

Death as an Eternal Process

*A case study of a 21st dynasty coffin at the University
Museum of Cultural Heritage in Oslo*

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Abstract

After a major archeological discovery at the west bank of modern day Luxor in 1891, Egyptian authorities decided to donate a large amount of priestly mummy-coffins to the foreign powers present in Egypt at the time. Coffin C47714 at the University Museum of Cultural Heritage in Oslo was one of six such coffins, all originating from the same tomb, presented to King Oscar II in 1894.

The wooden coffin, which is shaped in the image of a man with his arms across his chest, is densely decorated with religious icons and hieroglyphic inscriptions.

Through a careful study of the coffin's shape, materials, colors, and decorations, I have suggested an interpretation of what I call the coffin's *religious function*. I define religious function as the symbolic-mythological role the coffin took on in the ancient Egyptian funerary ritual.

Studies of older Egyptian coffins have shown that the coffin played a significant part in the funerary ritual and took on several roles from the myths, some of which were reenacted in the ritual. The rituals and the myths were recorded on the coffin in order to ensure the deceased a safe journey to the underworld and a happy existence in the beyond for eternity. On C47714 I have found evidence of continuation as well as of change. Old ideas are combined in new, creative ways, attesting to the genius of the religious thinkers at the time. Most prominent is the idea of the oneness between the deceased and Osiris, the king of the underworld, and Amon-Ra, the sun-creator god. This idea, which is very much in line with the general theology of the 21st dynasty, is expressed in numerous ways and is reflected in every aspect of the coffin's decoration program.

In the process it has been necessary to reconstruct the coffin's history after it was buried and up to the present, and reestablish the relationship between C47714 and the remaining coffins presented to King Oscar II in 1894.

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1 Introduction

Coffins and sarcophagi always played a significant role in ancient Egyptian funerary rituals. As the innermost structure to enclose the mummy, the coffin held the central position of the tomb throughout pharaonic history. On a practical level, the coffin functioned as a shelter for the corpse that protected it against exterior interference. From the late Old Kingdom and onwards, the coffin was also used as a writing surface for religious texts and images. But more importantly, the coffin was in itself, perhaps more than any other object in the burial equipment, a catalyst in the great “magical” project of the Ancient Egyptian burial¹.

Throughout history the shape and material of the coffins, as well as the repertoire of motifs decorated on them, varied dramatically. A change in form could reflect a change in religious thought. John Taylor summarizes the many symbolic roles of the ancient Egyptian coffin as follows:

“ It could be interpreted as an eternal house for the spirit, as a miniaturized version of the tomb, as a substitute body, or as an image of the glorified deceased elevated to the status of divinity. In this last aspect it could represent him or her in the external form of such a being, (...) or it could emphasize his identification with Osiris (...) The coffin could be personified as the goddess Nut, the mother of Osiris, within whose womb the deceased was enclosed (...) It could represent the entire universe in which the deceased existed, its decoration reflecting the characteristics of heaven and netherworld, and alluding to the rejuvenating cycle of the sun.”²

At all times in Ancient Egypt, the development of coffins mirrored the development in afterlife beliefs. Some coffin types and elements of the coffin structure were short lived, and disappeared from the sources shortly after their appearance, never to be seen again. Others disappeared only to reappear some centuries later, while others

¹ The concept of magic will be discussed in chapter 5.

² Taylor, 2001b, p. 164.

were kept for millennia alongside new elements that reflected completely different ideas. Whereas the various types of coffins from the Old to the New Kingdom are characterized by experimentation leading to the establishment of fixed forms, late and post New Kingdom craftsmen also employed *archaisation*, i.e. the copying of earlier styles.

The earlier coffins therefore reflect a limited number of ideas compared to the later ones. The late and post New Kingdom artists continued the traditions of their own time, adopted features from earlier times and invented new forms. These coffins thus convey an unprecedented richness in form and decoration. In one and the same coffin, features originating from almost any point in the tradition can occur. At this point in the history of coffin decoration, this tradition already spans some 2000 years.

Although it might seem unnecessary to include the bulk of this tradition in a study dealing with the 21st dynasty, it is in fact a prerequisite to understand the coffins from the late and post New Kingdom.

Purpose and method

Purpose

The present study is an investigation of a Late New Kingdom coffin at the University Museum of Cultural Heritage in Oslo (UKM), with emphasis on what I have called the coffin's *religious function*. This term is an extension of Taylor's "symbolic role"³ or "symbolic function"⁴ that includes not only mythological allusions but also the ritual function of the coffin. This approach is meant to answer the basic questions any curious spectator will ask on the first encounter with this awe inspiring artifact: Why did the ancients bother to produce such a complicated thing just to bury it in the

³ Taylor 2001a, p. 214.

⁴ Taylor 2001b, p. 164.

ground? What does this multitude of decoration mean, and what system of thought is behind it?

Two secondary purposes of this study should be mentioned. First, my encounter with the three museums housing the Swedish/Norwegian Bab el-Gusus coffins⁵ has proved the need for a critical analysis of their respective catalogues and various background materials on the coffins. The apparent absence of experts when the coffins were shipped, unloaded and finally registered back in 1893-94, led to flaws in the catalogues. Accumulating over 110 years of publications and reissuing of catalogues, these flaws are now guilty of a complete chaos regarding the coffins' background and relationship to each other. Through a comparison of these sources, a careful study of the coffins in question, as well as consultation of the Egyptian catalogues in which the coffins first were registered, I hope to pave the way for a reestablishment of the history of these coffins in modern times, as well as the relationship between them (chapter 3).

Second, it is a point for me to give a thorough presentation of this unpublished coffin, so often requested by scholars of this field⁶. The comprehensive picture-material included serves this end. This inquiry is not the place for an exhaustive analysis of all the motifs decorating the coffin. Even so, pictures of the entire coffin ensemble and all of its decorations are represented in Appendix 1, thus giving the reader the possibility to judge for her/himself the selection of decorative elements discussed in the conclusion chapter (chapter 5).

The two main purposes of this study are directly related. Before any attempt to establish the coffin's precise type, date, and place of origin can be initiated, the objects of the inquiry must be identified. In particular, it is worth questioning whether or not the objects given the catalogue number C47714 today really belonged to the same man, and if there are other objects located elsewhere belonging to the same

⁵ This collection of coffins will be identified in chapter 3.

⁶ For instance Billing 2002, p. 293, Niwinski 1988a, p. 33.

coffin ensemble. To establish for certain the type of the coffin is a prerequisite for an analysis of the coffins religious functions, since these would be relative to time and place. The remaining documents and objects given to Oscar II in 1893 is a good place to start the investigation.

Method

Interpretation of this ancient material requires a substantial research and an in-depth study of the culture that produced the coffin. The first step of this study was therefore to learn as much as possible about Ancient Egyptian geography, history, language, society and culture, i.e. to enter the field of *Egyptology*.

Reading Egyptology as well as Ancient Egyptian texts, both in original and translation, have given me a basic understanding of the culture. I spent about 13 months in Egypt over the last three years, seeing for myself the geographic and climatic conditions from which this ancient culture emerged, developed and declined. I visited a vast number of sites, mainly temples and tombs. The fall of 2001 I studied Ancient Egyptian art, language, science and funerary customs at the American University in Cairo (AUC), which became an “academic base” on my later expeditions. I have also visited some 25 museums in Egypt, Europe and USA, housing exhibitions of Ancient Egyptian art⁷. Through my job as a consultant for the Museum of Cultural Heritage in Oslo, I was fortunate to work closely with the artifacts.

Photography proved to be a valuable tool for me, both for the general studies of Ancient Egypt as encountered on my field trips, and in recording data from the coffins under inquiry. Generally, I have used the camera to record icons, architecture, landscape, etc., while texts were copied by hand. The latter method was used to get a better understanding of the individual signs, and how they were rendered by the scribe.

After the material was properly recorded, I started the task of “breaking down” the vast material into suitable categories, a task closely related to the interpretation, translation and identification of texts and icons. For this purpose I have used a number of works on Ancient Egyptian coffins. To establish the coffin’s type, I have employed the works of Andrzej Niwinski⁸, with René van Walsem’s critical remarks on his work taken into consideration⁹. The interpretation of the texts and icons, to which we shall soon return, has been an ongoing process, which is restricted only by the time limits this study is subject to. Rather than focusing on details in the decoration, I will consider the coffin as a whole, and examine how shape, structure, materials and colors, as well as iconographic and hieroglyphic inscriptions, work together to realize the coffin’s religious purpose. The coffin here examined has been treated as part of a larger corpus of contemporary coffins. To some extent, the single coffin will be compared to this group. Other exterior sources will be considered when I find it necessary, but this is first and foremost a study of what the coffin can say about itself. Although a longer list of sources would have been desirable, this approach has been necessary to limit the study.

Thanks to the help of Eivind Bratlie in the conservation section of UKM, I have been able to carry out some technical analysis of the materials and techniques used in the production of the coffin. The different methods employed for this work will be described for each case in chapter 3. The last stage of the study was the selection of material from the coffin suitable to shed light on the coffin’s religious function.

⁷ The majority of these visits was not part of the systematic collection of data to this study, and is therefore not included in the list of sources.

⁸ In particular, Niwinski 1988a, p. 65-99.

⁹ Walsem 1993.

Theoretical reflections on the interpretation of text, image, and symbol.

The material at hand consists of a peculiar combination of text and images, where the latter is dominating. Before we turn to the material itself, I would like to address some issues related to the study of religious iconography and the special interplay between text and image in Ancient Egyptian art.

Iconography

Erwin Panofsky distinguished between three levels of interpretation when analyzing art¹⁰. The *pre –iconographical* level is purely descriptive, and right interpretation is reached by *practical experience* and knowledge of the *history of style*, i.e. the “insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, objects and events were expressed by forms”¹¹. The *iconographical* level is analytical, and aims at explaining the object in question in terms of the images, stories and allegories that can be derived from the image. It includes conventional meaning apparent to the contemporary spectator. This level is dependent on, and contributes to, the discipline of typology. On the much debated *iconological* level, the inquirer tries to interpret the object’s “intrinsic meaning”, and in doing so, moves beyond the object itself and even beyond the intention of the artist.

As long as we limit ourselves to stating that Leonardo da Vinci’s famous fresco shows a group of thirteen men around a table, and that this group of men represents the Last Supper, we deal with the work of art as such, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as its own properties and qualifications. But when we try to understand it as a document of Leonardo’s personality, or of the civilization of the Italian High Renaissance, or of a peculiar religious attitude, we deal with the work of art as a symptom of something else which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as

¹⁰ Panofsky 1982, p. 26-41.

¹¹ Panofsky 1982, p. 41.

more particularized evidence of this” something else”. This discovery and interpretation of these “symbolical” values (which are often unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express) is the object of what we may call “iconology as opposed to “iconography”¹².

By comparing the object to as many records from the place and period in question as possible, the art historian working on this level can, with a proper “synthetic intuition”, discover meaning in the object not visible to the unspecialized spectator.

On the iconological level, the artifact in question is regarded as the product of a particular personality subject to a particular socio-cultural setting, but also as a window into this world. Panofsky’s iconology is therefore not relevant to art historians only, but to anyone aspiring to investigate human activities of the past, whether political, philosophical, poetic, or religious.

“It is in the search for intrinsic meaning or content that the various humanistic disciplines meet on a common plane instead of serving as handmaidens for each other”¹³

By searching for the coffin’s religious function, I aim to operate on the iconological level. I want to examine not only the “compositional and iconographical features” of the coffin, but I also hope to say something about the “peculiar religious attitude” it represents. And although “in actual work, the methods of approach which here appear as three unrelated operations of research merge with each other into one organic and indivisible process”¹⁴, these analytic levels of interpretation created by Panofsky can be useful to bear in mind.

Although Panofsky’s theories were largely accepted, critique has been raised against him, and especially against his iconological level of interpretation. Some scholars have, along the lines of Panofsky’s own reservations, raised the question of whether

¹² Panofsky 1982, p. 31.

¹³ Panofsky 1982, p. 39.

¹⁴ Panofsky 1982, p. 39.

or not a division between *conventional* and *natural* meaning is possible¹⁵. Ernest H. Gombrich stresses the fact that seeing is an active process, and that the beholder is subject to his own references in the encounter with art as with everything else. To this active spectator, form and meaning merge into one symbolic unity that is automatically matched, through the *faculty of projection*, with a stereotype known from his own culture¹⁶.

In an often quoted passage in the introduction of his book *Kingship and the Gods*¹⁷, Henri Frankfort states that “Art is expression in form, a direct expression directly grasped by the spectator”¹⁸, somewhat resembling Panofsky’s “synthetic intuition” as means of interpretation. To the modern scholar, it is apparent that the beholders intuitive, direct understanding of a given artifact is different from the “direct expression” of the artist. Both Panofsky and Frankfort did, however, stress the need for a substantial “insight into historical processes the sum total of which may be called tradition”¹⁹ as a condition for “correct” interpretation. In my own work with the coffin C47714, I believe my understanding has been proportional to the amount of general research conducted in the field of Egyptology. Realizing that I never can grasp the “intrinsic meaning” of the coffin, or the “direct expression” of the artist fully, I do believe that my research at least have narrowed the gap between the artist’s and my own *Weltanschauung*.

Text and image

A contemporary of Panofsky and Frankfort who also concerned herself with the direct experience of art was the philosopher Susanne K. Langer. She regarded both text and image as *symbols*. Signs and symbols and the way they convey meaning have puzzled philosophers and linguists for centuries. Langer defined the difference between a sign and a symbol as follows: Any use of *signs* will constitute three elements: a user

¹⁵ Kippenberg 1993.

¹⁶ Gombrich 1989, p. 182-183.

¹⁷ Te Velde 1986.

¹⁸ Frankfort 1984, p. 6.

(subject), a sign, and its object. The sign stands in a one-to-one correlation to its object, and when the subject senses the sign, its object will come to his mind²⁰. To the subject, the difference between the sign and its object is simply that he finds “one more interesting than the other, and the latter more available than the former”²¹.

One can differentiate between natural and man-made signs. An example of the former can be smoke signaling fire, or thunder signaling rain, whereas the latter can be the sound of a bell signaling that there is someone at the door. Signals often evoke a certain line of action, and correct interpretation of them is therefore crucial to survival for both men and animals.

The *symbol* resembles the sign, but is more complex and is restricted to human communication. Essential for the symbol, is the indefinite and fluent object. When the subject senses a symbol, it is not a concrete object that comes to his mind, but a *concept*. A symbol has multiple layers of meaning, can have an imprecise number of connotations, and tend to evoke emotional reactions rather than action. Furthermore, a symbol can evoke different emotions for different individuals, can accumulate new meaning over time²², and is thus impossible to define precisely²³.

Langer’s definition of a symbol was broad, and covered every means of communicating *meaning*, including language, ritual, myth and music. She saw, however, an important distinction between the *discursive* symbols expressed through language, and the *presentational* symbols expressed first of all through images:

Language in the strict sense is essentially discursive; it has permanent units of meaning which are combinable into larger units; it has fixed equivalences that make definition and translation possible; its connotations are general, so that it requires non-verbal acts, like pointing, looking or emphatic voice-inflections, to assign denotations to its terms. In all these salient characters it differs from wordless

¹⁹ Panofsky 1982, p. 39.

²⁰ Langer 1967, p. 53-78.

²¹ Langer 1967, p. 58.

²² Braarvig 1997, p. 58-59.

²³ Heisig 1993, p. 204-205.

symbolism, which is non-discursive and untranslatable, does not allow for definitions within its own system, and cannot directly convey generalities. The meanings given through language are successively understood, and gathered into a whole by the process called discourse; the meanings of all other symbolic elements that compose a larger, articulate symbol are understood only through the meaning of the whole, through their relations within the total structure. Their functioning as symbols depends on the fact that they are involved in a simultaneous, integral presentation. This kind of semantic may be called “presentational symbolism”, to characterize its essential distinction from discursive symbolism, or “language” proper.²⁴

Saphinaz-Amal Naguib has shown how this position illustrates the substantial differences existing between Western art and the tradition to be discussed here²⁵. The fundamental change in art that was brought about by the “Greek revolution”²⁶ is well known. To say it with Schäfer, “...the opposition between the Egyptian rendering of nature and that initiated in Greek art and brought to a scientific conclusion in the modern era is an opposition between two fundamentally different modes of artistic creation”²⁷. Naguib concluded that Egyptian art also had a discursive element, and therefore stands closer to the text-tradition than Western art ever did²⁸.

It is clear that in a culture using a fluent system of images (hieroglyphs) for writing instead of a fixed alphabet of letters, the relationship between text and image is far closer than it is in Western culture. Admittedly, the Latin letters also have a pictorial origin, and the hieroglyphs can be used as independent from the image as English text can. But particularly in the symbolic language of Ancient Egyptian religion, the gap is made even narrower by combining the two media into one expression. As we shall see on our coffin, small texts are often included within the image, spelling out the names of the characters, the nature of their actions or the ritual significance of the image.

²⁴ Langer 1967, p. 96-97.

²⁵ Naguib 1997, p. 75. See also Naguib 2001, p. 45, where the same argument is used for Islamic calligraphy.

²⁶ See for instance Gombrich 1989, p. 116-145.

²⁷ Schäfer 1980, p. 4.

²⁸ Even after the introduction of computers, internet, and hypertext, where the two forms of representation similarly merge in the graphic user interface (GUI), the connection was probably even stronger in the ancient Egyptian religious iconography.

Furthermore, the hieroglyphs can appear individually or in groups in elaborated forms as images themselves, or a part of an image can take on the form of a hieroglyph, thus blurring the distinction between the iconographical and linguistic expressions completely.

To use an example from the coffin, the coils of a snake can imitate the form of the hieroglyph *sA* (𐀀)²⁹, which means “protection”, thereby spelling out to us the protective role of the snake (Fig. 13, 17 and possibly 27)³⁰. Accordingly, groups of such hieroglyphic images can form cryptograms, full sentences of linguistic meaning hidden within a painting, relief, sculpture, and even architecture. A famous example of the latter is the twin-towered pylon gateways of temples. The massive pylon is said to imitate the shape of the hieroglyph *Axt* (𐀁), meaning “horizon”. The entrance was lined with huge flagpoles imitating the hieroglyph *nTr* (𐀂) meaning “God”. Some scholars believe these two architectural elements form the phrase *Axt nTr*, meaning “the horizon of God”³¹. Such cryptograms are common in the imagery of the coffin under inquiry and for that type of coffins in general³². Clearly, the textual tradition was not detached from art to the same extent as it is in Western culture, and discourse and presentation are present in both media. It is interesting at this point to note that the Ancient Egyptian name for “draughtsman” was *sS qdwt*, literally “scribe of forms”³³.

Since the vast majority of people in Ancient Egypt were illiterate, one can speculate that religious texts were recited to the masses. Andrzej Niwinski has suggested that the combination of text and image into one expression was developed to serve the purpose of a “mass media” easily grasped by an illiterate audience. In an article, he describes how religious texts were phrased according to a “pictorial structure”:

²⁹ According to Gardiner 1999, p. 523 the *s3* hieroglyph is a depiction of a “rolled up herdsman’s shelter of papyrus, and the connection with the snake must therefore be secondary.

³⁰ Naguib 1982, p. 24.

³¹ “Horizon” was commonly used as a metaphor for the “home” of the sun, thus making the temple a residence for the sun god. Wilkinson 2000b, p. 60-61, see also cover page illustration.

³² Niwinski 2000, p. 35, pl. II:3.

³³ Faulkner 1996, p. 246.

“For example, Amun is called, among others: “Bull of sharp-pointed [h]orns”, “He who wanders through the Underworld in purpose to give light”, “The Lord of Life who gives the circle of the Earth under the place of his face”, etc. These and other descriptions of God can easily be illustrated with the motifs from coffins and papyri of the period.”³⁴

The theory is interesting because it offers a challenge to the traditional belief that the images in question simply are illustrations to the religious texts, and instead gives priority to the image over the text. Whether it were the texts that had a “pictorial structure” or vice versa, it is clear that these creations are different means of expressing the same religious concepts, and that they were fashioned in this manner in order to reach a wide audience. Saphinaz-Amal Naguib has called this typical Egyptian expression, which “stands between the writing and the pictorial representation”³⁵, the *iconic image*. She stresses that its function is to visualize, rather than to introduce, religious beliefs:

In the process of visualizing religious beliefs, written texts and pictographs coalesce so as to form what I have called an iconic image. By iconic I mean a two-dimensional visual representation that has a codified style and a religious signification. The iconic image does not reproduce reality but rather makes religious concepts visible. It draws inspiration from the religious literature and exhibits properties that make it similar to what Gombrich has called the “arrested image”. Movement and the flow of action are captured and held still in a moment that epitomizes the whole ritual. Moreover, the iconic image is what Argan has described as: “the image which is worn out, consumed, recited for the thousand time...”³⁶

Naguib’s definition of the iconic image above is well suited for the images on the coffin, which I for the sake of convenience will continue to call “icons”. The icons, which will be presented in chapter 4, are related to the surrounding texts in various ways. Sometimes they form cryptographic clauses themselves, sometimes they are

³⁴ Niwinski 2000, p. 34-35. See also pl. 1-1.

³⁵ Naguib 1997, p. 75.

³⁶ Naguib 1997, p. 79-80.

equipped with smaller or larger sections of text within the frames of the icon, and sometimes they should be seen in connection with independent texts outside the icon.

Niwinski points out another characteristic of the icon of the 21st dynasty that makes its role as a symbol, in Langers' sense of the word, apparent. Niwinski observed that the icons of the *classic repertoire* of the early 21st dynasty after some decades had developed into abstract and condensed abbreviations of the original icon. New icons were created out of groups of such abbreviated images, thus multiplying and compromising the meaning behind. This tendency, which Niwinski called *pars pro toto*³⁷, shows how icons and symbols are interrelated, and how visual images can develop into abstract symbols.

In summary: the relationship between Ancient Egyptian text and image is much closer than it ever was in Western culture. Thus, the texts and images on the coffin under inquiry interact in the same semantic operation, and work together as one symbolic “mass media”, whose main function is to visualize religious and funerary concepts. By identifying the “primary and natural subject matter”³⁸ in terms of context and function, we have already achieved a lot on Panofsky's *pre-iconographical* level of interpretation, from which we now shall proceed.

³⁷ Niwinski 1989a, p. 19-21, 44, 121; 2000, p. 27, see also Niwinski 1988b.

³⁸ Panofsky 1982, p. 40.

2 The Coffin and its Religious Functions

As shown in the introduction (p. 3), the ancient Egyptians themselves interpreted the religious functions of their coffins in many different ways. In the first part of this chapter, I shall elaborate further on Taylor's list, discuss the various interpretations, and show how these various ideas were reflected in the coffin structure or decoration in various periods. Whereas the first part deals with multiplicity and change, the second part shall focus on continuity and unity behind the apparent diversity, and try to grasp the various forms and ideas as "symptoms of one religious phenomenon"³⁹. Coffins produced after the 22nd dynasty will not be considered in either part.

Themes and Ideas in Coffins from Early Dynastic Period through the New Kingdom

Miniature tomb

The tomb and the coffin are closely bound together in Ancient Egyptian funerary tradition, and frequently borrow structural or decorative elements from each other. As cultural innovations they seem to be closely connected, in fact so closely that sometimes in the earliest records it is hard to determine which is which.

Whereas most of the Predynastic graves were simple holes in the ground filled up by sand, the first true tombs appear in the Naqada II or the Gerzean Period (ca 3500-3100 BCE). The last autonomous chieftains of Abydos and Hierakonpolis were buried in deep, rectangular pits with mud-brick walls and log roofs, and monumental mounds of dirt above them. Within the tomb, the deceased was simply placed on the ground. The first real coffins appear approximately at the same time. Some of them were of wood and share the rectangular shape of the chieftains' tombs. These coffins were buried

directly in the ground, and the result was thus the same as for the chieftains: separation of the body from the sand by means of a single artificially built shelter.

Soon after, coffins and tombs start to occur together. The coffin became a standard element in the tomb equipment in the Early Dynastic Period. With their shared origin and basic function, it is not surprising to find that the two structures often were embedded with the same forms and decorations. An early example of this phenomenon can be seen on the palace-façade design on coffins and mastabas from the Early Dynastic period, and a later example can be seen in the cartouche shaped sepulture chambers and sarcophagi of the kings of the early 18th dynasty⁴⁰. Usually, we find that a certain decoration program applied on the tombs was adopted for coffins either later on or simultaneously, as seems to be the case in the latter example. In general we can therefore say that the tombs were the providers of material for the coffins, and not vice versa.

One special case of this general principle that was very common was the tendency to copy texts and visual art from the interior tomb walls to coffins. In the wooden chests from private Middle Kingdom tombs, we find texts and visual art clearly inspired by the chambers of the pyramids from the late 4th and the 5th dynasty. Likewise, the decoration program found in private tombs after the Amarna period inspired the yellow type anthropoid coffins from the late New Kingdom to the 22nd dynasty.

Thus it seems clear that the priests and artists responsible for the decoration program on the coffins often found inspiration in existing tombs, which provided a much richer material than did the coffins. This “borrowing” was made legitimate by the fact that the two structures shared the same basic function: a shelter for the deceased. As the religion developed, this shelter was to be understood in mythological terms and came to constitute a significant part in the increasingly comprehensive burial ritual. The more abstract understandings of the shelter probably developed by ways of metaphor

³⁹ Willems 1997, p. 239.

⁴⁰ Hayes, 1935, p. 4,9, Fig. 1-2, 5, Pl. XVIII-XIX.

and analogy, and often applied to the tomb as well as the coffin. An understanding of tomb decoration is therefore prerequisite to an understanding of coffins, and I will, where I find it necessary, apply a parallel treatment of the two.

Eternal dwelling

One such abstract understanding of the artificial room in which the deceased was put to rest, was the notion of the tomb/coffin as an eternal home. During the Early Dynastic Period, the tomb underwent serious developments. The substructure becomes multi-chambered, and the superstructures evolve from piles of dirt to large, massive structures of mud-brick or stone, the *mastabas*. The sloping walls of the mastabas could have series of recessed panels, the so-called “palace-façade” design.

The notion that the deceased dwelt in the tomb in physical form – implicit in the Predynastic custom of placing food, clothing, tools and weapons in the grave – survived into the Early Dynastic Period, and is manifested in the architecture of large tombs. The “palace-façade” design of early tombs probably reflects this concept, and the idea was carried further in some large mastaba tombs of the 2nd and 3rd Dynasties at Saqqara, Giza and Helwan. The substructures of these comprise a complex of chambers strongly reminiscent of the plans of houses of the living, as exemplified by surviving structures of New Kingdom date at el-Amarna. In the tombs, the burial chamber is equated with the main bedroom (suggesting an early conceptual association between death and sleep), while other chambers represent storerooms, servants’ quarters and even bathrooms and lavatories.⁴¹

The development of *offering niches* in the massive superstructure indicates that if the deceased was believed to dwell in his grave in a “physical form” only in Predynastic times, the “living dead” clearly has an immaterial aspect in the Early Dynastic Period. Many rituals and ritual objects within the funerary tradition were developed precisely

⁴¹ Taylor 2001a, p. 148.

to deal with the problem of communication between the immaterial “spirit”⁴² of the deceased and the material aids provided for it by the living.

One of the most successful solutions to this problem was the *false door*, which is found in the above-mentioned offering niches of private tombs in the Old Kingdom. The false doors worked as a magical gateway between the realm of the dead and the material world. Passing through this gate, the spirit went through a transformation that made it possible for it to consume or utilize the essence in the material offerings. The false door could also occur among the panels in the palace design on coffins, indicating the need for the “soul” to leave the body and the coffin to consume the offerings presented or otherwise to utilize the various material facilities provided in the tomb.

In connection to this, is it also interesting to note how textual offering lists and paintings of offerings are so essential in the decorations of tombs and coffins at all times throughout pharaonic history. It is my guess that text and painting was conceived as an abstraction of the offerings much the same way as the spirit of the dead was conceived as an abstraction of the living person, and therefore could be consumed directly without artificial aids such as the false door. Text and art used in a ritual context were in general believed to have a magical effect. When presenting in writing or painting for instance a scene where the deceased is receiving offerings in front of Osiris, this would become real in the netherworld.

It seems, however, that the idea of the shelter as an “eternal dwelling” was applied first of all to the tomb, and only secondary to the coffin, as indicated by the hieroglyphic spelling of the words. The various words for “tomb”, such as *iS* and *maHat*, take the house-determinative (𓏏) ⁴³, whereas the words for “coffin” do not. The coffin features mirroring the “eternal dwelling” idea were also restricted to the palace-façade design, which probably reflected the royalty of the deceased (see

⁴² The concept of the “soul” in Ancient Egypt will be dealt with under “Image of the transfigured deceased (saH)” below.

below) just as much as the idea of the coffin as a house for the deceased⁴⁴. Hayes found on the royal sarcophagi of the 18th dynasty that

*“The effect of the composition is highly architectural, the horizontal bands around the top edges of the box suggesting architraves or lintels, with the vertical columns serving as supporting pilasters. Nor is the effect the result of a chance arrangement, for the composition unquestionably derives from the paneled façades of the ancient Egyptian dwelling house, wherein the recessed door and the window openings are separated one from another by flay pilasters.”*⁴⁵

The presence of architectural features on coffins and particularly sarcophagi, is unquestionable. What is more complicated than what appears from Hayes statement is to decide whether these features reflect domestic architecture or the architecture of other buildings, such as the royal palace or the temple (see below).

Bed

If the burial chamber was perceived as the main bedroom in the eternal dwelling, it could be natural to think of the coffin as the bed. In fact, some bodies dating to the 1st dynasty from Tharkan in Lower Egypt were placed on beds⁴⁶, a tradition that was common also in Nubia (Kush) in later times⁴⁷. The tradition of providing the mummy within the coffin with a headrest is particularly well attested in the Middle Kingdom⁴⁸, where they also could occur painted in the friezes of objects near the mummy's head⁴⁹. But although the idea of death as a kind of sleep must have been a natural one, temporary as death was in the eyes of the Egyptians, the coffins seem primarily to reflect other ideas. The bed symbolism was early on taken over by another funerary object, the bier used in the *Stundenwachen* ritual the last night before the burial⁵⁰.

⁴³ Faulkner 1996, p. 29, 105.

⁴⁴ Willems 1997, p. 242.

⁴⁵ Hayes 1935, p. 62.

⁴⁶ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 109.

⁴⁷ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 107.

⁴⁸ Taylor 2001a, p. 107-108.

⁴⁹ Willems 1988, p. 202, 209.

⁵⁰ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 107, Willems 1997, p. 358-359.

Royal Palace

As we have seen, the idea of the tomb and hence the coffin as a residence for the deceased was realized by copying the royal *sr̄x*-façade. Doubtless, the royal palace would be magnificent as an eternal home in the afterlife, but the choice of residence also points to another aspect of Ancient Egyptian funerary tradition, namely the royalty of the deceased.

Since no royal palaces from this period have survived⁵¹, Egyptologists had to rely on other sources to identify the “palace-façade” design. Fortunately, this characteristic motive also made its way into the hieroglyphic script (*sr̄x*; ). In the script, it was used from the Early Dynastic Period in the Horus-name of the king, much the same way as the Middle Egyptian word for “royal palace” (*pr-aA*) later would be used as a reference to the king himself⁵².

Identification of private individuals with the king in death becomes apparent after the collapse of the Old Kingdom, when local officials adopt themes and motives from the complex pyramid-burials of the late 4th and early 5th dynasty kings. Here, the deceased king was identified with various gods corresponding to the various stages of transformation he was believed to go through after death, a theme mirrored also in the architecture of the pyramid chambers⁵³.

Harco Willems has showed how similar ideas were realized in standard class Middle Kingdom (SCMK⁵⁴) coffins of private individuals in the mid to late 12th dynasty⁵⁵. According to him, the mythological drama of the resurrection of Osiris was reenacted

⁵¹ Since the living quarters for commoners and royals alike were built primarily with adobe, reeds, and to some extent wood, hardly any such structure has survived.

⁵² It is through the Greek bastardization of *pr-aA* that we get the word *pharaoh*, which still is used to designate the Ancient Egyptian kings.

⁵³ Billing 2002, p. 59.

⁵⁴ This class of coffins is discussed in Willems 1988, p. 49-50. In short it designates the main-types of rectangular coffins found in the Middle Kingdom, and primarily in the 12th dynasty.

⁵⁵ Willems, 1997.

in the funerary rituals⁵⁶. The priests present take on the roles of the various deities who helped Osiris back to life in the myth, whereas the deceased himself plays the role of Osiris, the king of the netherworld. As a matter of fact, the deceased has several roles to play in the reenactment. On his journey through the underworld, on the way to the shrine of Osiris below the eastern horizon, he takes on the role of Osiris' son Horus⁵⁷, who is equal to the king of this world. When the deceased as Horus enters the shrine of his father, he embalms him, and thereby brings him back to life. In the process, the deceased takes on the role of the father who is resurrected to eternal life⁵⁸. The result of the Osiris myth was the coronation of both father and son, Horus in the world of the living, and Osiris in the Netherworld. As a result, “the mummification of the deceased was, among other things, interpreted as his coronation”⁵⁹.

The myth and its ritual reenactment were first met in the pyramid chambers, and as such seems to be dealing (among other things) with the transmission of kingship from father to son. By resurrecting the deceased king to eternal life, the son legitimizes the transfer of royal power to himself, by analogy to the myth. When and why private individuals adopted this scheme is still open to discussion. Hermann Kees suggested that the “democratization” of royal funerary ideas was a result of the decline of royal power in the first intermediate period, and that the royal privilege spread as multiple local rulers assumed “kingship”⁶⁰.

Willems opposed this well-established theory based on his findings on the SCMK-coffins. It appears that both the palace façade design and the objects of royalty in the

⁵⁶ I use the term “funerary ritual” as a blanket term covering a complex of rituals lasting for 70 days, starting with the purification ritual performed immediately after death, followed by mummification, *stundenwachen*, etc., and ending with the opening of the mouth ritual performed outside the tomb before burial. Some of these rituals will be discussed further in the text.

⁵⁷ Since Horus was believed to be a manifestation of the sun god Ra, king of the gods, this again is an allegory of the merging of Osiris and Ra every morning before sunrise. This symbiotic union caused the resurrection of both divinities. By taking on the roles of these gods, the deceased was ensured an everlasting, cyclic existence.

⁵⁸ Willems, 1997, p. 365-366.

⁵⁹ Willems 1997, p. 358.

⁶⁰ Willems 1988, p. 222.

object friezes gain popularity first in the late 11th dynasty, well into the Middle Kingdom. This indicates that the change was a result of a theological reform launched by the central power, and not a propaganda war led by its opponents⁶¹. However, as the palace façade design from private tombs and coffins of the Early Dynastic Period indicates, association with the king in death was not new to the Middle Kingdom. What is beyond doubt is that the idea of the royalty of the deceased became standardized in the Middle Kingdom, and held a central position in the funerary tradition throughout pharaonic history.

An interesting variation of the royal enclosure theme is the cartouche-shaped stone sarcophagi the kings of the early 18th dynasty had carved for themselves⁶². Just like the *srx*, the cartouche was used as an enclosure of the king's name in writing. Whereas the *srx* contained the Hours-name of the king, the cartouches, which came into use in the Old Kingdom, contained the *nsw-bity* and *sa-ra* names of the king⁶³.

Temple/Shrine

The first tombs and coffins prevented the natural preservation of the corpse that the dry sand earlier had provided. In these graves, the body was often wrapped carefully in linen. Since this innovation coincides with the sheltering that prevented the natural preservation of the body, it is often interpreted as a first attempt to preserve the corpse artificially, i.e. mummification⁶⁴. However, the linen might also have served another purpose. Erik Hornung has shown how the act of wrapping objects in linen was used to make the object sacred. He points out that the hieroglyph for “god”, used from the Old Kingdom and onwards, depicts some kind of a ritual staff (𓇑). In the most elaborate presentations, this hieroglyph can be seen carefully wrapped in linen⁶⁵. Likewise, the wrapping of the mummy in linen, which had no preserving effect on the

⁶¹ Willems 1988, p. 222.

⁶² Hayes 1935, p.4, 9, Fig. 1-2, 5, Pl. XVIII-XIX.

⁶³ Gardiner 1999, p. 71-76.

⁶⁴ See for instance Hamilton-Paterson, James and Carol Andrews, 1978, p. 35.

mummy⁶⁶, served a strictly religious purpose. By wrapping the deceased in linen, one aspired to transform the body from a ritually unclean corpse to a sacred *saH*, a being who could be venerated like a god (see below).

Numerous elements of the burial tradition served the same purpose. The shrines or temples erected above the burial chambers in most periods have already been mentioned. It has been shown how the coffins in the Early Dynastic Period and early Old Kingdom were conceived as a house or a royal palace by ways of copying the *srx*-façade, first to the tomb and then to the coffin. These early coffins were not, however, simple copies of the superstructure of the tomb or the royal palace, but borrowed features also from another monumental building:

Lids were sometimes flat, but generally they had a vaulted central section, with raised rectangular sections at either end. This seems to have signified the roof of an archaic shrine (𓆎), which was to become characterized as the per-nu, the national sanctuary of Lower Egypt at Buto. Such a lid is to be seen on coffins and sarcophagi down beyond the New Kingdom, forming the hieroglyphic sign for them, although other types appeared during and after the latter epoch, and a plain flat cover remained an option throughout.⁶⁷

The divinity of the deceased after going through the burial rites is undisputed after the Middle Kingdom, when private individuals began to copy the royal funerary ritual. However, the *pr-nw* lids and the wrapping of the body in linen might suggest the sacredness or even divinity of private individuals after burial already in the Early Dynastic period.

Whereas the *pr-nw* design of Lower Egypt for unknown reasons were preferred in coffin construction throughout pharaonic history, some New Kingdom sarcophagi and canopic boxes have copied the roof of the national sanctuary of Upper Egypt, Nekhen

⁶⁵ Hornung, 1982, p. 33-38.

⁶⁶ It has been suggested that the linen worked as padding to protect the mummy from harm when it was placed within the coffin (Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 153.), but this can certainly not be the only explanation.

⁶⁷ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 195.

in Hierakonpolis. This roof, called the *per-wr*, was sloping from front to back (𓂏), or in the case of the sarcophagi, from head to foot. This design was first discovered in a funerary setting in the tomb of Mentuhotep II, where the king was buried not in a sarcophagus or a coffin, but in a small shrine of this type⁶⁸. The design reappears on royal sarcophagi from the 17th dynasty Thebes, and may as such have been a political statement by a dynasty that was soon to re-conquer Lower Egypt and thereby lay the foundations for the New Kingdom. Throughout the 18th dynasty, the *pr-nw* and the *per-wr* designs were used almost interchangeably⁶⁹, though the latter was thereafter abolished.

Another coffin/sarcophagus feature, which I also believe mirrors the understanding of the coffin as a temple for the deified body, is the *cavetto cornice* and *torus moulding*. Both features were archaic architectural elements used to crown and line the walls or doors of elaborate buildings, and both are found on funerary structures dating as far back as to the early OK⁷⁰. They are extremely common in temples, and I believe it is the sacredness of the deceased that is emphasized when these designs occur in the tomb, rather than adding to the understanding of the tomb/coffin as a mansion⁷¹. This interpretation gains support from the fact that the design is common also on a wide range of other funerary items, such as the false door, canopic chests and even jewelry.

On coffins and sarcophagi, the cavetto cornice can occur on the sides of the lid or on the top of the case, surrounding the entire coffin. The torus moulding may occur in addition to the cavetto cornice as vertical moulding on the sides of the case. The earliest examples belonged to kings of the 4th dynasty, and the design is common in private tombs from the end of the Middle Kingdom.

Moreover, there are structural similarities between the temple and the tomb/coffin that cannot be disregarded. First of all they were both “houses of eternity”, built with

⁶⁸ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 250

⁶⁹ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 254

⁷⁰ See for instance Hayes 1935, fig. 16.

⁷¹ As stated in Schmidt 1919b, p. 33; Heyes 1935, p. 66-67.

materials meant to last for eternity, as opposed to perishable materials used in “this worldly” architecture. Secondly, multi-chambered tombs often resemble temples in that the sarcophagus chamber often is the innermost or central room in the structure. The main sanctuary in the temple was reached after passing through several courts and halls, increasingly smaller and darker before the “holiest of holiest” was reached. Here, the cult statue of the god was resting like the mummy rested in the sarcophagus chamber. In the tomb, these successive rooms could represent the various stages of transformation the deceased was believed to go through after burial, just like the sun god was believed to go through various stages of transformation during his eternal, cyclic journey. Something similar might be seen in the practice of providing the mummy with several coffins and sarcophagi, as discussed below under “The Principle of Layers”.

Finally, as we shall see in the next section, both the temple and the tomb/coffin are constructed as *microcosms*, with the divinity/ mummy resting in its center. Thus, in the words of Richard H. Wilkinson: “..the interrelationship between the rituals of life and death, this world and the next, were never distant in the minds and religious structures of the ancient Egyptians.”⁷²

Microcosm

A different interpretation of the *mastaba* introduces yet another element of afterlife belief: the connection between the individual’s death and the creation of the world. The *mastabas*, developing out of mounds of dirt, and further giving the impulse to the construction of the pyramids, are often understood as the “primeval mound” of the Heliopolitan cosmogony, first met in the Pyramid Texts of King Unas. According to this myth, the Sun God ascended for the first time from a mound of dirt called the *bn-bn*, probably a wordplay on the verb *wbn*, meaning “to rise”⁷³. In Ancient Egypt the creation was perceived as an ongoing process, and the creation myths were used

⁷² Wilkinson 2000b, p. 79.

⁷³ Lesko, 1991, p. 92.

metaphorically for any new beginning where order had to be established from chaos once again, like in the coronation ritual of a new king, the erection of a new temple, or the beginning of a new year⁷⁴. The usage of this metaphor in the burial context thus emphasizes the understanding of death as a new beginning, and places it among the elements of the ordered cosmos: cyclic, eternal and divine in nature.

In the pyramid of King Unas of the 5th dynasty, it is clear that the different chambers represented the process or the journey the king was believed to undertake after burial. The Pyramid Texts are to be read from the sarcophagus chamber out through the passage into the antechamber, and reflect a movement, through different stages of transformation and identification with various deities, from the sarcophagus chamber towards the rising sun:

“Ra and Atum, although sharing the same identity, remain distinct from each other in the manifested cosmos. The link between them is now Nefertem the sun god who, with the scent of his flower, as the energy brought forth from the static place, transmits life to the sun, acting as an umbilical cord that reconnects the god to the place from which he came forth. Whereas the king enters into the union with Atum in the sarcophagus chamber, he appears later in the antechamber as Nefertem, in a role of mediator between the two spheres. Finally, on the eastern wall of the corridor, the king heads for the sky as the “bull of double radiance” (...), an epithet of the sun god..”⁷⁵

The transformation of the deceased after burial, following the example of cosmic creation as reflected in various chambers in the pyramids, were soon to be adopted by private people. Particularly on the anthropoid coffins from the 19th dynasty and onwards, the decorations often contain lotus flowers, scarabs, and other motives with a clear reference to the creation theme.

From later sources we learn about the mythological significance of the deceased's position under the *mastaba* (=the *bn-bn*), mentioned in the beginning of this section. Osiris, the resurrecting agent in the sun god's eternal journey between heaven and

⁷⁴ Englund 1974, p. 38.

⁷⁵ Billing 2002, p. 59.

earth - life and death, was believed to dwell underneath the eastern horizon. By merging with Osiris, and take part in his resurrection, the sun god could rise again to accomplish another daily cycle. Positioning the deceased underneath a symbolic representation of the sun god's birthplace, the heart of the world, thus identifies him/her as Osiris.

The positioning of the deceased in the center of the cosmos was reflected in the coffin decoration in all periods, and in rectangular coffins as well as anthropoid. Frequently, the sky is represented in the lid, either as a concave curve on the inside of it, copying the hieroglyph for heaven (𐀀), in star clocks, or as the winged sky goddess Nut, spreading her wings across the lid. Similarly, references to the underworld are found in the bottom of the coffin, usually in texts or in images of underworld deities. On the sides of the case, we frequently find the four sons of Horus, which represented the cardinal directions, and also have been associated with the *HeH*-gods, four pairs of divinities who's sole role was to help the air and time god Shu to separate heaven from earth⁷⁶. The alignment of the tomb/coffin/body with the cardinal directions also played a significant part of a proper burial, a practice attested as far back as to predynastic times⁷⁷.

Mother

The predynastic graves were shallow, often oval-shaped pits cut into the bedrock at the edge of cultivation. That these early burials had a religious significance is evident from the increasing amount of provisions the deceased was equipped with. The fact that the bodies were placed in oval shaped pits in a crouching position, possibly imitating the position of the fetus in the mother's womb, might indicate a belief in post mortem rebirth already in the earliest stage of Egyptian civilization.

The oval shape (𐀀) reappears in the Pyramid Texts where it is associated with the sky goddess Nut, and some times is used as an alternative determinative in her

⁷⁶ Willems 1988, p. 140.

name⁷⁸. Nils Billing at the University of Uppsala wrote his PhD on this goddess. He recognizes water and space as her main attributes, and suggests that these basic elements are the link between the goddess' main roles as sky and cosmic mother⁷⁹. "The idea of the sky as a watery oval communicates a decisive mother symbolism with the celestial body as a pre-birth environment"⁸⁰.

Nut is thus identified as a "cosmic womb" in which the reconstitution process of the deceased takes place after burial⁸¹. After regaining life in the womb, the deceased was believed to be reborn to a new, eternal life in the underworld. As a child of Nut, the deceased is closely associated with the goddess' mythological sons Osiris and Re. As the nearest space surrounding the deceased after burial, it is not surprising to find that the coffin was identified with the goddess. In the Pyramid Texts, it is explicitly stated that the sarcophagus or the sarcophagus chamber is one of her manifestations⁸².

Billing goes so far to say that: "Any spatial entity set in relation to the deceased is closely linked to the mother of all, be it the tomb, the coffin or the canopic chest"⁸³. Some Old Kingdom texts also use the word *mwt* (meaning "mother"), as a designation of the inner coffin⁸⁴.

In the Middle Kingdom, similar ideas were reflected in private coffins, where we have seen that Nut can occur in her celestial aspect on the lid, but she can also appear in texts on the interior sides of the coffin⁸⁵. From the 19th dynasty, she also occurs in icons and text on the exterior sides (Fig. 26).

It should, however, be noted that the goddess in all of these instances can bear the name of other goddesses, in particular Neith, Isis and Hathor⁸⁶, and often she is not

⁷⁷ Taylor 1989, p. 13.

⁷⁸ Billing 2002, p. 11.

⁷⁹ Billing 2002, p. 10-12.

⁸⁰ Billing 2002, p.11.

⁸¹ See also Schott 1965.

⁸² *PT* 364 in Billing 2002, p. 108; *PT* 616e in Willems 1988, p. 134.

⁸³ Billing 2002, p. 181.

⁸⁴ Taylor 2001a, p. 215.

⁸⁵ Willems 1988, p. 194-195.

⁸⁶ Assman 1972; Billing 2002, p. 186.

named at all. Eric Hornung describes in his famous work *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt, the One and the Many* how all the gods (the many) could be seen as a manifestation of the sun-creator god (the one), but still maintain their individuality on a different level of understanding⁸⁷. Based on the works of Lana Troy, Saphinaz-Amal Naguib has shown that the same scheme can be applied on goddesses, where the One (la déesse primordiale) is seen as the feminine counterpart of the male creator god, without whom the circle of life would be impossible⁸⁸. It seems as if the attributes connected to the “universal goddess” is more important than identifying a particular divinity in the coffin decoration.

Egg

As a variation of the womb-theme discussed above, the coffin could be perceived as an egg of rebirth. In the Pyramid Texts, the Egyptian word for egg (*swHt*) was given the additional determinative for objects made out of wood (), and came to designate inner coffin⁸⁹. In terms of mythology, the egg is known from a creation myth where the primeval chaos came to an end by the cracking of an egg. From within emerged the sun god in the shape of a bird⁹⁰. The bird referred to in the myth is unnamed, but might very well be the *bnw*-bird of Heliopolis, which was also understood as a manifestation of Osiris⁹¹. In the ptolemaic “Khonsu Cosmogony”, the primeval egg is explicitly said to belong to a falcon, one of the most common manifestations of the sun-god⁹². Furthermore, religious texts often mention the egg as one of the god given miracles of life, parallel to human conception and birth⁹³.

Under the entry “Ei” (egg) in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* we find the following:

⁸⁷ Hornung 1982.

⁸⁸ Naguib 1990a, p. 35-37.

⁸⁹ *Wb* IV, p. 74: 4 ; Janssen 1975, p. 213-214; Willems 1988, p. 238 (also footnote 2).

⁹⁰ Quirke 1992, p. 27; Caminos 1975, p. 1185.

⁹¹ Quirke 2001, p. 30.

⁹² Lesko 1991, p. 105-106.

⁹³ Bettum 2001a, p. 43.

*Entirely void of cosmogonic significance are metaphors and similes, occasionally met with in Egyptian records, which were prompted by the shape, properties and functions of the egg; it was likewise by analogy that the word *swHt*, lit. “egg”, came to be used as “son”, “coffin”, “mummy-case”, and even “shroud”.⁹⁴*

Although the point remains to be proven, I find it highly unlikely that no cosmogonic significance was embedded in the use of the word *swHt* for coffins. As discussed above, the coffin was purposely fashioned to evoke the mental image of cosmic creation and divine re-creation, and the fact that the same word was used to designate both is hardly a coincidence.

In the coffins themselves, we find structural elements resembling eggs the exception rather than the rule. In the Early Dynastic Period, a coffin type was made in burnt or stamped clay, circular or oval in shape⁹⁵. It is tempting to see these containers as large eggs through which the deceased would be reborn, but the lack of evidence in these early records makes it hard to say anything for certain. What we can say for sure is that the egg motif played no crucial role in the coffin structure or decoration of mainstream coffins produced between the Old and the New Kingdoms.

Vessel

Insofar as death was believed to entail a journey, patterned on the sun-god’s journey through the underworld, it is not surprising to find that coffins occasionally took on the form of vessels. Harco Willems has described how some STMC-coffins sometimes are said to have a port- and a starboard side, and further that: “This may imply that it symbolized a bark or a structure on its deck, like its canopy. At any rate, it is beyond dispute that the coffin sometimes appears in a nautical context.”⁹⁶

The journey of the deceased was enacted in ritual through the funerary procession, where the coffin was pulled on a sled over land. Some sarcophagi of early 18th

⁹⁴ Caminos 1975, p. 1185.

⁹⁵ See Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 194 for illustration.

⁹⁶ Willems 1988, p. 242.

dynasty nobles have the sliding boards of the sled attached directly to the coffin. If this is a variation of the coffin-as-a-vessel idea, or simply a practical means for transportation, is hard to say.

An image of the transfigured deceased (saH)

From the 4th dynasty throughout the Old Kingdom, mummies were covered by linen wrappings applied in such a way that the bodily features were kept. Every limb was wrapped separately, and sometimes facial features and other details could be painted on or molded in a coat of plaster covering the wrappings⁹⁷. The classical mummy form, which is seen for the first time towards the end of the Old Kingdom, looks quite different. In addition to the layers of linen covering every limb, several layers of bandage and shrouds were now added without taking notice of the individual limbs, thus encapsulating the body in a cocoon of linen.

The reproduction of the facial features survived in a new element in the funerary equipment: the mummy mask. The masks were made of cartonnage cast to resemble a bust with a large wig and an ornamental collar (wsx) covering the chest. This image of a body encapsulated in textiles and adorned with a wsx-collar and a large wig surrounding a bare, life-like face came to materialize the concept of the saH⁹⁸ to the Egyptians. The image was transferred to the anthropoid coffins, which came into use in the MK, and completely dominated the scene from the New Kingdom and onwards.

The word saH is normally translated “mummy” in English literature, but the concept is more complex than that, and requires some explanation. The word could be used also for living people, with the meaning noble or dignified, but is then written with different determinatives⁹⁹. The Egyptians used two sets of words for their deceased. Xt and irw designated a body, dead or alive. The second set of terms, twt and saH,

⁹⁷ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 167.

⁹⁸ Wb. IV, p. 51-52: 7-15; Faulkner 1996, p. 214-215.

⁹⁹ Wb. IV, p. 50-51: 1-6; Faulkner 1996, p. 214.

came into use first after the funerary rituals were performed on the body¹⁰⁰. The rituals were, broadly speaking, patterned on the mythological prototype of the resurrection of Osiris, and the wrapped body of the *saH* was ultimately the resurrected body of Osiris himself, as he appears mummified in the iconography (Fig. 7, 10, 16, 23-24, 30, 38, 46, 56, 60-61). The reason for the open eyes and the life-like faces of the *saH*-image is therefore not modeled on the deceased as he/her looked in real life, but rather emphasizes life as an essential part of the existence in the hereafter, an existence that could be reached only after the proper rituals had been executed.

The determinative used in the words *twt* and *saH* (𓆎) indicates that the Egyptians regarded the mummy as more than a dry body, and still more than its mere components. The body, the linen, and the mask/coffin become one entity, an icon in its own right. In terms of religious function, the anthropoid coffin merges with the mummy inside, and becomes the embodiment of the transfigured deceased, patterned on the resurrection of Osiris. In the afterlife, the *saH* functioned as a base for the three mobile elements that together constitute our concept “soul”, the *ka*, the *ba* and the *Ax*. This is not the place for a comprehensive survey of these complex and ill-understood terms, but it can be mentioned that the *ka* and the *ba* were part of the living person’s soul as well, whereas the *Ax* was activated first after death and after a successful trial in Osiris’ throne room. As such it can be said to be the spiritual counterpart of the *saH*¹⁰¹, a victorious, glorified, and luminous version of the deceased.

The *saH*-image, like any other icon, goes through a development over the millennia it was in use. It is interesting to note that these developments often mirrored innovations in the mummification practice, which again was reflected in the decorations on the coffins. There are many examples of this. The (from a frontal view) horizontal text-bands that came in use with the white type coffins in the early

¹⁰⁰ Taylor 2001a, p. 17.

¹⁰¹ Taylor 2001b, p. 165.

New Kingdom were taken over from the rectangular coffins¹⁰², but adjusted to resemble the outer straps of the mummy at the time¹⁰³. The crossing of the arms of the mummy was introduced by the New Kingdom kings¹⁰⁴, who also had their coffins fashioned the same way. Finally, the *stola*-coffin of the late 21st and early 22nd dynasty have a large X painted on the chest, copying the leather braces found on mummies from the late 20th dynasty¹⁰⁵.

An image of the deceased in his/her living state

The religious function of the *saH*-image seems to have been rather constant, but the coffins could take on various other decorations that alluded to other functions. One of these was the image of the deceased as he or she was alive, a theme always lurking in the background, and sometimes appearing on the surface to such an extent that it even overrides the *saH*-image. The artist's job was first and foremost to create the eternal and idealized image of the transfigured deceased, which was the same to everybody. Still, two identical coffins have yet to be found, and on most coffin types it is possible to tell a man from a woman and to some extent determine the owner's social status from the decorations. And although this point should not be overemphasized, a certain degree of portraiture can sometimes be found in the faces. It seems that despite the strict frames of artistic creativity imposed by the canon, the most skilled artists found some outlet for their inspiration in these subtle individual features.

At some points in Egyptian history, the personality-aspect comes up to the surface. In the 19th dynasty, at the time when the yellow type coffin was introduced, some coffins display the deceased wearing their finest linen costume rather than their traditional wrappings. This subtype, which is attested from the 20th and the 21st dynasties as well¹⁰⁶, seems to celebrate the image of the deceased in his/her living state. In Greco-Roman times this theme re-emerges, as attested by the famous Fayyum portraits and

¹⁰² Taylor 2001a, p. 185.

¹⁰³ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 157.

¹⁰⁴ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 122.

¹⁰⁵ Walsem 1997, p. 116-119.

the neatly “dressed” anthropoid coffins. In this instance, however, the impulse to the change most likely came from the Greeks rather than the Egyptians.

Divine embrace of protection

Divine protection of the deceased is a central theme on all coffins. Again identified with the mythological prototypes Osiris and the sun god, the deceased was in constant need of protection from the forces of chaos, represented in the myths by Seth or Apophis, respectively. It is easy to see how protection is an underlying theme in many of the above-mentioned religious functions. The themes miniature tomb, eternal dwelling, royal palace, temple/shrine, and egg all share the function as shelter against external interference, which on a practical level also was the basic function of the coffin.

Under the section “Microcosm” above, I described how the deceased could be surrounded on all sides by divinities representing the elements of cosmos. As divine beneficiaries to the deceased, however, this composition can also be understood as a protective circle of divinities, guarding every side of the coffin against attacks from chaos¹⁰⁷. The main function of the four sons of Horus, described above as sky supporters, and their female counterparts Isis, Nephtys, Neith, and Serket, was undoubtedly protection of the mummy¹⁰⁸. Under the section “Mother”, I was focusing primarily on the rebirth- theme, but it is clear that divine protection is an important feature also of the coffin in its mother role. A very important aspect of the coffin is thus its function as a protective device. This theme is often expressed as the embrace of a winged goddess.

In the 17th dynasty a new type of anthropoid coffin had established itself in the Theban area as the first real alternative to the rectangular coffin. The most striking characteristic of these coffins is the polychrome plumage painted on the body of the

¹⁰⁶ Niwinski 1988a, p. 12-14, 79-80, pl. XII B.

¹⁰⁷ Taylor 1989, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Willems, 1988, p. 139-140.

coffin. At first sight, it seems as if the *saH*-image has been equipped with large wings, folded in along the body. It is from the Arabic word *rishi*, meaning “feathered”, that the coffin has earned its name.

On the *rishi*-coffins, the wig from the masks and the first anthropoid coffins of the Middle Kingdom has been replaced by the royal *nemes*-headdress, sometimes with the upper part of it decorated with feathers. The color scheme differs strikingly from earlier coffins. Bright red, blue, and green colors were painted on a yellowish-white background¹⁰⁹. The royal coffins, which were made in the same manner, were often partly or entirely gilded¹¹⁰. Religious icons also start to appear, and on the *rishi*-coffins we usually find the vulture goddess Nekhbet spreading her wings across the chest of the *saH*-image, sometimes paired with her cobra counterpart Wadjet. Underneath the feet, images of Isis and Nephtys are common, often with the latter as the dominating character¹¹¹. Like on the earlier types, a text band usually runs down the center of the lid, containing the offering formula (*Htp-di-nsw*).

The religious function of the *rishi*-coffins has been much debated. It is tempting to see it as a representation of the *ba*-soul of the deceased, which likewise was depicted as a bird with a human head¹¹². Personally, I do not find this theory very plausible. It fails to explain the feathers sometimes adorning the *nemes*-headdress, and the idea that the deceased should be buried within his/her own *ba*, which rather contrary was believed to rest within the mummy, seems unfounded.

A group of royal coffins from the early 22nd dynasty hints at an alternative solution. These coffins were equipped with falcon heads to identify the deceased king with the sun god or possibly the underworld-god Sokar, which was very popular at the time.

¹⁰⁹ Niwinski 1988a, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 204-205; Schmidt 1919b, p. 31; Taylor 1989, p. 28.

¹¹¹ Schmidt 1919b, p. 70.

¹¹² Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 204.

However, the rishi pattern was abandoned at the same time as the falcon head came into use¹¹³, thus excluding a possible connection.

A third theory rejects the idea that the *rishi*-coffin was meant to be a human-headed bird, and claims that the wings belong to an otherwise invisible, winged goddess in the background, embracing the deceased form behind¹¹⁴. Abstract as this theory might seem, it actually has its merits. Wings are a well-known feature of goddesses, used to symbolize their role as protectors, and the motif here partly imagined is well attested from sculptures and paintings from all periods. It is found on coffins from the 21st dynasty, where the goddess Imentet often is painted on the bottom of the case with her wings extending to the sides, thus embracing the deceased from behind. Furthermore, royal sarcophagi from the late 18th dynasty¹¹⁵ often have the four goddesses Isis, Nephtys, Neith, and Serket modeled on each corner, protecting the entire coffin with their extended wings. As we have seen, protective goddesses constitute the central theme in the religious iconography on these coffins, so the goddess theory matches the overall decoration scheme better.

In addition, the feathers on top of the *nemes*-headdress make more sense if the deceased is resting within the embrace of a big bird, rather than being the owner of the plumage him/herself. The positioning of the wings, falling straight down the front of the body, also seems to indicate that they belong to someone else than the deceased. The Egyptians followed their own well-established conventions in renderings of three-dimensional objects. Following these conventions, the birds, which frequently occur in art and in the hieroglyphic script, always have their wings folded neatly down their backs, leaving only the fine curve of the “elbow” visible from a frontal/profile view ( etc.). The wings of the *rishi*-coffins are lacking the elbow joint entirely, indicating that there must be more of them further up.

¹¹³ Taylor 1989, p. 47.

¹¹⁴ Schmidt 1919b, p. 69; Taylor 1989, p. 28.

¹¹⁵ This feature is found on the sarcophagi of both Tutankhamon, Ay, and Horemheb. Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 260-261.

Both Schmidt and Taylor have suggested that the goddess could be Isis or/and Nephtys¹¹⁶, thus continuing a theme known from the Middle Kingdom rectangular coffins, where the two goddesses were protecting the recumbent Osiris (=the deceased) against Seth. But as Willems has pointed out, Nut is also present in this scene, as the supervisor of her two daughters¹¹⁷. The protective embrace of Nut is known from funerary texts of all kinds from the Old Kingdom and onwards¹¹⁸, and I am therefore tempted to see the hidden goddess as Nut.

Another candidate is Nekhbet, the vulture-goddess of Upper Egypt, who is spreading her wings across the chest of the coffin. We have earlier seen how the Theban nobles of the same period chose the *pr-wr* sanctuary of Upper Egypt over the more traditional *pr-nw* sanctuary of Lower Egypt as model for their coffin lids. I indicated that this might have been an expression for the growing tension between the Theban lords and the foreign Hyksos rulers in the north. If the hidden goddess is Nekhbet, the protectress of southern Egypt, the *rishi*-coffins could be part of the same political program.

In reference to the previous “Mother” section, the identity of the goddess is often subordinate to the general attributes of the universal goddess, and I believe it is more important to recognize the presence of the goddess as an expression of motherly protection than speculating over her identity. The coffin takes on the role as a divine embrace in which the deceased can rest safely, protected from the forces of chaos. In private tombs, the *rishi*-coffins were replaced by the white type anthropoid coffin in the mid 18th dynasty. In royal tombs, however, the theme survived throughout the New Kingdom. Wings and winged goddesses of various identities and in various postures continued to adorn and protect coffins of all types up until Roman times.

¹¹⁶ Schmidt 1919b, p. 69; Taylor 1989, p. 28; 2001a, p. 224.

¹¹⁷Willems 1988, p. 134-135.

¹¹⁸ Willems 1988, p. 134; Billing 2002.

Synthesis

The Egyptian predilection for metaphors is well known, so this variety is no cause of surprise. (...) But by collecting as many as possible symbolic meanings, the view is blurred rather than that a coherent picture emerges. It appears, however, that all metaphors are easily understood once they are considered as symptoms of one religious phenomenon¹¹⁹.

Indeed, this great variety of forms and symbolic meanings may be confusing, and some pages will therefore be devoted to defining principles of thought overruling the multiplicity. First of all, it seems like many of the religious functions tend to cluster around two main forms: the rectangular and the anthropoid. The former dominated the scene until the New Kingdom, and was thereafter used predominantly as *sarcophagi* in which one or more anthropoid coffins were nested. The choice of material also differs for these two main forms. Sarcophagi and rectangular coffins were always made of either stone or wood. The anthropoid coffins were primarily made of wood, but stone, cartonnage and even clay could also be used. Royal coffins are sometimes made of pure gold or silver. Sarcophagi and rectangular coffins tend to reflect the themes of the miniature tomb, eternal dwelling, royal palace, and temple/shrine, all of which share the rectangular form and the basic residence function. The anthropoid coffins on the other hand, represents the resident within the residence, i.e. the deceased in his/her transfigured state.

The coffin as sacred space

The construction of sacred space is something that has preoccupied historians of religion for decades. Mircea Eliade claimed to have found universal principles in the way *homo religiosus* created such space, be it a temple, a church, a mosque, or even a village or a house¹²⁰. Fundamental to Eliade's theory is the need of the

¹¹⁹ Willems 1988, p. 238-239.

¹²⁰ Eliade 1959, p. 20-65. Eliades theory has been severely criticized and largely abandoned today due to his uncritical use of sources (Smith 1992, p. 1-10, 14-17, Ore 1998), his negligence of differences

religious man to live in the center of the world, where the creation took place. In a sacred building, this center is marked by the *axis mundi*, a pole, a tree, a mountain, etc., which works as a window to the world of the gods above and the underworld of the forefathers below. The walls of the building represents the cardinal directions, the ceiling represents the sky and the floor the earth. Any sacred space becomes an *imago mundi*, a microcosm centered around the “navel” of the earth.

Eliade’s scheme fits some of the religious functions described above fairly well. The cosmological aspects of coffins and sarcophagi are indisputable, and as we shall see below, the decorations always stand in relation to its core, the mummy. The mummy was believed to be precisely in the center of the world, where the sun emerged for the first time in the creation myth. We have further seen how the mummy stands in a special relationship to the sun god, the main character of the celestial gods, and to Osiris, king of the underworld. The mummy can thus be said take on the role as *axis mundi* in the microcosm of the coffin.

However, the list above includes many religious functions that do not fit Eliade’s description of sacred space. Typical for the ancient Egyptian symbolic language is the use of allegories and metaphors to say the same thing in as many ways possible, and it is often impossible to determine which meaning is the original one. Sometimes, different myths about the same theme may have come into being independently in different localities, later to be merged into the state religion. In other words it is not possible to find one “original” or “true” meaning behind the multiplicity of coffin-myths described above.

Eliade does not mention the tomb or the coffin as an example in his book, and it might be that his theory works better on temples and houses proper. In line with this, it also seems to fit the sarcophagi and rectangular coffins better than the anthropoid ones, the former being highly influenced by temple- and domestic architecture. In sum we can

between cultures, and universalistic approach to religion as phenomenon (Ore 1998). I will not engage in these discussions here, but simply examine to what extent his model of religious space can be applied on the ancient Egyptian coffin.

say that Eliade's theory matches certain aspects of sacred space as expressed through the symbolic language of ancient Egyptian coffins, especially the rectangular type. I cannot see, however, that Eliade's notion of sacred space should be more original or more important than the symbolic function of the coffin as mother, divine embrace, or an extension of the mummy.

In fact, I believe the richness and the ambiguity of the ancient Egyptian symbolic language indicates that the "multiplicity of approaches"¹²¹ contributed to the sacredness of an object, be it a coffin, a temple, a religious text, or an icon. One interpretation does not have predominance over another.

The mummy as the central iconographic element in coffin decoration

Another feature all coffins have in common is the context in which they occur. Every coffin stands in the same relation to the deceased within and the tomb outside, and this affects the decoration scheme considerably. As demonstrated in the discussion of the coffin as microcosm, the alignment of the coffin in the tomb was not accidental. By following the (usually local) cardinal directions, each side of the coffin came to symbolize different aspects of the tomb and the world outside. In the Middle Kingdom for instance, the left side of the coffin had a special significance because it pointed east, towards the rising sun and the ceremonial part of the tomb. This is reflected in the decoration by the painting of eye panels and false doors by the head end of the left side of the case, through which the deceased could come forth and observe or participate in the ancestor worship¹²².

Harco Willems has shown how texts were oriented in such a way on the SCMK-coffins that they were readable from the viewpoint of the deceased¹²³. Likewise, the object friezes on the inside contained objects relevant to the adjacent body part. Thus

¹²¹ This term, introduced by Henri Frankfort in 1946, has been used about the Egyptian, many-faceted approach to nature and the nature of god, but also as a method of research applied when examining the Egyptian "aspective art". Hornung 1982, p. 252; Naguib 1998, p. 49-50.

¹²² For the term "ancestor worship", see Hardacre 1993.

¹²³ Willems 1988, p. 119, 175-178.

the friezes on the head end contain objects like headrests, masks and wigs, whereas sandals are found on the foot end.

Andrzej Niwinski shows in his article “Mummy in the coffin as the central element of iconographic reflection of the theology of the 21st dynasty in Thebes” that this principle was developed to perfection in the densely decorated 21st dynasty anthropoid coffins¹²⁴. We shall return to some of these complicated compositions in chapter 5, for now it will suffice to mention just one rather trivial example: The icons on the feet of these coffins are inverted compared to the rest of the decorations (Fig. 22). To the spectator with a frontal view on the coffin, these icons seem upside-down, but to the deceased, looking down at his/her feet, they appear the right way.

The principle of layers

From the 5th Dynasty it became more and more common to include a smaller, wooden coffins within the large, stone-sarcophagi. Willems writes:

It is a well-known fact that Egyptians often possessed two, and occasionally even three coffins, which fitted into one another. The reasons for this remarkable practice are still ill-understood, though in the N.K., outer and inner coffins may have served different (religious) purposes. For the M.K., no functional variance could be determined. The inner and outer coffins of sets like B3-4Bo and Sid2-3X, for instance, are well-nigh identical.¹²⁵

In the 18th dynasty, double or multiple coffins were still relatively rare outside the court. From the 19th dynasty, however, it became the norm rather than the exception to use two anthropoid coffins, one nesting within the other¹²⁶. The popularity of this practice increased during the Third Intermediate Period into the Late Period, when as

¹²⁴ Niwinski 1983b.

¹²⁵ Willems 1988, p. 51.

¹²⁶ Janssen 1975, p. 209-213.

much as four coffins could be stacked inside one another, the two innermost coffins always anthropoid, and the outermost always rectangular¹²⁷.

When the difference between inner and outer coffin corresponds to the difference between the anthropoid and the rectangular coffin, we can at least grasp some of the meaning. As we have seen, the two types usually reflect a different set of corresponding symbolic meanings. The Egyptians themselves had a great variety of terms used to designate the coffin at various times and at various places. It is not always clear, however, which part of the coffin ensemble is referred to in each case. Again, we find that the main difference in shape usually was clearly expressed, either by different terms or by different determinatives. Some terms, such as nb-anx¹²⁸ (lit. “Lord of Life”) and qrs^w¹²⁹, could designate both types, depending on whether the saH- (𓆎) or a shrine-type determinative (𓆎𓆏𓆐) were used. The word DbAt¹³⁰, however, seems to have been used exclusively for the sarcophagus, written with determinatives indicating material rather than shape.

Jac J. Janssen conducted a study on commodity prices from the Ramesside Period, based on ostraca found in the workman’s village in Deir el-Medina. At this time, two (yellow type) anthropoid coffins were used, sometimes in addition to a wooden rectangular sarcophagus, and sometimes with a wooden mummy-cover placed directly on the mummy as a second lid to the innermost coffin¹³¹. The mummy-cover often took on the form of the deceased in his/her living state, whereas the coffin lids always represented the transfigured deceased. As discussed above, the difference in form indicates a difference in religious significance, and we should also expect to find to a difference in terminology¹³².

¹²⁷ Taylor 2001a, p. 238.

¹²⁸ *Wb.* II, p. 228:14; Faulkner 1996, p. 128.

¹²⁹ *Wb.* V, p. 63: 9; Faulkner 1996, p. 281.

¹³⁰ Janssen 1975, p. 215; *Wb.* V, p. 561: 8 ff.; Faulkner 1996, p. 321.

¹³¹ Janssen 1975, p. 209-212; Niwinski 1988, p. 12. For a later version of the mummy-cover, see Fig. 1.

¹³² Janssen 1975, p. 213.

Janssen found three words designating “coffin” in his ostraca: *wṯ*, *swḥt* and *mn-anx*. He concluded that *swḥt*, which basically means “egg”, but also has the meaning of “garment”, also referred to the inner coffin¹³³. He further believed that *mn-anx*, which literal meaning probably is “place of life”, refer to the second anthropoid coffin, whereas *wṯ*, together with an adjective indicating size, could be used for both¹³⁴. Since the rectangular sarcophagi disappeared during the 19th dynasty, he was not surprised that no word for it was found in the ostraca. Janssen was no expert on coffins, however, and Niwinski has later suggested another solution, that contradicts Janssen’s conclusions but not his observations¹³⁵. According to Niwinski, *swḥt* refers to the mummy-cover, which was the element that most often appeared in the dress of the living¹³⁶, whereas both the inner coffins were called *wṯ*. This solution brings harmony between the terminology and the main split in religious function, that of the deceased dressed in garments (*swḥt*) of the living, and that of the deceased as *saH*-image.

The 21st dynasty yellow type coffins also had two coffins, though the dress of the living appears rarely (about 1% of the examined coffins), and then in combination with *saH* elements¹³⁷. The dress of the living on this peculiar type of coffin seems to be an exceptional element of archaisation, inspired by the 19th dynasty coffins¹³⁸. We must therefore look elsewhere for the difference in religious function. In the more representative coffin-ensembles of this dynasty, there seems to have been a slight difference in the choice of icons decorating the two, the significance of which I will discuss in chapter 5.

Overall, the difference in the religious significance between various elements in the coffin ensemble seems to be relative to the different forms produced in various times

¹³³ Janssen 1975, p. 213.

¹³⁴ Janssen, 1975, p. 214.

¹³⁵ Niwinski 1988a, p. 8.

¹³⁶ Janssen mistook at least one mummy-cover for an inner lid, namely the mummy-cover of Ta-maket, published in Danish in Schmidt 1919b, p. 98 (Fig. 732).

¹³⁷ Niwinski 1988a, p. 81-82, Fig. 30, pl. XII A-B.

¹³⁸ Niwinski 1988a, p. 82.

and places. If a general significance of this remarkable practice is to be sought, I believe it could be found in a *principle of layers* underlying the decoration scheme of the individual coffins, where the layering has significance in itself. To understand how this principle works, all aspects of the burial should be taken into consideration, from the body to the various chambers of the tomb and the tomb chapel. It is well known that the mummies were wrapped in several layers of bandages and shrouds¹³⁹. On top of this, an elaborate façade is usually created by use of make up, jewelry and/or decorative wrappings, thus making up a layer in its own right. Thereafter follows the mask, the cartonnage or the mummy-cover, then the coffin(s), the sarcophagi, then the burial chamber and then the rest of the tomb, and eventually the outer world.

We have seen how particularly the rectangular coffins shared the symbolic references with the tomb itself, and how they both borrowed architectural elements from the temple. In fact, temples were often fashioned according to a similar principle, where a series of increasingly smaller chambers eventually take you to the “holiest of the holy”, the innermost sanctuary where the god dwells¹⁴⁰. Could the layering of the mummy be an artistic and space-efficient rendering of the same principle? Matching this possibility with the list of religious functions above, it could be assumed that the layers are a variation of the journey-theme discussed in the section “Vessel” above, each layer signifying a different stage of transformation.

More examples of layering or repetition in the Egyptian universe of religious symbols could be mentioned, and it would certainly be a study worth while to find more about the “principle of layers” overruling the various forms.

¹³⁹ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 155-164.

¹⁴⁰ Wilkinson 2000, p. 70.

The coffin as a “ritual machine”¹⁴¹

So far, the focus has primarily been on the mythological aspects of the coffin. However, a search for religious functions would be incomplete if it was not placed within a ritual context as well. In the section, “An image of the transfigured deceased”, we saw that the terminology for “body” (Xt/irw vs. twt/saH) changed with the ritual, and not with the moment of death. This indicates that the most important moment in the transition from life to death was not death in itself, but rather the accomplishment of the rites that followed. Thus, the Ancient Egyptian funerary rites confirm the universality of ritual practice as discussed by Arnold van Gennep in his famous book *The Rites of Passage*.

According to van Gennep’s theory, the rites of passage took the neophyte through stages of “separation” (pre-liminal rites), “transition” (liminal rites), and eventually “incorporation” (post-liminal rites) into a new, well defined, and meaningful state of being¹⁴². This scheme could be applied to the ancient Egyptian funerary rituals by ascribing death and transportation to the embalmers house to the pre-liminal rites, mummification and funerary procession to the liminal rites, and finally the opening of the mouth and the burial to the post-liminal rites. At first sight, it seems as if the ritual function of the coffin, and especially the anthropoid coffin, is limited to the post-liminal rites, where the new state is being celebrated. This is, however, not the case.

For an understanding of the ritual function of the coffin, we must once more turn to Harco Willems. We saw in the discussion of the coffin as a “royal palace” how the deceased was believed to play the role of the king of the gods (the sun and creator god) and the king of the dead (Osiris) in a ritual enactment of the corresponding myths. To reconstruct the rituals based only on coffin decoration is next to impossible. To say it with Willems:

¹⁴¹ The term “ritual machine” is taken from Willems 1997, p. 239, who apologizes for the use of this “disrespectful” term. I choose to use it because of its great explanatory value to the modern reader.

¹⁴² Gennep 1960, p. 18-21.

*“ It is as if we are visiting the backstage storeroom of a theatre, where we may perceive the attributes used by the players without, however, knowing for which play or plays they are intended.”*¹⁴³

However, the funerary ritual may be at least partially reconstructed from text and picture material elsewhere in the tomb equipment, most notably from the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts, and the tomb paintings from the New Kingdom. By comparing the ornamental text¹⁴⁴ and iconography of the SCMK-coffins with these sources, Willems extrapolated a possible ritual function for the larger part of the coffin decoration.

For instance, the liturgical text of the *purification ritual* was recorded in the Pyramid Texts (Pyr. 50-57) and later in the Coffin Texts (CT 934-936)¹⁴⁵. The text mentions among other things how seven jars of unguent and two colors of eye paint were to be applied on the object of the ritual, be it a statue or a mummy. Also two *wnx*-cloths were to be used in the ritual. In the object frieze at the head end of the SCMK-coffins of the late 12th dynasty, Willems found the same objects represented in painting, in the same order as in the liturgical text¹⁴⁶. Likewise, object friezes on the long sides of the coffin are filled with objects referring to various aspects of the ritual.

Whereas the object friezes of the SCMK-coffins are limited to the Middle Kingdom, the ritual theme survived the transition from rectangular to anthropoid coffins. Niwinski observed that “Typical for the ‘White’ anthropoid coffins of the early 18th dynasty are scenes of burial rites (transport of mummy, mourners, offerings, before

¹⁴³ Willems 1997, p. 343.

¹⁴⁴ The “ornamental texts” differs from the “Coffin Texts”, by being painted in the true hieroglyphic form, as they were chiseled into rock, etc. The hieroglyphs could be written in any direction, depending on what worked best artistically. The Coffin Texts on the other hand, were written in *hieratic*. Hieratic was a cursive form of the hieroglyphs used in everyday life, always written from right to left. The Coffin Texts required such a script because of their length. However, to accommodate the principle of readability from the viewpoint of the deceased (see “The Mummy in the coffin as the central iconographic element” above), the columns had to be reversed on certain surfaces. This resulted in a special form called *retrograde writing*, where the individual signs were read from right to left, as the handwriting of the artist required, whereas the columns were read the opposite way. Willems 1988, p. 177-178.

¹⁴⁵ Willems 1997, p. 344.

the deceased etc.)”¹⁴⁷. Also the ornamental texts that Willems found as evidence of a ritual theme in the coffin decoration survived into the following eras. Perhaps the best example to illustrate this point is the Dd-mdw formula, also known as the *divine speeches*.

This formula, which was introduced by the words Dd-mdw in D (words spoken by the divinity D) are known from coffins and sarcophagi of all periods. As with most of the coffin decorations, these texts were previously understood in purely mythological terms, but Willems suggests that the divinities in the formula actually might be priests playing the roles of the divinities during the enactment of the myths in the funerary ritual¹⁴⁸.

“In these utterances, it is stressed that the deceased is protected by his mother Nut, and that his corpse is restored (...). She also proclaims his vindication (mĀa-xrw) before the divine tribunal (...), a prerequisite for the deceased’s appointment as ruler of the Netherworld (...). The same themes underly [sic] the rites in the place of embalmment in the night before burial (...) it is not implausible that these rites are also referred to in the divine speeches.”¹⁴⁹

This interpretation of the Dd-mdw-in formula, which is well documented in Willems’ works¹⁵⁰, adds a new dimension to the understanding of the coffin. Although no comprehensive study has been carried out to establish a direct link between coffin decoration and rituals in later periods, the theme is definitely carried on, not only by the continued use of the Dd-mdw-in formula, but also by icons depicting various stages of the funerary ritual (see chapter 5).

The interpretation of the coffin as a “ritual machine” necessitates a new understanding of the ancient Egyptian funerary ritual. It should be apparent to the reader by now that the decoration of coffins in ancient Egypt was far from a trivial matter. Every dot of

¹⁴⁶ Willems 1997, p. 344-345.

¹⁴⁷ Niwinski 1988a, p. 11.

¹⁴⁸ Willems 1988, p. 198.

¹⁴⁹ Willems, 1988, p. 199.

¹⁵⁰ Willems 1988, 1996, 1997.

paint had a meaning, and was part of a highly complex decoration program that served a very specific purpose. The texts and the visual art were not meant for the living spectators, but were provided as a magical aid for the deceased in his/her eternal, post-mortem existence. When the Egyptians dedicated so much space on the coffin to the ritual theme, it must mean that the rites had significance to the deceased beyond the momentary act of performance.

A fascinating theory was proposed by Willems in an article by the name “The Embalmer Embalmed”¹⁵¹. We saw under “Royal Palace” how the SCMK decoration program reflected a ritual that placed the deceased in the role of the embalmer. As such he/she is Horus, who enters his father Osiris’ shrine in order to embalm him. In the process, the deceased takes on the role of the father, and is thus resurrected to new life. It was shown above how this myth was patterned on the merging of Osiris and Ra every morning before sunrise, the very “engine” in the cosmos, which causes life to renew itself day after day. The Egyptian saw this “Osirian principle” in the cyclic movements of the sun, the stars and the moon, the annual flooding of the Nile and in the coming and going of generations of humans, animals and plants¹⁵². It seems clear from the many metaphors used for the existence in the afterlife, such as being part of the crew on the bark of the sun god, a star on the night sky, a farmer on the fields of Retjenu, etc., that the transfigured deceased was believed to become one with this principle.

The eternal life the deceased was believed to achieve after death, was thus more precisely an everlasting cycle between life and death, in accordance with the divine principle of nature. The sun, often referred to as the ba of Osiris, had to return to its mummy (Osiris) in order to be resurrected to a new day¹⁵³. Likewise, the ba of the deceased had to return to the mummy (saH) for reconstitution every night. Willems suggests that this daily resurrection would entail a daily repetition of the

¹⁵¹ Willems 1997.

¹⁵² Bettum 2003, p. 24.

¹⁵³ Willems 1997, p. 361.

mummification ritual, and that the deceased, as Horus, had to repeat the mummification of Osiris for all eternity. Willems' point is that the enactment of the myths in the funerary ritual sets a process in motion that is continued for eternity in the coffin decoration, so that it "creates the reality of a kind of ritual *perpetuum mobile*, a process of action that kept itself going"¹⁵⁴.

Apparently, the deceased was believed to continue his/her religious life in the afterlife, and perform rituals for the sake of his/her own continued existence. The decorations of the coffin were meant for eternity, and thus equipped the deceased with the necessary formulas, tools and even companions (through the divinities/priests of the Dd-mdw formula) to perform all stages of the rites required for an eternal afterlife. As a rite of passage, the funerary rituals of the Middle Kingdom not only initiated the deceased to a post-mortem existence, but also ordained him/her as a priest, both rituals sharing the basic theme of *purification*.

¹⁵⁴ Willems 1997, p. 366.

3 Anonymous Man C47714 at the University Museum of Cultural Heritage in Oslo (UKM)

The coffin here under inquiry is a yellow type anthropoid coffin, the type that was in use between the 19th and the early 22nd dynasty. It originates from a famous excavation of a priestly collective grave on the west bank of Thebes, and can safely be dated the 21st dynasty.

Historic background

The history of the 21st dynasty

The transition from the 20th to the 21st dynasty (1069-945 BCE¹⁵⁵) marks the end of the New Kingdom, the golden age of the empire, and the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period. Possibly as a result of famine (the year of the hyenas) and the economical regress that followed the collapse of the empire, the end of the 20th dynasty was riddled by internal strife, which culminated with a civil war. As a result of this war, the control over Nubia, the only remaining part of the empire, was lost. After the civil war, Ramses XI or Herihor declared *wHm mswt*, literally the “repetition of births”, more loosely translated as the renaissance. To declare *wHm mswt* has been interpreted as a “magical repeating of the act of creation”¹⁵⁶, and was a means the ruler could employ to ritually reestablish order after a period of chaos¹⁵⁷, i.e. a reinstatement of *ma'at*¹⁵⁸. The renaissance lasted from the end of the civil war to

¹⁵⁵ The chronology of the 21st dynasty is still much disputed. I cannot go into the details of this discussion here, and will simply follow the chronology provided in the latest standard work of Ancient Egyptian history (Taylor 2000).

¹⁵⁶ Niwinski 2000, p. 30.

¹⁵⁷ Dijk 2000, p. 309.

¹⁵⁸ Niwinski 1996b, p. 18.

Ramses XI's death in 1069 BCE, a period of approximately 12 years¹⁵⁹. It is generally accepted that the many theological changes of the period, as well as the program launched by the state to rescue the mummies in the necropolis from tomb robbers, were sanctioned in the doctrines of the *wHm mswt*¹⁶⁰.

Following the death of Ramses XI, the last of the Ramesside kings, Smendes founded a dynasty in the North with Tanis and possibly Memphis as centers of administration¹⁶¹. His origin is unknown, and his reign seems to have been legitimized partly by his marriage to Tentamun, most likely a relative of Ramses XI¹⁶². The kings of the north were formally ruling all of Egypt, but in reality the north was controlled by the High Priests of Amun, who also tended to gather other titles of power, such as chief general of the army, vizier, etc. in one person¹⁶³.

The dynasty has been called “the theocracy of Amun”, since political decisions were reached through the oracles of the *triad of Karnak*: Amon-Ra, Mut and Khonsu. Major political decisions could not be reached without consulting the oracle of the sun- and creator-god Amun-Ra, whose will only the King and the High Priest of Amun could interpret. In theory, Ancient Egypt was always a theocracy, with the divine Pharaoh as mediator between gods and men, and personally responsible for implementing *ma'at*, the principle of social and cosmic order. Neither is the idea of the one Supreme Being as the ultimate source of all existence a novelty. A consciousness of the oneness of the creator god, from which every other god in the pantheon ultimately originated, is apparent already in the Old Kingdom¹⁶⁴. In the 21st dynasty, however, these ideas were taken to a new level.

¹⁵⁹ Goff 1979, p. 51.

¹⁶⁰ Niwinski 1996b. Its implications on the iconography are discussed in Niwinski 2000, p. 30-36.

¹⁶¹ Few sources from the 21st dynasty have actually been found in Memphis, but contemporary material and unconfirmed finds of the 1700 and 1800s indicate state activity in the area in the 21st dynasty. As for Tanis, only the temple and the royal tombs have been found. In Memphis, more material is expected to be found, but the poor preservation conditions in the delta keeps expectations of further finds there low. Niwinski 2002, p. 416.

¹⁶² Taylor 2000, p. 331.

¹⁶³ Goff 1979, p. 45-55; Niwinski 1988a, p. 39; Taylor 2000, p. 331.

¹⁶⁴ Hornung 1982, p. 235.

One consequence of this new theology was the elevated status of the sun-creator god on behalf of the king. Whereas Amun-Ra's position in the hierarchy of gods and men now was greater than ever, the former god-king was reduced to a simple oracle-reader, an office he shared with the High Priest of Amun in the south. The reduced status of the king in the state religion reflects the political realities of the era. The early Ramesside kings enjoyed loyal commitment from the neighboring kingdoms for apparent reasons¹⁶⁵. During the reign of Ramses XI, however, the situation changed. The *Report of Wenamun* relates how humiliating and dangerous even simple trade affairs in the Levant became after the fall of the empire, when pharaoh no longer evoked fear and respect¹⁶⁶.

Another logical consequence of the theocracy was that every state official held a priestly title. Since the god now was the head of state, every servant of the state, and according to Niwinski every member, was consequently a servant of the god, i.e. a priest¹⁶⁷. Unlike the Amarna Period (ca 1352-1330 BCE), when the status of the sun god reached a comparable level, the cults of the other gods in the pantheon were maintained. The other gods were seen as manifestations of the sun-creator god, whose ability to take on whatever form he desired was stressed in the funerary compositions. At the same time, the individual gods were seen as independent and real at their own level of existence, and the traditional public worship was maintained. This new theological system of the 21st dynasty has been described in a rather contradictory term as *polymorphic monotheism*¹⁶⁸. It is a special case of *henotheism* or *monolatry*, which is how Egyptian religion generally is labeled¹⁶⁹.

Despite the apparent division of power, relations between the south and the north seem to have been fairly peaceful. Tensions were minimized by the close connections between the two rulers, who strengthened their ties through intermarriage. There were

¹⁶⁵ Bettum and Steiner 2003.

¹⁶⁶ Lichtheim 1984, p. 224-230.

¹⁶⁷ Niwinski 1988a, p. 15.

¹⁶⁸ Niwinski 1989b, p. 106; 2000, p. 28, 32-33.

¹⁶⁹ Hornung 1982, p. 235-237.

often close family connections between the two rulers, such as between the brothers Psusennes I (c.1039-991 BCE) and H.P. Menkheperra (c.1036-988 BCE)¹⁷⁰. The fortresses built by the southern rulers throughout Upper Egypt down to the border north of the Fayyum were probably not directed towards their northern colleagues, but rather towards Libyan tribes, who randomly attacked the valley. Since the end of the New Kingdom, “Libyans” from the Meshwesh and Libu tribes in the western desert made a growing impact on Egyptian society. In alliance with the *Sea People*, the Meshwesh actually tried to conquer Egypt during the reign of Merenptah (1213-1203 BCE)¹⁷¹, but was brutally defeated by the Egyptians. However, the defeat was not enough to diminish the Libyan influence, which continued in various ways for the next three centuries¹⁷².

Themselves pressured by the Sea People and shortage of food, the Libyans embarked on large-scale migration to Lower Egypt in 12th and 13th centuries BCE¹⁷³. Taylor writes:

*Although major incursions of Meshwesh and Libu had been repulsed by Merenptah and Ramses III, the settlement of immigrants, war captives, and garrison troops continued, (...) it has been suggested that by the end of the New Kingdom the Egyptian army was almost entirely made up of Libyan mercenaries*¹⁷⁴

In the vacuum of power that occurred after the death of Ramses XI, social mobility increased within the army, and several of the Libyan families gained wealth and authority within the Egyptian society. If the dating of C47714 is correct, the coffin ensemble was produced within the last decade before one of these Libyan families rose to power and assumed kingship in Lower Egypt. Osorkon the Elder (984-978 BCE) thus anticipated the political situation of the 22nd dynasty, when his nephew Sheshonq established a pure Libyan dynasty that held power for more than 200 years.

¹⁷⁰ Taylor 2000, p. 333-334. The regional years of the pontificate of Menkheperra was taken from Niwinski 1988a, Table VI, p. 2008.

¹⁷¹ Shaw 2000, p. 328; Dijk 2000, p. 306-309.

¹⁷² Leahy 1985, p. 53.

¹⁷³ Taylor 2000, p. 339.

¹⁷⁴ Taylor 2000, p. 335.

The 21st dynasty was also a period characterized by a radical break with the funerary beliefs of earlier times, both with regard to the king and his officials. The lack of income from the former colonies forced the government to search elsewhere for income, and plundering of tombs was common. The dynasties of both high priests and kings are well known for the systematic plundering of their predecessors' graves and reuse of funerary equipment from earlier tombs¹⁷⁵.

Because of the informal division of the kingdom, the lack of security, the apparent shortage of financial resources, and eventually the “moral downfall” attested by the official tomb robbery, the 21st dynasty is often referred to as a period of political and cultural decline. This conclusion is too simple, however. In many aspects, the 21st dynasty represents a peak of the cultural development rather than its downfall. Royal building activity, often used as a measure of the power of the government, was no less than in the late Ramesside times¹⁷⁶. The art of mummification reaches its definite peak in this period, and the same can be said about the coffin production and the theology reflected in the funerary art¹⁷⁷.

Interestingly, “The Instruction of Amenmope” is said to constitute the culmination of the literary genre of instruction texts¹⁷⁸, a genre that contains instructions on how to live a good life in accordance with *ma'at*, i.e. a code of moral standards. This evidence suggests that the 21st dynasty was more prosperous and politically stable than what often is assumed, and that the seeming contradictions probably stem from insufficient sources¹⁷⁹. Due to the continuation of artistic trends of the New Kingdom in the funerary art, the 21st dynasty is in this capacity often referred to as “Late New Kingdom” rather than “Third Intermediate Period”.

¹⁷⁵ Goff 1979, p. 47, Naguib 1990a, p. 98.

¹⁷⁶ Niwinski 2002, p. 417.

¹⁷⁷ Niwinski, 1989b, p. 89.

¹⁷⁸ Lichteim 1984, p. 147.

¹⁷⁹ Niwinski 2002, p. 416-418.

The Theban necropolis and the Bab el-Gusus cache

Because of its numerous ancient monuments, the city of Luxor is today one of the most visited tourist sites in Egypt. The city, which was called *niwt* or *τΑ-ipt* in Egyptian, and *Thebai* in Greek¹⁸⁰, the latter from which the modern name Thebes is derived, was the administrative center of Upper Egypt. Thebes was the capital of Egypt throughout most of the New Kingdom, and by the 21st dynasty its west bank had been the necropolis for Pharaohs and officials for centuries. Some of the royal funerary temples once lining the edge of the cultivated land are still standing. The mountain range surrounding the apex of el-Qurn must have been covered with the funerary chapels of the officials, under which rock cut burial chambers were hewn. Today only numerous shafts, tunnels and chambers in the ground remain, sometimes with decorations more or less intact¹⁸¹.

The necropolis was the center of the ancestor worship of Thebes, where both the deified kings and private ancestors were venerated. During the yearly “Beautiful Feast of the Valley”, a procession was led through the necropolis in honor of the dead. In the 21st dynasty, the final stop of the procession and the culmination of the ritual happened at the Hathor temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari¹⁸². The funerary temples of Tutmosis III and the great Middle Kingdom pharaoh Nebhepetre Mentuhotep were also located at Deir el-Bahari, thus forming a natural center for the ancestor worship. Perhaps the astonishing geography in the area, and its location right across the river from the Karnak temple, contributed to its special sacredness¹⁸³. With its gardens of tamarisk and sycamore trees in front of the splendid temples¹⁸⁴, this little pocket in the mountain range must truly have been a marvelous sight.

¹⁸⁰ Naguib 1990b, p. 70.

¹⁸¹ Maniche 1989; Hodel-Hones 2000.

¹⁸² Naguib 1990a, p. 125-127, 1991.

¹⁸³ Personal correspondence with Dr. Niwinski at the site 25/11 2001.

¹⁸⁴ Winlock 1942, p. 84.

Tomb robbers were known and feared in Ancient Egypt since the Old Kingdom, and many precautions to prevent it had been attempted since then¹⁸⁵. The kings of the New Kingdom tried to avoid the problem by hiding their tombs in the remote *Valley of the Kings*. Their strategy was not successful. Numerous well-preserved documents have been handed down to us proving how widespread and advanced tomb robbery had become by the late New Kingdom¹⁸⁶. During the *wHm mswt* period, the southern rulers launched a program to rescue the royal mummies. Herihor ordered the opening of the tombs of Sety I and Ramses II, and their mummies were transported to the Medinet Habu temple¹⁸⁷. By the mid 21st dynasty all but two tombs in the Valley of the Kings had been emptied, and the rewrapped mummies were provided with some new burial equipment and reburied in a new hiding place. It is tempting to suggest that the kings were stripped for their last valuables in the process. The resulting royal collective grave was discovered by modern tomb-robbers near Deir el-Bahri first in 1870, and in 1881 it caught the attention of the Antiquity Service and its director Gaston Maspero. The intriguing events surrounding this marvelous discovery are often related in books on Egyptology¹⁸⁸, and have even been reconstructed on film¹⁸⁹.

Ten years later, another collective grave was discovered by George Daressy, assisted by Mohammad abd el-Rasool, G. Brunton and O. Guéraud. The grave, known as Bab el-Gusus or simply “the priestly cache”, was located just in front of the temple of Hatshepsut (Fig. 64). It was untouched by tomb robbers, and turned out to contain the bodies and funerary equipment of 153 priests of the 21st dynasty, including the owner of C47714. Every coffin was given an “A-number” by Daressy while they were still *in situ*, a number system that has been used to recreate the position of the individual coffins in the tomb. From Daressy’s reports¹⁹⁰, which were refined into a detailed map

¹⁸⁵ Kanawati 1987, p. 32-37.

¹⁸⁶ Goff 1979, p. 46, 53-54.

¹⁸⁷ Goff, 1979, p. 47; Naguib 1990a, p. 98; Niwinski 1996b, p. 16.

¹⁸⁸ For instance Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 77-80; Bettum 2003, p. 52-58. The original version of the story can be found in Maspero 1889, p. 511-519; Maspero and Brugsch 1881.

¹⁸⁹ Shadi Adb el-Salam’s “El-momia” or “Night of Counting of the Years” from 1969. Ikram and Dodson 1998, p. 79.

¹⁹⁰ Daressy 1900; 1907.

of the cache by Niwinski¹⁹¹, one can find C47714 as A37, located in the tunnel about 30 meters from the entrance.

According to Niwinski, both the royal and the priestly caches must have been finished during the reign of Psusennes II (ca. 959-945 BCE)¹⁹². Judging from the various styles of decoration found on the coffins from Bab el-Gusus, many of the coffins were apparently buried elsewhere first, and then moved to the cache later on. A37 must have been made at least 30 years before it was placed in the collective grave (see below). The fact that the coffin is anonymous, with a slot left open for the name in two of the texts (see text 2 and 19 in chapter 4), indicates that the coffin was manufactured for general sale and not made on order for one particular individual. Thus, there is no reason to assume that the coffin was made a long time before the burial, which could have been the case if the coffin was ordered from the owner while he was still alive. C47714 most likely belonged to the group of coffins that was reburied, possibly along with the surrounding coffins of similar date.

We can only speculate as to where the original tomb can have been. Not a single decorated tomb from Thebes has been proved to originate from the 21st dynasty. The undecorated tombs are difficult to date, a task that is complicated further by frequent reuse through the following centuries. There is some evidence, however, that priests of the 21st dynasty were buried within the precinct of temples that were active in the period, such as the Medinet Habu and Ramesseum temples¹⁹³.

The undecorated collective grave without any superstructure, as well as the pre-made coffins, are inventions of the 21st dynasty, and constitute a radical break with the classical repertoire of ancient Egyptian burial tradition. In the New Kingdom, officials spent the surplus of their income to have a proper tomb cut out and decorated for them, and a funerary chapel built above. The funerary equipment was likewise made on order a long time before it was required. The individual was thus actively planning

¹⁹¹ Niwinski 1988a, Table I, p. 196-197.

¹⁹² Niwinski 1984, p. 73-78, 1988, p. 25-26.

¹⁹³ Naguib 1990a, p. 122.

his/her burial through a large part of his/her lifetime. In the 21st dynasty, however, it seems as if most of the preparations for burial happened after death occurred. A coffin could be bought at the market in no time, and after the body was mummified and placed in the coffin, room could be found for it in the temple's burial area.

Symptomatically, stress was placed on the treatment of the body. Never before had the mummification process been so elaborate and time consuming as now. The 21st dynasty embalmers continued the classical procedures of the New Kingdom, but went several steps further with the cosmetic repertoire. Saw dust, sand or pads of linen could be sewn in under the skin to make the body look fleshier, and great care was taken to make hair and makeup look perfect. Inlaid eyes and false hair woven into the hair of the deceased to make it look thicker was common¹⁹⁴.

This sudden change in burial customs has usually been explained by the worsened economy and an acute need for security, both for the dead and for the workmen in the necropolis. On a strictly practical level, this explanation is self evident, but in the religious cosmos of the ancient Egyptians, I do not think a cultural revolution like this could have taken place without the support of religious ideology. There is no doubt that the theology of the period underwent significant changes, but as far as I know, the few sources we have are silent about changes in afterlife belief that could lead to such radical changes in burial practice. Although we do not know what the ideological change consisted of, A. Leahy, followed up by Saphinaz-Amal Naguib, has suggested a possible source of influence to the supposed change in ideology. Following the argument above, Leahy writes:

The changes in funerary practice must therefore represent a different attitude to the dead, an indifference to elaborate long-term preparations for death, or to permanent memorials in the form of monumental superstructures. This outlook is new and, at the very least, compatible with the customs of a (semi-) nomadic people who habitually buried their dead where they fell, without ostentation or prior concern¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Fouquet 1896; Daressy and Schmidt 1903; Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 124-128.

¹⁹⁵ Leahy 1985, p. 62.

The “(semi-) nomadic people” here referred to, is none other than the Libyans who rose to power within Egypt during the 21st dynasty. As a powerful and highly regarded element of Egyptian society at the time¹⁹⁶, these people could very well have contributed to the development of religious ideas. More research is necessary before anything conclusive can be said about the ideological reasons behind the sudden change of funerary practice in the 21st dynasty, but I believe the line of thought presented here is logical given what we do know.

The Swedish-Norwegian collection

Of the 153 coffin ensembles found in the Bab el-Gusus cache, 101 were double¹⁹⁷. The total number of coffins was thus 254. The Egyptian Museum in Cairo was already having storage problems, and in 1893 the government decided to donate the larger part of this find to foreign powers. 17 institutions in Europe and Turkey were chosen as the lucky receivers of the khedive’s gift. Each institution was to receive a pack of four or five coffin ensembles, and to make the distribution fair, the coffins were selected by lot¹⁹⁸. The kingdom of Sweden-Norway, represented by king Oscar II, was one of the receiving powers.

Oscar II decided to divide the gift between the National Museum in Stockholm and the “Ethnographic Museum of the University in Christiania”, which was the name of the museum back then. The coffins were probably shipped from Alexandria in two different loads, since there is no mention of the Oslo-coffins in the documents in Stockholm, which include the shipping papers from Alexandria¹⁹⁹. I have not been able to find any shipping papers belonging to the Norwegian part of the collection, and precisely how and when the coffins made it to Norway is unclear. The Swedish

¹⁹⁶ Whereas foreigners (including Libyans) generally were depicted in the art with a fixed set of features spelling out their differences from Egyptians, the Libyan groups in question appear no different from other Egyptians. This indicates that the Libyans were accepted as full worthy members of the Egyptian state. At the same time, however, there is evidence that they to some extent maintained their own culture. Leahy 1985, p. 54; Taylor 2000, p. 340.

¹⁹⁷ Daressy 1900, p.144.

¹⁹⁸ Daressy 1907, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ Nämndskatalogen 9. mars 1894 (attachments).

part of the collection was again split up and sent on “loan” to the Mediterranean Museum in Stockholm (MM) and the Victoria Museum in Uppsala (VM), where all but one element (the lid of VM 152, which is in severe need of conservation) have been given a place in the permanent exhibitions. The Oslo-coffins are now back in storage after the temporary exhibition “The Mummy Lives!” in 2003-2004.

In Daressy’s publication of the results of the lottery, “14e LOT. – Suède et Norvège. – Musée national. Stockholm” was to receive the coffin-ensembles with the A-numbers: 7 (Ankhsenmut), 37 (anonymous man), 80 (anonymous woman), and 82 (Khonsumes)²⁰⁰. There is reason to doubt, however, that this is actually what was shipped. Niwinski writes:

In the course of the preparations made for sending these off, some errors were made, and pieces which were parts of one and the same coffin [-ensemble] were in some instances sent off to different museums. On the other hand, some changes were probably made just after drawing the lots, since there are several inaccuracies in Daressy’s list of the sets of the presented coffins. Daressy himself frankly admitted to having made some errors in respect to the anonymous coffins²⁰¹.

To the untrained eye, the coffins from the Bab el-Gusus can look extremely similar, and in some instances even the experts can make mistakes. Since the only way to transport the coffin ensembles efficiently is to separate the inner coffin and its content from the sarcophagus, the sets have been mixed up. Mistakes probably occurred already in antiquity, when the coffins were moved to the cache. Disregarding as much as possible of the often erroneous and contradictory information found in the various publications and catalogues at the museums involved²⁰², the following information

²⁰⁰ Daressy 1907, p. 5-6, 10 and 21. The mummies were left behind in Cairo where they still are in storage in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The mummies have been unavailable to scholars for decades, but have recently been brought to the museums attention again, with the “Egyptian Mummy Project”, which was started the spring 2004.

²⁰¹ Niwinski 1988, p. 26-27.

²⁰² The University Museum of Cultural Heritage in Oslo (UKM), The National Museum in Stockholm (NME), The Mediterranean Museum in Stockholm (MM), and the Victoria Museum in Gustavianum, Uppsala (VM).

can be extracted from the coffins themselves. I have tried to cross-reference my results with Daressy's original list of A-numbers:

Current location	Nature of the object	Current catalogue number	Name	Titles	A-nr.
UKM	Inner coffin, F	C47713 (=EM8125)	Anonymous*	nbt-pr Smayt	80
UKM	Inner coffin, M	C47714ab (=EM8124)	Anonymous (slot left open)		37
UKM	Mummy-cover, M	C47714c (=EM8123)	Anonymous (slot left open)	Hsy-aA m rx-immn	37
MM	Outer coffin, M	NME 890	Anonymous		37 ²⁰³
MM	Outer coffin, F	NME 892	Ankhsenmut ²⁰⁴	nbt-pr Smayt n immn nsw-nTrw Hsy-t-aAt	7
MM	Mummy-cover, F	MM 32003 (=NME 895)	Nesy	nbt-pr Smayt n immn nsw-nTrw Hsy-t-mwt nbt-pt	7
VM	Inner coffin, F	VM 152 (=NME 893)	Anonymous*	nbt-pr Smayt n immn Hsy-t-aAt	7
VM	Inner coffin M	VM 228 (=NME 891)	Khonsumes	wab n mwt sS pr-immn	82
VM	Mummy-cover, M	NME 894	Khonsumes	wab n mwt Ss pr-immn	82

* The "feet" of the lids on these coffins, where the name usually was written, have broke off and are missing.

There is no room here for a thorough discussion of all the sources involved²⁰⁵. Suffice it to say for now that I have good reasons to assume that NME 893 is the inner coffin of NME 892 (a conclusion also reached by Niwinski²⁰⁶), and once contained the mummy of the child Ankhsenmut and the reused mummy-cover of Nesy. Niwinski followed both Daressy²⁰⁷ and Porter and Moss²⁰⁸ in assuming Ankhsenmut's location to be in Oslo, and repeated the mistake made in Nämndskatalogen by giving NME 892-93 the A-number 80.

There has been some discussion on how the title Hsy aA m rX immn, found on only three of the Bab el-Gusus coffins²⁰⁹, should be read. The problem is mainly how

²⁰³ The arguments for a pairing of C47714 with NME 890 are given in detail below.

²⁰⁴ The name is taken from Nämndskatalogen.

²⁰⁵ An article with such a discussion is under preparation.

²⁰⁶ Niwinski 1988a, p. 174.

²⁰⁷ Daressy 1907, p. 19

²⁰⁸ Porter and Moss, volume I, part 2, p. 639.

²⁰⁹ Niwinski 1988a, p. 194, entry 109, 320, 340 in the list of sources.

to understand the word *rx*, which is written without any determinative. Its basic meaning is “knowledge”, but it could also mean “wisdom”, “secret”, or “opinion”²¹⁰, depending on spelling and determinative used. Following this, the title could be translated as “The great chanter of Amun’s knowledge/wisdom/secret/opinion”, possibly connected somehow to the institution of the oracle of Amun. However, Naguib suggests²¹¹ that *rx* in this case should be understood as an abbreviation of *rx-nf*, meaning “image”²¹². Following Naguib’s theory, anonymous man C47714 was thus “The great chanter/singer-musician of Amun’s image”²¹³.

Technical data from the coffin

The 21st dynasty coffins usually consisted of five components: the lid and case of the inner coffin (C47714a-b), the mummy-cover (C47714c), and the lid and case of an outer coffin or sarcophagus²¹⁴. All components of the 21st dynasty coffin ensemble were densely decorated, sometimes both on the interior and exterior surfaces. Usually, as in this case, the interior decorations were less dense, and painted on a darker background. C47714 has a decorated interior of the case, but the mummy-cover and the lid is left undecorated. Similarly the footboards on the case could be decorated on the inside, but on C47714 there are no decorations on the footboards whatsoever. Thus there are four decorated surfaces to consider, the exterior and the interior of the case, and the exterior of the lid and the mummy-cover.

Except from the interior of the case (Fig. 42-44), which was severely damaged by remaining moisture in the mummy shortly after burial²¹⁵, the coffin is in a relatively good state of preservation. A piece of plaster has fallen off by the exterior head end of

²¹⁰ *Wb* II, 442:7 – 449:3; Faulkner 1996, p. 151-152.

²¹¹ Personal correspondence with Dr. Naguib July 23rd 2004.

²¹² *Wb* II, 445:11.

²¹³ For her discussion of the institution of the temple chanter/ singer-musician (*Hsy*), see Naguib 1990a, p. 232-234.

²¹⁴ The terms “outer coffin” and “sarcophagus” will here be used interchangeably.

the case, but this does not affect any crucial part of the decoration. Paint has worn off by the knees on the exterior right side of the case (Fig. 33), where a text has been seriously damaged. Extremities like the beard and the items once placed in the hands on the lid and the mummy-cover have fallen off and are lost. Large cracks in the plaster all over the lid may become a problem if not dealt with in due time.

The state of the mummy-cover is more critical²¹⁶. Two pieces of wood with intact decorations have fallen off the mummy-cover, but the pieces are still in the custody of the museum, and could easily be put back in place (Fig. 3-4). A crack in the plaster running through the center of the cover from head to foot threatens to split it in two. At the head, the plaster is no longer touching the wood, due to contractions in the wood over the millennia. This free-hanging shell of plaster is extremely fragile, and the faintest touch could make it disintegrate. A little “first aid-conservation” was given to the lid and particularly the mummy-cover for the exhibition “The Mummy Lives” at UKM in 2003. This consisted mainly of removal of dust, and the free-hanging plaster on the mummy-cover was temporarily secured. No traces or documentation of earlier conservation have been found.

All components of the 21st dynasty coffin ensembles were made of plastered and painted wood. Usually sycamore wood was used, but other local wood types like acacia or tamarisk could be used²¹⁷. The damages on the coffin give us a clue to how it was made. First, the carpenters must have made a wooden box roughly resembling the shape of a human being. Both case and lid were constructed by joining ready-carved boards together with dowels (Fig. 3) and glue²¹⁸. The remains of charcoal on the boards in the bottom of the case where the plaster has disappeared (Fig. 42 and 44) indicates that a fire was made inside the box before it was decorated. This method, which was used also in Europe in medieval times, extracted the moisture from the

²¹⁵ From the UKM conservation section’s internal archive: ”Rapport etter analyser av skader samt konservering av mumiekiste C47714B”, by Anders Bettum and Eivind Brattlie, September 10, 2003.

²¹⁶ Personal correspondence with UKM-Conservators Svein Viik and Eivind Brattlie.

²¹⁷ Niwinski 1988a, p. 57; Havrevold 1985, p. 353.

²¹⁸ Niwinski 1988a, p. 59.

boards and reduced contraction and expansion of the wood that later could damage the decorations²¹⁹. It is noteworthy that the cracks in the plaster threatening to damage the decorations on the lid and the mummy-cover are nowhere to be seen on the case.

The details in the woodwork, such as the face and the hands, were carved separately, and added to the rough frame by wooden pegs. As can be seen in the damages on the interior of the case, a layer of linen was applied over the boards to even out the surface before the plaster was smeared on. No such layer can be seen in the abrasions on the exterior surfaces. The linen and the thick layer of coarse plaster covered cracks and depressions in the wood, and gave the coffin a smooth surface. The plaster was molded to further emphasize the human shape of the coffin, particularly on the lid and the mummy-cover.

By studying the gashes in the paint through a microscope, several layers of colors can be identified. First, a layer of white grounding was applied over the plaster. Then follows a layer of light yellow grounding, on top of which an outline of the decoration was drawn with red color. This sketch can be seen in the background everywhere, and particularly on the hands and the ears (Fig. 13), where it constitutes the only decoration necessary. The raised relief on the lid was made by a finer type of plaster, before the remaining colors (black, white, and blue) were added. Nuances in color were achieved by painting these colors on top of each other. For instance, light green was achieved by adding blue to the already yellow background, and the darker blue/green was achieved by adding blue color to a black background. A thick layer of resinous varnish was applied at last, making the light yellow coffin shimmer like gold. The resin-varnish must have darkened over the millennia²²⁰, causing the blue colors to look green and the yellow background to look almost orange. On the interior of the case, the varnish was applied to certain elements of the decorations only, thus making

²¹⁹ Personal correspondence with Eivind Brattlie.

²²⁰ This is indicated by the random and imprecise way the varnish has been applied on the interior decoration. If the varnish was colored from the beginning, more care would have been taken to cover the motif and not spill outside of it. This observation was also made by Niwinski (1988, p. 61-62.) on some of the coffins he studied.

them stand out brightly against the dark background. After the mummy was placed inside, the inner coffin was sealed by a system of dowels locking the lid to the case. The outer coffins were usually not sealed.

The coffin is 184 cm long. It is 53 cm wide at the broadest point across the chest, and 29 cm at the narrowest point across the ankles. The profile has two apexes, one at the foot end, 55 cm, and one at the tip of the nose, ca 50.5 cm. The profile is lowest by the ankles, where it measures 33.5 cm. The interior of the case measures 177 (bottom) -179 (top) cm in length, 20-43 cm in with and 21-28 cm in depth. The thickness of the walls in the case varies between 4.5 and 5.5 cm. The mummy-cover is 171 cm long, 42.5 across the chest and 20 cm broad across the ankles. A test rendered at the museum with the aid of Conservator Eivind Brattlie, proved that the mummy-cover fitted within the inner coffin, if only barely. There is no apparent reason to doubt that the inner coffin and the mummy-cover belong together.

NME 891, the outer coffin?

Most 21st dynasty coffins had an outer coffin in which the inner one was placed. I have not been able to find any documentation proving the existence of an outer coffin belonging to C47714, but its location in the tomb indicates that there must have been one. A37 had namely another coffin, A38, stacked on top. The fact that A38 is a double coffin²²¹ makes it highly unlikely that A37 was single, since that would have caused a problem of balance.

The history of the coffin makes it natural to start searching for a possible outer coffin at the Mediterranean Museum in Stockholm and the Victoria Museum in Uppsala. In fact Niwinski, who visited the Scandinavian museums in preparation for his PhD in the early eighties, claimed to have found the outer coffin in Stockholm, recorded as NME 891²²². However, NME 891 is in fact the coffin of Khonsumes, which was

²²¹ Niwinski 1988a, Table III, p. 203.

²²² Niwinski 1988a, p. 162.

published by Gertie Englund²²³. By studying the main catalogue of the National Museum in Stockholm²²⁴, the museum that still formally owns the coffins, it became clear to me that Niwinski is referring to NME 890 (Fig. 54-63). In the catalogue, which Niwinski must have used as source, the coffins are mixed up, and NME 891 is described as 890²²⁵. The mistake was officially corrected in 1928²²⁶, but it continues to confuse scholars who only examine the earliest entries, since these generally (and in this case erroneously) are believed to be the most reliable source.

Contrary to NME 891, NME 890 is in fact an outer coffin, originating from the same tomb as C47714. Furthermore, it is anonymous, and belonged to a man. The decoration of the lid is strikingly similar to the composition found on C47714a and c, but both the interior and the exterior decorations on the case are quite different (see the discussion of the decoration below). NME 890 is about 212 cm long (measured by the bottom), and 72 cm broad across the chest. Interior measures are similarly 204,5 cm long and 40 cm wide, which means that C47714 would fit perfectly inside.

After studying NME 890 in some detail, I must agree with Niwinski that this coffin probably is the sarcophagus of C47714, although conclusive evidence has yet to be found. The formal criteria for judging whether or not the coffins belonged to the same man, such as size, gender, textual references and style all turned out positively. However, we still cannot exclude the possibility that two men about the same size and with the same titles²²⁷ were living in the same period, and had their coffins made at the same workshop. As so often has been the case with these coffins, it is not unlikely that two such coffin ensembles were split up and confused in modern times.

²²³ Englund 1974 and 1985.

²²⁴ Nämndskatalogen 09.03.1894.

²²⁵ Aksejionskatalogen

²²⁶ Nämndskatalogen 11.08.1928.

²²⁷ I did not find any title or other specific references to the deceased on neither NME 890 nor C47714a-b. Only the Mummy-cover (C47714c) is provided with a title.

Conclusions have been made too rapidly in the past, and by these reservations I am trying to avoid doing the same mistake. Although I shall proceed as if the coffins do belong together, I will leave the question open, and continue the search for evidence.

NME 890 is in a good state of conservation, but this was not always the case. The decoration was seriously damaged when it arrived Stockholm in 1894²²⁸. After being conserved by Peter Tångeberg, at an unknown date²²⁹, the numerous abrasions in the paint have been filled in and painted with a yellow color identical to the one used originally for the background, in order to preserve the general visual impression of the coffin.

Decoration

Instead of four, we now have seven decorated surfaces to consider: the three lids, including the mummy-cover, and the interior and exterior decoration on both the inner and the outer case. The lids follow the same basic composition (Fig. 1, 12 and 54). They are fashioned in the shape of a man with his arms crossed over his chest. The gender can be determined by the striped wig (women usually had monochrome wigs), the closed fists (women usually had their fingers extended), the protruding ears (women usually had their ears hidden under the wig) and the lack of female attributes such as breasts, rosettes and jewelry. He is adorned with a wig and a large floral collar (wsx), and except from the face and the hands, his body is covered with texts and icons on a yellow background. The lid of NME 890 differs from C47714a by having the exterior of the footboard decorated.

The cases on the other hand, differ considerably in respect to both the inner and the outer decoration. Due to time and space limits on this study, NME 890 has not been given the through presentation as C47714 in chapter 4, and I will therefore go through

²²⁸ Namndskatalogen

²²⁹ Inventarietkatalogen (NME 890).

the most important differences between the two cases here. The interior decorations of these cases have a background color that is red/brown, and the density of the decoration is much lower. The interior decoration on NME 890 is limited to a single figure on the bottom of the case (Fig. 63), whereas the decoration in C47714 extends to the sides, and the density of motifs is higher (Fig. 42-47). Also the exterior decoration differs in respect to density of motifs. NME 890 has large figures painted on panels of white (Fig. 58-59), whereas C47714 has more complex compositions on the same yellow background that covers the rest of the coffin (Fig. 25 and 33). It is also noteworthy that NME 890 has certain decorative elements (i.e. the wig) extending from the lid to the case, whereas the two components are totally independent on C47714. The top motif on both cases is the same (Fig 34 and 62), a motif that is repeated again on the footboard of the lid on NME 890.

Dating based on Niwinski's typology

Following the typology established by Niwinski²³⁰, the mummy-cover and the lids are all of type IIa. Whereas C47714 has a B-case with 2b-type interior decoration, NME 890 has a D-case with 2a-type interior decoration. This particular combination of styles is rare but not unique, and provides us with excellent criteria for dating. Again following Niwinski, the coffin can, based on this particular combination of types within the same coffin ensemble, be dated to the reign of Amenmope, (c. 993-984 BCE) a ten-year period during which the pontificate of Thebes passed from Menkheperra to Pinudjem II²³¹.

Some support for this date can be derived from the positioning of the coffin in the tomb. Niwinski dated Coffin A38, which was placed on top of A37, to the reign of Amenmope and the pontificate of Pinudjem II. Also other coffins in the same area of

²³⁰ Niwinski 1988a, p. 65-69.

²³¹ Niwinski 1988a, table VII, p. 207. Needless to say, this dating is approximate, as always is the case when dealing with dates prior to 664 BCE. Even more caution should be taken when the dating is based on stylistic criteria only.

the tunnel (A24-49) have been given a similar date²³². Although it is a rule with exceptions, coffins from the same period tended to be clustered together in the tomb.

Coffins of this period seem to copy the styles of coffins from the late Ramesside era. This is particularly apparent on the case of NME 890, which style is an archaisation of the earlier type A of the exterior decoration.

Two levels of decoration

As mentioned earlier, the coffin is meant to resemble a man, or more precisely, the glorified *saH*-image of the deceased. All decorative elements contributing to the *saH*-image constitute what I shall call decoration-level 1. This includes many of the features of the lids, such as the wig, the face, the hands and the collar. Also the general shape of the lid, outlining features such as shoulders, feet, etc, and the subtle slopes and inclines meant to outline parts of the body such as lower arms (Fig. 13), shins, knees and a little belly (Fig. 25), all belong to this level of decoration.

Apart from the head and the hands, the body is covered with what must be interpreted as mummy-shrouds²³³. This relatively large surface has been utilized as canvas for a large number of texts and icons independent from the *saH*-image. These decorative elements, which will be presented in the next chapter, constitute what I call decoration-level 2. The two levels overlap in a few texts and icons contributing to the *saH*-image by their shape, but are independent icons or texts in terms of content. This hybrid level of decoration, which for the sake of convenience shall be called decoration-level 3, concerns the jewelry adorning the lower arms and chest on the lids (Fig. 2, 13 and 55). Also the horizontal and vertical text-bands on the lower part of the body (Fig 1), meant to resemble the outer straps of the mummy holding the shroud in place, belong to decoration-level 3.

²³² Niwinski 1988a, Table I, p. 196-197.

²³³ See the discussion of the *saH*-image in chapter 2.

On the anthropoid coffins of the New Kingdom, emphasis was on the decoration levels 1 and 3, which could be found both on the lid and the case. Interestingly, hardly any decoration belonging to level 1 or 3 can be found on the cases here examined. Looking at the cases alone, only the rough shape of a human being (Fig. 42) brings the *saH*-image to mind. Earlier the vertical text-bands resembling mummy-straps extended from the center of the lid down across the case. Now they are limited to a tiny strip on the sides of the lid only (Fig. 12 and 25). The *saH*-image is thus mainly represented on the lid, while the cases primarily serve as writing surface for religious texts and icons traditionally found elsewhere on the tomb equipment, such as papyri or the tomb walls. There is one exception to this rule, however. The horizontal stripes by the head on the outer case (Fig. 58-59) are meant to be a continuation of the wig, and is, like the rest of the composition on this surface, an archaism from Ramesside times²³⁴.

Research and publications of the 21st dynasty coffins²³⁵

As should be apparent from my bibliography, the works of Andrzej Niwinski, a professor at the Institute of Archeology at the Warsaw University, dominates this field. In the late 70's, he embarked on the difficult task of gathering information about the 21st dynasty coffins from their locations all over the world. Since then he has published two monographs and several articles on various aspects of the 21st dynasty burial. He also continued the work started in 1909 by Chassinat, by adding two volumes to the catalogue of coffins in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo²³⁶. Prior to Niwinski, only one comprehensive, and according to Niwinski not very useful typological study of the 21st dynasty coffins were accomplished²³⁷, namely the PhD dissertation of S. Simonian from 1973. Goff's book on symbols of the 21st dynasty from 1979 could also be mentioned, but similar to the work of Simonian, the part

²³⁴ Niwinski 1988a, p. 84, footnote 34.

²³⁵ For the few publications produced prior to 1970, see Niwinski 1988a, p. 29-33.

²³⁶ "Catalogue Generale", Niwinski 1996a; 1999.

²³⁷ Niwinski 1988a, p. 34.

dedicated to the coffins suffers from meager sources and a failure to understand the iconography and theology of the time²³⁸.

A growing number of in depth studies of individual coffins have also been published. Of particular interest to this study are the works of Gertie Englund on the coffin of Khonsumes in Uppsala²³⁹. Also worth mentioning are The Bristol Mummy Project, where particularly the technical aspects of the mummy and coffin of Horemkensi were published²⁴⁰, and the works of René van Walsem in Leiden. In his work on the coffin of Djedmontuiefankh, van Walsem established a typology of so-called *stola*-coffins of the late 21st and early 22nd dynasties²⁴¹. In an earlier article, he also criticized Niwinski's book from 1988²⁴².

The study of the 21st dynasty coffins is in its youth, having just began in the early 1970s. Works of the late 70's and 80's, and particularly the studies of Andrzej Niwinski, provide a foundation for further studies into the field. There is, however, a lot of work to be done, and as Niwinski writes, a revision of the established typology would be largely simplified if more individual coffins were published²⁴³. This study is among other things meant as an answer to this need.

²³⁸ Goff's book was criticized by Niwinski (1983a).

²³⁹ Englund 1974 and 1985.

²⁴⁰ The book is referred to under Spencer 2002.

²⁴¹ Walsem 1997.

²⁴² Walsem 1993.

²⁴³ Niwinski 1983a, p. 326.

4 Decorations

As discussed in chapter 1, presentation of art in linear text is a complicated matter. This becomes apparent now, when the three-dimensional composition of art and text on the coffin is to be accounted for. The three objects here to be examined (NME 890 not included) are all densely decorated with texts and icons. As discussed in chapter two, these decorative elements contain a religious significance in relation to each other, to the mummy which once was inside the coffin, and to the tomb/world on the outside. The relationship between the individual elements does not conform to principles of logical or linear thought, but appear at first rather random.

Upon closer examination it becomes clear that relationships can be found based on their significance or content, whereas the order in which they occur seems, at least in this case, secondary. An icon, say by the knee on the exterior side of the case of the inner coffin, may relate to texts within the frames of the icon, to texts on either side, to icons in its proximity, to texts and/or icons on the opposite side of the case, to texts and/or icons by the knee of other decorated surfaces, such as the interior of the case, the exterior of the outer case, the mummy cover or the lid. Only rarely do icons follow each other, to be “read” in the order they appear on the coffin.

It is of course difficult to render all the possible relations between the decorative elements in a linear presentation of individual texts and pictures. At the same time, each element deserves individual attention. In the following presentation, efforts have been made to address this problem. The result has been a combination of images, models and entries written in “catalogue style” below, hereafter referred to as “catalogue entries”²⁴⁴. The decorations are presented linearly (with an artificial starting point and end) in the catalogue entries, with text and icon numbers

²⁴⁴ My ideas on how to organize the material have been influenced heavily by other works on 21st dynasty coffins, primarily Chassinat 1909; Englund 1974; 1985; Niwinski 1988a; 1996; 1999; Walsem 1993; 1997; Spencer 2002, p. 38-54.

corresponding to the models and the pictures in the appendixes. The appendixes contain photographs of the individual icons (Appendix 1) and computerized versions of the hieroglyphic texts (Appendix 2).

A lack of space prevents me from giving detailed descriptions and explanations to each individual icon or text. The ones I find relevant to my thesis will be discussed in the next chapter, but otherwise the pictures and translated texts will have to speak for themselves, supported by references to literature where the motif is discussed in detail.

The texts

Whereas text and icons should be seen as complementary here, and not treated as qualitatively different from each other (see chapter 1), they demand different methods of presentation. For practical reasons I have presented them separately in the appendix and with two different sets of reference numbers.

The texts are standardized, religious formulas written in Middle Egyptian and known from other coffins and papyri of the 21st dynasty. Sometimes, however, only an abbreviated version is recorded on the coffin, or the text in question can be a variation of a text known from elsewhere. The use of Middle Egyptian hieroglyphs and the existence of comparative material facilitated the translation. What makes these texts harder to read compared to many others is the unusual execution of the individual sign. The hieroglyphs were written with a rather thick brush that sometimes fails to distinguish between similar signs. Color codes have been used to compensate for this, but sometimes the individual sign can only be identified judging from the group in which it occurs.

Translation of these texts thus happens in three stages. First the individual signs must be identified. Then individual words must be recognized, and finally the words can be read as intelligible sentences. Since the individual sign often can be identified only from its context, these three stages are all at work simultaneously, similar to Panofsky's three stages of iconographic interpretation. As indicated above, only stage

one (the rewriting of the hieroglyphs with computer fonts in Appendix 2) and three (the translation in the text-entries below) are included in this thesis. Due to lack of space, neither transliteration nor discussion of the many irregularities in grammar and spelling of the hieroglyphic inscriptions are included here. However, my notes on these topics will be submitted along with the thesis and will be available to those particularly interested.

Following Rene van Walsem's recipe for such operations²⁴⁵, the computerized hieroglyphs have been rendered the same way as they occur on the coffin, with regard in particular to reading -direction and whether the text is written as a line or a column. The hieroglyphic texts written in separate columns are treated as individual elements, whereas texts written within the frames of an icon are treated as part of the icon and (with one exception) translated under the same entry. In the appendix, hieroglyphic signs with an uncertain identification, either because of the execution of it or because of damages, have been slashed over, with a suggestion visible underneath. Hieroglyphs I have not been able to identify at all are marked by slashes without any sign underneath. Passages in the text that I have not been able to read are marked by square brackets and dots [...] in the translations, whereas editorial remarks are written in regular brackets (...). Other problems or comments in the appendix or in the translated text are mentioned in footnotes.

Icons

While the texts here are given in a computerized reproduction, the icons are presented as photographs of the original. Since the pictures are used as illustrations for other parts of the thesis as well, the figure numbers do not correspond to the icon-numbers, but are supplied in brackets with each figure caption. The text entries are similarly equipped with the corresponding figure numbers. Every icon has been named according to what the central motif depicts or how it is known in the literature.

²⁴⁵ Walsem 1997, p. 11. Although his methodology is ideal, the limitation of resources often forced me to use simpler methods.

The “multi-source character”²⁴⁶ of the decorations of the 21st dynasty is well known. Some of the icons are known from a large corpus of religious iconography, often dating several hundred years back. When the origin of an icon can be traced, it is given in the catalogue entry. As opposed to the texts, which are so far unpublished, some of the icons on the inner coffin were published in an article written by Saphinaz-Amal Naguib²⁴⁷. This article is of great value to readers unfamiliar with ancient Egyptian iconography, and will be used as a starting-point of the discussion in chapter 5. A few errors found in the article have been corrected in the text entries dealing with the icons in question.

The “double icons” are icons mirrored symmetrically around a central axis. The symmetry is, however, not perfect. Subtle differences in the mirrored image have been made deliberately, sometimes to emphasize slight differences in significance between the two images. The double icons are usually enlisted as one, and when necessary referred to as icon Xa or Xb, the former always referring to the image to the left in the double icon. The black slots in model 2 and 3 represents ornamental bands, some of which significance will be discussed in the next chapter.

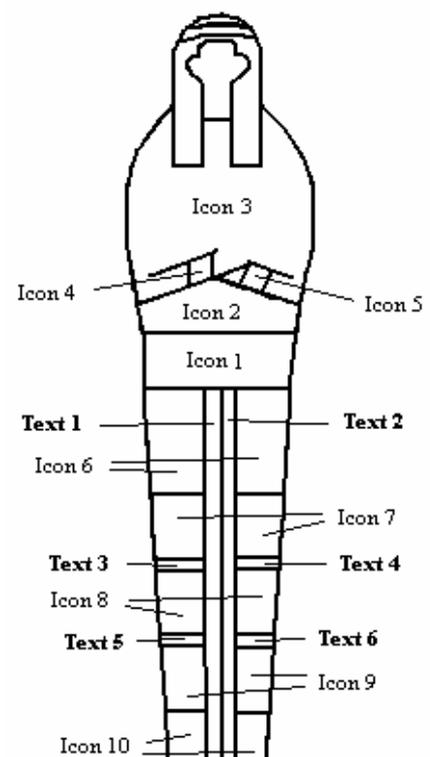
C47714c: mummy-cover (Model 1)

Icon 1: Nut with her wings outstretched (1), Fig. 6

This icon is located at the lower abdomen of the mummy-cover. The hieroglyphs above the head of the goddess identify her as the sky goddess Nut. The hieroglyphs above the wings of the cobras are probably also an abbreviated name, although the reading of it is dubious. Naguib has suggested the reading $\tau A \text{ } xytt$,

²⁴⁶ Niwinski 1981, p. 49-50.

²⁴⁷ Naguib 1982.



meaning “the (fem.) sky”²⁴⁸. If this interpretation is correct, the cobra could be seen as a different manifestation of the sky goddess. The interpretation seems plausible since the cobras on the coffin share the basic function of protection with the winged goddesses. The motif is repeated on the lid, and will be dealt with under icon 16.

Icon 2: Scarab flanked by double, enthroned Osiris (1), Fig. 5

This icon is located on the upper abdomen of the mummy-cover. The hieroglyphs above the wings of the goddesses read on the left side: *Isis* and on the right: *Osiris*, (*lord of*) *the Duat* and *Nephtys*. The text in front of the Osiris-figure to the left reads: *Osiris, lord of the Duat for ever* (?). Two hieroglyphs above the *ba*-bird to the left read: *coming forth*. A variant of this motif is found in the same location on the lid, and general information about it will be given under icon 17.

Icon 3-5, jewelry-icons. Fig. 2

These three icons belong to decoration level 3, since they in addition to being independent icons also function as jewelry adorning the *saH*-image²⁴⁹. Located on the chest of the mummy-cover, the winged scarab carrying the sun disc (icon 3) is often found on mummies as a pectoral plate attached to a chain hanging around the neck of the mummy. As an icon, it serves the same purpose as the other scarab-icons on the mummy-cover and the lid, which significance will be discussed in the next chapter. Icon 4 (Falcon god protected by cobras) and 5 (Scarab with sun-disc) similarly resembles bracelets that could adorn the wrists of the mummy. As icons, they are repetitions of motifs found several other places on the mummy-cover and the lid. For the falcon god, see icon 7, for the scarab, see icon 11.

²⁴⁸ Personal correspondence with Saphinaz Amal-Naguib. See also *Wb* III, p. 237:7, 238: 1, 2, 4.

²⁴⁹ For comparative material, see Niwinski 1988a, “colour plate” A/B, pl. III A, IV A, V A/C, VI A/B, VII A, VIII A/B, XI B, XII B, XV B.

Text 1-2

These two text-columns are written between the legs of the mummy cover, facing each other. Text 1 should be seen in connection to icon 6. The texts are repeated in abbreviated versions elsewhere on the coffin (text 1 is repeated in text 20 on the lid and text 30 on the case, whereas text 2 is repeated in text 29, 33 and 36 on the case).

The texts read:

1: Words spoken by Osiris, lord of the everlasting cycle (nHH), Wennefer, ruler of life, king of the everlasting cycle, lord of eternity (Dṯ). May he give sustenance offerings (consisting of) everything good and pure, everything good and sweet on which the god lives, (to) Osiris N²⁵⁰, the great chanter of Amun's wisdom²⁵¹.

2: Words spoken by the great Isis, mother of the god, the eye of Ra, lady of the embalming house. May she give sustenance offerings (consisting of) everything good and pure, everything good and sweet on which the god lives, (to) the Osiris, the great chanter of Amun's wisdom: ... He says: I have descended.

Icons 6-10 and texts 3-6

These decorative elements constitute a compositional unit covering the lower half of the mummy-cover. The icons are double, mirrored symmetrically around the central text bands (text 1-2). Four short text-lines comprise the two horizontal text-bands across the legs of the mummy-cover, which were meant to resemble the outer straps of the mummy. Texts 3-4 work as captions to icon 7 immediately above. Texts 5-6 are similarly captions to Icon 8 above. The icons all represent various divinities located under multi-colored canopies, sometimes with the deceased present before them, sometimes not.

²⁵⁰ "Osiris N" is used by Egyptologists to emphasize that it is the deceased that is referred to, and not the deity, which name usually is written with additional epithets like "Wennefer", "Foremost of the Westerners", etc.

²⁵¹ This priestly title was discussed in chapter 3. After the title, the name would normally follow. In this text, no space was available for the name, but in text 2 and 19 there are lacunas in the text meant for the name, which never was filled in (see Fig. 10).

In the uppermost icon (icon 6), where the space allows for it, the deceased is present. In the next icon, he might be represented in a slimmer version (see discussion under icon 7), whereas in the three lowermost icons (icons 8-10), where there is no space available, he is left out completely. In the corresponding scenes on the inner and outer lid, where there is more room, the deceased is present in all icons. Taking the *imaxy-Hr*-formulas²⁵² in texts 3-6 into consideration, it is therefore reasonable to assume that the presence of the deceased is understood also in icon 8-10, and that he was left out simply because of lack of space. The many scenes displaying the deceased presenting offerings to various deities probably originated in tomb-paintings of the Ramesside period²⁵³.

Icon 6: The deceased presenting unguent to Osiris enthroned, Fig. 7

This icon is located at the thighs of the mummy-cover. The hieroglyphs above the heads of the two figures identify them both as Osiris, with the epithets (probably meant for the god Osiris) *divine lord of the Duat* in 7a, and *lord of the everlasting cycle* in 7b. The motif is extremely common in the same location on coffins from the period, alternatively with (Ptah-) Sokar (-Osiris) as the deity worshiped²⁵⁴. As such it is found both on the inner and outer lid of this coffin. A more elaborate version of the motif is painted on the outer lid (fig. 58-61). A scene similar to this usually introduces the mythological papyri of the period, and is interpreted as the moment of death²⁵⁵.

Icon 7: Mummy-form deity of the west before Ptah-Sokar, Fig. 8

This icon is located by the knees of the mummy. The hieroglyphs in front of the falcon-deity identify him as *Ptah-Sokar*, but other identities, such as Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, Sokar-Osiris or Ra-Horakhty, are known for this figure from papyri and

²⁵² This formula, meaning "the revered one before D", where D is a divinity, refers to the deceased. Faulkner 1996, p. 20.

²⁵³ Niwinski 1981, p. 50.

²⁵⁴ Niwinski 1988a, "colour plate" B, pl. II B, III A, IV B, V A/B/C, VI A, IX A/B, XI B, XIV A/B.

²⁵⁵ Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p. 21. Papyri 1, 4-8, 10-15, 18-20 and 23-25 are all introduced with this motif.

coffins of the period²⁵⁶. Again the winged cobra is named $\tau A-xyt\tau$, although the spelling is abbreviated slightly. The $i\text{maxy}$ –formulas in texts 3-4 work as captions to this icon, which might indicate that the mummy-form deity with the head replaced by the sign of the west is the deceased himself. Regardless, this icon is a variant of a motif that is repeated in the same location on both the inner (icon 22) and outer (Fig. 54) lids. The falcon deity is also depicted in icon 21 and 32.

Texts 3-4

Captions to icon 7:

3: *The revered one before Ptah-Sokar [...]* 4: *The revered one before Ptah-Sokar (?) [...]*.

Icon 8: Striding Ram, Fig. 9

This icon is located by the shins of the mummy. A variant of it is repeated on the inner lid in the same location (icon 23). The single hieroglyph above the head of the ram means *god*. The god is unnamed in the captions, and is referred to only as *the ram of Duat* and *the divine ram*. In texts 13-14 on the lid he is referred to as *the great ba*. These epithets hint to a solar-Osirian identity²⁵⁷, which is further indicated by the presence of the serpent in this version of the motif. The motif is known from papyri from the same period²⁵⁸, and probably originates from the Book of the dead, chapter 9²⁵⁹.

Texts 5-6

Captions to Icon 8:

²⁵⁶ Schmidt 1919b, entry 711, 717, 766,791; Spencer 2002, p. 38, 41, 51, fig. 4.3, 4.5, 4.18 and 4.19; Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p. 71-72, 107, pl. 1 and 9; Niwinski 1988a, "colour plate" B, pl. IV A, V A VI A VII A, XI B. For a discussion on the symbolic role of the falcon in the period, see Goff 1979, p. 221-239.

²⁵⁷ For the epithets, see Leitz 2002, band III, p. 786-787 and band II, p. 666

²⁵⁸ Piankoff and Rambova 1957; v. 1, p. 114 and v. 2 plate 10. The ram is also present in papyrus 8, 6, 11, 15, 16, 19 and 23.

5: *The revered one before the ram that is in the Duat.* 6: *The revered one before the divine ram, lord of the Duat.*

Icon 9: Kneeling god before the imiwt -fetish, Fig. 10

This icon is located by the ankles of the mummy, and is repeated not on the inner lid, but on the outer (Fig. 54, the icon is hardly recognizable due to damages and attempted reparations in the plaster). The *imiwt* () was a religious fetish connected to the cults of Osiris and Anubis²⁶⁰.

Icon 10: Seated goddesses in mourning posture, Fig. 11

Between the arms of the goddess in 10a, the word *mw*, meaning water, is written. It can be understood as if the goddess is presenting water, i.e. a libation offering, to the deceased. It is tempting to see the image also as a cryptographic wordplay, since the scene resembles the hieroglyph *ni-ni* (), meaning “welcome!”²⁶¹. The cryptogram is known from royal tombs of the New kingdom, where the goddess usually is standing in the doorways between the chambers. The goddesses are probably meant to be Isis and Nephtys²⁶².

²⁵⁹ Faulkner 1998, plate 18.

²⁶⁰ *BMD*, p. 140.

²⁶¹ *Wb* II, p. 203. See also Wilkinson 2003, p. 11, which shows this version of the *ni-ni* sign in use in a text on a coffin from the 21st dynasty. See Niwinski 1988a, “colour plate” D for an interesting variation with 4 “n” hieroglyphs.

²⁶² Englund 1985, p.37 and 39.

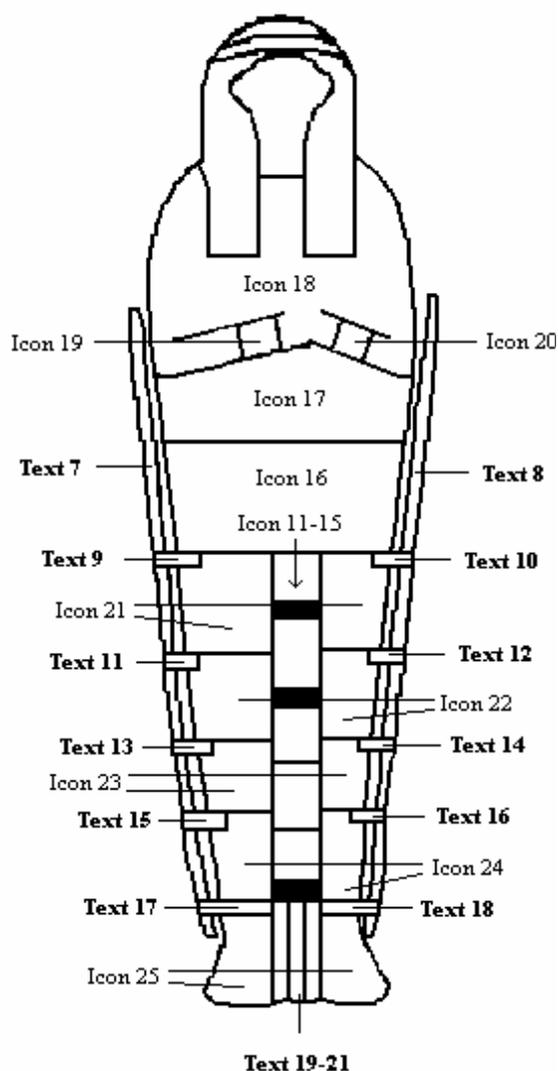
C47714a: inner lid (Model 2)

Text 7-8

These two texts are written along the sides of the lid, invisible from a frontal view, and are therefore “folded out” on each side on the model, which also shows how it is overlapped by the horizontal text-bands (text 9-18). The reading direction of these texts is the same on both sides, from head to foot, and both sentences are introduced by an Wdjat-eye facing the opposite direction. The two texts, repeated in text 24 and 41, are closely related. They read:

7: Words spoken by Geb, prince of the gods, blessed spirit (ꜣꜥ) of his day (or: since the day he was born), and this falcon born by Isis, potent heir of Wennefer. May they give a thousand bread, thousand jars of beer, thousand oxen, thousand fowl, thousand incense (offerings), thousand libations, thousand (units) of linen, thousand offering loaves and thousand flower offerings, a thousand of everything good and pure, a thousand of everything good and sweet.

8: Words spoken by the great Nut, mother of the gods, the mighty eye of Ra, and this falcon born by Isis, potent heir of Wennefer. May they cause that I may come and go with Ra and travel freely like the lords of eternity. May I receive offerings and come forth in the presence of Osiris, foremost of the westerners, repeatedly (nHH) and eternally (Dṯ).



Icon 11: Winged scarab with sun-disc (1), Fig. 14

Located between the ankles of the interior lid, this icon is the first in a series of icons of the sun god in the shape of a scarab alternating with more abstract icons occupying the central register between the legs of the mummy. Possibly due to its peculiar ways of procreation, the scarab beetle (ꜥꜥꜣ) became a powerful symbol of resurrection to the ancient Egyptians, most strongly connected to the sun god at dawn (ꜥꜥꜣꜣ)²⁶³. Just like icons 21-24 on the lid, the icons in the central register are framed by shrine-like structures, possibly including the ornamental bands marked black in the model.

Icon 12: sꜣm-scepter flanked by two winged wDAꜥ, Fig. 14

Protruding from the same level as the row of uraeuses crowning the shrine of icon 11, the sꜣm can be understood as part of icon 11. Either way, the two icons are closely related. The sꜣm symbol (𓄎) is known also from the hieroglyphic script, where it is used for "power" and related words²⁶⁴. The winged eyes (wDAꜥ) are both named "Isis", hinting at an Osirian understanding of the sꜣm.

Icon 13: Winged scarab with sun-disc (2), Fig. 14

This icon should be seen in relation to the other icons in the central register between the feet of the mummy (icon 11-15), and needs no further explanation.

Icon 14: The Abydos head-fetish flanked by two mourning goddesses, Fig. 15

The goddess to the left is named *Isis*. The one to the right is unnamed, but is probably meant to be Isis' counterpart Nephtys. The goddesses are seated on each side of the Abydos head-fetish, a symbol connected to the mythical tomb of Osiris in Abydos²⁶⁵. To the right of the fetish it is written: *Osiris, ruler of the west, may he give an offering*. Like in icon 10 on the mummy-cover, we find "mw/ ni -ni" written between

²⁶³ For the symbolic value of scarabs on funerary equipment of this period, see Goff, 1979, p. 207-220, Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p. 34.

²⁶⁴ Faulkner 1996, p. 241, Wilkinson 2000a, p. 182-183.

²⁶⁵ Wilkinson 2000a, p. 168-169.

the arms of the goddesses. A variant of this icon can be found on the case (icon 38)

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Icon 15: Scarab with sun-disc flanked by two gods, Fig. 15

This scarab differs from the preceding ones (icon 11 and 14) by not having wings and by the presence of the seated deities, which take up the space where the wings of the scarab are located in icon 11 and 14.

Icon 16: Winged scarab with sun-disc ascending to the sky in the morning bark, Fig. 17

What I have treated here as one icon can easily be split in two. The winged Nut-figure can be seen as a separate icon, independent from the scene below where a winged scarab on a bark is flanked by various deities. I see the two icons connected, as the sun god (scarab) ascending to the sky (Nut) in the morning bark. On the mummy-cover, only the sky-goddess is present (Icon 1). This element is among the oldest iconographic elements on the coffin, first found as the vulture-goddess Nekhbet on the rishi coffins of the 17th dynasty²⁶⁷.

The inscription above her left wing here identifies the goddess as *Nut*, whereas her epithet *Mother of the gods* is written above her right wing. Above the wings of the goddesses in the lower section it is written (twice): *Neith, mother of the god, may she give bread and beer*. Above the seated Atum figure on both sides it is written: *May they give*, and in front of him on the right side in the icon it says: *Atum, may he give bread and beer*. In the same location on the left side of the image the text is slightly different: *Atum, may he give bread and beer and everything*.

²⁶⁶ Its significance is explained in Rambova 1957, p. 55-56. For comparative material, see Schmidt 1919b, entry 719; Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p.108, pl. 9.

²⁶⁷ This particular icon is described in Naguib 1982, p. 26. For comparative material and general discussion of the motif, with or without the lower section of the icon included, see Schmidt 1919b, entries 675, 719-722, 757, 783; Englund 1974, p. 56-58, fig. 12, 1985, p.35 and 38; Niwinski 1981, p. 49-50, 1983c, p. 53-54, 1988a, pl. I A, II A/B, III A, IV A, V A/C, VI A/B, VII A, VIII A, IX A/B, X A/B, XI B, XIII B, XIV A/B, XV B; Spencer 2002, p. 47-48 and 51.

Icon 17: Scarab flanked by double, enthroned Osiris (2), Fig. 16

The goddesses are both named *Neith* from the hieroglyphs above their heads, but have a different identity in the hieroglyphs written in twice in six short columns above their wings:

Left: Osiris, lord of the everlasting cycle. May she (Nephtys) give everything good and pure, everything good and sweet to Osiris N. Nephtys, sister of the god.

Right: Osiris, lord of the everlasting cycle. May she (Isis) give everything good and pure, everything good and sweet, to Osiris N. Isis, mother of the god.

This double identity of certain deities is not uncommon in the 21st dynasty²⁶⁸. The central motif with the HH-goddess supporting the scarab is an original 21st dynasty composition²⁶⁹, and can be read as a cryptogram saying the sun god (☀) is alive (𓆎) for eternity (𓆎).

Icons 18-19, jewelry-icons (Fig. 13)

Icons 18-19 are again jewelry-icons belonging to decoration level 3. Icon 18 depicts a winged scarab with a sun-disc²⁷⁰, and Icons 19 and 20 show winged uraeuses protecting an wDAṯ. Parallel icons can be seen on the mummy-cover (icons 3-5) and the outer lid (Fig. 54-55).

Icons 21-24 and texts 9-18

These elements constitute the lower composition of the lid, running down both legs from the hips to the ankles. The icons are double, mirrored symmetrically around the central axis of icon-registers 11-15. Icons 21-24 depict the deceased within the temples of various deities. Just like the mummy cover, the lid has short, double text-

²⁶⁸ Englund 1974, p. 56-58, Fig. 12, 1985, p. 35, 38.

²⁶⁹ This particular icon is described in Naguib 1982, p. 26. For discussion of the motif and comparative material, see Niwinski 1988a, pl. V A, VI A/B, VII B, VIII A, IX A, XI B, XIV A/B; 2000, p. 35, fig. 13.

bands (with small variations) running horizontally across the legs. Like on the mummy cover, the texts are highly abbreviated to fit in the short columns, and can sometimes be hard to read. The number of bands is here five instead of two, and the texts are written in columns instead of lines. Whereas the text-bands of the mummy cover relate to the icons above, the bands on the lid are captions to the icons below.

Text 9-10:

9: *The revered (one) before Osiris.* 10: *The revered (one) before Osiris for eternity.*

Icon 21: The deceased before Sokar-Osiris, Fig. 18

This icon is located by the thighs of the mummy. The text in front of the falcon-headed divinity identifies him as Sokar-Osiris. The goddess in 21b is named “Serket”, whereas she in 21a is called “The god’s sister”. The icon must be seen as a variant of icon 6 in the same location on the mummy-cover, repeated again in the same location on the outer lid (Fig. 54).

Text 11-12:

11: *The revered one before Sokar.* 12: *The revered (one) before Sokar.*

Icon 22: The deceased before Sokar, Fig. 19

This icon, located by the knees of the mummy, is a version of icon 7 in the same location on the mummy-cover, repeated again in the same location on the outer lid (Fig. 54).

Text 13-14:

13: *The revered (one) before the great ba.* 14: *The revered (one) before the great ba.*

²⁷⁰ This icon is described in Naguib 1982, p. 24.

Icon 23: The deceased before a striding ram, Fig. 20

This image is located by the shins of the mummy, and is repeated in the same location on the mummy-cover. No hieroglyphs are written within the frames, but texts 13-14 above, and possibly texts 15-16 below, work as captions to the icon. See icon 8 for general information.

Text 15-16:

15: *The revered (one) before this god.* 16: *The revered (one) before this god.*

Icon 24: The deceased mummified before two snake-headed deities, Fig. 21

This icon is not found anywhere else on the coffin ensemble, and no text is written within its frames. Texts 15-16 above might have been intended as its caption. However, the singular writing of “god” does not match the two snake deities in the image, which should have been written in the dual form. Perhaps the texts in this case should be seen as independent from the icon, or maybe it belongs to the icon above (icon 23).

Texts 17-18:

17: *The revered one before Nephtys, sister of the goddess, mistress of the west.* 18: *The revered one before Nephtys, sister of the goddess, may she give an offering.*

Icon 25: Isis and Nephtys before the mummified and crowned deceased, positioned above the Hathor-cow, Fig. 22-24

This icon, which is symmetrically arranged around three text columns (text 19-21), differs from the icons above by being painted up side down from the viewpoint of the spectator. From the viewpoint of the deceased, however, the icon would appear the right way. In 22a, the goddess is identified as Nephtys from her hieroglyphic headgear. Above her head is also written her epithet *sister of the god*. In front of her we read: *may she give an offering*. The mummy-form figure is identified as Osiris

(N). In 22b the deceased is again named Osiris (N), but the goddess is Isis, judging from her headgear. Above her is written her epithet *mother of the god*. In front of her we find the *mw/ ni-ni* construction again (see icon 10). The mismatch between 22b and caption-text 18 might in this case be due to an error or is perhaps another expression for the relativity of the identity of certain goddesses in this period²⁷¹. The icon should be seen thematically related to the icon in the same location on the outer lid²⁷².

Text 19-21

Contrary to the icons on either side, these three columns between the feet of the mummy are written in a direction suited for the spectator of the coffin, but appear upside down from the viewpoint of the mummy. The texts can be compositionally compared with texts 1-2 on the mummy cover, which occupies the central space between the legs. On the lid, this central space is continued up between the legs by a register of icons (icons 11-15), to which these texts do not seem to have any connection in terms of content. Like texts 1-2 on the mummy cover, text 19 has left space open for the name of the deceased, which never was filled in. The texts read:

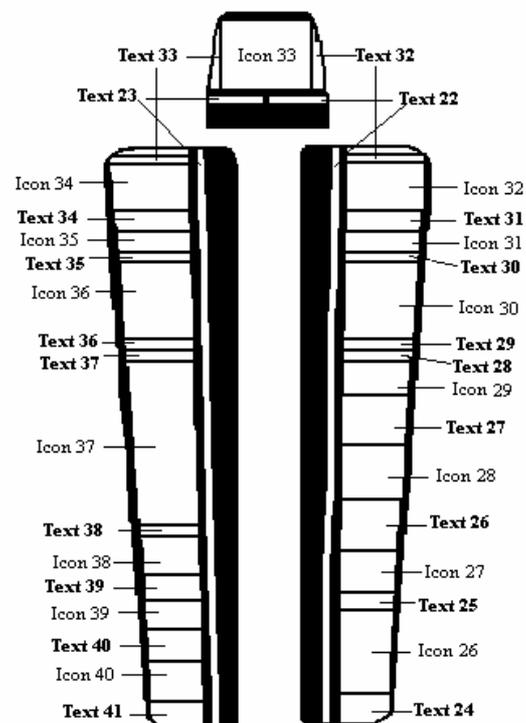
19: Words spoken by the great Neith, mother of the god. May she give a flower offering to Osiris N ... 20: Words spoken by Osiris, foremost of the westerners. May he give voice-offering of bread, oxen and fowl, everything good and pure, everything good and sweet. 21: Words spoken by Serket, mother of the god, may she cause that I may (be) in front of her offering table during the day [?] every day.

²⁷¹ Englund 1974, p. 56-58, 1985, p. 38. See also chapter 2 in this thesis.

²⁷² The icon on the inner coffin is described in Naguib 1982, p. 28. For comparative material and a discussion on the general significance of the motif, see Englund 1974, p. 59-60.

C47714b: inner case, exterior decoration (Model 3)

The composition of the exterior decoration of the case is relative simple. Apart from texts 22-23, all decorations here constitute alternating icons and vertical text-columns. The composition of the uppermost icons (30-36) and texts (28-37) are relatively symmetrical both with regard to composition and content, mirrored around the axis of the head and upper body of the mummy inside. The symmetry disappears after text 28 and 37, but comes back in the texts at the foot end (texts 24 and 41).



Text 22-23

These two texts are located on the edge of the sidewalls of the case, and run from the top of the head down to the feet on both sides, surrounding the entire coffin. The beginning of each text is missing, since they both start at the point on the top of the case where a large flake of plaster has been worn off (Fig. 34). Text 22 is lacking a maximum of 13 centimeters, text 23 a maximum of 6 cm. It is tempting to guess that the text is another *Dd-mdw-in* formula, and if that were the case, the beginning of both texts would read: Words spoken by Atum, etc. The texts read:

22: ...[Atum], he who awakes sound. Hail to you Osiris, foremost of the westerners, Wennefer, ruler of life, king of the everlasting cycle, lord of eternity. Millions of his lifetimes have yet to pass. When he welcomes your beautiful face, he shall appear glorious with Isis on his right side, Nephtys on his left, and Ra's daughter behind him with protection. The Ennead of the southern and northern lands, the west and the east, may they cause that I can explore the Duat when I enter the burial chamber. May I receive food offerings when I come forth in the presence of Osiris at his

festival. May I enter the western side safe and sound and come forth as a living ba eternally.

23: ...Atum, he who awakes sound. Hail to you Osiris, Lord of Dd̄t²⁷³, ruler of Hqa-anD and its nobles, the foremost in At̄ft, great one of Hwt-kAw-p̄tH, lord of appearances in iAb̄t, sovereign of Hut-iAw, and the great Ennead, lords of the temple, gods of the sacred land (necropolis). May they cause that I may come forth with Ra, unhindered like the lords of the everlasting cycle. May I receive offerings when I come forth in the presence of Osiris at his festival. May he say that my ba (may eat) offering bread (in) the Duat [...]. May the embrace of Nut conceal my body in the necropolis in peace.

Text 24

Starting with this text by the left foot, the remaining decorative of the exterior decoration follow each other in the order presented from here and around the body, back to the foot end on the right side. This text is an abbreviated version of text 7 on the lid, and should probably be seen in connection with 41 on the opposite side of the case. The text reads:

Words spoken by Geb, prince of the gods, blessed spirit (Ax) of his day (or: since the day he was born), and this falcon born by Isis, potent heir of Wennefer. May they give bread and beer, oxen and fowl and every (thing).

Icon 26: The tree-goddess and the Hathor-cow in the necropolis, Fig. 26

As noted by Naguib in her discussion of this icon²⁷⁴, we are here dealing with two well-known icons merged into one. The Hathor-cow in the necropolis to the left (26a) is often found on coffins and papyri in the period, usually occupying the final register

²⁷³ For the place names in this text, see Gauthier 1926.

²⁷⁴ Naguib 1982, p. 28-30

in the papyri²⁷⁵. The three-goddess motif to the right (26b) is no less common²⁷⁶. The former is an illustration of the Book of the Dead, chapter 186, the latter of chapter 59/63.

The name and epithet *Hathor, mistress of the west* is written between the two goddesses, and Naguib interpreted this as if the two goddesses both were aspects of Hathor²⁷⁷. However, in a recent study it has been shown that the tree goddess on the coffins of the 21st dynasty usually is Nut, and rarely Hathor²⁷⁸. This new interpretation makes sense of the following text 25, which now can be read as a caption to icon 26b. The name *Hathor*, followed by a second epithet *lady of the sacred land (necropolis)*, written above the back of the cow, must thus be seen as belonging to 26a alone. The jackal lying on the ground underneath the cow is identified as *Anubis*. Both icons originate from the book of the dead, and are found in many versions in this period, both on coffins and papyri.

Text 25

Caption to Icon 22(b):

Words spoken by the great Nut, mother of the gods. May you receive flower-offerings and libations in the presence of the lords of the west.

Icon 27: Three mummified divinities standing in the coils of a snake, Fig. 27

This icon depicts the 12th hour of the Amduat, the moment of the union between Osiris and the sun god, where the sun god (represented by the ram's head, which is his

²⁷⁵ For comparative material and a discussion of the Hathor cow motif, see Rambova 1957, p. 34, 39-42; Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p. 87, 92, 103 and pl. 6, 7 and 8; Heyne 1998 (this reference was taken from Billing 2002, p.452); Niwinski 2000, p. 35-36, 39, pl. II:5-6; Spencer 2002, p. 44 (49).

²⁷⁶ For a thorough discussion of the three-goddess motif, see Billing 2000, p. 185-309. Comparative material is published in Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p. 97, 105-106, 145, pl. 8, 9, 16; Niwinski 1988a, pl. XVII B.

²⁷⁷ Naguib 1982, p. 30.

²⁷⁸ Billing 2002, p. 294-298, 303.

nocturnal manifestation) has entered the body of Osiris (the mummy)²⁷⁹. The motif illustrates a passage in chapter 180 of the Book of the Dead, and a version of it was represented in the tomb of Queen Nefertari of the 19th dynasty²⁸⁰.

It should be mentioned that there are two interpretations of the role of the serpent in this icon. Niwinski sees the snake as Apophis, the great serpent that attacks the sun god every night. The three divinities standing in its coils can thus be said to trample the enemy²⁸¹. Naguib on the other hand, sees the snake simply as a symbol of resurrection, supporting the main theme of the icon²⁸². Personally I find Naguib's interpretation more coherent. The identity and purpose of the two divinities flanking the great god are unknown.

Text 26

Words spoken by the Ennead of the necropolis. May you cause Osiris N (to be) among you, his prosperity like your prosperity, his divinity like your divinity, his peace like your peace. May he come and go without being detained at the doors and portals of the Duat.

Icon 28: Winged scarab with sun-disc on a bark above a pierced serpent, Fig. 28

This icon is also very well known from coffins and papyri from the period²⁸³, and depicts the sun-god rising on the eastern sky, after a successful journey through the underworld and battle against the chaos-serpent Apophis²⁸⁴. The image is located by the right thigh of the mummy, and must be seen as part of a composition consisting

²⁷⁹ This particular icon is described in Naguib 1982, p. 30. Comparative material and the discussion of the significance of the motif can be found in Englund 1974, p. 47-49; Piankoff and Rambova p. 115-116, 171-172, pl. 10, 22; Niwinski 1983b, p. 77; 1989b, p. 90-91 and 99-100.

²⁸⁰ Niwinski 1983b, p. 77, 1989b, p. 90-91; McDonald 1996, p. 80-81.

²⁸¹ Niwinski 1989b, p. 99.

²⁸² Naguib 1982, p. 30.

²⁸³ This particular icon is described in Naguib 1982, p. 30. Comparative material and a discussion of the motif can be found in Englund 1974, p. 41-42; Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p. 82-83, pl. 5; Niwinski 1988b, p. 99-98; 2000, p. 35, pl. II: 4; Spencer 2002, p. 38, 40, Fig. 4.3.

²⁸⁴ The actual battle is commonly depicted on papyri in the period. See Piankoff 1957, p. 75-76, 157-158, pl. 2, 19.

also of text 27 and icon 29, as the deceased venerating the sun god at dawn²⁸⁵. Seen in relation also to icon 26 and 27, this entire part from the left foot to the upper hip could be understood as a summary of the eternal solar-Osirian cycle constituting of death/sun-set (icon 26), resurrection (icon 27) and rebirth/dawn (icon 28), which the deceased (icon 29) aspired to be part of.

Text 27

(I) give praise to Ra when he arises to the sky from his horizon in the east! May you give me flower-offerings at the entrance of my tomb, may I come forth as a living ba into the rays of his sun-disc, full of his peace, in the shape of the living phoenix. May I receive (every) thing.

Icon 29: The deceased giving praise, Fig. 29

This icon is positioned by the right hip of the mummy. The few hieroglyphs in front of the deceased read: *offerings upon the table* (?). The icon should be seen in connection with Icon 28 and text 27.

Texts 28-29:

The following texts might be seen in relation to icon 30, where both goddesses are present, and they are repeated in the parallel texts on the opposite side of the coffin (texts 36-37). They read:

28: *Words spoken by Nephtys, sister of the god. May she give a flower offering.* 29: *Words spoken by Isis, mother of the god, mistress of the sacred land (necropolis). May she give bread and beer.*

²⁸⁵ This combination of decorative elements into one larger composition is attested also in Schmidt 1919b, entry 713-714

Icon 30: Osiris enthroned on double stairways, Fig. 30

Also this icon, located by the upper left arm of the mummy, is well known, and often discussed in the literature of the 21st dynasty coffins and papyri²⁸⁶. All the anthropoid deities are identified, either by headgear or caption texts. From right they are Hepet, Horus, Osiris (*ruler of the west*), Isis, Nephtys and Heqa. The latter deity is often identified erroneously, possibly because of the alternative use of the hieroglyph (𓆎), which is not mentioned in the dictionaries and reference books most used²⁸⁷. For unknown reasons, Clark sees him as Sia²⁸⁸. Naguib identifies him as Khonsu²⁸⁹, which is more understandable, since the hieroglyph when used as nome-emblem for Tanis could be replaced by an image of a royal child²⁹⁰. As noted by Goff, however, the Karnak-triad (Amon-Ra, Khonsu and Mut) were gods of the living, and are rarely found in a funerary context in this period, except in names and titles²⁹¹.

A comparative study of this icon will make it clear that the divinity in question is Heqa²⁹². In the more elaborate versions of this icon, he is equipped with his insignia and sometimes even has his name spelled out fully, as in the example in Wilkinson's recent book²⁹³. The significance of Heka in the funerary context will be explained in the next chapter.

Finally an inscription underneath the tail of the serpent reads: *bread and beer is given*. The icon should be seen in relation to texts 28-30, which are "divine speeches" of Osiris and his sisters. Also icon 31 seems to be part of this group, and the icon should

²⁸⁶ For comparative material and a discussion on the significance of this motif, see Niwinski 1988b, p. 97-98; 1989b, p. 97-98; 2000, p. 34, pl. I:2; Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p. 112-113, 119-120, pl. 10, 11; Rambova 1957, p. 58-63.

²⁸⁷ *Wb* I, p. 533:12-541:5, III, p. 170:7, 174:9; Gardiner 1999, p. 464. The exception is Faulkner 1996, p. 179.

²⁸⁸ Clark 1959, p. 171-172.

²⁸⁹ Naguib 1982, p. 31.

²⁹⁰ Lurker 1984, p. 89

²⁹¹ Goff 1979, p. 225. Although this point was rightfully criticized by Niwinski (Niwinski 1983a, p. 332) with regard to Amun, the point remains undisputed with regard to Khonsu.

²⁹² Te Velde 1970, p. 183-184, pl. XXVI A, XXVII A, XXVIII B, XXIX B, XXX B, XXXII.

²⁹³ Wilkinson 2003, p. 10-11.

probably be seen in relation to icon 36 on the opposite side of the case, where the enthronement theme is repeated.

Text 30:

Caption to icon 30:

Words spoken by Osiris, lord of the everlasting cycle, foremost of the westerners. May he give bread and beer.

Icon 31: Thot presenting the standard of the west (1), Fig. 31

This icon is located by the left shoulder of the mummy, and must be seen in relation to icon 30 and text 28-30, as indicated by the text in the upper left corner, which reads: *May they give bread and beer*. Furthermore, text 31 works as a caption to this icon, and the whole composition is repeated on the opposite side of the coffin (icons 35-36 and texts 34-37), surrounding the head of the deceased completely.

Text 31

Caption to icon 31:

Words spoken by Thot, master of the hieroglyphs, righteous scribe of the Ennead. May the sun live and the enemy strive! Hale is the one who is in the mound, the one who is in the mound is hale, (namely) Osiris, foremost of westerners.

Icon 32: Sokar-Osiris between Isis and Nephtys, Fig. 32

This icon is located by the left ear of the mummy. The text above the wings of the goddess to the left reads: *Nephtys, sister of the god*, and by the tip, above the falcon-god: *Sokar-Osiris*. The mummy-form deity to the right is identified as Isis by the headgear. The icon should be seen as part of the composition referred in icon 31, and in particular to icon 34 on the opposite side of the head.

Text 32

Words spoken by Nephtys, sister of the god. May she give everything good and pure.

Icon 33: tit-knot flanked by serpents and standards of the west, Fig. 34

This partly damaged icon is located at the top of the head of the mummy²⁹⁴. The tit-symbol (𓆎), also called “Isis-knot” or “blood of Isis”, is often found in funerary art alongside the anx and the Dd-pillar (see icon 34)²⁹⁵, and was probably an apotropaic device with connotations of the birth-rebirth theme. Texts 32-33 work as captions to the icon.

Text 33

Words spoken by Isis, mother of the god, mistress of the sacred land. May she give a flower-offering.

Icon 34: Isis and Nephtys giving praise to a partly anthropoid Dd-pillar, Fig. 35

The Dd-pillar (𓆎) represented the backbone of Osiris, and was used for “stability” and related words in the hieroglyphic script²⁹⁶. The (partly) anthropomorphic form was particularly popular in the 21st dynasty, and often, as on NME 890, appears in life size on the bottoms of the cases (Fig. 63)²⁹⁷. In front of the goddess to the left it is written: *Nephtys, sister of the god, may (she) give bread and beer*. In front of the goddess to the right it is written: *Isis, mother of the god, may (she) give an offering*.

Text 34

Caption to icon 35:

²⁹⁴ This particular icon is described in Naguib 1982, p. 33. See also Englund 1985, p. 39.

²⁹⁵ Wilkinson 2000a, p. 200-201.

²⁹⁶ Wilkinson 2000a, p. 164-165.

²⁹⁷ This particular icon is described in Naguib 1982, p. 33. For comparative material and a discussion of the motif, see Schmidt 1919b, entries 708, 742-745, 824; Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p. 114, 125, pl. 10, 11; Niwinski 1989b, p. 97-98.

Words spoken by Thot, master of the hieroglyphs, righteous scribe of the great Ennead. Must the sun live and the enemy strive! Hale is the one in the mound, the one in the mound is hale, (namely) Osiris.

Icon 35: Thot presenting the standard of the west (2), Fig. 36

This icon²⁹⁸, located by the right shoulder of the mummy, is a repetition of icon 31 on the opposite side. The icon should be seen in the same context as described for icon 31, but the target for Thot's offering is now Sokar and Osiris in icon 36. The three columns of script above him reads: *Thot, master of the hieroglyphs, righteous scribe...*), and is an abbreviation of the fuller titular found in the caption-texts on both sides (texts 34-35).

Text 35

Caption to icon 35:

Words spoken by Thot, master of the hieroglyphs, righteous scribe of the Ennead.

Icon 36: Osiris and Sokar enthroned on each side of a sꜣxm/Dd-pillar

This icon is located by the right upper arm of the mummy, and is compositionally and thematically mirrored by icon 30 on the opposite side. The combined sꜣxm/Dd-pillar symbolizes power and stability/duration.

Text 36-37

36: *Words spoken by Isis, mother of the god, mistress of the sacred land. May she give an offering.* 37: *Words spoken by Nephtys, sister of the god, mistress of the embalming-house. May she give bread and beer.*

²⁹⁸ This particular icon is mentioned in Naguib 1982, p. 33.

Icon 37: The judgment scene, Fig. 38

This famous scene, also known as the “weighing of the heart” scene, where the heart of the deceased is balanced against the feather of *Ma’at*, originates from the Book of the Dead (chapter 125 and 30B). The scene takes up the entire section from the hip down to the knee on the right side of the mummy. A longer text is written above the scene. This text ends with a single column outside the frames of the icon, and is translated as one unit under text 38, with a corresponding entry in the appendix. The hieroglyphs written above the enthroned deity identifies him as *Osiris*. The text written in front of the deceased underneath the scales read: *Osiris N, justified*, and between the two versions of the deceased in the far right of the icon it says: *May he give an offering*.

Due to its fame, this icon has received somewhat more attention from Norwegian scholars than the rest of the coffin²⁹⁹. Comparative material and discussions of the general significance of the motif can be found in these articles and elsewhere³⁰⁰.

Text 38

This text is the only example I have found of where the texts inside the icon (icon 37) is continued in a separate column. The entire text, including the 15 short columns within the icon, is translated here and represented fully in the appendix. The text reads:

Words spoken by Thot, master of the hieroglyphs, righteous scribe of the Ennead, protector of Osiris, lord of the everlasting cycle, and those who examine his (the deceased's) heart. The scales are in the presence of the divine magistrates, lords of the Duat. He (the deceased) is found without any fault 38: upon earth. His heart comes forth openly with justification in the necropolis.

²⁹⁹ Naguib 1982, p. 34-35; 1997; Johansen 2002, p. 142.

³⁰⁰ Schmidt 1919b, entry 679, 686-687, 698, 710, 807; Rambova 1957, p. 52-56; Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p. 99, 104-105, 123, 134-135, 147-148, 161-162, pl. 8, 9, 11, 15, 17, 19; Niwinski 1988a, pl. XVII A.

Icon 38: Abydos head-fetish flanked by Isis and Nephtys mummified, Fig. 39

This icon, located by the right knee of the mummy, was described under icon 14. This particular icon was described by Naguib³⁰¹. It should be noted, however, that the fetish in the center is not a Dd-pillar, but rather the thematically related head-fetish of Abydos.

Text 39

This text is severely damaged, and only parts of it are still readable. I have tried to reconstruct whatever I could recognize of the text in the appendix. Although some word can be recognized, a translation would not make much sense.

Icon 39: The deceased offering incense, Fig. 40

The text above the offering table reads: (*in*) *the Duat, Osiris N*. The icon should be seen as part of a composition consisting also of icon 40 and text 40.

Text 40

Text accompanying icon 39 and 40:

(I) give praise to you, the gods of the Ennead in the necropolis. May you give (me) an existence (as) Osiris, lord of strides in the necropolis, and those who follow (?) lord of the entrance of Rostau, the tomb of Osiris in Dd̄t. My shape is that of the living phoenix, I shall receive everything.

Icon 40: The four sons of Horus³⁰²

These four well-known funerary deities are named by the hieroglyphs written above them, from left to right: Imseti, Hapy, Duamutef and Qebsenuf. Seen in connection

³⁰¹ Naguib 1982, p. 35

³⁰² In the 21st dynasty, the four sons of Horus might actually have been called “the four sons of Osiris” (Goff 1979, p. 139). The implications of the use of this alternative name are unknown, and I chose to hold on to the traditional and better-known name.

with icon 40 and text 40, this is a composite scene where the deceased is venerating the four sons of Horus, similar to the composition consisting of icon 28-29 and text 27 on the opposite side. “The Ennead of the necropolis” in text 40 undoubtedly refers to these gods. From this it should be clear that it was the four sons of Horus the writer had in mind also in text 26, where the same phrase is used. This is interesting in the light of Willems’ discussion of whether or not the four sons of Horus and their female counterparts Isis, Nephtys, Serket and Neith are the ones referred to by the name “The small Ennead” on the SCMK-coffins (see chapter 2). There is no evidence on this coffin, however, that the female counterparts are included in the “Ennead of the necropolis”. The scene is repeated large scale on in the exterior decoration on the outer case (Fig. 58 and 59). The four sons of Horus as a theme on coffins dates back to the Old Kingdom, and is represented in the iconography of the white coffins of the early New Kingdom, not so differently from how they appear on NME 890³⁰³.

Text 41

This text is located by the right foot of the mummy. The text should be seen in connection to text 24 on the opposite side of the coffin, where Nut’s consort Geb is speaking, and might be an abbreviation of text 8 on the lid. The text reads:

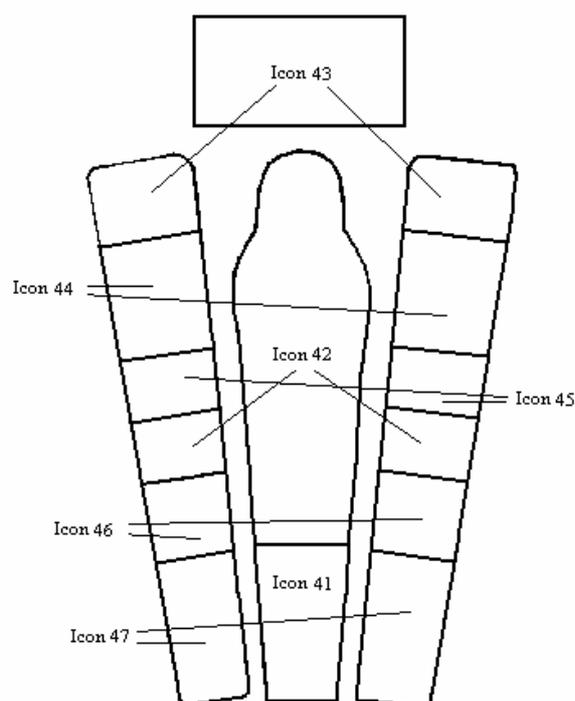
Words spoken by the great Nut, mother of the gods, embracer of the west. May she give everything good and pure, everything good and sweet, flower-offerings and sustenance-offerings, and (may she cause that I may) come forth in the presence (of Osiris) forever.

³⁰³ Niwinski 1981, p. 50, tafel 1. For more information and comparative material on the iconography of the four sons of Horus in the 21st dynasty, see Piankoff and Rambova 1957, p. 88-89, 128, 130-131, pl. 8, 9, 16; Niwinski 1988a, pl. XVI A, XVIII B, 2000, p. 37.

C47714b: Inner case, interior decoration (Model 4)

Icon 41: X flanked by standards of the west

This icon, covering the bottom of the case from the knees and down, has been severely damaged. The central motif is lost, but standards of the west (𐏧) can still be seen on both sides (parts of may be seen on Fig. 52. A thorough study of coffins from the same period might perhaps give a clue to what was once painted on this surface. It might have been a Dd-pillar, which often is found on the interior foot-boards on coffin a generation or so older than this one³⁰⁴. It could alternatively be a tit-knot, as seen in the same location on the coffin of Khonsumes³⁰⁵.



Icon 42: Imentet embracing the mummy with her wings, Fig. 43, 44 and 48-49

Due to the skillful assistance of UKM Conservator Eivind Brattlie, I was eventually able to make a certain identification of this highly damaged icon. The motif covers the bottom of the case from the knees to the head, and even extends to the sideboards on both sides. It shows the goddess of the west, Imentet, embracing the mummy with her wings. Variations over this motif (with Imentet or the Dd-pillar as the central motif) are well known from coffins of the period³⁰⁶. Judging from the material published, however, this particular version of the icon seems relatively rare, as I was unable to

³⁰⁴ Niwinski 1983c, p. 55.

³⁰⁵ Englund 1985, p.39-40.

³⁰⁶ Niwinski 1983c, p. 53, pl. 1; 1988a, 90-94, pl. XIX A, XX A/B, XXI A.

find a good comparable illustration³⁰⁷. Neither is it found on any other coffin in the Swedish-Norwegian collection.

Icon 43: Ba-bird, Fig. 45

Located at the head end of the case, it seems as if the *ba* of the deceased is hovering just above the head of the mummy³⁰⁸. Two text columns written on white background runs down from the central image on both sides. The one to the right of the ba-bird reads: *May he give an offering of everything good and sweet*. The one to the left reads: *May he give an offering of flowers and offering-loaves [...]*.

Icon 44: The deceased presenting incense to Osiris, Fig. 46-47

Again we find a series of double icons, running down both sides of the case, and mirrored around the axis of the mummy. This first icon is located by the arms of the mummy. Both 44a and 44b are severely affected by the damages by the shoulders, but the main contents of the icon can be identified from 44a. A short text above the head of the deceased reads in a): *May he give an offering of flowers [...]*, and in b): *May he give everything [...]*. The end of the text is damaged in both versions.

Icon 45: The four sons of Horus seated on standards, Fig. 48-49

The “sons” are here seated in pairs on each side, facing away from the abdomen of the mummy, with their names written above their heads. In 45a we find, from left to right: Duamutef and Qebsenuf, in 45b, from right to left: Imseti and Hapy. Underneath the standards, the wings of the goddess from icon 42 protrude.

Icon 46: Crowned Anubis on a shrine

By the thighs of the mummy, Anubis is resting on a sarcophagus-like shrine, facing away from the mummy. The text above his snout reads on both sides: *Anubis*. Above

³⁰⁷ Niwinski 1988a, Fig. 40 and pl. XIX A are fairly close.

³⁰⁸ Niwinski 1983c, p. 61-62, 1989b, p. 103.

his back it is written in 46a: *Anubis, lord of the sacred land*, and in 46b: *Anubis, lord of [...]*.

Icon 47: Isis and Nephtys mourning by the feet of the deceased

Again we find the two goddesses in a mourning position facing the calves/feet of the mummy. Isis is identified in 47a by her headgear and the text in front of her reading: *Isis, mother of the god, mistress of the sacred land (necropolis), may she give an offering*. In 47b, Nephtys is likewise identified by her headgear and the text in front of her reading: *Nephtys, sister of the god, may she give a flower offering*.

5 The Religious Function of Coffin A37 from the Priestly Cache in Deir el-Bahari

Scholars of Egyptology tend to explain the density of religious iconography on 21st dynasty coffins as a practical means to ensure that the deceased had the necessary repertoire of religious texts and imagery with them in the burial after the individual tomb had ceased to exist³⁰⁹. Many of the texts and icons on these coffins are compositions known from elsewhere in New Kingdom burials, such as tomb walls and papyri. It has also been firmly established that there is no difference between the level 2 decorations on the coffins and those on the funerary papyri of the same period³¹⁰. Following this line of thinking to its conclusion, it can be argued that the 21st dynasty coffins were nothing but a writing surface.

There is, however, something about the way the decorative elements are put together that makes one suspect the artist intended to say something more. On the papyri, the same compositions of texts and icons appear in a linear manner. On the coffins, the artist had a three dimensional image of a person to work on (decoration level 1), an object which served a very different purpose than the papyri. In my view, decoration level 1 merges with level 2 into one iconographical whole, which main purpose was to define the sacred space in which the deceased could live, die, and be reborn for eternity.

The coffin as mummy, king, and god.

As we have seen, the coffin is meant to resemble the deceased, and as discussed in chapter 2, it is not the deceased as a living person that is depicted, but rather his saH-

³⁰⁹ For instance Englund 1985, p. 33.

³¹⁰ Niwinski 1981, p. 47.

image, the idealized image of the body in the afterlife. Since the coffin was mass-produced, there is little reason to search for traces of portraiture or other features of the deceased in his living state. The open eyes and the lifelike expression on the faces of the lids does not point back to the living person, but rather to the state of eternal life that was prepared for the deceased through the funerary rituals.

As mentioned in chapter 3, the coffin must originally, with its light yellow background color and generous coat of resin varnish, have shimmered like gold. The New Kingdom pharaohs introduced the golden color of the *saH*-image, with the blue striped wig or nemes-headress, possibly on the assumption that the gods looked this way. As it was written about the sun god in the myth *Destruction of Mankind*: “His bones are silver, His flesh is gold and His hair true lapis lazuli”. Most famous of these coffins is the coffin ensemble of Tutankhamun³¹¹, of which the inner coffin was made of solid gold with inlays of glass paste and semi-precious stones. It has been suggested that the 21st dynasty priests tried to recreate the visual impression of these coffins with the materials that were available to them³¹². The decorations on the gold-shimmering surface were painted with much the same colors as the inlays you find on the royal coffins. The influence becomes even clearer on the coffins belonging to the high priest families, which usually had at least the hands and the face on the lid gilded³¹³.

That the *saH*-image was both royal and divine at the same time is also indicated by the crossed arms and the curled beard. The beard has disappeared from C47714a-c, but is still present on NME 890 (Fig. 55). In the theological and political landscape of the 21st dynasty, it was probably not the earthly king the deceased wanted to be identified with, but rather the two kings of the gods, Amun-Ra and Osiris³¹⁴. These two divinities ruled each of the two hemispheres the ancient Egyptian cosmos was believed to consist of, the physical world of the living, and the underworld of the

³¹¹ Comand 2001.

³¹² Niwinski 1988a, p. 12.

³¹³ Niwinski 1988a, p. 12.

³¹⁴ Niwinski 1983a, p. 326.

dead. Life was generated by an eternal process of exchange between the two spheres, represented by the union of the two divine kings each morning before sunrise (icon 27). It was this life-generating engine of the cosmos the deceased wished to become one with after death.

The coffins thus merge with the mummy inside into one multi-layered image. The coffins can be seen simply as a continuation of the structure of the mummy itself, as a natural extension of the various layers of linen bandages and shrouds. Such an interpretation finds support in the terms used to designate the coffin-elements at the time. Early on in Egyptian history, the term *swHt* (“egg”) came metaphorically to designate various elements surrounding the mummy. Janssen believed the word referred to the mummy-mask in the 19th Dynasty³¹⁵. In the 21st dynasty, it is used for the mummy-cover, and it is a well-known term for cartonnage or even the outer shroud of the mummy at all times³¹⁶. It seems as if the word *swHt* was used for this particular layer of the mummy regardless of what material was used or how it was decorated.

The name used for the coffins makes the point even clearer. Both the inner coffin and the sarcophagus were called *wt*, which meant “bandages” or “mummy wrappings”³¹⁷. The inner coffin was called “the small *wt*” (*wt Sri*) and the outer one simply “the great *wt*” (*wt aA*)³¹⁸. Furthermore, we saw in chapter 2 how the determinative used for the word “mummy” (*saH* or *twt*), indicates that the coffin was seen as part of it. To see the coffin-ensemble as a continuation of the layers of linen on the mummy is therefore not so far fetched. By using wood as the outermost layer of the mummy, the artist had a great possibility of manipulating the façade.

The façade of the mummy was important because the *ba* and the *ka*, which were believed to leave the body at the moment of death, had to recognize its body in order

³¹⁵ Janssen 1975, p. 213.

³¹⁶ Niwinski 1988a, p. 8

³¹⁷ Faulkner 1996, p. 71.

³¹⁸ Niwinski 1988a, p. 8.

to return to it. Like the body inside, the façade also had to last for eternity, since the journey of the “soul” was believed to reoccur every night. As discussed in chapter 2, Harco Willems explicated that the funerary rituals were not over after the tomb was sealed, but were believed to magically repeat themselves for eternity. Neither in the 21st dynasty was death seen as a state of being to the Ancient Egyptians, but rather as a continuous, cyclic process of life, death and resurrection. This process would come to an end only with the collapse of the universe, when everything again would fall back into the primeval chaos-waters of Nun³¹⁹.

It is interesting to note that the 21st dynasty coffins had two façades. The innermost coffin, which was sealed after the mummy was placed inside it, constituted the face of the mummy during the burial rituals. When placed in the tomb, the inner coffin was lowered down into the outer coffin, which thus took over the role as façade. Since the two layers looked the same, the façade stayed the same through the process.

The significance of the layers

The problem of the meaning of the different layers in the coffin ensemble was discussed in chapter 2. The terminology used for the various elements gives us no clue to the differences in significance, and the same can be said about the decoration. The same texts and icons appear on both the inner and the outer coffin, and the same deities are represented on all three layers. Except from the alternative style found on the case of NME 890, also the composition of the various elements is the same.

To regard the coffin as an extension of the mummy might at least suggest where to look next for answers. Dr. Salima Ikram, an expert on mummy-wrappings at the American University in Cairo (AUC), observed that except for the outer shrouds, the best quality linen bandages were usually placed closest to the body, and the coarser textiles away from it³²⁰. Whether this is a testimony of a conscious difference in symbolic value between the layers of bandages, or simply a concern for the comfort of

³¹⁹ Naguib 1998, p. 53.

the deceased, is hard to say. It is likely though, that just like the façade, the innermost layer of the mummy held a special significance.

It is noteworthy that in the coffin ensemble, it is on the mummy-cover that most care has been taken to record the identity of the deceased, with full titles and space left open for the name (text 2). Also the inner lid has space left open for the name (text 19), but it is introduced simply by “Osiris N:”, which also is the only reference to the deceased found on the outer coffin. Traditionally the name played a crucial role in the notion of the person both in life and death³²¹, and was repeated all over the tomb and the burial equipment to ensure its preservation³²². It is therefore surprising to find so many anonymous coffins in the 21st dynasty, particularly since there were no tomb decorations and only a very limited amount of other funerary objects to compensate for the lack of identity on these coffins. It is also surprising to find that most care was taken to prepare for the name on the mummy-cover. This was the only element of the coffin ensemble that never held the role as façade, and probably never was seen by anyone but the crafter and the buyer. However, the other coffins I have examined do not seem to follow a similar principle, and I do not think this practice was a general trend in the 21st dynasty.

There is one more difference between the layers in the coffin ensemble of C47714 and NME 890 that is worth mentioning. The facial expression is not the same from lid to lid. Whereas the face on the mummy-cover (Fig. 1-2) resembles that of a young boy, the face on the inner lid (Fig. 12-13) has the expression of a serious, almost grim adult. The face on the outer lid (Fig. 55) is more neutral, and has the features you would expect from an idealized image of a man in Egyptian art.

The practice of depicting the deceased at various stages in life in the funerary equipment is well attested from the Old Kingdom. One famous example is the life-size twin statues of Ranofer from the early 5th dynasty, where one represents the

³²⁰ Dodson and Ikram 1998, p. 162.

³²¹ Hornung 1992, p. 178; Naguib 1994, p. 106-107, 110.

³²² Naguib 1984, p. 132-133.

deceased as a young official, and the other as an elderly man at the peak of his career³²³. However, this practice is to my knowledge not attested from the 21st dynasty, and this isolated case is not sufficient evidence to rewrite art history.

Although some differences in the layering of the 21st dynasty mummies can be detected, there is not enough evidence yet examined to suggest any difference in meaning between the various layers of the coffin ensemble. Perhaps the significance was not to be found in the individual layer, but rather the “principle of layers” held significance in itself.

The coffin as tomb and temple

As discussed in chapter 3, the traditional tomb was no longer in use in the 21st dynasty. It was replaced by the cache, an undecorated collective grave without superstructure, in which as many bodies as possible were placed. As mentioned in chapter 4, however, many of the icons were inspired by Ramesside tomb walls of both royal and private individuals. Icon 27 and the numerous scenes of the deceased presenting offerings to various deities are examples of this. The many texts including pleas for offering in the afterlife belong to the same category, and also many of the scenes originally found in the Book of the Dead, such as icon 26 a-b and 38, were found in Ramesside tombs. Since the tomb no longer held any reference to the individual, the coffin ensemble became the only personal space available, and as such took over some of the functions of the tomb³²⁴.

In terms of structure and decoration, however, the influence from the tomb is limited to the icons. A replica of the inner coffin has replaced the rectangular dwelling-like sarcophagus, and there is no trace of the *palace-façade*. The collective grave arrangement deprived the deceased of the traditional writing surface of religious texts

³²³ Croce 2001.

³²⁴ Niwinski 1988a, p. 15.

and icons, and some of these compositions, which were crucial for a proper burial and the prospects of an eternal life among gods and forefathers, were simply transferred to the surface of the coffin. As discussed in chapter 2, the tomb and the coffin were closely related concepts to the Ancient Egyptian mind, and the transition could have taken place without any radical changes in religious ideology. Also the *horror vacui* effect in the decorations and the increased number of components in the coffin ensemble can partly be explained by the need for a personal writing surface.

If the idea of the coffin as miniature tomb was still alive in the 21st dynasty, it was not expressed like in the Old Kingdom (see chapter 2). The only decorative element on the coffin that resembles an architectural feature is the ornamental band of alternating *uraeuses* and *Ma'at*-feathers surrounding the edge of the exterior surface of the cases (Fig. 25, 33 58-59). Similar friezes often crowned the *cavetto cornice* on temple walls and doorways. In fact they can be seen on the many illustrations of chapel structures on the coffin, particularly on the inner and outer lid (Fig. 18, 19 and 21). If this interpretation is correct, the cases could be understood as a small two-room temple structure, with the chambers tucked inside one another instead of following each other as they normally did in the temples. The mummy inside, placed within the innermost structure, would thus correspond to the cult statue in the temple, which was placed at the heart of the compound.

However, the friezes on the chapels depicted on the coffin differ from the ones surrounding the case, and consist of *uraeuses* only. If the idea behind this feature was to express a relationship between the case and the chapel, one would expect the friezes to be identical. Although not the norm, 21st dynasty coffins where the chapel – and case-friezes actually are identical, have been found³²⁵. If the connection to the temple architecture is vague, there is no doubt that the friezes served the same protective purpose as the ones found on temples and funerary chapels. The coffin also shared the cosmic aspects with both the temple and the tomb.

³²⁵ Schmidt 1919a, entry 706-707.

The coffin as cosmos and cosmic mother

After the apparent function of the coffin as *saH*-image and an extension of the mummy, the idea of the coffin as a miniature cosmos is probably the most predominant. With the sky goddess spreading her wings across the lids and the series of winged scarabs with sun discs traversing across it lengthwise, there is little doubt that the lid represents the sky. The journey of the sun god in his shape of a scarab (*xpr*) starts with icon 11 in the central register between the ankles on the inner lid, and goes through various stages of empowerment (*sxm*, icon 12) and resurrection (the Abydos-fetish, icon 14), before ascending to the sky (Nut) in icon 16. The presence of Atum in icon 16 brings the creation to mind. Just like death, the creation was seen as an ongoing process, repeated with every sunrise. In icon 17, the scarab is flanked by a double figure of Osiris, who now is enthroned as ruler of the underworld. The cryptographic composition of the *HH*-goddess and the *anxs* surrounding the sun god ensures that he is “alive forever”. In icon 18, the sun god is equipped with falcon-wings, sailing majestically over the sky.

Likewise, the case represents the earth and the underworld. This is particularly clear on the interior decoration, where the large-scale figure of the goddess of the west, Imentet, is embracing the deceased from below (icon 42). Embraced by the wings of Nut from above and Imentet from below, the mummy is placed between the sky and the earth at the center of the cosmos. As such, the deceased takes on the role of Shu, the God who was created by Atum to separate the sky from the earth³²⁶. This situation was recorded in the famous cosmogony-scene often found on coffins from the 21st dynasty³²⁷, where Shu is standing over his son Geb (the earth) while supporting his

³²⁶ Niwinski 1983c, p. 54.

³²⁷ For instance on the coffin of Khonsumes in Stockholm. Englund 1974, p. 53-55.

daughter Nut hanging over him on his extended arms. Imentet could easily replace Geb in this scene since they both represent the chthonic hemisphere³²⁸.

Also the exterior decoration of the cases can be said to have a primarily chthonic content. Whereas the main focus of the lid seems to be solar resurrection, the icons on the case emphasize the resurrection of Osiris (icon 30, 35, 37, and 39) and the deceased (icon 26, 38)³²⁹. Furthermore, the chapel structures that appear on the lids, the exterior of the cases, and the mummy cover are not the same. Whereas the chapels on the lids have certain recognizable architectural features known from excavated temples, such as the pillars and the cavetto cornice discussed above (Fig. 18-21), the “chapels” on the cases (Fig. 31-32, 35-36, 39-40, and 58-59) and the mummy-cover (Fig. 8-11) are marked by polychrome arches only. In fact, these structures are not chapels at all, but are meant to represent the *īAt*-mounds of the netherworld, also mentioned in texts 31 and 34.

There thus seems to be a clear division in the symbolism of the lids and the cases, where the former represents the sky above the deceased, and the latter the underworld below him. The mummy-cover, which was placed over the mummy inside the case, seems to take an intermediary position, with a combination of celestial and chthonic images represented by the winged Nut-figure in icon 5 and the *īAt*-mounds respectively.

Although their positioning under the *īAt*-mounds indicate their chthonic role, the four sons of Horus on the exterior sides of the outer case (Fig. 58-59) might be understood in an alternative way. As the observant reader might remember from chapter 2, these divinities were interpreted by Harco Willems as identical to the so

³²⁸ I use the term “chthonic” here simply as “subterranean” or “Osirian”, as opposed to the celestial hemisphere (or solar, i.e. the world of the living) in Egyptian cosmology. It should not be confused with the meaning it entails in studies of Greco-Roman religion. Luther 1987, p. 8-9. Although the necropolis, here represented by the goddess Imentet, was physically located in the world of the living, it was regarded as the entrance to the netherworld, and as such seem to belong to the chthonic hemisphere in the iconography.

called HH-gods, a group of four male divinities representing the cardinal directions and assisting Shu in his never ending task of separating heaven from earth. The difference in composition on the inner and outer case is striking, and a reason in itself to search for a secondary religious function. The composition on NME 890, with the single figures extending from bottom (underworld) to the lid (heaven), fits the sky supporter idea well. That the deceased appears facing them on the left side of the coffin conforms to the idea accounted for above, where the deceased is identified with Shu as the *axis mundi*. Thus, with the addition of the cardinal directions and the element of air, our microcosm is complete.

It is of no surprise to find the cosmos-theme emphasized more on the outer coffin than on the inner one. Throughout the New Kingdom, there was an apparent split in function between the inner, anthropoid coffin and the rectangular sarcophagus. The coffin represented the *saH*-image, residing within the tomb-temple-cosmos structure of the sarcophagus. This logical arrangement was broken with the introduction of the anthropoid sarcophagus in the 19th dynasty, but clearly the old functions of the sarcophagus was deeply rooted in the mind of the artist, and was not abandoned entirely right away. As an archaisation of a Ramesside type of cases, NME 890 might therefore be a revival of New Kingdom composition, which was still alive in the Ramesside transitional type.

The cosmic aspects of the 21st dynasty coffins were explored by Niwinski, who argued that the coffin ensemble actually enclosed the deceased within several imaginary cosmoi. This is particularly visible on the inner coffins, which were raised up to standing position during the *opening of the mouth* ritual. This final ritual was so crucial to the transformation process of the deceased that some artists took both positions into account in their iconographic compositions. The result can be seen on some 21st dynasty coffins where the footboard and the top of the head on the interior

³²⁹ It is, however, hard to draw the distinction firmly, since the life-death-resurrection theme is common to all three characters, and one of the main points behind the decoration program is to emphasize the oneness of the three.

decoration of the inner case were decorated with chthonic and celestial symbols respectively. When seen as a three-dimensional composition including the mummy standing up between these icons, it is easy to see how the mummy was given the role as *axis mundi*³³⁰, a role it shared with Shu and in the 21st dynasty also the great god himself³³¹. The *ba*-bird hovering above the mummy's head in icon 43 follows the same principle, in that it would only be hovering above the mummy's head if the coffin were erect. The point is made even clearer on an earlier version of this icon where the *ba*-bird appears upside-down when the coffin is lying down³³².

The scarab's flight along the lid makes sense from both perspectives. When the coffin was lying down, it would represent the sun god's journey across the sky (= Nut = the lid), and when it was erect, it would appear as if the sun was rising up from the eastern horizon. This latter interpretation is supported by the stages of empowerment (icon 12) and resurrection (icon 14), which would have taken place in the underworld, and perhaps also by the icons representing the necropolis at the foot end of the coffin (icon 25a-b and 26).

Niwinski also argued that icons on the exterior sides on the cases could represent the two hemispheres, again with the mummy placed in between³³³. This might have been the idea behind the composition consisting of icon 28-29 and text 27, the only composition on the cases containing solar symbolism only. The composition is more or less symmetrical with the judgment-scene (icon 37) on the opposite side, which clearly belongs to the chthonic hemisphere. Texts with Nut and Geb, representing heaven and earth respectively, also tend to be mirrored around the mummy on the sides of the coffin, such as in text 7-8 and 41-24. There is no consequence, however, in which side the gods appear on.

³³⁰ Niwinski 1983c, p. 55-58; 1989b, p.103-105.

³³¹ Niwinski 1989b, p. 101.

³³² Niwinski 1983c, p.62-63.

³³³ Niwinski 2000, p. 34.

This last observation might be explained by the random manner the decorative elements relate to each other. The point could have been to place the deceased between the two hemispheres, and not necessarily to define one side as chthonic and the other as celestial. If this were the case, there would not be any point in a consequent use of symbols on each side, as long as each opposing pair of decorative elements contained the dichotomy. It is also hard to see why the Egyptians would have defined, say, the left side as chthonic and the right celestial, since such a composition would have violated the entire plan behind the cosmologic iconography, which was based on an allegorical resemblance of the world. What often is found on the sides (or the ends) of Egyptian coffins and sarcophagi are symbols representing the cardinal directions, particularly east and west, thus adding the third dimension to the microcosm the artist attempted to recreate. In such cases, alignment of the coffin in the tomb played a great significance, since the symbolic east, west, up and down had to correspond to the real world outside.

The multi-cosmoi compositions proposed by Niwinski do not seem to play a major part in the iconography of C47714. The numerous cosmological elements in the decoration all refer to the same cosmos, where the deceased is placed as an *axis mundi* between the chthonic and the celestial hemisphere. Icon 42 might be the only remains of the earlier multi-cosmoi decoration program studied by Niwinski.

As discussed in chapter two, there is some evidence that earlier coffins were identified with Nut in her aspect as mother goddess, or along the same line of thought, as an egg. Although Nut is represented in numerous texts and icons on the coffin ensemble (texts 8, 25, and 41, icon 5, 17, and 26b on C47714), there is no evidence in the decorations that the coffin was personified as Nut. It is interesting to note, however, that the first choice of material for coffins was sycamore wood, the tree in which the goddess was believed to manifest herself. This possible connection is brought even closer to mind by the fact that the sycamore-goddess actually appears in icon 26b. The evidence gathered by Nils Billing shows that the main attributes of Nut were space and water. These qualities made her presence required in every enclosure associated

with the idea of rebirth and resurrection (see chapter 2). From Billing's conclusions, the continued use of sycamore wood, and the frequency with which Nut here appears in text and iconography, it seems reasonable to assume her presence also in the 21st dynasty coffins.

No egg-symbolism can be found on the coffin-ensemble, and the word *swHt*, as mentioned above used for the mummy-cover in the 21st dynasty, might very well have lost its metaphorical connotation by this time.

A sphere of divine protection

Another predominant function of the coffin is the protection of the deceased. As we have seen many examples of by now, the deceased was believed to go through a process that was paired with the myths of the death and resurrection of Osiris and the sun god. In both myths, the protagonist is threatened by the forces of chaos, represented by Seth and Apophis respectively. The deceased was similarly under constant threat from the powers of chaos during his eternal journey, as personified by the monster Ammut, which usually was depicted in the more elaborate judgment scenes (icon 37 is a version where she is not present), ready to devour the heart of the deceased should the scales be off balance.

Security for the deceased on his journey was ensured by the numerous symbols of protection surrounding the entire coffin, such as uraeuses, *wDAṯs*, and winged goddesses. Also the texts with references to various beneficial deities served this purpose, so that hardly a spot on the coffin was left unprotected. The writing of the name of a deity with the sacred hieroglyphs meant to invoke it (see below). The many *Dd-mḏw-in* formulas (divine speeches) surrounding the cases even assume the presence of the deity in question. The deities that appear in both texts and icons are

the same as those who acted in favor of Osiris (Isis, Nephtys, Nut, Geb, and Thot³³⁴) and the sun god (Isis and Heqa³³⁵) in the myths.

Also other religious symbols, such as the numerous, Dd-pillars, tit-knots, anxs and ma'at-feathers were meant to ensure the deceased stability, rebirth, life and justice³³⁶. As such they take part in the protection of the deceased and ensures a successful outcome of his trial.

The coffin as ritual machine

We saw in chapter 2 that Harco Willems posited that the *object friezes* on the SCMK-coffins were a kind of summary of the purification ritual, and equipped the deceased with ritual objects and even fellow priests to repeat the rites in the afterlife for eternity. The 21st dynasty coffins seem to focus more on the myth than on the ritual. It is, however, difficult to draw the distinction firmly, since the ritual often was an enactment of the myth. What we can say for sure is that there is nothing on C47714-NME 890 corresponding to the object frieze on the SCMK-coffins.

The coffin is surrounded by more or less the same deities as on the SCMK-coffins, such as Osiris, Isis, Nephtys, Neith, Serket, Geb, Nut, Thot, Ptah-Sokar and the four sons of Horus. Furthermore, their active presence is still indicated by Dd-mdw-in and imAxy-xr formulas. As discussed in chapter two, Willems suggested that the former, the so-called “divine speeches” could have been texts recited by priests taking on the roles of the deities in a ritual enactment of the myth. It is, however, hard to make any conclusions without contemporary material to compare with. As far as I know, no serious attempt has been made to reconstruct the 21st dynasty funerary ritual, and the lack of detailed knowledge of the ritual makes it hard to search for parallels in the funerary equipment.

³³⁴ Bettum 2001b, p. 27-31.

³³⁵ Te Velde 1970, p. 175-176.

³³⁶ Wilkinson 1999, p. 102-103, 164-165, 176-177, 200-2001.

Certain icons on the coffin may provide vague hints to certain stages of the funerary ritual, but usually not without equally significant references to the solar-Osirian cycle with which the journey of the deceased, and possibly also the ritual, was paired. For instance may the necropolis scene (icon 26a) be a reference to the burial, but the icon also hold strong solar connotations³³⁷. Quite a few 21st dynasty coffins have scenes from the *funerary procession* included in the repertoire of icons, sometimes in connection with the necropolis scene (icon 26a)³³⁸. However, these scenes display features from the 19th dynasty burial and funerary equipment, such as the obelisk shaped superstructure of the tomb in icon 26a. They are clearly not renderings of the 21st dynasty funerary procession, since the latter must have taken place within the precincts of temples (see below).

Icon 26b, where the *ba* of the deceased receives libations from Nut in the sycamore, could also have had a corresponding stage in the ritual. But also this scene is so bound to the standards of the iconography at the time, and so loaded with mythological allusions that it is impossible to derive any details of the ritual from it. The icon of Osiris rising up from the funerary bier (Fig. 56) might likewise be a parallel to the *stundenwachen* ritual, but could just as well be an allusion to the myth alone.

From the discussion of the multi-cosmoi decoration programs above, it can be assumed that the *opening of the mouth* ritual was continued as before. At least the artist must have expected the coffin to stand up straight at some point before it was buried. Icon 42 might be relevant to the ritual, since one of its purposes was to bring the *ba*-soul back into the body. All in all we can conclude that the few allusions to the ritual possibly rendered in these icons are not sufficient evidence to reconstruct the 21st dynasty funerary ritual. To the extent the icons do reflect the ritual, there is no evidence indicating any major changes since the New Kingdom, a reason in itself to question their value as sources.

³³⁷ Naguib 1982, p. 28.

³³⁸ Niwinski 1981, Fig. 3.

Many questions arise from the changes in burial practice in this period. It is reasonable to assume that if the original 21st dynasty burials were located within the precincts of one of the major temples, that the funerary rituals and the ancestor worship took place there.

Was the reburial of kings and priests ritualized, and in that case how? If the caches did not have superstructures, where did the ancestor worship take place after the reburial³³⁹? Since people were buried collectively, could also the ancestors have been worshipped collectively, say in one of the major temples³⁴⁰? Is it possible that the private ancestor worship was merged with a larger, collective celebration that was easier to protect, such as the wAg-festival or the Beautiful Feast of the Valley? Was the new funerary practice regarded as an emergency solution that changed with varying conditions of security in the necropolis throughout the dynasty, or was the new form of the ritual fixed, based on new ideological grounds sanctioned by the wHm mswt? In that case, what did this new ideology consist of, and how did it conform to the new theological ideas at the time? Unfortunately, the coffin-decorations do not seem to give many answers.

The concept of magic and the coffin as a magical device of resurrection

At the millennium conference on Egyptology in 2000³⁴¹, Herman Te Velde was chosen as the primary spokesman for of the study of Ancient Egyptian religion (AER). In his paper he points out that the study of AER, usually carried out by Egyptologists, is suffering from a lack of reflection over basic terminology, and in this aspect still has much to learn from disciplines such as History of Religions and Anthropology³⁴². In the literature on AER, terms such as magic, symbol, myth and

³³⁹ As Niwinski points out, the practice of keeping the cult place separated from the tomb was already well established by the New Kingdom kings. Niwinski 1989a, p. 36.

³⁴⁰ Niwinski suggests Hatshepsut's temple in Deir el-Bahari (Fig. 64). Niwinski 1988a, p. 29; 1989a, p. 35-36.

³⁴¹ The Eight International Congress of Egyptologists, Cairo 2000.

³⁴² Te Velde 2002, p. 45.

ritual, not even to mention the word “religion” itself, are often used incoherently and without a consensus within the field of what these terms actually mean.

Searching through my reference literature for examples of divergences in the use of the word “magic”, I was surprised not to find much. There seems to be an unwritten consensus in the field that the technical term “magic”, when applied to in AER, is identical to the Egyptian concept of HqA. In the pantheon, the corresponding god Heqa “...personifies the creative energy of the creator-god”³⁴³. Through the acquisition of a certain esoteric knowledge, this energy could also be used by human beings to manipulate their surroundings³⁴⁴. By leaving the problem of defining “magic” to the Egyptians themselves, the Egyptologists have avoided many of the problems encountered by anthropologists and historians of religions, such as defining the relationship between religion and magic³⁴⁵. The presence of Heqa is documented from scenes and texts dealing with the creation, the battle between Re and Apophis, the birth of pharaohs³⁴⁶, and, as seen from icon 30 on C47714b, he was also involved in the transformation process of the sun god, Osiris and the deceased. Against this background it is easy to see how Wilkinson could conclude that:

*...the purpose of Egyptian magic does not essentially differ from that of religion itself, with both sharing the common goal of what anthropologists have called “transformation of state” – the changing of existent reality to a more desirable situation.*³⁴⁷

Following such an understanding of the word “magic”, the coffin can be understood as the medium of the special esoteric knowledge required to employ magic (=HqA) in the service of the deceased. The religious icons and the sacred hieroglyphs were closely related to HqA³⁴⁸, and were believed to inhibit powers with the potential of bringing about the situation it conveyed. This is why the deceased is depicted as

³⁴³ Te Vlede 1970, p. 183.

³⁴⁴ Te Velde 1970, p. 175.

³⁴⁵ Middleton 1993.

³⁴⁶ Te Velde 1970, p. 175, 178, 180.

³⁴⁷ Wilkinson 1999, p. 7.

³⁴⁸ Te Velde 1970, p. 185.

victorious in the judgment scene (icon 37), Apophis is depicted defeated in icon 28, and the deceased receives libations from the lady of the sycamore in icon 26b. Opposite, the theoretically possible negative outcome of the process is never rendered, since the rendering in itself could make the undesired result real. The name of Seth or Apophis would never occur on a coffin, since the writing of their name would be an invocation. The presence of the divinities bringing about chaos was not wanted, except in the mutilated form found in icon 28. As such, the texts and images on the coffin are closely related to, or even part of the ritual, in which the same desired situations were acted out to the same effect³⁴⁹.

The terminology here accounted for has the advantage of eliminating the artificial distinctions often created by scholars of religion using a more differentiated vocabulary³⁵⁰. The weakness of equating magic to the Egyptian *Hqꜣ*, is that it conforms poorly to the generic term “magic” as it is used in phenomenological approaches to religion. Neither does it make a distinction between the institutionalized rituals of the state religion and the doings of the physician or the snake charmer in the rural village. Te Velde himself seems confused by the imprecise terminology when he resorts to calling the latter “magic in a stricter sense”³⁵¹. His suggestion to reserve the word “magic” for the unofficial employment of *Hqꜣ*, as opposed to the “practical theology” of the state, might prove useful to future students of AER.

Clearly, the coffins of the priests of Thebes were subject to strict control from the high priest or even the king himself, and as such the decorations reflect the state religion. Following Te Velde and the old sociological definition of magic as “any rite which does not take part in organized cults...³⁵²”, there is thus nothing magical about the coffin. It is also questionable if precautions taken for a life that is to take place after death can be called magic, since “magic” in the sense it is used by anthropologists and historians of religions primarily concerns everyday life.

³⁴⁹ Wilkinson 1999, p. 7.

³⁵⁰ Middelton 1993, p. 82.

³⁵¹ Te Velde 1970, p. 181.

³⁵² Middelton 1993, p. 85.

Whether the coffin can be labeled a “magical device of rebirth” thus depends on which definition of “magic” one is using. It seems like Egyptologists (and particularly those publishing for a wider audience), are ready to apply the term where anthropologists and historians of religion would not.

Summary and Conclusions

From choice of material through construction, composition and decoration, we find the coffin loaded with symbolic meaning. Every little detail held significance. We have seen that the choice of wood associated the coffin with the goddess Nut, how the shape, colors and even varnish work together in realizing the glorified *saH*-image, and how the composition of the decorative elements placed the deceased in the center of cosmos.

In the New Kingdom coffin ensemble, two groups of religious functions were split between two main elements in the coffin ensemble, the anthropoid inner coffin and the rectangular sarcophagus. Whereas the former primarily reflected the symbolism of the *saH*-image, the tomb-temple-cosmos symbolism was stressed in the latter. In the 21st dynasty coffin ensemble, the two groups meet and merge into one expression. The coffin ensemble is at the same time the *saH*-image and the space surrounding it.

The tendency to merge concepts that earlier held an independent status is typical for the 21st dynasty, and has parallels in the theology of the time. Niwinski has accounted for the trend in the religious iconography to combine well known religious symbols into one image of the great god (*nTr aA*), thus emphasizing his omnipotence and ability to appear in whatever form he desired, no matter how abstract or surreal³⁵³. By constituting, at the same time, the microcosm of the *saH*-image and the macrocosm

³⁵³ Niwinski 2000, p. 32-33.

of the universe, the mummy takes on the ability of the great god to be the whole and the particular at the same time.

Following a similar line of logic, the religious thinkers of the time were less interested in the individual and its position in the social hierarchy. Niwinski argued that every member of the state held a priestly title. We have also seen how the tomb as a celebration of the status of the individual cease to exist, and even the once so important recording of the name seems to lose its significance. In its place we find the collective grave where the personal space is limited to the coffin. But the pre-made coffins, which are surprisingly similar, and point out the difference in status between say a princess and a temple musician only in its details³⁵⁴, are not concerned with the identity of the individual either. As the gods merge into one, so do people after they pass away and enter the realm of the great god.

Again confirming the results of the pioneer works of Andrzej Niwinski, it can be said that every little detail in the choice of materials, construction and decoration of the coffin are different ways of expressing the same theme. The theme is the solar-Osirian cycle where the two kings Re and Osiris merge at night into yet another manifestation of the great god, the engine that takes the universe through the stages of life, death and resurrection day after day³⁵⁵. As noted in chapter 2, the *saH*-image is ultimately the body of Osiris himself. The lid of the coffin is his mother Nut, the sky-goddess, and the case is his father Geb, the earth. The mummy within is placed in the center of the universe defined by the encircling of the sun god, whose resurrection every morning is dependent on the protection by the gods of the Ennead and a successful union with Osiris – i.e. the deceased.

The coffin ensemble of C47714-NME 890 demonstrates well the complexity of the theology and the symbolic language in which religious ideas were conveyed in the early to the mid 21st dynasty.

³⁵⁴ What Niwinski has called the "democracy in the face of death". Niwinski 1988a, p. 99.

³⁵⁵ Niwinski 1989b.

Abbreviations, bibliography, and list of sources:

Abbreviations

<i>ASAE</i>	Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte, Cairo.
<i>BD</i>	Book of the Dead
<i>BIÉ</i>	Bulletin de l'institut Egyptien, Cairo.
<i>BIFAO</i>	Bulletin de l'institut Francais d'Archeologie Orientale, Cairo.
<i>BiOr</i>	Bibliotheca Orientalis, Leiden.
<i>BMD</i>	British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt (1995): Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson (eds.). British Museum Press, London.
<i>BSFE</i>	Bulletin de la Société Français d'Égyptologie
<i>CG</i>	Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire.
<i>CT</i>	Coffin Texts
<i>ER</i>	The Encyclopedia of Religion. Mircea Eliade (ed.) Simon & Schuster Macmillan, New York 1993.
<i>GM</i>	Gottinger Miszellen, Göttingen.
<i>JEA</i>	Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 12 vols. London.
<i>JEOL</i>	Jaarbericht van het Voorasiatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap, "Ex Oriente Lux".
<i>LÄ</i>	Lexikon der Ägyptologie, Helck, Wolfgang, Eberhard Otto, and Wolfgang Westendorf (eds.), 7 vols. Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1975-1992.
<i>MDAIK</i>	Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archeologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo.
<i>MM</i>	The Mediterranean Museum in Stockholm
<i>MMAF</i>	Mémoires publiés par les membres da la Mission Archéologique Française, Cairo.
<i>OBO</i>	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis.
<i>OLA</i>	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analeta, Leuven.
<i>OLZ</i>	Orientalistische Literaturzeitung
<i>PT</i>	Pyramid Texts

<i>RdE</i>	Revue d'Égyptologie
<i>SCMK</i>	Standard class Middle Kingdom (-coffins)
<i>UKM</i>	The University Museum of Cultural Heritage in Oslo
<i>VM</i>	The Victoria Museum in Uppsala
<i>Wb.</i>	Erman, A. and H. Grapow (1926-1931), Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache, 5 vols. Leipzig.

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