

## Two Unpublished Baboon Coffin Lids in El-Ashmunein Magazine

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### Abstract

The goal of this paper is to publish and study a two unpublished Baboon coffin lids, nowadays stored in El-Ashmunein Magazine (N.1401- N. 1409). Based on the typology, orthography and stylistic features of writing it could be dated from the end of the 26th Dynasty to the first half of the second century BC.

### Keywords

Baboon; Coffin Lids; El-Ashmunein; Tuna el-Gebel; Thoth; Pyramid Texts

### اثنين من أغطية توابيت البابون غير المنشورة في مخزن الأشمونين

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مدرس، قسم الآثار المصرية، كلية الآثار، جامعة الفيوم، جمهورية مصر العربية

### الملخص

الهدف من هذه الورقة هو نشر ودراسة اثنين من أغطية توابيت البابون غير المنشورة، والمحفوطة حالياً في مخزن الأشمونين (أرقام ١٤٠١ - ١٤٠٩). بناءً على أسلوب الكتابة والتهجئة والسمات الخطية، يمكن تأريخها من نهاية الأسرة السادسة والعشرين إلى النصف الأول من القرن الثاني قبل الميلاد.

### الكلمات الدالة

قرد البابون، أغطية توابيت، الأشمونين، تونا الجبل، تحوت، متون الأهرام

### Article History

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## Introduction

These two wooden boards are a part of larger collection of wooden objects found during the excavations inside the animal crypts at Tuna al-Gebel by Cairo University, which are presently stored in El-Ashmunein Magazine with inventory numbers: 1369, 1395, 1397, 1398, 1399, 1400, 1401, 1404, 1405, 1407, 1409, 1410, 14011. Add to that two published wooden lids from Mallawi Museum nos. 263- 264 by El-Hussein Zaghloul<sup>1</sup>. It is clear from the introductory mortuary formula, which begins with the formula “Osiris–baboon, justified”<sup>2</sup>, that these wooden boards were lid-fragments of chests or baboon containers, the scared symbol of Thoth. <sup>3</sup>These mummies were brought from all over Egypt to be dedicated in the subterranean galleries at Tuna el-Gebel and Saqqara <sup>4</sup>deposited in the side niches in the subterranean galleries<sup>5</sup>. I would suggest that these lids probably came from Hermopolis or one of its workshops.

The two lids that are the subject of this paper come from two different wooden boxes. Each has vertical lines of hieroglyphic texts on the face. There are four lines and half of text on the first lid, N.1401, and four lines on the second lid, N. 1409.

The whole text that was written on the two lids is taken from earlier religious literature, PT 638- 639 (sections a-d), which bestows the protection of Nut, the goddess of the sky, onto the deceased<sup>6</sup>, who embodies Osiris himself. <sup>7</sup> Nut is always the defender against everything evil and therefore the spells that invoke her name performed a significant religious and practical role. These spells recall the mortuary ceremonies acted out by Nut over the deceased-Osiris, who is embodied here by the mummified baboon<sup>8</sup>. According to Egyptian mythology, Nut alighted upon Osiris, after he was murdered by Seth, and she called his two sisters, Isis and Nephthys, in order to keep him out of Seth reach.<sup>9</sup> The text reinforces this by saying, “*your*

<sup>1</sup> El-Hussein. “Zaghloul, An Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts on Two Wooden Fragments from the Mallawi Museum”, *MDAIK* 50 (1994), 307-308, pls. 52 (a-b).

<sup>2</sup> Wsir pA any is the main deity of the animal necropolis, together with the god Wsir r pA hb 'Osiris-the-ibis, For further details, see D. Kessler, Tuna el-Gebel, II: Die Paviankultkammer G-C-C-2.mit einem Beitrag zu den Funden von Hans-Ulrich Onasch (HÄB 43, Hildesheim, (1998), p. 84, pl. 36; LGG II, p. 537.

<sup>3</sup> P. Boylan, Thoth, The Hermes of Egypt, Oxford University press, London, 1922 , 76-80.

<sup>4</sup> J. Goudsmit, & D. B. Jones, “[Mummies of Olive Baboons and Barbary Macaques in the Baboon Catacomb of the Sacred Animal Necropolis at North Saqqara](#)”, *JEA* 85 (1999),p.4; J.A.Tyldesley, "Tuna El-Gebel", in *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, London-New York , 1999, 1037-1039

<sup>5</sup> For the excavation works in the galleries, see D. Kessler, Tuna el-Gebel, II: Die Paviankultkammer G-C-C-2.mit einem Beitrag zu den Funden von Hans-Ulrich Onasch (HÄB 43, Hildesheim, (1998), pp. 1-4; G. GRIMM, "Tuna el-Gebel 1913-1973. Eine Grabung des deutschen Architekten W. Honroth und neuere Untersuchungen in Hermopolis-West (Tanis Superior), *MDAIK* 31 (1975), pp. 226-229.

<sup>6</sup> K. Sethe, *Die Altägyptischen pyramiden Texte*, 1, Leipzig, 1908, spells.638 a-d, §639 a.

<sup>7</sup> The deceased king in Ancient Egypt was equated with the God Osiris. Since the First Intermediate Period, everybody after death was named Osiris; this title of the monkey refers to the two wooden lids that turned him after death into a god united with Osiris, rather than just an animal. This is indicated in the passage "to make you god without any enemies".

See: J.G. Griffiths, "Osiris", *LÄ* IV, 1989, col.627 ; R. Faulkener, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, United States, 2007, 121 ; *C.T.* spell.237 .

<sup>8</sup> For further details, see LGG II, p. 537; D. Kessler, 'Die Tempel von Tuna el-Gebel, in: B. HARING - A. KLUG (eds), 6. Ägyptologische Tempeltatung: Funktion und Gebrauch altägyptischer Tempelräume (KSG 3.1, Wiesbaden, 2007), pp. 131-152.

<sup>9</sup> H. Willems, *Chests of Life*, (Leiden, 1988), 234.

*mother Nut spreads herself over you*", "She defends you from all evil things"<sup>1</sup>. Accordingly, Nut is referred to as "the coffin", so that the mummified baboon would have no enemies, in the name of "*Khnmet-wert*"<sup>2</sup>. The Nut formula might be reflected in the concept of the journey of the deceased baboon to be reborn at sundown in the Underworld as a child of Nut, a regaining new life in her womb. She is said to be a mother embracing the deceased as she gives birth, as well as a guardian of the dead-baboon<sup>3</sup>. This idea is explicitly stated when she is called *mwt* "the mother", in the Pyramid Texts. There, the term is used repeatedly to refer to her as the mother of the deceased king.<sup>4</sup> "You have been given to your mother Nut in her identity of the burial place, she has collected you in her identity of the burial chamber, and you have been elevated to her in her identity of the tomb's superstructure."<sup>5</sup>

**Lid No. 1401:**

This lid is light brown and is of mediocre quality. It is made up of four pieces joined together. Its dimensions are as follows: height 58 cm; width 43 cm; and thickness varying between 3 and 4 cm. Eight peg holes can be seen on its edges, two of them still filled with the wooden dowels, which attached the lid to the rest of the coffin. It is missing part at the upper edge of the right side. One face of the lid bears five clearly handwritten vertical lines of text from top to bottom.



**Figure 1. Lid N. 1401, photograph by the author.**

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase "nn xftyw.k" was occasionally replaced in texts with another phrase, "nn st"; meaning "no existence for Seth". See: A. Rusch, *Die Entwicklung der Himmelsgöttin Nut zur einer Totengottheit*, Leipzig, 1922, 23, 31.

<sup>2</sup> J. Assman, "Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt, translated from German by M. Grauer & R. Mayer, in: James P. Allen, *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, Yale Egyptological Studies 3, (New Haven, 1989), 139.

<sup>3</sup> Pyr., 1835a; J. Assman, "Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt, in: James P. Allen, *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, Yale Egyptological studies 3, 139.

<sup>4</sup> J. Bergman, *Nut, Himmelsgöttin, Baumgöttin, Lebensgeberin in Religious Symbols and Their Functions*, ed. by H. Biezais, (Uppsala, 1979), 53-69; S. Schott, "Nut spricht als Mutter und Sarg" in: *Rde* 17 (1965), 81.

<sup>5</sup> J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Society of Biblical Literature, (Atlanta, 2005), 80.; Pyr., 616d-616f

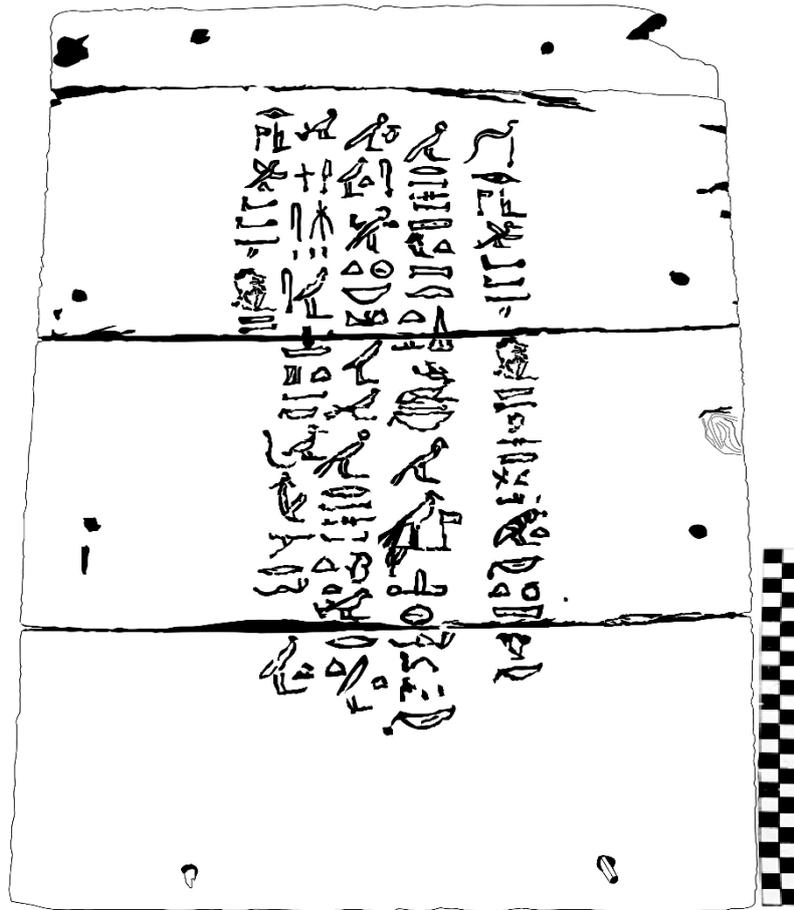
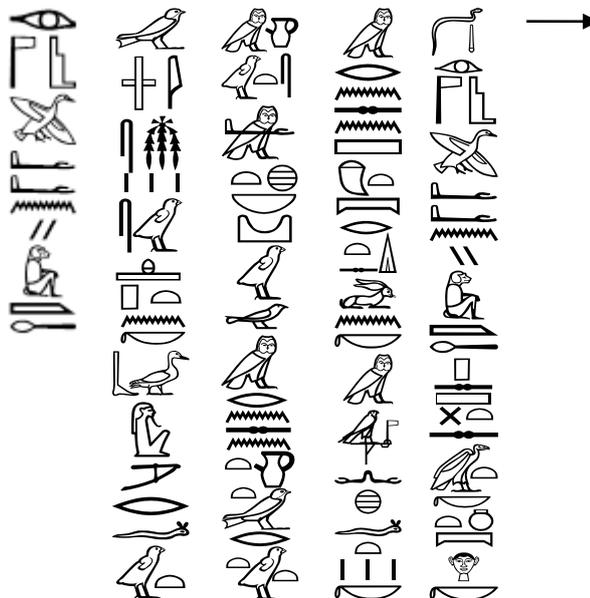


Figure 2. Drawing by M. Abady.

### The Hieroglyphic inscriptions



**Transliteration and Translation**

- 1- *dd mdw[in] Wsir p3 ʕny m3ʕ-hrw pšš.t. s mwt.k Nwt hr.k*
- 2- *m rn.s n Št3-pt<sup>(a)</sup> rdi.t.s wn.k m Ntr<sup>(b)</sup> n hftyw.k.*
- 3- *hnm.s tw m-ʕ ht nb dw m rn.s n Hnmt-wrt<sup>(c)</sup> tw.t.*
- 4- *wr imy msw.s htp.n.k Gb mr.f tw*
- 5- *Wsir p3 ʕny m3ʕ-hrw.*

- 1- *Words spoken, Osiris (of) the baboon, justified, your mother Nut spreads herself Over you.*
- 2- *in her name of Sheta-pet. She causes you to be as a god without enemies against you*
- 3- *She defends you from all evil things in her name Khnmet-wert*
- 4- *You are the eldest of her children, Geb is satisfied with you. He loves you*
- 5- *(oh) Osiris (of) the baboon, justified.*

**The lid No. 1409:**

Its dimensions are as follows: Height 52cm; Width 39 cm; and Thickness varies between 3 and 3.5 cm. Eleven peg holes can be seen along its edges, some of them still filled with dowels. One face of the lid bears four clear handwritten vertical lines of inscriptions from top to bottom. It contains two pieces joined together.



**Figure 3. Lid N. 1409, photograph by the author.**

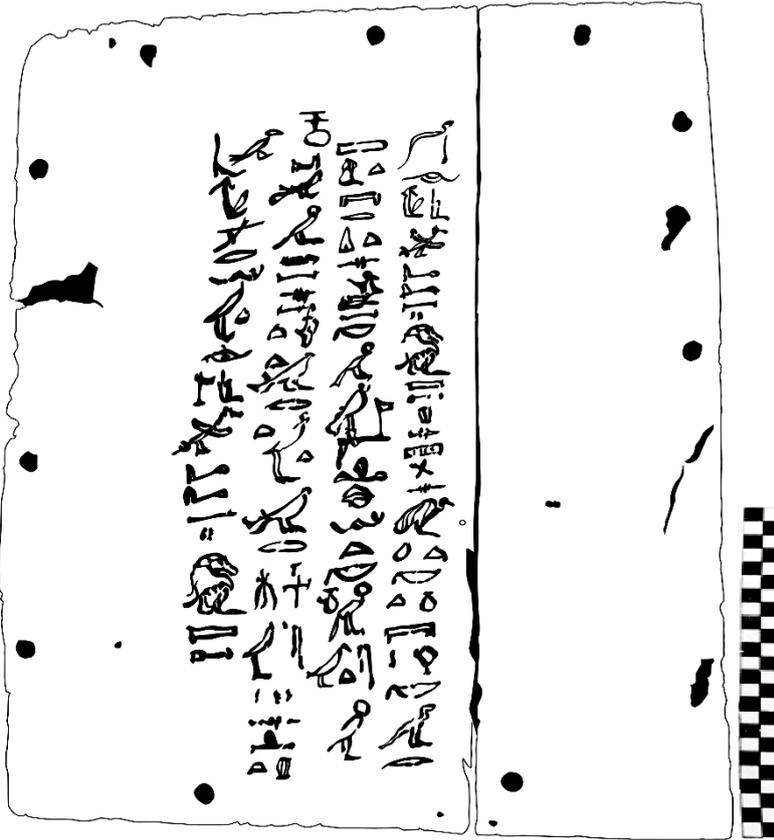


Figure 4. Drawing by M. Abady.

### The Hieroglyphic Inscriptions



### Transliteration and Translation:

1- *dd mdw[in] Wsir p3 ʿny m3ʿ-ḥrw pšš.s mwt.k Nwt ḥr.k m rn.s*

2- *Št3-pt<sup>(a)</sup> rdi.t.s wn.k m Ntr<sup>(b)</sup> n ḥft.k hnm.s tw m-ʿ ḥt nb*

3- *dw m rn.s n Hnmt-wrt<sup>(c)</sup> tw.t wr imy msw.s ḥtp.n.k*

4- *Gb mr.f tw Wsir p3 ʿny m3ʿ-ḥrw*

PT 638- 639 (sections a-d) is copied verbatim on this lid, so there is no reason to give the translation again.

### Textual Commentary

(a) This subsidiary name occurs frequently for Nut in the Pyramid Texts.<sup>1</sup> It literally means “the heavenly secret”, in reference to the coffin, which she embodied. This secret contained the body of Osiris-baboon,<sup>2</sup> so it might mean “cosmic womb” (*sšt3*), which is clearly attested in the Late Period texts referring to the womb.<sup>3</sup>

(b) This term refers to the transferring of the physical body of the mummified baboon from the terrestrial mortal world to the divine realm of gods, through the union with the womb of Nut. Therefore, the Nut formula ended as: “you are the greatest among her children; Osiris-baboon justified”.<sup>4</sup>

(c) Is a title associated with the goddess Nut,<sup>5</sup> it means literally “**great sieve**” or “**great protectress**”, as she embraces the deceased inside herself to give him rebirth as well as protection. In this case, both the coffin and Nut are regarded as the embrace of a mother in which the reconstitution process takes place after burial.<sup>6</sup>

### Dating of the Two Lids

The texts of the two lids do not contain any historical evidence, such as the name of a reigning pharaoh or an event distinctive to any period. Therefore, they can be dated only by internal indications from the writing system, which essentially mixed Old, Middle and Late Egyptian orthographies. This mixture is identified by F. Junge *Medio Late Egyptian*<sup>7</sup> in a reference to the late Saite period, and by Peter der Manuelian to refer the same period.<sup>8</sup> Because of this, I would suggest that they are to be dated from the end of the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty to the first half of the second century BC. Examples of these are presented below:

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<sup>1</sup> J.P. Elias, Coffin Inscription in Egypt after the New Kingdom, 3, (Ph. D. diss., Chicago, 1993), 599 ; H. Willems, Chests of Life, 604; PT, 580c §638d .

<sup>2</sup> T. Duquesne, “Anubis, Master of Secrets (Hry sStA), and the Egyptian Conception of Mysteries”, *Discussions of Egyptology* 36, (1996), 26.

<sup>3</sup> Wb.IV, 555(2-6)

<sup>4</sup> J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Society of Biblical Literature, (Atlanta, 2005), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Wb, III, 382 (5-6)

<sup>6</sup> J. Bergman, Nut, Himmelsgöttin, Baumgöttin, Lebensgeberin in *Religious Symbols and their Functions*, 53-69

<sup>7</sup> F. Junge, *Late Egyptian Grammar*, Oxford, 2001, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Peter der Manuelian M., *Living in the Past, Studies in Archaism of the Egyptian Twenty-Sixth Dynasty*, (London, 1994), P.387, 391.



lid No. 1409	lid No. 1401

3. Although the exact provenance of these lids is not known because the archive of the Magazine doesn't provides enough details, we may conjecture that they originally came from Hermopolis, based on Tuna el-Gebel were the necropolis of the ancient metropolis Hermopolis Magna, Which Thoth was -in his two forms ibis and baboon- her main god.
4. The lid N.1409 bears one *nfr* hieroglyph on the other side. This can be interpreted as follows:
  - The word *nfr* means good, perfect, excellent.<sup>1</sup> So it may used by the craftsmen to distinguish between the good worked wood and those that were imperfect.
  - It could possibly have been written to specify that it was for a mummified baboon, not an ibis, as one of the *nfr* meanings is "baboon".<sup>2</sup>
  - It could possibly be an internal indication that the mummified body is male as one of the meanings of *nfr* is "phallus".<sup>3</sup>
  - This may have been merely the ancient scribe testing his brush before writing.

<sup>1</sup> Wb. II, 253 (1); L. Lesko, A Dictionary of Late Egyptian, II, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Wb. II, 261 (17).

<sup>3</sup> Wb. II, 261 (8)

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