

A COFFIN FRAGMENT WITH CHAPTERS 1 AND 72 OF THE BOOK OF THE DEAD IN THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM

Pavel Onderka – Jiří Honzl¹

ABSTRACT: The Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures keeps a small collection of fragments of ancient Egyptian *qeresu*-coffins dated to the Late Period (ca. 747–332 BCE), specifically the Twenty-fifth Dynasty (ca. 747–664 BCE). Five of the six pieces came from the Monthu priests' burials at Deir el-Bahri and have been already published in the past. The sixth unprovenanced specimen, Inv. No. P 4551, is dealt with in the present paper. While its provenience remains unknown it was accessioned as part of the former study collection of the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology, Charles University in Prague. The decoration of the piece comprises of depictions of two Sons of Horus, Amset and Hapi, with captions and partially preserved texts of two chapters of the *Book of the Dead*, namely the Chapter BD 1 and Chapter BD 72. Both of these spells represented typical components of the decoration of coffins. Based on the texts, the anonymous owner of the coffin could be identified as a woman. The stylistic analysis confirmed the dating of the fragment to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty and its Theban provenience.

KEYWORDS: Late Period Egypt – Twenty-fifth Dynasty – Theban region – *qeresu*-coffin – *Book of the Dead*

Introduction

The Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, namely its Ancient Near East and Africa Collection keep six fragments of *qeresu*-coffins dated to the Late Period (ca. 747–332 BCE), specifically the Twenty-fifth Dynasty (ca. 747–664 BCE).

Qeresu-coffins² represent a type of ancient Egyptian outer coffins which appeared for the first time during the reign of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty and continued to develop during the consecutive dynasties. These coffins comprised of two parts – a rectangular casket, representing in theological terms the earthly realm, and a vaulted lid, representing the sky. In their corners, the coffins were supported by four small pillars. The overall shape symbolised the tomb of Osiris.

Five of the fragments can be with certainty traced back to the burials of the Monthu priests' family members deposited in the terraces of the funerary temple of Queen

1 Contacts: Pavel Onderka & Jiří Honzl, National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, Ancient Near East and Africa Collection, Prague, Czech Republic; e-mail: pavel.onderka@nm.cz, jiri.honzl@nm.cz. The present work was financially supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic (DKRVO 2024–2028/18.1.e).

2 e.g. Aston 2003, pp. 143–149; Taylor 2018.

Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri.³ Although the provenance of the sixth fragment is not known, Western Thebes seems to be also its likely source.

The five fragments⁴ originally formed part of the collection of Archduke Josef Ferdinand von Toskana (1872–1942), who purchased over 400 antiquities during his visit to Egypt in 1903.⁵ In 1906, the archduke established a museum bearing his name – The Archduke Josef Ferdinand Museum – in Olomouc, the present-day Czech Republic. Between 1906 and 1981, the entire collection was hosted in several successive institutions. Eventually, the Regional Museum in Olomouc handed over the collection to the Náprstek Museum. All five pieces have been published by Verner in his publication on ancient Egyptian coffins in the collections of former Czechoslovakia.⁶ All five fragments originate from coffins, which are currently kept in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, namely those of Ankhefenkhonsu (ii) (No. CG 41004;⁷ fragments Inv. Nos. P 6220 and P 6221), Neskhonsu (ii) (No. CG 41003;⁸ fragments Inv. Nos. P 6222 and P 6223) and Iretheriru (son of Nespasef and Tashepenkhonsu) (No. CG 41016;⁹ fragment Inv. No. P 6224). Other pieces from the Monthu priests' family burials, including statuettes of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, statues of *akhom*-birds and a shabti box form part of the archducal collection.¹⁰

The sixth piece was accessioned by the Náprstek Museum in 1972, when it was transferred from the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology, Charles University in Prague, along with the rest of the study collection assembled by František Lexa (1876–1960), Zbyněk Žába (1917–1971), and their students since the establishment of the Egyptology Seminar at the faculty in 1925.¹¹ It could possibly be identified with a coffin fragment reportedly acquired by Lexa during his 1930–1931 study trip to Egypt.¹² The coffin fragment was registered under the Inv. No. P 4551.¹³

Fragment Inv. No. P 4551 [Figs. 1–2; Pl. 1]

The sixth fragment (max. h. 49.5 cm, max. w. 86.0 cm, th. 2.7 cm) represents approximately half of a side of a *qeresu*-coffin. The wooden board with a pair of protruding pegs on the left side which served for setting the side board into the corner frame was covered with a layer of stucco and polychrome decoration (yellow, blue, red and black on white background). The surface of the fragment is extensively damaged and imperfectly restored.

The fragment's decoration is divided into three parts, namely a horizontal line of slightly cursive and partly destroyed hieroglyphic text bordered by dividers and

3 Sheikholeslami 2003.

4 Inv. Nos. P 6220 – P 6224.

5 Podhorný and Onderka 2018.

6 Verner 1982, pp. 182–205.

7 Moret 1913, pp. 75–88.

8 Moret 1913, pp. 191–200.

9 Moret 1913, pp. 168–174.

10 Onderka 2013.

11 Acc. No. 51/[19]72.

12 Suková 2006, pp. 10–12.

13 The fragment is not included in Verner 1982.

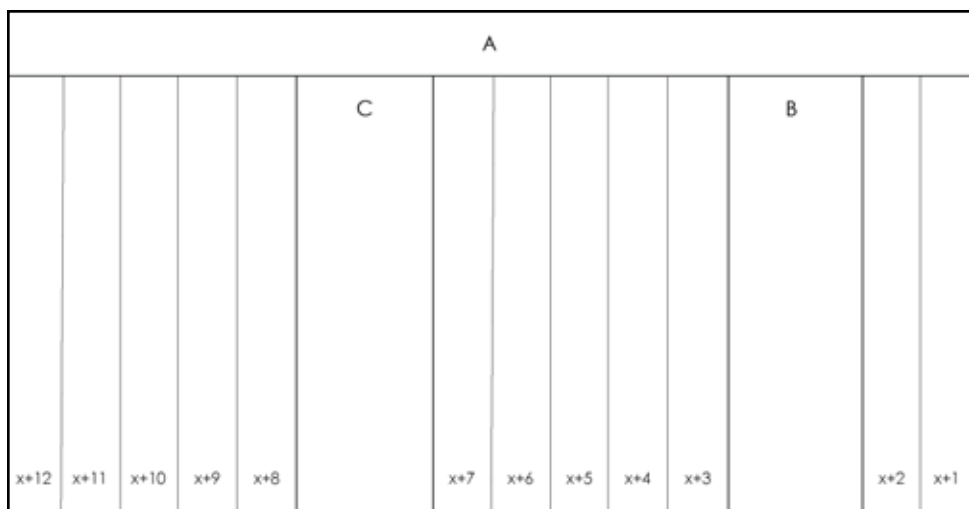


Fig. 1. Layout of texts on the coffin fragment Inv. No. P 4551 (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

running along the upper edge; a central panel featuring 12 preserved columns (Columns [x+1] to [x+12]) alternating with depictions of two Sons of Horus – Amset on the right and Hapi on the left – both identified with a hieroglyphic caption; and a frieze along the bottom edge consisting of palace façades, the so-called *serekhs*. The figure of Amset is positioned between Lines [x+2] and [x+3], while that of Hapi was between Lines [x+7] and [x+8].

The faces of the Sons of Horus are largely damaged; however, the preserved parts confirm that Amset was human-headed, while Hapi had the head of a baboon. Both wear tripartite wigs. Broad *wesekh*-collars hang around their necks. They are dressed in corselets hanging on shoulder straps and short pleated kilts. Bull tails hang from the belts of their kilts. Their arms are adorned with armllets. The exposed parts of their bodies are red, as typical for the depiction of males. In their left hands they hold a *was*-sceptre, and an *ankh* in their right. The captions above their heads (Lines B and C) had the form of Osiris + [name of the Son of Horus], i.e. ‘[Osiris Amse]t’ and ‘Osiris Hapi’.

The horizontal line [Line A] contains a section of Chapter 72 of the *Book of the Dead*, i.e. Spell for Opening the Tomb, a chapter closely connected by its content to the inner parts of the tomb and thus regularly appearing on sarcophagi and coffins.¹⁴ The text in the 12 columns of the central panel represents a portion of Chapter 1 of the *Book of the Dead*, i.e. Spell for Going out into the Day, perhaps the most widely reproduced chapter of the entire collection.¹⁵ Unlike the fragments from the collection of Archduke Josef Ferdinand, the texts from Inv. No. P 4551 do not contain either the name of the deceased, nor any other genealogical information, which would help establish the identity of the owner. Based on the use of the hieroglyph B1 of the Gardiner’s list (i.e. a seated woman) for the first singular suffix pronoun, it could be assumed that it was

14 e.g. Quirke 2013, pp. 173–174.

15 e.g. Quirke 2013, pp. 5–12; Tarek Sayed Tawfik 2023.



Fig. 2. Transcription of the hieroglyphic texts on the fragment Inv. No. P 4551 (Illustration: Pavel Onderka, Vlastimil Vrtal).

a woman. Fragment Inv. No. P 4551 exemplifies the contextualisation of the spells in question. Chapter BD 1 and Chapter BD 72 were meant to be written on coffins or simply known by the deceased.¹⁶ Similarly to the present fragment, Chapter BD 72 may be found spread horizontally at the top of *Book of the Dead* manuscripts, which are otherwise vertically oriented.¹⁷

Chapter BD 72

Line A [... w]b³=j r=f[n] 3h[kw(j) m] jrw=j shm[kw(j)] m hk3.w(=j) 3tp.kw(j)
 m 3h.w=j nhm=tn <w>j m-^c 3[dw ...]
 [...] I am penetrating to you, (for) I am glorious in my form, I have power over my magic, I am loaded with my power of the *akh*-spirit. May you save me from the F[urious One ...]

Captions

Line B [wsjr jms]y
 [Osiris Ams]et

Line C wsjr hpy
 Osiris Hapy

Chapter BD 1

Column [x+1] [wn.n=j hn^c h3y.w] wsjr [j3]kb[y].w
 [I was with the mourners of] Osiris, those who lamented

16 Régen 2017, p. 106.

17 Mosher 2017, p. 247.

- Column [x+2] [wsjr m jdb].wy rht.y sm^{3c}.[hrw]
[Osiris on] the Washerman's [Sho]res and who made (him) justified
- Column [x+3] r h[fty].w=f hsf (sic!)¹⁸ n sw r^c n
against his enemies. So said he, Ra, to
- Column [x+4] dhw.ty sm^{3c}-hrw wsjr r hfty.w=f
Thoth: 'Make Osiris justified against his enemies!'
- Column [x+5] hsf (sic!)¹⁹ jr {j}.n(=j) dhwty [w]n.n=j r-hn^c hr
So (he) said. (And) so have I, Thoth, done. I was with Horus
- Column [x+6] hrw pw n hbs tštš n wn
on the day of the clothing of the Dismembered, of the opening
- Column [x+7] tph.t r j^cj {jb} n wr[dw]-jb
of the cavern of purifying of the Weary One (and of)
- Column [x+8] sštš s[š]tš m r^c-stš.w wn.n=j
concealing the secrets in Rosetau. I was
- Column [x+9] r-hn^c hrw m nd k^ch jšb
with Horus in protecting of the left arm
- Column [x+10] n {n} wsjr jm(y) shm pr=j
of Osiris, who is in Letopolis. I go out
- Column [x+11] k=j m wnmy.t hrw
and I enter from the fire on the day
- Column [x+12] dr sbj.w m shm wn.n[=j ...]
of banishing of the rebels from Letopolis. I was [...]

In terms of its decoration, the texts, and their rendering, the coffin of the present fragment has the closest parallel in the coffin of Titenese (Egyptian Museum in Cairo; No. CG 41020),²⁰ the wife of the vizier Nesmin B from the Twenty-fifth Dynasty.²¹ The texts are identical except for minor details, such as the rendering of the name of Osiris and occasional omission of some sign in writing. Another close parallel is the coffin of Titenese's son Khahor (Egyptian Museum in Cairo, No. CG 41021).²² It is without a doubt that the coffin to which fragment Inv. No. P 4551 belonged was

18 Read: hrw=fy.

19 Read: hrw=fy (sw).

20 Moret 1913, pp. 199–219; Pls. 20–22; unfortunately the corresponding side from the coffin is not reproduced in the plates.

21 For Nesmin B see e.g. Leahy 1980; Naunton 2011, pp. 20–21.

22 Moret 1913, pp. 219–237, Pls. 23–24.

produced in the same Theban workshop as the coffins for Titenese and Khahor and hence date to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty.

Literature:

Aston, D. (2003). The Theban West Bank from the Twenty-fifth Dynasty to the Ptolemaic Period. In: Strudwick, N. and Taylor, J. H., eds., *The Theban Necropolis. Past, Present and Future*. London: British Museum Press, pp. 138–166.

Leahy, A. (1980). Two Late Period stelae in the Fitzwilliam Museum. *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*, 8, pp. 169–180.

Moret, A. (1913). *Sarcophages de l'époque bubastite à l'époque saïte (CG 41042–41072)*, 2 vols. Le Caire: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale.

Mosher, M., (2017). Transmission of funerary literature: Saite through Ptolemaic periods. In: Scalf, F. (ed.), *Book of the Dead: becoming god in ancient Egypt*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, pp. 85–96.

Naunton, C. H. (2011). *Regime Change and The Administration of Thebes During The Twenty-fifth Dynasty*. PhD Thesis, Swansea University, Swansea.

Onderka, P. (2013). 1858–1862: Pohřby Moncuových kněží v Dér el-Bahrí. In: Onderka, P., Mynářová, J., Podhorný, R. and Vrtal, V., *Poklady starého Egypta. Sbírka Josefa Ferdinanda Habsburského*. Olomouc: Vlastivědné muzeum v Olomouci, pp. 18–31.

Podhorný, R. and Onderka, P. (2018). The Journey of Archduke Josef Ferdinand of Austria to Egypt in 1903. In: Gregorovičová, E. (ed.), *Ludvík Salvátor Toskánský, vědec a cestovatel, v roce 170. výročí narození*. Středočeský sborník historický, 46(1). Praha: Národní Archiv.

Quirke, S. (2013). *Going out in daylight - prt m hrw: the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: translation, sources, meaning*. GHP Egyptology 20. London: Golden House.

Régen, I. (2017). The archaeology of the Book of the Dead. In: Scalf, F. (ed.), *Book of the Dead: becoming god in ancient Egypt*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, pp. 97–106.

Sheikholeslami, C. M. (2003). The burials of priests of Montu at Deir el-Bahari in the Theban necropolis. In: Strudwick, N. and Taylor, J. H., eds., *The Theban Necropolis. Past, Present and Future*. London: British Museum Press, pp. 131–157.

Suková, L. (2006). František Lexa nad the National Museum in Prague. *Annals of the Náprstek Museum*, 27, pp. 1–13.

Tarek Sayed Tawfik (2023). Spell 1 of the Book of the Dead and its vignette. In: Lucarelli, R. and Stadler, M. A., eds., *The Oxford handbook of the Egyptian Book of the Dead*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 357–372.

Taylor, J. H. (2018). Evidence for Social Patterning in Theban Coffins of Dynasty 25. In: Taylor, J. H. and Vandenbeusch, M., eds., *Ancient Egyptian Coffins. Craft traditions and functionality*. British Museum Publications on Egypt and Sudan 4. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, pp. 349–386.

Verner, M. (1982). *Tschechoslowakei, Lieferung 1: Altägyptische Särge in den Museen und Sammlungen der Tschechoslowakei*. Corpus antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum: Lose-Blatt-Katalog ägyptischer Altertümer. Praha: Univerzita Karlova.

Vittmann, G. (1978). *Priester und Beamte im Theben der Spätzeit: genealogische und prosopographische Untersuchungen zum thebanischen Priester- und Beamtentum der 25. und 26. Dynastie*. Veröffentlichungen der Institute für Afrikanistik und Ägyptologie der Universität Wien 3. Beiträge zur Ägyptologie 1. Wien: Afro-Pub.



Pl. 1. Coffin fragment Inv. No. P 4551 (Photo: Jiří Vaněk).