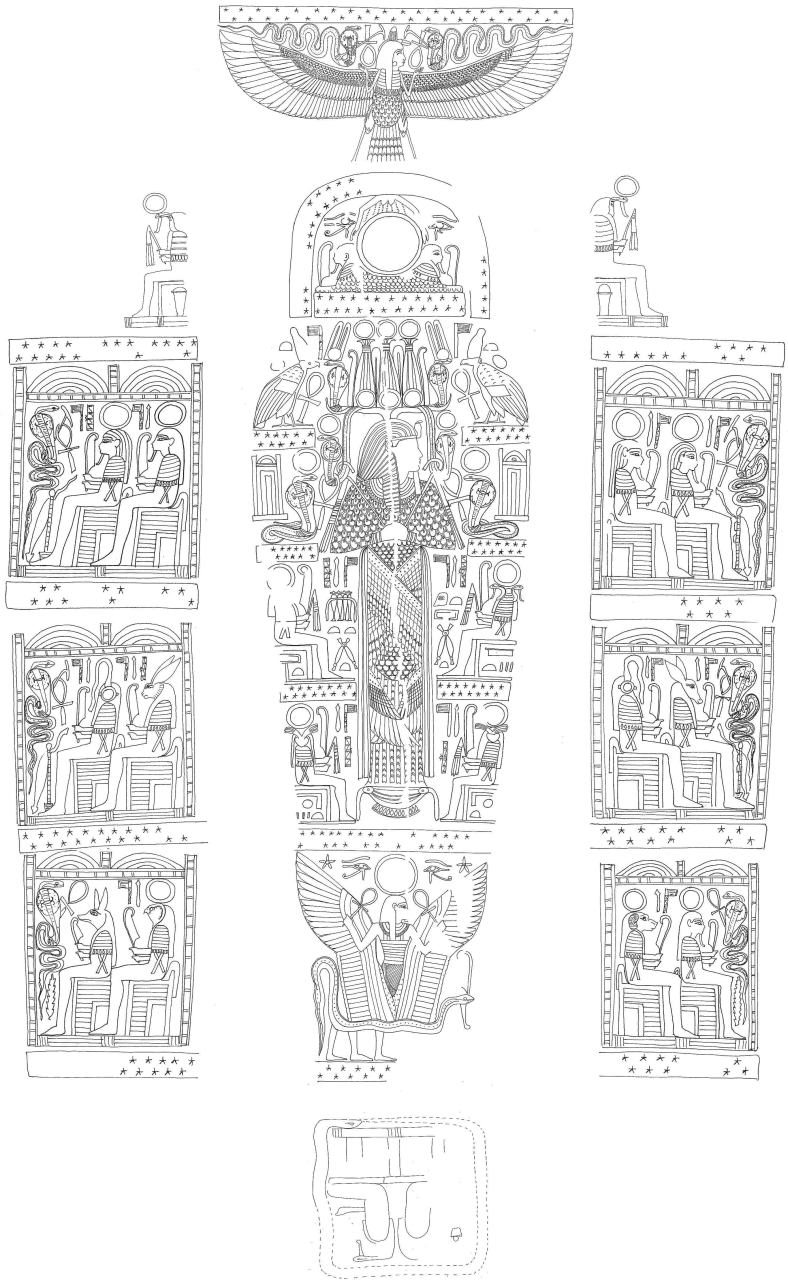


Fig. 4.6. Interior: outer box of Henuttaui (Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst in Munich).



Fig. 4.7. Interior (detail): outer box of Nesipakashuti (A.43).

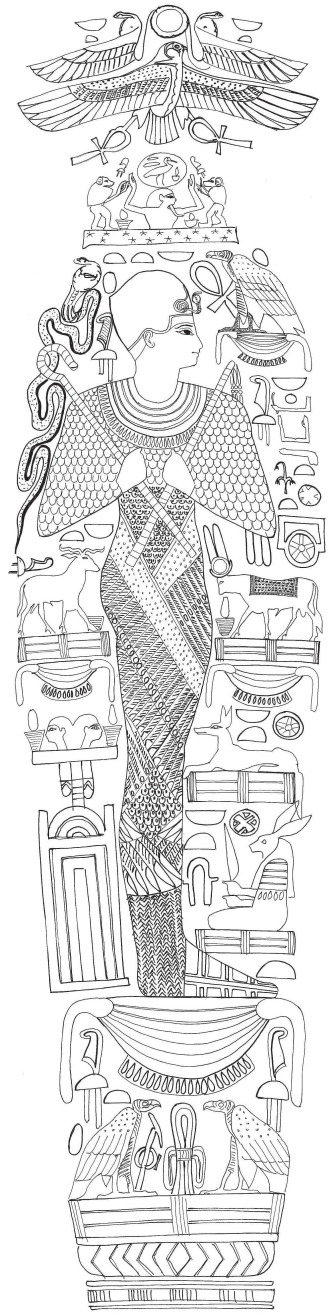


Fig. 4.8. Interior (detail): inner box of Pinedjem (A.55).

- The god Nun emerging from the horizon[47] or from heaven,[48] raising the solar disc (Fig. 4.8).
- The solar scene depicting the sun disc rising from the lions of the horizon or from the god Aker (Fig. 4.6).[49]

Some tableaux representing Osiris in fully human form are found in inner coffins, which underscores their increasing significance in funerary art.[50]

Long sides

With the establishment of independent sections within the interior space of the boxes, the long sides were structured into registers, typically three, though their number increased to as many as four by the end of the 21st Dynasty . The register binders are painted in blue and shaped as sky-signs, sometimes decorated with stars, evoking the heavenly realm.

The compositions on the long sides were aligned with the longitudinal axis of the floorboard. Two primary types of scenes can be observed in this context:

Groups of mummiform deities

These scenes consist of repetitive series of mummiform deities depicted standing or enthroned, with a diverse array of attributes represented as heads. These may include the following:

- Animal heads:
  - Birds: Heron, falcon, vulture.
  - Mammals: Baboon, jackal, rabbit, lioness, mouse, ram, hippopotamus.
  - Reptiles: Cobra, serpent, crocodile.
  - Human: Full- frontal head, female head, male head.
- Natural elements: Flame, sun disc, moon, West pole, East pole.

47 A.43: outer coffin of Nesipakashuti.
48 A.55: inner coffin of Pinedjem.
49 A.60: anonymous outer coffin.
50 A.40: inner coffin of Bakenmut. A.55: inner coffin of Pinedjem. A.6: iInner coffin of Nesitanebettaui.

- Objects: Feather, *nekhakha*-sceptres combined with the *shen*-ring.
- Composite forms: Vulture with a sun disc devouring a serpent, double serpent with a sun disc, triple serpent with a sun disc, lion and crocodile heads, double cobra.

This vast repertoire of heads serves to heighten the otherworldly and unfamiliar nature of the Duat. Most of them are depicted in profile, following traditional conventions, although fully frontal views are also possible, particularly for human and jackal heads.[51]

These features draw heavily from the royal iconography found in the tombs of the Valley of the Kings, such as the Litany of Re, while also being influenced by the imagery of the Book of the Dead, especially Chapter 182, which features a large divine assembly of human and animal forms encircling Osiris's mummy for its protection.[52] Additionally, associations with royal funerary imagery, such as black-pitch-coated wooden statues, are evident.[53]

These mummiform gods are painted in vivid white, creating a striking contrast with the red background. These are the multiple forms of the Creator, that of 'Many faces' (Asha Heru), 'Many forms' (Asha Kheperu), or 'Many Names' (Asha Renu).[54] They represent the divine manifestations of the supreme god, with whom the deceased is identified.

These deities are frequently shown with a libation stand or lettuces at their feet. While standing figures are the norm, variations include enthroned gods in the upper registers and squatting gods in the lower registers.

The lower registers of the long sides may also feature motifs from the classical scheme, such as a jackal, or new elements from the Book of the Amduat, such as a goddess carrying a serpent on her shoulders, alluding to the Twelfth

51 The jackal-headed mummiform figure depicted in frontal view also appears in the Book of the Dead of Anhai, specifically in the vignette illustrating the Gates of the Netherworld, Taylor 2010, 70.
52 Taylor 2010, 199.
53 Taylor 2010, 200-201.
54 Niwiński 2018, 38.

Hour).[55] Another exceptional motif includes the depiction of the funerary barque bearing the mummy.[56]

Short inscriptions are sometimes added referencing these deities without revealing their names. Examples include: 'Lord of dread in the Duat', 'Ennead of the Duat', 'Great ones of the Duat', 'Ruler of Igeret', 'Lord of dread', 'Foremost of the Duat, in the *shetyt*-shrine', 'He who rises in the Duat' 'Foremost of the tomb', 'Foremost of the secret places', and 'He who is in the Duat'. Some inscriptions take the form of self-referential declarations, such as 'I am the Duat', 'I am ruler of the West', or 'I am lord of the Duat'.

These deities are often enclosed within vaulted ceilings, alluding to the shrines where they would rest in the Duat.

Ritual scenes

By the late 21st Dynasty, ritual scenes became increasingly common on the long sides, although their use remained limited. These scenes, which were already present in the classical scheme, were reintroduced, often interspersed among traditional mummiform deities. Examples include:

- Mourning scene: Widow squatting before a mummiform god.[57]
- Adoration scene: Borrowed from the tomb and temple iconography, these scenes vary in complexity. Simpler compositions show the deceased before Osiris[58] or a goddess performing ritual actions an enthroned god.[59] More elaborate scenes depict Hathor embracing the enthroned Osiris, with his firstborn wearing priestly garments and carrying the standard of Wepwawet.[60]

55 Hornung 1999, 53.
56 A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare. This motif recalls the Osirian scenes featured in the classical scheme, typically depicting Osiris atop the funerary bed. However, the subject is interestingly reinterpreted as crossing the Nile.
57 A.6: inner coffin of Nesitanebettaui.
58 A.33: outer coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
59 A.149: anonymous outer coffin.
60 A.55: outer coffin of Pinedjem.

These ritual scenes disrupt the otherwise repetitive depictions of mummiform gods, with some coffins intentionally incorporating such scenes in every register. The inclusion of ritual scenes introduces an earthly, albeit sacred, element into the netherworld imagery, which had previously been exclusively associated with the Duat. This 'contamination' of earthly subjects within the interior of the box vividly highlights the growing sanctity attributed to the necropolis.

Short sides

In the complex scheme, the decoration of the headboard becomes distinct and self-contained, framed within monochromatic bands. The most frequently depicted motif in this area is, by far, the avian form of the deceased, shown with outstretched wings as if flying back to the coffin to rest upon the mummy, symbolising its nightly return. Surrounding the *ba*-bird, various elements are often included, such as the poles of the East and the West, again alluding to the daily circuit of the *ba*-bird in the sky, or mummiform deities. Hieroglyphs relating to the concept of "going forth by day" are also commonly found in this area.

Alternatively, a raptor is sometimes depicted, likely representing Isis.[61] Similar symbolism is conveyed through scenes featuring a winged Tjet-sign,[62] a winged cobra, or even a vulture, [63] all of which are shown with wings spread wide, echoing the imagery of temple ceilings.

Solar motifs, prevalent in the classical coffin scheme, are rare within this corpus. However, the winged sun disc occasionally appears in association with human arms upholding the sky.[64] This humanised depiction of the sun disc is also found in sunrise scenes from Chapter 16 of the Book of the Dead,[65] where it held significant symbolic importance.

61 A.55: outer coffin of Pinedjem. A.33: outer coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
62 A.102: outer coffin of Haes. A.140: outer coffin of Ankhefenmut.
63 A.131: anonymous outer coffin.
64 A.117: outer coffin of Horhotep.
65 Papyrus of Userhet. See in Wilkinson 1992, 51.

As for the floorboard, it is typically painted red, a simple yet effective reference to the burial chamber floor.

Commentary

From the end of the 20th Dynasty through the first quarter of the 21st Dynasty, the use of outer boxes became limited, resulting in a small number of examples in this corpus.

The earliest objects appear undecorated or coated in monochrome paint, most commonly red, echoing the colour of Ramesside burial chamber floors, though white or black pitch is also occasionally observed.

When figurative decoration was introduced in the interior of the outer boxes, the Djed-pillar became the primary motif. Originating from the exterior footboards of black coffins, where it symbolically supported the coffin, this motif was later transferred to the box interiors and expanded to cover the entire floorboard. Within this context, the sacred pillar aligned with the iconography of Chapter 151 of the Book of the Dead, referencing the Osirian burial chamber.[66] When used in the interior of the boxes, its presence conferred dual identification: first associating the coffin with the protective Osirian burial chamber, and secondly, but no less importantly, the deceased with Osiris himself.

Secondary depictions in this space derive from these associations. Traditional funerary constellations, including Isis, Nephthys, and the jackal-form of Anubis, are depicted alongside underworld deities associated with Chapter 182, symbolising divine protection during rebirth. Solar scenes positioned near or above the headboard allude to the rising sun god's rebirth, united with Osiris within the coffin, mirroring the *ba*-bird of the deceased's cyclical journey of departure and return to the coffin to join his own corpse.

The association of the Djed-pillar with the depiction of the cosmic deity extending human arms to hold the newborn sun carries a profound liminal meaning. Firstly, the human arms evoke the hieroglyph D 32 (*hepet*), meaning 'embrace' or 'hold'. The depiction of human arms cradling the sun symbolises the

66 Taylor 2010, 114-115.

transitional state of this phenomenon, serving as an abbreviated representation of Nun as depicted in the closing scene of the Book of the Gates,[67] or of Shu in the Twelfth Hour of the Book of the Amduat.[68] The liminal character of this representation is underscored by the partial depiction of the deity.[69] This same liminal meaning inspired the scenes in Chapter 16 of the Book of the Dead that illustrate the sunrise.[70] The tableau featuring the Djed-pillar and the cosmic god bearing the sun disc thus emphasises the liminal role of the outer coffin in guiding the newborn sun god to the exterior. This concept of transition and rebirth is already evident in Ramesside tomb decoration, where the solar embrace by a cosmic deity is also depicted, occasionally through representations of Nut,[71] or even a divine couple.[72]

In the Book of the Dead, the rebirth of the sun god is celebrated in Chapter 15, consisting of a hymn to the sun god at dawn.

> Worship of Re when he rises in the eastern horizon of the sky by Ani
>
> He says: Hail to you, you having come as Khepri, who is the creator of the gods. You rise and shine on the back of your mother, having appeared in glory as King of the gods. Your mother Nut shall use her arms on your behalf in making greeting. The Manu-mountain receives you in peace, Maat embraces you at all seasons. May you give power and might in vindication – and a coming forth as a living soul to see Horakhty – to the Ka of Ani (...)[73]

These hymns, which became an important feature of the Book of the Dead after the Amarna period, are followed by a large vignette of the sunrise, designated as Chapter 16. In these vivid scenes, the sun god rises from a Djed-pillar, symbolizing the *axis mundi* that leads the sun god from the depths of the netherworld to the heights of the heavens, greeted by the acclamation of gods,

67 Hornung 1999, 65.
68 Hornung 1999, 41.
69 Liptay 2014, 72.
70 Liptay 2014, 72.
71 Maystre 1936, Pl. VII. Valbelle 1975, Fig. 4. Wild 1979, Pl. II.
72 TT 2. In Bruyère 1952, Pl. III.
73 Book of the Dead of Ani.

ba-spirits and baboons.[74] It is this pivotal role of the Djed-pillar in facilitating the sun god's ascent that is reflected in the floorboards of the outer coffins.

In the complex scheme, the interior of the box is designed as a sacred space, a shrine wherein Osiris, fully identified with the deceased, emanates his divine presence to the Duat. This sacred space, wholly identified with the Duat, is open to the daily circuit of the sun, as well as to the comings and goings of the *ba*-bird, through which the deceased is perpetually regenerated and revived.

2. Inner boxes: the cosmic mother goddess

Basic scheme

The interiors of the earliest coffins are uniformly painted, typically in red or coated in black pitch. When compositions are introduced, only the floorboard is decorated showing the mother goddess painted against a red background (Fig. 4.9).[75] As a general rule, the deity is depicted standing on a *nub*-sign, always facing the proper left side of the box. On her head, she may wear the pole of the West (Fig. 4.10), or the symbol of the Theban Mountain (the falcon perched on the pole of the West). In the former case, she is labelled as the 'Lady of the West',[76] while in the latter, she is identified as Khefhernebes, 'She who faces her Lord', an allusion to the Theban Mountain.[77] Occasionally, she is referred to as 'Nut, the great one, who gave birth to the gods'.[78] In some instances, she is adorned with a double-feathered headdress and a solar disc, a characteristic attribute of the star goddess Sopdet (Fig. 4.9).

The goddess is clad in a tightly fitted garment that varies in design: it may be simply painted in white or featured a beaded pattern.

The goddess is almost universally depicted with her arms outstretched alongside her body, symbolising an embrace of the mummy contained within the

74 Taylor 2010, 238.
75 A.60: anonymous coffin. A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
76 A.60: anonymous coffin.
77 A.121: inner coffin of Khonsumes.
78 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Khonsumose.

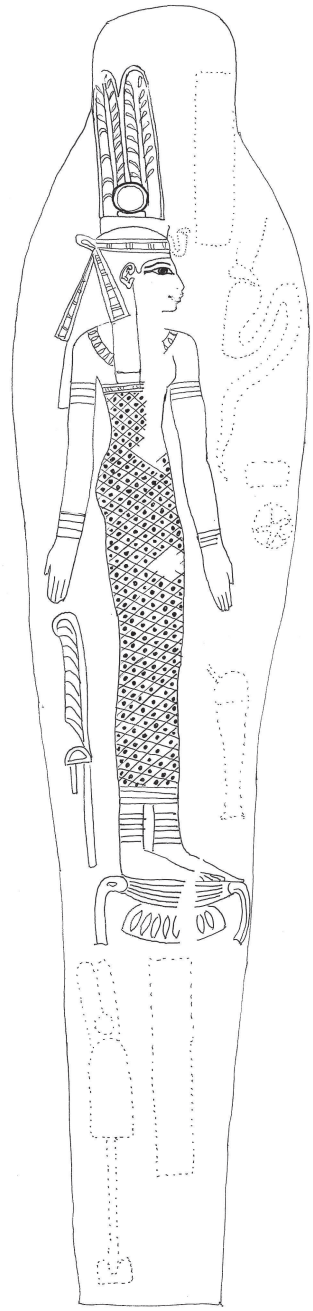


Fig. 4.9. Interior: anonymous inner box (A.60).

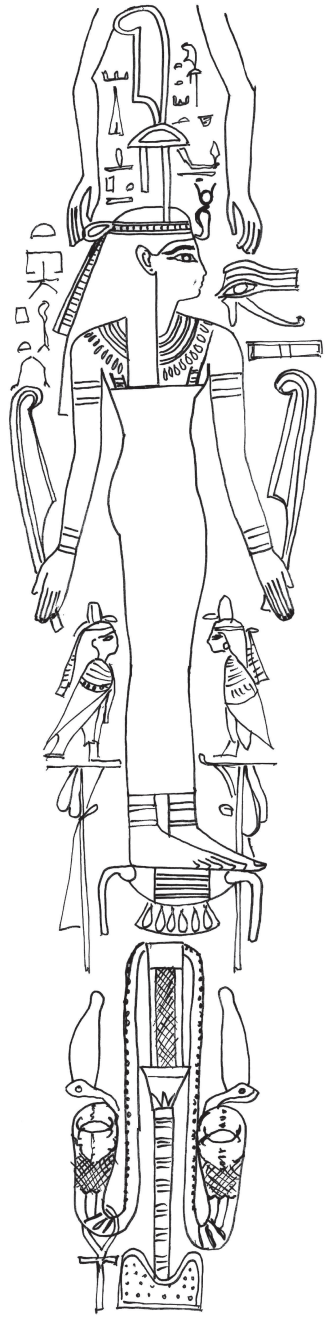


Fig. 4.10. Interior: box of Shebti (A.86).

box. Typically, her hands are open, signifying her role in welcoming the deceased (Fig. 4.9), though in some cases, she is shown holding feathers (Fig. 4.10).

Secondary motifs often flank the goddess. These may include *ba*-birds resting on divine standards, a falcon perched on a pole, or a coiled cobra. Even in these early compositions, a lower register is frequently present beneath the goddess, often featuring a *sekhem*-sceptre standing over the horizon (Fig. 4.10). Alternatively, a Tjet-sign may be depicted, following the same layout found on the exterior short sides of the box (footboard or headboard).

In the upper part of the composition, solar elements are commonly featured. In some cases, a solar disc is positioned above the head of the goddess. However, even when the sun god is not explicitly depicted, some representations subtly allude to his presence. For instance, in the coffin of Shebti (A.86), a unique composition above the head of the goddess features two open arms leaning towards her (Fig. 4.10).[79] This design is a subtle allusion to the closing scene of the Book of the Gates, where the god Nun raises the sun god above the primordial waters. Here, the depiction of Nun's arms implies that, while not directly shown, the solar child was begotten by Nut in the interior of the coffin and he is supposed to be raised to the horizon by Nun's arms. In any case, the interior face of the headboard works as the Eastern horizon from where the sun-god rises each morning.

Classical scheme

The defining characteristic of the classical scheme is the depiction of the cosmic goddess with her wings outstretched towards both sides of the box, creating a cohesive spatial connection between the floorboard and the sides.

The increased complexity observed in this stage of coffin decoration underscores the significant role of this area within the overall design of the coffin set. Several design variations are notable, as presented below.

79 A.86: coffin of Shebti.

1. Winged goddess encircled by text bands and friezes

This rare category of coffins, associated with high elite burials, represents a period of unparalleled creativity. These coffins typically feature a white or yellowish background. As in earlier designs, the cosmic goddess remains central, but she is now shown as a winged deity, with her wings spread wide across the sides of the coffin to protect the mummy (Fig. 4.11).[80]

As is common, the goddess's arms are extended to embrace the deceased, with a large feather in each hand. She stands on a *nub*-sign, beneath which various iconographic elements are displayed, including winged *wedjat*-eyes, *nefer*-signs, poles of the West, the Ta-wer totem, and the Djed-pilar. The goddess embodies the formula: 'Oh, my mother Nut, stretch your wings over me (...) and so I may never die', derived from the Pyramid Texts. This formula is frequently inscribed along the longitudinal text bands of the lid.

The standout feature of this group of compositions lies in the decorative treatment of the box's thicknesses, or the upper edges of the interior walls: text bands and/or block-friezes run along these edges, forming a magical ring encircling the goddess.[81] In some instances, the frieze is exceptionally elaborate. The following examples illustrate this complexity:

– In the inner coffin of Butehamun, the upper edge of the box features a multicoloured frieze of squatting, mummiform gods holding feathers, alongside winged cobras (Fig. 4.11).[82] Both sides of the frieze emanate from a Djed-sign at the centre of the footboard and converge at a winged scarab on the headboard. The goddess is thus depicted at the centre of a magical ring formed by an assembly of deities of the underworld. This magical protection is further reinforced by block friezes and text bands on the ledges of the box.

80 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Butehamun. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Sutimes. TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret. A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun. A.141: inner coffin of Tawedjatre. Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge: inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt. Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori.

81 Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge: inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt. Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Sutimes.

82 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Butehamun.

– In the inner coffin of Tauheret,[83] a sophisticated frieze is displayed along the edge of the interior walls displaying vignettes from the Litany of Re, with each figure representing a mummiform god of the netherworld.

Another notable characteristic of this group of compositions is the neat division of the long sides into two distinct areas:

– In the upper section, the compositions are arranged transversally in relation to the main goddess. A common vignette in this location depicts the sexual union of Osiris and Isis, with the goddess represented as a raptor hovering over the mummy. This scene is sometimes accompanied by the embalming scene, which portrays Anubis attending to Osiris.[84]
– In the lower section, several registers displaying mummiform deities, alluding to the Litany of Re, become increasingly prevalent.[85] These registers are oriented along the longitudinal axis of the floorboard, aligning the depicted gods with the central goddess and facing outwards. This marks the emergence of a trend that would later dominate the complex scheme, consisting of the decoration of the side walls with registers depicting mummiform deities of the netherworld. The inclusion of the Litany of Re enhances the protective role of these netherworld deities for the mummy. While these elements were previously featured in the exterior decoration of boxes adhering to the basic scheme, they are now applied to the interior. This likely serves to free space on the exterior walls for a new repertoire of scenes.

These high elite coffins demonstrate a pronounced interest in mythological scenes, which are otherwise rare in coffin decoration. Exceptionally, depictions of the caverns of the night may appear on the interior walls,[86] or even

83 TT 320: Coffin set of Tauheret.
84 Guilhou 2021.
85 A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun. A.141: inner coffin of Tawedjatre.
86 TT 320: inner coffin of Tauheret.

on the floorboard, where other extraordinary scenes alluding to the rebirth of the sun god may also be included.[87] In this context of exceptional complexity, representations of the deceased are rare, especially in festive garments, which are more commonly depicted on the exterior walls of the box. However, when such depictions are found, as in the inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt (Fig. 4.12), they create a remarkable continuity between the exterior and interior of the coffin, suggesting a symbolic return of the deceased to the source of life, represented by the mother goddess.[88]

The paramount role of solar imagery is consistent with the adoption of a white/yellowish background in most objects of this group, an exceptional feature within the yellow corpus, which otherwise typically features a red background in the interior of the boxes.

Each object in this group is a masterpiece in its own right, often incorporating esoteric imagery of the netherworld. The levels of complexity, visual density, and semantic depth achieved in these compositions remain unparalleled within the yellow corpus.

These features are rooted in royal archetypes, the most notable being the anthropoid alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I, housed at Sir John Soane's Museum in London. The interior of this monumental box is adorned with the hours of the Book of Gates, displayed along its walls, echoing the esoteric compositions found in the interiors of these coffins. Moreover, the depictions of the hours encircle the goddess Nut within a ring, mirroring the arrangements seen in these coffins (Fig. 7.1).[89] The friezes and ornamental bands displayed adorning the edges of these yellow coffins can thus be viewed as shortened versions of the elaborate panels surrounding the goddess Nut in Seti I's sarcophagus. The unique yellow background observed in this group may also reflect an aspiration to emulate the royal archetype, possibly alluding to the alabaster medium in which the impressive image of Nut was carved in Seti's sarcophagus. Finally, the inherent concept of movement, central to the depictions along the sarcophagus

87 Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge: inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt.
88 Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge: inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt.
89 Taylor 2017b, 73.

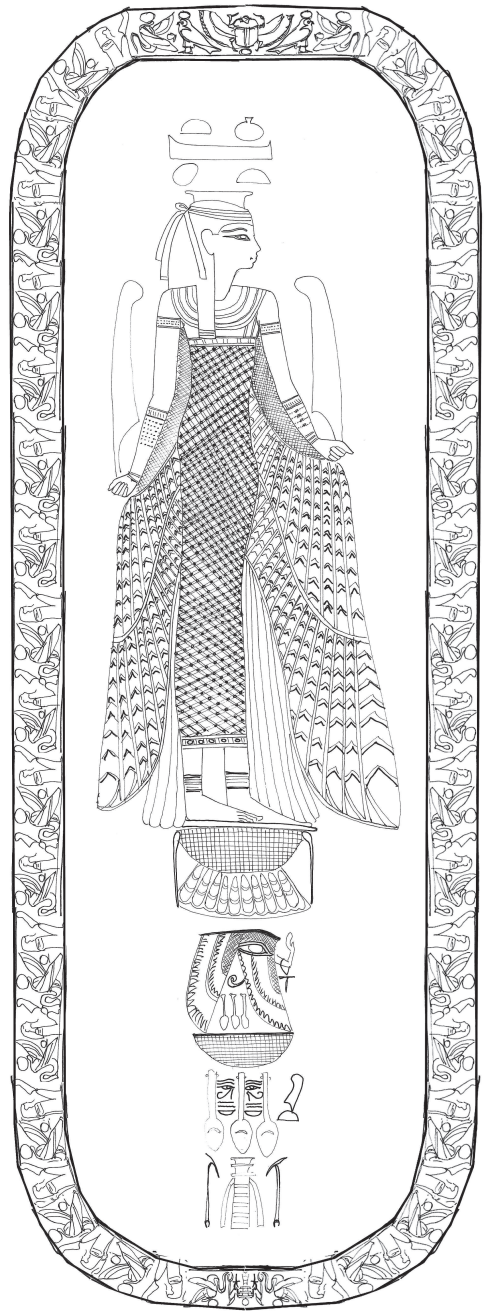


Fig. 4.11. Interior: inner box of Butehamun (Museo Egizio in Turin).



Fig. 4.12. Interior: inner box of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

walls of Seti I, is vital to understanding the pictorial decoration of the yellow coffins as a dynamic interaction between their inner and outer spaces.

2. Boundless (winged) goddess

Following a layout rooted in the previously described scheme, these coffins no longer feature the magical ring of text bands or friezes along the upper edge of the box. Two main groups can be identified:

Winged goddess

As in the previous group, the wings of the goddess extend to the sides of the box. The goddess is clad in a beaded garment, wearing a modius, sometimes embellished with a frieze of *iaret*-cobras,[90] and a headband. The Hathoric headdress and the royal vulture-crown may also be depicted but are exceptional. The goddess grasps feathers or *ankh*-signs, or she may simply hold her hands open, ready to embrace the deceased. She stands on a *nub*-sign.

Above the goddess, a sun disc is occasionally depicted, symbolising the rebirth of the sun god.[91] The sun disc may feature wings or human arms. In the latter representation, rays of light illuminate the goddess below. Related to this scene is the partial depiction of the god Nun above the headboard, with his arms outstretched to hold the sun disc expected to rise from the coffin.[92]

The remaining decoration can vary in complexity, ranging from a plain red background[93] to inscriptions referring to the goddess, such as: 'Nut, the great one, who gave birth to the gods, the Eye of Re, ruler of the Two Lands',[94] or 'Isis, the great divine mother'.[95] Exceptionally, several figurative elements are depicted on the floorboard, including winged cobras, the pole of the West, and *ba*-birds.[96] Below the goddess, a secondary register may include a *sekhem*-sceptre

90 A.115: inner coffin of Paharu.
91 A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepetkhered. A.88: inner coffin of Nesitanebetaui. A.152: inner coffin of Gatseshen.
92 A.88: inner coffin of Nesitanebetaui.
93 Louvre Museum: coffin of Panebmontu. A.115: inner coffin of Paharu. Louvre Museum: outer coffin of Tanetheret.
94 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh.
95 A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepetkhered.
96 A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepetkhered.

flanked by mourning goddesses or poles of the West,[97] or it may feature the Tawer totem.[98] The most elaborate compositions form three registers by adding the Djed-pillar.[99]

Some coffins depict the goddess against a background of inscriptions, creating an intriguing visual contrast between the vividly coloured deity and the profusion of texts outlined in yellow on a dark red background.[100] This scheme would later evolve in archaizing objects, which replaced texts with images to achieve a similar effect (Fig. 5.14-15).

Over time, secondary elements were introduced along the sides, which were divided into distinct areas:

- The upper section displays vignettes prominently derived from the Osirian repertoire: the sexual union of Osiris and Isis, the mummification of Osiris by Anubis,[101] or the resurrection of Osiris.[102] These scenes, displayed transversally, are reserved for the upper section. The use of such vignettes clearly draws from practices observed in the highest elite objects discussed earlier.
- The lower section frequently includes depictions of the Sons of Horus[103] and Anubis.

Above the headboard, the *ba*-bird is often depicted with its wings wide outstretched. Alternatively, a winged goddess may be portrayed in this location.[104]

Wingless goddess

When the long wings of the mother goddess were removed from the layout of the floorboard, the division between the latter and the sides became more pronounced. These compositions are consistently associated with highly

97 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh. A.120: inner coffin of Khonsuemrenepetkhered. A.46: inner coffin of Senu.
98 A.88: inner coffin of Nesitanebetaui.
99 TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu.
100 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanetheret.
101 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanetheret.
102 Musée de la Vieille Charité: coffin of Khonsumes. TT 320: inner coffin of Nesikhonsu.
103 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanetheret.
104 A.152: inner coffin of Gatseshen.

creative and unique tableaux depicted on the floorboard. The representation of the deceased became significantly more frequent and contributes greatly to the innovative nature of these compositions (Fig. 4.13).[105]

The imagery depicted on the floorboard is remarkably rich and diverse, sometimes challenging the decorum typically associated with the interior of the box. One striking example features the deceased alongside the goddess, sacrificing gazelles and fighting Apophis (Fig. 4.14).[106] Similarly, the scene of the cat killing the serpent threatening the cosmic tree also appears in this context.[107] While these scenes symbolise the victory of the deceased over the powers of death and evil, they are highly exceptional, especially given the general exclusion of chaotic elements in this setting.[108]

Another notable characteristic of this group is the prominence of solar scenes, which are loosely distributed across the headboard, the upper area of the floorboard or near the footboard. These solar motifs typically take the form of the following:

- Liminal depiction of the god Nun extending his arms to hold the newborn sun god (Fig. 4.13)[109] with the solar child occasionally depicted within the disc.[110]
- Sun disc rising from the lions of the horizon (Fig. 4.14).[111] In some cases, the sun disc is raised up by the Djed-pillar, flanked by the lions of Yesterday and Tomorrow.[112]
- Sun disc rising from the god Aker.[113]

The visual resources of these coffins are varied, strongly drawing on the imagery of the Book of the Dead, which is freely employed across different

105 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut.
106 British Museum: anonymous inner box (EA 29591).
107 A.102: inner coffin of Haes.
108 Taylor 2010, 196.
109 Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Tabakenkhonsu. A.142: inner coffin of Nesipernub. A.97: inner coffin of Horpeshi. A.95: inner coffin. A.105: inner coffin of Userhat.
110 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut.
111 British Museum: anonymous inner coffin (EA 29591). A.105: inner coffin of Userhat.
112 A.95: inner coffin.
113 A.105: inner coffin of Userhat.

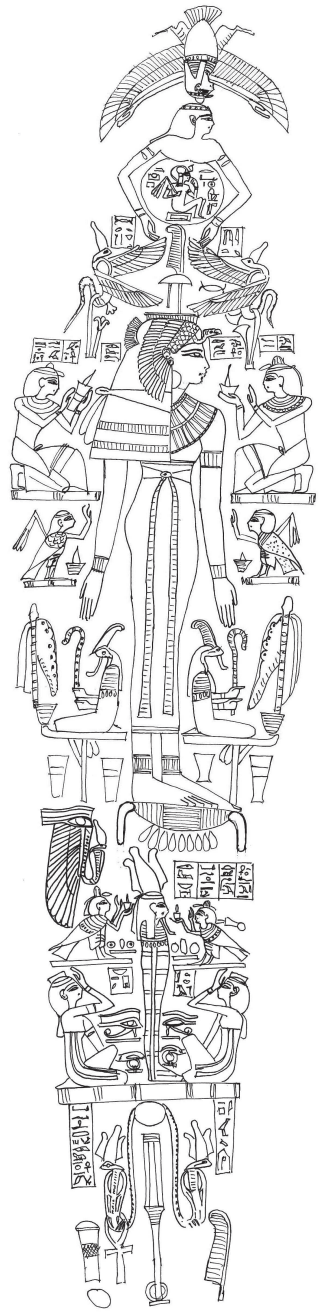


Fig. 4.13. Interior (floorboard and headboard): inner box of Ankhefenmut (A.16).

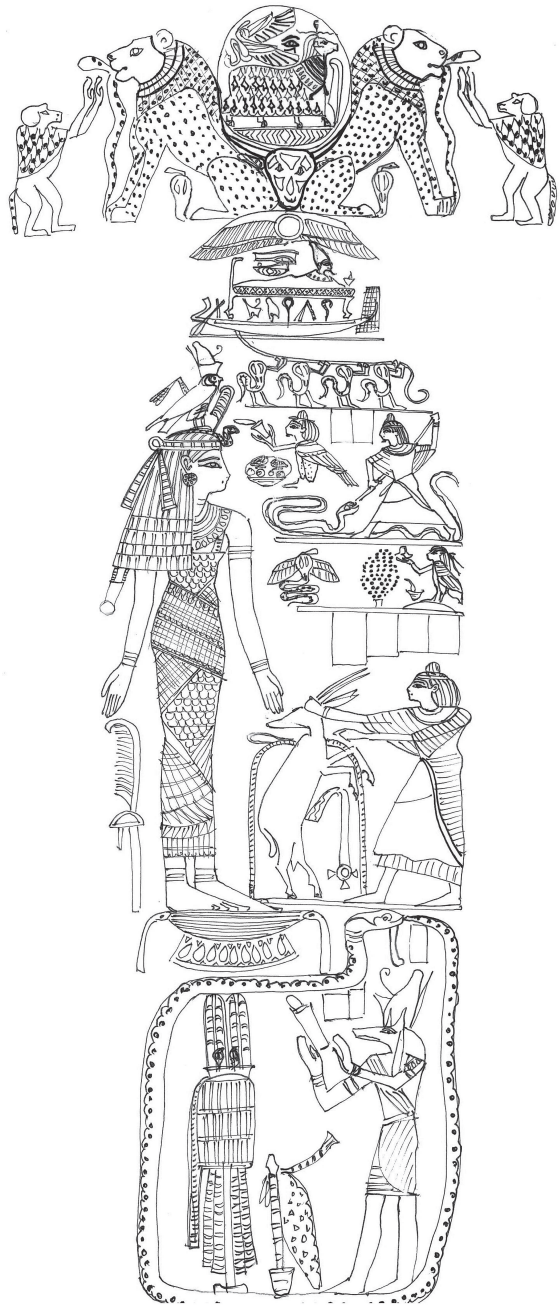


Fig. 4.14. Interior (floorboard and headboard): anonymous box (British Museum, EA 29591).

sections of the interior of the box. However, the technical skills of the artisans responsible for these coffins appear significantly inferior to those observed in the previous group. Moreover, the subjects depicted also reflect an aspiration to emulate the designs of the highest elite coffins, albeit with markedly lesser technical and iconographic resources.

The long sides follow the standard division into upper and lower sections. The reclining depiction of Osiris remains a constant feature of the upper section, though it now often adopts a longitudinal orientation.[114] The lower section typically includes vignettes of mummiform deities, featuring a diverse range of scenes such as gods standing on a coiled serpent, or mourning rituals.[115]

The headboard showcases a wide array of motifs, including:

- Solar themes:
  - Solar barque raised by the Djed-pillar.[116]
  - Sun disc rising flanked by the lions of Yesterday and Tomorrow (Fig. 4.14).
  - God Nun rising the sun disc.[117]
  - Winged scarab.[118]
- *Ba*-bird (Fig. 4.13).[119]
- Winged goddess.[120]

Complex scheme

The key feature of the complex scheme lies in the delineation of various pictorial areas within the interior of the box. In this process, the composition of the floorboard becomes independent of those displayed on the sides, with the cosmic goddess depicted entirely within the confines of the floorboard. The

114 A.97: inner coffin of Horpeshi. A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.48: inner coffin of Nesimut.
115 A.95: inner coffin. A.48: inner coffin of Nesimut. A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.97: inner coffin of Horpeshi.
116 A.95: inner coffin of Pameshem.
117 A.88: inner coffin of Nesitanebetaui.
118 Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori.
119 A.105: inner coffin of Userhat. A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner coffin of Tabakenkhonsu. A.46: inner coffin of Senu.
120 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser. A.152: inner coffin of Gatseshen.

long sides are now decorated as a single pictorial unit, divided into three or more registers.

These changes were accompanied by the introduction of standardised sets of scenes for each area of the coffin, along with a clear definition of the layout for each section (Fig. 4.15). It is thus only at this later stage that a detailed definition of the decorative space inside the box is fully realised.

Long sides

In the classical scheme, sequences of mummiform gods borrowed from the Litany of Re had been incorporated into the highest elite coffins.[121] Over time, this theme found its way into lower elite burials, where it became associated with the lower portion of the long sides.[122] In the complex scheme, these scenes were extended to cover the entire length of the long sides. This new pattern eliminated the traditional distinction between the upper and lower sections, introducing highly standardised sequences across these areas. These sequences typically feature three or four registers with mummiform deities depicted with an extensive range of attributes, often concentrated around their heads (Fig. 4.15-18). This repertoire may include the following features:

- Animal heads:
  - Birds: Falcon, vulture, heron, ibis.
  - Mammals: Baboon, hippopotamus, rabbit, jackal, ram, gazelle, cow, mouse, donkey.
  - Reptiles: Cobra, crocodile, serpent, turtle, frog.
  - Human: Full- frontal head, female head, male head.
- Natural elements: Flame, pole of the West.
- Objects: Feather, disc.
- Composite forms: double serpent, double cobra, an entire serpent positioned over the headless mummy.

121 TT 320: outer coffin of Tauheret.
122 A.114: inner box of Padiamun.

These deities are typically depicted with a libation stand or lettuces at their feet. As a rule, they are all depicted standing, but in high elite coffins they may be portrayed enthroned. Labels are added next to these deities, although this is less common than in the outer boxes. These labels refer to the gods as belonging to the underworld, with inscriptions such as: 'Great god, the foremost of the burial mound', 'Great god, the foremost of the shrine', 'Great god, the foremost of the *shetyt*-shrine', 'Great god, the foremost of the West', 'Great god, the foremost of the Duat', 'Great god, the lord of the mysterious land', 'Great god, the foremost of the Manu Mountain'.

As previously noted, the depiction of these deities may have evolved from the repertoire of the Litany of Re,[123] but the imagery from the Book of the Dead also plays a significant role. These deities should not be confused with the demons or gatekeepers mentioned in chapters 42, 144/146 of the Book of the Dead.[124] They are more likely related to the protective deities found in the vignettes of Chapter 182, entitled 'Book for the permanence of Osiris, giving breath to the Inert One in the presence of Thoth, and repelling the enemy of Osiris'.[125] The vignette from this chapter focuses on creating a protective environment around the mummy, with the burial chamber being defended from evil by a large group of deities in both human and animal form, holding snakes, lizards and knives. These deities appear to have originated from the imagery of royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings, where they are depicted on walls or as three-dimensional wooden figures coated in black pitch.[126]

In the context of coffin decoration, particularly in association with the mother goddess, these deities seem to have been included specifically with the aim of protecting childbirth. The interior of the innermost coffin recreates the womb of Nut, where the deceased enters a new life, vulnerable as a newborn.

123 Van Walsem 2014, 21-22.
124 Despite their unusual attributes, they are never depicted with knives, as is typically the case for demons.
125 Taylor 2010, 199-201.
126 Examples of statues inspired by the deities of Chapter182 have been found in the royal tombs of Horemheb, Ramses I, Sety I, and Ramses IX. These figures were coated with a glossy black varnish or sometimes simply painted black, a colour symbolising resurrection. Taylor 2010, 199-201.

The display of magical defences here aims to safeguard the perilous time of childbirth.[127]

These deities are sometimes enclosed within shrines decorated with cobra-friezes[128] or vaulted ceilings, the latter always being an explicit reference to *shetyt*-shrines.[129]

By the end of the 21st Dynasty these scenes were reinterpreted as cult scenes, with the deceased depicted performing ritual actions before the mummiform god.[130] This composition was progressively developed by introducing a different scene in the lower register. Such compositions may take the form of the following:

- Large Tjet-sign.[131]
- Coiled cobra encircling the inscription: '*Shetyt*-shrine who is in the Duat', or '*Shetyt*-shrine who is in the burial mound'.[132]
- Ritual funerary scene showing the widow mourning at the feet of the mummy.[133]
- Ritual adoration scene showing the deceased before a goddess.

Headboard

In the complex scheme, the headboard forms a clearly independent tableau. The following subjects can be found:

- Winged Tjet-sign.[134] This motif derives from the decoration of the exterior of the box, where the same motif appears in the same location. The resemblance of these panels is further enhanced by the removal of the wings. The goal behind the use of this motif seems to be related to the idea of passage between the exterior and the interior of the box.

127 Taylor 2010, 106.
128 A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun.
129 A.133: inner coffin of Heretenureb.
130 A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer. A.99: inner coffin of Padiamun.
131 A.54: anonymous inner coffin.
132 A.133: inner coffin of Heretenureb. A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun.
133 A.123: inner coffin of Direpu. This scene has the interesting feature of showing the deceased, a woman, being mourned by her own 'widow'.
134 A.44: outer coffin of Tjenetehenef. A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti.

– Raptor (Fig. 4.19).[135] Exceptionally, a raptor may be depicted, most likely referring to Isis.
– Winged solar disc.[136] The scene depicts an anthropomorphised solar disc with two human arms (Fig. 4.18). Rays of light flow between the arms into the interior of the box, evoking the Amarna iconography of the god Aten. Occasionally, serpents flank the sun disc in the tableau. This scene clearly derives from the depiction of the cosmic god holding the sun disc in his arms, as seen in the coffins of the basic and classic schemes (Fig. 4.10/13). Notably, at this stage, the cosmic god's arms were incorporated as part of the sun disc itself.
– Cosmological scenes. These may portray a cosmic god (Shu or Nun) and Nut, shown with only human arms protecting the sun disc.[137] These scenes are abbreviated versions of the closing scenes of the Book of the Amduat or the Book of Gates, both referencing the sunrise. Other compositions, equally alluding to the sunrise, feature the sacred scarab.[138]
– *Ba*-bird.[139] This is by far the most common motif, appearing in at least two thirds of the objects from this group (Figs. 4.15-17). The *ba*-bird is shown in full frontal view, as if flying back to the coffin to join the mummy at night or going forth by day at dawn. The scene is often framed by a starry band, symbolising the heavenly realm. The *ba*-bird may be flanked by various motifs, such as coiled cobras, mummiform deities, the pole of the West, or hieroglyphs alluding to the concept of "going forth to the light" or 'entering the Duat'.[140] These terms clearly denote the liminal zone from which ascent to the sky and descent to the netherworld are possible.[141] This imagery is closely linked to Chapter

135 A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun. A.15: inner coffin of Djedmutiuesankh.
136 Museo Egizio in Turin: anonymous inner coffin (10117). A.27: anonymous inner coffin. A.7: anonymous coffin. A.99: inner coffin of Padiamun. A.106: inner coffin of Nesineferher. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Nesikhonsu. A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer.
137 A.137: inner coffin of Tashedkhonsu.
138 A.91: inner coffin of Tadimut.
139 A.110: coffin of Shedsutauepet. A.12: coffin of Nesipanebimakh.
140 The most explicit of which is the outer coffin of Taahuti (A.32).
141 Liptay 2017, 261.

89 of the Book of the Dead, which facilitates the union of the Ba with the corpse during the night. Such an association is already attested in the anthropoid sarcophagus of Seti I.[142]

Floorboard

In the floorboard, the composition is also highly standardised, with the cosmic goddess typically portrayed as the personification of the Theban Mountain, accompanied by her characteristic monogram of a falcon perched on the pole of the West (Figs. 4.15-17).

The attributes of the goddess are simplified: in most of the compositions she wears a simple white headband, and her hair (sometimes striped) frequently exhibits large binding bands. Elaborate crowns are relatively rare, such as the vulture headdress (Fig. 4.20),[143] or the modius adorned with rosettes,[144] or even uraei (Fig. 4.20).[145] The attire is usually plain white,[146] though it may display a beaded pattern.[147] The detailed feathered dresses are consistently associated with the use of vulture headdresses (Fig. 4.21).[148]

The goddess is depicted in three distinct forms:

– In most coffins, the goddess is portrayed with her arms positioned along her body, embracing the mummy with open hands (Figs. 4.16-18).[149]
  • A sub-group of this type features the distinctive characteristic of *ankh*-signs emerging from the goddess's open hands.[150] This trait is significant enough to form a small corpus of coffins sharing other

142 Taylor 2017b, 74.
143 A.91: inner coffin of Tadimut. A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti. A.43: coffin of Nesipakashuti. A.102: inner coffin of Haes. A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun. A.133: inner coffin of Heretenureb. A.99: inner coffin of Padiamun.
144 British Museum: anonymous coffin (EA 24907).
145 A.41: anonymous coffin.
146 A.41: anonymous coffin.
147 A.15: inner coffin of Djedmutiuesankh.
148 A.123: inner coffin of Direpu. A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer. A.133: inner coffin of Heretenureb. A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun. A.102: inner coffin of Haes. A.43: coffin of Nesipakashuti. A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti.
149 A.12: coffin of Nesipanebimakh.
150 A.43: coffin of Nesipakashuti. A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun. A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer. A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui.

similar features, such as an unusually long lappet of hair at the back and an equally long hairband.[151]

– Exceptionally, the goddess is depicted in majesty, holding royal sceptres (*nekhakha*-sceptre),[152] or ritual objects such as the *menat*-necklace,[153] or the lily-sceptre (Fig. 4.21).

In the majority of coffins, the goddess stands over a *nub*-sign, yet she may also appear standing over a sky-sign (Fig. 4.15/18),[154] or simply over a register-sign (Fig. 4.20).[155]

The goddess is often flanked by large ornamental hieroglyphs, suggesting an identification of the floorboard with a temple wall. Liminal elements, such as *shetyt*-shrines, vultures, cobras, mummiform gods, the poles of the East and the West, or heraldic plants, are also abundantly displayed along the sides of the goddess (Figs. 4.17/19).[156] The *ba*-bird is another common feature in this context. More rarely, the composition of the floorboard includes elegantly arranged floral offerings at the goddess's feet.[157] Occasionally, the red background is richly adorned with stars.[158]

Below the goddess a secondary register is formed using one of the following elements:

– Tjet-sign, usually flanked by mummiform figures (Fig. 4.17), poles of the West[159] or Djed-signs.[160] Exceptionally, it may be displayed as a frieze.[161]

151 A.71: coffin of Meritamun. A.61: outer coffin of Pinedjem. A.106: inner coffin of Nesineferher. A.17: anonymous inner coffin. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Nesikhonsu. Vatican Museums: anonymous coffin (Inv. N.: 25016.2.1-2).
152 British Museum: anonymous coffin (EA 24907). A.133: inner coffin of Heretenureb.
153 A.123: inner coffin of Direpu.
154 A.147: inner coffin of Menkhepere.
155 Vatican Museums: anonymous coffin. A.41: anonymous coffin. A.27: anonymous coffin.
156 A.133: inner coffin of Heretenureb.
157 A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer. A.135: anonymous outer coffin.
158 A.106: inner coffin of Nesineferher. A.17: anonymous inner coffin. A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu. A.110: coffin of Shedsutauepet.
159 A.132: inner coffin of Maatkare.
160 A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui. A.44: outer coffin of Tjenetehenef.
161 A.5: Anonymous coffin.

– Hieroglyphic compositions featuring the *ankh*-sign.[162] This symbol may be flanked by *shetyt*-shrines, or combined with the *per*-sign to form the cryptic composition 'Per-Ankh', e.g., 'House of Life', which, in this context, is associated with the coffin.
– Ta-wer totem.[163] This is sometimes depicted alongside an offering table or flanked by mourning goddesses,[164] or mummiform gods of the netherworld.[165]
– *Sekhem*-sceptre.[166] Unsurprisingly, this remains a recurring motif within this area of the floorboard, consistent with its traditional associations. It is often accompanied by liminal elements, mourning goddesses,[167] or mummiform gods of the netherworld (Fig. 4.18).[168]
– Nefertum-sceptre (Fig. 4.20).[169] This sceptre, adorned with the nymphaea flower and tall feathers, is rarely featured. However, its formal similarity to the *sekhem*-sceptre occasionally places it within this context.
– Ritual scene. From the late 21st Dynasty, this scene depicts the funerary priest performing libations before the mummy. In some instances, an additional register is included, illustrating the mummification of Osiris by Anubis.[170]
– Cryptographic scene. Some motifs are specifically borrowed from the repertoire of the Book of the Amduat. Examples include the two bearded serpents crowned with a sun disc (Tenth Hour),[171] the god Atum raising the sun disc alongside a winged serpent (Eleventh Hour),[172] and symbols denoting the 'necropolis' with a sun disc (Tenth Hour).[173] Other motifs derive from the vignette of Chapter 17 of the

162 A.83: inner coffin of Djedkhonsuiuesankh.
163 A.38: inner coffin of Ankhsenmut. Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Nesikhonsu. A.106: inner coffin of Nesineferher.
164 Inner A.71: coffin of Meritamun.
165 A.61: outer coffin of Pinedjem.
166 A.23: inner coffin of Nesipakaef.
167 A.17: anonymous inner coffin.
168 A.27: anonymous coffin.
169 A.41: anonymous coffin.
170 A.99: inner coffin of Padiamun.
171 A.15: inner coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun. A.133: inner coffin of Heretenure. See original motif in Hornung 1999, 51.
172 A.147: inner coffin of Menkhepere. See original motif in Hornung 1999, 52.
173 A.133: inner coffin of Heretenure. See original motif in Hornung 1999, 51.

Book of the Dead, such as the sun disc emerging from a calf's head positioned between *ba*-birds.[174] A particularly significant composition features a serpent encircling a mummiform god[175] or a hare poised on a divine standard (Fig. 4.19).[176] The latter is a cryptic composition alluding to the dynamic interplay between the cosmos ('existence', *wen*) and the unmanifested (Nun), also reflected in designs on the floorboard.

In the upper area of the floorboard, above the goddess' head, a well-defined repertoire of motifs serves to distinguish groups of compositions. These depictions provide key criteria for establishing a typology of the interior of the box. They are identified as direct attributes of the goddess:

- Elongated coiled cobra.[177] The most common motif is an elongated coiled cobra displayed above the goddess's head, forming a luminous 'halo' (Fig. 4.15-16). This represents the serpent Mehen that protects the solar god during his nightly journey. Here, it performs a similar protective role over the mummy.
- Vaulted sign of the sky. The sky-sign is distorted to accommodate the rounded shape of the headboard. This element may appear in conjunction with the cobra (Fig. 4.18),[178] or with the monogram of the Theban Mountain (Fig. 4.18).[179] When the goddess is depicted without a monogram, small scenes are included between the vault of the sky and the goddess's head:
  - Hieroglyphic compositions. These frequently take the form of an *ankh*-sign, flanked by liminal elements.[180]

174 A.139: anonymous inner coffin
175 A.43: coffin of Nesipakashuti.
176 A.147: inner coffin of Menkhepere.
177 A.110: coffin of Shedsutauepet. Museo Egizio in Turin: anonymous coffin (10117). A.132: inner coffin of Maatkare.
178 A.12: coffin of Nesipanebimakh. A.10: inner coffin of Tabaekkhonsu.
179 Inner A.71: coffin of Meritamun. A.7: anonymous coffin.
180 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Tabakenkhonsu. A.unknown: coffin of Takhybtiat..

- Solar scenes. This small corpus includes the depiction of the solar barque navigating the sky beneath the dome of heaven (Fig. 4.20).[181] In the solar barque, the sun disc is shown rising from a calf's head positioned between *ba*-birds (Fig. 4.19),[182] or between the heads of the god Aker (Fig. 4.21).[183] These scenes symbolise the rising sun and may allude directly to triumph over death/Apophis.[184] The sun disc may also appear rising from two vultures,[185] or from the horizon accompanied by the sacred scarab representing Khepri within the disc.[186] The Mehen serpent may be depicted above these scenes.

– *Ba*-bird used as monogram.[187] As previously noted, the goddess typically bears the monogram of the Theban Mountain. Alternatively, she is shown with the *ba*-bird resting on the pole of the West, sometimes carrying the solar disc on its head, or assisting the sun god in his ascent to heaven.
– Winged motif. This rare motif may consist of a falcon,[188] a vulture[189] or a winged disc,[190] depicted as if flying over the goddess and the mummy.

In later coffins, a *shetyt*-shrine may be employed as a monogram above the goddess's head.[191] In these instances, the *shetyt*-shrine symbolically refers to the coffin itself and thus the goddess is figured as an embodiment of the body container.

181 A.41: anonymous coffin. A.147: inner coffin of Menkhepere. A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti.
182 A.15: inner coffin of Djedmutiuesankh.
183 A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun. A.133: inner coffin of Heretenureb.
184 A.102: inner coffin of Haes.
185 A.139: anonymous inner box.
186 Vatican Museums: anonymous coffin (Inv. N. 25016.2.1-2). A.43: coffin of Nesipakashuti.
187 A.54: anonymous coffin. A.149: anonymous inner coffin. A.26: inner coffin of Nesiniutitaui. A.91: inner coffin of Tadimut.
188 A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer.
189 A.123: inner coffin of Direpu.
190 A.99: inner coffin of Padiamun.
191 A.32: outer coffin of Taahuti.

Footboard

In most coffins, the footboard is simply covered with monochrome paint. Occasionally, it features a simple composition. The following motifs may be observed:

- Djed-sign flanked by poles of the West.[192] The depiction of the Djed-pillar in this location is often interpreted as the place of sunset.[193]
- Serpent encircling a cryptic composition. The area enclosed by the Uroborus represents the primeval mound, the site where the Creator first appeared.[194] Within the Uroborus, cryptic compositions may be depicted, frequently incorporating a hare poised on a standard.[195] This is an allusion to the word *wenen*, meaning 'exist' or 'being', an important concept associated with the constellation of Osiris, also known as 'Wenen-nefer' ('Perfect being'), a well-known epithet of Osiris referring to the everlasting existence of the god in the *djet* dimension of time. This composition highlights the dynamic interplay between 'Being', e.g., divine creation, and the unmanifested, represented by Nun, with the Mehen serpent symbolising the latter. Other compositions may feature hieroglyphs, such as 'Foremost of the funerary mound' flanking the *sekhem*-sceptre.[196] In such cases, the cryptic symbolism pertains to the resurrection of the deceased as a god. In either instance, these compositions are deeply connected to the mummy which, upon placement within the coffin, would become a three-dimensional symbol of the creator god Atum, the primordial being emerging from the primeval ocean.[197]

These compositions were evidently designed to symbolically support the mummy, once it was positioned within the box.

192 A.106: inner coffin of Nesineferher. A.71: inner coffin of Meritamun.
193 Niwiński 2018, 38.
194 Niwiński 2018, 38.
195 A.15: inner coffin of Djedmutiuesankh. A.147: inner coffin of Menkhepere. A.139: anonymous inner coffin
196 A.133: inner coffin of Heretenureb.
197 Niwiński 2018, 38.

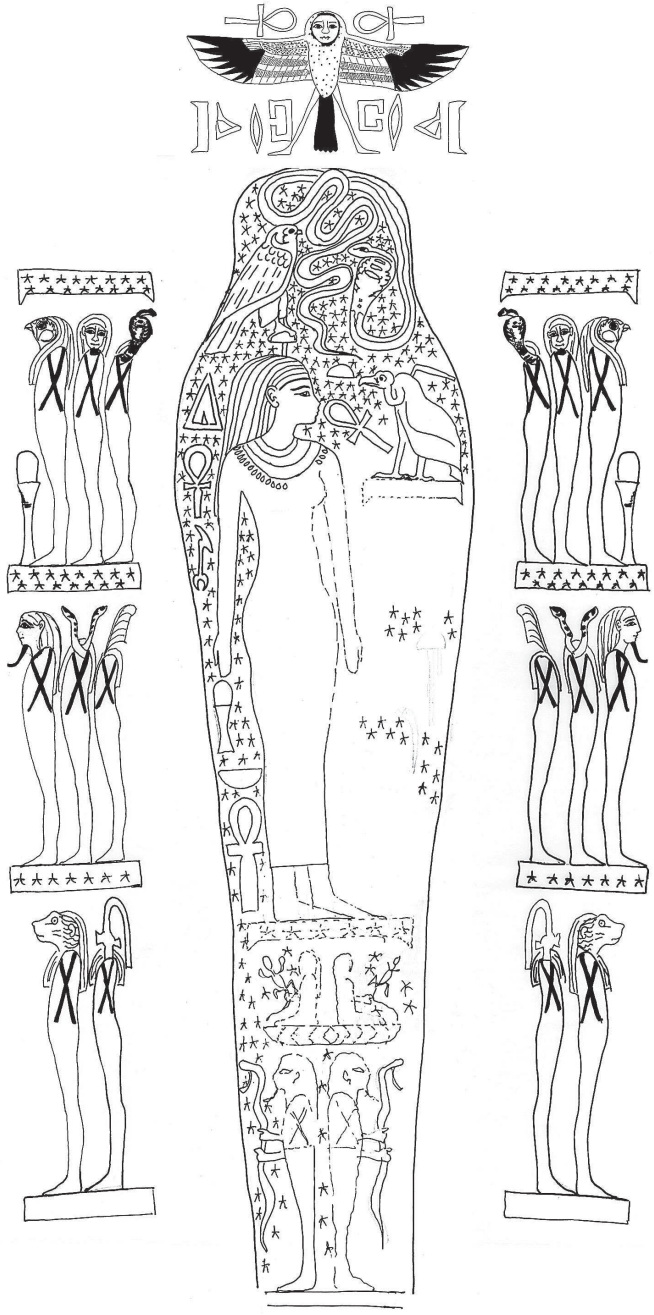


Fig. 4.15. Interior: box of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

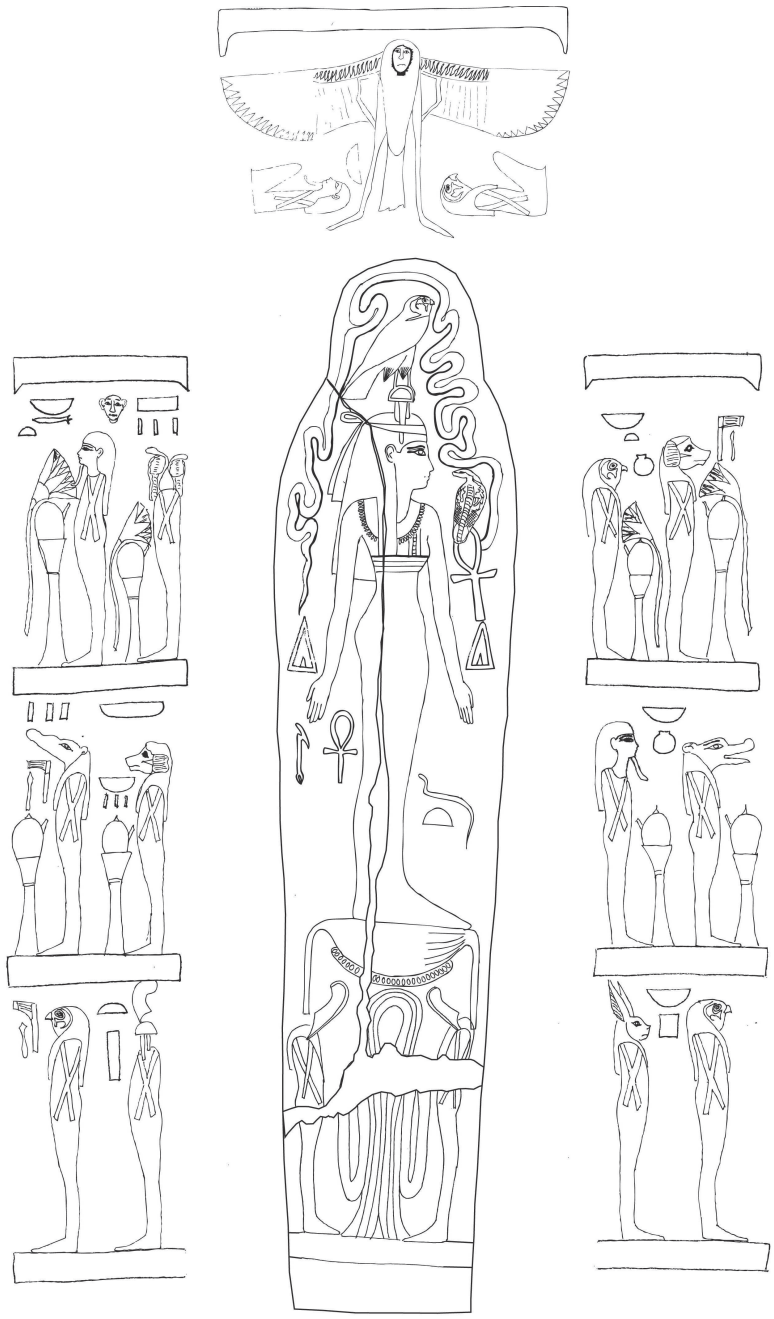


Fig. 4.16. Interior: inner box of Henuttatui (A.136).

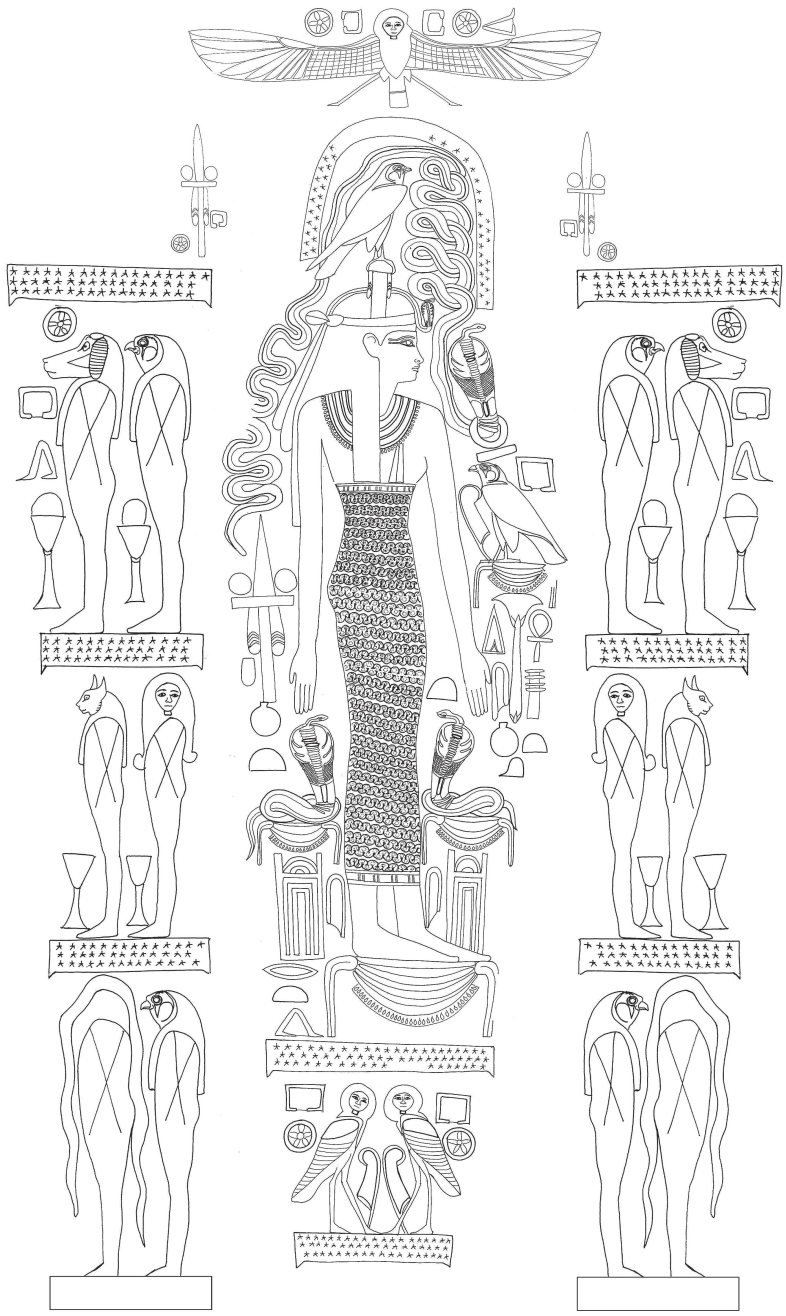


Fig. 4.17. Interior: box of Nesipanebimakh (A.12).

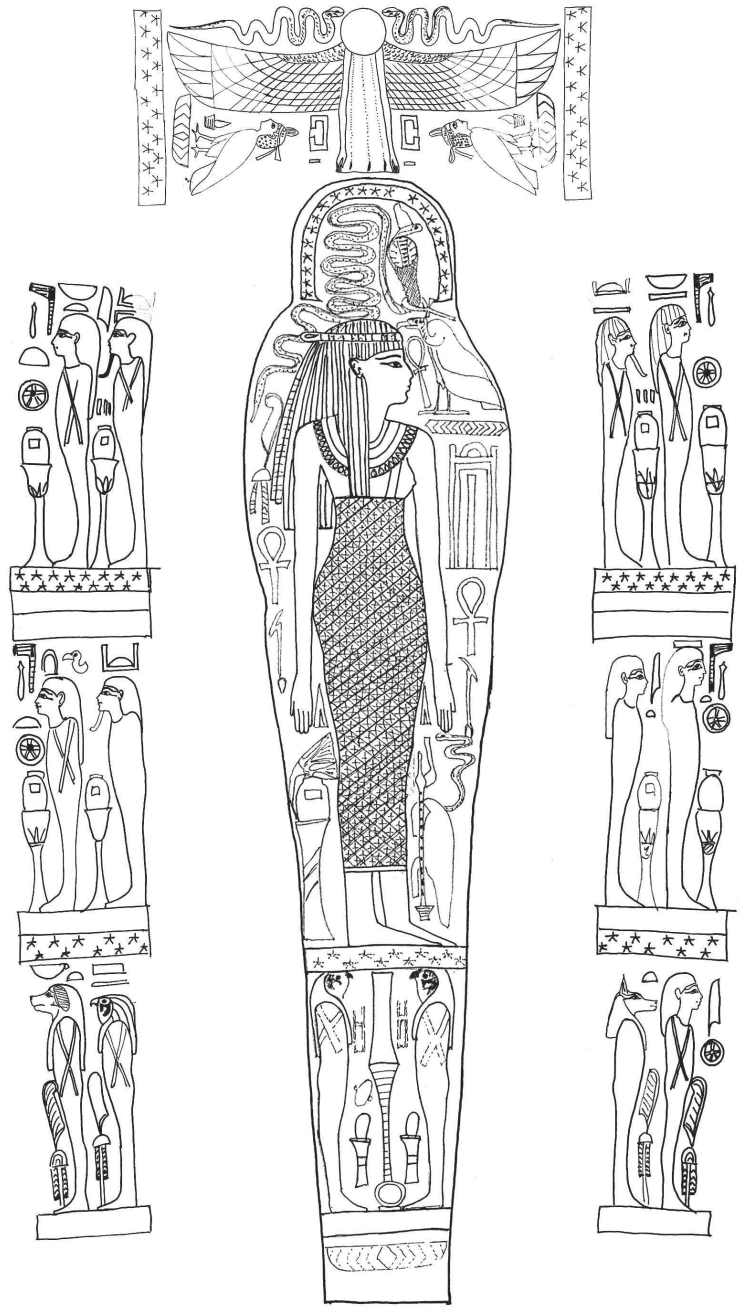


Fig. 4.18. Interior: anonymous box (A.27).

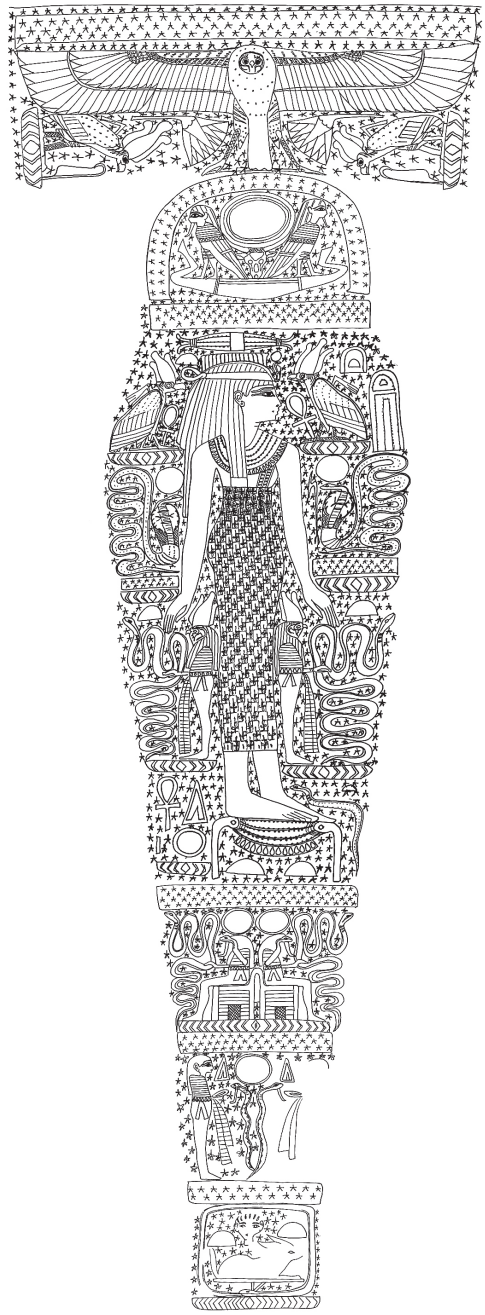


Fig. 4.19. Interior (floorboard and headboard): anonymous inner box (A.15).

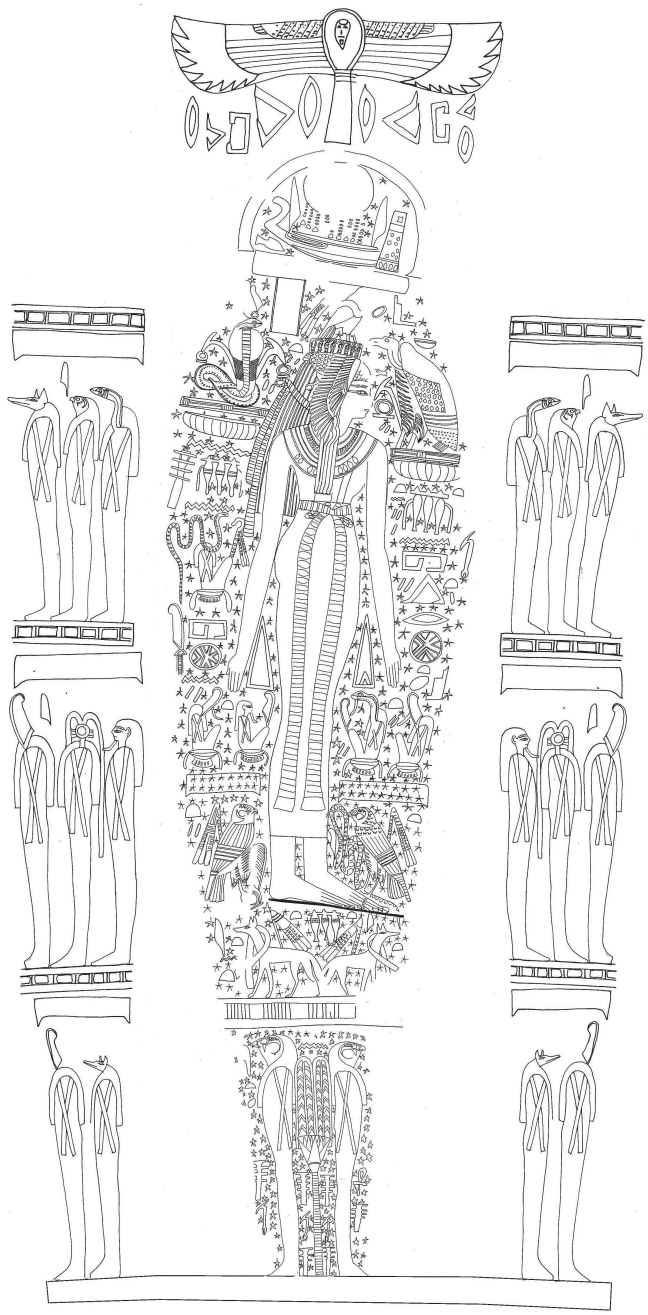


Fig. 4.20. Interior: anonymous box (A.41).



Fig. 4.21. Interior (floorboard): inner box of Heretenureb (A.133).

Reverse sides

The interior of the box is complemented by occasional ornamentation found on the reverse side of the lids or mummy boards. Typically, this area is left undecorated or simply painted in red or white.

The decoration of the reverse side of objects within coffin sets has traditionally remained an exceptional practice, typically reserved for highest elite burials. In the basic scheme, this feature is rarely observed. In the corpus studied here, it is attested only in the coffin set of Butehamun,[198] which includes funerary texts on the reverse side of the mummy board. While this evidence cannot be considered representative, it suggests that the figurative decorations later found in this context may have evolved from such textual inscriptions.

Visual decoration was incorporated into the classical scheme. The earliest evidence appears on the mummy board of Nesipawershefyt, housed at the Fitzwilliam Museum. This object is adorned with five registers of representations (Fig. 4.22), which visually render Chapter 18 of the Book of the Dead.[199]

A noteworthy feature is the complementary association between the layout of the inner box's interior and the reverse side of the mummy board. Taken together, the scenes displayed on these objects fully envelop the mummy. The interior of the box features the goddess of the Theban Mountain, surrounded by guardian deities and symbols of the sun-god's rebirth. Conversely, the reverse side of the mummy board borrows imagery from the Book of the Dead, depicting the ascent of the reborn sun-god. The decoration of the reverse side undoubtedly heightened the sacredness of the coffin's innermost space, imbuing it with divine power manifested in the rich and esoteric imagery surrounding the mummy.

Functionally, the reverse side of the mummy board acts as the reverse side of a door. Parallels for such decorated doors are evident in the burial chamber of Sennedjem (TT 1), where reverse side's decoration is integrated into the burial chamber's layout.[200]

198 Museo Egizio in Turin: coffin set of Butehamun.
199 Niwiński 2018.
200 Bruyère 1959.

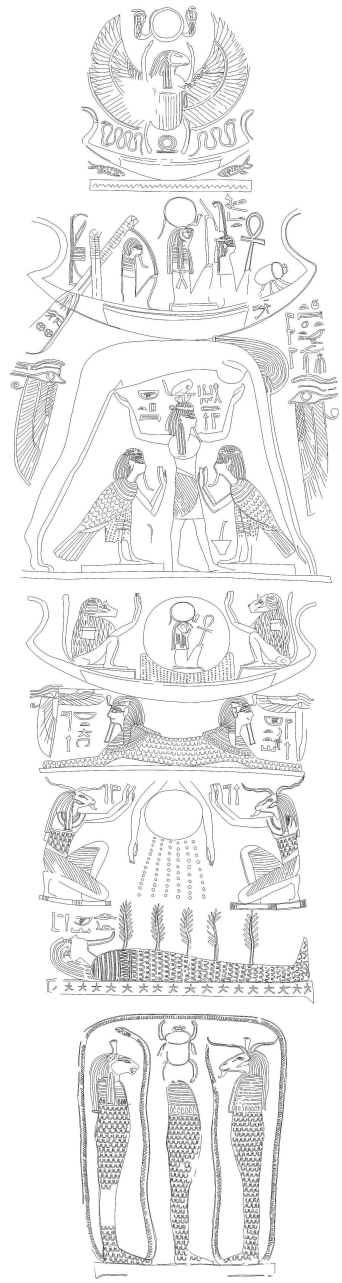


Fig. 4.22. Reverse side of the mummy board of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum). Drawing by Wolfram Grajetsky.

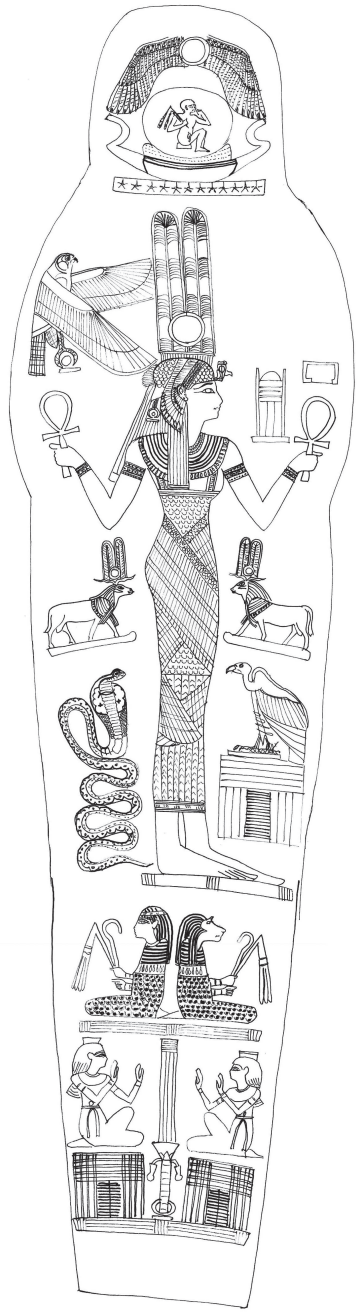


Fig. 4.23. Reverse side of the mummy board of Nesikhonsu (TT 320).

The coffin set of Nesikhonsu, from the Royal Cache, now housed at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, provides exceptional examples of reverse side decoration. In this set, the resource was used to decorate the reverse side of the inner lid and mummy board.

The inner lid depicts the winged cosmic goddess against a white background, her upraised arms embracing the deceased.[201] As in the inner box, she embodies the Theban Mountain, and above her head the solar barque appears, carrying the solar child - a cryptic image alluding to the birth of the sun-god, e.g. the sunrise.

Similarly, the reverse side of the mummy board features a comparable composition, exquisitely executed against a red background (Fig. 4.23). Here, the goddess is identified as 'Isis, the great divine mother, the Eye of Re, Lady of the West'. She bears the attributes of Sopdet, the mourning star heralding the Nile flood and cosmic regeneration.[202] Above her head, the sun disc encircles the solar child within. Collectively, these representations provide multiple manifestations of the cosmic mother goddess, whose wings fully embrace the deceased, guiding them to rebirth and renewed life.

These lavish compositions suggest that even the reverse sides of objects within coffin sets held ritual significance. This role appears to extend the sacredness of the inner box's interior. When the reverse side of the mummy board is decorated, it often replicates the tableau positioned in the box's interior, ensuring that the mummy remains fully protected within the divine embrace of the divine mother.

In coffin sets adhering to the complex scheme, the use of decoration on the reverse sides of mummy boards or lids is infrequent, even among the highest elite sets. The prevailing trend is to feature representations of Osiris in place of the mother goddess.

201 TT 320: coffin set of Nesikhonsu.
202 The inscription ensures the goddess's protection of the deceased when going forth to the light.

In the coffin set of Isetemkhebit (TT 320), the reverse side of the mummy board contains an exceptionally elaborate composition divided into five registers. The second register, the largest, displays the customary standing figure of Osiris. The third register features another depiction of Osiris in a symmetrical scene, with the enthroned god flanking the *sekhem*-sceptre. The fourth register depicts the deceased in mummiform guise, and the final register shows the Tjet-sign flanked by Djed-pillars. At the top of the composition, a winged sun disc with two human arms extends downwards to protect Osiris. The arrangement envelops the mummy, visually associating it with Osiris, likely as an extension of the funerary shroud, which typically displayed a similar sketch of Osiris roughly outlined in red or black.

Commentary

With the decoration of the interior of inner boxes, the mother goddess emerged as the divine archetype most closely associated with this space. She was often linked to the Theban Mountain in her manifestation as Khefhernebes, but also to Nut, in her role as divine mother, which implies an association of the mummy with Osiris, her divine son. Within the box, the deceased is depicted as if embraced by his mother, who engenders him anew and leads him to rebirth.

The depiction of the goddess inside the box is not unique to the yellow type but can be traced back to the royal sarcophagi of the New Kingdom. In these, the cosmic mother goddess was carved in the interior, in association with the nightly journey of the sun.[203] This connection is deliberate and meaningful, as the goddess engenders the dead king, who is identified with Osiris, facilitating his rebirth as the newborn sun god. This imagery embodies a deeply venerated royal archetype, encapsulating the king's association with the mysteries of Osiris's resurrection and the sun god's renewal.

The depiction of the mother goddess Nut in the interior of private sarcophagi dates to the late 18th Dynasty in Saqqara, during the reign of

203 Anthropoid sarcophagus of Seti I (Taylor 2017b).

Tutankhamun, or Horemheb.[204] In Thebes, however, such motifs in the interior of coffins are rare. The coffin of Iineferti from TT 1 is an exception, featuring a summarily depicted tree goddess within the box. It was only with the yellow corpus that this motif became widely integrated into private coffin decoration and non-royal contexts.

Unsurprisingly, the interior of the inner coffin, where the mummy is cocooned, contains the most intricate iconographic repertoire, representing the Osirian resurrection and solar rebirth within the Duat. The 'secret chamber' was conceived as a unified space, an undivided locus for the mysteries of rebirth, particularly during the first half of the 21st Dynasty. At first, the mystery is fully embodied by the mother goddess herself. Her depiction encapsulates the *summum bonum*, the ultimate destination of the journey featured along the exterior of the boxes. Returning to her nurturing embrace and re-entering her womb symbolically enables the deceased to undergo a rebirth as the rising sun.[205] The interior of the coffin is thus conceptualised as an Osirian Cavern of the Underworld, the site of the cosmic mystery where the rebirth of the sun god occurs. In the basic scheme, a subtle allusion to this mystery is introduced through the depiction of a cosmic god's arms, symbolising the act of bringing forth the newborn sun god. This potent imagery, inspired by the closing scenes of the Book of the Amduat and the Book of Gates, continued to be reinterpreted in later developments of the coffin's interior decoration. This deity, identified with Shu, Nun or Geb, is at times paired with an abbreviated depiction of Nut, characterised by two breasts.

In the classical scheme, the spatial unity of the coffin's interior is further accentuated by the addition of the goddess's elongated wings, extending along the sides of the box. This striking depiction, frequently enhanced by selective varnish, remained a central motif in subsequent designs. In high elite coffins, this sacred area was further emphasised by a protective ring of friezes and/or text bands bordering the edges of the box. Within this space, an extraordinary proliferation of esoteric imagery occurred, including elements borrowed from

204 Sarcophagus of Senqed (Egyptian Museum in Cairo, unknown number).
205 Assmann 2003.

different sources, such as the Litany of Re and several mythological compositions referring to the Duat. These visual elements were distributed throughout the interior, including along the long sides, which, for the first time, were decorated and formally divided into upper and lower sections. This marked the initial step towards challenging the unity of the coffin's interior.

The sacred chamber was now explicitly defined as a space symbolising both Osiris's resurrection and the sun god's rebirth. In this context, the deceased was primarily depicted as a *ba*-bird, following the divine archetype, representing the union of the Ba with the corpse, an image already seen in the anthropoid sarcophagi of Seti I.[206]

Although rare, representations of the deceased in ceremonial garments are also attested. In these cases, the deceased is shown at a sacred destination, witnessing the mysteries of the Duat after completing the long journey illustrated on the lids and exterior walls of the boxes. These depictions transformed death into an initiation journey, culminating in the ultimate revelation within the coffin's interior. Despite the enormous significance of such a climactic scene, it remained exceptional in coffin decoration (Fig. 4.12).[207] Typically, when the deceased is depicted, it is along the long sides.

Increased visual density within the inner box equated to heightened sacredness. This visual intensity often influenced the decoration of the coffin's exterior, as seen in the widespread use of liminal elements on lids and exterior walls.

In exceptional sets, the sacredness of the interior of the box was further enhanced by decoration on the reverse sides of mummy boards or lids. Initially, these features consisted of sacred texts aimed at protecting and sanctifying the space. However, in line with trends observed in the yellow corpus, images gradually supplanted texts by the second quarter of the 21st Dynasty, leading to the emergence of visual compositions (Fig. 4.22). These decorations typically adhered to one of two layouts: one centred on the cosmic goddess (Fig. 4.23), and the other on Osiris (Fig. 5.19). The former extended the box's layout, symbolically

206 Taylor 2017b, 74.
207 Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge: inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt.

embracing the mummy, while the latter drew on designs from mummy shrouds, thus establishing a link to the mummy itself. In both cases, the reverse side of the mummy board functioned as the back of the shrine door, visible from within the box.

In coffins of the classical scheme, the magical ring of text bands or block-friezes was progressively removed, potentially reflecting the increased sacredness of the coffin's exterior and the perception of the exterior as an extension of the interior's sanctity. Meanwhile, the interior saw an evolution towards distinct spatial divisions. The upper sections of the long sides often depicted Osiris and Isis in sexual union or other themes linked to resurrection and mummification, while the lower sections and floorboard featured compositions 'flowing' across spaces without rigid boundaries.

The complex scheme was achieved only when the long sides became a unified design, fully adorned with mummiform deities borrowed from the Litany of Re and Chapter 182 of the Book of the Dead. Initially appearing on the box's exterior walls (basic scheme), and later in the interior (classical scheme), this theme was eventually reintroduced specifically for the long sides. Its recurrence is also evident in contemporary funerary papyri, where it retained prominence.[208]

The headboard, long implicitly associated with the sunrise, was explicitly reimagined as the entry point to the sacred chamber, where the *ba*-bird entered or departed.

The interior of the coffin, increasingly delineated into pictorial spaces, came to be equated with a shrine, explicitly identified as a *shetyt*-shrine, hence the abundant use of liminal elements over the floorboard. These liminal elements (vultures, cobras, *shetyt*-shrines, hieroglyphs, and even the *ba*-bird) emanate from the interior of the coffin to the exterior. These features defined the coffin as a sacred space, a *shetyt*-shrine, where the rebirth and resurrection mysteries unfolded. Their role extended the interior's sacredness outwards, ensuring the sacredness of the entire coffin set.

208 In Bab el-Gasus alone, 6 papyri were found with this theme. Lenzo 2021, 213.

While the cosmic mother goddess played a central role in this sacred context, the leading protagonist was the mummy itself. Enshrined as an Osirian statue, the mummy embodied the eternal mystery of resurrection and the sun god's rebirth. Brief sketches on the reverse sides of lids, such as 'I am', reinforced the mummy's identification with the primeval god, who, embodying the unmanifested realm of the uncreated, perpetually recreates himself in infinite forms (endsheet: A.71-lid of Meritamun).

CHAPTER V

Archaizing layouts

During the second half of the 21st Dynasty, and increasingly so in its final quarter, a revival of older models from the first half of the 21st Dynasty becomes evident. This trend coincided with the growing complexity of coffin decoration and has been characterised as an artistic phenomenon known as 'archaizing'.[1] As will be demonstrated, this archaizing trend is observed in the recovery of the elements from both the basic and classical schemes.

1. Lid

Due to the scope of this study, it is not possible to explore all the nuances of archaizing layouts found on lids and mummy boards. Nevertheless, the most striking examples of this phenomenon can be observed in coffins that revive the festive dress layout. For instance, the mummy board of Meritamun (A.71) portrays the deceased clad in a white garment adorned with long ivy branches and a red belt (Fig. 5.1), resembling those found in Ramesside objects (Fig. VII). The unique layout of this mummy board has led authors to interpret the set either as an example of the archaizing trend of the late 21st Dynasty[2] or

1 Niwiński 1988.
2 Niwiński 1988, 79-80. Niwiński includes thus type of occurrences under Type IV-c, regarding them as evidence of an archaizing trend.

as a potential re-use of early Ramesside materials.[3] As previously noted, the deliberate use of an ancient model is usually associated with highly innovative layouts. This is precisely what can be observed on the lid and mummy board of Meritamun, where the typical floral collar of the upper section has been replaced by a shawl entirely decorated with liminal elements showing scarabs, vultures, royal cartouches, bees, falcons, and floral motifs (Fig. 5.2). In this object, the binding bands of the lappets, the pectoral and the bracelets, exhibit abundant use of liminal elements, a distinctive characteristic of the later stages of the yellow corpus.[4] Another irregular feature in the upper section of the Meritamun coffin set is the position of the deceased's arms: instead of the forearms being crossed over the chest, the right arm is positioned alongside the body, as seen in the festive dress layout commonly used during the early Ramesside period (Fig. VII).[5] Both features are highly unusual within the yellow corpus and are combined in this object to create a highly innovative result that merges the most recent trends in coffin decoration with elements that would be immediately recognised as ancient.[6]

This juxtaposition of the archaizing layout, with bold innovative features creates a striking contrast that undoubtedly captivated the audience for whom this object was intended. However, additional subtler motifs further enrich the appreciation of this unique coffin set. On the lid, the depiction of the white festive garment has been replaced by an extended version of the central section, with the latter actually interpreted as a dress (Fig. 5.3). The ornamental fringes hanging along the lower edge of this tableau are highly unusual, and the overall design suggests that Meritamun is portrayed wearing an intricately embroidered garment, which could rightly be described as a 'heavenly dress'.

Another refined detail is the exquisite pectoral worn by the deceased on the lid. This feature is seamlessly integrated into both the layout of the upper

3 Cooney 2018, 500 (footnote 12). Cooney sees this type of objects as the result of an opportunistic re-use of a coffin.
4 On the liminalisation of coffin decoration see Sousa 2018, 203-204.
5 Funerary board of Iyneferty (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 86.1.5: Cooney 2007, Fig. 141), funerary board of Tamakhet (Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrus Sammlung in Berlin, Inv. no. 10832: Cooney 2007, Fig. 5), coffin of Weretwahset (Brooklyn Museum, 37.47Ea-b: Bleiberg 2008, figs. 124-125), coffin of Henutwati (Louvre Museum, E 18848: Cooney 2007, Fig. 125).
6 Sousa and Villaró-Fabregat (forthcoming).

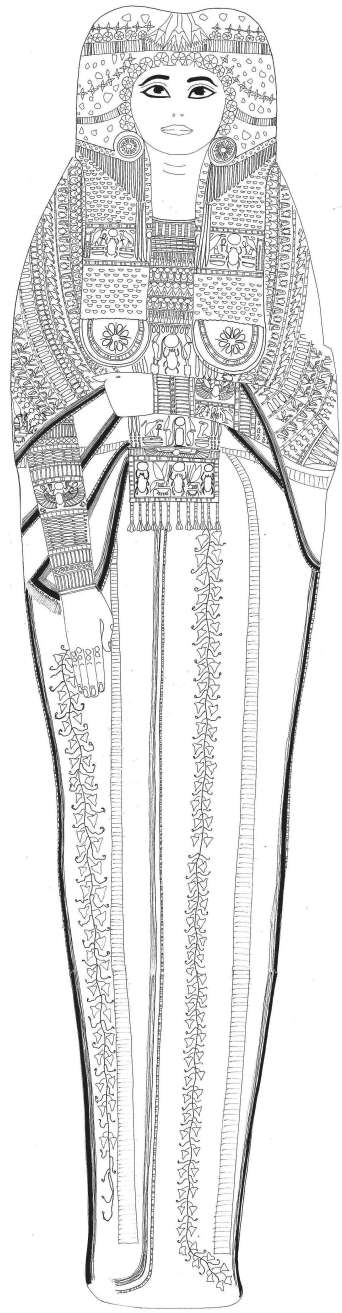


Fig. 5.1. mummy board of Meritamun (A.71).

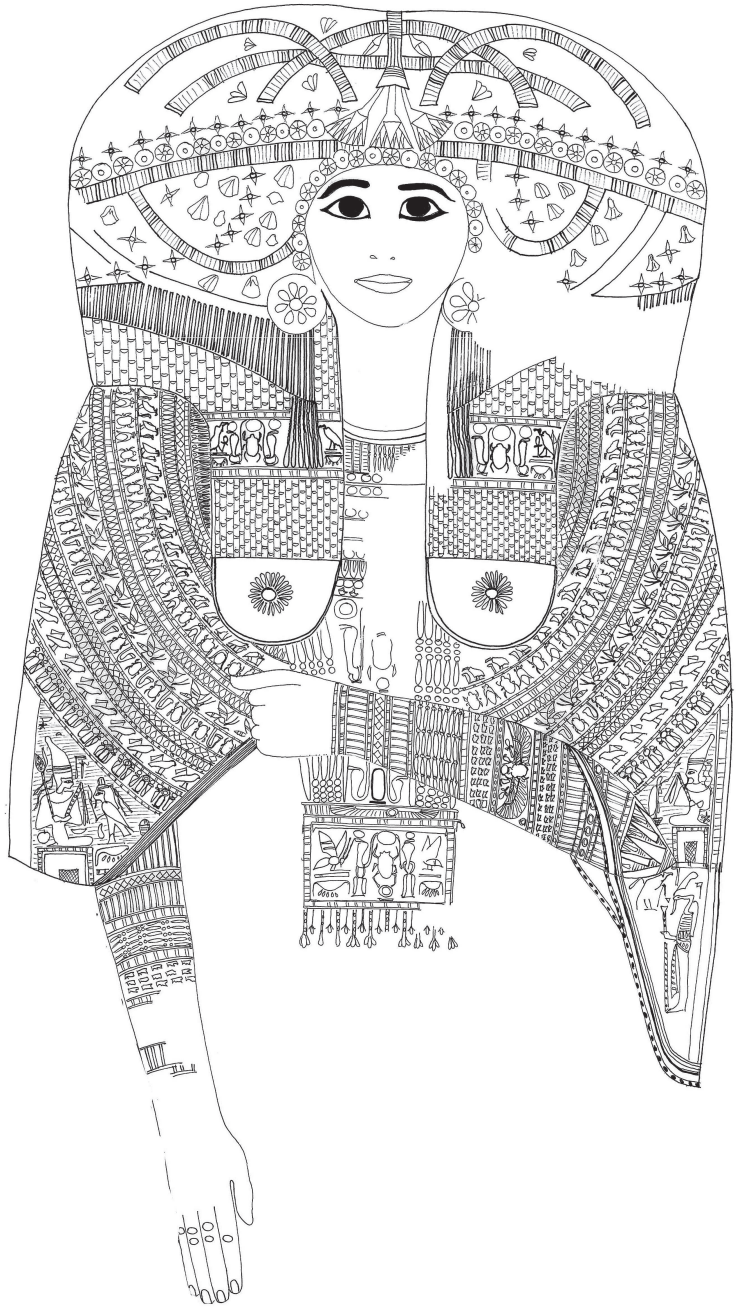


Fig. 5.2. Upper section. Lid of Meritamun (A.71).



Fig. 5.3. Lid of Meritamun (A.71).

section and the extended central section, establishing a firm link between the two compositions and providing a rare sense of unity to the overall design of the object. The superimposition effect caused by the addition of independent tableaux over the body of the deceased observed in most lids of the yellow type is avoided, creating a rare unity between the secondary compositions and the primary depiction of the deceased.

The layout put forward in the coffin set of Meritamun clearly had an impact, as it is found in a small sample of other coffins.[7]

Entangled compositions: fusing the upper section and the central section

As previously discussed, archaization is often associated with highly innovative designs. Unsurprisingly, the central section, the most heavily codified tableau governed by strict rules, becomes the primary focus for innovative input in archaizing objects.

One of the most interesting features of this corpus is how it challenges the established boundaries between the upper and central sections. Remarkable compositions were achieved by creating a continuous tableau extending from the short collar down to the lower section (Fig. 5.4). In these objects, the central section penetrates the central axis of the upper section, creating a single composition that blends features typical of both sections. This design approach appears repeatedly across various objects.[8] It represents a highly innovative layout, deliberately breaking with the conventions that define the layout of the upper and the central section. In strictly formal terms, such compositions could be classified as 'irregular', a topic further explored in the following chapter. However, interestingly, breaking the boundaries between the upper and central sections is not exclusive to the archaizing corpus. This feature is present in some of the earliest yellow-type object, such as the mummy board of Hori (Fig. VIII),[9] where the wings of the scarab extend into the upper section, partially covering

7 Sousa and Villaró-Fabregat (forthcoming).
8 Outer and A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope. A.109: outer coffin of Tjenetimentether. In the coffin set of Padiamun (A.87) all the objects of the set present this layout.
9 August Kestner Museum: mummy board of Hori.

the forearms of the deceased (Fig. 6.11). Short-lived innovations like these likely inspired the compositions seen in the archaizing corpus.

Typically, several pectorals, amulets, or ritual objects are displayed along the longitudinal axis of the composition, above and below the winged goddess. However, contrasting with the overall archaizing layout, the central section consistently includes at least three registers, and its composition vividly challenges the mainstream principles identified in the yellow corpus: the symmetry between the first and third register is never observed; the wings of the main goddess adopt a U-shaped layout; and in the symmetrical registers, the expected repertoire of alternating centrifugal and centripetal blocks is replaced by ritual scenes of a completely unpredictable nature. Examples include depictions of the Cosmic God on a solar barque elevated by Shu,[10] or elaborate ritual scenes where the deceased plays a paramount role.[11] Additionally, the main figure of this tableau, the mother goddess, is often depicted with exceptional features, such as wearing a vulture headdress and unbound hair,[12] or even holding royal sceptres.[13]

Another striking feature of this corpus is the prominent role played by the heart amulet which, surprisingly, is not an archaizing element at all (Fig. 5.4-5). While traditionally a central marker of the upper section during the second half of the 21st Dynasty, in this corpus it is instead associated with the central section, replacing the scarab as a nuclear block. This anomaly served as a cornerstone for creating distinctively innovative compositions. The inner lid of Tjenetipet (A.119) is in this respect a true masterpiece (Fig. 5.5): the scarab is replaced by the heart amulet, while the winged goddess, adorned with the tall Sopdet-headdress, is depicted standing, which gives her the nuclear position of the tableau. Above her head, the sky-sign and her name, Nut, are inscribed. In this formal context, the heart amulet becomes an extension of the goddess herself, alluding to the essential being of the deceased, from which the Benu-bird and the sacred scarab- reduced to sketch-like forms- emerge. Moreover, the goddess is shown standing over the tomb, within which the jackal form of Anubis is enclosed. Thus, the

10 A.109: outer coffin of Tjenetimentether. A.113: outer coffin of Nesiamenemope.
11 A.87: outer coffin of Padiamun.
12 A.87: inner coffin of Padiamun. A.109: outer coffin of Tjenetimentether.
13 A.109: outer coffin of Tjenetimentether.

goddess becomes the true axis of the tableau,[14] and the heart amulet, traditionally associated with the upper section, subtly challenges the boundaries between the upper and central sections.

In this context, the heart amulet is consistently depicted as a dark blue object with side projections, suspended on a thin golden necklace. Occasionally, it is inscribed with a short version of Chapter 30B of the Book of the Dead. Surrounding the object, a plethora of symbols is displayed, including mummiform deities, the Benu bird, the sacred scarab, the words '*djet*' and '*ankh*'. In exceptional cases, the heart amulet is paired with a larger motif, such as the solar barque,[15] or even the Osirian Ta-wer totem.[16]

Not unexpectedly, this visual constellation recalls the compositions featured in a particular corpus of mythological funerary papyri, where the heart amulet plays an important role (Fig. 5.6).[17] These papyri follow a common layout, with the introductory scene depicting the heart amulet flanked by the Benu-bird, the scarab, the Sons of Horus in mummiform guise, in other words, exactly the same constellation displayed on the lids surrounding the object. The central subject of these papyri is the journey of the deceased through the netherworld, culminating in solar rebirth, a journey governed by the deceased's heart.

Another striking feature of this small corpus of coffins is the unrivalled emphasis on the heart amulet in the vignettes displayed along the exterior walls of the box. The object is not only depicted in the weighing of the heart scene (Figs. 3.58; 5.9/13),[18] but also in a variety of other situations, such as adoration scenes before the tree goddess,[19] the Cosmic God standing over the hacking up the earth scene, the Ta-wer totem, the solar barque in triumph over Apophis,[20] or the deities from the Litany of Re.[21] The prominent role of the heart amulet in these coffins is intrinsically linked to its symbolic meaning as the divine essence of

14 A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet.
15 A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope.
16 A.93: coffin of Amenempermut.
17 For this corpus see Sousa 2008.
18 Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: coffin of Hori. Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut.
19 A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope.
20 A.30: outer coffin of Shedsuamun.
21 A.30: inner coffin of Shedsuamun.

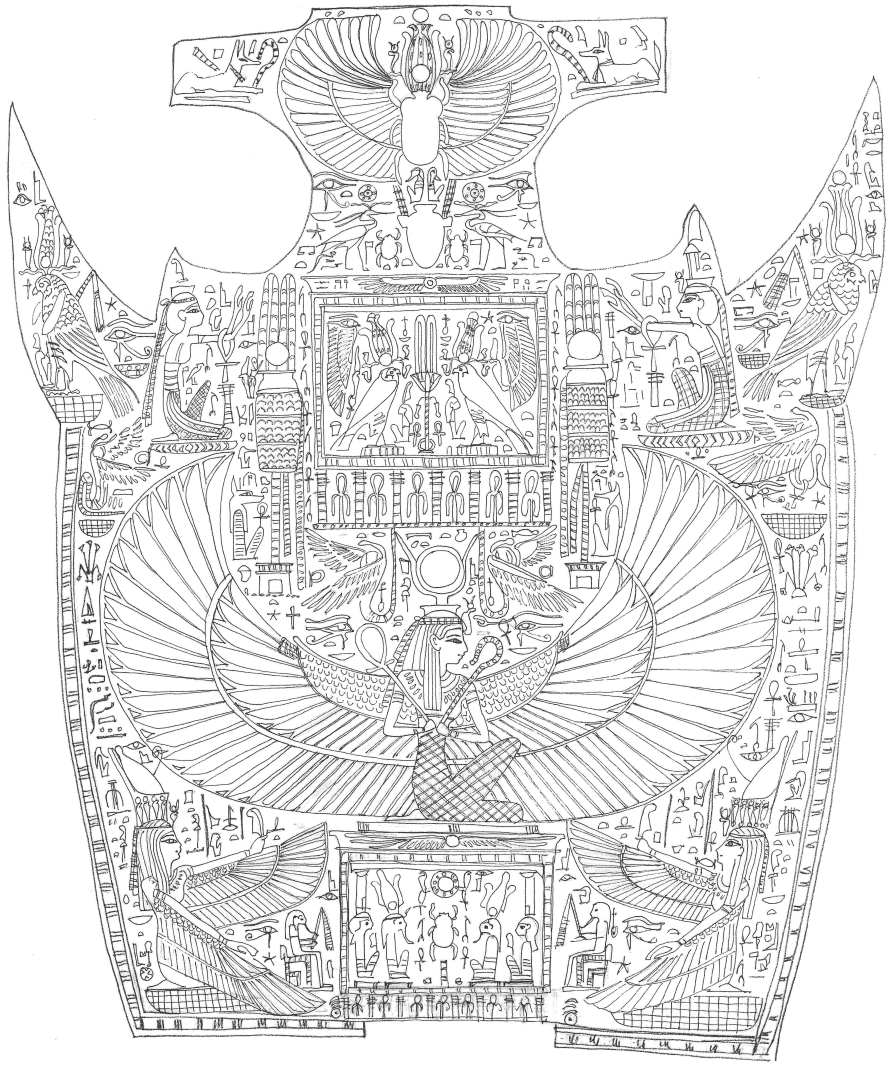


Fig. 5.4. Central section. Mummy board of Padiamun (A.87).



Fig. 5.5. Central section: Inner lid of Tjenetipet (A.119)

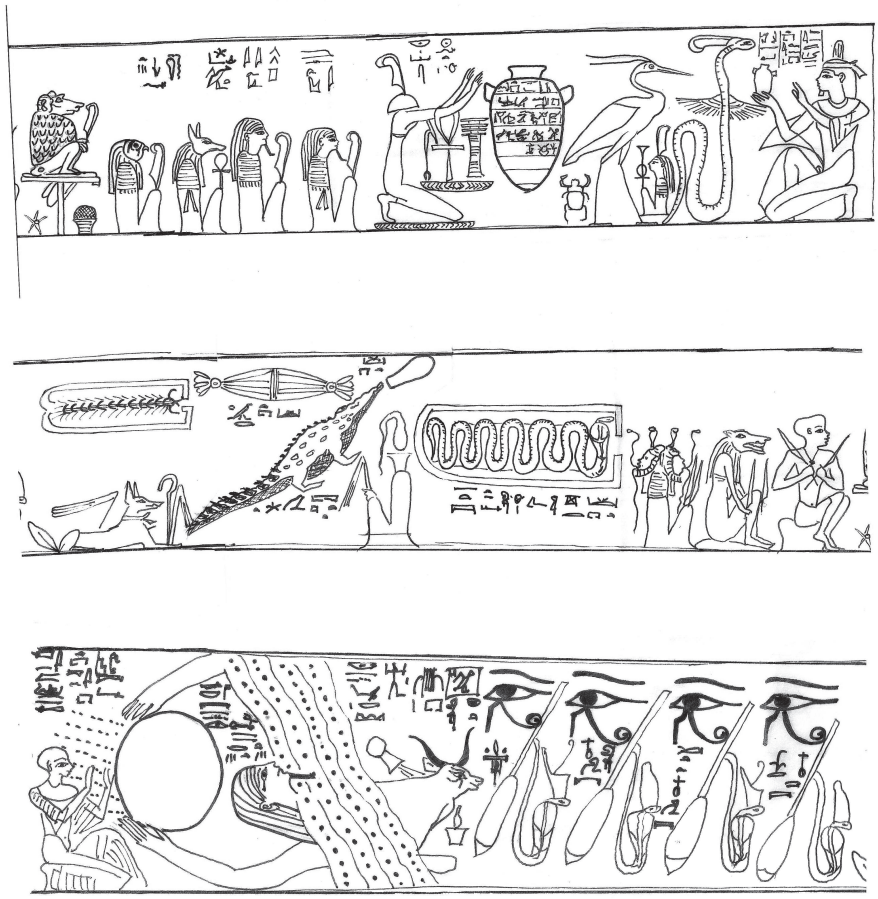


Fig. 5.6. Papyrus of Amenemwya (Egyptian Museum in Berlin, P 3127).

the deceased, signifying their Osirian identity, manifested through wisdom and virtue. This archaizing corpus of coffins appears to consciously elaborate on the meaning of the heart as the divine essence of the deceased's being, establishing a visual connection between the lid, the box, the papyrus and the heart amulet, which were theoretically enclosed within the mummy wrappings.

This sophisticated combination of an archaizing layout with highly innovative and creative arrangements created outstanding compositions, characterised by a distinct and vivid sense of uniqueness.

Lower section

In the archaizing trend, the lower section is heavily shaped by the normative layout of the classical scheme. Innovations, when present, tend to be found in the lateral partitions. These typically follow the standard sequence of vignettes, including Osiris and the avian form of Ptak-Sokar, in the first and second registers, respectively. However, in the third register, instead of the Sons of Horus, strongly innovative subjects occasionally appear. The following occurrences have been identified:

- Sacred cow of Hathor.[22]
- Sacred bull.[23]
- Heka or the lioness-headed goddess Hepet.[24]
- Guardian deities. This is an exceptionally rare motif in the yellow corpus. The only attested example depicts a child seated on the horizon, holding knives, with cobras rising from their head.[25]

Other archaizing layouts of the lower section are specifically associated with mummy boards. In a limited number of these objects, the lower section is simply painted white[26] or features a beaded pattern (Fig. 5.7). Within the

22 A.113: outer and inner coffin of Nesiamenemope. A.87: mummy board of Padiamun.
23 A.115: coffin set of Paharu. A.87: inner coffin of Padiamun.
24 A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun.
25 A.152: coffin set of Gatseshen.
26 A.19 (mummy board), A.97 (coffin set). Mummy board of Khaemopet (Collection Harris), mummy board of Panebmontu (Louvre Museum).

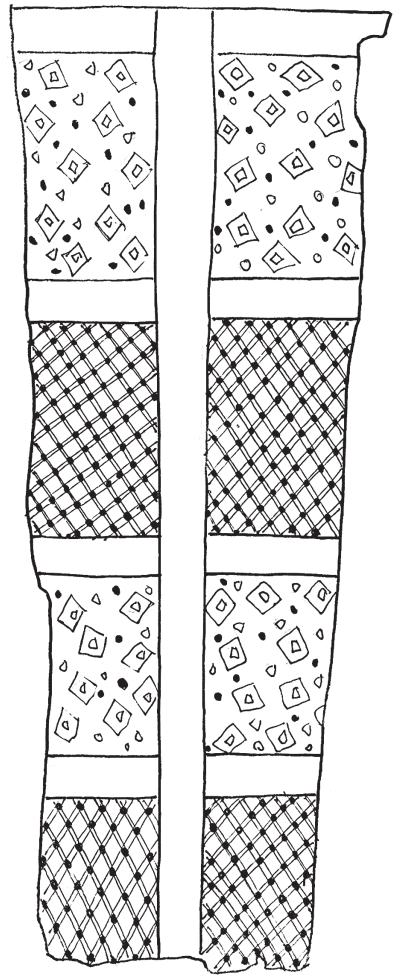


Fig. 5.7. Lower section: Anonymous mummy board (A.27)

yellow corpus, this layout is commonly found in late Ramesside coffin sets or in archaizing objects. The beaded pattern, in particular, directly references the Hathoric blanket that covers the back of the sacred cow (Fig. 3.64). This motif is widely used in iconography, especially in the ritual tents used in the funerary processions to cover the coffin (Figs. 3.97; 6.17-18). This protective role appears to derive from the iconography of the mummiform sacred cow, suggesting regeneration occurring within the Theban Mountain, identified with the womb of the cosmic goddess.[27]

Although this layout might seem reminiscent of the earliest anthropoid coffins, it is clearly abnormal within the yellow corpus. It represents a significant departure from its fundamental conventions, such as the use of longitudinal diptychs or tryptics. Its application, therefore, must have been highly intentional and imbued with symbolic meaning.

2. Box: exterior decoration

The exterior decoration of the boxes demonstrates a variety of approaches to archaization, deliberately employing elements from both the basic scheme and the classical scheme.

The archaizing use of the basic scheme

Two main types of archaizing layout may occur:

– **Pure recovery of the basic scheme**. Coffins with this layout typically feature striped patterns along the side panels of the headboard, the god Thoth in the upper section, and the Sons of Horus in the lower section. In some cases, the layout is so meticulously reproduced that accurately dating these objects can be challenging. Only a holistic study of all objects within the set may clarify the actual period of

27 See Tomb of Irynefer (TT 290). Wilkinson 1992, 59.

their craftsmanship.[28] It has been suggested that such objects could represent reused pieces, with the boxes retaining their original layout while the lids were redecorated. Although such practices occurred,[29] high elite objects often demonstrate an intentional attempt to recover the original style and scheme of the early 21st Dynasty. These efforts were so successful that the reproductions frequently rivalled, or even surpassed, their original counterparts.[30]

– **Selective use of the basic scheme**. More commonly, however, specific compositions from the basic scheme are selectively integrated into the layout of the box.
  - Lower section. The Sons of Horus feature prominently in the lower section, usually combined with innovative elements in the upper section. This approach is evident for the high priests of Amun and their families, where the archaizing layout blends elements of the basic and classical schemes.[31] Lower elite burials also reflect this trend, indicating a broader emulation of high-status models.[32] Additionally, archaizing layouts sometimes incorporate elements of the complex scheme.[33] For example, the Sons of Horus may appear alongside imagery from royal books of the netherworld or the nightly journey of the solar barque.
  - Central panel of the headboard. This is another composition frequently recovered in later coffins, particularly in highest elite burials, where the goddess is typically depicted standing[34] or squatting.[35]

28 A.111: outer coffin of Mashasekebt. A.114: outer box of Padiamun.
29 A.136: outer box of Henuttaui.
30 A.11: inner coffin of Paennesittaui. A.81: inner coffin of Amenniutnakht.
31 TT 320: inner coffin of Pinedjem II. TT 320: coffin set of Masaharta.
32 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer coffin of Nesikhonsu.
33 A.51: outer coffin of Ankhefenamun usurped by Ikhy. TT 320: outer coffin of Pinedjem II.
34 A.150: inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh. A.96: outer coffin of Nesitawadjatakh. A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer.
35 Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet. Museo Egizio in Turin: inner box of Khonsumose. A.100: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit.

The juxtaposition of elements from the basic scheme with those of the complex scheme could suggest reuse, particularly when there is a clear stylistic divergence between compositions.[36] However, such cases are rare, and most examples appear to represent intentional design choices. In objects adhering to the complex scheme, the Sons of Horus, for example, are often depicted in a more schematic style, such as enthroned mummiform gods.[37]

The archaizing use of the classical scheme

Similar to the basic scheme, the classical scheme can be so faithfully reproduced in later coffins that identifying their later origin may prove to be difficult. Again, these reproductions, particularly in highest elite objects, reflect deliberate and intentional design choices.

Patterns of recovery within the classical scheme include:

- **Pure recovery of the classical scheme**. Although rare, some late coffins achieve a near-perfect recreation of the classical scheme, incorporating its original repertoire (Fig. 5.8). This trend is most evident in high elite burials, resulting in exceptional works of art where style and proportion achieve an elevated level of execution.[38] Occasionally, such archaizing features are only detected through the layout of the lid[39] or unexpected scene integration, revealing a departure from what would be typical of the first half of the 21st Dynasty.[40]
- **Reinterpretation of scenes used in the classical scheme**. In later contexts, the vignettes typical of the classical scheme are often re-interpreted and re-designed, incorporating innovative elements:
  - In the scene of Osiris rising on the funerary bier, the god may not be depicted in mummiform guise, but as a living god, wearing a short kilt, corselet, and *nemes*-headdress.[41]

36 A.51: outer coffin of Ankhefenamun.
37 Museo Egizio in Turin: outer box of Tabakenkhonsu.
38 A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut.
39 A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun.
40 A.150: inner box of Djedmutiesankh.
41 A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope.

- The scene of Geb and Nut may include a stream of water or constellations of stars added to Nut's body, while Geb's body is outlined with feathers (Figs. 3.41; 5.12).
- The adoration of the Ta-wer totem, traditionally linked to the headboard's side panels, is often reimagined as a standalone topic,[42] frequently combined with the sacred cow of Hathor[43] or depicted as a divine image carried by a sacred barque during a festival.[44]

This re-interpretation often involves truncating scenes, reducing them to their most essential elements. For example:

- The weighing of the heart scene, which is typically lengthy, may often be abbreviated, reduced to its most essential elements,[45] or even focused solely on its central element, the scale (Fig. 5.9).[46]
- The typical structure of the Osirian stepped throne can also be truncated. Some scenes may depict only the throne of Osiris,[47] while others incorporate the guardian goddess Hepet, depicted alongside features that are not typically present in this vignette, such as the nymphaea flower,[48] or the solar barque.[49]

– **Integration of new scenes**. New vignettes may be integrated sporadically, with one or two additions, or more extensively.[50] Among the novel scenes, the following may be found:

- *Seven sacred cows and the bull*.[51] The scene is usually associated with the "four steering oars of the sky" and is borrowed from the

42 A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope. A.119: outer coffin of Tjenetipet.
43 A.87: outer coffin of Padiamun.
44 A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope.
45 A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun.
46 A.119: outer coffin of Tjenetipet. A.113: outer coffin of Nesiamenemope.
47 A.87: inner coffin of Padiamun.
48 A.113: outer coffin of Nesiamenemope.
49 A.87: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet.
50 A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope. In this coffin, the scene depicting the Ta-wer totem is unusually positioned in the upper section, deviating from its traditional placement on the side panels of the headboard. Moreover, the totem is portrayed within a shrine, navigating on a barque elegantly arranged for a festival. This same coffin is notable for its wealth of innovative scenes centred around the sacred objects of Osiris, including a striking and highly innovative vignette depicting the resurrection of Osiris as he lies on a funerary bier.
51 A.87: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet. A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut. A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope. The coffin of Itiamun (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Rich-

vignette of Chapter 148 of the Book of the Dead, which pertains to provisioning the deceased.[52] Occasionally, the topic is incorporated into other vignettes, such as the weighing of the heart scene,[53] or the tree goddess.[54]

- *Sacred barque of Sokar*.[55] This is a rare scene, attested only once in the corpus. Nevertheless, it clearly provides evidence of the influx of temple decoration in the funerary workshops.
- *Cosmic god and hacking up of the earth*. This is by far the most important and innovative scene included in the repertoire of the archaizing versions of the classical scheme. While not exactly new - it can be detected in the pure classical scheme, particularly in the interior decoration of the box (Fig. 4.12),[56] or in liminal zones such as the side panels of the headboard-[57] it is expanded upon significantly in later iterations. Earlier versions include three primary elements:
  - The central element consists of a headless mummiform god, with a scarab or a sun disc rising from his body.
  - Below this figure, a circular motif containing two sun discs connected by dotted lines, along with miniature depictions of men wielding hoes.
  - The upper part of the scene is composed of the solar barque carrying the sun god.

In these earlier versions, the scene is complemented by secondary figures, such as ram-headed gods flanking the standing mummiform god and supporting the sun barque. Below, two goddesses pour water (?), creating a circle around the lower part of the composition. The inclusion of ram-headed gods, also found in the Geb and Nut scene,

mond) appears to represent an early and isolated occurrence of the subject.
52 Taylor 2010, 152.
53 A.96: outer coffin of Nesitawadjatakh.
54 A.87: inner coffin of Padiamun.
55 A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun..
56 Fitzwilliam Museum: inner coffin of Nesipawershefyt.
57 Brooklyn Museum: inner coffin of Pasebakhaienipet.

suggests a symbolic affinity between these vignettes. In fact, the imagery of both revolves around heaven and earth united by a cosmic pillar, represented by Shu in the Geb and Nut scenes and by the headless standing deity in this corpus.

In archaizing versions, the subject is explored in a broader sample of objects and is often simplified. The ram-headed gods are omitted, replaced by *ba*-birds,[58] or the goddesses themselves, who are transferred to this position.[59] The lower circular motif is sometimes excluded, resulting in scenes where the scarab-headed standing god is flanked by goddesses holding up the sun barque. These scenes are often combined with features borrowed from other vignettes, such as the goddess Hepet or the Osirian stepped throne (Fig. 5.10-11),[60] or even the Geb and Nut scene, where the standing scarab-headed mummiform god is depicted on the solar barque (Fig. 5.12).[61] The meaning of this important scene is rather obscure. The hacking up of the earth is often interpreted as an allusion to the nightly journey of the sun, with the two small discs symbolising the points of sunrise and sunset.[62] The men with hoes, on the other hand, are thought to represent the *khebes-ta*, the nightly ritual involving a bloody sacrifice and an offering of water over the tomb of Osiris.[63] The large circle, flanked by two goddesses pouring water, likely symbolises the north and south.[64] In this cosmological context, the scarab-headed god signifies the Osirian resurrection and rebirth of the sun god, representing the Cosmic God holding up the solar barque which embodies the creation of light.[65] In many ways, the scene elaborates on the solar-Osirian unity and may have served to unify the imaginary of the Geb and Nut scene with that

58 A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut.
59 A.87: outer coffin of Padiamun.
60 A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet. A.119: outer coffin of Tjenetipet.
61 A.87: outer coffin of Padiamun.
62 Régen 2017, 439-448.
63 Régen 2017, 439-448.
64 Niwiński 2018, 42.
65 Régen 2017, 439-448.

of the Osirian stepped mound. Its usage aligns with the incorporation of motifs borrowed from mythological papyri.

– **Association with scenes of the complex scheme**. In these objects, the style may still retain the Ramesside softness and grace, and many of the vignettes may still depict the usual subjects of the classical scheme, while vignettes from the classical scheme are blended with elements from the complex scheme. For instance: symmetrical scenes featuring Osiris[66] often indicate a later dating; vignettes borrowed from the Book of the Amduat, such as the solar barque pulled by jackals or baboon-headed cobras, serve as definitive markers of a later dating;[67] a subtler indication is the inclusion of goddesses carrying serpents on their shoulders, a motif borrowed from the Twelfth Hour of the Book of the Amduat.[68]

  Another form of re-interpretation of the classical scheme involves subtle stylistic changes. While the iconographic repertoire and depictions of the deceased in white festive garments remain consistent with the classical scheme, the incorporation of liminal elements and schematic styles typically associated with the complex scheme suggests a shift in artistic intention.[69]

  Eventually, the vignettes may depict the same subjects as those in the classical scheme, such as the tree, the cow goddess, or the solar barque. However, the deceased is no longer clad in festive white garments and the scenes make extensive use of animal-headed deities incorporating attributes of serpents, vultures, or even feathers. It is evident that liminal elements are prominently featured in these scenes.[70]

66 A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun. A.136: inner coffin of Henuttaui.
67 A.151: inner coffin of Tjanefer. Michael Carlos Museum in Atlanta: coffin of Tanatnektahat. A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun. British Museum: inner coffin, EA 29591.
68 A.108: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
69 A.148: inner coffin of Nesiamun.
70 A.unknown: inner and outer boxes of Ikhy (Vatican Museums). A.15: outer box Djedmutiuesankh. Vatican Museums: coffin of Takhybiat.

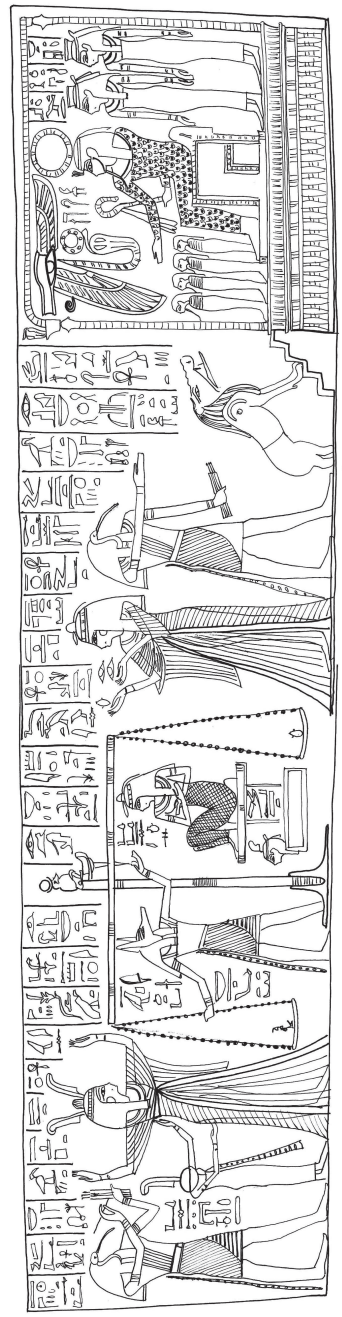


Fig. 5.8. Lower section: weighing of the heart scene. Inner coffin of Djedmutiesankh (A.150).

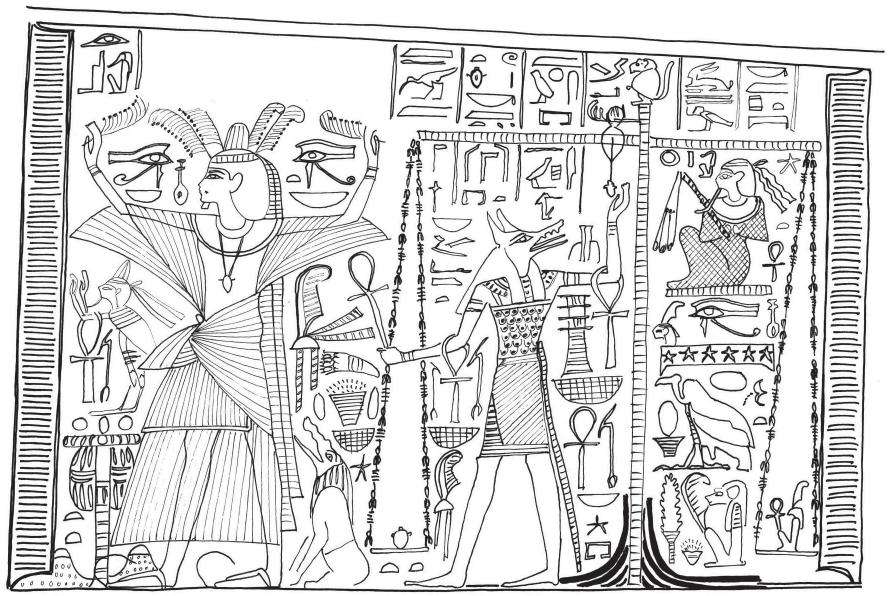


Fig. 5.9. Lower section: weighing of the heart scene. Outer coffin of Nesiamenemope (A.113).

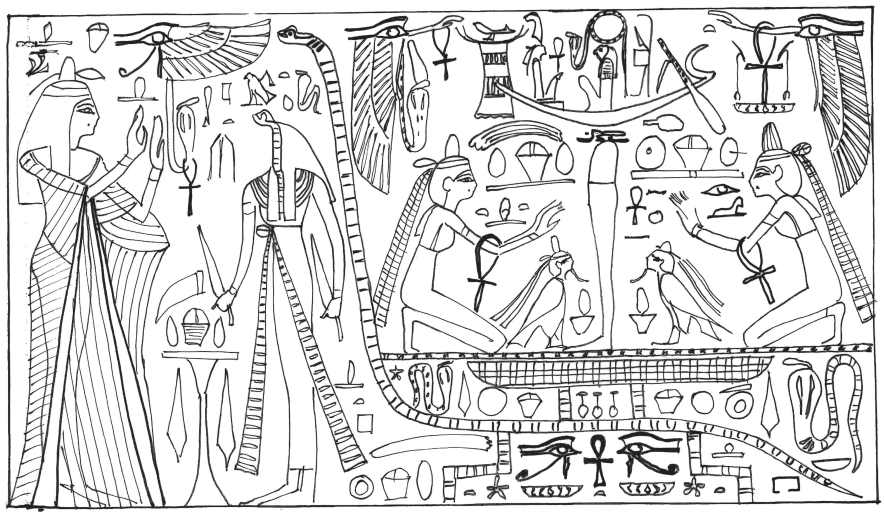


Fig. 5.10. Upper section: Osirian stepped throne scene. Inner coffin of Tjenetipet (A.119).

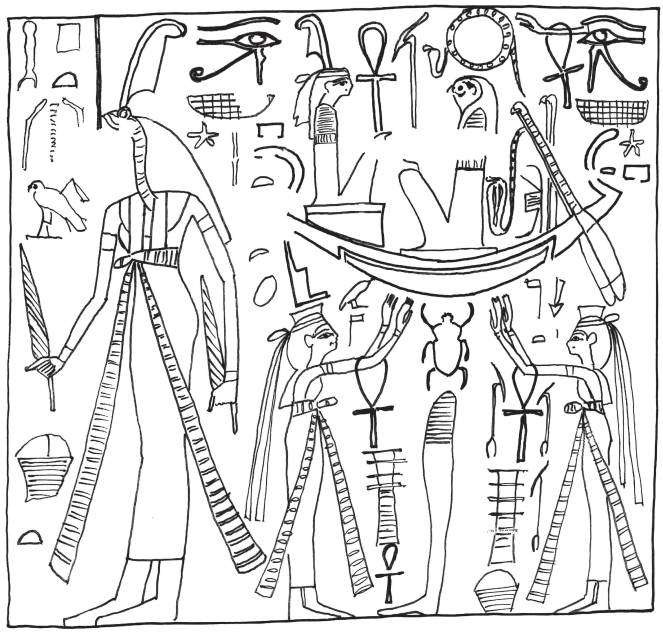


Fig. 5.11. Upper section: solar-Osirian scene. Outer coffin of Tjenetipet (A.119).

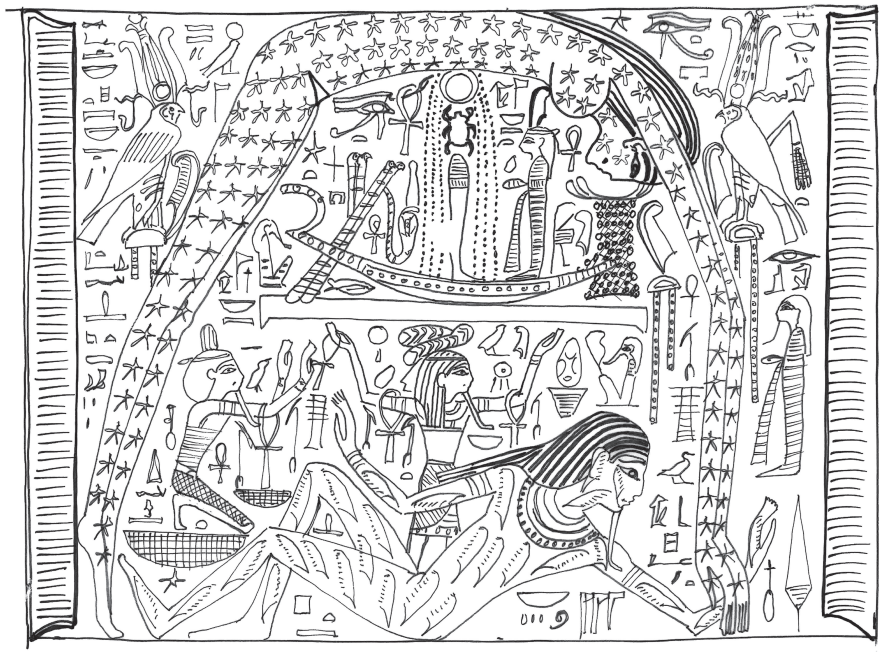


Fig. 5.12. Upper section: Geb and Nut scene. Outer coffin of Padiamun (A.87)



Fig. 5.13. Lower section: Sacred tree. Inner box of Paharu (A.115).

Exceptionally, objects may be found displaying a rather eclectic assemblage of motifs borrowed from all the various layouts, such as the outer box of Asetemakhebit (A.100). Here, vignettes of the Sons of Horus (basic scheme) are combined with the scene of the sacred tree and the Hathoric cow (classical scheme) and placed alongside the symmetrical throne of Osiris (complex scheme).[71] This provides the most compelling evidence that the different layouts employed during the 21st Dynasty were intentionally used to generate additional diversity.

Other coffins exhibit rather erratic displays of scenes. Despite using the same repertoire as described above, these scenes are arranged in a fluid manner, often resembling a loose collection of tableaux. In such instances, it is most likely that these are later objects decorated in an archaizing style.

3. Box: interior decoration

The archaizing use of the classical scheme

The archaizing trend observed in the exterior decoration of coffins yield particularly interesting results in the interior decoration of the boxes, demonstrating a deliberate effort to create stylistic consistency between the interior and exterior of the coffins.

This is especially visible in a restricted number of high elite coffins, where a re-interpretation of the classical scheme was applied to the interior. In these compositions, there is a clear attempt to restore the pictorial unity of the box's interior. To enhance the perception of unity, the red monochrome background of the interior is entirely decorated with a wealth of motifs outlined in yellow, creating a striking visual contrast with the multicoloured, varnished central motifs. This pattern is based on the use of texts outlined in yellow over a red

71 A.100: outer coffin of Asetemakhbit. Such a heterogeneous assemblage of scenes is rare. See also A.68: box of Ankhefenkhonsu (Albany Institute of History and Art).

background, as observed in some high elite objects associated with the classical scheme.[72]

The following motifs can be identified:

Djed-pillar compositions.

In the outer coffins, these compositions centre on the Osirian Djed-pillar depicted on the floorboard. In keeping with the classical scheme, the Djed-pillar is shown with open wings extending along the sides of the box. However, notable deviations from the original compositions of the classical scheme can be observed, the most significant of being the depiction of the pillar without a human torso. Instead, the arms are fully rendered, open and upraised, as if holding the inner coffin.

Rather than a double-feathered headdress, the god is shown wearing the *atef*-crown adorned with a zigzag pattern, which initially suggests a watery motif but is, in fact, a feathered design associated with a raptor. In the outer coffin of Tjenetimentether,[73] the pillar has falcon eyes and human heads displayed along its vertebrae.

Other versions are even more humanised, depicting the sacred pillar with a beautifully rendered human head, complete with a divine wig and beard (Fig. 5.14).[74] The human arms remain depicted in the same open, upraised position, as though embracing the inner coffin.

These imposing figures of Osiris are multi-coloured and varnished, contrasting vividly with the red monochrome and unvarnished background. The deity is fully surrounded by an intricate, yellow-sketched composition extending to all sides, featuring ritual scenes and divine images representing Osiris in his various manifestations - as a mummiform god, a sphinx, and as a figure escorted by Anubis, the Sons of Horus, the god Sokar, and other elements of the netherworld.

72 Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Tanetheret.
73 A.109: coffin set of Tjenetimentether, usurped by Djedmaatiuesankh.
74 A.87: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.113: outer coffin of Nesiamenemope.

This sacred space is consistently crowned by a solar scene alluding to the Cosmic God and the rebirth of the sun god. In the coffin of Tjenetimentether,[75] this identification is explicit, featuring a standing winged scarab-headed mummiform god with a sun disc over his body. In the other two known objects with similar layouts,[76] two sun discs are depicted, as in the hacking up of the earth scene, alluding to the nocturnal journey of the sun god and his rebirth at sunrise. In the coffin of Padiamun (A.87), this scene forms part of a wider composition showing a mummiform god lying down with a falcon head rising from his body, symbolising Sokar and the light he embodies (Fig. 5.14). Above this, a sun disc with human arms is depicted holding another sun disc, a bold image that defines the sun god as a self-created and self-engendered force, emerging from himself. Rays of light radiate from one disc to the other.

These elaborate compositions not only recreate the sacred atmosphere of a shrine but also provide powerful and visually arresting depictions of the mysteries held within. Surrounding the inner coffin, they create a protective and deeply symbolic space.

Mother goddess compositions.

In inner coffins, the central figure of these compositions is the mother goddess, depicted on the floorboard. As seen in the outer coffins, this central figure plays a pivotal role in the overall composition of the interior space of the box. The goddess is depicted with open wings extending along the sides of the box, as was customary in the classical scheme. However, a notable distinction from the original compositions of the classical scheme is the positioning of the arms which are usually upraised.

Another intriguing variation is the adornment of the goddess. She is often depicted with a vulture headdress, and her long wig is beautifully arranged without binding bands (Fig. 5.15).[77] The usual tripartite wig is

75 A.109: outer coffin of Tjenetimentether.
76 A.87: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.113: outer coffin of Nesiamenemope.
77 A.109: inner coffin of Tjenetimentether. A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet. A.93: inner coffin of Amenempermut.

rare in this context.[78] Additionally, the headdresses are remarkably diverse, including the Hathoric headdress, the feathered headdress of Sopdet, and the monogram of the Theban Mountain. The goddess is clad in a beaded dress tied with a long belt, complemented by a large collar, bracelets, anklets and a *menat*-necklace.[79]

As is customary, the goddess stands on the *nub*-sign, and below her figure, either the Djed-pillar or the *sekhem*-sceptre can be found.

The majestic depiction of the mother goddess is further enhanced by the multi-coloured detailing and varnish applied to her imposing figure, contrasting vividly with the red monochrome and unvarnished background. Surrounding the goddess is a profusion of yellow-sketched compositions extending across the interior of the box. These sketches depict ritual scenes and divine images identified with the netherworld: mummiform gods, winged cobras, and ritual scenes commonly seen in the classical scheme, including the mourning goddesses, Horus, and the Sons of Horus. In these compositions, the interior space of the box is always treated as a cohesive unit, imbued with a strong sense of completeness. Above the goddess hovers the avian form of the deceased, its wings outstretched to encompass the space.

The resulting composition is visually powerful, showcasing the vibrant, multicoloured and varnished figure of the winged goddess at the centre, juxtaposed with the intricate, yellow-sketched motifs that extend across the interior. The prominent role of these yellow-outlined motifs within the overall composition may reflect the outlined sketches found on linen shrouds themselves, effectively blurring the boundaries between the body containers and the mummy itself.

Given the shared stylistic features and the pictorial techniques employed, it is evident that these coffins originated from a common context of craftsmanship.

Another line of coffin production within the archaizing trend reveals a more conservative layout. In this approach, the interior design of the box adheres more closely to the original, with the goddess depicted with her wings spread

78 A.87: inner coffin of Padiamun. A.115: outer and inner coffins of Paharu.
79 A.109: inner coffin of Tjenetimentether. A.119: inner coffin of Tjenetipet.

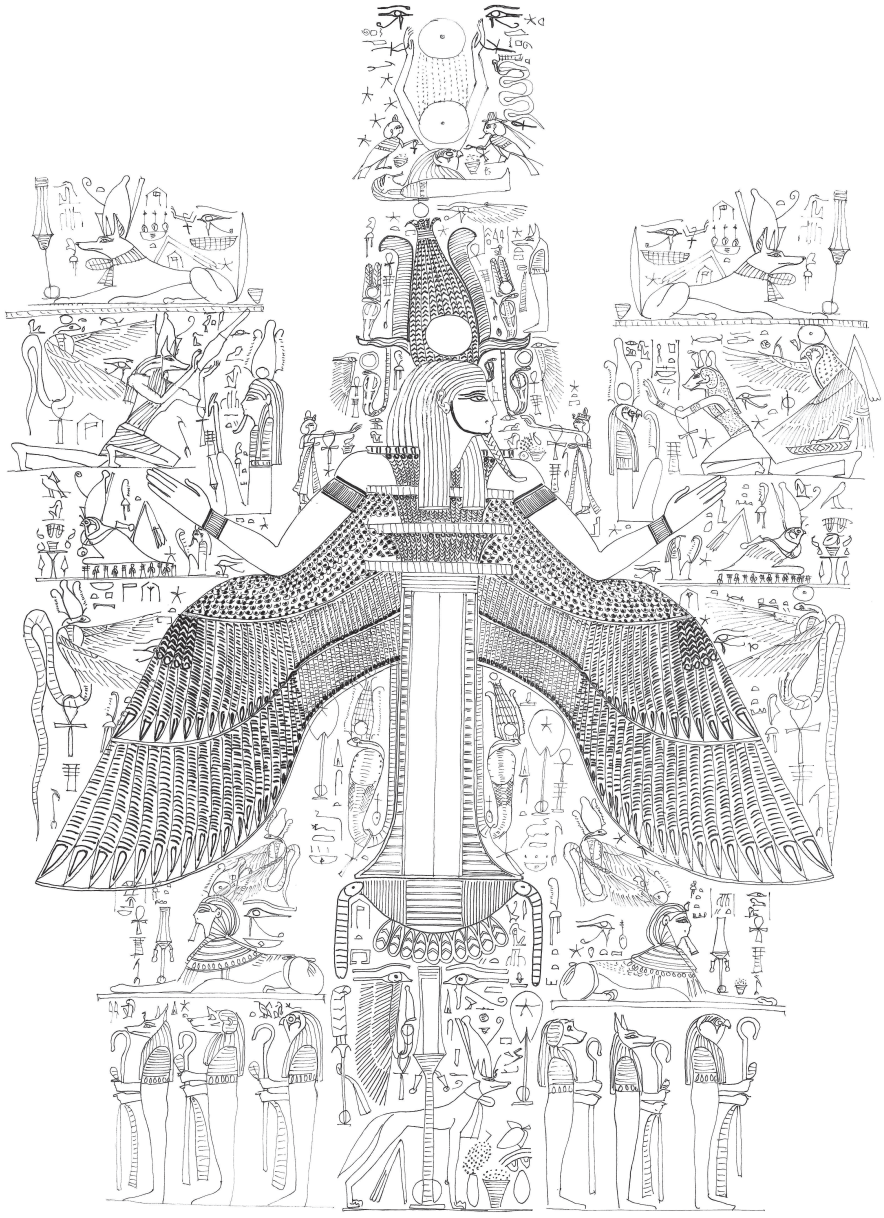


Fig. 5.14. Interior of the outer box of Padiamun (A.87).

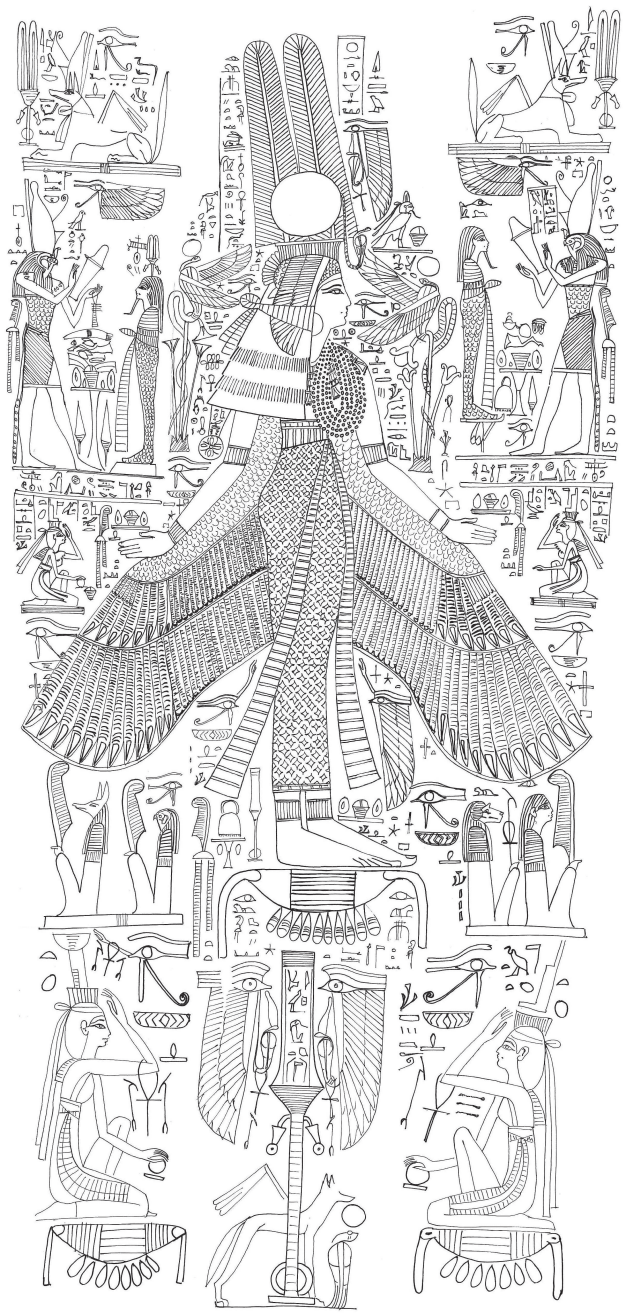


Fig. 5.15. Interior of the inner box of Padiamun (A.87).

along the sides and accompanied by a wealth of secondary scenes typically associated with this context.[80] Notable in all these coffins is the positioning of the goddess's arms, which are consistently shown upraised. This feature serves as a relatively reliable criterion for identifying an archaizing layout and suggesting a later date for the object.

The exceptional quality of the pictorial work seen in these coffins shows that the archaizing trend was visibly at the service of the high elite of the Theban priesthood.

4. Reverse sides

Archaizing coffins exhibit some of the richest corpora of representations displayed on the reverse sides of the objects. In these sets, it is not uncommon to find more than one object decorated in this way.

The decoration of reverse sides and mummy boards in archaizing sets is often eclectic.

For instance, while the mummy board might feature the figure of the mother goddess, the reverse side of the lid typically displays the effigy of Osiris (Fig. 5.16). Often, this figure is depicted standing alone, grasping royal sceptres, following the archetype seen on the linen shrouds that covered the outermost layers of contemporary mummies (Fig. 5.17). These shroud figures, roughly outlined in black, would thus be in close proximity to the finer depictions of Osiris painted on the reverse sides of lids/mummy boards. Typically, the depiction of Osiris is remarkably simple, even when finely executed.

The coffin set of Padiamun (A.114), now housed in the Grand Egyptian Museum, presents particularly fascinating compositions on the reverse sides of the inner lid and mummy. The reverse side of the Padiamun's mummy board is divided into two sections (Fig. 5.18). The upper section features an iconographic

80 A.144: inner coffin of Tawedjatre. A.114: inner coffin of Padiamun. A.152: inner coffin of Gatseshen. A.53: inner coffin of Tantdjehuti. Louvre Museum: inner coffin of Paser. A.113: inner coffin of Nesiamenemope.

composition depicting the goddess of the West standing on a *nub*-sign with her arms upraised to embrace the deceased. The goddess is flanked by *ba*-birds and the mourning goddesses, mirroring the deity depicted in the interior of the inner box. Together, these goddesses symbolically embrace the deceased, offering protection within their arms.

The lower section of the mummy board is particularly remarkable for its inscription, which revives the practice of inscribing texts observed in the basic scheme. Gaston Maspero himself noted the exceptional character of this inscription, which he translated as follows:

> Je suis un que devient deux. Je suis deux qui devient quatre. Je suis quatre qui devient huit. Je suis un après celui-lá. Je suis Khepri dans Hait-berborou, je suis Osiris dans Khonit, je suis Hâpi engendré de Ptah, je suis ce créateur Râ, pére de Shou! Donne-moi, donne-moi, Bélier sauteur, donne-moi que nul mal n'assaille le corps d' Osiris.[81]

Luca Miatello, in a personal communication, suggested that the text inscribed on Padiamun's mummy board builds upon the epithet of Amun-Re, 'The one who made himself into million(s)', as proposed by Jan Assmann,[82] thereby suggesting an identification with the supreme god.

The inscription in Padiamun's mummy board is striking in its repeated structure: 'I am .... who manifests as ...'. This phrasing simultaneously associates the deceased with two dimensions of being. 'I am' (*ink*) refers to the eternal being that participates in the timeless dimension (*djet*), while 'manifest' (*kheper*) relates to the cyclic process of rebirth and becoming (*neheh*). The text not only identifies the deceased with the supreme god dwelling in the primeval moment of creation, but also projects them into both dimensions of time.

It is possible that the scenes depicted on the reverse sides allude to these complementary dimensions of being and becoming. Undoubtedly, the image of the goddess embracing the deceased on the reverse side of the mummy board illustrates the process of becoming and rebirth. Meanwhile, on the reverse side

81 Maspero 1901, 196. We are indebted to Luca Miatello, who kindly and generously informed us of the existence of this translation.
82 Assmann 1983.

of Padiamun's inner lid (Fig. 5.19), a multicoloured depiction of a standing Osiris likely represents the timeless dimension of being. This concept could be summarised in the single word 'I am' (*ink*), which enigmatically appears on the reverse side of some lids (endsheet: A.71 - lid of Meritamun). This word serves as a *pars pro toto* allusion to both the text inscribed on Padiamun's mummy board and the effigy of Osiris, connecting the deceased to the eternal being from which all life originates.

Additionally, archaizing coffin sets of the highest elite may also feature representations on the reverse sides of the floorboards. In the inner box of Nesikhonsu (TT 320), the goddess of the West is painted against a red background with her arms open. Since the exterior surface of the inner coffin's floorboard is designed to remain in close contact with the interior of the outer box, the goddess's open arms symbolically embrace the Djed-pillar featured on the floorboard of the outer box. Thus, the two deities embodying the different dimensions of eternity are themselves united in an everlasting embrace.

In the same coffin set, the reverse side of the floorboard of the outer box displays a large, coiled serpent with a tail shaped as a jackal's head (Fig. 5.20). The red background is marked with yellow to suggest sand, as though the serpent is moving through the desert. The serpent's coiled body encircles headless standing mummies, with the missing heads reappearing along the serpent's body. One of these heads rises from the serpent's body with outstretched wings. This motif appears to be based on the Sixth Hour of the Book of Gates, where the heads of those swallowed by Apophis emerge from its body, [83] symbolising the deceased's release from death.

Serpent motifs are also found in other examples. On the reverse side of Psusennes' outer box (A.85), three elongated serpents are featured.[84] A similar depiction is found in the inner coffin of Tjanefer (A.151), where the coiled body of an imposing serpent dominates the exterior surface of the floorboard (Fig. 5.21). The tail ends in a jackal head and along the serpent's curves, sixteen human heads emerge, seemingly rising to new life. In this case, the cobra is

83 Hornung 1999, 62.
84 Niwiński 1995, 14.

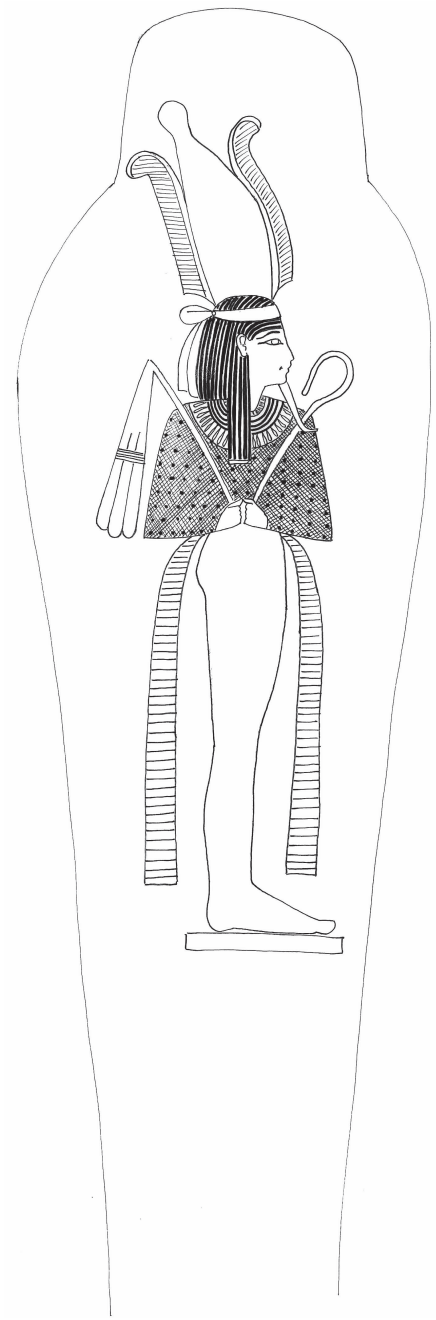


Fig. 5.16. Reverse side of the inner lid of Nesiamenemope (A.113).



Fig. 5.17. Linen Osiris shroud of Tiye (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

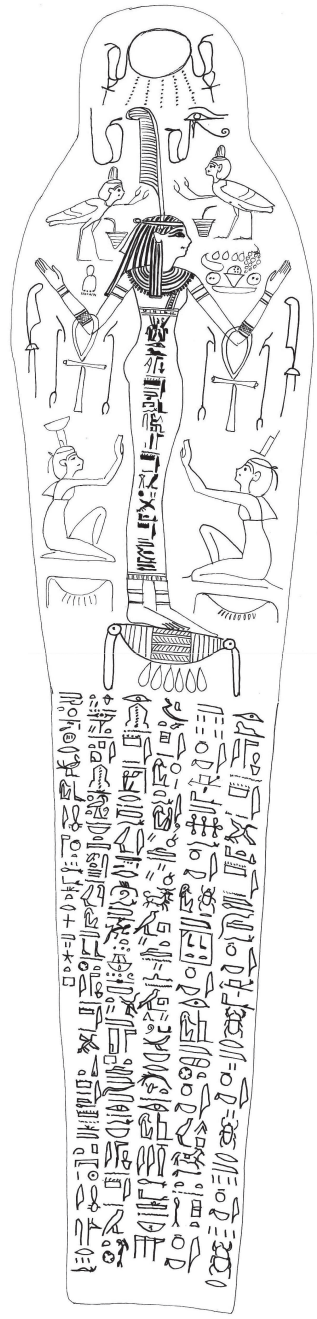


Fig. 5.18. Reverse side of Padiamun's mummy board of (A.114).

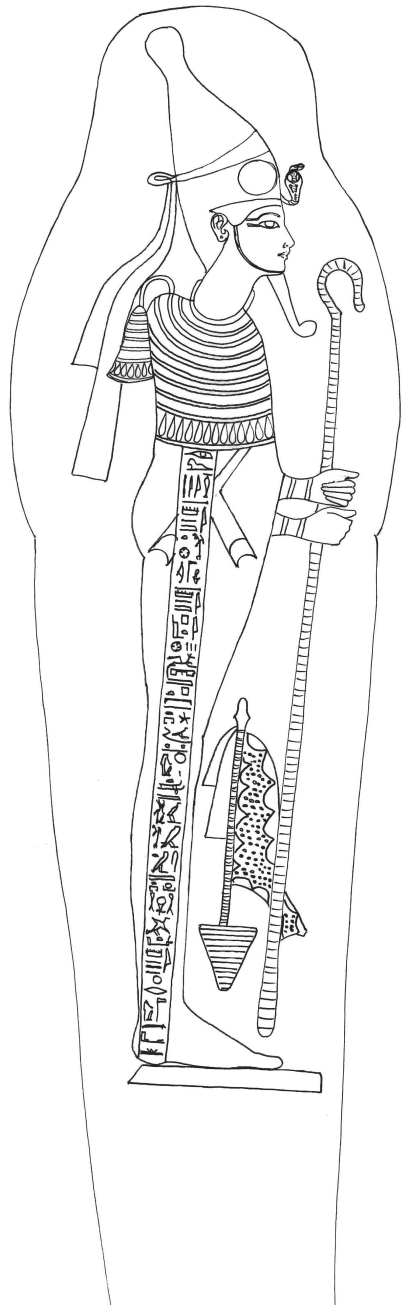


Fig. 5.19. Reverse side of the inner lid of Padiamun (A.114).

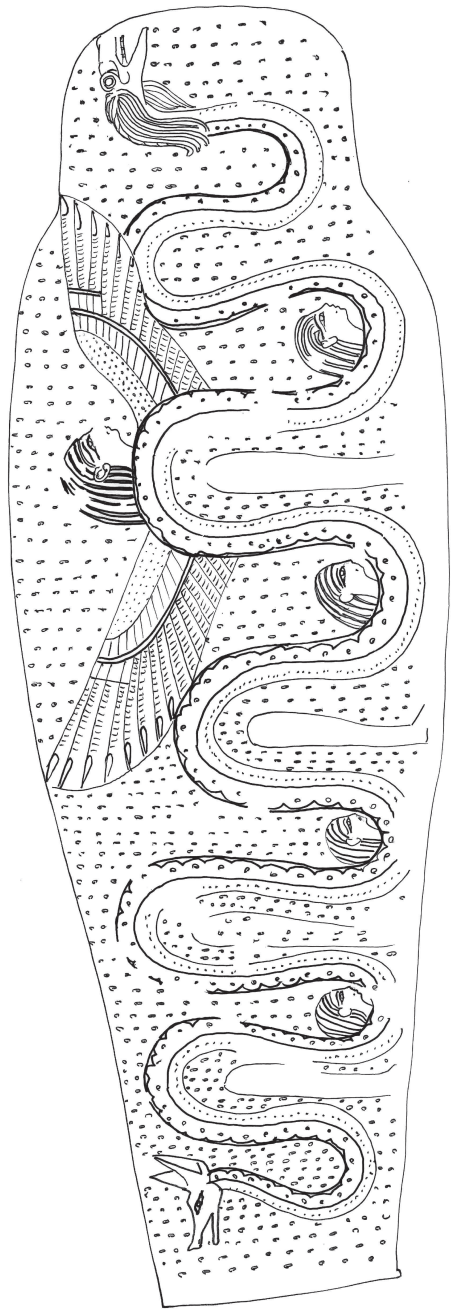


Fig. 5.20. Reverse side of the outer box of Nesikhonsu (TT 320).

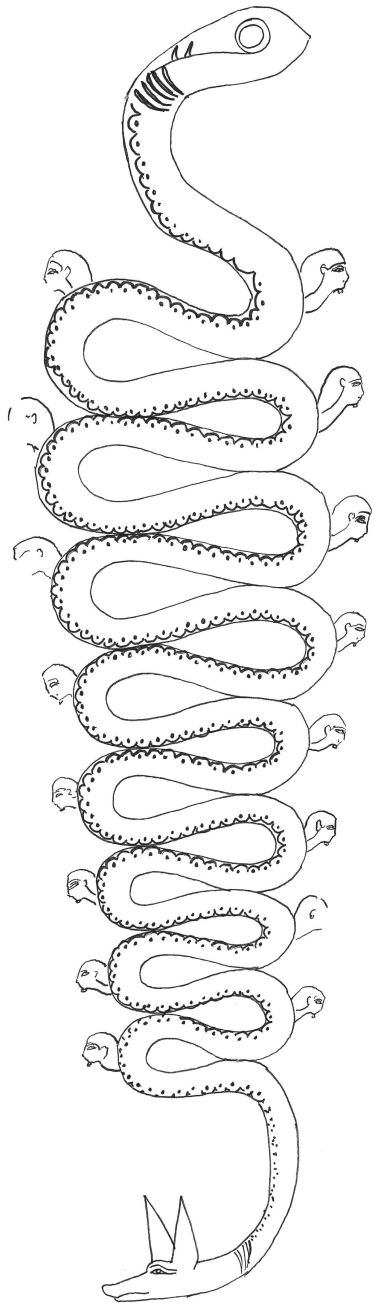


Fig. 5.21. Reverse side of the outer box of Tjanefery (A.151).

embraced by the wings of the enormous Djed-pillar featured on the floorboard of the outer box.

On the other hand, the reverse side of Tjanefer's outer box floorboard features a unique depiction of an unnamed god standing in triumph over the *sema-taui* sign. The deity is clad in a royal sceptre *nekhakha* and a royal *shendjit*-kilt with a bull's tail hanging from the waist. This royal imagery is further complemented by divine attributes, such as a long wig, a divine curled beard and green skin. The most striking feature, however, is the monogram the deity wears on his head: a mountain upon which the *ba*-bird rests in adoration. The caption refers to it as the 'Great Mountain from Herkhefnebes (lit.)'. This imposing figure thus appears to embody the sacred mountain of the dead, where the entire cosmos is recreated.

These examples make it abundantly clear that archaizing coffins are highly innovative, showcasing unique features that reveal the adoption of older models was not a passive replication of archetypes. Rather, these models served as a source of inspiration, triggering further innovative developments. This is evident from the introduction of entirely new motifs in this context. For instance, the reverse side of the mummy board may, in exceptional cases, display a falcon-headed mummiform god instead of Osiris, recalling the Tanite tradition of associating this deity with the funerary set (Fig. 5.22).

Commentary

The archaizing trend observed in high elite objects presents a particularly challenging phenomenon, as it does not simply consist of replicating old models.

Despite a conservative preference for older designs, and the deliberate use of the beautiful naturalistic style characteristic of the basic and classical schemes, these coffins frequently exhibit a vibrant innovative input. This is visible in the manner in which compositions traditionally considered classical are re-interpreted and re-imagined, often resulting in highly innovative arrangements that break with the most basic conventions.

The creation of these elaborate compositions suggests that the targeted audience of these workshops was deeply knowledgeable about the imagery of yellow coffins and held a great appreciation for iconographic subtleties. Thus, it is possible that these novelties, combined with the seemingly old layouts, enhanced the economic and social value of the coffins.

This phenomenon is particularly apparent in the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, where the archaizing trend gave rise to unique coffin sets in which most, if not all, the compositions were extensively redesigned (A. numbers: 87, 93, 96, 109, 113, 114, 115, 119, A.151 and many more). In these high elite sets, the archaizing trend is manifested in the re-interpretation of the classical scheme, resulting in outstanding creations. These designs are so innovative that the term 'archaization' seems inadequate, as it often implies a passive replication of older designs.

Thus, archaizing layouts appear to have been particularly associated with high elite workshops. In this respect, it is significant that the coffin set of the high priest Pinedjem II aligns precisely with this trend, with the boxes designed after the basic scheme and the lids featuring an eclectic combination of the basic and classical schemes.

The archaizing trend can also be observed in many other objects,[85] though in a less extensive manner and often mingled with stylistic features of the complex scheme.[86] A comprehensive overview of these coffins falls beyond the scope of this study, but from this provisional analysis, it becomes evident that the trend remained a high elite phenomenon, somehow associated with a restricted circle. Within this circle, the interplay of ancient layouts was likely used as a sign of distinction and knowledge.

85 Coffin of Tamut (National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh). Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon: coffin of Padikhonsu. A.43: coffin of Nesipakashuti.
86 A.61: outer coffin of Pinedjem. A.108: outer coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.

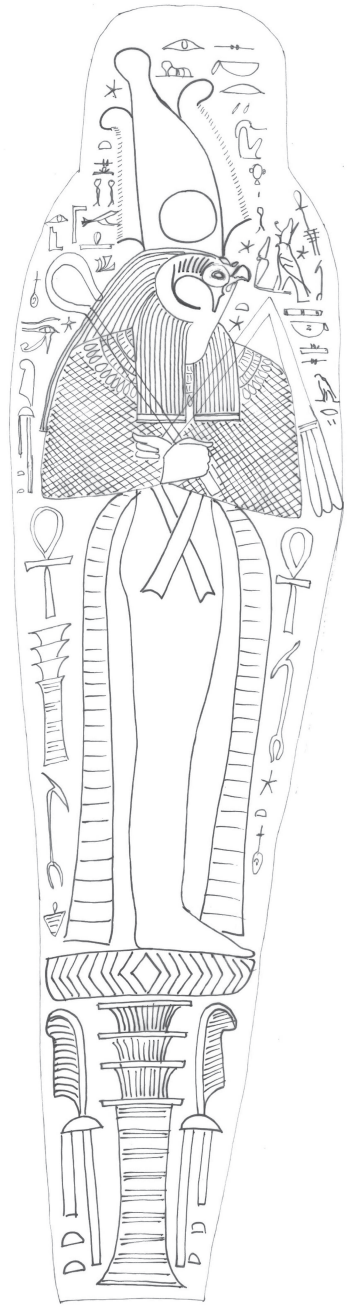


Fig. 5.22. Reverse side of the mummy board of Tjenetimentether (A.109).

CHAPTER VI

Typology and irregular layouts

1. The yellow corpus: an art historical typology

Typologies serve a range of purposes, and are constructed within particular conceptual frameworks. Grounded in an art historical perspective, this examination of the yellow corpus focuses on the study of the pictorial compositions displayed on yellow coffins. As existing typologies for this corpus fail to recognise these compositions as autonomous pictorial units,[1] the development of a typology consistent with this perspective became necessary.

Unlike the typology proposed by Niwiński, this approach does not classify types based on the overall layout of the objects. Instead, the proposed typology focuses on the compositions themselves, with the primary aim of describing their evolutionary nature. These types have been identified by applying the seriation method to one composition at a time. For a given composition, the objects were arranged according to their level of complexity, making it possible to establish their genealogical line. The resulting types define the layout of a given composition across the different stages of the evolution of the yellow type.

The classification of any given section consistently follows the same principle: Type I corresponds to the layout of the composition within the basic scheme, Type II to the classical scheme and Type III to the complex scheme.

1 Niwiński 1988.

To establish these distinctions, fundamental key features defining each stage for a given composition were identified. The methodological approach reflects as closely as possible the meaningful variations detected within the documentary corpus, avoiding an overly rigid pursuit of absolute consistency in typological criteria. A bold contrast has been observed between the lid and the box in terms of how the compositions are designed. On the lid, secondary compositions, such as the central and lower sections, became highly elaborate panels with increasingly sophisticated structures. Conversely, the compositions displayed on the boxes tend to form thematic units where semantic distinction, rather than formal differentiation, plays a more prominent role in the arrangement of scenes.

The criteria adopted for constructing these typologies were designed to reflect this contrasting phenomenon. As a result, the typology of the lid is based on formal aspects, while the typology of the box is grounded in semantic aspects.

Subtypes were established whenever variations in specific features triggered consistent differences in the layout of a particular composition. These subtypes are denoted by the letters of the alphabet (a., b., c., ...).

From an art historical perspective, this typology offers significant advantages, particularly in understanding the relative position of each tableau within the yellow corpus as a whole. This examination of yellow coffins reveals a highly flexible approach by ancient painters in the decoration of these objects. Within the same set, and even on the same object, varying levels of development are often easily discernible. These differences provide valuable clues for detecting re-use and accurately reflect the specific moment(s) at which the object was (re) decorated.

The typology presented here delves into the normative layout of coffins, showcasing what can be regarded as the mainstream outputs of Theban workshops. Results from so-called 'provincial workshops' and irregular layouts, such as compositions that deliberately deviated from the normative rules guiding coffin decoration, are not included.

However, it is important to recognise the significant role that irregular layouts played in coffin decoration, particularly during the fourth quarter of the

21st Dynasty. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to highlight some of these arrangements.

1.1. Typology of lids and mummy boards

Upper section

Key-feature: Shape of the forearms (Fig. 6.1).

Type I: The forearms are fully visible.

Type II: The forearms are partially hidden beneath the floral collar. The clasps of the large floral collar are depicted.

Type III: The forearms are completely concealed beneath the floral collar. The clasps of the collar are absent.

Subtypes: These are determined by the central marker used in the decoration of the chest:

a. (Winged) scarab.
b. Heart amulet.
c. No central marker present.
d. Mummy braces.

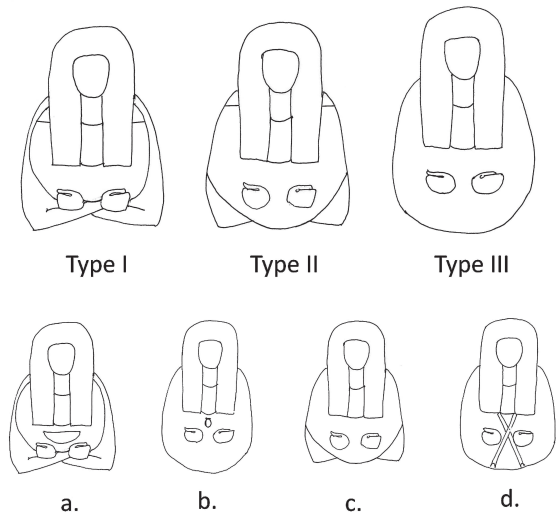


Fig. 6.1. Typology of the upper section.

Central section

Key-feature: Number of registers of the composition (Fig. 6.2).

Type I: Two registers.

Type II: Three registers.

Type III: Four or more registers.

Subtypes: Established after the nuclear block of the first register:

a. Solar barque.

b. Pectoral.

c. Scarab.

d. Winged sun disc.

e. Raptor.

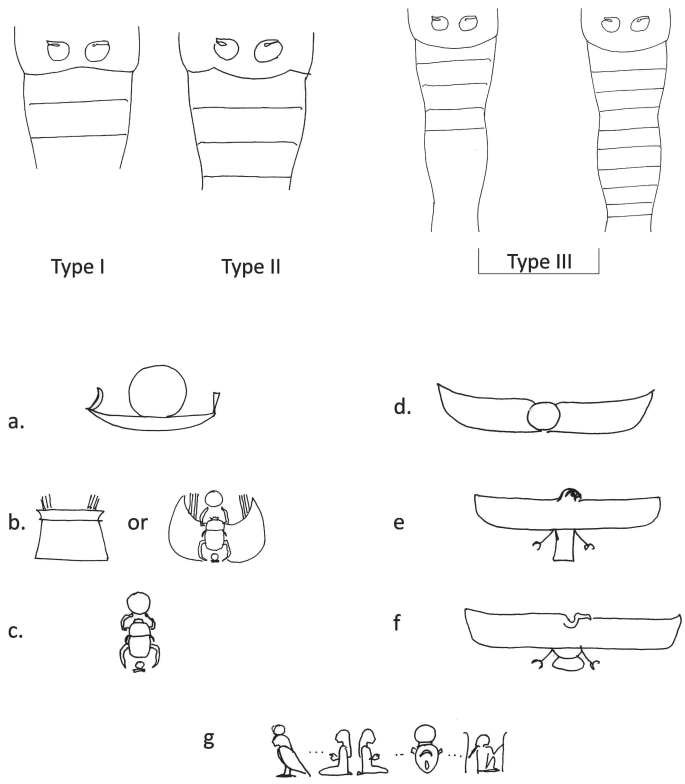


Fig. 6.2. Typology of the central section.

f. Vulture.
g. Liminal element or hieroglyphic sign.

Note: Regardless of the number of registers in the composition, nuclear blocks incorporating features such as a winged sun disc, raptor, vulture or liminal elements are consistently classified as Type III.

Lower section: Lateral partitions

Key-feature: Iconographic sequence displayed on the partitions (Fig. 6.3).

Type I: Osiris/Ptah-Sokar, Sons of Horus and usually (but not always) Thoth, Bennu, or Nefertum.

Type II: Osiris, avian form of Sokar and usually (but not always) the sacred ram.

Type III: Only mummiform gods are depicted.

Note: Type I is consistently used without the central partition.

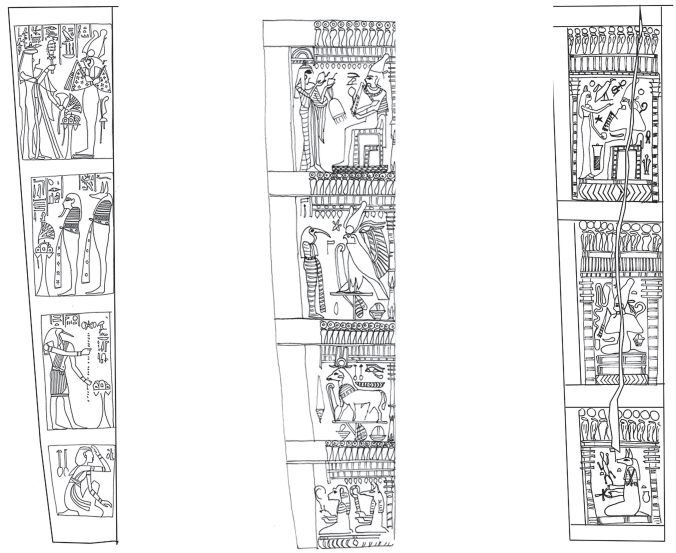


Fig. 6.3. Typology of the lower section: lateral partitions.

Lower section: Central partition

Key-feature: Lateral motifs flanking the nuclear block of the vignettes (Fig. 6.4).

Type I: The central partition is absent.

Type II: Lateral motifs may either be absent or include a variety of features, such as winged deities, mourning goddesses, *wedjat*-eyes, *ba*-birds or the avian form of Sokar, etc.

Type III: Lateral motifs consist exclusively of liminal elements (e.g. vultures, cobras, baskets, *shetyt*-shrines, etc).

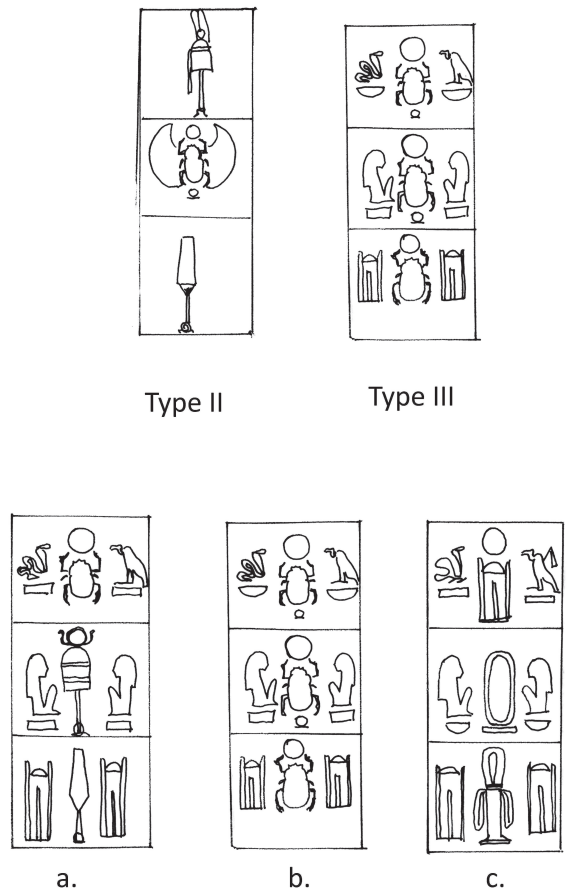


Fig. 6.4. Typology of the central section: central partition.

Subtypes: Established after the nuclear block of the vignettes:

a. *Ta-wer* totem and/or the *sekhem*-sceptre.

b. Sacred scarab only.

c. Liminal elements serve as nuclear elements.

Footboard

Key-feature: Osirian motifs (Fig. 6.5).[2]

Type I: Only mourning goddesses are featured.

Type II: Mourning goddesses are shown alongside the Ta-wer totem or a standing Osiris.

Type III: Enthroned Osiris or mummiform gods are depicted.

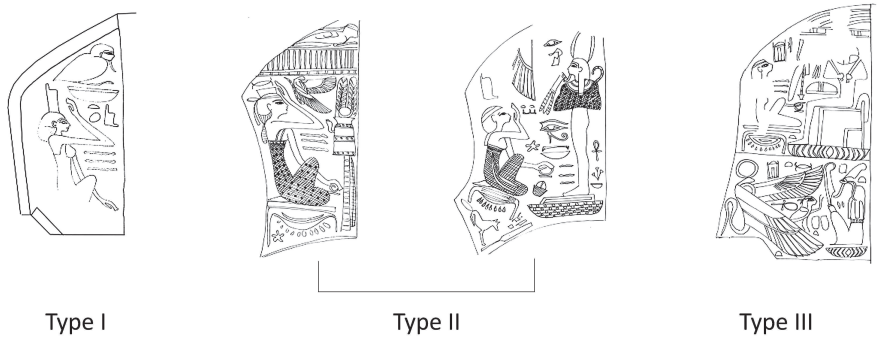


Fig. 6.5. Typology of the footboard.

1.2. Typology of boxes: Exterior decoration

Headboard

Key-feature: Layout of the side panels.

Type I: Striped pattern.

Type II: Figurative decoration from the Book of the Dead repertoire.

Sub-types include:

2 These scenes are depicted in a reversed position. However, on mummy boards, these vignettes are aligned with the remaining decoration. For this reason, the footboard is excluded as an autonomous section on mummy boards, as it is simply integrated into the sequence of the lateral partitions within the lower section.

a. Avian form of Sokar.
b. Osiris and/or Ta-wer totem.
c. Other motifs.

Type III: Figurative decoration using exclusively mummiform gods or motifs borrowed from the Book of the Amduat.

Upper section

Type I :

a. *Wedjat*-eye panel.
b. Jackal god.
c. Enthroned Osiris (var.: Ta-wer totem).

Type II:

a. Rising Osiris.
b. Osirian stepped throne.
c. Geb and Nut.

Type III:

a. Symmetrical scene with mummiform gods.
b. Solar scenes.

Lower section

Type I:

a. Sons of Horus (and other deities).
b. Litany of Re.

Type II:

a. Deceased facing the footboard+ two or more vignettes (Classical Scheme - Layout A).
b. Osiris + deceased facing the headboard+ deceased facing the footboard+ one or more vignettes (Classical Scheme - Layout B).
c. A single vignette covers the lower section (Classical Scheme - Layout C).

Type III:

a. All or most of the vignettes display mummiform deities.
b. Royal compositions, covering several topics:
    i. Temple ritual.
    ii. Royal ritual.
    iii. Funerary ritual.
    iv. Introduction ritual.
    v. Amduat scene.
    vi. Integrative scenes (assemblage of previously mentioned scenes).

Note: In Type III, the lower section can be extended to the full length of the long sides.

1.3. Typology of boxes: Interior decoration

Type I:

a. Interior undecorated or painted in monochrome
b. Only the floorboard is decorated, depicting the main deity.

Type II:

a. Winged main deity on the floorboard with wings outstretched towards the long sides, which are designed as forming a unit with the main motif displayed over the floorboard.
b. Main deity depicted only on the floorboard. Long sides arranged in upper and lower section.

Type III:

Headboard, floorboard and long sides are clearly distinct. Long sides divided into several registers forming a single composition.

Sub-types: established after the composition of the upper register of the floorboard, which displays one of the following features:

a. Mehen cobra.
b. Vaulted sky-sign.

c. Solar composition.
d. Winged deity.
e. Others.

2. Typological profiles and their application: some examples

In practical terms, when classifying a coffin set, attention must be given to each pictorial area of the objects within the assemblage. This approach facilitates comparisons both within the set and with objects from other burial assemblages. The typological profile acts as a true 'fingerprint' for a given set, offering a diverse range of criteria for establishing the relative dating of the object.[3]

To assist readers in applying this tool, two examples of its use are provided below.

2.1. Coffin of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110).

Lid (Fig. 6.6):

- The upper section does not display the forearms or clasps of the collar (Type III), nor is a central marker present on the chest (subtype c). The resulting classification would be 'Upper section: Type III.c'.
- The central section displays three registers (Type II). The nuclear block of the first register displays a solar scarab (subtype c.). The resulting classification would be 'Central section: Type II.c'
- The central partition of the lower section displays vignettes with an abundant use of liminal elements flanking the nuclear block (Type III). The nuclear block exclusively features solar scarabs (subtype b). The resulting classification would be 'Central partition: Type III.b'.

3 For examples of the application of typological profiles, see Sousa 2017, Sousa 2018, Sousa 2022.

– The lateral partitions of the lower section display a sequence of vignettes exclusively featuring mummiform gods, resulting in 'Lateral partitions: Type III'.
– The footboard shows vignettes featuring mourning goddesses and therefore the resulting classification would be 'Footboard: Type I'.

Box (Fig. 6.7):

– The side panels of the headboard depict the deceased making an offering before the *sekhem*-sceptre and the Ta-wer totem (Headboard: Type II.c).
– The upper sections display a symmetrical scene with mummiform gods (Upper section: Type III.a).
– The lower sections only display vignettes featuring mummiform gods (Lower section: Type III.a).
– In the interior, the long sides are designed as a single composition (Fig. 4.15) The upper register of the floorboard presents the Mehen cobra (Interior: Type III.a).

The typological profile of coffin A.110 would be:

Lid	Box
Upper section: Type III.c	Headboard: Type II.c
Central section: Type II.c	Upper section: Type III.a
Central partition: Type III.b	Lower section: Type III.a
Lateral partitions: Type III	Interior: Type III.a
Footboard: Type I	

This typological profile reveals a design consistently associated with the complex scheme, though it retains some influence of the classical scheme, notably in the central section of the lid and the headboard of the box. This suggests the coffin was crafted in the early third quarter of the 21st Dynasty. Interestingly, the basic scheme is applied to the footboard of the lid, indicating the emergence of an archaizing taste in Theban workshops during this period.

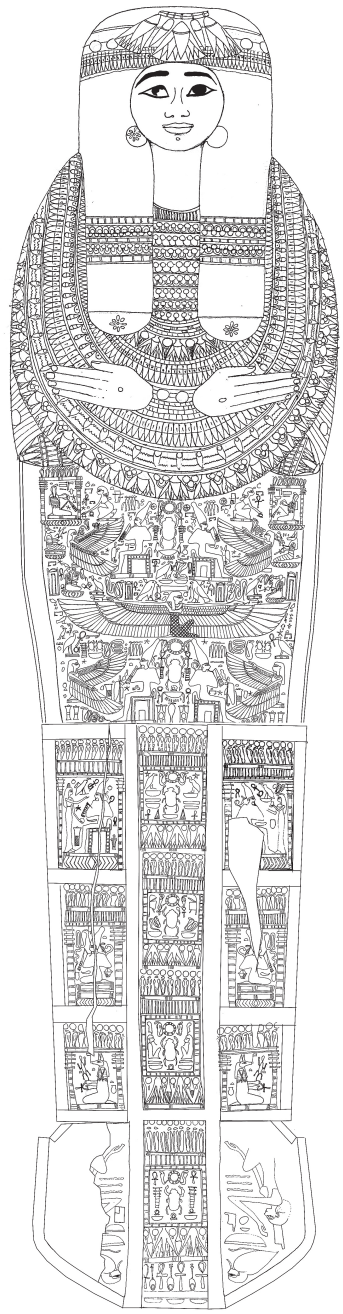


Fig. 6.6. Lid of Djedmutiuesankh(A.110)

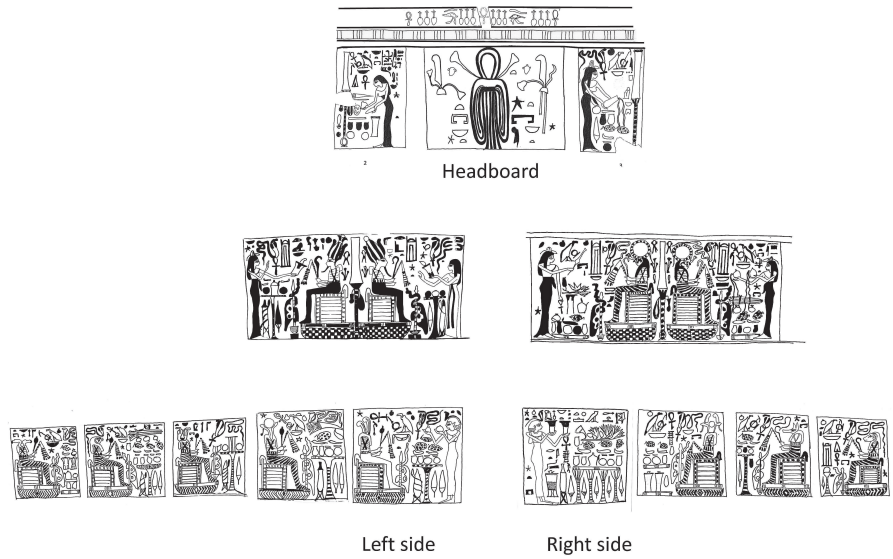


Fig. 6.7. Box of Djedmutiuesankh: exterior decoration (A.110)

Ideally, the information gleaned from the typological profile should be complemented by an examination of the stylistic features of the objects. The relative size of the compositions, particularly on the lid, provides important criteria for estimating the object's dating. By the mid-21st Dynasty, the upper and central sections increase in size, and the style becomes more miniaturist and highly standardised, with a heightened use of liminal elements. These features can be observed on the lid and mummy board of this example. Additionally, the programme of the box aligns with characteristics typical of the early second half of the 21st Dynasty.

2.2. Outer coffin of Henuttaui (A.136).

Lid (Fig. 6.8):

– The upper section does not display the forearms, but the clasps of the collar are present. Thus, the resulting classification would be 'Upper section: Type II.'

- The central section contains three registers, with a winged sun scarab heading the composition. The resulting classification would be 'Central section: Type II.c.'
- In the central partition of the lower section, lateral motifs are absent (Type II) and the nuclear blocks take the form of scarabs. The resulting classification would be 'Central partition: Type II.b.'
- The lateral partitions depict only mummiform deities. The resulting classification would be 'Lateral partition: Type III.'
- The footboard displays the mourning goddesses before a standing figure of Osiris. The resulting classification would be 'Footboard: Type II.'

Box (Fig. 6.9):

- The side panels of the headboard feature vignettes depicting Osiris and the Ta-wer totem. The resulting classification would be 'Headboard: Type II.b'.
- On the right side of the box, the upper section shows Thoth before an enthroned mummiform god. The resulting classification would be 'Upper section (right): Type I.c'.
- On the left side, the upper section depicts the scene of Geb and Nut. The resulting classification would be 'Upper section (left): Type II.c'.
- The lower sections are adorned with vignettes showing the Sons of Horus. The resulting classification would be 'Lower section: Type I.a'.
- The interior decoration shows all the sides decorated (Fig. 4.3), forming an indivisible unit and so the resulting classification would be 'Interior: Type II.a'.

The typological profile of the outer coffin from A.136 would be as follows:

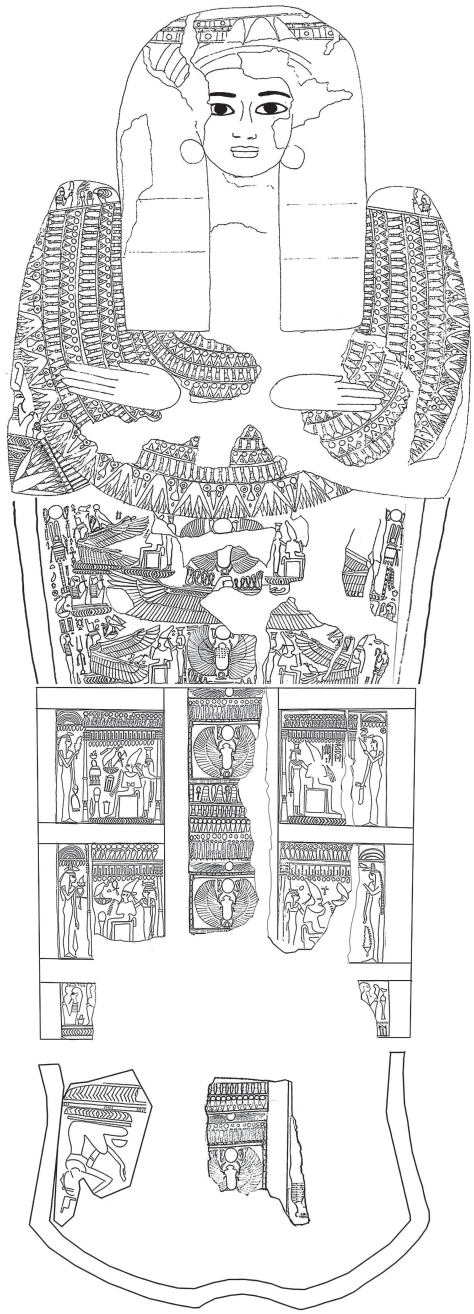


Fig. 6.8. Lid of Henuttaui (A.136).

Lid	Box
Upper section: Type II.	Headboard: Type II.b
Central section: Type II.c	Right upper section: Type I.c
Central partition: Type II.b	Left upper section: Type II.c
Lateral partition: Type III	Lower section: Type I.a
Footboard: Type II.	Interior: Type II.a

This typological profile highlights a true patchwork of compositions. The lid compositions suggest a transitional stage where many principles of the classical scheme remain evident but with significant features of the complex scheme already emerging. Conversely, the box exhibits a much earlier layout, with compositions heavily influenced by the principles of the basic scheme while integrating elements reflecting the influence of the classical scheme.

From a stylistic perspective, this coffin presents a striking contrast. The lid displays the standardised and miniaturist style characteristic of the complex

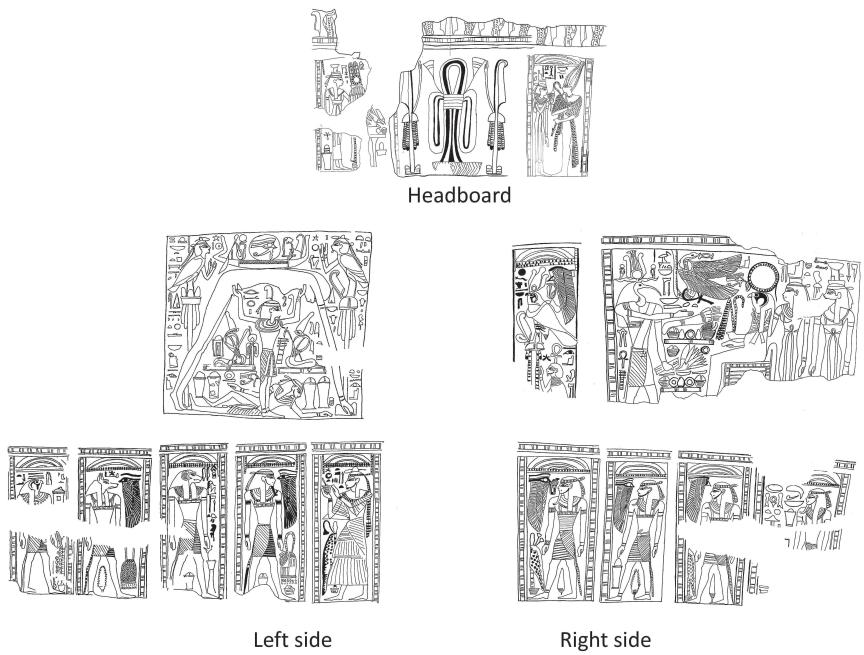


Fig. 6.9. Box of Henuttaui: exterior decoration (A.136)

scheme, whereas the box features scenes rendered in the soft and naturalist style typical of the first half of the 21st Dynasty.

Collectively, these elements suggest that the box was crafted in the early second quarter of the 21st Dynasty, while the lid, if originally part of the same coffin, was fully redecorated at a later stage, likely during the third quarter of the 21st Dynasty. Evidence of re-use corroborates the idea of the lid's redecoration at a later stage.[4]

3. Irregular layouts

As mentioned in the Introduction, the decorative space of yellow coffins is composed of distinct sections, each with its own repertoire, which evolved over time with an extraordinary sense of continuity, forming what can truly be considered as genealogical lines. The previous chapters provided an overview of the repertoire of these sections and their evolutionary trajectory, which represents the mainstream of Theban coffin decoration in the 21st Dynasty.

However, within the yellow corpus, irregular layouts are also encountered. These consist of compositions that disrupt the genealogical continuity of a given section. Such layouts deliberately challenge well-established principles to create diversity. Irregular layouts are particularly prevalent during transitional periods, where new approaches are explored innovatively. By the late third quarter of the 21st Dynasty, these layouts became increasingly common.

From a typological perspective, irregular compositions defy classification, as they deliberately deviate from the genealogical line of the yellow type. Consequently, the proposed typology deals exclusively with the normative canon of the yellow type. Compositions that do not conform to the normative structure starkly contrast with the latter, and as such, can only be classified as 'irregular'. This inherent nonconformity renders irregular compositions unsuitable as reliable dating criteria. Typically, irregular layouts are restricted to one or two sections of

4 Sousa 2017.

a coffin and no examples were identified in this study of objects entirely designed with irregular layouts. For this reason, the layout of the remaining sections of the coffin serves as a valuable tool for determining its dating.

Despite the non-normative nature, irregular layouts were clearly designed with intent. Their deliberate creation makes it impossible to exhaustively characterise all variations that may occur in the yellow type. Nevertheless, selected examples illustrate the application of irregular layouts across different compositions.

3.1. Lid

Irregular layouts are particularly evident on the lids and mummy boards, where the overall layout of specific sections can be dramatically altered by challenging dominant conventions.

Upper section

In the upper section, decoration is traditionally dominated by the floral collar, which is rarely omitted. However, exceptions exist where the floral collar is conspicuously absent. For example, in the coffin set of Tjenetipet (A.119), both the outer lid and the mummy board feature an extremely rare composition entirely decorated with a zigzag pattern.[5] This pattern typically alludes to the feathered markings of a raptor and is commonly associated with archaizing layouts, where it often serves as a divine attribute (Fig. 6.10).

Another notable example of an irregular layout in the upper section is found in the coffin set of Meritamun (A.71). Here, the typical floral collar is replaced with a shawl richly decorated with liminal elements, including scarabs, vultures, royal cartouches, bees, falcons, and floral motifs (Fig. 5.2).

Both examples demonstrate that these deviations are deeply symbolic. The alterations in the upper section were introduced to enhance the divine status of the deceased, either by incorporating feathered patterns associated with light, or by adding liminal elements imbued with the sacredness of the Duat.

5 A.119: Coffin set of Tjenetipet.

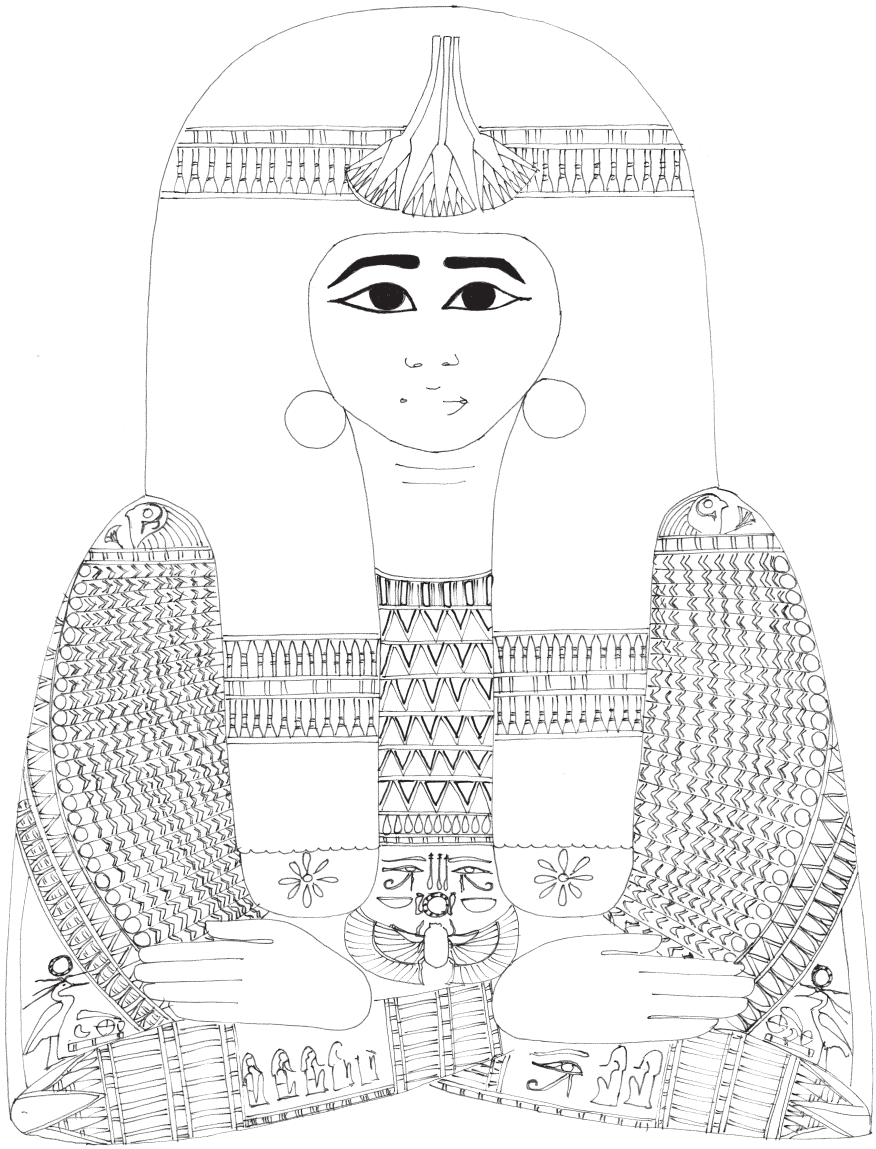


Fig. 6.10. Outer coffin of Tjenetipet (A.119)

Central section

As suggested elsewhere,[6] the basic scheme of the central section emerged through the fusion of elements from Ramesside funerary objects during the creation of the mummy board. The pectoral, depicted on early funerary masks, was combined with the winged goddess often shown on the open-work boards, establishing the fundamental features of the central section. This association became the root of a long evolutionary process that resulted in highly complex compositions.

The preference for exceptional compositions can be traced back to the very origins of the yellow corpus. In the mummy board of Hori, one of the earliest known objects of the yellow type,[7] the central section was designed in a markedly different manner. It features a symmetrical register below a winged deity which, in this extraordinary case, is the solar god Khepri rather than the usual goddess Nut(Fig. 6.11).



Fig. 6.11. Central section. Mummy board of Hori (August Kestner Museum in Hanover)

6 Sousa 2014. Sousa 2024.
7 Sousa and Loeben (forthcoming).

The imagery of this composition is equally distinctive: instead of the typical mother-son mythical constellation commonly depicted in the central section, it portrays the morning sun rising from the Djed-pillar, a cosmic event witnessed by the Ennead of Heaven and the Ennead of Earth. Moreover, the wings of the solar god overlap the forearms of the deceased, enhancing the ascending movement of the sun and challenging the newly established boundaries of this section. The adjacent inscriptions are short solar hymns uttered by the deceased. Taken as a whole, this composition represents an outstanding achievement, standing in sharp contrast to the subsequent development of the tableau.

During the transition from the basic to the classical scheme, irregular layouts emerged as part of the search for new ways to integrate a third register in the layout of the central section. Initially, this was achieved by creating a third register in the upper area of the tableau, simply by moving the winged scarab from the centre of the symmetrical register to the upper register (Fig. 2.31).[8] However, the area below the winged goddess was eventually favoured for the addition of this new register. This process, examined elsewhere,[9] can be observed in tableaux where highly innovative secondary compositions were grouped under the wings of the mother goddess (Fig. 2.32-34). In terms of classification, these tableaux are considered irregular as they do not precisely align with either the basic or the classical scheme. Over time, this secondary register became codified and integrated into the normative structure of the central section, leading to the establishment of the classical scheme (Fig. 2.36).

In the complex scheme, the central section is frequently extended down the lid, reaching the footboard (Fig. 2.41). While this extension in itself does not constitute an irregular layout, it was occasionally employed irregularly to create innovative results. One such example involves blurring the boundary between the central and lower sections, with compositions extending downwards into the lower section but confined to the central partition.[10] Conversely, some layouts

8 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Nauny.
9 Sousa 2014.
10 A.unknown: inner coffin of Gautseshen.

extend the registers of the central section onto the footboard via the lateral partitions of the lower section, leaving the central partition intact.[11]

Another exceptional feature associated with the central section is the depiction of mummy braces beneath the floral collar. In this arrangement, only the extremities of the braces are visible.[12] This motif predates the depiction of mummy braces above the floral collar, a feature that only appears at the end of the 21st Dynasty. The introduction of this new motif in coffin decoration reflects its introduction into the archaeological record, as mummy braces seem to have been applied to wrappings only from the pontificate of Menkheperre onwards.

Lower section

Irregular patterns are rarely encountered in the lower section. When present, they are typically associated with the archaizing trend in coffin decoration discussed in Chapter V.

A particularly irregular repertoire of vignettes appears in the lateral partitions of the inner coffin of Padiamun (A.87).[13] The first and second registers of the lateral partitions exhibit highly distinctive features:

- 1st register: The vignette is arranged in two registers. Enthroned Sons of Horus are displayed along the upper register as a reminder of the usual repertoire. However, this scene is integrated into a broader tableau, with the lower register depicting two standard-bearers kneeling before a squatting figure of Osiris.
- 2nd register: a kneeling goddess holds up a sphinx on an offering table.

Such a disruptive degree of innovation is exceptional in the lower section and it may be related to the involvement of the commissioner himself, an uncommon occurrence, particularly in the late 21st Dynasty.

11 A.47: inner coffin of Tenetpenheruenefer. This is clear from the 5th register down to the 10th register.
12 A.114: outer coffin of Padiamun. A.unknown: anonymous mummy board (Vatican Museums, 25022).
13 A.87: coffin set of Padiamun.



Fig. 6.12. Mummy board of Tjanefery (A.151).

As discussed in Chapter V, the use of a beaded pattern is a distinctive archaizing feature (Fig. 5.7). This motif deviates from the normative trends of coffin decoration and must be regarded as irregular.

The mummy board of Tjanefery (A.151) expands on this feature, creating one of the most disruptive designs recorded in the yellow corpus (Fig. 6.12).[14] In this object, the usual distinction between the central and lower sections is removed, resulting in a unified tableau below the floral collar. This tableau combines elements from both the central and lower sections, displayed against a beaded net background, a feature typically associated with the archaizing layout of the lower section and symbolising regeneration provided by the mother goddess. Over this background rests a large falcon with extended wings, which appear to embrace the mummy entirely. Despite its strongly innovative layout, subtly reminiscent of the rishi layout, the falcon must here be understood as a quotation from the repertoire of the central section (cf. Type III.e of the central section). It recalls falcon-shaped metal blades used within mummy wrappings, symbolising the loving embrace of Isis and her sexual union with Osiris. Also drawn from the central section's repertoire is the solar barque (Type I.a of the central section), a motif common in the early stages of the yellow corpus. By combining these archaizing elements borrowed from the repertoire of the lower section and the central section, this composition achieves a uniquely disruptive design.

Footboard

Irregular compositions are rare in this section. However, when they do occur, the vignettes are aligned with the remaining decoration of the lid, rather than presented in the reversed direction typically observed in this area.[15]

A distinctive irregular layout is evident in cases where the festive dress type is recovered. In such rare circumstances, the feet are depicted, instead of the usual repertoire displayed on the footboard (Fig. 5.3).[16]

14 Niwiński 1988, Plate VIII-B.
15 A.32: inner coffin of Taahuti. A.142: inner coffin of Nesipernub. A.102: outer coffin of Haes.
16 A.71: coffin of Meritamun.

A far more interesting source of variation involves depicting a single tableau of solar significance on the footboard. These compositions, rendered in a naturalistic style, are generally associated with coffins from the third quarter of the 21st Dynasty.[17] In such cases, the footboard is decorated as a single tableau featuring a large, winged deity depicted either in reversed direction[18] or aligned with the remaining decoration of the lid.[19] The motifs depicted in this context allude to rebirth and resurrection, and include:

1. Falcon deity with outstretched wings: this motif likely represents Isis in her avian form, recalling the metallic blade frequently found in contemporary mummy wrappings,[20] symbolising the sexual embrace of Osiris and Isis.[21]
2. *Ba*-bird[22] joining the reborn sun god in his ascent to the sky (Fig. 6.13).
3. Winged Djed-pillar[23] holding up the sky and the barque of the morning sun (Fig. 6.14).

These subjects allude to the solar cycle, suggesting an association between the footboard and the horizon, a theme already present in proto-yellow coffins dating back to the early Ramesside period.[24] Such scenes evoke the concept of solar navigation, implying that the footboard represents a threshold between the Duat and the world of the living. Consistent with this interpretation, the footboard tends to be shaped after the *djw*-sign, symbolising the horizon with two small elevations and a central depression. While this feature is typically implied in the format of the footboard, in these coffins it appears to be rendered with deliberate emphasis.

17 TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare. A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.95: coffin set of Pameshem. A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt.
18 TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare.
19 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.95: coffin set of Pameshem. A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt.
20 Marwa Abdelrazek (forthcoming).
21 TT 320: outer coffin of Maatkare.
22 A.16: inner coffin of Ankhefenmut. A.111: mummy board of Mashasekebt.
23 A.95: coffin set of Pameshem.
24 TT 1: inner coffin of Khonsu.

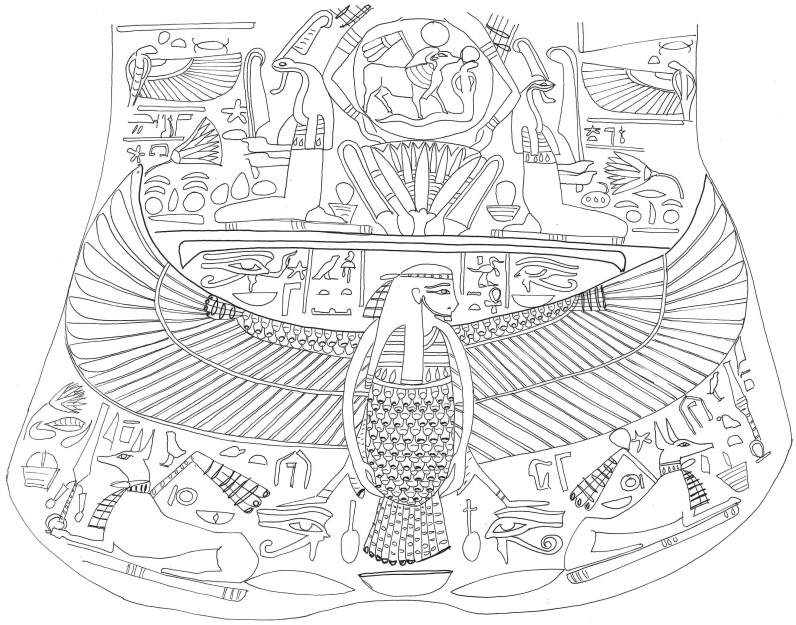


Fig. 6.13. Footboard, Inner coffin of Ankhefenmut (A.16).

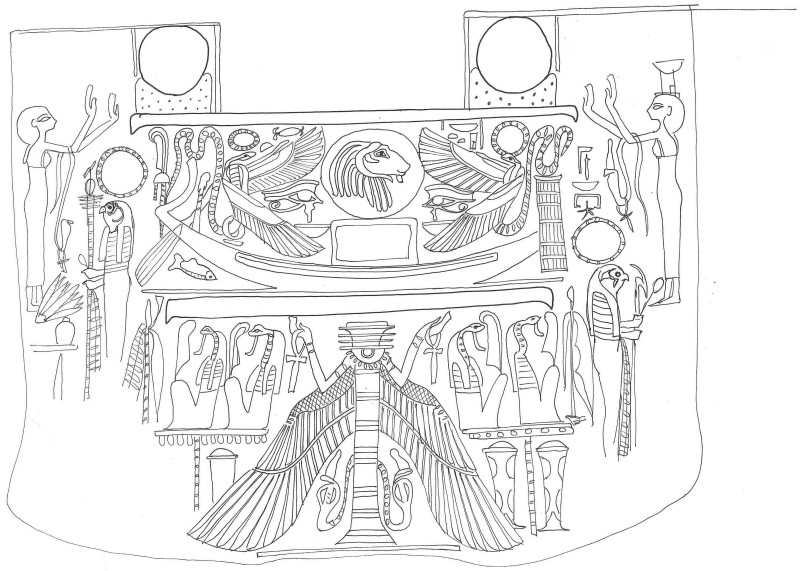


Fig. 6.14. Footboard. Coffin of Pameshem (A.95).

3.2. Box (exterior)

On the exterior walls of the boxes, the compositions are framed by friezes and bands of text, typically in specific association with the section in which they are displayed.

However, in a few coffins, the boundaries between these sections are flexible. Particularly during the second half of the 21st Dynasty, the distinction between the upper and lower sections becomes less defined, with the long sides becoming increasingly decorated as a single pictorial unit. Even in these instances, this layout appears to result from the extension of the lower section, which expands, leading to the elimination of the upper section and, in some cases, the side panels of the headboard. This process complements the extension of the central section observed on lids.

A notably disruptive phenomenon occurs with the introduction of two registers running along the long sides of the box, a feature consistently associated with the complex scheme.

From a genealogical perspective, the use of the double register seems to have been introduced in connection with solar imagery. In the classical scheme, solar scenes depicting the divine barque of the sun god are typically designed in two registers (Fig. 3.45-48). However, this feature is always contained within the vignette and found in the lower section. A significant departure occurs when the solar tableau is depicted in the upper section, with the sun barque in the upper register and the divine oarsmen in the lower one (Fig. 6.15).[25] The latter, all male deities typically depicted in fully human guise, are drawn from the Eleventh Hour of the Book of the Gates and of the Twelfth Hour of the Book of the Amduat. These scenes act as subtle visual references to this esoteric repertoire[26] and represent the earliest explorations of the double register as an independent visual resource.

This design was eventually extended to the long sides. In the magnificent coffin set of Hori (A.143), now housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, the use of the double register is applied intermittently, with scenes arranged in two registers

25 TT 320: outer coffin of Nesikhonsu. A.33: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu.
26 The depiction of paddlers in active mode is a feature displayed in the Ninth Hour of the Book of the Amduat.

interspersed with single compositions (Fig. 6.16). Moreover, these scenes convey an unparalleled dynamic movement: the deceased is first depicted in adoration before Osiris, a common motif in the exterior decoration of the box. Next, the deceased, dressed in priestly garments, appears before the Ta-wer totem. The deceased is then depicted as a falcon-headed *sem*-priest escorted by deities to the presence of Osiris. Maintaining his falcon-headed manifestation, but now wearing royal garments and carrying a sceptre, Hori is shown being introduced into a shrine and embraced by the god.[27] The sequence culminates with Hori, again shown as a falcon-headed man, fully enthroned. This unique series not only alludes to the Hori's Osirian initiation, which is drawn after royal archetypes, but also to his divine manifestation likely referencing the meaning of his name ('He who belongs to Horus').

In other sets, the double register is used as a continuous composition occupying the full length of the wall. Such is the case of the outer coffin of Maatkare (A.132), where the left side features solar scenes in the upper register and royal Osirian scenes in the lower register.[28] This arrangement clearly aligns with the solar journey of the sun god through the netherworld.

The outer box of A.135 also employs a double register, but here they both allude to burial scenes (Fig. 6.17). As discussed in Chapter III, these burial scenes suggest an identification between the necropolis and the Duat, as proposed by Cássio Araújo Duarte.[29] In this coffin, the dynamic displacement of the funerary cortège is beautifully described as a twofold movement. In the upper register, the cortège moves from the footboard to the headboard: the funerary bier containing the coffin is depicted on a barque and a sledge pulled by a group of divine cows and four men led by a *sem*-priest. The cortège is headed by standard-bearers and mourning women. In the lower register, the cortège shifts direction, moving from the headboard to the footboard: the funerary bier now moves on the barque pulled along the water by two small papyrus boats and groups of men walking along the riverbank. This scene is arranged as a double register, creating a tripartite arrangement on the wall. The cortège then continues over firm ground:

27 Mostafa 2020.
28 A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare.
29 Duarte 2017.

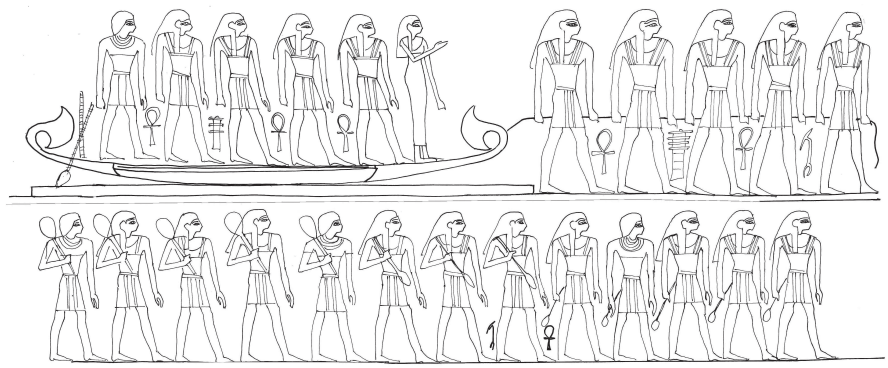


Fig. 6.15. Upper section: inner coffin of Ankhefenkhonsu (A.33).

the funerary bier is carried on the shoulders of a group of men, alongside the anthropoid coffin, which stands on a shrine of its own. The bier is escorted by a group of mourners. Leading the cortège is a *sem*-priest, accompanied by an intriguing figure wearing the red Heb Sed robe and holding royal sceptres. The group is completed with a flute player looking backwards and a striking assembly of divine mourners presenting themselves before an offering pile.

In all these exceptional examples, the use of the double register consistently conveys a sense of dynamic movement and subtly associates the compositions with the royal themes of the Amduat, which focus on the nightly journey of the sun god and are typically arranged in three registers. Although this tripartite design is rarely replicated (see, for example, Fig. 6.17), the double register effectively approximates it.

The fusion between the funerary cortège and the solar journey is even more explicit in the anonymous box kept at the Vatican Museums, where the deceased is first mourned in his funerary bier, and then transported in a boat within a funerary tent. The boat drags the Osirian barque to the Theban Mountain pulled by jackals and anthropomorphized cobras following the journey of the sacred scarab. *Rekhyt*-birds, probably symbolizing the inhabitants of the Duat, salute the entrance of the deceased in the netherworld (Fig. 6.18). Not only this sequence shows one of the most extreme examples of the solarization of Osiris, as it reveals the complete identification of necropolis with the Duat.



Fig. 6.16. Right side: inner coffin of Hori (A.143).

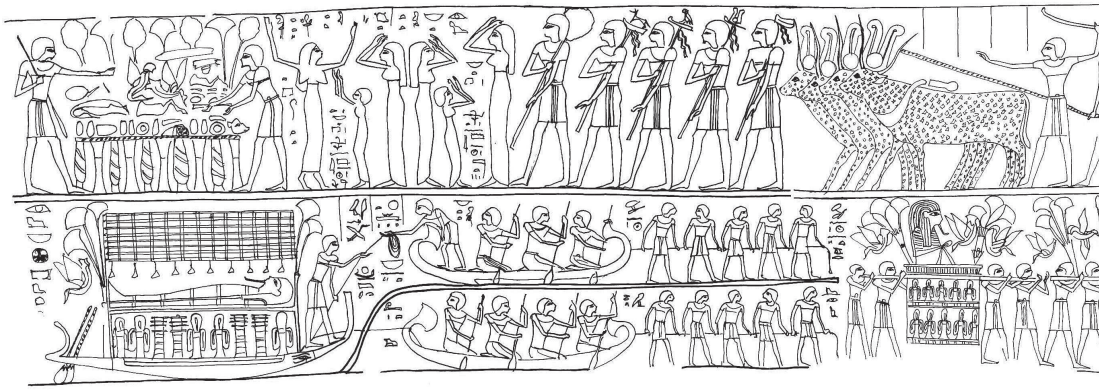
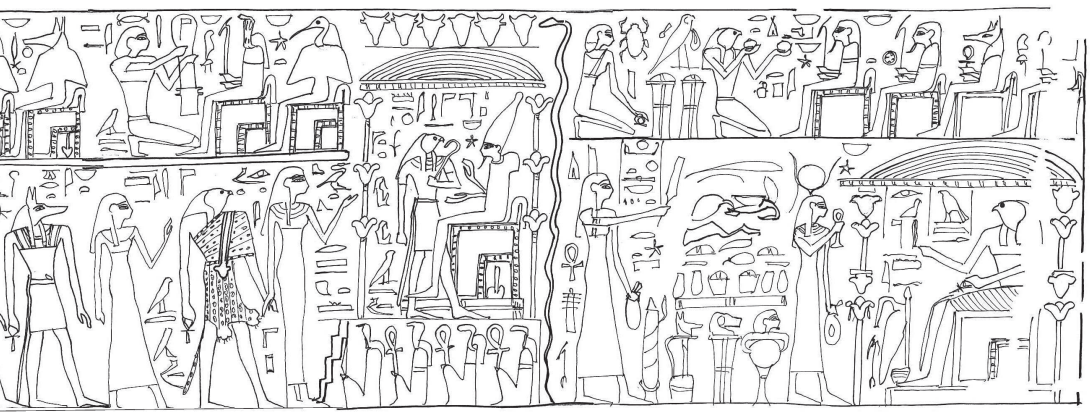
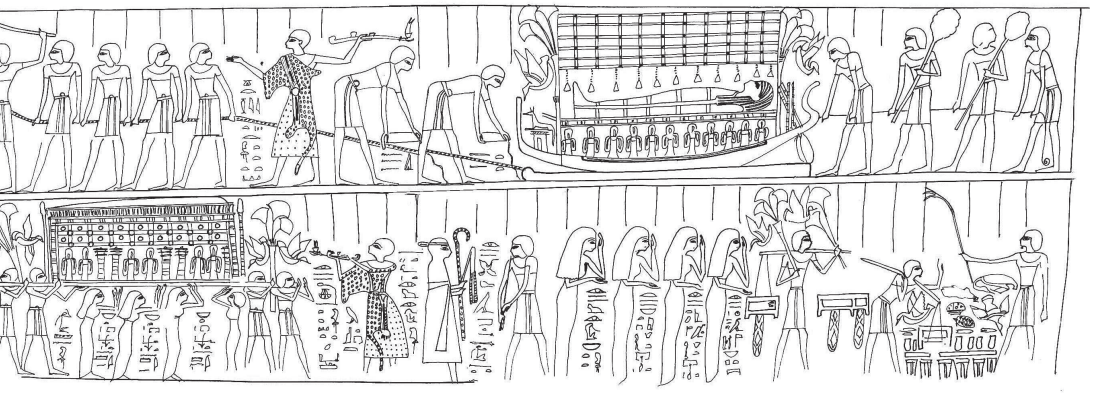


Fig. 6.17. Left side: anonymous outer coffin (A.135)





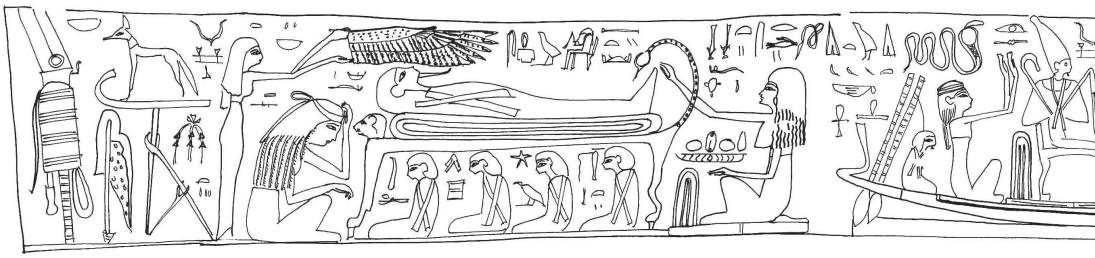
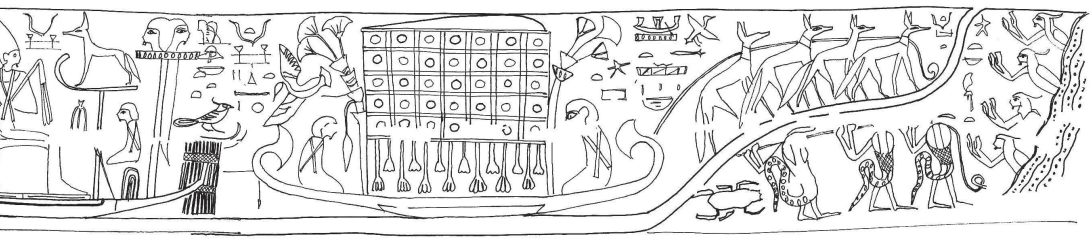


Fig. 6.18. Right side: anonymous coffin (Vatican Museums, Inv. N. 25016.2.1-2).

Irregular designs also occur at limited spots, only affecting the repertoire of a given section. Chances of finding irregular occurrences at any of the scenes described in Chapter Three are ilimited and of course they fall outside the scope of this work. We will only present here an example focused on the headboard, where the design of the central panel, normally focused on a goddess or a Tjej-sign, shows a solar scene, where the sun disc is raised by the arms of cosmic deities (Fig. 6.19). The deity below shows breasts and so is identified with the goddess Nut, while the god above is probably associated with Nun. The scene is featured in a coffin where the predominant design is classical, with most of the scenes showing the costumary repertoire. However, it shows other unusual features, such as the upper edges adorned with a secondary frieze of vignettes (Fig. 1.9), and Osirian scenes that became common in the complex scheme. This context, suggests that the coffin was produced in a workshop where the features that would become normative in the complex scheme were already being integrated. The solar scene depicted on the headboard remained an isolated occurrence in the yellow corpus but it already shows the clear association of the headboard with the solar imagery, an association which became increasingly clearer in the complex scheme (Figs. 3.75 ; 77-78). This example superbly shows how irregular designs were often used to introduce new ideas, which became later adapted and integrated in the normative layout.



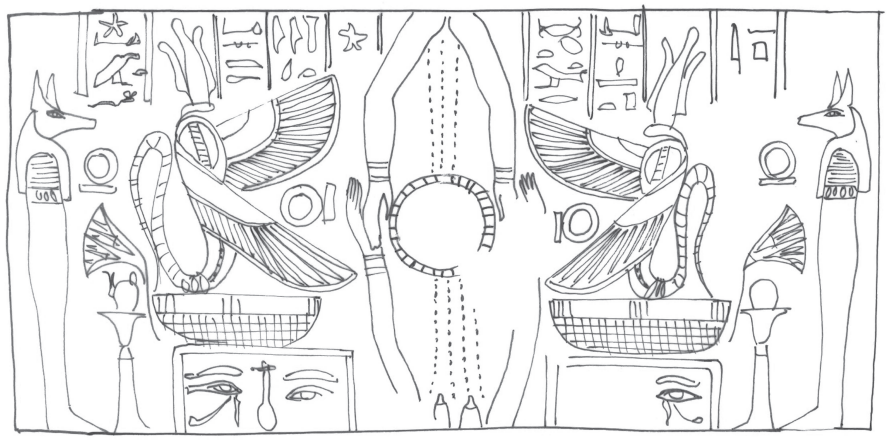


Fig. 6.19. Headboard: coffin of Amenemhat (Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid).

3.3 Box (interior)

Due to the profound sacredness associated with the interiors of the boxes, this area was rarely used for irregular compositions. The few identified examples are related to the use of large Tjet-signs instead of the Djed-pillar on outer boxes.[30] These Tjet-signs can be incorporated either within the framework of the classical scheme (Fig. 6.20) or the complex scheme layout.[31] The latter designs subtly associate the Tjet-sign with the Djed-pillar by incorporating feathered designs and the large *hemhem*-crown, attributes of the typically associated with the Djed-pillar.

Occasionally, irregular features are introduced with such subtlety that they may go unnoticed. In the anonymous outer coffin MMA 60, housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the mother goddess depicted on the floorboard is shown wearing a headdress usually associated with the Djed-pillar, which is extremely rare (Fig. 6.21). This fusion of attributes can be considered an irregular feature, suggesting a blending of the typological characteristics of the outer coffin with those of the inner coffin.

On the long sides, irregular motifs may appear interspersed with the standard repertoire of mummiform gods from the Amduat. For instance, a register featuring a mummy lying on the solar barque may be inserted into the usual sequences of mummiform gods.[32] Other exceptional scenes may depict of a goddess performing ritual actions before a large Tjet-sign.[33]

30 A.64: outer coffin of Nesitanebettaui.
31 A.64: outer coffin of Nesitanebettaui.
32 A.132: outer coffin of Maatkare.
33 A.149: anonymous outer coffin.

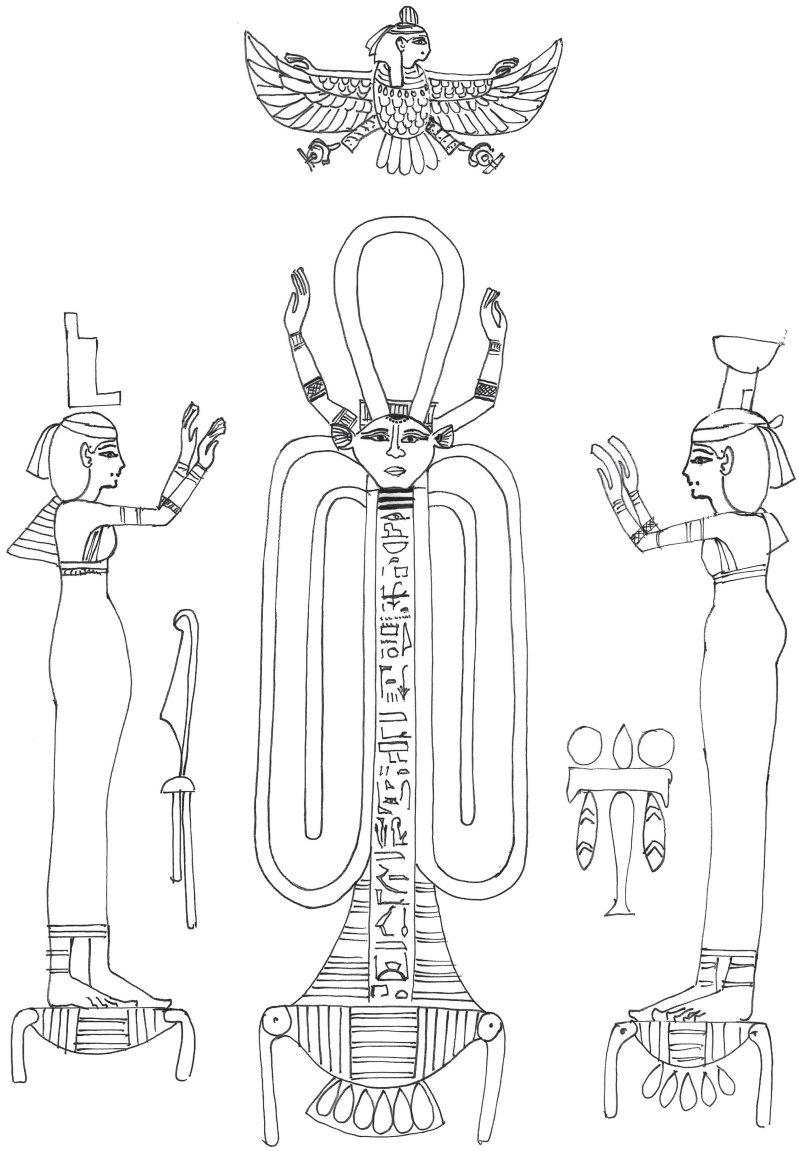


Fig. 6.20. Interior: outer coffin of Mashasekebt (A.111).

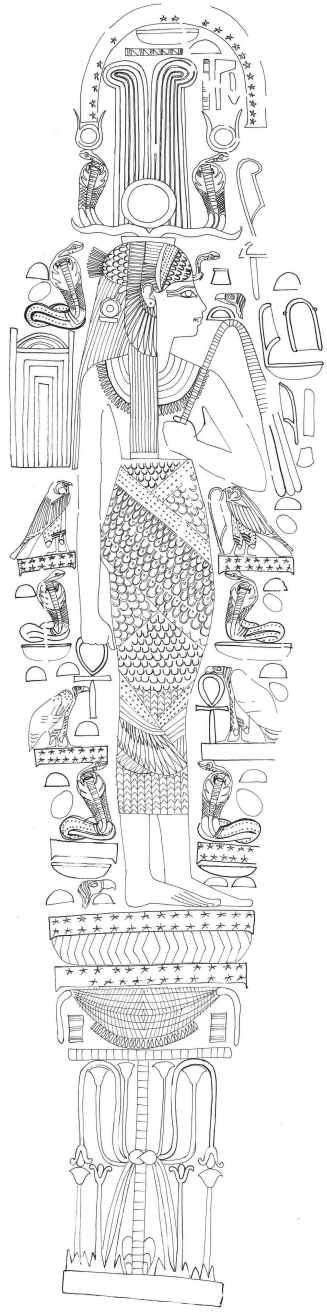


Fig. 6.21. Interior: Anonymous outer coffin (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 26.3.6)

Commentary

Irregular designs are consistently associated with the Theban highest elite. The significance of irregular compositions appears to vary depending on their placement. On the exterior walls of the box, the use of the double register aligns with the imagery of the Book of the Amduat, suggesting an esoteric function. As such, these designs may have been imbued with a significant status symbol. Moreover, through their implied association with the journey of the sun god, these compositions convey a dynamic sense of movement, whether expressed as a mythological journey in the Amduat, a ritual initiation, or a progression through the necropolis.

On the lid, the adoption of irregular layouts vividly enhanced the uniqueness of the objects. The central section appears to have held particular significance, as innovative solutions are heavily concentrated in this composition. This observation underscores the paramount role of the lid in shaping the overall perception of a coffin set's significance and value. It is likely that, when assessing the value of a particular coffin, the layout of the central section of the lid was subject to particularly meticulous scrutiny. The importance of innovative inputs in this section explains the diversity of categories inventoried in the typology of this particular composition. However, irregular layouts of this section extended beyond the 'normative' trend of innovation, aiming to redefine the decorative space of the lid/mummy board. By blurring distinctions between sections, these compositions introduced new meanings to well-established tableaux. The craftsmen involved in these compositions displayed remarkable skill in achieving innovative results while re-interpreting rigid conventions governing their activity.

Irregular compositions further suggest that the targeted audience of the Theban funerary workshops was highly knowledgeable about the subtleties of coffin decoration. These compositions introduced disruptive elements that were clearly recognised and valued as original, undoubtedly enhancing the perceived worth of the coffin set.

CHAPTER VII

Visual narratives in the yellow corpus

The imagery of yellow coffins was never confined to a fixed or established repertoire. On the contrary, it has always remained open to new inputs and ongoing developments, forming a unique creative phenomenon with Egyptian pictorial art. The dynamic character of coffin decoration in the yellow corpus makes the term 'visual narrative' an intuitive choice to define it. However, what exactly should be understood by this term? Does interpreting figurative decoration as a visual narrative imply that it unfolds a story to be deciphered?

The interpretation of the visual elements displayed on yellow coffins poses interesting challenges. The idea of deciphering a narrative by reading the images displayed on the various elements of the coffin set may lead modern scholars to interpret these messages in a linear manner. This approach presumes integrating the different sets of images into a single 'story'. While such a linear narrative aligns with the framework of a modern observer, it would hardly serve the original purpose of such compositions. In reality, these objects were not designed to tell us a 'story'.

The interaction between the visual elements and the viewer reflects a cognitive phenomenon of its own that cannot easily correspond to contemporary experiences of viewing artefacts. Modern interactions typically involve a sense of distance and distinction between the beholder and the object, while yellow coffins were produced with the implicit aim of merging their identity.

The various layers provided by the nested assemblage of objects do not necessarily provide a narrative sequence, at least not in the sense that a modern viewer would expect as the recipient of their message. The narrative encoded in coffin decoration is not a story to be told, but rather an experience to be lived – and not by the external observer, but by the deceased.

Nested burial assemblages have been understood as spatial phenomena involving a journey, with a 'series of portals as in the temple plan or Netherworld geography.'[1] This analogy relies on the identification of the coffin with the temple space, a path marked by obstacles and transformations leading to its core.[2] Yellow coffins, however, are sacred spaces of a different nature from temples. Temple spaces are designed to erect barriers to protect the sacred from the profane. Temples lead humans from the profane experiences of ordinary life to the primordial world of the divine. This process involves ritual purification and the acquisition of sacred knowledge, enabling humans to attain the divine status which allows them to interact with deities. Space, ritual and knowledge are inseparable axes of contact with the sacred.[3]

This phenomenology can be observed in the Book of the Dead, where the introduction of the deceased into the Duat requires navigating places imbued with supernatural power – points where the deceased must confront challenges (gates, mounds, or caverns). At these points, the deceased must demonstrate worthiness and the special knowledge provided by the Book of the Dead. For example, Chapters 144-7 describe the multiple gates guarded by apotropaic deities of fearsome appearance, animal-headed and armed with knives.[4] Despite the significance of this imagery in the Book of the Dead, it is conspicuously absent from yellow coffin decoration.

The visual narratives of yellow coffins do not depict a progression from the profane to the sacred. The space within which the deceased moves is entirely defined by its sacredness. The sacred space depicted in the yellow coffin set is

1 Bettum 2012, 40.
2 Bettum 2012.
3 Loprieno 2001, 13-50.
4 Taylor 2010, 136.

designed for the deceased, who resides in this sacred topography as a deity among deities and not as a newcomer.

Another common misconception is that yellow coffins replicate tomb decoration. However, an examination of coffin decoration does not support this conclusion. The typical Theban themes of Ramesside tomb decoration are conspicuously absent from the yellow corpus. This is particularly evident in the decoration of superstructures, with the usual themes of banquet scenes, offerings for the Ka of the deceased, or depictions of daily life- all of which are entirely excluded from the yellow repertoire. Although some affinity with Ramesside burial chambers can be detected, this is mainly due to the fact that both tombs and coffins draw upon the imagery of the Book of the Dead.

Another essential aspect of understanding yellow coffin decoration is recognising that visual narratives are not merely symbolic discourses, but rather markers leading to a phenomenological experience. Unlike the linear compositions of the Book of the Amduat, the narratives of yellow coffins unfold along several axes, through which the deceased undergoes different experiences. These images are designed to be functional in essence. When seeking to unravel the visual narrative of a yellow coffin, a decisive question in this respect is how visual narratives interrelate across the different layers provided not only by the objects themselves (outer coffin, inner coffin and mummy board) but also by the relationship between the interior and exterior decoration. Pictorial art of the coffin set envelops the mummy within layers of imagery, forming what can be described as a fluid 'semiotic wrapping', where pictorial art, employing various visual and symbolic resources, constructs multiple dimensions of eternity around the deceased.[5]

Nested yellow coffins have been recognized as layered assemblages of objects, with each object contributing to a coherent story that integrates into

5 Regardless of the original source of the images – ritual tattooing, jewellery, temple decoration or funerary artefacts – a vast array of symbols began to be incorporated into coffin decoration, providing the coffin with several layers of meaning centred around the body. These symbols not only transformed the body from within but also brought it back to life, restoring the deceased's identity and introducing them to the gods of the underworld. This 'inter-iconicity' transformed anthropoid coffins into extraordinary complex semiotic objects.

the overarching narrative provided by the set.[6] Interpretations of how the iconography is read often consider the starting point of this narrative, typically associated with the interior of the coffin, or its position – whether standing or lying down.[7] For example, when laid on the ground, the lid and the box are often seen as representing the two hemispheres of the cosmos. The boxes, serving as sarcophagi and tombs, are associated with the Earth and the Netherworld, while the lids are associated with the sky.[8] While this interpretation applies to many coffin types, applying it to yellow coffins oversimplifies the worldview embedded in these objects.

We approached this matter by focusing on the actual axes provided by the decorative layout as it appears on the objects. In doing so, two main axes have been identified in the decoration of yellow coffins.

1. The transversal axis: the dimension of space

The decoration of the exterior walls of the boxes represents what can be considered a transversal axis. Along this axis, the various scenes displayed on the walls of the box suggest movement through space. Generally, the headboard of the box is associated with the East and solar rebirth, while the footboard is linked to the West and the chthonic netherworld.[9] The narratives depicted on the long sides of the box varied significantly during the 21st Dynasty and assumed different meanings.

Basic scheme

The upper section of the box retains the traditional role of the eye panel, connecting the exterior to the interior of the coffin, which symbolises the Osirian underworld. In this setting, depictions of the deceased are rare, with the role

6 Bettum 2012.
7 Niwiński 2018, 36-37. Liptay 2017.
8 Niwiński 2018.
9 Liptay 2017, 260. Manassa 2007, 452.

of 'Opening the West' mainly entrusted to Thoth, who is almost universally featured holding the pole of the West. In contrast, depictions of the deceased are more common in the lower section, where they are portrayed performing rituals before the deities of the netherworld. These scenes are simplified versions of the Litany of Re and aim to associate the deceased with the nightly circuit of the sun, but also with the protective manifestations of the supreme being, summoned to safeguard the coffin's space. A box designed according to the basic scheme thus serves as a passageway to both the Osirian netherworld, and the nightly journey of the sun god, where the deceased rests in safety. This layout is clearly intended to grant the deceased the ability to move in the netherworld, ultimately joining Osiris and Re.

Classical scheme

In the classical scheme, the repertoire of scenes on the exterior walls of the box becomes significantly more elaborate, consistently describing a sacred landscape. The side panels of the headboard play an introductory role to this territory, marking the starting point of this journey. The upper sections of the box allude to heaven and the netherworld, the transcendent dimensions of space. Within these mythological dimensions, the deceased moves in different forms: as a *ba*-bird they follow the circuit of the solar barque in its daily circuit in heaven, while as a justified god they enter the realm of Osiris.

The lower section of the box unfolds a sacred territory, likely identified with the Theban necropolis , where the deceased performs ritual actions before local shrines. The long sides of the box literally open pathways for the deceased, portraying a journey undertaken on foot, with the deceased dressed in ceremonial garments. These elements are deeply intertwined, collectively signifying the realm of light where the deceased resides. The necropolis is depicted as a sacred precinct in which the deceased moves and interacts with divine powers along a ceremonial path. Within this spatial scheme, the sacred path always leads the deceased towards the Theban Mountain, which is firmly equated with the footboard of the box. The flow described along the box thus opens a pathway

of light for the deceased, eradicating the pathlessness and darkness that are otherwise fundamental features of the Nun.[10]

It is not uncommon at this stage to find sets where an inner coffin designed in accordance with the classical scheme is paired with an outer coffin following the basic scheme.[11] This combination is not necessarily the result of re-use or the association of objects from different periods, but rather reflects the complementary roles inherent in the two layouts. By this stage, the basic scheme had become closely associated with a protective role, granted by the Sons of Horus. As such, it was used as the outermost, defensive, layer of the set, while the inner coffin represented a sacred landscape traversed by the deceased.

Complex scheme

The diversity of layouts adopted at this stage highlights the wide range of references involved in the representation of space. Despite this variety, the space depicted on the boxes of the complex scheme consistently refers to the Osirian netherworld. This differs significantly from the classical scheme, which encompasses distinct dimensions of space, including heaven, the Duat, and the necropolis. In the complex scheme, the focus is fully immersed in the transcendent Osirian realm.

In the earliest stages of the complex scheme, the different sections of the box retain their formal autonomy. The upper section is consistently designed as the throne room of Osiris, while the layout of the lower section undergoes constant elaboration, centred around the imagery of the royal funerary complexes from the New Kingdom. This development is first observed in the association with the royal cults performed in the royal funerary temples. The focus on royal funerary imagery reflects the immense political and religious significance of the kings' reburials, a phenomenon likely occurring by the early fourth quarter of the 21st Dynasty. This same phenomenon may have significantly shaped perceptions of the sanctity of the Theban necropolis, potentially materialising in the

10 Taylor 2010. Chapter 9 of the Book of the Dead enables the deceased to move and drive away darkness.
11 Coffin set of Nauny (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 30.3.23a, b; 30.3.24a, b;30.3.25). Coffin set of Henuttatui (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 25.3.182–.184).

development of cultic areas around the cliffs of TT 320[12] and Deir el-Bahari.[13] The adoption of this ritual imagery into coffin decoration not only enhanced the role of the box as a sacred space but also associated the deceased with ritual practices of considerable political significance.[14]

The identification of the box with the royal funerary complex progressed even further with the inclusion of imagery from the Amduat scenes, borrowed directly from the royal tombs from the Valley of the Kings. This imagery was eventually incorporated into the lower section of the box. These subjects became so prominent that the lower section was often extended to the full length of the box, showcasing a selection of elements from the Book of the Amduat.

2. The longitudinal axis: the dimension of time

While the design of the boxes is displayed along a transversal axis, the layout of the lids, mummy boards, and the interior of the boxes is arranged longitudinally. The common axis shared by these different objects reflects a magical continuum between them, conceived as a flow through the dimension of time. The way this journey through time is articulated varied during the 21st Dynasty, assuming different meanings.

Basic scheme

Once again, each section of the layout is endowed with its own distinct dynamics. The primary depiction of the lids and mummy boards shows the deceased as a living being who has attained divine status (Fig. 7.2).

This is further elaborated in the secondary tableaux displayed along the lids. The lower section of the lids is designed as a sacred gate, depicting the doors of a shrine. The deities represented in these 'doors' are often related to the material equipment of the mummy itself, including the Sons of Horus, the Benu

12 Perez-Accino et all. 2023.
13 Niwiński 2019.
14 Liptay 2017, 263.

bird, Thoth, and, notably, Osiris and Ptah-Sokar. The arrangement of these 'doors' suggests that these deities reside within the shrine, corresponding to the mummy itself.

Consistent with this view, the central section of the lid reveals the interior of the coffin, giving visibility to the outer wrappings of the mummy, often adorned with a funerary pectoral or a heart scarab. The mummy is equated with Osiris, and its wrappings reinforce this identification, frequently featuring a shroud with the image of Osiris roughly sketched upon it (Fig. 5.17). Through this depiction, the deceased is anchored in the timeless dimension of everlasting existence, *djet*.[15]

In the basic scheme, the coffin's interior may be simply painted red, alluding to the unmanifested realm of the Duat, or it may feature a simple composition depicting the cosmic mother goddess on the floorboard (Fig. 4.10). This goddess, an embodiment of the Theban Mountain and Nut, cradles the deceased as her son Osiris, begetting him within her divine womb. This celestial imagery links the coffin to the royal sarcophagi of the New Kingdom (Fig. 7.1),[16] and associates the deceased with the cyclic dimension of time, *neheh*, identifying him with the reborn sun god who, in the form of Khepri ('He who manifests'), manifests himself in the creation.[17] Not coincidentally, this imagery is deeply connected to that observed on the central section of the lids, where the scarab symbolises the rebirth of the sun god begotten by Nut (Fig. 2.25), and to the upper section, where sunrise is depicted on the chest of the deceased (Fig. 2.10).

If an outer coffin is included in the set, the Djed-pillar is typically displayed within the interior of this outer box, providing the mummy with the protective imagery of the Osirian burial chamber, as described in Chapter 151 of the Book of the Dead (Fig. 4.1). While its primary significance is Osirian, this powerful symbol may also have a solar reading, referencing sunrise. In the vignettes of Chapter 16 of the Book of the Dead,[18] the Djed-pillar functions as an *axis mundi*, ensuring the safe transition of the newly born sun god to the realm of the living.

15 For further discussion on this concept, see Assmann 2001.
16 Alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I (Taylor, 2017b).
17 Assmann 2001:242.
18 Taylor 2010, 247.

The imagery along the longitudinal axis, therefore, depicts the deceased in three distinct ways: as an Osirian deity firmly rooted in the *djet* dimension of everlasting existence, as Khepri manifesting in the *neheh* dimension of time, and as a as a living god dwelling in a realm of light. It is in this latter form that he is portrayed on the lateral partitions of the lid (Fig. 2.51) and on the exterior walls of the box, clad in festive garments and presenting offerings to the several manifestations of the supreme being (Fig. 3.12).

Classical scheme

The central section of the lid continues to depict the interior of the coffin, but this tableau now extends beyond the mummy wrappings, revealing the interior of the mummy itself, which is equated with the mythological landscape of the Duat. This large tableau visualises the union of the two dimensions of time, *neheh* and *djet*, by illustrating the union of the sun god with Osiris (Fig. 2.37).

The lower section of the lids is now arranged in three partitions, displaying the aspective representation of the doors of a shrine as though they are open,[19] thereby revealing the interior (Fig. 2.57). In this scheme, the lateral partitions depict the open doors, while the central partition visualises the exterior wrappings of the mummy, adorned with several pectorals. The layout of this tryptic is of fundamental importance to understand the dynamic flow of decoration represented in the classical scheme, as it 'opens' to reveal the interior of the coffin (Fig. 7.3). This is precisely what is depicted in the lower section, where the heavenly gates stand open, and the interior of the mummy itself is revealed in the central section.

This scheme establishes a dynamic interplay between the interior and the exterior of the coffin, characterised by movement in different directions. In the lower section, the flow is inward, following the journey of the sun god, who begins at the footboard and ascends along the lid to the interior of the Duat (Fig. 2.56). This journey culminates in the central section, where the sun god unites

19 Liptay 2017, 263.

with Osiris (Fig. 2.36).[20] Simultaneously, another movement flows outward, with the deceased portrayed as a living god emerging into the light through the lateral partitions of the lower section (Fig. 2.56). This outward journey progresses downwards along the lid, leading to the side panels of the headboard of the box, where the deceased's journey continues through the spatial dimension (Fig. 3.22).

Inside the coffin, a broader range of imagery is now present, though the central imagery remains consistent with the basic scheme. The mummy, again equated with Osiris, is still protected by the mother goddess. However, her protective role is amplified, as she is now depicted with long, outstretched wings along the side walls (Fig. 4.11), symbolising the sheltering sky that fully embraces the deceased. Moreover, the cosmic creative powers embodied within the mummy are now encircled by a magical ring displayed along the edges of the box's interior. This magical boundary may take the form of text bands, ornamental friezes, or simply block-friezes (Fig. 4.12). Over time, this framing element progressively diminishes as an enhanced sense of sacredness pervades the box's exterior decoration. On the interior walls surrounding the mummy, Osirian scenes depicting the god's embalming and his resurrection through the sexual union with Isis frequently appear on the upper sections of the long sides. On the floorboard, the cosmic mother goddess begets the sun-god within her womb, leading him to a rebirth. The depiction of sex, which takes place in the *djet* timeless existence, leads to childbirth in the *neheh* cyclic time, unfolding a narrative of love within the coffin's interior. Here, the deceased, identified with Osiris, is begotten and reborn as a solar child (Fig. 4.13). The imagery of the deceased as a living god inside the box shows him witnessing the mysteries of his own rebirth and resurrection (Fig. 4.12).

20 The god Osiris guards the underworld and embodies regeneration. The rejuvenation of the Sun is conceptualised through the unity of Solar and Osirian forces, a central theme in the royal books of the netherworld. The embrace of Re and Osiris leads to the transfiguration of the deceased. See Weiss 2017, 222-230.

Complex scheme

On the lids, the primary depiction of the deceased as a living god becomes increasingly concealed, evidenced by the gradual disappearance of the forearms, now hidden beneath the floral collar (Fig. 7.4).

The deceased is fully enshrouded under an increasingly elaborate floral collar, symbolising Hathor's regenerative powers bestowed upon the mummified dead.[21] Similarly, the introduction of the mummy braces in the late 21st Dynasty, within the upper section's repertoire, symbolises the lethargic state preceding resurrection (Fig. 2.24).[22] Together, these symbols underscore the deceased's divine status as an Osirian god. Correspondingly, the depiction of the deceased as a living god is almost absent from the coffin's iconographic programme, emphasising the objects' anonymous nature.

The lower section of the lid is now significantly reduced or, in some cases, entirely omitted (Fig. 7.5). As this section traditionally depicts the deceased, its reduction often results in diminished visibility of the deceased within the lid's decorative programme. This change amplifies the central section, which continues to depict the coffin's interior and the sacred mystery of the solar-Osirian union within the Duat. Through this large tableau, the sacred realm of the Duat becomes fully 'visible' on the lid, as if the sanctity of the interior has manifested on the coffin's exterior. The increasing presence of liminal elements on the lid reinforces this continuum, blurring the boundaries between the coffin's interior and exterior through a 'transparency' effect created by its decoration.[23]

The box's interior is now formally designed as a shrine, specifically a *shetyt*-shrine, ('mysterious one'), where the resurrection of Osiris and the rebirth of the sun god are achieved. The most notable change is detected on the long sides, which are entirely adorned with mummiform deities of the underworld (Fig. 4.15), arranged as if placed along the side walls of a shrine, protecting the

21 Floral collars played an important role during the mummification process. In burials from the 21st Dynasty, garlands frequently adorned the exterior wrappings of mummies. The royal embalming cache (KV 63) uncovered an extensive collection of funerary garlands and floral collars, almost certainly used in the royal mummification process. Sousa 2013, 67.
22 Smith 1906, 155-160. See also Van Walsem 1997, 117.
23 Liptay 2017.

deceased's mummy, fully identified with Osiris. On the floorboard, depictions of the Djed-pillar (Fig. 4.2) or the mother goddess may still be found (Fig. 4.15). Outer coffins become slightly more prevalent at this stage, with increasingly innovative decoration, especially in highest elite burials. Outstanding compositions occasionally replace the Djed-pillar with striking anthropoid effigies of Osiris, clearly depicted as a solar deity (Fig. 4.6).

Ultimately, the profound sacredness associated with the interior of the coffin seeks to achieve complete association between the coffin and a *shetyt*-shrine, where the deceased rests fully endowed with Osirian divine status. This intense sacred atmosphere also pervades the exterior walls of the box, now closely associated with the royal imagery of the Duat. In short, the coffin is now designed as the deceased's personal shrine, where they, akin to a king, partake in the supreme mysteries of cosmic renewal.

3. Unifying the narratives

The two axes described above allow the deceased to traverse both space and time, demonstrating a profound interconnection between these dimensions.

The spatial movement provided by the box symbolically merges with the Theban Mountain, which acts as a transitional zone, as noted by Éva Liptay.[24] Both the Hathoric cow and the tree goddess featured near the foot ends of the long sides can be interpreted as manifestations of the Theban cosmic divine mother, ultimately revealed within the interior of the box. Thus, the coffin not only facilitates passage through the sacred dimension of space but also transforms into a sacred site itself – an *entheotopos*, as defined by Antonio Munõz Herrera,[25] specifically embodying the Theban cliff sanctuary of the Hathor cult. It is within this cliff sanctuary that the rebirth of the deceased takes place. Perhaps for this

24 Liptay 2017, 261.
25 Munõz Herrera 2023.

reason, the interior of the box is typically painted against a red background, as this is the colour associated with the interior of the earth.[26]

The narrative encoded in the coffin also includes the material that was used to craft it, such as the wood. Several tree species are native to Upper Egypt, including types of *Ficus*, the date palm, acacias, poplars, the date palm of the desert, jujube trees, tamarisks, and willows. Despite this diversity, most yellow coffins were crafted from *Ficus sycamorus*. It has long been recognised that the choice of this wood may reflect a strong religious symbolism. The sycamore, which can grow up to fifteen metres tall,[27] is deeply associated with fertility, eternity, and revival and its close connection with Hathor suggests that these majestic trees likely grew in the vicinity of the Theban Mountain during the 21st Dynasty.[28] In this context, the coffin embodies these sacred and majestic trees of Hathor, uniting the dimensions of space and time. The spatial and temporal transitions facilitated by the boxes and lids, respectively, converge within the interior of the coffin. This space is intrinsically linked to both the sacred tree of life and the Theban Mountain, serving as the unifying point for these narratives.

At the heart of this unification lies an element that is often absent today: the mummy itself.

Mummification procedures

The visual narratives displayed on the coffin set are closely intertwined with the materiality of the mummy and its equipment. As in coffin decoration, mummification practices during the 21st Dynasty exhibit significant innovation. Most of what is known about these practices relies heavily on Elliot Smith's observations of mummies from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun,[29] supplemented by examinations of other contemporaneous mummies.[30]

26 This colour scheme is probably rooted in the practice detected in Ramesside tombs of painting the ground of the burial chamber in red.
27 Amorós 2017, 46-47.
28 Personal communication by Gersande Eschenbrenner Diemer, in August 2024.
29 Elliot Smith 1906.
30 Winlock 1932, 53-57.

These examinations show that during the 21st Dynasty, the viscera were no longer stored in canopic chests but reinserted into the body cavity. Although removed from the corpse and salted, they were later sprinkled with sawdust from aromatic woods, wrapped in linen,[31] and accompanied by wax figurines depicting one of the Sons of Horus. These figurines are a distinctive feature of funerary materials from this period and were often moulded entirely from wax, though mud or a resin-mud-wax mixture was also used.[32] A typical set includes four mummiform figurines, each with the typical attributes of the Sons of Horus: Imset (human-headed) wrapped in the liver, Hapi (baboon-headed) wrapped in the lungs, Duamutef (jackal-headed) in the stomach and Qebehsenuef (hawk-headed) in the intestines.[33] These figurines appear to have replaced Canopic jars,[34] transforming the interior of the mummy into a symbolic Canopic chest, thereby unifying the mummy and viscera for the first time. In the yellow corpus, the Sons of Horus are omnipresent elements in coffin decoration, both on the lids and the boxes, likely seeking to establish a magical continuum between the interior of the mummy and the coffin's exterior layers.

The flank incision used to remove the viscera was covered by a plate bearing the *wedjat*-eye design, an innovation of the period. These plates were often moulded in wax but could also be made of metal.[35] Considerable variety is shown in the quality of the wax and the care with which the *wedjat*-eye is wrought upon it. In some cases, the gaping wound was not protected by a plate of any sort, and in two cases the edges of the wound were stitched together with ligatures.[36]

The preparation of the external appearance of the corpse involved the most innovative and time-consuming processes. Embalmers of the 21st Dynasty

31 Elliot Smith 1906, 32.
32 Elliot Smith 1906, 40.
33 Elliot Smith 1906, 40.
34 This practice was not consistently observed in all the examined mummies. Elliot Smith notes that out of a study of nearly fifty mummies, a clear identification between the figurines and the organs was possible in only fifteen cases. Thus, a considerable number of mummies contained no figurines within the body, either because they were never included or because they had decomposed alongside the viscera (Elliot Smith 1906, 37).
35 Abdel Razek, S. (forthcoming).
36 Elliot Smith 1906, 17.

focused on rendering the corpse as lifelike as possible.[37] Before the body was placed into the salt, each nail of both the hands and feet was carefully secured with a piece of string. The impressions left by these strings remain visible in almost all cases, and it is not uncommon to find the string still in place on one or two fingers or toes.[38]

A particularly distinctive feature of these mummies is the practice of stuffing large quantities of sawdust, sand and mud under the skin. This technique aimed to restore some semblance of the form and consistency the body had enjoyed in life, counteracting the collapse and shrinkage caused by desiccation.[39] In the case of women, this process sometimes included the slight enhancement of the breasts through mud packing, although this practice was exceptional.[40] On the back, packing was usually restricted to the loins and buttocks but occasionally extended up to the shoulders.[41] The head and face received considerable attention. During the preliminary stages of embalming, the eyes collapsed into the orbits. To counteract this, artificial eyes were inserted in front of the remnants of the real eyes, and the eyelids were pulled down into a semi-closed position. These artificial eyes typically consisted of a piece of roughly rolled linen with the pupil represented by a black painted spot. In some cases, they were made of white stone with a black spot.[42]

These procedures were applied regardless of the sex or age of the deceased.[43] The bodies were then painted. In most mummies from the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, the entire body surface was painted. Female bodies were painted with a mixture of chrome yellow and gum – the same materials used for painting female statues. Male bodies were painted either red, rose-coloured or more commonly a dull reddish or yellowish brown. In several cases where the mummies of males were not painted, a sheet of red linen was wrapped around the body.[44]

37 Salima and Dodson 1998, 126
38 Elliot Smith 1906, 19.
39 Elliot Smith 1906, 19.
40 Elliot Smith 1906, 26.
41 Elliot Smith 1906, 24.
42 Elliot Smith 1906, 28.
43 Elliot Smith 1906, 41.
44 Elliot Smith 1906, 33.

A sophisticated cosmetic procedure followed the painting of the body. The eyes, nostrils, ears, and mouth were thickly sprinkled with red or yellow resin or resin paste. This was followed by the application of a thick resin coating over the entire face. Before this step, however, the eyebrows were painted with a black material, which sometimes exhibits a dull reddish tinge. A similar band was often painted across the forehead.[45] The final steps towards restoring the lifelike appearance of the corpse involved hairstyling, which frequently included hair extensions and wigs. Occasionally, small pieces of jewellery were found, such as rings (A.83), necklaces (A.91, A.127), bracelets (A.83, A.123, A.124, A.125), and earrings (A.124). Interestingly, although jewellery use on mummies was relatively rare, coffin decoration often echoed this practice, depicting items such as bracelets, earrings and necklaces.

The corpse was then coated with beeswax to enhance preservation. Resin was also liberally applied,[46] often accumulating on the floorboard, sometimes damaging its pictorial work.[47] Through this process, the oils, resins, unguents – imbued with connotations of purity and divinity – literally transformed the corpse into a living god.[48]

Mummy wrappings and amulets

Once again, the mummies of the Tomb of the Priests Amun provide most of the evidence regarding the wrapping procedures of the 21st Dynasty. The reports published by Georges Daressy remain the most important references to these practices.[49] Many of these mummies were poorly equipped, offering little material beyond their wrappings. However, it is important to consider that what Daressy observed during the unwrapping of these remains may reflect a

45 Elliot Smith 1906, 28.
46 Salima and Dodson 1998, 124.
47 Strudwick, Dawson 2016, 99. The use of resin extended to the application of amulets. Recent research on the amulets uncovered from the mummies of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, unwrapped by Georges Daressy and Eugène Grébaut, revealed that these objects were attached to the linen bands of the mummies by applying resin. Thus, the amount of resin used in the wrapping of the mummy was substantial, adding further layers to the materials already applied to the mummy itself. In some cases, resins appears on the interiors of coffins as deposits resulting from embalming treatments, transferred through contact with the mummies they once held.
48 Taylor 2010.
49 Daressy 1907.

later restoration effort. The original funerary equipment might have been almost entirely removed in antiquity.

The best equipped mummies featured a relatively rich collection of amulets and papyri. Small collections of amulets were often discovered around the neck, including Djed-pillars, Tjet-knots, *wadje*-columns, and figures of Thoth.[50] Small cobras were sometimes positioned at the front (A.33, A.43, A.85, A.98, A.127, A.132). Over the arms, small amulets were occasionally found, such as plaques depicting Thoth and the *wedjat*-eye (A.32, A.58), small *wedjat*-eyes (A.91), or Djed-pillars (A.33).

One of the most valuable items included in these funerary assemblages is a metallic blade shaped as a raptor. Crafted from bronze or lead and occasionally covered with gold foil, these artefacts depict a falcon with outstretched wings. Two holes allowed the pectoral to be fastened to the mummy wrappings. While several interpretations of its function are possible,[51] it is likely that the raptor was positioned over the abdomen of the mummy as an allusion to the nightly union of Isis with her lover to grant him resurrection, a scene which is often depicted in the interior of the box (classical scheme).[52] Thus, the role of the raptor would be to grant resurrection to the deceased, bringing him back to life through Isis's loving embrace.

The inclusion of a heart amulet was rare (A.65, A.96, A.114, A.125, A.135, A.141, A.148), but it was a highly exclusive object. The Book of the Dead, Chapter 29B (Spell for a heart-amulet of *Seheret*-stone) prescribes its use:

> I am the Benu-bird, the *ba* of Re, who guides the gods to the Duat when they go forth.[53]

Not surprisingly, some of the heart amulets found in the mummies of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun feature an engraved Benu-bird. The heart amulet

50 The use of these amulets is already prescribed in the Book of the Dead: papyrus column amulet (Chapters 159-160), *djed*-pillar of gold (Chapter 155), *tjet* amulet (Chapter 156) in Taylor 2010, 42, 131.
51 Abdel Razek, M. (forthcoming).
52 The falcon blade appears to have assumed the role previously fulfilled by the Ba-shaped pectorals used during the New Kingdom, particularly in royal burials. These objects alluded to the nightly union of the Ba with the mummy.
53 Taylor 2010.

symbolised wisdom and played a crucial role in the funerary symbolism of the yellow corpus. It represented the timeless essence of the deceased, enduring the *djet* dimension of everlasting existence, further solidifying the deceased's Osirian identity.

However, the most significant amulet was the heart scarab. Almost without exception, the heart scarabs found in the mummies of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun were inscribed with a version of Chapter 30 B:

> Oh, my heart (*ib*) of my mother! Oh, my heart (*ib*) of my mother! Oh, my heart (*haty*) of my different forms (*kheperu*)! Do not stand up as a witness against me, do not be opposed to me in the tribunal, do not be hostile to me in the presence of the Keeper of the Balance, for you are my *ka* which was in my body, the protector who made my members hale. Go forth to the happy place whereto we speed. Do not make my name stink to the Entourage who make men. Do not tell lies about me in the presence of the god. It is indeed well that you should hear![54]

Due to its inscription, the heart scarab has traditionally been emphasised for its role in ensuring a favourable outcome in the judgement of the dead. While this is undeniably true, the magical function of the object is not restricted to the judgement of the dead and encompasses other roles. The most critical of these is its capacity to provide the deceased with an identification with the newly born sun god, in his manifestation as the rising sun, Khepri ('He who creates himself' or 'He who manifests himself'). The paramount importance of the heart scarab in the magical equipment of the mummy lies in its introduction of solar imagery into what is otherwise a strictly Osirian context. It is this object alone that represents the rebirth of the sun god, occurring in the depths of the night. With the inclusion of the heart scarab, the mummy becomes the primeval hill from which the sun-god rises for a new life (Fig. 7.6). In other words, the heart scarab embodies the manifestation of the deceased in the *neheh* dimension of time.

Alluding to this solar rebirth, flowers and other plants are also found in and on the body and among the mummy wrappings.[55] Flowers were frequently deposited on the surface of the body, sometimes wrapped around individual

54 Taylor 2010, 209.
55 Wise and Jacquat, 2014.

fingers and toes. Complete nymphaea flowers with long stalks were also placed alongside the arms near the elbows.[56] Nesikhonsu, for instance, had nymphaea plants wrapped around her feet.[57] Nymphaea petals and bulbs were also found around the legs, under the feet (A.120), or on the chest (A.127) of mummies. In addition, garlands of leaves and flowers were placed outside the mummy wrappings, displayed in concentric bands along the upper torso. This prevalence of flowers is consistent with the abundant use of flower motifs in coffin decoration, particularly over the lids.

A papyrus scroll is often found positioned between the legs, likely serving a twofold purpose. It embodies the regenerative role of the papyrus forests while simultaneously encoding the knowledge required to guide the deceased through the netherworld.

The exterior wrappings of the mummy are decorated with leather mummy braces. These braces often feature terminals adorned with ritual scenes depicting the high priests performing rituals before certain deities, typically Amun or Mut.[58] Traditionally, the depiction of these high priests has been used as a criterion for dating mummies and coffins.[59] However, these objects should not be considered definitive for dating burials but rather as evidence of a final phase of 'restoration', akin to the dockets found on royal mummies. The significance of these objects was highly political, as they placed the mummies under the authority and protection of a specific high priest. By marking them as 'finished', the high priest effectively rendered the mummies inaccessible and prohibited their reuse or recycling.[60] Menkheperre is the first attested reference to a high priest in these objects, followed by frequent mentions of Pinedjem II and Psusennes. These references should be understood as dating the restoration of the mummies rather than their original burial. Mummy braces were used to signify sanctity, distinguishing the deceased as sacred. By marking the mummy as such, they reinforced its inaccessibility and forbade further tampering.

56 Elliot Smith 1906, 30.
57 Salima and Dodson 1998, 124.
58 Prada 2017.
59 Niwiński 1988.
60 This would, of course, suggest that a site like the Tomb of the Priests of Amun may contain a corpus of mummies originating from significantly different periods. See Sousa 2021.

Unsurprisingly, coffin decoration mirrors this phenomenon when, by the late 21st Dynasty, this motif was eventually integrated into the upper section of the lids and mummy boards, clearly with the purpose of declaring these objects sacred, and, consequently, 'forbidden' for recycling purposes.

Finally, the mummy was wrapped in a shroud outlined with the image of Osiris (Fig. 5.17). This depiction frequently mirrors similar imagery found on the reverse side of lids/mummy boards (Figs. 5.19). Despite its simplicity, this image fully equates the deceased with Osiris.

The mummy as a source of meaning

Once positioned within the coffin, the mummy becomes the nuclear element of the coffin set. Regardless of the specific composition of the mummy and its respective coffin set,[61] a form of inter-iconicity exists between the magical repertoire of the mummy and the coffin set. The lids and mummy boards consistently reference pectorals, scarabs and heart amulets, small amulet collections, and floral elements that are found among the mummy wrappings and displayed over the body.

It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that much of the coffin decoration, particularly that displayed on the lids and mummy boards (e.g. along the longitudinal axis), visualises the divine power emanating from the mummy enclosed within the box. In a sense, the mummy boards and lids of the yellow coffin set appear to 'come forth' from the mummy, as a form of magical emanation.[62]

In addition to the burial equipment mentioned above, an abundant corpus of textiles was found, either wrapped around the mummy, or carefully stored within the boxes. These included gloves, tunics, shirts, or simple linen cloths, sometimes inscribed. Wigs, sandals and occasionally even mirrors were also included.

61 Given the high rates of re-use pointed out by Kara Cooney the relation between the mummy and its coffin set was far from being established once and for all (Cooney 2024).
62 The idea is implied in Englund 1985 and Bettum 2012.

Although this practice may echo the 18th Dynasty practice of using daily life objects in the burial equipment of the dead, these items likely held a far deeper and more specific meaning than has been previously acknowledged.

Adding garments to the burial equipment of the deceased is closely tied to the aforementioned mummification practices, which aimed to present the deceased in a lifelike form. While the mummified bodies were crafted to resemble living beings, they remained unclothed. The addition of garments, wigs and sandals ensured that the deceased could emerge from the netherworld suitably clad in ceremonial dress.

This emphasis on restoring the lifelike appearance of the deceased in the mummy is consistent with the genealogy of the yellow corpus, which developed from the festive dress type of coffins. As we mentioned at the beginning of this book, the festive dress coffins emerged during the reign of Akhenaten, presenting the deceased as ready to participate in the sacred festivals of Akhetaten. Under Tutankhamun's rule, this concept merged with the layout of the black type, resulting in sarcophagi displaying the living image of the deceased on the lid, and the typical iconographic scheme of the black type on the box. In symbolic terms, this layout reproduced the Osirian sepulchral chamber, from which the deceased would rise as a living deity.[63]

During the Ramesside period, the proto-yellow corpus further developed this concept. The depiction of the deceased as a living being became progressively concealed on the lids, which only preserved the head bearing the festive wig. The depiction of the deceased in festive garments was then transferred to the inner objects of the set, such as the full-length funerary board, or the extended funerary mask.[64] At the same time, and most likely related to these changes, heart amulets were re-shaped and received a human head, not surprisingly wearing a festive wig (Fig. 7.7). This category of objects, interpreted as personifications of the deceased's Osirian conscience,[65] likely had a broader significance. By depicting the head of the deceased with a festive wig, this category of heart amulets

63 For the association between the elements of vignette 151 and childbirth see Taylor 2010, 107.
64 Cooney 2008.
65 Sousa 2011.

elevated the symbolic representation of the festive dress motif to a deeper level. Ultimately, these amulets represent the living form of the deceased rising from their own heart and going forth into the light. This liminal representation of the deceased is naturally the innermost layer of the same living form detected in the coffin equipment. The liminal movement from darkness to light is perfectly embodied in the nymphaea flower, which is most why it was so frequently found within the wrappings of the mummy and in coffin decoration itself. This 'flow' towards the light is ultimately the core purpose of the yellow coffin and therefore its imagery is deeply embedded in this transformative phenomenon that blurs the boundaries between the exterior and interior spaces.

By the mid-20th Dynasty, the yellow type was fully developed, and the depiction of the deceased as a living being was largely removed from the lids. At the same time, mummification techniques changed dramatically, adopting sophisticated cosmetic treatments to create a lifelike appearance for the first time.[66]

The depiction of the deceased as a living being was thus progressively transferred from the exterior layers of burial containers to the innermost layers, eventually including the mummy itself. Through this process, the mummification practices of the 21st Dynasty created a form that was radically distinct. While the mummy's exterior remained that of a *sah* – a divine underworld deity identified with Osiris – the body itself was prepared to resemble a living image. It was fully clothed, anointed with unguents, and equipped to rise from its cocoon in ceremonial attire, mirroring the depictions on the coffin set.

Interpretations of this transformation have primarily focused on its connection to Egyptian anthropological representations. Elliot Smith, for instance, suggested that the changes detected in mummification sought to create a 'statue' of the Ka:

> Dr. Reisner made the suggestion that all the elaborate measures taken to restore the integrity of the skin and to preserve the form of the body might be explained on the supposition that the embalmers of the 21st dynasty aimed at making the body itself take the

66 Salima, 118.

> place of the statue : in other words the corpse was preserved and fashioned so as to retain some resemblance to the deceased and be the home of the Ka.[67]

Andrzej Niwiński makes a similar assumption regarding the depiction of the deceased as a living being in the yellow type.[68] Such an identification, which is commonly accepted in the pictorial art displayed in private tombs, aligns well with 'daily life' scenes – those depicting the deceased receiving food offerings from relatives or engaging in activities within their estate or household. However, the scenes depicted on yellow coffins are of an entirely different nature, as they exclusively revolve around sacred contexts. Thus, the identification of the deceased depicted as a living being with the Ka, appears to be out of context in this setting.

More recently, the lifelike coffins of the late 18th and 19th Dynasties have been interpreted as representations of the *akh* of the deceased.[69] These interpretations centre on the idea that the *akh* is latent within the *sah,* the manifestation of the deceased as a mummiform deity of the underworld. Thus, the *sah* would contain the *akh*, expressing the idea of a potential resurrection from the wrapped body.[70]

Although these arguments resonate from an anthropological perspective, they do not provide sufficient explanation from an art historical standpoint. This phenomenon, which is historically well-defined from the late 18th-Dynasty to the 21st Dynasty, remains unexplained in terms of its historical specificity. The anthropological argument fails to clarify why this phenomenon occurred during this particular period and was not consistently prevalent across all periods, as might be expected if it fulfilled a fundamental anthropological function.

Another objection is related to the pictorial tradition itself. The *akh* has always remained an abstract and immaterial dimension of human nature, with minimal impact on material culture and iconographic representations. The main argument for identifying the depiction of the deceased with the *akh* is based on

67 Elliot Smith 1906, 45.
68 See for example Niwiński, Rigault-Déon 2024.
69 Cooney 2008b: 19; 2009: 106-107; 2010; Bettum 2012, 81.
70 Bettum 2012, 163-164.

the corpus of stelae known as *akh iker en Re*, from Deir el-Medina, dating from the 18th-20th Dynasties. In this corpus the deceased is depicted in festive garments, as seen in other contemporary pictorial traditions. However, these distinctive features are explicitly identified as *akh*.[71] While this interpretation may be valid for these specific representations, such cases appear to be exceptional. The limited sample of these stelae cannot be regarded as representative of the broader pictorial tradition, such as that found in the Book of the Dead, tomb decoration or coffin decoration, where depictions of the deceased as a living being are never referred to as embodying the *akh*.

On the contrary, the labels commonly associated with these scenes simply refer to the deceased as a *maa-kheru*, e.g. a justified god. It is important to recall that the acclamation of the deceased as justified god occurred in the context of the judgement of the dead, after the weighing of the heart. Notably, Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead provides instructions about dress and conduct when entering the Hall of the Two Maats:

> This is the way to act toward the Hall of the Two Maats. A man says this speech when he is pure, clean, dressed in fresh clothes, shod in white sandals, painted with eye paint, anointed with the finest oil of myrrh.[72]

From our perspective, the mummies from the 21st Dynasty were specifically prepared to embody the deceased as a living being, fully dignified and deified, ready to join, as a justified god, the divine community of the hereafter. It is important to clarify that justification, meaning being acclaimed as 'true of voice', revolves entirely around the wisdom of the deceased and the way they lived. Living in accordance with the principles of *maat* ultimately transforms the deceased into a living god. These two dimensions are thus closely interconnected.

The festive dress type implies a sacred experience. A common misconception surrounds the interpretation of lifelike representations of the deceased in coffins. These depictions are often regarded as representations in everyday attire, suggesting a 'profane' reading of this dress code, which entirely

71 Bettum 2012.
72 Taylor 2010, p. 205.

misinterprets the intent behind these creations. On the contrary, a genealogical analysis of these depictions reveals that they portray the deceased in ceremonial attire, the type worn during sacred festivals, and thus imbued with profound divine and sacred significance. Yellow coffins developed an extensive imagery where the deceased is abundantly featured in ritual scenes, establishing direct contact with the deities. Such direct interaction with the gods presupposes the acknowledgement of the deceased as a divine being.[73]

The mummies of the 21st Dynasty would therefore feature the deceased as a living god, a justified deity as acclaimed by the court of Osiris. The full significance of the living image of the deceased, however, extends beyond the imagery of the judgement of the dead and has a deeper theological expression, which warrants further exploration.

The three dimensions of the immortal self: corpse, *ba*, and living image

The manifestation of the deceased as a living god should therefore not be confused with the ordinary representations of daily life. These are completely absent from the repertoire of the yellow corpus: Within yellow coffins, the usual motifs of tomb decoration—such as agricultural activities, workshops, or banquet scenes—are nowhere to be found. Even ritual activities, when depicted, are only integrated at a very late stage and are imbued with a sacramental reading, rendering them far removed from any "earthly" context. The portrayal of the deceased as a living god in the yellow corpus is firmly situated within a sacred framework.

This observation does not diminish the importance of other anthropological dimensions of human nature in the burials of the 21st Dynasty. The mummy itself remains the nuclear element of the burial, fully identified with Osiris. However, as a *ba*, the deceased would leave the coffin at dawn to join the solar journey.[74] Through the mummy and *ba*, the deceased would identify

73 DuQuesne 1994: 57.
74 Taylor 2010, 165.

with both Osiris and Re, becoming one with these complementary aspects of a unified divine being.[75] Niwiński has interpreted this phenomenon as shaping the coffin as a micro-cosmos where the mummy stands at the centre of the cosmos like an *axis mundi*, connecting heaven and earth and thereby assuming the role of the Great God.[76]

As to the manifestation of the deceased as a living god it has remained surprisingly overlooked. The Ramesside theology concerning the nature of the cosmic god offers valuable insights into the deeper significance of the festive dress imagery. The theology of divine unity recognises that the supreme god manifests himself in the world through different dimensions: the sole god created the sky for his *ba*, the sun, the depths of the underworld to conceal his 'mystery', e.g., his corpse, Osiris, and his image (e.g. *tut*, the cult image of the god) dwelt in Thebes, the sacred city. Several hymns allude to these three realms of creation by the supreme being:

> Amon-Re created the sky for his *ba*,
> To illuminate the Two Lands.
> Amon-Re who covered the underworld,
> To conceal his mystery.
> Amon-Re who wears the crown at Thebes,
> In this cult image of him who is greater than the gods.[77]
>
> The sky holds your *ba* and irradiates your brightness
> The underworld contains your relic and conceals your body
> This land holds your image.[78]
>
> The mysterious Duat conceals her lord,
> The one of the sarcophagus who is in her.
> His *ba* is in heaven,
> Thebes is his temple for his image,
> The realm of the dead is for his mummy who rests in the Duat.[79]

75 Taylor 2010, 238.
76 Niwiński 2018.
77 Papyrus of Berlin 3049. Assman 2003, 306.
78 STG 17. Assman 2003, 306.
79 Papyrus Leiden I 350. Assman 2003, 306.

Thus, the supreme god exists in three distinct forms, each manifesting in a different realm of creation: as a *ba* the supreme god ascends to the sky, identified with Re, as a corpse, he rests in the netherworld, identified with Osiris; and as a divine image, he reveals himself in the realm of the living, in the sacred city of Thebes. While the manifestations of the supreme god as a *ba* and as a corpse are not new, the third element is particularly intriguing. The image, *tut*, corresponds to the cult statue in which the supreme god is manifested in the temple. In the case of Thebes, this would correspond to the divine cult statue housed in the Temple of Amun-Re in Karnak.

Since Ramesside theology is in many ways a reaction to the Amarna movement, these notions must be understood in light of the latter's concepts. It is worth recalling here that the cult instituted by Akhenaten excluded the use of divine statues. Temples in Akhetaten were open and the cult was performed to the sun itself, without recourse to any divine statue. Notably, the concept of the god's sacred image was transferred instead to the king. This is strikingly and programmatically expressed in the name Tutankhaten, meaning 'Living image of Aten'. By adopting this name for his son, Akhenaten defined the king as the living embodiment of the supreme god, thereby positioning the king himself as the object of worship and as the divine image in the earthly realm. Akhetaten, the 'Horizon of Aten', thus became, quite literally, a city of light where the living king personified the supreme god's divine image.

Following the end of the Amarnian reform, king Tutankhaten became the embodiment of the 'Living image of Amun', signifying a crucial shift in his identification with the divine image of Amun-Re in Karnak. This transformation called for a reinterpretation of the concept of *tut ankh*, or 'living image', under a sacramental framework. In Saqqara, this reinterpretation extended to the festive dress type of coffins. By adopting this living form, the high officials of the court of Tutankhamun likely expressed a royal privilege, portraying themselves as living images. This representation was not associated with the Osirian realm of the Duat or with the heavenly realm of Re but with a tangible realm of light, directly inspired by the model established by Akhenaten. In this paradigm, Thebes, the

sacred city of Amun, literally became the 'Horizon' where the primeval god manifested himself as a living god.

Amun-Re-Osiris emerges as the constellation defining the three axes of emanation of this supreme deity: as Re, he manifests himself as a *ba* in the ever-renewing dimension of creation (*neheh*). As Osiris, he endures as a corpse in the timeless dimension (*djet*) of the Duat. As Amun, he resides in the holy city of Thebes as a living image of the supreme god.

Viewed through this lens, the burial assemblage of the yellow type can be understood as a micro-cosmos where the mummy occupies the central position, uniting heaven, the netherworld, and the Temple of Amun-Re in Thebes. The mummy, embodying the deceased as a *sah*, was united with the *ba* and, at a deeper level, concealed the 'living image' of the deceased, e.g. their sacred 'statue'.

Unlike the god of Amarna, Amun is the 'Hidden One' and, by definition, his image is concealed. This likely explains the progressive transfer of the living image of the deceased from the exterior parts of the coffin set to the mummy itself. By the 21st Dynasty, the mummy, prepared as a living image, came to embody the concept of the 'Hidden One'. This reading also illuminates why the interior of the box was designed as a shrine since it was intended to contain a divine 'living statue'. In a more literal sense than is often considered, it was from this living image of the deceased that the entire coffin set emanated, manifesting itself across the sacred dimensions of space and time. To the eyes of an ancient beholder, the yellow coffin would have been perceived as a sacred vessel, sanctified by the presence of the living image concealed within.

Liminality and the representation of the deceased

The threefold manifestation of the supreme god corresponds to three anthropological dimensions of the deceased, namely the mummy (Osiris), the *ba* (Re), and *tut*, the living image (Amun). The exact nature of this living image remains largely unknown, but by the 21st Dynasty, it was regarded as an anthropological element in its own right. One of the few attested references to the concept of *tut*, the living image, appears in the inner coffin of Nauny:

> O this mountain of the West, she who conceals the powerful form of the people, open to me and my image (*tut*)![80]

This reference alludes to the living image of the deceased as a hidden form emerging from the mountain of the West. The idea is superbly expressed in the papyrus of Nebqed,[81] dating from the reign of Amenhotep III, where these three manifestations of the deceased are depicted (Fig. 7.8). The famous vignette presents a plan of the tomb, showing the superstructure where the funerary rituals are conducted, the shaft used by the *ba*-bird to descend to the burial chamber, and the mummiform coffin enclosing the Osirian manifestation of the deceased. Emerging from the burial chamber, the deceased is shown in white ceremonial garments, accompanied by a sun disc radiating light over the tomb. The accompanying label clarifies that the deceased 'comes forth to the day'. Unlike the other vignettes in the papyrus, Nebqed is depicted only partially, showing the upper half of the body. This incomplete depiction carries profound liminal significance, precisely illustrating the deceased transitioning into the realm of light. This visual device, employed to render a state of transition, is not uncommon in Egyptian art. It is particularly evident in funerary iconography, as highlighted by Éva Liptay, in scenes of Hathor emerging from the Theban Mountain.[82] The depiction in the papyrus of Nebqed closely resembles the closing scene of the Book of Gates where the god Nun is half concealed, raising the solar barque from the primeval waters.[83]

The liminal significance of this depiction is fundamental to understanding Ramesside coffin decoration, where the mummiform shape of the *sah* is combined with the living image of the deceased in ceremonial garments. Ramesside shabtis offer an even more sophisticated intertwining of these dimensions, often combining all three manifestations of the deceased into one image, such as the shabtis depicting the deceased embracing his own *ba*. In certain cases, the deceased is shown in ceremonial attire, while the feet are often

80 Inner coffin of Nauny (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 30.3.23a, b; 30.3.24a, b;30.3.25). The translation is by Luca Miatello.
81 Louvre Museum (N 3068 ; N 3113).
82 Liptay 2014.
83 Hornung (1999, 65).

designed in mummiform shape. The *ba*-bird frequently nests on the deceased's chest.[84] In other shabtis, the mummiform shape is more prevalent, however the head is still designed with a ceremonial wig, and in some cases, the arms are displayed along the body, in a pose of adoration.[85] Additionally, the *ba*-bird may be included, depicted as embracing the deceased.

A similar process is observed in Ramesside heart amulets, where the heart is represented with a human head bearing a ceremonial wig. Many of these amulets feature the *ba*-bird embracing the heart,[86] the Benu-bird,[87] and even a winged scarab.[88] Even more interesting are the funerary pectorals showing a human-headed heart amulet navigating the solar barque, flanked by Re and Osiris (Fig. 7.9).[89] In the most elaborate human-headed heart amulets, a *naos* is flanked by Re and Osiris.[90]

Traditionally, the human head of the amulet has been interpreted as a personification of the heart, which itself embodies the deceased's conscience.[91] As consistent as this reading may appear, integrating these features into the broader framework discussed here reveals that the amulet does not merely personify the heart but instead represents the ceremonial manifestation of the deceased who literally 'comes forth' from the heart. Particularly when a *ba*-bird is depicted, the amulet intertwines the three aspects of the deceased: the heart embodies the essential being identified with Osiris, the *ba* is the newborn solar form of the deceased associated with Re, while the head embodies the living image of the deceased identified with Amun. As mentioned above, some of the human-headed heart amulets clearly suggest an association between the heart and a *naos* where the supreme god is hidden, flanked by Re and Osiris.

This concept of 'coming forth' is highly significant, indicating that the illuminated form of the deceased emanates directly from the heart, coming forth

84 Shabti of Wepwautmes (National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden: AH 117). See also Shabti of Iuredef in Martin (1991,137).
85 See shabti (Egyptian Museum in Cairo: SR 7270, JE 22170, CG 47229) in Newberry (1930, Pl. XV).
86 British Museum, 26807 (Andrews 1998, Fig. 61). Egyptian Museum in Cairo, SR 9204, CG 5238.
87 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden, Inv. B326.
88 Petrie Museum, UC 52612.
89 Pectoral of Kiemneferui (Egyptian Museum in Cairo).
90 Petrie Museum, UC 52605.
91 Sousa 2011.

from the mummy and progressing towards the light. This process is consistently represented in coffins, shabtis and amulets, all conveying the same meaning: the ceremonial image of the deceased literally 'comes forth' from their mummiform manifestation to enter the realm of light.

The association between the living form of the deceased and Akhetaten, literally the 'Horizon of light', is a fundamental aspect of understanding this concept in Amarna. However, this concept predates Akhenaten's reign. Evidence from the papyrus of Nebqed supports this view, but it is not an isolated case. In the tomb of Yuya (KV 46) an exceptional shabti was found depicting the deceased wearing a ceremonial wig[92] and a heart amulet, both remarkable features at this stage. In the tomb of Khaemhat (TT 57), dating to the reign of Amenhotep III, monumental niches contain life-sized mummiform statues of the deceased. However, these statues, notably, depict the deceased wearing a ceremonial wig instead of the tripartite divine wig typical of a netherworld deity, and they also include a heart amulet.

Comparable imagery appears in the so-called 'lustral scenes' where the deceased is portrayed in ceremonial attire standing on a sand mound, symbolising rebirth as they rise from the horizon, identified with the sun god (Fig. 7.10). This can be regarded as the Egyptian representation of 'illumination'. It is certainly not by chance that Ramesside shabtis,[93] often bear the inscription *sḫḏ Osiris N.* ('To make shine the Osiris N.'), often using the sun disc with irradiating rays as a determinative (N 8 in Gardiner's list). Since the heart is the source of this illuminated manifestation of the deceased, it is certainly for this reason that the heart amulet was so often depicted in Ramesside shabtis,[94] statues, and mural paintings.

Paradoxically, the use of heart amulets in the yellow corpus is a later development. Initially, the amulet appears in scenes of the weighing of the heart in the classical scheme. By the late third quarter of the 21st Dynasty, the object had replaced the scarab on the chest of the deceased, becoming a central feature

92 Shabti of Yuya (Cairo Egyptian Museum, CG 51033) in Quibell 1908, Pl. XVII).
93 Shabti of Sunur (Taylor 2001, 123).
94 Shabti (Egyptian Museum in Berlin, N. Inv. 4401) in Weizsäcker 1991, 221. Shabti of Yuya (Egyptian Museum in Cairo, SR 95368, CG 51033) in Quibel 1908, Pl. XVIII.

in coffin decoration. At this location, the most important depictions of the heart can be found. Simpler versions are painted in dark blue and typically inscribed with a short version of Chapter 30B of the Book of the Dead. More elaborate depictions incorporate complex symbolism. In the coffins of the priests of Amun it is not uncommon to find the heart amulet depicted with a sun disc, flanked by *uraei*.

This imagery has a compelling genealogy. Its earliest known occurrence appears in the funerary temple of Queen Hatshepsut, where a solar-heart amulet is depicted on the chest of Thutmose III. As suggested elsewhere, solar-heart amulets were first used as a royal symbol, alluding to the illuminated conscience of the king, e.g., the manifestation of the supreme god in the king's conscience.[95] Although the use of heart amulets by the Theban elite increased during the 18th Dynasty, as a royal decoration, they were never depicted as solar-heart amulets. This specific iconography reappears only in the burials of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun and the Royal Cache, representing an appropriation of royal imagery (Fig. 7.12). Consistent with this view, this appropriation aligns with the broader integration of royal symbolism into coffin decoration, including compositions from the Amduat, which also began appearing at this time.

At the core of this appropriation of royal imagery lies the quest for illumination, superbly illustrated in the solar-heart amulets depicted in yellow coffins. More elaborate variations of this archetype feature a winged scarab rising from the heart and holding up the solar disc.[96] Yellow coffins and their respective burials revolve around this pursuit of illumination, which truly emanates from the heart of the deceased. From this central locus of light and divine energy, the deceased's illuminated form—his living image— comes forth. The earliest mummy boards of the yellow type, which combine a mummiform design with the upper torso of the deceased depicted in festive dress, provide the simplest renditions of this liminal depiction (Fig. 7.11). Here, the deceased is portrayed

95 Sousa 2011.

96 Once again, we find in this apparent simple composition an allusion to the threefold manifestations of the deceased and their divine roots. The heart amulet stands for the Osirian identity of the deceased, the scarab alludes to his identification with Re, and the sun disc, encircled within a block frieze, probably alludes to Amun, the hidden source of all life.

as if coming forth from the mummy wrappings.[97] As the yellow coffin tradition evolved, these manifestations became increasingly complex and difficult to discern.

*
* *

From the perspective of the beholder, yellow coffins represent a singular phenomenon in Egyptian art. Their elaborate decorative programmes do not represent a static, immobilised state but instead embody an ongoing process of transformation. The resulting object juxtaposes various manifestations of the deceased, flowing through distinct dimensions of space and time. This design actively involves the beholder in a cognitive process where the coffin's materiality seems to dissolve, opening symbolic spaces belonging to an otherworldly sacred landscape, which otherwise would be either invisible or out of reach. Moreover, the visual narratives displayed along the longitudinal and transversal axes refer to a never-ending story, continuously left open and unfinished, where the deceased emerges as the leading protagonist. Although the visual discourse closely aligns with the imagery of the Book of the Dead and, occasionally, the royal imagery of mortuary temples and tombs, its dynamism and openness are unprecedented, forming a unique visual phenomenon in Egyptian pictorial art.

This phenomenon requires an unusually active cognitive engagement on the part of the beholder, based on their understanding of the cultic spaces and traditions of the Theban necropolis. Coffin decoration incorporates esoteric references that only a select audience would recognise and appreciate. In the classical scheme, these references could be used as visual quotes from shrines and sacred places of the Theban necropolis. However, from the complex scheme onwards, the esoteric character of these references increased, directly alluding to royal tombs and temples of millions of years, a trend that paralleled the growing sacredness of the necropolis.

97 A.20 (mummy board), A.27 (mummy board), A.68 (mummy board), A.86 (mummy board), mummy board of Henuttaui (Metropolitan Museum of Art),

Undoubtedly, such a dynamic and exclusive interaction with a learned audience contributed significantly to the increased complexity of coffin decoration.

At the same time, this visual discourse was intended to have a magical agency. At the innermost core of the yellow set stood the mummy, and hidden within its wrappings lay the living image of the deceased. Following the tradition established from the reign of Tutankhamun onwards, during the first half of the 21st Dynasty, the *tut ankh* was depicted in the coffin set as rising from the mummy and coming forth to the light. In this outflow, the coffin functioned as a gateway, literally opening a horizon of light for the deceased (Fig. 7.11). The difference between the basic and classical scheme is the extent of this journey. In the former, the deceased interacts with netherworld deities which are supposed to protect him, while in the latter, this process is interpreted as a journey through the necropolis, where a new agency is given to the deceased who follows a ritual path through the necropolis.

With the complex scheme, there is a shift, and the visual discourse no longer revolves around coming forth to the light, but rather focuses on the opposite movement of flowing inwards into the coffin's interior. The living image of the deceased now resides within the mummy itself, where it stands as a *tut ankh*, a living statue dwelling in a *shetyt*-shrine. To an ancient Egyptian observer from the late 21st Dynasty, yellow coffins were perceived as a sanctified *shetyt*-shrine intimately connected with the Duat and the sacred territory of the necropolis. Thus, the complex scheme no longer depicts the deceased coming forth to the light but dwelling in the sacred realm of the Duat, completely fused with the earthly territory of the necropolis, sanctified by the royal burials in TT 320. It is evident that the area around this tomb became pivotal in the Theban sacred landscape, as suggested by José Perez-Accino,[98] and it is likely that royal rituals included in the yellow corpus were rooted in the sacred structures associated with the Royal Cache.

98 Perez-Accino et all. 2023.

The sanctity associated with the necropolis intensified to such a degree that the concept of 'coming forth to the light' became unnecessary. The yellow coffin of the complex scheme fully embodied an *entheotopos*[99] – a sacred space embedded within a mythical landscape where the deceased manifested in their pure form of light, fully identified with Amun, the supreme being and creator of all.

In various ways, it is this focus on the ever-flowing dimension of being that endows the yellow type with its distinctive dynamism, openness, and unique cognitive depth. This blurring of boundaries between interior and exterior, container and contained, body and landscape, merges the deceased into the primordial, ever-present, moment of creation. The development observed in the yellow type reflects a continuous reinterpretation of this phenomenon.

99 On the concept of *entheotopos* and the imagery of the Theban necropolis, see Muñoz Herrera 2023.

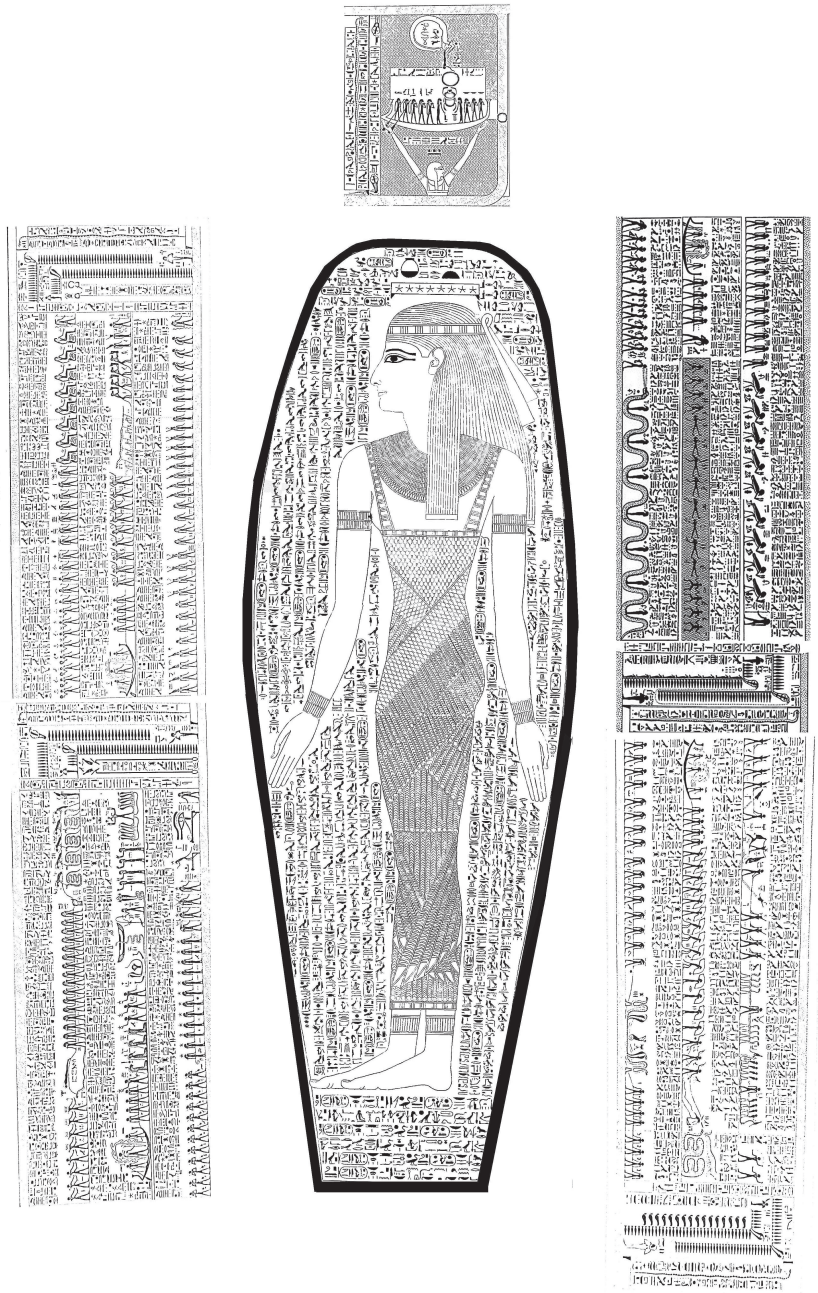


Fig. 7.1. Interior decoration of the anthropoid sarcophagus of Seti I. Drawings in Taylor 2017, assembled by the Author.

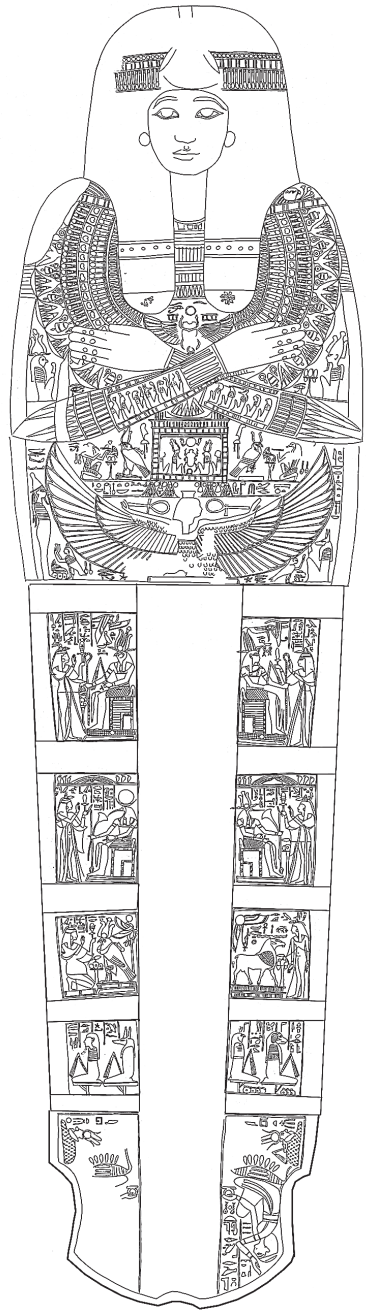


Fig. 7.2. Lid of Tabasety (Antikmuseet in Aarhus).

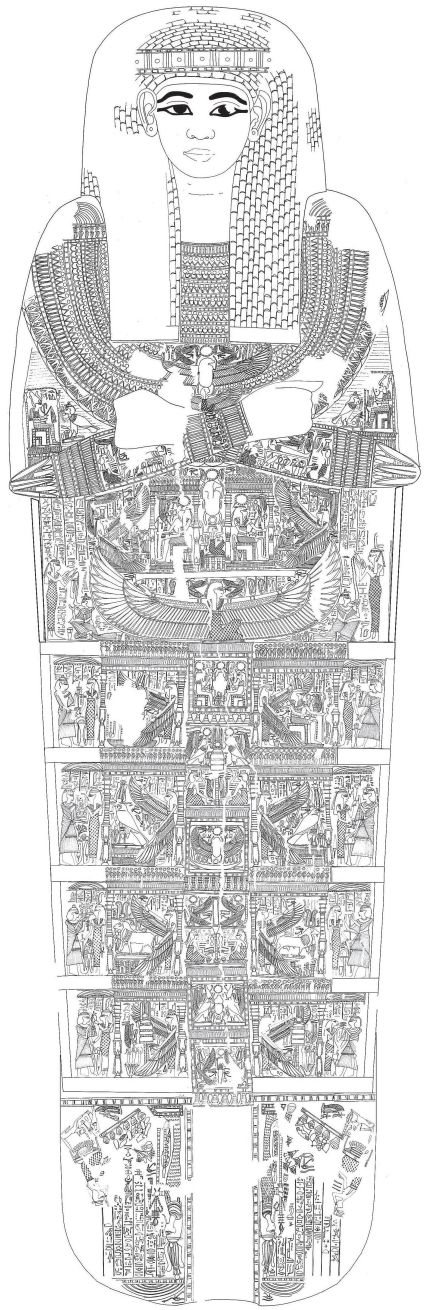


Fig. 7.3. Inner lid of Nesipawershefyt (Fitzwilliam Museum).

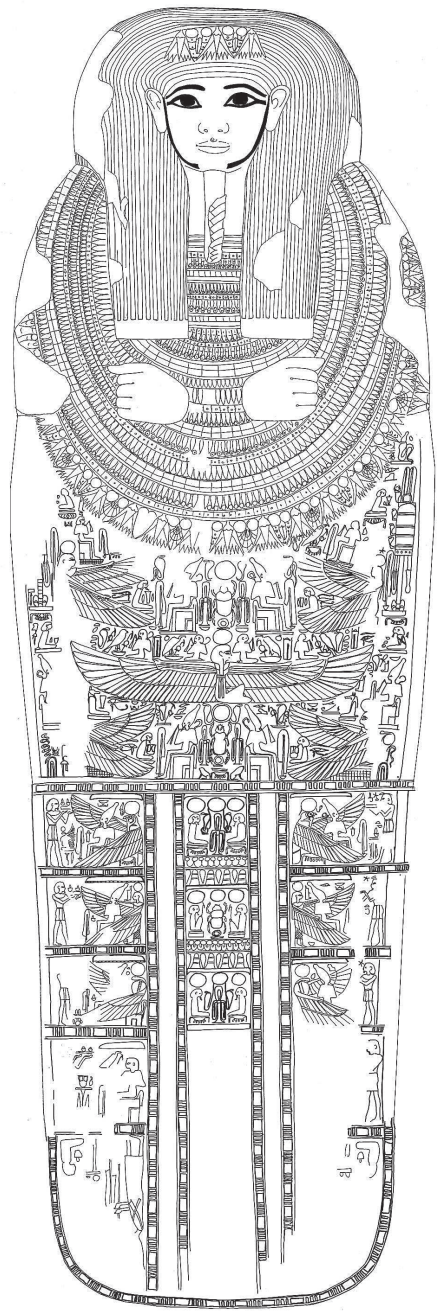


Fig. 7.4. A.56: anonymous outer lid.

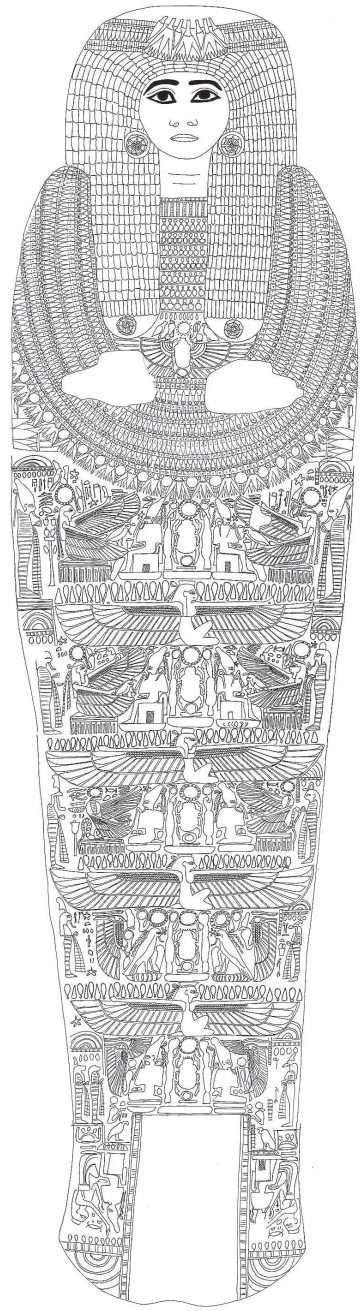


Fig. 7.5. A.15: anonymous inner lid.

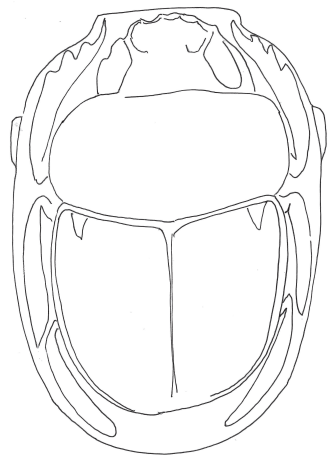


Fig. 7.6. Heart amulet with a scarab incised.

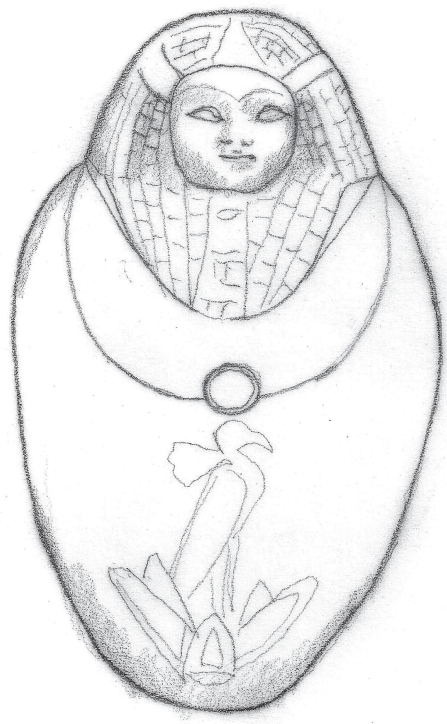


Fig. 7.7. Human-headed heart amulet (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Inv. B326)

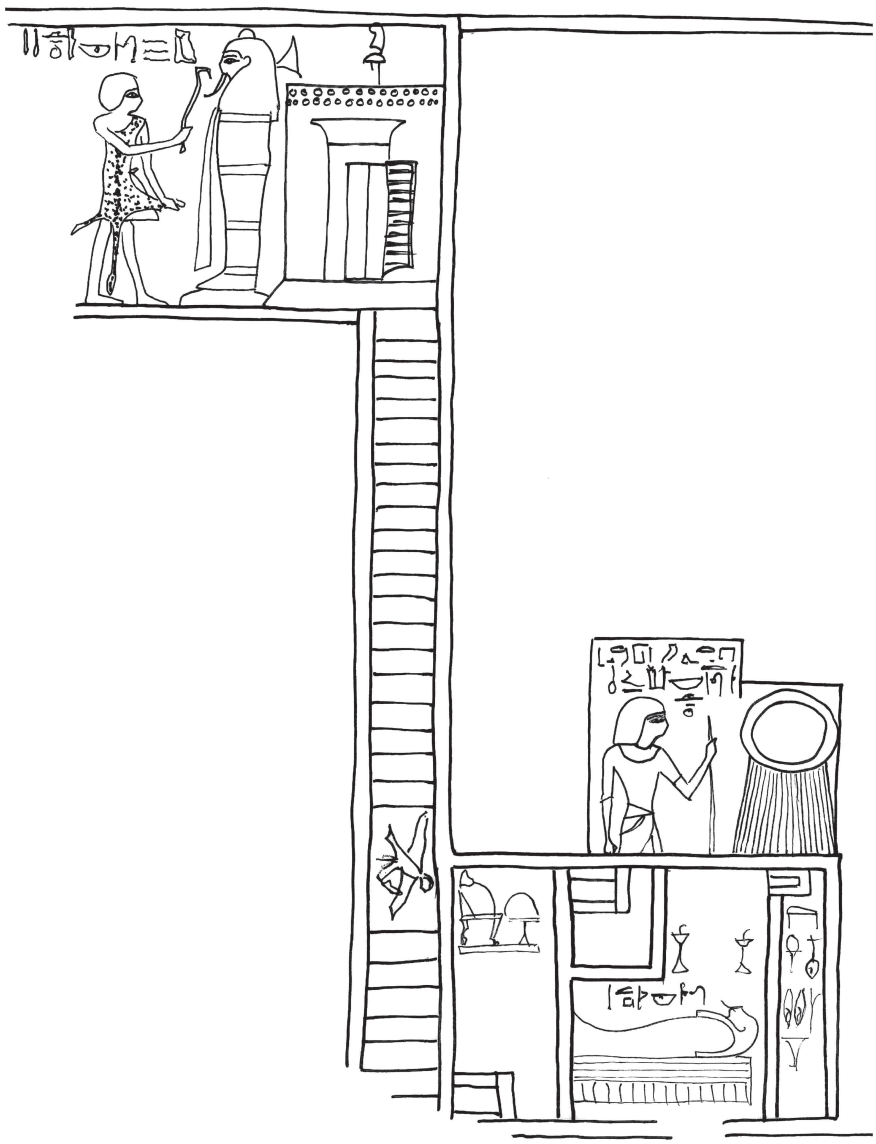


Fig. 7.8. Papyrus of Nebqed (Louvre Museum, N 3068 ; N 3113).



Fig. 7.9. Pectoral of Kiemneferwy (Cairo Egyptian Museum, JE 92638).

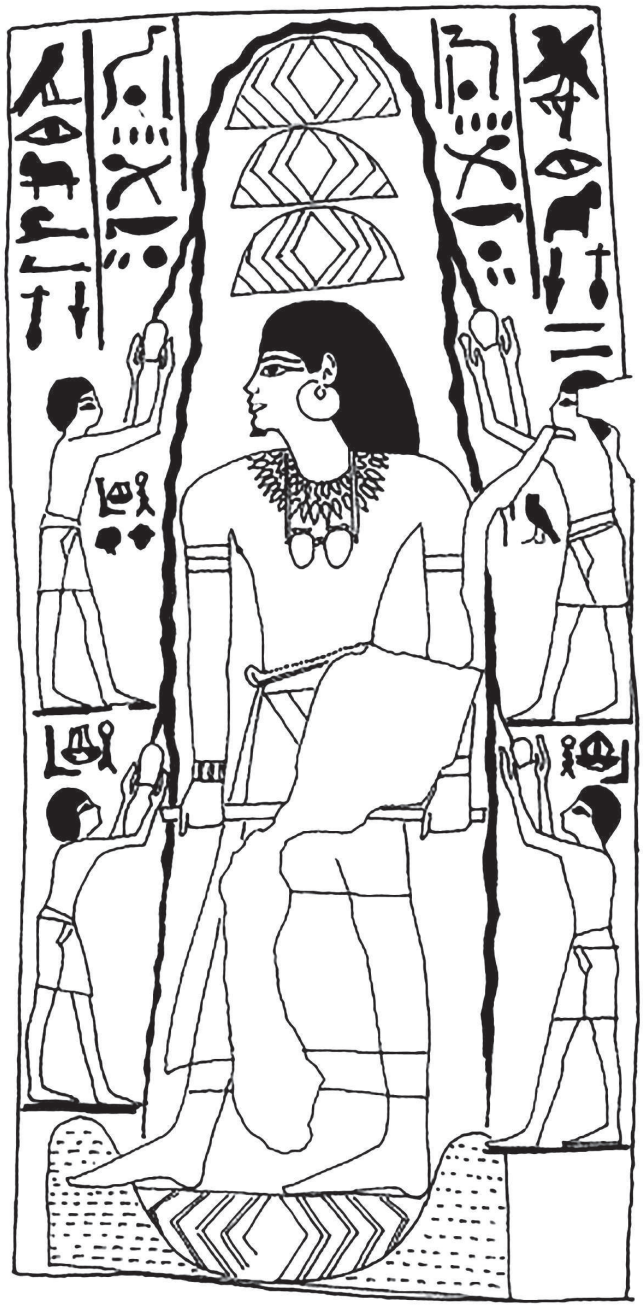


Fig. 7.10 . Lustration scene. Tomb of Sennefer (TT 96).

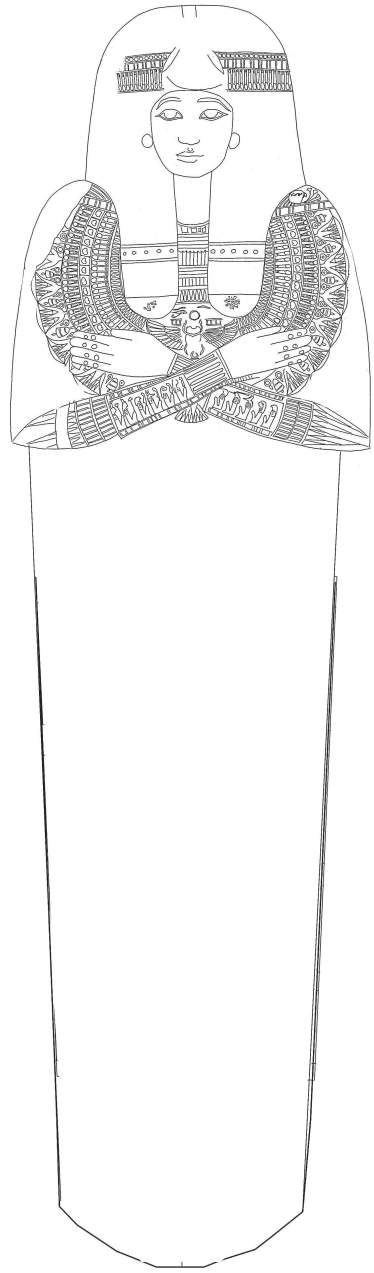


Fig. 7.11. The primary depiction of the lid of Tabasety (Antikmuseet in Aarhus) showing the deceased as a living being coming forth from the mummy wrappings.

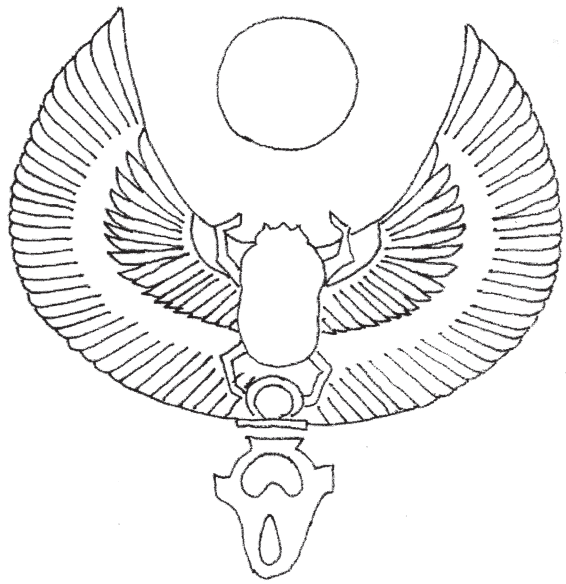


Fig. 7.12. Detail of the upper section: outer lid of Pinedjem II (TT 320).

CHAPTER VIII

Coffins, workshops, and power structures

1. Yellow coffins and workshop practices

Visual culture represented on yellow coffins required the combined work of artisans involving a wide range of skills and technical expertise. While the focus of this study is on the pictorial decoration adorning these objects, direct examination of the coffins invariably requires an understanding of their wooden structures. These structures are occasionally exposed due to the deterioration of the pictorial layer, thereby also revealing aspects of the painting techniques employed. Although these observations do not stem from a purely technical analysis, they provide valuable insights into the organisation of workshops within the Theban necropolis during the 21st Dynasty. The findings presented here are preliminary and are advanced with the expectation that they will be more thoroughly investigated in future studies.

Carpentry workshops

A particularly compelling aspect of the research arises from the analysis of numerous facial fragments within the yellow corpus. In black coffins from the 18th Dynasty, various techniques were employed to sculpt the head and face, depending on the resources of the workshop.[1] In some cases, pieces of imported

1 Sartini 2024. Eschenbrenner-Diemer, Sartini and Serpico 2021.

wood could be added separately to shape the face[2] however, the face was more commonly carved directly on the same planks composing the headboard.[3] In black coffins, the planks were carved to adapt to the desired shapes, leading to objects that can be likened to statues in their construction. The approach to working with wood was highly organic, with artisans adapting their methods to the particular characteristics of the planks at their disposal.

In contrast, in yellow coffins, the facial structure was entirely independent from the rest of the lid, being crafted separately as a small T-shaped plank.[4] It is therefore not uncommon to find facial fragments with this layout. This configuration can also be observed in lids where the face had been removed in antiquity, potentially because it was originally gilded.[5] Although definitive conclusions cannot be drawn due to the lack of technical studies, it appears that many proto-yellow coffins produced during the Ramesside period employed this procedure, albeit inconsistently.[6]

A similar principle is observed in the application of the hands. In black coffins, there is no fixed rule. The hands, invariably depicted as clenched fists, might be carved directly into the boards of the lid, or sculpted separately and attached to the lid. However, yellow coffins, differentiated the application of the hands onto the lid by gender (open hands for women and clenched fists for men).[7]

The footboards of yellow coffins also reflect notable innovations in carpentry techniques. In earlier periods, the feet were carved from a solid block of wood, a practice continued in Ramesside proto-yellow coffins featuring the deceased as a living being.[8] By contrast, the footboard construction in yellow coffins involved joining two planks: one positioned perpendicularly at the lower extremity of the legs, and another placed obliquely, connecting the legs to the perpendicular plank of the footboard.[9]

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2 Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 117.
3 Strudwick and Dawson, 2016, 114-117.
4 Strudwick and Dawson, 2016, 190-191.
5 Mann, Greco and Weiss 2018, 40-41. Kunsthistorisches Museum: mummy board of Nesipautitaui.
6 Betrò and Miniaci 2018, 172-173. Raven 2017, 423.
7 Sousa 2023.
8 Betrò and Miniaci 2018, 173-175.
9 Prestipino 2017, 400.

Another significant innovation associated with yellow coffins was the construction of the lid in longitudinal layers. Typically, the topmost layer consisted of a plank forming the face, followed by additional boards that formed the lappets of the wig and the abdomen in the second layer. These upper layers were generally positioned on a longer master-board that supported the entire structure of the lid.

In lower-quality coffins, where the pictorial layer had significantly deteriorated,[10] the lid's stratification was reduced to a minimum, resulting in a rather flattened object.[11] Conversely, high-quality examples displayed an enhanced sense of volume achieved not only through the use of thicker planks but also by incorporating additional layers, including boards beneath the master-board to create side walls along the edges. This resulted in a voluminous object, usually displaying sculptural expertise.[12]

The layered structure of the lid is so characteristic of the craftsmanship of yellow coffins that it serves as a key criterion for identifying instances of reuse.[13]

The structure of the mummy boards adhered to the same principle as that observed on the lids, but employed a simpler and thinner structure with fewer layers.[14]

The structure of the boxes was relatively simple, comprising five parts: a floorboard, two short sides, and two long sides. The number of planks used for each element often corresponded to the quality of the workshop, as lower elite workshops tended to use a higher number of planks.[15]

As can be seen, access to wood was visibly a critical factor, as even high elite objects frequently presented an elaborate assemblage of small planks.[16] This contrasts sharply with earlier periods, where archaeological evidence

10 Sousa 2017, 277.
11 Sousa (ed.) 2018, 135.
12 Prestipino 2017, 399. Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 183. Miatello and Ibrahim 2020, 124.
13 This appears to be the case with the coffin of Susawerkhonsu (Kunsthistorisches Museum), which features a decorative scheme characteristic of the 21st Dynasty. However, the poor state of preservation of the pictorial layer reveals the absence of the typical structural stratigraphy of that period, suggesting that this coffin was re-decorated from an earlier black coffin dating back to the 18th Dynasty (Egner and Hauslauer 2009, 11).
14 Prestipino 2017, 349.
15 For the carpentry work of a high elite yellow coffin set see Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 184-186. See also Dawson and Turmezei 2021. For the wooden structure of a low elite mummy board see Amenta 2018.
16 Prestipino 2017, 348-349.

reveals a broad variety of wood types, including imported species.[17] During the 21st Dynasty, however, the majority of Theban yellow coffins were constructed almost exclusively from sycamore fig (*Ficus sycomorus*), for the main planks, with pegs and tenons crafted from acacia (mainly *Vachellia nilotica*) or tamarisk (*Tamarix* sp.).[18] These species can be found in Upper Egypt.

Another characteristic of yellow coffins was the clear differentiation of gender through specific additions. Female coffins featured earrings, open hands, and exposed breasts while male coffins included ears, a divine beard, and clenched fists.[19]

These observations indicate that, at the turn of the 21st Dynasty, the carpentry techniques involved in the production of yellow coffins underwent significant changes. Even high elite workshops shifted away from the informal and organic methods characteristic of earlier periods, adopting instead a more standardised approach.[20] This included structuring the lids in layers and applying gender markers after its completion.[21]

These changes in traditional workshop practices represent a significant rupture, or at least an intentional departure, from the traditional methods used during the New Kingdom. Not coincidentally, these shifts in carpentry techniques coincide with the exponential increase in pictorial decoration observed on these coffins.

In addition to the technical factors that may have influenced these changes, the separation of carpentry and painting workshops appears to have had significant repercussions in the production of yellow coffins. One of the most immediate observations regarding the changes in carpentry work is that the layered production process not only reduced the time required for the execution

17 Victoria Amorós (Amoròs et al. 2020, 339) describes a study centred on 69 Middle Kingdom wooden coffins, 35 of which were made of imported softwoods. Of these, 31 were made from Lebanese cedar, two from 236 cypresses, and two yew (*Taxus baccata*).
18 Amorós 2017, 46. Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 78.
19 Strudwick e Dawson 2016, 193.
20 Lower elite workshops that produced black coffins already used a variety of planks assembled together to obtain the desired shape (Eschenbrenner-Diemer, Sartini and Serpico 2021). However, this assemblage is not as systematic as that observed in yellow coffins.
21 The majority of the examined coffins exhibit clear evidence of this type of manufacture, however a comprehensive study on this subject has yet to be conducted.

of coffins but also significantly improved the efficiency of wood usage, thereby facilitating mass production.

As noted by Kara Cooney, concerns regarding the use of wood may have justified the re-use of Ramesside coffins. Arguably, access to wood, even to native species such as sycamore, was restricted during the 21st Dynasty, necessitating more efficient practices in material usage.[22]

The carpenter workshops of the 21st Dynasty in Thebes appear to have been limited to producing generic and undifferentiated objects, which explains the systematic use of gender markers in a detached manner. These elements, especially hands and beards, were invariably carved separately and attached to the lids as independent objects. This approach likely stemmed from the separation of carpentry and painting workshops, where the entire decorative programme of the object was decided. This procedure would have been required owing to the simple fact that the carpenters did not know the intended user of the coffin.

The carpenters' main concern appears to have been the production of objects in two standard sizes. Larger coffins, typically ranging between 2.05-2.15 meters in length, were used as outer coffins, while smaller ones, averaging 1.80-1.90 meters in length, were designed for use as inner coffins.

The quality of carpentry is most apparent in the choice of wood. The finest coffins used fewer and larger boards while lower-quality coffins used smaller, often reused boards, which severely compromised the stability and solidity of the structure.[23] In some cases, it is evident that the reused wood was obtained from fragments of Ramesside coffins that had been previously destroyed. This is particularly visible in coffin A.19 found at Bab el-Gasus (Nationalmuseet Copenhagen, Inv. N. 3912), where beneath the pictorial decoration, the feet of the deceased can be discerned,[24] revealing that artisans had repurposed feet from a Ramesside coffin and integrated them into the lid.[25] Such practices appear consistent with workshops serving the lower Theban elite.

22 Cooney 2024.
23 Amenta 2018, 328-329.
24 Sousa 2022, 90.
25 Betrò and Miniaci 2018, 173-175.

It is likely that other wooden artefacts such as shabti-boxes, or Osirian statuettes, commonly used in the burial equipment of the period, were crafted in the same workshops as the coffins. Given the low quality of craftsmanship observed in both carpentry and painting techniques on these objects, it is possible that these artefacts may have been produced by apprentices that could using leftover wood as part of their training.

Painting workshops

The most distinctive characteristic of yellow coffins is the unprecedented development of pictorial decoration, which reaches an exceptional level of complexity in the 21st Dynasty. All the authors studying this phenomenon have consistently emphasised the importance of polychrome decoration as a hallmark of this corpus.[26] While the exclusive use of polychrome decoration as a criterion for defining this group is debatable, it is undeniable that it plays a fundamental role in the technical and socio-economic dynamics of their craftsmanship.

During the 18th Dynasty, the decoration of black coffins exhibited entirely different characteristics. Gypsum was applied selectively to decorative motifs and inscriptions, creating a relief that was then gilded with gold leaf.[27] Occasionally, glass and stones were used to inlay the eyes, cosmetic lines, the straps of the wig and other details.

Typically, the coffin was not painted but coated with black resin. Gilded foil was used to cover texts and images, ensuring that the black resin did not obscure them. Coffins that did not feature gilded foil had to be 'ready' when leaving the workshop, which precluded the ritual application of black pitch—a practice that was likely a significant element of the funerary rites. It was precisely in these cheaper objects that painting was sporadically used, and the earliest examples of coffins painted with yellow ground were produced to imitate gilded decoration.[28] Due to this association, painting remained a 'poor' resource used in workshops catering to the lower elite. These workshops likely followed the

26 Niwiński 1988. Taylor 2001. Dodson 2000.
27 Sartini 2019.
28 Brooklyn Museum: coffin of Teti (Bleiberg 2008, Fig. 34).

traditions associated with the production of white or *rishi* coffins, produced in the early 18th Dynasty.

The profuse use of colour in yellow coffins implied a fundamental reorganisation of workshop practices, which likely drove the changes observed in carpentry techniques.[29] The exponential development of pictorial decoration rendered it impractical for carpenters and painters to continue working in the same space, resulting in the separation of carpentry workshops and painting workshops. The need for such separation stems primarily from the distinct materials used, as the extensive use of pigments and resins required a clean and controlled environment. Such conditions would have been incompatible with the sawdust and airborne particles typically present in carpentry workshops, which would hinder the application of pigments and varnishes.

Thus, coffins left the carpenters' workshop as undifferentiated objects. Gender markers, as previously noted, were added only in the painters' workshops, based on specific requirements at the time. This practice was due to both technical and functional reasons. Technically, certain markers, such as breasts, could only be created during the painting phase, as they were moulded entirely from paste. More importantly, the painting workshop served as the interface with the commissioners, where the demand dictated whether a coffin would be decorated as masculine or feminine.

The decoration of coffins required a series of preparatory steps during which the ground layers supporting the pictorial decoration were created. Here, too, significant differences in these procedures are evident between high-quality and lower-quality workshops.

In the finest ateliers, a linen layer was adhered to the exterior wooden surface of the coffin[30] and glued to the wood to increase the stability of the ground layer and to improve the adherence of the pigments.[31] This practice was common in high-quality coffins from the first half of the 21st Dynasty, but its use decreased thereafter.

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29 Sousa 2023.
30 Serota, Bruno and Barbash 2019, 38.
31 Cooney 2018, 302-303. Sousa 2020, 43-63. This practice becomes rare from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards.

Following this, a layer of gypsum was applied, which, in lower-quality ateliers, was applied directly onto the wood.[32] This usually consisted of a very thin layer that coated the exterior surfaces, as seen in the coffin of the so-called 'White Lady,' discovered by José Galan's team in Dra Abu el-Naga. In this example, beyond the preparatory layer of gypsum, upon which the pigments were applied, only the eyes and eyebrows were outlined in black,[33] presenting a rare example of a yellow coffin prior to the application of its full pictorial decoration.

From the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, the layer of paste s became thicker, especially on the head and feet of the lid.[34] This thickening appears to have been intentional, as it coincided with much coarser woodworking. Typically, the moulding of the face was executed directly onto the gypsum, with the underlying wood displaying only basic or crude representations of facial features.[35]

In some cases, a different type of paste was used, comprising a mixture of various materials, including mud. The use of mud was not solely an economic measure, as it appears even in objects with high quality painting.[36] However, it was not a practical choice, as mud is highly instable and often led to the complete collapse of the decorative layer.

These marked the beginning of the highly elaborate pictorial process. Following the application of the white ground layer, the surface was coated with orpiment to achieve a yellow hue. Orpiment was obtained using indigenous iron-aluminosilicate and imported Eastern arsenic sulphide, chosen for its ability to replicate the brilliance and colour of gold.[37] Given the high cost involved in the use of orpiment, this procedure was reserved for high quality objects.[38] The work undertaken in painting workshops also involved other elaborate chemical operations for the production of pigments. Each colour required a unique preparation method, with some, such as blue and green, representing the earliest manufactured pigments ever known.

32 It is reasonable to assume that the application of the ground layer may have been undertaken within painting workshop.
33 Galán 2009, 255.
34 Cooney 2018, 83. Sousa (ed.) 2018, 246-247. Amenta 2018, 327.
35 Sousa 2020a, 81-83.
36 Sousa 2017, 252.
37 Pagès-Camagna and Guichard 2017, 359.
38 Dawson 2018.

Egyptian blue, designed to mimic lapis lazuli, contained cuprorivaite crystals and tin residues.[39] It was the only blue pigment used on coffins.[40] Green was consistently produced from synthetic copper materials. This pigment could be prepared as a copper silicate, termed Egyptian green, to imitate turquoise, or as a copper oxalate.[41] Both pigments were created by heating copper minerals with limestone and quartz sand, resulting in a glassy frit. The final colour—blue or green—depended on the mixture's proportions and the firing temperature.[42]

There were several ways to make yellow. Yellow earths contained iron oxides and iron sulphates,[43] while a ferrous pigment (potassium earth with titanium) was another option.[44] Black was obtained from a carbon pigment,[45] while red came from indigenous iron-oxide and aluminosilicate with ilmenite and arsenic sufide, such as realgar.[46]

The manufacture of these substances was undoubtedly carried out in the painters' workshops, but their handling and storage required specialised knowledge.

In yellow coffins, unlike the standard practice for black coffins, the lid and box were often decorated separately. It is likely that distinct teams were involved in decorating each of these objects, as both presented unique challenges. From the second half of the 21st Dynasty in particular, the prominence of the floral collar on the lid and mummy board increased progressively, suggesting that some artisans became specialised in these motifs.[47]

A specific challenge involved in decorating lids and mummy boards was the increasing miniaturisation of scenes. The growing complexity of the compositions, particularly from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, led to a higher number of motifs and a reduction in the size of figures. This shift not only

39 Pagès-Camagna and Guichard 2017, 359.
40 Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 96.
41 Pagès-Camagna and Guichard 2017, 359.
42 Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 96.
43 Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 95.
44 Guichard, Pagès-Camagna and Timbart 2017, 172-173.
45 Guichard, Pagès-Camagna and Timbart 2017, 172-173.
46 Pagès-Camagna and Guichard 2017, 359.
47 Liptay 2011, 90/93. Sousa 2020, 92-93.

introduced a schematic style, but also undoubtedly required an unprecedented level of technical mastery.

The use of *pastiglia,* a technique involving the application of gypsum to the lid and mummy board to create relief on specific motifs, became increasingly prevalent from the second half of the 21st Dynasty onwards,. This added a new layer of technical complexity to the decoration process, as well as significantly extending the time required for completion.

The exterior walls of the boxes often featured complex designs composed of friezes and bands of texts framing the vignettes. Observational evidence indicates that the decoration proceeded in stages: first, the basic features of the layout were outlined in red, followed by the application of colours in a consistent sequence, starting with green and finishing with blue. While this process is evident in inscriptions, complex compositions, such as those in the vignettes, may have followed a less standardised approach.

Today, the degradation of green and blue pigments results in these colours becoming less distinct, with both taking on darker and brownish tones. However, visible light-induced luminescence photography reveals that the original blue pigments had a striking visual impact, accentuating the contrast with the yellowish background.[48]

The interior of the box also presented its own challenges: due to the cramped space, painters would have found the surface difficult to work on, making it nearly impossible for more than one artisan to work simultaneously. Nevertheless, it is within this context that the finest compositions of the coffin are often found. Both in quality and style, the contrast between the exterior and the interior decoration of the box can be striking. It seems highly unlikely that the interior was painted by the same teams responsible for the exterior decoration of the box and lid. Generally, the craftsmanship evident in the interior compositions of the box is of significantly higher quality than that observed on the exterior walls. Moreover, the grandeur of the interior compositions stands in vivid contrast to the miniature paintings typically found on the exterior of

48 Medina Sánchez 2019.

the box or on the lid. Another interesting clue in this respect is found in some coffin sets where the decoration remained unfinished. In such cases, the outer decoration was usually completed, while the interior of the box remained either undecorated[49] or unfinished.[50] This suggests that different teams, possibly working in separate spaces, were responsible for these tasks.

These observations indicate that painting was performed by specialised artisans who focused on specific parts of the coffin. Estimating the number of artisans involved in decorating a coffin is very difficult. Only in cases where there is a clear disparity in painting skills can evidence of multiple hands be found, indicating the collaborative work of a master and his apprentice.[51] However, such occurrences are rare, and their absence does not necessarily imply that a single individual completed the entire coffin.

It is reasonable to assume that apprentices began their training in painters' workshops by working on simpler items such as *shabti*-boxes, and Osirian statuettes to develop their skills. The evidence found in *shabti*-boxes often reveals very rough and rudimentary work, with the interiors typically left undecorated.[52]

The final stage of the painting process involved the application of varnish, which fixed the pigments and imparted a gloss to the object, one of the most prized features of yellow coffins.[53] Varnish replaced black pitch and was intended to replicate the gilded radiance of gold while evoking the revered connotations of incense used in temple rituals.[54]

Although today varnish may appear darkened due to material degradation, this was certainly not the case in antiquity,[55] where would have added a shimmering, slightly golden effect without compromising the polychromy of the compositions. The fragrant and antibacterial properties of varnish likely added further significance and practical value to its use.[56]

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49 Metropolitan Museum of Art: coffin set of Nauny.
50 A.32: outer coffin of Tahuty.
51 A.136: outer coffin of Henuttaui.
52 Shabti-boxes from the Danish Lot (Sousa and Haslund Hansen 2022).
53 Serpico and White 2001.
54 Taylor 2016, 57. Sartini, Nardella and Ribechini 2019.
55 Eschenbrenner-Diemer, Sartini and Serpico 2021.
56 Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 99.

Several types of varnish have been identified. A bright, translucent, yellow varnish, made from mastic resin exudate from *Pistacia lentiscus*,[57] was sometimes mixed with oil.[58] Mastic resin was imported from Syria or Palestine, where the mastic tree was abundant. Another type of varnish was a translucent red of unidentified origin.[59] Preparing and applying varnish is not an easy task. Given the significant disruption to international trade following the Bronze Age collapse, acquiring the large quantities of resin required for funerary workshops would have been a considerable challenge. Another possibility is that incense trees were planted in the Theban area. This theory gains plausibility when considering the well-documented expedition undertaken by Hatshepsut to acquire incense trees. If this were the case, gardens of incense trees, possibly located within the precinct of Deir el-Bahari itself, could have supplied the main ingredient for varnish preparation.

Modern attempts to reproduce varnish have proven elusive, underscoring the technical difficulty involved in this process. Again, the process likely required specialised premises that could not have been shared with carpenters. Although most varnishing took place in specialised workshops, the evidence found on the objects suggests that varnish may also have been applied during funerary rituals, a practice notably observed on mummy boards[60] and within the coffins themselves.

While today its importance may often go unnoticed, varnish was highly esteemed in antiquity for the gloss it bestowed on the coffin's colourful decorations. From a technical perspective, this transparent gleaming coating transformed the coffin into a literal canvas, celebrating painting and colour. The application of varnish, therefore, truly crowned the pictorial work, protecting the pigments and giving it the much-desired gloss. The significance of varnish was further amplified by its religious meaning, as the use of this coating material

57 Pagès-Camagna and Guichard 2017, 360.
58 Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 99.
59 Pagès-Camagna and Guichard 2017, 360. Black varnishes have a more varied composition typically including combinations of oil/fat, beeswax, coniferous resin/pitch or other coniferous products, pistacia resin/pitch and bitumen (Eschenbrenner-Diemer, Sartini and Serpico 2021).
60 Antikmuseet in Aarhus: mummy board of Tabasety.

was deeply embedded in the magical quest for the solarisation of funerary equipment.

Decoration scheme

The production and use of funerary goods are necessarily embedded within a socioeconomic framework where relationships with power structures play a decisive role. Black coffins are highly political objects. They were introduced during the reign of Hatshepsut/Thutmose III in close association with the rich imagery related to the Book of the Amduat and the Book of the Dead, which began to assume a paramount role in the funerary visual culture of the period.[61] Although rooted in earlier developments, black coffins were established as a consistent model, fully equipped with texts, images, and materials that assured the deceased's everlasting manifestation as an Osirian deity of the netherworld. In this model, innovations were introduced *from above*, e.g., royal workshops propagated the model of coffins that would be used by the subjects of the king. This model was, of course, deeply imbued with an ideological and political significance, contributing to define the status of the owner in relation to the pharaonic power structure of the time. While workshops may have operated independently, they adhered to a relatively simple set of specifications. The design of black coffins was stable and well-defined, entirely codified by ritual requirements, that dictated the inclusion of key features. This consistency enabled craftsmen to replicate texts and images from one object to another with ease.

In contrast, the yellow corpus introduced continuous innovation into its compositions. These innovations were not random but built upon former developments, reflecting meticulous design work. The evolving nature of the yellow type thus played a crucial role in its craftsmanship.

Due to this *modus operandi*, the decoration scheme of the yellow type continued to be expanded during the 21st Dynasty, achieving levels of extreme complexity.

61 Hornung and Bryan 2002.

As a result, painters planned each pictorial section carefully, making deliberate decisions about where to incorporate innovative features and how to execute them. The requirement for such innovation obviously called for a profound understanding of earlier accomplishments, which was likely facilitated by the use of models. These models outlined the basic features of each section to guide the work of the painters. The outer coffin of Yetefamun, housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, appears to be one such object: it retains facial features of the late 18th Dynasty suggesting that it was crafted as a black coffin, and later redecorated following the basic scheme of the yellow type. The interesting aspect of this coffin is its highly sketchy style, resembling an iconographic notebook that may have been used as a model.

Another important source for the work of painters would have been the continuous observation of coffins. By reconstructing the sequence of events, it appears that from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, coffins were removed from their original burial grounds and stored in temple magazines awaiting re-burial.[62] Access to these older materials may have facilitated the emergence of the archaizing trends observed during this period.

The tremendous growth in complexity required a totally different organisation of labour among the painters. As discussed elsewhere, this transformation occurred during the late 20th Dynasty, resulting in the unification of Theban workshops under the leadership of artisans from Deir el-Medina.[63]

The examination of the yellow corpus repertoire undertaken in this study reveals that from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards a more diversified scenario emerged. Theban coffin workshops appear to have formed distinct communities:

– In the more sophisticated workshops, meticulous attention was given to creating the overall decorative programme. It is likely that a team of chief designers made the main decisions related to each coffin: based on the specific commission, the team would define the complexity of each section, the innovative aspects to be implemented, and the iconographic

62 Sousa 2021.
63 Sousa 2024.

resources. It is evident that the composition of each section of the coffin was carefully planned. The coffins produced in these workshops were prepared for the highest Theban elite and it is in this context that one would expect to find the highest degree of individualisation. By individualisation, a closer interaction between the commissioner and the workshop is implied. Indeed, some of these coffins reveal a visual narrative of such an unusual nature that the likelihood of personal involvement seems plausible. These exceptional creations are typically associated with fine pictorial artistry and excellent carpentry work. Moreover, not only the creation of the design is exceptional, but also the knowledge they reveal on textual resources. These resources may vary from the use of hymns and ritual texts, as well as direct access to esoteric knowledge that had formerly been restricted to exclusive royal use. It is in this context that we encounter full or partial reproductions of the Book of the Amduat, which introduced highly innovative design features. The repertoire of coffin decoration often involved a careful study of other sources, especially of funerary papyri. The latter were evidently used as models,[64] though their compositions were always adapted when transposed to the coffin walls. It is also plausible that coffin decorators used older coffins as models for their work, particularly when seeking to create archaizing coffins. Occasionally, the reproduction of archaizing features was so faithful that dating these coffins becomes extremely challenging. Fortunately, the archaizing trend did not merely replicate ancient models but rather reinterpreted them, yielding innovative results. The community of artisans associated with these workshops not only revealed a consolidated knowledge of the pictorial art of the New Kingdom, including private and royal repertoires, they also mastered the technical skills required for coffin decoration. The restricted nature of this knowledge strongly suggests that these groups were self-segregated. It is undoubtedly from

64 Guilhou 2017, 190. Bottiglienco 2017.

these cutting-edge workshops that innovative trends emanated. These workshops also assessed previous innovations and made decisions regarding the future development of coffin decoration.

– An interesting aspect of 21st Dynasty coffin production is the significant role played by less skilled workshops. Particularly after the mid-21st Dynasty, the production of lower- quality objects increased. The pictorial work in these coffins was often sketchier, the vignettes more repetitive, and the accompanying texts increasingly impoverished. However, even in objects of apparently lesser quality, interesting innovations in composition can occasionally be detected. This is especially true in the central section of the lid, which consistently remained the most important tableau of the coffin in terms of innovation. From a sociological perspective, these lower-quality coffins raise fascinating questions, as they suggest that, perhaps for the first time, a wider strata of the Theban low elite was able to access funerary goods. The highly standardised features of coffin production detected in this corpus, as well as their often anonymous character, suggest that these workshops were managed collectively by the priesthood of Amun, aiming at creating coffins that could have been given to the lower members of this community. Thus, the commission of these objects was not individualised but instead carried out for a generic group.
– Theban coffin production was not confined to the two previously discussed contexts. Examination of the yellow corpus suggests that from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, another significant player entered the scene. Its particular signature is marked by an apparent contradiction: while demonstrating a high degree of literacy in both texts and iconographic resources, its pictorial execution was notably poor. This corpus features outstanding creations, characterised by highly innovative designs and compelling compositions that revolve around royal rituals and reintroduce funerary scenes. Surprisingly, despite these innovations, the pictorial work often appears rough, sketchy, and unfinished. Additionally, the visual narratives displayed in

> this corpus exhibit a profound knowledge of royal initiation imagery, including esoteric allusions to the theological imagery of the time. These resources differ significantly from those employed by the highest elite workshops and suggest the influence of a distinct community, one which was familiar with the literary resources of funerary papyri rather than with the traditional repertoire of coffin decoration. This is consistent with a community composed of scribes, whose professional activity gave them familiarity with the traditions of the royal Temples of Millions of Years and the corpus of funerary papyri. The participation of this community in coffin decoration appears to have been well-accepted and welcomed by the high Theban elite, as many of these individuals were eventually equipped with coffins produced by this group. This development likely reflects the increasing significance of initiation rituals within the priestly community.[65]

The heterogeneity of yellow coffin production suggests that by the late 21st Dynasty, a wide range of workshops was involved in their creation. This dynamism reflects the new agency achieved by these communities of artisans. The level of complexity achieved in the decoration of yellow coffins and the perceived value of the work clearly elevated the socioeconomic and political importance of these artisan groups within Theban society.

Moreover, the integration of these workshops with the Theban elite extended to a broader audience, as not only the high Theban elite was targeted, but the lower strata of the elite was also involved.

Consistent with this view is the fact that the number of low-quality coffins increased towards the end of the 21st Dynasty. However, this rise in quantity does not necessarily indicate the decline of Theban workshops, as exceptional items continued to be crafted. Rather, this trend represents a sociological phenomenon: apparently for the first time, a larger segment of the lower strata of the Theban elite was able to be awarded a coffin set.

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65 Kruchten 1989.

Commission

Black coffins were highly expensive objects, commissioned privately and affordable only to the highest elite. Given the high levels of standardisation detected in these objects, it is unlikely that commissioners had any influence over their design or features.

The situation regarding the ownership of yellow coffins, however, evolved over the course of the 21st Dynasty. In the early 21st Dynasty, coffins rarely displayed an anonymous character. The deceased's name was typically inscribed prominently in the main inscriptions and often repeated in captions accompanying representations of the individual. These patterns clearly suggest that during the early 21st Dynasty, coffins were typically crafted on commission.

From the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, many coffins ceased to include information regarding the deceased. The anonymous character of the coffins is often found in low elite objects, suggesting a form of 'mass production' at this level. However, even high elite objects, meticulously crafted in terms of carpentry and decoration, often reveal no evidence of being commissioned. Frequently, blank spaces were left on these coffins to be inscribed later by their eventual owners.

These features suggest that a communal ownership of coffins was developed during the second half of the 21st Dynasty, indicating that coffins were then commissioned by a collective entity. It is plausible that this entity was the Temple of Amun itself.[66]

The same communal pattern is evidenced by the Temple of Amun in the management of the Theban necropolis throughout the 21st Dynasty. One of the most significant actions taken by the high priests of Amun was the systematic dismantling of the New Kingdom necropolis in Thebes. The royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings were emptied, and private tombs were carefully inventoried and exploited in a similarly systematic manner.[67] While these actions brought immense material wealth to the Temple of Amun, consolidating the high priests'

66 Sousa 2021, 149.
67 Cooney 2024, 65.

authority in the Theban kingdom, they also addressed broader issues. Emptying the royal tombs served other important purposes, the most significant of which was to control the instability and pressure in the Theban necropolis. From the beginning, one of the main aims of the so-called 'Renaissance Era' initiated at the end of the 20th Dynasty was to resolve this problem. In times of scarcity, the extraordinary riches buried in the Theban necropolis during the New Kingdom had become a constant source of unrest.

The need to reduce insecurity has been used to explain the emergence of collective burials during the 21st Dynasty. However, the decision to build communal burial grounds cannot be explained solely by defensive motivations. These developments reflect a new awareness of the Theban priesthood as a coherent social group, with a strong sense of collective identity. Such awareness is likely related to other important corporative achievements, such as the construction of communal houses for the priests of Amun in the sacred precinct of Karnak itself.[68] It is therefore interesting to see that a corporative identity of the priests of Amun was emerging, and not only at the funerary level.

The production of new funerary goods was integrated into this corporative regime. Workshops produced and recycled coffins under the specifications and rules provided by the Temple, which redistributed them according to the needs of the priesthood of Amun. In this manner, yellow coffins became a privileged expression of the collective identity of this social group. The stark contrast between yellow coffins and earlier coffin models underscores the emerging corporative self-awareness of the priesthood and its evolving political status.[69]

Many yellow coffins preserved in museum collections were found in collective tombs, such as the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, the Royal Cache, and Tomb MMA 60 where an intriguing cluster of high elite coffins was found by Herbert Winlock.[70] However, a notable shift occurred after the sealing of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun. A completely different pattern emerged, with yellow coffins being buried in plain sight, laid directly on the ground and covered

68 Masson 2008.
69 Sousa 2021, 177-162.
70 Kamrin 2020.

only with sand. This type of occupation is attested across the Theban necropolis, from Dra Abu el-Naga[71] to the Ramesseum[72] and Deir el-Medina. Many of these objects are now reduced to fragments and in most cases, they remain poorly documented. Nevertheless, it is evident that by the beginning of the 22nd Dynasty, yellow coffins were being buried in the exterior parts of older tombs.

2. Workshops, innovation, and power

The development of yellow coffin decoration is a unique phenomenon in Egyptian art. Within a span of almost 200 years, from the mid-20th Dynasty, when the yellow type seems to have emerged in its basic form, to the end of the 21st Dynasty, an enormous flow of innovations materialised in its decoration. The question of why this innovative trend occurred naturally arises.[73]

Andrzej Niwiński relates every major change detected in coffin decoration of the 21st Dynasty to major political events, such as changes in the office of the Theban high priest of Amun.[74] However, an examination of the innovation patterns in yellow coffins suggests that these changes emerged organically *from below*, rather than being imposed 'by decret'. The sheer complexity and high number of variables involved in the innovative arrangements make it improbable that they were directed by a single, centralised authority.

This innovative phenomenon appears to have been made possible by the new collective patterns introduced in the 21st Dynasty. The control of the necropolis by the Temple of Amun, the collective management of funerary goods, and the establishment of collective tombs all indicate a new cultural paradigm emerging at a time when the traditional pharaonic power structures were suspended. With royal ideology in abeyance, the Temple of Amun underwent a unique political phenomenon, establishing the Theban theocracy — a regime that recognised the priesthood of Amun as a new political entity.

71 See Tomb K93.12 (Rummel and Fetler 2017).
72 Francesco Tiradriti personal communication.
73 Niwiński 2019, 58.
74 Niwiński 2024.

Under this political regime, new socioeconomic patterns of a collective nature were implemented, and innovation played a paramount role in the creation of new discourses. In the funerary realm, strikingly innovative trends are evident at every level. In mummification, new techniques were applied both to the internal and external equipment of the corpse, including re-shaping it to give it a life-like appearance, as well as the use of new forms of amulets, papyri, shrouds, and leather braces. Similar innovations are apparent in coffin production, particularly in carpentry and, even more significantly, in polychrome decoration.

The innovative trends in coffin decoration that flourished from the late Ramesside period to the end of the 21st Dynasty are unparalleled in the history of anthropoid coffins. This innovative impetus is expressed in highly dynamic visual narratives, as discussed above. The key question, however, is the simplest one: why did these visual narratives become so highly valued during this particular period?

In our view, the rise of visual culture in coffin decoration can be traced back to the role of the Books of the Amduat and related royal compositions in royal burials during the New Kingdom. Royal visual narratives fuelled an artistic phenomenon of unprecedented dynamism, marked by increasing complexity and continuous innovation. The royal compositions of the Amduat expressed the association of the king with the fundamental theological concepts of the time and, by doing so, played a paramount political role by highlighting the exceptional role of the king in embodying the great cosmic principles.

The profuse imagery displayed on yellow coffins ultimately stems from a process that began with the visual representation of the Books of the Amduat in the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings.[75] The yellow type is deeply embedded in this royal esoteric tradition, where visual resources symbolise power on both magical and political levels. Rather than simply replicating the decorative programme of Ramesside tombs,[76] yellow coffins reflect a focused interest on

75 Taylor 2010, 200-201.

76 A longstanding observation highlights the correlation between the complexity of the 'yellow' type coffins and the absence of decorated tombs during the 21st Dynasty. Yellow coffins are seen to have absorbed the iconographic repertoire and ritual functions associated with tomb decoration. Taylor 1989, 32. Bettum 2017, 73.

the esoteric visual tradition of the hereafter. Initially expressed through selective use of Book of the Dead imagery, this repertoire expanded to incorporate a broader range of royal motifs, eventually including elements from the Book of the Amduat. The visual splendour of yellow coffins thus became a political statement, representing an appropriation of the royal visual discourse.

At the heart of the yellow corpus is this appropriation of the royal imagery of the Amduat. This connection to royal imagery not only explains the innovative trend detected in the yellow corpus, but also sheds light on the architectonisation detected in these coffins, as their ultimate mythical archetype was the royal burial chamber itself.

This re-use of royal imagery coincided with the restoration and re-burial of royal mummies. The latter were used to sanctify the Theban necropolis in unprecedented ways, bringing the sacred aura of the Valley of the Kings to the foothill and cliffs of the Theban Mountain. Yellow coffins were used as a testament to this sacralisation of the Theban landscape which was eventually taken as an extension of the netherworld itself.

Recent archaeological research conducted by José Ramon Pérez-Accino and his team along the wadi of the Royal Cache has uncovered abundant evidence of the intense occupation of the area of TT 320, where the royal mummies were eventually buried. Many of the royal scenes depicted on the walls of yellow coffins appear to allude to the sacredness associated with royal ancestors.

The Tomb of the Priest of Amun, another significant site of collective burials in Thebes during the 21st Dynasty, must have been integrated into a similar sacred context. This question has consistently been overlooked in studies of the tomb, as its connection to the sacred precinct of Hatshepsut has generally been assumed without question. Although the association between Bab el-Gasus and the funerary temple of Hatshepsut might seem evident today, when the tomb was created, the site had already undergone significant transformation and may have included many additional structures, now lost, which obscured its original connection to Hatshepsut's temple. Early 20th century archaeological

excavations at the site carried out by Édouard Naville[77] and Herbert Winlock[78] focused mainly on the funerary temple of Hatshepsut, treating other levels of occupation as mere 'debris'. Consequently, the nature of the site's use during the late 20th and 21st Dynasties remains unknown, but it is certain that, at the least the lower platforms were deeply intervened. Winlock refers that in the northern part of the first courtyard of Hatshepsut's temple, thus very close to the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, a wealth of debris was found from intrusive structures built after the 18th Dynasty. Particularly in the 21st Dynasty, when Deir el-Bahari became the focal point of the Theban necropolis, the large platform extending from the northern slope of the Theban Mountain and the Royal Wadi was surely very densely occupied.

As it stands today, Bab el-Gasus lies outside the funerary complex of Hatshepsut. However, following the patterns of contemporary collective tombs, namely in the royal tombs of Tanis, it is reasonable to expect that Bab el-Gasus would originally have been located within the walls of a sacred precinct, which would imply that other sacred structures existed in its vicinity. Given the abundant references to ritual activity and sacred shrines found in yellow coffins, it is possible that structures of this nature extended along the foothills of Deir el-Bahari. These might have formed a coherent sacred landscape alongside the surviving elements of Hatshepsut's temple. Viewed in this light, the imagery of yellow coffins offers potential insights into the nature and extent of the Theban sacred landscape. Some depictions may refer to the cliffs around TT 320 – particularly scenes with liminal significance, such as the sacred tree and the shrine with the bovine form of Hathor – and others referring to the sacred precinct of Deir el-Bahari, within which Bab el-Gasus was excavated. References to the latter temple area may be found in Osirian and solar scenes, as also in depictions of royal and burial ceremonies, the latter likely performed in a lower courtyard where Bab el-Gasus was excavated.

Following this line of speculation, it is conceivable that the two sacred areas served complementary roles. The cliffs of the royal wadi would have

77 Naville 1894-1908.
78 Winlock 1942.

held the mountain shrines of Hathor and Anubis, potentially associated with the sacred groves of the sycamore goddess, whether symbolically or physically. Meanwhile, the sacred precinct around Bab el-Gasus may have functioned as a large ritual arena, holding the complex sequences of rites illustrated in yellow coffins. Winlock found abundant remains of a garden of tamarisk trees and sycamore figs before the funerary temple of Mentuhotep II,[79] not far from Bab el-Hosan. It is implausible that these trees were still in place by the 21st Dynasty but it is likely that such gardens persisted nearby, particularly in the mouth of the royal wadi, where the presence of water could have been more continuous.

In this context, the platform extended along the first courtyard of the funerary temple of Hatshepsut and the area of Bab el-Hosan, before the complex of Mentuhotep II, might have formed a large sacred precinct that could have worked as the ritual arena so often depicted in the coffins of the complex scheme. This complex communicated directly with the mouth of the Royal Wadi which makes the sacred itinerary represented in yellow coffins nothing but highly plausible.

Extending even further this speculative exercise, it is plausible that funerary workshops, particularly those dedicated to coffin decoration, were also established in the vicinity of this precinct. The close integration of temple structures, ritual activities, workshops, and the priestly community likely contributed to the remarkable achievements in coffin decoration during the 21st Dynasty.

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The patterns of creativity and innovation detected in Thebes during the 21st Dynasty should be understood as a cultural and political phenomenon emerging as an autochthonous Theban expression. The flourishing of innovative patterns reflects the new political context where the priesthood of Amun became independent from the pharaonic ideological framework, allowing the formation of new corporative identity. Members of this priesthood no longer defined

79 Winlock 1942.

themselves as subjects of the king, but rather as subjects of Amun, the king of the gods. This shift enabled them to acquire a royal aura previously reserved for the king. This new status allowed them to appropriate the royal compositions for their own use. Such appropriation aligns with other evidence from the period, namely the contents buried within the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings. As suggested by Kara Cooney, the high priests of Amun sanctioned the emptying of the royal tombs by establishing new patterns of use of funerary goods in which re-use was accepted and imbued with meaning.[80] What coffin decoration allows us to understand is that this re-use of royal goods reflects a wider cultural process that goes beyond material needs, aiming at an appropriation of royal religious imagery itself. Ultimately, both the re-use of royal goods and funerary imagery allowed the members of the priesthood of Amun to re-define their status, integrating into their own experience the very heights of the pharaonic interpretation of the world. The use of royal imagery in the yellow corpus transcends mere social or political emulation. When referring to royal status, the Egyptian experience of power largely transcends the political significance in *stricto senso* and projects itself into the very core of life, as the king, the perfect god (*netjer nefer*), embodies the fullness of life, a state of deified human experience that transcends the ordinary realm of existence. In the yellow corpus, the appropriation of royal archetypes carried both political implications and a profound metaphysical significance, aiming to extend and amplify the sphere of existence of the deceased. Addressing this ambition was the ultimate purpose of the yellow coffins.

The yellow type thus reflects a new sociological reality in Thebes, where the royal patronage was replaced by a new economic model established by the theocratic regime implemented by Herihor during the 'Repetition of Births'. Yellow coffins thus result from the political and economic shift that occurred from the mid-20th Dynasty onwards, when the royal patronage became increasingly weaker, allowing the Temple of Amun to assert itself as an autonomous power structure.

80 Cooney 2024, 13-14.

In this new political context, workshops engaged in the creation of yellow coffins played a highly important political role. Three distinct types of workshop communities can be identified in Thebes during this period.

Workshops working for the highest elite were evidently well-connected with the Theban power structure. They possessed highly differentiated technical knowledge and a deep understanding of Theban funerary traditions, as well as of its unparalleled iconographic and textual resources, which they used with exceptional mastery and creativity. Their work bears striking similarities to that of the Ramesside artisans of Deir el-Medina, a connection that likely reflects more than coincidence. The close association between the use of polychrome decoration in royal tombs and its adoption in coffin design has long been recognised.[81] This phenomenon is particularly evident in Deir el-Medina, where it is closely linked to the artisans of the royal necropolis.[82]

In fact, it is quite possible that the painters in these workshops were descendants of the ancient workers of Deir el-Medina, and that the profound changes detected in the decoration of Theban coffins in the late 20th Dynasty ultimately resulted from the assimilation of the skills and knowledge of those artisans into these workshops.[83] This assimilation likely occurred when work in the Valley of the Kings ceased and the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina abandoned the village to settle in the walled enclosure of Medinet Habu.[84] Furthermore, the integration of the artisans from Deir el-Medina and their descendants must have been fundamental to ground the use of royal compositions of the hereafter in the visual narratives woven on the yellow coffins. These artisans possessed extensive knowledge on the iconographic repertoire used to decorate royal tombs, combined with unrivalled technical skills related to the production and use of pigments, as well as painting techniques. This specialised knowledge, maintained within a self-segregated community, was likely preserved and transmitted to their descendants. It is important to note that during the late Ramesside period, the workforce in the royal tombs decreased significantly—from sixty-six workers to

81 Dodson 2000.
82 Such is evidently the case of the first known proto-yellow coffins from the tomb of Sennedjem (TT 1).
83 Sousa 2024.
84 Reeves and Wilkinson 1996.

forty-four, then to thirty-four during the reign of Ramesses IX, approximately thirty-two under Ramesses X, and eventually only twenty-three during the reign of Ramesses XI.[85] The integration of the workers that left Deir el-Medina in local coffin workshops was likely a key factor in the emergence of the yellow type and may have had a profound impact on how these workshops were organised.

Workshops serving the lower Theban elite produced coffins for a heterogeneous community. Their activity was likely managed by the priesthood of Amun, but without close supervision. The result of their work is mainly visible from the mid-21st Dynasty onwards, and the coffins they produced exhibit a high level of standardisation and lower-quality craftsmanship, with limited skill in the use of wood, pigments and varnish.

The third group of workshops is composed of individuals with expertise in funerary papyri and local ritual traditions. This knowledge is consistent with the activity of scribes, whose professional activity gave them familiarity with the traditions of the Temples of Millions of Years and the corpus of funerary papyri. As mentioned above, the painters associated with this group were far less skilled than those in the other two groups, however this does not seem to have hindered the value associated with their work, as if the meaning associated with the esoteric compositions they were able to display on coffins was perceived as valuable in its own right.

Regardless of the quality of the coffins, the yellow corpus reflects the work of a vibrant community of highly valued artisans who managed to use their work to renegotiate their position in a new political context where the traditional categories of royal power structures were no longer active. Ultimately, the unique features of the yellow type result from the agency of these craftsmen who, in the context of a corporative state of Amun, were able to renegotiate their own socioeconomic role in Theban society by using the innovative inputs of their own work as a tool for social display for the elite. The prominence of innovation in this system was only achievable because of the exceptional literacy of the audience for whom these objects were created.

85 Bács 2023, 3.

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LIST OF SOURCES

In this list we include the objects that were used in our survey. For facility of access this list is organized according to two main criteria:

– Provenance:

This element is strictly reserved for the objects that were found in the following sites:

Royal Cache (TT 320).

Tomb of the Priests of Amun.

In the footnotes these objects are headed by the reference of the tomb or, in the case of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun, by the A.number, e.g. the number given by Georges Daressy defining the position of a given burial assemblage inside the tomb, followed by the object.

Examples:

A.53: mummy board of Tantdjehuti.

TT 320: outer coffin of Masaharta.

– Current location:

For all the other objects, we present the current location of the object. The museums quoted in this way are arranged in alphabetical order according to its city of location. When we quote these objects, the reference is headed by the Museum, followed by the object.

Example:

Louvre Museum: inner box of Paser.

It is in the current list that inventory numbers are provided, as well as bibliographical references, when they are available. This list has been produced as complete as possible, but given the ongoing work carried out on the yellow corpus it must be considered provisional.

Royal Cache (TT 320)

Coffin set of Asetemkhebit - Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG 61031)
- Daressy 1909, Pl. L.
- Hornung and Bryan 2002, 133-134.

Coffin set of Maatkare - Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG 61028)
- Daressy 1909, Pl. XXXIX.

Coffin set of Masaharta - Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG 61027)
- Daressy 1909, Pl. XXXVI.
- Niwiński 1988, Pl. III.

Coffin of Nedjemet - Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG 61024)
- Daressy 1909, Pl. XXVI.

Coffin set of Nesikhonsu - Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG 61030)
- Daressy 1909, Pl. XLV.

Coffin set of Pinedjem II - Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG 61029)
- Daressy 1909: PL. XLII.

Coffin set of Tauheret - Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG 61032)
- Daressy 1909, Pl. LIV.

Tomb of the Priests of Amun (Bab el-Gasus)

A.1: Anonymous coffin set – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29725; 29732)

A.2: Coffin set of Tauseretempernesu – Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (E.5884, E.5909)
- Delvaux and Therasse 2016, 86-91.

A.3: Coffin set of Paiuresekher – Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid (Inv. no.18253)
- Perez-Die 2021, 316-318 (figs. 2, 3, 4, 5).

A.4: Anonymous coffin – Geographical Society of Lisbon (SGL-AC-514)
- Sousa 2017.

A.5: Anonymous coffin – Museum Appenzell (JE 29726)
- Hornung 1984.
- Küffer 2011.
- Küffer 2017.

A.6: Coffin set of Nesitanebetaui – Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden (F 93/10.2)
- Mann, Greco and Weiss, 2017, 42-44 (Figs. 15-17).

A.7: Coffin set of Ankhesenmut – Medelhavsmuseet in Stockholm and Victoriamuseet in Uppsala (NME 895; MM 32003)
- Dodson 2015.

A.9: Coffin set of Nesitanebetaui – National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution, Washington (Inv. nos. 154955, 364998)
- Noah 2013, 42-44.

A.10: Coffin set of Tabaekkhonsu – Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (ÄS 6266/6265/6264)
- Egner and Haslauer 1994.

A.11: Coffin set of Ankhefenmut – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29698)

A.12: Coffin set of Nesipanebimakh – National Museum in Copenhagen (Inv. no. 3909)
- Sousa and Hansen 2022.

A.13: Coffin set of Ruru – Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid (Inv. no.18254)
- Perez-Die 2021, 319 (figs. 6,7,8).
- Medina Sánchez 2019.

A.14: Coffin set of Isetemkhebit – Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid (Inv. no. 18257)
- Perez-Die 2021, 320-322 (figs. 9, 10, 11, 12).

A.15: Anonymous coffin set – Museo Egizio in Florence (Inv. no. 8524, 8528, 9534)
- Sousa (ed.) 2018.

A.16: Coffin set of Ankhefenmut – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29692)
- Niwiński 1988, 127 (Pl. V).

A.17: Anonymous coffin set - Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29699)
- Niwiński 1988.

A.18: Anonymous coffin set – Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (Inv. E. 5884, E.5906)
- Delvaux and Therasse 2016, 92-97.

A.19: Coffin set of Taiuheret – National Museum in Copenhagen (Inv. no. 3912)
- Sousa and Hansen 2022.

A.20: Coffin set of Tauhenut – Museo Egizio in Florence (Inv. no. 8522, 9476)
- Sousa (ed.) 2018.

A.22: Coffin set of Khonsumes – Museo Egizio in Florence (Inv. no. 8527/9530)
- Sousa (ed.) 2018.

A.23: Coffin set of Nesipakaef – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29624)
- Niwiński 1995, 135-141.

A.24: Coffin set of Padiuamun – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29623)
- Niwiński 1995, 70-79.

A.26: Coffin set of Nesiniutitaui – Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (ÄS 6263/6262/6261).
- Egner and Haslauer 1994, Pl. 23.

A.27: Anonymous coffin set – Geographical Society of Lisbon (SGL-AC-515, 516)
- Sousa 2017.

A.28: Coffin set of Padiamun, usurped by Nesipenhertahat – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29643)
- Niwiński 1988, 121.

A.29: Anonymous coffin set – British Museum (EA 24789, 24790)
- Niwiński 1988, 152.

A.32: Coffin set of Taahuti – British Museum (EA 24793, 24794, 24795)
- Niwiński 1988, 153.

A.33: Coffin set of Ankhefenkhonsu – National Museum in Copenhagen (Inv. N. 3910)
- Sousa and Hansen 2022.

A.38: Coffin set of Ankhsenmut – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29675)
- Niwiński 1988, 126.

A.40: Coffin set of Bakenmut – British Museum (EA 24792, 24798, 24799)
- Niwiński 1988, 153.

A.41: Anonymous coffin set – National Museum in Copenhagen (Inv. N. 3911)
- Sousa and Hansen 2022.

A.43: Coffin set of Nesipakashuti – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29641)
- Niwiński 1995, 122-125.

A.44: Coffin set of Tjenetehenef – British Museum (EA 24796, 24791)
- Niwiński 1988, 152.

A.46: Coffin set of Senu – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29651)
- Niwiński 1988, 122 (Pl. VII).

A.47: Coffin set of Tenetpenheruenefer – Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden (F 93/10.3a-b)
- Mann, Greco and Weiss 2017, 44-45 (Figs. 18-19).
- Boeser 1916, Pl. IV.

A.49: Coffin set of Diukhonsuiry – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29733)
- Niwiński 1988, 131.

A.51: Coffin set of Ankhefenamun– Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (E 5887)
- Delvaux and Therasse 2016, 92-97.

A.52: Coffin set of Butherkhonsu – Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva (Inv. no. 007363, 012454) and Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (ÄS 6271)
- Egner and Haslauer 2009, Pl. 9.
- Egner and Haslauer 2009, Pl. 257-274.
- Haag and Hölzl 2015.
- Küffer 2017.
- Küffer 2011.

A.53: Coffin set of Tantdjehuti – National Museum of Natural History in Washington (Inv. N. 154953, 154954, 365000) JE 29648

A.54: Anonymous coffin set – Musée d'Ethnographie in Neuchâtel (Eg. 184) JE 29645
- Küffer 2011.
- Küffer 2017.

A.55: Coffin set of Pinedjem – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29637)
- Niwiński 1995, 54-69.

A.56: Anonymous outer coffin – Museo Egizio in Florence (8525)
- Sousa (ed.) 2018.

A.58: Coffin set of Ankhefenkhonsu – Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid (Inv. no. 18256)
- Perez-Die 2021, 322-324 (Figs. 13, 14, 15, 16).
- Medina Sánchez 2019.

A.60: Anonymous coffin set – Museo Egizio in Florence (Inv. N. 8523, 8526) JE 29701
- Sousa (ed.) 2018.

A.64: Coffin set of Nesitanebettaui – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29656)
- Niwiński 1995, 27-32.

A.66: Coffin set of Isety – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29654)
- Niwiński 1988, 122 (Pl. XII).

A.68: Coffin set of Ankhefenmut – Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (ÄS 6267), Albany Institute of History and Art, and British Museum (EA 24797)
- Egner and Haslauer 1994, Pl. 8.
- Haynes and Warne 2021.
- Lacovara and D'Auria 2018.

A.71: Coffin set of Meritamun – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG 6176, 6197)
- Sousa and Villaró-Fabregat (forthcoming).

A.73: Coffin set of Iuesankh – Pushkin Museum in Moscow (Inv. I, 1a 6800)
- Lavrentyeva 2021.

A.74: Anonymous coffin – Historishes Museum in Bern (Inv. no. AE10)
- Hornung 1978.
- Küffer 2007.
- Küffer 2011.
- Küffer 2017.
- Küffer and Renfer 1997, 103 - 12.

A.77: Coffin set of Nesinebtaui – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29685)
- Niwiński 1995, 46-53.

A.81: Coffin set of Ameniutenakht – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29649)
- Miatello and Ibrahim 2020.
- Niwiński 1988, 122 (Pl. LXIV).

A.83: Coffin set of Djedkhonsuesankh – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29658)
- Niwiński 1995, 80-89.

A.84: Coffin set of Padiamun – Mummification Museum in Luxor (JE 29683)
- Chassinat 1909, 74-75.

A.85: Anonymous coffin set – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29680)
- Niwiński 1995, 6-22.

A.86: Coffin set of Shebti – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29711)
- Chassinat 1909, 70-74.

A.87: Coffin set of Padiamun – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29668)
- Abbas 2014.

A.88: Coffin set of Nesitanebetaui – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29716)
- Niwiński 1988, 129.

A.91: Coffin set of Taditumut – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung in Berlin (Inv. no. 11081, 11982, 11983)
- Niwiński 1988, 110.

A.93: Coffin set of Padiamun usurped by Amenempermut – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29706)
- Niwiński 1988, 128.

A.95: Coffin set of Pameshem – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29718)
- Chassinat 1909, 23-26.

A.96: Coffin set of Nesitawadjatakh – Odessa Archaeological Museum (Inv. N. 52976) and National Museum of Tatarstan (Inv. N. KAZ-111605)
- Tarasenko 2021.
- Bolshakov 2021.

A.97: Coffin set of Horpeshi – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29715)
- Niwiński 1995, 90-94.

A.99: Coffin set of Padiamun – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29616)
- Niwiński 1988, 119.

A.102: Coffin set of Haes – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29665)
- Niwiński 1995, 99-110.

A.105: Coffin set of Userhat – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29661)
- Niwiński 1988, 123 (Pl. XI).

A.108: Coffin set of Ankhefenkhonsu – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29663)
- Niwiński 1988, 124 (Pl. IX-A).

A.109: Coffin set of Tjenetimentether, usurped by Djedmaatiuesankh – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29660)
- Niwiński 1988, 123.

A.110: Coffin set of Djedmutiuesankh – Geographical Society of Lisbon (SGL-AC-517/ SGL-AC-518) JE 29679
- Sousa 2017.

A.111: Coffin set of Mashasekebt – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29667)
- Niwiński 1988, 124-125 (Pl. VI).

A.113: Coffin set of Nesiamenemope – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29659)
- Niwiński 1988, 123.

A.114: Coffin set of Padiamun – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29666)
- Hornung and Bryan 2007, 158-161.

A.115: Coffin set of Paharu – Egyptian Museum in Cairo/National Museum of Alexandria (JE 29670)
- Niwiński 1988, 125.

A.119: Coffin set of Tjenetipet – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29662)
- Niwiński 1988, 123.

A.120: Coffin set of Khonsuemrenepet – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29613)
- Niwiński 1988, 125.

A.121: Coffin set of Khonsumes – Medelhavsmuseet in Stockholm and Victoriamuseet in Uppsala (NME 890, NME 891, NME 894)
- Dodson 2015, 13-15.
- Dodson 2017, 145-147.

A.122: Anonymous outer coffin – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29691).
- Niwiński 1995, 95-98.

A.123: Coffin set of Direpu – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29669)
- Niwiński 1995, 111-121.

A.124: Anonymous outer coffin – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29696)
- Chassinat 1909, 1-3, 47-49 (Pl. III).

A.128: Anonymous coffin set – Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid (Inv. no.18255)
- Perez-Die 2021, 325-326 (figs. 19-20).

A.131: Anonymous coffin set – Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (Inv. E.5879, E.5885, E.5908)
- Delvaux and Therasse 2016, 102-107.

A.132: Coffin set of Maatkare – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29612)
- Niwiński 1988, 118.

A.133: Coffin set of Heretweben – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29738)
- Niwiński 1988, 131.

A.135: Anonymous coffin set – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (no JE)

A.136: Coffin set of Henuttaui – Geographical Society in Lisbon (SGL-AC-519/SGL-AC-520/ SGL-AC-521)
- Sousa 2017.

A.139: Anonymous coffin set – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29621)

A.140: Coffin set of Ankhefenmut – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29730)
- Niwiński 1995, 126-130.

A.142: Coffin set of Nesipernub – Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (ÄS 6270/6269/6268)
- Egner and Haslauer 2009, Pl. 1-9.

A.143: Coffin set of Hori – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29619)
- Mostafa 2020.

A.145: Coffin set of Tjanefer – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29702)
- Niwiński 1995, 1-5.

A.147: Coffin set of Menkhepere – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29628/29735)
- Niwiński 1988, 120

A.148: Coffin set of Nesiamun – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29611)
- Niwiński 1988, 118.

A.149: Anonymous coffin set – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung in Berlin (Inv. no. 11978, 11980)
- Niwiński 1988, 109.

A.150: coffin set of Djedmutiuesankh - Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29679).

A.151: Coffin set of Tjanefery – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29736)
- Niwiński 1988, 131.

A.152: Coffin set of Gatseshen – Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29635)
- Niwiński 1988, 131.

Unknown A-numbers

A.unknown: Coffin set of Ikhy – Vatican Museums (25035.3.1-25035.3.2)
- Gasse 1996, Pl. XIII.
- Prestipino 2017, Fig. 4, 12c.

A.unknown: Anonymous mummy board – Vatican Museums (25022)
- Gasse 1996, Pl. XXXII.
- Prestipino 2017, Fig. 12b.

A.unknown: Anonymous mummy board (25020) Gasse 1996, Pl. XXXI, (fig. 16).

A.unknown: Inner box (Vatican Museums, Inv. N. 25016.2.1-2).
- Gasse 1996.

A.unknown: Coffin set of Gautseshen – Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden (F 93/10.1)
- Boeser 1916, Pl. VIII
- Mann, Greco and Weiss 2017, 40-42 (Fig. 12-14).

A.unknown: Anonymous coffin – Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden (F 93/10.4)
- Boeser, 1916: Pl. I.
- Mann, Greco and Weiss 2017, 45 (Fig. 20).

A.unknown: Anonymous mummy board - Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (Inv. E.5907)
- Delvaux and Therasse 2016, 111.

A.unknown: Anonymous coffin - Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (Inv. E.5881)
- Delvaux and Therasse 2016, 108-110.

Museums' collections

Antikmuseet (Aarhus)
Coffin set of Tabasety (O 303)
- Niwiński 1988, 104.
- Sousa and Nørskov 2018.
- Sousa 2019, 128-146.
- Sousa (ed.) 2020, 43-63.

University Museum (Aberdeen)
Mummy board of Mutemuia (ABDUA 21781)
- Sousa (ed.) 2020, 73-79.

Vleeshuis Museum (Antwerp)
Coffin of Nesikhonsu (AV 88.1)
- Gubel 1995, p. 89.

Michael Carlos Museum (Atlanta)
Mummy board (1999.1.12)
- Lacovara and Trope 2001, 51.

Coffin of Tanatnektahat (1999.I.17 A-D) – Plate 29
- Lacovara and Trope 2001, 49-50.

Coffin of Pashedkhonsu (1999.1.15, A-B)
- Lacovara and Trope 2001, 51.

Museum of Fine Arts (Boston)
Coffin set of Henuttaui (115b) – Plate 30
- D'Auria, Lacovara and Roehrig 1988, 162-163.

Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Brussels)
Outer coffin of Butehamun (E. 5288)
- Villaró-Fabregat (forthcoming).

Egyptian Museum (Cairo)
Coffin of Padiamun (JE 26220 / CG 61011)
Cooney 2007, fig. 175.

Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge)
Coffin set of Nesipawershefyt (Inv. No. 88.1903)
- Niwiński 1988, 133.
- Strudwick 2017, 522.
- Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 183.
- Grajetsky, Sousa, Strudwick and Dawson (forthcoming).

Fragment from a coffin (E.GA.2861.1943)
- Strudwick and Dawson 2016, 193.

National Museums of Scotland (Edimburgh)
Coffin of Tamut, also named Tjenetweretheqau (A.1907.569 B)
- Manley and Dodson 2010, 36-37.

August Kestner Museum (Hanover)
Mummy board of Hori (Inv. no. 1977.1)
- Sousa and Loeben (forthcoming).

Leeds City Museum (Leeds)
Coffin set of Nesiamun (D. 426-426a.1960)
- Cooney 2007, figs. 187-191.

Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (Leiden)
Coffin set of Khonsuhotep (Inv. no. AMM 26-a, b)
- Boeser 1916, Pl. I-X.

Coffin set of Amenhotep (Inv. no. AMM 2-a, b)
- Boeser 1917, Pl. I-X.
- Ikram and Dodson 1998, 231.
- Schneider 1998, nº 201.

Mummy board of Nesipanebu (Inv. no. AH 1)
- Niwiński 1988, 145.

British Museum (London)
Anonymous coffin (EA 24907b)
- Niwiński 1988, 153.
- Russmann, Strudwick and James 2006, nº 82.

Coffin (EA 29591)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles)
Anonymous coffin set (M.47.3a-c)

Musée des Beaux-Arts (Lyon)
Coffin of Padikhonsu (Inv. H 2320-H 2321)
- Jamen 2016.
- Jamen 2017, 227.

Museo Arqueológico Nacional (Madrid)
Coffin set of Amenemhat (Inv. no. 15216-15218)
- Perez-Die 1991, 97.

Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne (Marseille)
Mummy board of Tentamun (Inv. no. 253/1)
- Maspero 1914, p. 10-12.
- Meeks and Meeks 1990, 24.
- Nelson 1978, 80-81.

Coffin of Khonsumes (Inv. no. 253/2-3)
- Guilhou 2021, 435-436.

Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts (Moscow)
Coffin of Amuniuesankh (I.1.a 6800)
- Hodjash 2002, nº 42.

Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst (Munich)
Coffin set of Herytubekhet (ÄS 12a-c)
- Sousa (ed.) 2020, 27-42.

Coffin set of Henuttaui (ÄS 57a-c)
- Sousa (ed.) 2020, 81-100.

Brooklyn Museum (New York)
Coffin set of Pasebakhaienipet (08.480.1a-b)
- Bleiberg 2008, Figs. 94-96.

Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York)
Coffin set of Henuttaui (25.3.182–.184)
- O'Neill 1987, 74-76.
- Winlock 1916, fig. 85.

Coffin set of Nauny (30.3.23a, b; 30.3.24a, b;30.3.25)
- Winlock 1932, 53-56 (Plates X-XI).
- El-Shazly and Kamrin, (forthcoming).

Coffin of Djedmutesankh (MMA 25.3.1a, b, 25.3.2a, b)
- Kamrin 2020.

Coffin of Menkheperre (MMA 25.3.7a, b; 25.3.8a, b; 25.3.9)
- Kamrin 2020.

Coffin set of Tabakmut (25.3.10)
- Kamrin 2020.
- Kamrin and Ikram, (forthcoming).

Coffin set of Yetefamun (26.3.1)
Coffin set of Gautseshen (26.3.6-8)
Coffin of Anresenmes (26.3.4)
Anonymous outer box (26.3.6)

Louvre Museum (Paris)
Coofin set of Panebmontu (Inv. E 13029, 13046)
- Seipel 1989, nº 472-473
- Niwiński and Rigault-Déon 2024, 60-87.

Coffin set of Sutimes (N 2609, N 2610, N 2611)
- Niwiński and Rigault-Déon 2024, 88-181.

Coffin set of Paser (N 2581, N2570, N 20165)
- Niwiński and Rigault-Déon 2024, 182-223.

Coffin set of Tanethereret (E 13027, E 13034, E 13035)
- Niwiński and Rigault-Déon 2024, 250-297.

Carnegie Museum of Natural History (Pittsburgh)
Anonymous coffin
- Patch 1990, nº 60.

Náprstkovo Museum (Prague)
Anonymous coffin (P 629)
- Verner 1982, 1-23.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Richmond)
Coffin of Itiamun (Inv. MFA 6.7.47.77). Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art
- Régen 2017, Fig. 4.

Museu Nacional (Rio de Janeiro)
Coffin of Hori (Inv. no. 525) – destroyed.
- Kitchen 1990, 109-110.

Egypt Centre Museum (Swansee)
Coffin of Iwesemhesetmut (W1982)

Museo Egizio (Turin)

Coffin of Bakenkhonsu (CGT 10111.a-b)
- Niwiński 2004, Tav. XX.

Coffin set of Butehamun (10101, 10102, 10103)
- Niwiński 2004, Tav. I, IV, VII.

Coffin of Hori (CGT 10112-10113)
- Niwiński 2004, Tav. XXII, XXII

Coffin of Khonsumose (CGT 10106-10107
- Niwiński 2004, Tav. XI, XIII.

Mummy board of Mutemperamun (CGT 10109)
- Niwiński 2004, Tav. XVI.

Coffin of Pahereniset (10108.a-b)
- Niwiński 2004, Tav. XIV.

Coffin of Tabakenkhonsu (CGT 10104, 10105)
- Niwiński 2004, Tav. VIII, X.

Coffin of Tamutmuef (CGT 10119-10120)
- Niwiński 2004, Tav. XXXIII, XXXVI.

Anonymous coffin set (CGT 10117-10118)
- Niwiński 2004, Tav. XXX, XXXIII.

Bohusläns Museum (Uddevala)

Anonymous mummy board (No inv. number)
Sousa (ed.) 2020, 65-72.

Kunsthistorishes Museum (Vienna)

Mummy board Nesipaherentahat (ÄS 231)
Egner and Haslauer 2009, Pl. 25-37.

Collection Harris

Mummy board of Khaemopet
Cooney 2007, fig. 213.

INDEX OF SOURCES

Coffins from TT 320

Coffin set of Asetemkhebit – 50, 51, 52, 75, 84, 102, 156, 164, 167, 173, 211, 213, 597

Coffin set of Maatkare – 72, 75, 76, 77, 78, 81, 83, 92, 93, 94, 99, 101, 107, 132, 133, 135, 179, 208, 209, 210, 228, 233, 495, 597

Coffin set of Masaharta – 63, 67, 72, 76, 79, 82, 85, 89, 93, 101, 110, 132, 133, 135, 136, 137, 138, 175, 177, 208, 209, 210, 229, 241, 277, 284, 443, 597

Coffin of Nedjemet – 72, 75, 84, 86, 91, 597

Coffin set of Nesikhonsu – 33, 63, 72, 81, 82, 83, 92, 93, 158, 173, 177, 181, 182, 183, 185, 208, 210, 245, 262, 264, 265, 269, 296, 298, 303, 305, 315, 351, 373, 398, 406, 408, 409, 422, 423, 443, 461, 466, 497, 527, 597

Coffin set of Pinedjem II – 38, 50, 51, 52, 72, 74, 76, 78, 79, 82, 83, 85, 89, 94, 95, 101, 102, 134, 135, 174, 175, 208, 209, 210, 233, 362, 443, 469, 527, 554, 597

Coffin set of Tauheret – 50, 51, 52, 62, 68, 69, 74, 75, 76, 80, 82, 101, 134, 173, 177, 178, 179, 182, 183, 185, 208, 209, 227, 228, 233, 244, 256, 263, 265, 272, 276, 280, 288, 302, 392, 393, 403, 597

Coffins from Bab el-Gasus

A.1 – Anonymous coffin set – 225, 233, 241, 246, 255, 365, 597

A.2 – Coffin set of Tauseretempernesu – 50, 52, 94, 102, 175, 179, 186, 597

A.3 – Coffin set of Paiuresekher – 316, 347, 597

A.4 – Anonymous coffin – 72, 75, 79, 94, 97, 183, 185, 313, 314, 317, 332, 597

A.5 – Anonymous coffin – 76, 79, 94, 187, 408, 597

A.6 – Coffin set of Nesitanebetaui – 64, 68, 156, 164, 213, 323, 325, 382, 384, 597

A.7 – Coffin set of Ankhesenmut – 229, 243, 272, 276, 299, 315, 331, 332, 368, 406, 410, 597

A.9 – Coffin set of Nesitanebetaui – 60, 227, 228, 234, 597

A.10 – Coffin set of Tabaekkhonsu – 64, 76, 78, 84, 86, 89, 91, 94, 97, 102, 110, 147, 150, 186, 187, 209, 211, 213, 314, 315, 321, 322, 323, 335, 373, 408, 410, 597

A.11 – Coffin set of Ankhefenmut – 61, 320, 234, 443, 597

A.12 – Coffin set of Nesipanebimakh – 51, 76, 79, 147, 176, 177, 183, 185, 209, 314, 315, 324, 350, 406, 407, 410, 597

A.13 – Coffin set of Ruru – 61, 228, 234, 241, 598

A.14 – Coffin set of Isetemkhebit – 243, 256, 262, 275, 281, 285, 598

A.15 – Anonymous coffin set – 61, 76, 182, 183, 272, 314, 316, 317, 375, 406, 407, 409, 410, 412, 448, 548, 598

A.16 – Coffin set of Ankhefenmut – 64, 81, 89, 93, 102, 109, 177, 185, 245, 256, 263, 264, 274, 290, 369, 399, 402, 495, 598

A.17 – Anonymous coffin set – 408, 409, 598

A.18 – Anonymous coffin – 76, 77, 78, 82, 91, 101, 102, 108, 142, 150, 172, 182, 186, 187, 208, 210, 229, 243, 245, 250, 290, 296, 300, 598

A.19 – Coffin set of Taiuheret – 61, 73, 75, 76, 78, 80, 81, 82, 91, 101, 108, 134, 137, 175, 212, 229, 233, 598

A.20 – Anonymous coffin set – 52, 60, 156, 164, 175, 243, 246, 252, 253, 254, 272, 276, 284, 293, 296, 299, 541, 598

A.22 – Coffin set of Khonsumes – 62, 73, 77, 80, 81, 83, 93, 118, 256, 262, 264, 275, 283, 598

A.23 – Coffin set of Nesipakaef – 73, 76, 86, 147, 378, 409, 598

A.24 – Coffin set of Padiuamun – 228, 242, 253, 322, 323, 350, 373, 598

A.26 – Coffin set of Nesiniutitaui – 56, 57, 65, 86, 89, 91, 103, 148, 150, 179, 186, 187, 208, 211, 213, 335, 350, 407, 411, 598

A.27 – Anonymous coffin set – 51, 72, 73, 76, 94, 101, 103, 109, 126, 158, 186, 331, 406, 408, 409, 416, 441, 541, 598

A.28 – Coffin set of Padiamun – 68, 85, 86, 134, 182, 208, 209, 598

A.29 – Anonymous coffin set – 50, 73, 76, 79, 89, 142, 145, 156, 179, 209, 208, 243, 246, 275, 276, 278, 281, 287, 288, 302, 373, 598

A.32 – Coffin set of Taahuti – 50, 78, 92, 150, 158, 163, 164, 165, 186, 187, 203, 213, 314, 324, 331, 348, 405, 406, 407, 411, 494, 525, 565, 598

A.33 – Coffin set of Ankhefenkhonsu – 50, 52, 76, 78, 121, 127, 147, 150, 151, 162, 179, 186, 198, 204, 211, 313, 317, 321, 348, 373, 374, 376, 384, 385, 497, 499, 525, 598

A.38 – Coffin set of Ankhsenmut – 63, 137, 178, 179, 210, 228, 243, 275, 281, 284, 296, 409, 598

A.40 – Coffin set of Bakenmut – 68, 147, 150, 155, 160, 161, 314, 317, 358, 378, 382, 598

A.41 – Anonymous coffin set – 62, 156, 172, 201, 313, 317, 332, 407, 409, 411, 418, 598

A.43 – Coffin set of Nesipakashuti – 77,94, 158, 378, 380, 382, 407, 410, 411, 469, 525, 599

A.44 – Coffin set of Tjenetehenef – 147, 242, 314, 322, 335, 405, 408, 599

A.46 – Coffin set of Senu – 61, 137, 241, 365, 398, 402, 599

A.47 – Coffin set of Tenetpenheruenefer – 51, 73, 101, 102, 158, 324, 492, 599

A.49 – Coffin set of Diukhonsuiry – 133, 136, 137, 138, 599

A.51 – Coffin set of Ankhefenamun – 321, 443, 444, 599

A.52 – Coffin set of Butherkhonsu – 50, 51, 52, 57, 63, 64, 65, 75, 89, 95, 97, 102, 108, 128, 158, 163, 164, 166, 180, 186, 202, 208, 210, 217, 358, 599

A.53 – Coffin set of Tantdjehuti – 50, 76, 79, 138, 209, 459, 599

A.54 – Anonymous coffin set – 50, 75, 79, 108, 158, 160, 174, 175, 179, 183, 185, 186, 187, 208, 210, 314, 323, 331, 343, 344, 345, 405, 411, 599

A.55 – Coffin set of Pinedjem – 64, 65, 68, 73, 85, 97, 102, 158, 163, 209, 338, 358, 372, 373, 378, 381, 382, 384, 385, 599

A.56 – Anonymous outer coffin – 37, 68, 73, 125, 186, 317, 547, 599

A.58 – Coffin set of Ankhefenkhonsu – 315, 316, 358, 525, 599

A.60 – Anonymous coffin set – 321, 353, 382, 358, 359, 599

A.64 – Coffin set of Nesitanebettaui – 504, 599

A.66 – Coffin set of Isety – 156, 331, 599

A.68 – Coffin set of Ankhefenmut – 50, 51, 52, 73, 74, 79, 81, 83, 89, 93, 101, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 183, 185, 541, 599

A.71 – Coffin set of Meritamun – 316, 324, 325, 347, 408, 409, 410, 412, 429, 431, 432, 433, 488, 494, 599

A.73 – Coffin set of Iuesankh – 253, 285, 599

A.74 – Anonymous coffin set – 50, 51, 75, 76, 79, 86, 89, 94, 100, 101, 102, 160, 183, 185, 600

A.77 – Coffin set of Nesinebtaui – 91, 176, 182, 208, 209, 210, 600

A.81 – Coffin set of Ameniutenakht – 132, 133, 233, 442, 600

A.83 – Coffin set of Djedkhonsuesankh – 61, 62, 150, 409, 524, 600

A.84 – Coffin set of Padiamun, usurped by a woman -77, 173, 179, 372, 373, 600

A.85 – Anonymous coffin set – 160, 461, 525, 600

A.86 – Coffin set of Shebti – 134, 245, 256, 275, 277, 281, 285, 291, 293, 294, 390, 391, 541, 600

A.87 – Coffin set of Padiamun – 73, 94, 95, 96, 99, 101, 208, 434, 435, 437, 440, 445, 446, 447, 452, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 492, 600

A.88 – Coffin set of Nesitanebetaui – 80, 175, 176, 178, 179, 227, 228, 288, 368, 369, 370, 397, 398, 600

A.91 – Coffin set of Taditumut – 64, 72, 76, 97, 102, 131, 158, 211, 213, 321, 323, 324, 331, 335, 336, 348, 349, 372, 373, 407, 411, 524, 525, 600

A.93 – Coffin set of Padiamun usurped by Amenempermut – 73, 74, 85, 89, 109, 208, 209, 210, 215, 244, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 270, 274, 290, 291, 293, 294, 296, 436, 444, 445, 447, 455, 600

A.95 – Coffin set of Pameshem – 76, 82, 89, 138, 173, 175, 177, 182, 208, 209, 256, 262, 264, 281, 289, 290, 291, 293, 300, 399, 402, 495, 496, 600

A.96 – Coffin set of Nesitawadjatakh – 142, 244, 261, 262, 263, 270, 315, 443, 446, 525, 600

A.97 – Coffin set of Horpeshi – 73, 324, 332, 399, 402, 440, 600

A.99 – Coffin set of Padiamun – 74, 85, 86, 150, 372, 373, 405, 406, 407, 409, 411, 600

A.102 – Coffin set of Haes – 50, 52, 76, 94, 102, 173, 185, 210, 322, 385, 399, 407, 411, 494, 600

A.105 – Coffin set of Userhat – 50, 63, 101, 176, 183, 185, 262, 264, 275, 372, 399, 402, 600

A.108 – Coffin set of Ankhefenkhonsu – 73, 94, 147, 210, 448, 469, 600

A.109 – Coffin set of Tjenetimentether, usurped by Djedmaatiuesankh- 79, 93, 174, 434, 435, 454, 455, 456, 601

A.110 – Coffin set of Djedmutiuesankh – 79, 82, 86, 101, 102, 103, 123, 147, 148, 150, 152, 153, 186, 187, 199, 207, 208, 209, 212, 214, 318, 321, 324, 326, 329, 331, 332, 333, 406, 408, 410, 413, 480, 481, 482, 483, 601

A.111 – Coffin set of Mashasekebt – 61, 67, 78, 81, 84, 91, 134, 135, 175, 176, 225, 226, 234, 236, 255, 443, 495, 505, 601

A.113 – Coffin set of Nesiamenemope – 81, 101, 174, 177, 209, 296, 300, 434, 435, 436, 440, 444, 445, 450, 454, 455, 459, 462, 601

A.114 – Coffin set of Padiamun – 61, 69, 73, 74, 76, 78, 82, 83, 89, 91, 94, 95, 99, 101, 102, 109, 135, 136, 174, 175, 209, 227, 234, 372, 392, 393, 403, 440, 443, 445, 446, 459, 464, 465, 492, 525, 601

A.115 – Coffin set of Paharu – 72, 78, 82, 85, 91, 95, 101, 109, 174, 397, 440, 452, 456, 601

A.119 – Coffin set of Tjenetipet – 75, 81, 86, 91, 93, 98, 101, 175, 176, 245, 261, 262, 284, 285, 300, 435, 436, 438, 445, 447, 451, 455, 456, 488, 498, 499, 601

A.120 – Coffin set of Khonsuemrenepet – 63, 227, 228, 233, 238, 243, 247, 251, 252, 276, 277, 300, 305, 304, 352, 368, 369, 397, 398, 527, 601

A.121 – Coffin set of Khonsumes – 62, 63, 134, 138, 229, 241, 245, 246, 256, 257, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 268, 277, 283, 285, 289, 293, 296, 303, 304, 388, 601

A.122 – Anonymous outer coffin – 373, 601

A.123 – Coffin set of Direpu – 50, 51, 53, 58, 73, 91, 101, 102, 163, 170, 180, 186, 187, 205, 208, 211, 253, 248, 249, 405, 407, 408, 411, 524, 601

A.124 – Anonymous outer coffin – 156, 524, 601

A.128 – Anonymous coffin set – 315, 324, 331, 332, 601

A.131 – Anonymous coffin set – 62, 73, 84, 85, 101, 147, 186, 211, 213, 315, 316, 318, 319, 323, 337, 338, 340, 353, 373, 385, 601

A.132 – Coffin set of Maatkare – 52, 90, 92, 97, 101, 182, 185, 186, 317, 320, 323, 324, 339, 346, 358, 378, 384, 408, 410, 498, 504, 601

A.133 – Coffin set of Heretweben – 68, 76, 79, 97, 173, 183, 185, 317, 320, 355, 356, 377, 378, 405, 407, 408, 409, 411, 412, 419, 601

A.135 – Anonymous coffin set – 341, 344, 346, 358, 372, 408, 498, 500, 525, 601

A.136 – Coffin set of Henuttaui – 51, 52, 63, 73, 78, 79, 80, 83, 84, 94, 95, 101, 102, 103, 108, 109, 119, 124, 134, 147, 148, 154, 156, 181, 197, 206, 210, 220, 229, 231, 235, 234, 236, 238, 244, 248, 251, 253, 254, 261, 262, 264, 265, 268, 286, 298, 302, 315, 327, 369, 371, 372, 408, 414, 443, 448, 483, 484, 495, 486, 565, 601

A.139 – Anonymous coffin set – 369, 373, 375, 410, 411, 412, 601

A.140 – Coffin set of Ankhefenmut – 242, 324, 331, 373, 385, 601

A.142 – Coffin set of Nesipernub – 50, 51, 53, 72, 76, 79, 103, 142, 148, 150, 179, 182, 185, 186, 245, 316, 322, 348, 399, 494, 602

A.143 – Coffin set of Hori – 72, 156, 160, 324, 372, 373, 497, 500, 602

A.147 – Coffin set of Menkhepere – 72, 76, 78, 94, 101, 178, 179, 183, 209, 375, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 602

A.148 – Coffin set of Nesiamun – 94, 95, 183, 185, 261, 265, 272, 314, 375, 405, 406, 407, 409, 411, 444, 448, 525, 602

A.149 – Anonymous coffin set – 51, 52, 68, 72, 73, 76, 79, 85, 86, 102, 103, 147, 150, 186, 187, 211, 213, 314, 315, 316, 317, 323, 337, 337, 338, 339, 340, 373, 384, 411, 504, 602

A.150 – coffin set of Djedmutiuesankh – 62, 63, 228, 244, 254, 256, 257, 261, 263, 264, 265, 269, 289, 293, 297, 368, 397, 398, 443, 444, 449, 602

A.151 – Coffin set of Tjanefery – 32, 61, 63, 72, 76, 95, 133, 134, 176, 182, 186, 243, 257, 261, 263, 264, 352, 405, 406, 407, 408, 411, 443, 448, 461, 467, 469, 493, 494, 602

A.152 – Coffin set of Gatseshen – 227, 228, 233, 368, 397, 398, 402, 440, 459, 602

Unknown A-numbers

Coffin set of Ikhy – Vatican Museums (25035.3.1-25035.3.2) – 61, 94, 95, 131, 183, 185, 217, 272, 314, 316, 375, 443, 448, 602

Anonymous mummy board (Vatican Museums, 25022) – 219, 492, 602

A.unknown: Inner box (Vatican Museums, Inv. N. 25016.2.1-2) – 252, 602

A.unknown: Coffin set of Gautseshen – Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden (F 93/10.1) – 84, 156, 158, 164, 491, 602

Anonymous coffin mummy board – Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (Inv. E.5907) – 158, 602

Museums' collections

Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology (Aarhus)

Coffin and mummy board of Tabasety – 37, 61, 83, 103, 109, 116, 138, 139, 140, 173, 174, 177, 191, 192, 212, 213, 214, 218, 222, 223, 230, 231, 235, 238, 257, 259, 545, 553, 566, 603

Vleeshuis Museum (Antwerp)

Coffin of Nesikhonsu – 92, 603

Michael Carlos Museum (Atlanta)

Mummy board – 72, 93, 179, 209, 603

Coffin of Tanatnektahat – 78, 80, 138, 177, 182, 208, 209, 245, 265, 275, 288, 448, 603

Coffin of Pashedkhonsu – 147, 150, 187, 603

Museum of Fine Arts (Boston)

Coffin set of Henuttaui – 76, 177, 243, 288, 603

Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire (Brussels)

Outer coffin of Butehamun (E. 5288) – 229, 603

Egyptian Museum in Cairo

Coffin of Padiamun –

Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge)

Coffin set of Nesipawershefyt – 63, 69, 81, 83, 93, 117, 134, 141, 175, 195, 223, 224, 249, 258, 259, 267, 279, 282, 283, 286, 294, 301, 306, 367, 392, 394, 396, 420, 421, 426, 446, 546, 603

Fragment from a coffin (E.GA.2861.1943) – 78, 603

National Museums of Scotland (Edimburgh)

Coffin of Tamut, also named Tjenetweretheqau – 469, 603

Kestner Museum (Hannover)

Mummy board of Hori – 46, 47, 72, 74, 78, 82, 83, 103, 114, 173, 174, 190, 208, 209, 434, 490, 603

Leeds City Museum (Leeds)

Coffin set of Nesiamun – 50, 51, 60, 73, 75, 79, 82, 83, 86, 93, 98, 101, 102, 110, 132, 133, 135, 138, 176, 177, 178, 208, 209, 222, 232, 237, 603

Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (Leiden)

Coffin set of Khonsuhotep – 82, 83, 89, 93, 134, 135, 138, 175, 177, 603

Coffin set of Amenhotep – 51, 52, 73, 79, 91, 93, 101, 134, 137, 142, 147, 176, 177, 181, 183, 184, 185, 208, 209, 210, 256, 257, 261, 262, 264, 272, 281, 293, 296, 302, 315, 603

Mummy board of Nesipanebu – 76, 82, 101, 142, 174, 210, 603

Musée des Beaux-Arts (Lyon)

Coffin of Padikhonsu – 324, 331, 469, 603

British Museum (London)

Anonymous coffin (EA 24907) – 62, 79, 312, 330, 407, 408, 603

Anonymous coffin (EA 29591) – 261, 399, 401, 448, 603

Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles)

Anonymous coffin set (M.47.3a-c) – 50, 51, 52, 74, 80, 81, 89, 93, 101, 102, 133, 134, 135, 178, 179, 182, 208, 229, 243, 262, 263, 264, 272, 276, 603

Museo Arqueológico Nacional (Madrid)

Coffin set of Amenemhat – 51, 66, 74, 75, 83, 110, 177, 182, 183, 185, 210, 219, 503, 604

Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne (Marseille)

Mummy board of Tentamun – 81, 95, 100, 136, 604

Coffin of Khonsumes – 65, 67, 262, 289, 291, 604

Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts (Moscow)

Coffin of Amuniuesankh – 156, 604

Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst (Munich)

Coffin set of Herytubekhet – 173, 174, 208, 209, 227, 233, 241, 604

Coffin set of Henuttaui – 129, 313, 354, 377, 378, 379, 604

Brooklyn Museum (New York)

Outer coffin of Pasebakhaienipet – 50, 51, 52, 61, 62, 76, 81, 82, 83, 84, 89, 133, 136, 140, 176, 175, 210, 222, 229, 233, 239, 243, 246, 257, 263, 265, 272, 276, 283, 290, 291, 293, 305, 392, 436, 443, 446, 604

Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York)

Coffin set of Henuttaui – 50, 51, 52, 60, 73, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 86, 89, 91, 102, 110, 132, 133, 134,

135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 141, 173, 174, 177, 182, 185, 208, 227, 233, 241, 514, 541, 604

Coffin set of Nauny – 61, 62, 81, 83, 84, 135, 138, 143, 177, 182, 183, 185, 210, 222, 227, 228, 233, 234, 241, 244, 245, 250, 260, 263, 265, 267, 277, 279, 283, 284, 285, 296, 297, 299, 300, 307, 491, 514, 537, 565, 604

Coffin set of Tabakmut – 72, 73, 76, 79, 91, 103, 150, 180, 181, 182, 183, 185, 186, 209, 210, 211, 213, 604

Coffin set of Yutefamun – 74, 81, 177, 210, 568, 604

Coffin set of Gautseshen – 173, 187, 604

Coffin set of Anresenmes – 91, 175, 176, 208, 222, 224, 233, 237, 604

Anonymous outer coffin (26.3.6) – 504, 506, 604

Louvre Museum (Paris)

Coffin set of Panebmontu – 72, 74, 75, 79, 81, 82, 83, 91, 101, 135, 136, 137, 138, 174, 218, 397, 440, 604

Coffin set of Sutimes – 61, 66, 67, 68, 69, 79, 177, 392, 604

Coffin set of Paser– 61, 82, 85, 91, 132, 135, 137, 208, 209, 210, 244, 255, 257, 261, 263, 265, 290, 291, 369, 372, 402, 459, 604

Coffin set of Tanethereret – 135, 227, 228, 233, 244, 277, 280, 289, 604

Carnegie Museum of Natural History (Pittsburgh)

Anonymous coffin – 183, 604

Náprstkovo Museum (Prague)

Anonymous coffin (P 629) – 186, 187, 604

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Richmond)

Coffin of Itiamun – 244, 263, 265, 283, 285, 289, 296, 445, 604

Museu Nacional (Rio de Janeiro)

Coffin of Hori – 61, 69, 74, 75, 81, 93, 110, 134, 208, 209, 244, 277, 280, 289, 307, 392, 402, 436, 605

Museo Egizio in Turin

Coffin of Bakenkhonsu –147, 256, 605

Coffin set of Butehamun – 61, 69, 73, 74, 76, 78, 81, 82, 83, 85, 89, 101, 132, 133, 137, 148, 179, 208, 209, 222, 229, 232, 368, 392, 394, 420, 605

Coffin set of Hori– 75, 103, 142, 150, 186, 324, 331, 332, 605

Coffin set of Khonsumose – 63, 80, 85, 93, 99, 110, 142, 147, 148, 150, 176, 187, 209, 229, 242, 244, 247, 261, 262, 264, 275, 276, 281, 282, 287, 288, 292, 302, 388, 443, 605

Mummy board of Mutemperamun – 51, 101, 147, 605

Coffin of Pahereniset – 61, 83, 93, 182, 183, 605

Coffin set of Tabakenkhonsu – 63, 78, 80, 82, 83, 86, 91, 93, 103, 134, 135, 136, 138, 175, 177, 182, 183, 185, 209, 210, 243, 246, 256, 261, 262, 264, 274, 290, 291, 314, 317, 321, 331, 332, 399, 402, 410, 444, 605

Coffin set of Tamutmuef – 156, 164, 605

Anonymous coffin – 77, 158, 331, 332, 406, 410, 605

Anonymous mummy board – 158, 605

Kunsthistorishes Museum (Vienna)

Mummy board Nesipaherentahat – 74, 76, 82, 83, 89, 102, 605

Collection Harris

Mummy board of Khaemopet – 50, 51, 74, 78, 79, 80, 101, 110, 132, 137, 440, 605



Yellow coffins form one of the largest and more intriguing corpus of Egyptian body containers. In terms of pictorial decoration, they excel in quality and levels of complexity, forming a unique art historical phenomenon. This book proposes an innovative approach to the examination of the visual culture displayed in these objects with a view not only to carry out an 'iconographic mapping' of the repertoire used in the several components of the yellow coffins but also to understand how and why they evolved along the 21st Dynasty. Ultimately this examination helps us to unravel the several layers of meaning displayed in these objects and to foresee the sociopolitical role they played in the Theban society of the 21st Dynasty.

Besides theoretical insights, this book provides useful methods to stimulate researchers in exploring yellow coffins by themselves, by giving them objective tools for dating the compositions and understand the significance of a given coffin within the broader context of the yellow corpus.

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