

Unpublished Anthropoid Wooden Coffins from Ancient Philadelphia Necropolis

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Abstract:

This article illustrates the variety of coffin decoration and the texts that were implemented on the wooden anthropoid found by the Egyptian mission through the latest excavation at the necropolis of Philadelphia. Most of these coffins were made from local wood that could still be found in the arid desert surrounding the site. Nevertheless, one could notice that the artistic canons of these coffins are somehow like other coffins dating to the early Ptolemaic period found in other archaeological sites in Fayoum. Based on this either a workshop in Philadelphia was meant to manufacture and decorate these coffins and illustrate them with the religious text and scenes that we are going to discuss in this article either with or without the deceased name and his titles. The eleven wooden coffins which are presented here have localized features that reflected mainly in the unusual orthography in writing words, which may be due to not all the people at this period were still familiar with the hieroglyphic script, in addition to the influence of the cryptography on the texts of this period.

Keywords:

Anthropoid, Coffins, Philadelphia, Ptolemaic, Roman, Hieroglyphs.

Introduction:

The studied coffins were found in both burial shafts *hypogea* and at a shallow grave as will be described prior to each case of them. The evolution of this decoration from those dated to the late period coffins could be noticed through the Ptolemaic period in a distinctive way.

The painted wooden coffins discussed here were found at the far southeast sector of the necropolis, in the area known in our survey and topographic map as zone four excavation area F, which is the earliest phase of the necropolis dating to the early Ptolemaic period.

On the other hand, the mummy portraits discussed here also were found in the far west at the later phase of the necropolis, adjacent to the settlement and, date back to the 2nd century A.D.

The first coffin discussed in this article (no. 018-Bs70-142) was found at the burial shaft (BS) 70, inside the burial chamber where a niche was cut into the eastern wall of the burial chamber

and the coffin was placed inside the head to the west, two burials were placed over, one was a wrapped child, and another was a mummified dog.

The four painted coffins, which three of them are discussed in this article were found during the 2019 season, the four coffins were placed inside a shallow ellipsoid grave nominated as grave G4, coffins were placed one beside another, head to the west.

Later in 2020, the remains of the two beautifully painted coffins were found at the burial chamber of the burial shaft BS 30, nevertheless, other fragments of the painted coffins which are also discussed in this paper were found at the burial chambers of the burial shaft BS200. Which is allocated to the southwest of the burials shaft BS 70.

Most of these coffins were made from local wood, they were joined together using hardwood wooden pins. The artistic canon of the coffins is characteristic of the Ptolemaic coffins that were made during the Ptolemaic period and several coffins painted based on the same artistic canon were found at sites around Fayoum and north Beni-sueif. It seems that several workshops were making wooden coffins that were made using planks of local wood combined to shape the body of the coffin, while the mask was made from a separate piece of wood that was joined to the coffin lid using the same technique of wooden pins. Unlike the 22nd and the 24th dynasty coffins⁵ from the Late period, the hands were never modeled on the coffins lid. Large wigs were presented as well as large collars. The two sides of the coffins were either painted to resemble the wood grain, or with two gods on each side. The bottom of the coffins were usually decorated with Nut in different size, with only one exception of one of the two coffins from BS 30 which was painted with three columns of hieroglyphic text extracted from the book of the dead and the name of the coffin owner, which indicate that there was local differences between each coffin, and although the general semantic similarities of these group of coffins discovered at Fayoum and in particular Philadelphia dating to the Ptolemaic period, such as imitation of wood grains especially at the coffin sides and back, the two facing jackal lying over the shrine on the pedestal, small painted squares with chess board pattern by color exchange at the two sides of the lid edge, there were individual characteristic for each coffin in terms of selecting text derivatives from the book of the dead, the spells written, scene selected from the book of the dead shown on different register with various orientation, background of the line or the columns where the text was written above, and the presence or absence of the coffin owner name and title or epiphytes.

One should also note the unprofessionalism in using the ancient Egyptian language within the written texts in hieroglyphs, the unusual orthography in writing words, which may be due to not all the people at this period were still familiar with the hieroglyphic script, which was exclusive

in use at the metropolis and the very well-educated priest. On the other hand, most of the texts were written either in demotic as the indigenous script used, or in ancient Greek as an official language. The reason might hinder the people in such a village from being capable of producing a perfect hieroglyphic text.

I. Coffin No. 018-Bs70-142 [Plate 1]

Dating: Early Ptolemaic

Provenance: Philadelphia necropolis, zone 4, area F, BS 70.

Material: Painted wooden anthropoid.

Name of the Owner: *bik-nb-ḥs(t)?*

Name of the father: not mentioned

Name of the mother: *sn(.t)-sy*

Titles: *nb; nb(.t) pr; nb mdḥ(w)*

Bibliography: Unpublished

Description: An anthropoid wooden coffin (reused) in a bad condition of preservation, decorated in polychrome. The mask of the head is missing. This coffin is like other coffins in the late period. The remains of the first register depict the judgment of the deceased before the god Osiris, (chap.125 BD).

The Second register contains Anubis bending over the mummy, flanked by Isis and Nephthys, (chap.151BD). This chapter shows the details of the mummification process with a ritual priest dressed as Anubis; the scene is mostly destroyed.

Then a scene includes five squatting guardians of the netherworld (chap.146, 147 BD), with geometrical decorations, at the bottom three columns of Hieroglyphs abbreviated text.

Finally, on the pedestal base, double scene of the jackals of the god Anubis lying on the tomb. Below the jackals of Anubis, the decoration is small squares taking the form of a colored zigzag in red, blue, and white. While the decoration of this part in coffins nos. 216, 217, 79/2, 295, 220, and 222 are small vertical strips colored in red then white and black then white.

The Text:

Col. 1. *dd mdw in Wsir bik-nb-ḥs(t)? nb*

Col. 2. *ms (n) nb(.t) pr sn(.t)-sy, nb mdḥ(.w), pri (m) 3ḥt tn?*



Col. 3. *ḥnt mw, 3ḥt? nbw, Ist-t3wy^{sic}*

Translation:

(1) Words to be spoken by Osiris *bik-nb-ḥs(t)*, (the) lord (2) born (of) the mistress of the house *sn.t sy*, lord of carpenter(s), (who) comes (from) this arable land (3) which is in front of water, the arable land of lords, *Ist-t3wy?*.


Comment:





-*bik-nb-ḥs(.t)*: the word *bik* could also be read *Ḥr* or *ntr*, see WPL, 308; Kurth 2008, vol. 1, sign 14.





-The reading *nb* is not certain, it could also be the sign *n*  that stands horizontally, hence it will be read as *bik-n-ḥs(.t)*. Also, the word *ḥs(.t)* is written by alphabetically without the bilateral sign .

-The name *sn(.t) sy* is not attested in Ranke, *Personennamen*.

-For considering *nb(.t) pr* as a title, see the comment of S. Böttcher/F. Hassan 2018, p. 40, n. 5.

- The word *mdḥ*⁶ in the title *nb mdḥ(.w)*  written in its abbreviated form, for the title *mdḥ* see Ward 1982, pp. 97-98.

- The two dots which occurs before and after the sign *ḥ* in the word  *ḥt* could be represent the sign  for one of them and the determinative  or  for the other one.

-*Ist-twy*: the reading is not entirely certain; it could be written mistakenly for the name of the ancient capital *itt-twy*    .

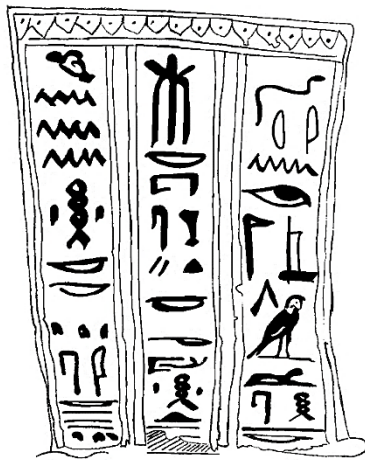


Fig. (1): Facsimile of text on coffin No. 018-Bs70-142

II. Coffin No. 20-Bs 30-295 [Plate 1]

Dating: Ptolemaic.

Provenance: Philadelphia necropolis, zone 4, area F, burial shaft 30.

Material: Painted wooden anthropoid.

Name of the Owner: *Sbk-mn*?

Titles: *nb.t pr*

Name of the father: not mentioned

Name of the mother: *I(i)-nfr.t*

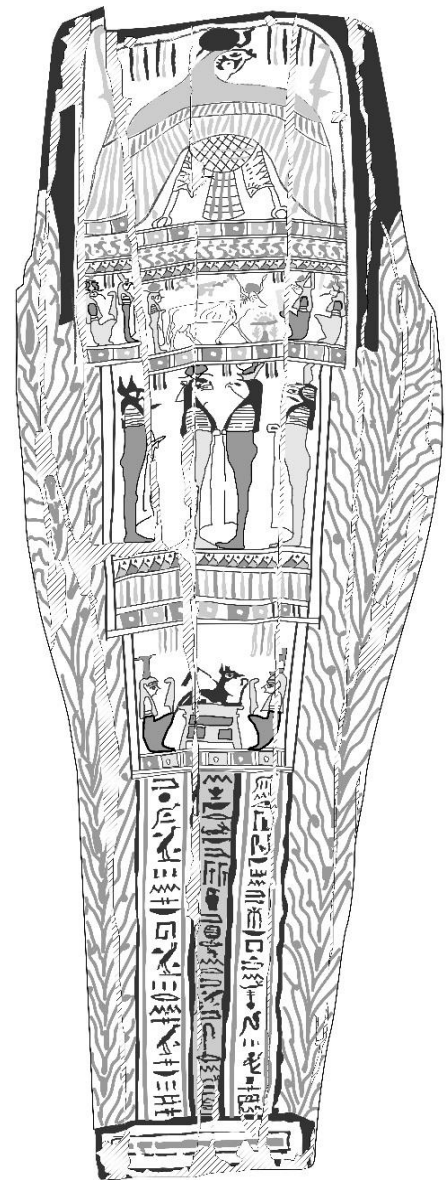


Fig. (2): Facsimile of Coffin No. 20-Bs 30-

Bibliography: Unpublished

Description: Only found the back of an anthropoid coffin, with colorful scenes. It is divided into four registers and finally three columns of Hieroglyphic text. At the top: The God Rahorakhty with spread wings including the two feathers of Maat on the two edges of its wings, patching of a long row of Uraeus with solar disk above. The Goddess Hathor in Cow form stands in the second register before an offering table and surrounded by five figures of gates guardians' gods. The third register depicts the four sons of Horus in mummified form. The fourth register shows the God Anubis lying on his shrine with black color holding the Sekhem scepter and the flail, flanked by the two kites of Isis and Nephthys in a squatting form with feathers of Maat. (Chap.151, BD) In the final scene: four columns of Hieroglyphic texts, including the name of the deceased (Sobek-Mn) and his mother's name (*I(i)-nfr.t*), prays to protect the soul of the deceased in the netherworld.

Also, all scenes refer to the deceased entering the netherworld with the protection of the great gods (Rahorakhty, the Goddess Hathor, the guardians of gates, and Anubis).

Fragment of the pedestal base: including the rest of three Hieroglyphic columns, continuously prays for the deceased.

Text (I): on the back of the anthropoid

Col.1. *dd mdw in Wsir Sbk-mn? m3^c-hrw ms (n) nb.t pr I(i)-nfr.t psš.n.[s] (Nwt)*

Col.2. *{n}^{sic} hr=k r(di.t=s) wn.k m ntr 3 hnm hr=k n rmt 3tms rn=fm h...*


Col. 3. *m r^c dt twt n=s nb htmwt? rn=s twt=s nbw mr=s*

Translation:

Words to be spoken by Osiris *Sbk-mn?*, justified, born (of) the mistress of the house *I(i)-nfr.t*, (Nut) has spread (herself) (2) over you (she allowed) you to exist as a great god (who) will unit with you in a man whose name is *3tms?* ... (3) in the sun of eternity, the forms for her. Every *htmwt?* is her name and her form. The lords love her.

Comment:

- The reading *sbk* in not certain. For the name *Sbk-mn*, see Ranke, *Personennamen*, 304. 11; *Demotische Namenbuch*, p. 954.

- The name *I(i)-nfr.t*  is attested in Ranke, *Personennamen*, 389. 29. Another confusion made in writing the determinative of the seated man following the woman's name.

- In many cases, the scribe did not estimate the allowed

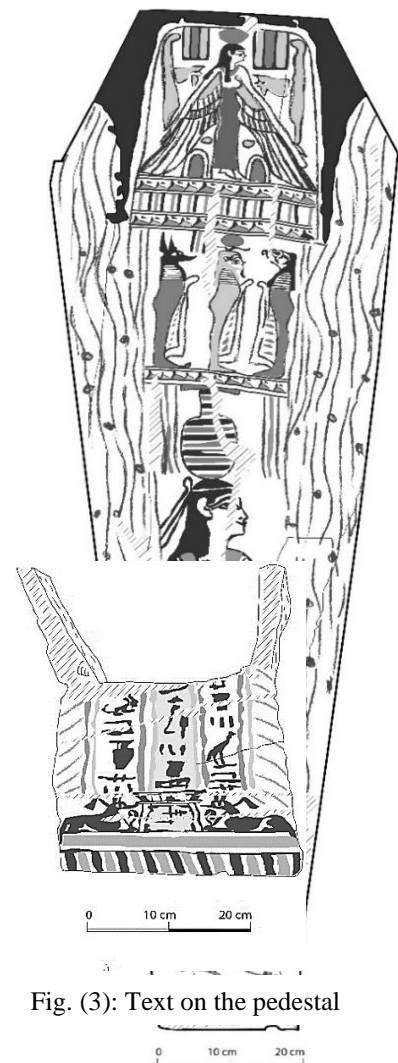




Fig. (3): Text on the pedestal

Fig. (4): Facsimile of Coffin No. 20-Bs 30-297

space for writing precisely, for this reason, the sign s at the end of column no.1 was not written.

- The *n* at the beginning of column no. 2 could be superfluous by the scribe or it could refer phonetically to the goddess Nut in an abbreviated form.

-Both the classical  and the Ptolemaic sign  are used in the text for the suffix pronoun, 2nd Pers. Sing.

- The verb *rdi.t* written in abbreviated form just by the first phonetic sign of the verb (*r*).

Text (II): the fragment of the pedestal base

Col.1. [...].....

Col. 2. [...]..... *pšs*

Col. 3. [.....] *wn m hnm(.t)=s*

Translation:

(1) (2) has spread (3) to exist in her sieve.

III. Coffin No. 20-Bs 30-297 [Plate 1]

Dating: Ptolemaic.

Provenance: Philadelphia necropolis, zone 4, area F, burial shaft 30.

Material: Painted wooden anthropoid.

Name of the Owner: not mentioned

Titles: not mentioned

Name of the father: not mentioned

Name of the mother: not mentioned

Bibliography: Unpublished

Description: The back of an anthropoid coffin, divided into three registers, At top: The outspread body of goddess Nut in a female form, with the Red sun disk above her head she is standing on geometrical figures between two figures of Udjat eye, surrounded with two feathers, represent symbol of Maat, the middle register: The deceased in form of God Re flanked by two gods, Horus at right and Anubis at left, both in mummiform (Book of breathing)⁸. The third Scene depicts the western Goddess Nut with her symbol the vessel of (nw) upon her head.

Text: There is no text.

IV. Coffin No. G4-A-216 (2019-010) [Plate 2]

Dating: Ptolemaic

Provenance: Philadelphia necropolis, Zone 4, Area F, Grave 4.

Material: Painted wooden anthropoid.

Name of the Owner: *P3-...-r^c*

Titles and epithets: *m3^c-hrw; nb.(t) pr*

Name of the father: not mentioned

Name of the mother: *Nsnm*

Bibliography: Unpublished

Description: depicts an anthropoid coffin wearing a tripartite wig with no hands, the face is missing, and the wig is green with yellow and red banded terminals.

A very deep broad collar reaches from below the shoulders to just below the waist, springing from a pair of very large raptors- from terminals. The first register, a scene of chapter 125 BD, is the judgment of the deceased before Osiris, In the middle register: A kneeling figure of Nut, facing left with wings extending upwards towards the edge of the lid. The lower register: containing, Anubis bending over the mummy, flanked by Isis and Nephthys, (chap.151BD), the last scene depicts the deceased in the bark of Re with the guardians of gates who allow him to enter the netherworld. The final scene which extends to the foot consists of three columns of Hieroglyphic spells. On the pedestal base, the double scene represents the jackals embodying the embalming god Anubis lying on shrines.

The Text:

Col. 1. *dd mdw in &Wsir\ P3-...-r^c m3^c-hrw ms (n) nb.(t)*

Col. 2. *pr Nsnm? nb ttmt nb*

Col. 3. *... nb tmt nb phrw? tmt nb=s*

Translation:

Words to be spoken by Osiris *P3-...-r^c*, justified, born (of) the mistress of (2) the house *Nsnm?*, lord of *ttmt*, lord of (3) ..., lord of *tmt*, lord of *phrw?*, *tmt* (is) her lord.

Comment:

- The coffin was broken at the begging of the pedestal, thus caused damage of the word between the definite article *P3* and *r^c* in the personal name of the owner.



Fig. (5): Facsimile of Coffin No. G4-A-216 (2019-010)

V. Coffin No. G4-C-220 (2019-017) [Plate 2]

Dating: Ptolemaic

Provenance: Philadelphia necropolis, Zone 4, Area F, Grave 4.

Material: Painted wooden anthropoid.

Name of the Owner: no name mentioned.

Titles: no titles mentioned.

Name of the father: not mentioned.

Name of the mother: not mentioned.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Description:

The lid of an anthropoid coffin, wearing a heavy tripartite wig, with no hands and decorated in polychrome. The face of the coffin is nicely modeled with its bright color, it is painting white stands out the heavy wig, which is colored black, with red nails, a tripartite wig that covers the head, it has triangular, with tilted ears, like the ears of the Goddess Hathor, extremely large eyes that droop at the outer corners, and an ovoid mouth. He is dressed a very deep and wide pectoral consisting of seven rows, reaching from the shoulders to just below the waist, spinning from a pair of very large raptor from terminals it ended with the head of god Horus. The scenes are divided into four registers, below: The judgment of death with the Goddess Amentit (chapter 125 BD), Middle: A kneeling figure, of Goddess Nut, facing left, spreads her wings which is extending upwards to protect the body, with a solar disk above, The-lower register: scene of jackal Anubis bending the mummy of deceased (chapter 151 BD). The last scene depicts a bark that included five seated guardians of gates with the deceased (chapter 147&148 BD).

The Text:

Col. 1. [*dd mdw in*] *Wsir pš-*

Col. 2. *s mwt.k Nwt (hr.k) m*

Col. 3. [*rn. s n št-pt*] *ir=s spdwt?*

Translation:

(1) [Words to be spoken by] Osiris, (2) your mother Nut spreads herself (over you), in (3) [her identity of Shetpet], (who) has made Sopd?

VI. Coffin No. G4-D-222 (2019-019) [Plate 2]

Dating: Ptolemaic

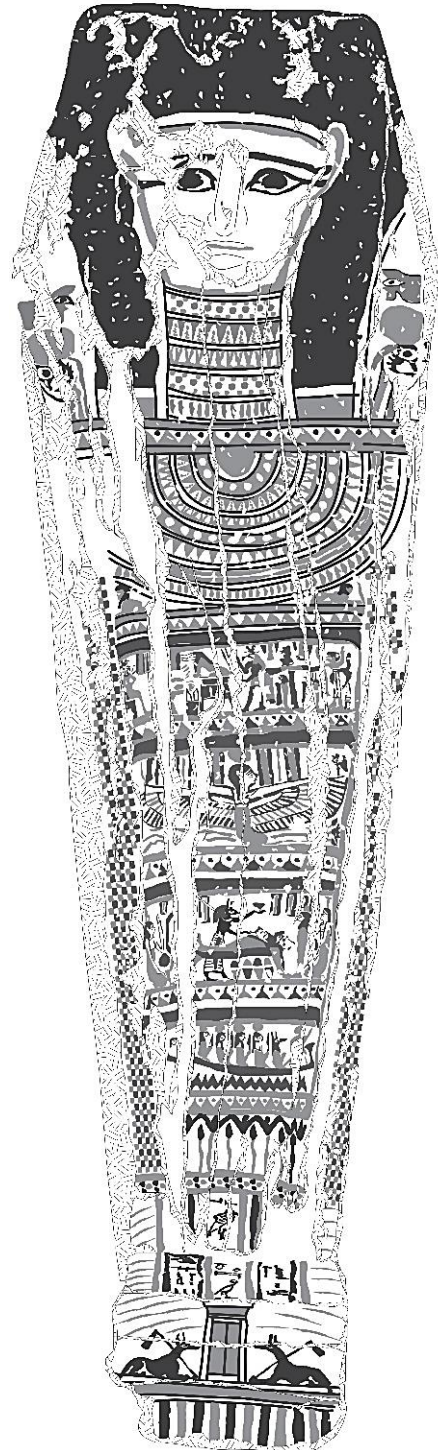


Fig. (6): Facsimile of the whole Coffin
No. G4-C-220 (2019-017)

Provenance: Philadelphia necropolis, Zone 4, Area F, Grave 4.

Material: Painted wooden anthropoid.

Name of the Owner: no name mentioned.

Titles: no titles mentioned.

Name of the father: not mentioned.

Name of the mother: not mentioned.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Description:

The first register on the top of this coffin depicts the Judgment scene (chap125BD), while the second register depicts a kneeling figure of the Goddess Nut who spread her wings to protect the deceased. In the middle, the God Anubis bending over the mummy (chap 151DB), then a scene of five squatting guardians of the netherworld (chap.146,147 BD). Finally, on the pedestal base, scene of the jackals of the god Anubis lying on the tomb, above this scene three columns of Hieroglyphic text that derived from PT, sp. 145+156 depicting prays for the deceased to save his soul and body.

The Text:

Col. 1. *dd mdw in Wsir pšs mwt.k Nwt*


Col. 2. *hr.k m rn.s (n) Št-pt rdi.t.n.s*

Col. 3. *wn.k m ntr ʿ3 nn hft(y).w(=k)*


Translation:

(1) Words to be spoken by Osiris, your mother Nut has spread herself (2) over you, in her identity of *Št-pt*. She has allowed (3) you to exist as a great god without your enemies.

Comment:

Št-pt: the exact meaning of this word is not well established. It was mentioned as a toponym in the Pyramid texts and was translated by T. G. Allen as “Wadi Natrun oasis” in the Libyan desert west of Delta⁹. Also, it was compared with the word  *štyt* which occurs in Sarcophagus of Padienisis (GEM 2751) and translated by S. Baumann as “the tomb”¹⁰.

- Note the difference in writing the preposition *m* in line 2 and 3.

- Attaching the two words *ntr* and *ʿ3* caused to appear as one sign which looks like the sign .

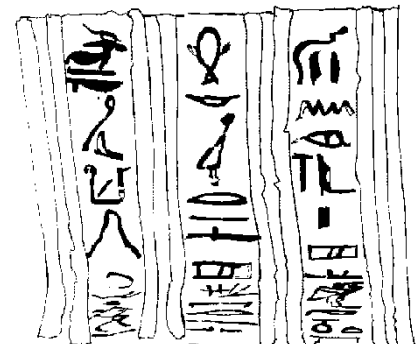


Fig. (7): Facsimile of the text on coffin no. G4-D-222 (2019-019)

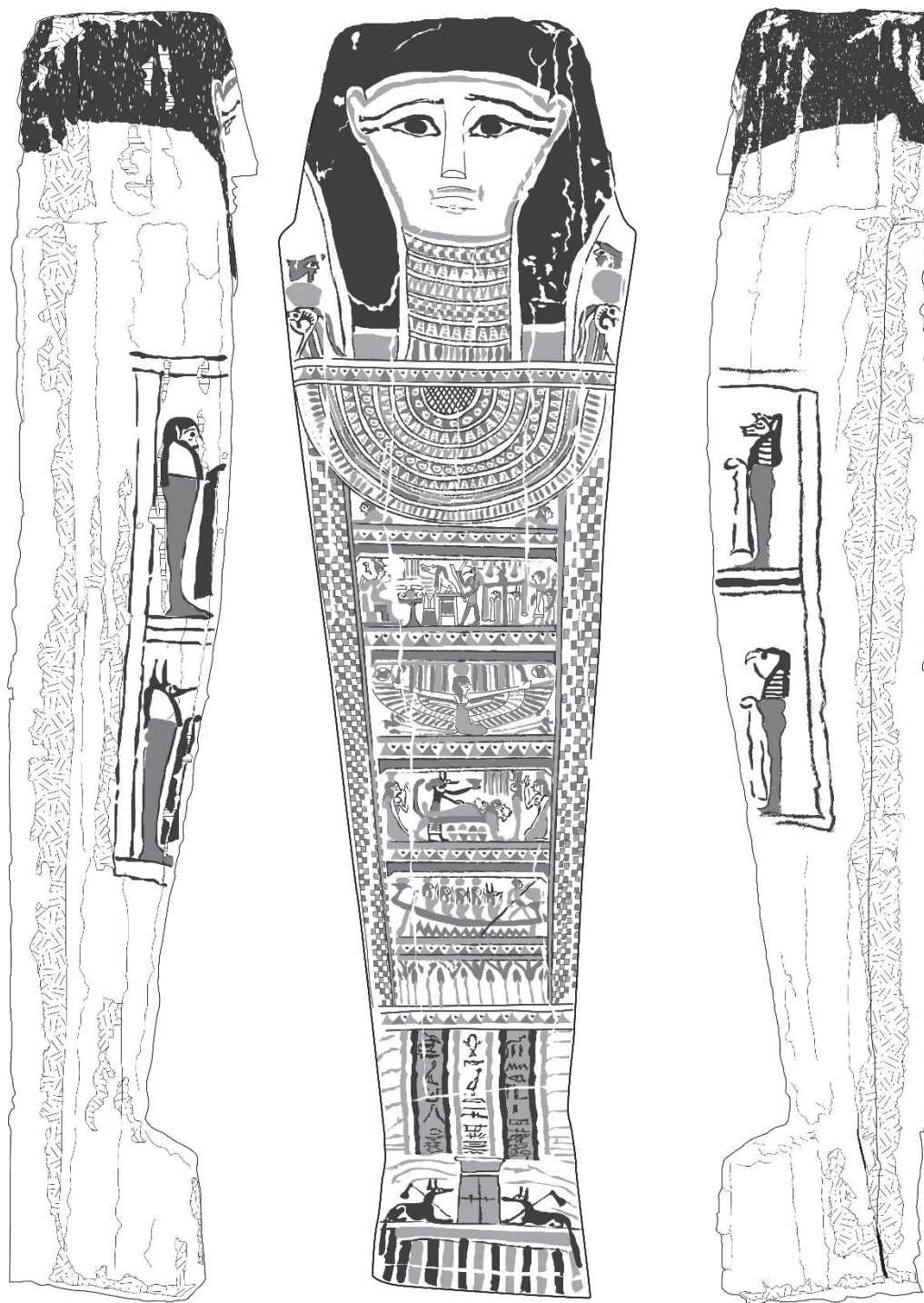


Fig. (8): Facsimile of Coffin No. G4-D-222 (2019-019)

VII. Coffin No. 018-Bs 200-79-1 [Plate 3]

Dating: Ptolemaic

Provenance: Philadelphia necropolis, Zone 4, Area F, Burial shaft 200.

Material: Painted wooden anthropoid.

Name of the Owner: no name mentioned.

Titles: no titles mentioned.

Name of the father: not mentioned.

Name of the mother: not mentioned.

Text: There is no text.

IX. Coffin No. 018-Bs 200-79-3 [Plate 3]

Dating: Early Ptolemaic.

Provenance: Philadelphia necropolis, zone 4, area F, burial shaft 200.

Material: Painted wooden anthropoid.

Name of the Owner: No name.

Titles: No titles.

Name of the father: not mentioned.

Name of the mother: not mentioned.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Description: A lid of an anthropoid coffin, without name or titles, decorated in polychrome on a colored background, formerly varnished but now in poor condition, with the feet and foot end of the lid missing and many areas of surface decoration damaged or destroyed, including the top of the head.

The deceased wearing a tripartite wig which is colored black, with no hands, and the face is missing. A very deep broad collar reaches from below the shoulders to just below the waist, springing from a pair of very large raptors- from terminals. The first register, is a scene, is a kneeling figure of Nut, facing left with wings extending upwards towards the edge of the lid. The lower register: containing, Anubis bending over the mummy, flanked by Isis and Nephthys, (chap.151BD), The last scene depicts, Remains of the bark of Ra with the oars of the bark which take the form of the god Horus headed, gates guardians who allow him to enter the netherworld, the final scene which extends to the foot consists of one Hieroglyphic column of chapters (178, 9 from the ancient Egyptian book of the dead, spell 368 of the pyramid texts. On the pedestal base, the double scene represents the jackals embodying the embalming god Anubis lying on a shrine.

The text:


derivation of the text: BD, Ch. 178-9; PT, Sp. 368.

[*hnm.s*] *tw* {*nb*} *m-^c ht.w nb dw m rn.*[*s n hnm t nb wrt*]

Translation:

(She will protect) you from all things evil in her name [of Great sieve].

Comment:

-  *nb* after *tw* is superfluous.

X. Coffin No. 018-Bs 200-79-4 [Plate 4]

Dating: Late Ptolemaic- Early Roman.

Provenance: Philadelphia necropolis, Zone 4, Area F, Burial shaft 200.

Material: Painted wooden anthropoid.

Name of the Owner: not mentioned

Titles: no titles mentioned on this fragment.

Name of the father: not mentioned

Name of the mother: not mentioned

Bibliography: Unpublished

Description:

The front part of the wooden coffin, decorated in polychrome on a colored background, formerly varnished but now in poor condition, with double-crossed snakes the two heads in the front, maybe for the protection of the deceased's mummy from any danger, (serpents and snakes shed their skin through sloughing they are symbols of rebirth, transformation, immortality and healing the ouroboros is a symbol of eternity and continual renewal of life.

Text: There is no text.

XI. Coffin No. 018-Bs 200-79-5 [Plate 5]

Dating: Late Ptolemaic- Early Roman.

Provenance: Philadelphia necropolis, Zone 4, Area F, Burial shaft 200.

Material: Painted wooden anthropoid.

Name of the Owner: No name.

Titles: No titles.

Name of the father: not mentioned.

Name of the mother: not mentioned.

Bibliography: Unpublished

Description:

Part of the back of the colored coffin depicting chapter 151BD, from the right-side double scene of goddess Isis in squatting form, and on the left side the double scene of the two sisters "Isis and Nephthys" With the same form holding Maat feathers, in the center of the depiction stands Anubis who attends the mummy, which lies on a lion-form bed. Above the scene four colored columns without text. At the head end of the coffin, a human-headed bird, representing the Ba of the deceased hovers with spread wings, at the bottom a geometrical decoration This vignette is one of the most frequently depicted images on coffins, of the new kingdom, Third Intermediate period, Late period, Ptolemaic and Roman periods.



Fig. no. (10): Facsimile of Coffin No. 018-Bs 200-79-5

Text: There is no text.

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Ancient Philadelphia Necropolis
Egyptian mission

Wooden Coffins of Burial Shafts number Bs 70 and Bs 30



Coffin object no.20-Bs30-297



Coffin object no.: 018-Bs70-142



coffin object no.: 20-Bs30-295



coffin object no.: 20-Bs30-295

Plate (1): Coffins from BS 30 and 70

Ancient Philadelphia Necropolis
Egyptian mission
Wooden Coffins Of Grave G 4



Coffin object number : G4-A-216 (2019-010)



Coffin object number : G4-C-220 (2019-017)



Coffin object number : G4-D-222 (2019-019)

Plate (2): Coffins from grave no. 4

Ancient Philadelphia Necropolis
Egyptian mission
Wooden Coffins in Burial Shaft Bs 200



Plate (3): Coffins from BS200

Ancient Philadelphia Necropolis
Egyptian mission
Wooden Coffins of Burial Shaft Bs 200



Coffin object no.: 018-Bs200-79-5



Coffin object no.: 018-Bs200-79-6



Coffin object no.: 018-Bs200-79-4



Coffin object no.: 018-Bs200-79-4

Plate (4): Coffins from BS200

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³ Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

⁴ Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

⁵ Taylor J., 2009, pp. 375– 416.

⁶ Wb, II, pp. 190-191; FCD, 124/4.

⁷ GAUTHIER 1925, I, P. 124.

⁸ Book of breathing are several Late Egyptian funerary texts enable deceased people to continue to exist in the afterlife. The earliest known copy dates to about 350 BC. while other copies come from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. It is simplified from the Book of the dead. The title has used the word breathing as a metaphorical term for all aspects of life that the deceased hoped to experience again after life. See, SMITH 2009, 462 ff., HORNUNG 1999, pp. 23–25.

⁹ ALLEN 1974, pp. 188; 269.

¹⁰ BAUMANN, HASSAN 2018, p. 14, n. 21.