



COFFINS AS STATUES? THE STUDY OF COVER BRITISH MUSEUM EA 55022 FROM ROMAN EGYPT

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ABSTRACT

This article explores notions of traditions and materiality in the production of standing coffins during the Roman period. The coffin cover British Museum EA 55022 is carved in the shape of a standing man dressed in Greek clothing. The detailed study of this piece led to the investigation of parallels from Abusir el-Meleq, where the production of coffins appears to be extremely varied. Among more traditional coffins, the local craftsmen developed a series of coffins in the shape of shrines, seemingly meant to be standing. The British Museum cover was probably inserted in such a shrine-coffin that originally sheltered the mummy of the deceased. It is used here as a starting point to present how the manufacture of coffins could be adapted, or even reinvented, to match the changes in rites and beliefs in an Egypt in constant evolution between new influences and ancient traditions. We will see how the owners of these funerary pieces tried to show their affiliation with the new ruling powers, while craftsmen innovated, often on a regional basis, to merge these multiple traditions.

THE COVER BRITISH MUSEUM EA 55022: DESCRIPTION AND MANUFACTURE

The coffin cover British Museum EA 55022 represents a man standing in tunic (chiton) and Greek mantle (himation) (FIG. 1).¹ The figure is depicted with one arm in draping—in an arm-sling posture—while the other lies along the body, holding a papyrus roll. He is standing on his right leg with his left knee bent.² The man has short hair, in a style common at the beginning of the 1st century CE. The piece is usually dated to that period, or more specifically to 40–60 CE.³ Originally, the wooden piece had inlaid eyes, possibly made of a combination of metal and stone or glass. In comparison with the rest of the cover, the style of the foot case is very different (FIG. 2): the front panel is painted and its decoration shows a *ba* bird spreading

its wings and what appear to be several columns of pseudo-hieroglyphs (FIG. 3). The back of the cover has been completely hollowed out (FIG. 4).

The wood seems in good condition at first glance, but a meticulous inspection of the surface shows that insects and rot have extensively damaged the cover. In addition to the missing eye inlays, part of the external layer of wood has been lost, particularly on the right side of the face. The surface might also have been in contact with fire or smoke—the right side has darkened—and the whole piece seems to have been covered by a waxy substance, possibly applied to the surface in the 1970s.⁴

The cover is made of fourteen pieces of timber.⁵ Its core consists of the trunk of a tree forming the upper part of the body and the head. The side of the left arm, part of the left shoulder, the left leg, the left



FIGURE 1: Front and side views of cover British Museum EA 55022. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



FIGURE 2: Lower part of the British Museum cover showing the feet and the foot case. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



FIGURE 3: Detail of the front panel of the British Museum cover decorated with a *ba* bird spreading its wings. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



FIGURE 4: Back of the British Museum cover. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



FIGURE 5: The British Museum cover was assembled from many pieces of wood (outlined by red squares).



FIGURE 6: Detail of the back showing the location of the four dovetail joints, one is missing. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

knee, and both feet are made of separate pieces of wood (FIG. 5), while the box forming the base consists of six planks, partly covered with plaster. Most of the cover is made of *Ficus sycomorus*, a species of fig indigenous to Egypt.⁶ The two main elements were attached by four large dovetail joints, one of which is missing (FIG. 6), while the other pieces were assembled using dowels: at least forty-six dowels were included in the cover (FIG. 7).⁷ Dowels were spread everywhere, but are particularly concentrated in some areas: the left side of the base has no less than nine dowels, six of them in the same small corner of the panel. Based on their location and the general construction of the cover, the necessity of all these dowels can be questioned. We might witness here either the reuse of previously pierced wooden components, a superfluous use of dowels, or a combination of both. The function of the ten holes pierced along the edge of the cover, eight on the right side and two on the left, is not clear. The

suggestion of reuse can be discarded here, since they closely follow the edge of the current object and are spread across various pieces of wood. We could, however, consider that they were used to attach the piece to an external element, another part of the coffin, for example,⁸ and we will return to this below. Finally, the two pieces of wood screwed to the bottom of the base are modern additions, seemingly joined to the cover to stabilize it when standing. These elements, fixed with metallic screws, were possibly added in the 1970s.

Most of the cover's surface is bare wood. It must have originally been covered with gesso and pigments—at least partly—based on the traces still preserved here and there. Various samples were analysed, and the results suggest a ground layer made of gypsum gesso.⁹ Different layers appear to have been applied on top. The white layer, notably visible near the bottom of the tunic to the right of the left foot, consists of calcite (calcium carbonate) and



FIGURE 7: Location of holes with dowel (in red), holes without dowel (in blue) and traces of gold (in yellow), as visible on the front and both sides of the British Museum cover. Not all elements are visible on these views.

beeswax; the wax is here either a binder or a coating. The red layer, visible between the feet, consists of minium (red lead).¹⁰ In addition to red and white pigments, the surface was partly gilded; traces of gilding are still visible on the right side of the face and shoulder, and the left side of the legs (FIG. 7). The combination of gesso and minium attested on several parts of the cover could have been part of the preparatory layers of the surface before the application of pigments. The base is decorated using several pigments layered on top of some gypsum and calcite deposited directly on the wood. Minium was applied on top. The blue-grey pigment, made of Egyptian blue, had been applied first, and the black, which consists of Egyptian blue with crushed carbon black, was used on top to provide additional details for the decoration. It is difficult to assess how much of the cover was originally coloured and if the wood was still partly visible, but we can imagine that the surface was originally levelled using thin layers of gesso, which would have had the double advantage of smoothing the surface and serving as a base for the application of pigments and gilding.

ABUSIR EL-MELEQ AND THE PRODUCTION OF STANDING COFFINS

QUESTIONS OF PROVENANCE AND PARALLELS

The cover EA 55022 entered the British Museum collection in 1921 with no information relating to its provenance or past history. It was purchased on the art market from Panayotis Kyticas, the well-known Cairo dealer who supplied thousands of antiquities to Wallis Budge, the then keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum.¹¹ The information is too meagre to retrace the origin of this piece. However, other objects found in more secure archaeological contexts can serve as a basis for a discussion relating to the provenance of the British Museum piece. An ensemble, found in 1904 by Otto Rubensohn during his excavation at Abusir el-Meleq¹² and now in the Neues Museum in Berlin (ÄM 17126–7), offers interesting elements of comparison. The similarity between the pieces will be instrumental to the discussion of the provenance of the British Museum example.

The cover ÄM 17126 and its coffin ÄM 17127 (FIG. 8) were found in the tomb of the so-called priests of Harsaphes.¹³ This tomb contained twenty-one chambers with many burials dating from the late Ptolemaic period to the 1st century CE. The

ensemble is interesting for various reasons. In addition to providing a clear archaeological context, the cover was found within a coffin which can be best described as a “shrine-coffin” (ÄM 17127).¹⁴ This type of cabinet, closed by a double-shutter door, was built with an elaborate internal structure consisting of an arched element on top to maintain the head and bands narrowing down at the sides to enclose the body. A photograph—a unique record showing this coffin still in situ—confirms that the shrine-coffin was found lying horizontally,¹⁵ but its shape and structure leave little doubt that it was conceived as a vertical element and the internal construction was built to maintain the mummy upright.¹⁶ Despite a lack of hard evidence, it seems likely that the British Museum cover was originally enclosed in a similar type of coffin.¹⁷ The holes around the edge discussed above could have been used to secure the piece to a shrine-coffin or a coffin of any other shape and to maintain the cover and the mummy steadily in a vertical position.

Unlike the British Museum piece, the Berlin cover was made of a single piece of wood, certainly because of its much smaller size: its height of only 114 cm suggests it was produced for the burial of a child. The sculptural style and body position of both pieces are very similar. The angled position of the feet on the child’s cover is the main variation, which was perhaps required by the original shape of the trunk. The wood of both pieces was originally covered with various layers of gesso and paint, which have now mainly disappeared. The Berlin cover was coated with material differing from that of its British Museum counterpart. Analysis shows the presence of a red base (hematite containing red earth/ochre), white gypsum, and calcium oxalate.¹⁸ Gilding can be observed at various locations, especially on the folds of the tunic. The eyes, just as in the British Museum example, were inlaid but these inlays were lost during the war, when extensive damage was caused to the surface, leading to the loss of gilding and plaster. The child is also wearing a Greek outfit and is holding a papyrus roll in the left hand.¹⁹

Another piece, also in Berlin (ÄM 17016), is of very similar workmanship and style, but unlike the two covers discussed above it was only meant to cover the face.²⁰ This wooden mask was found by Rubensohn at Abusir el-Meleq, but unfortunately the precise location of its discovery was not clearly



FIGURE 8: Shrine coffin Berlin ÄM 17126 with doors closed (left) and doors open revealing the cover Berlin ÄM 17127 (right), from Abusir el-Meleq. Courtesy Rubensohn Archive at the University of Basel.

recorded. Although less three-dimensional than the two other pieces—perhaps because of the materiality of the mask itself—the style, the carving work and the preparation of the wood are quite comparable, allowing us to wonder if they could have been produced by the same workshop.

When comparing the two covers, we notice that the production methods varied somewhat. They certainly depended on the size of the item and the pieces of wood available. However, in spite of their

obvious similarity in style, analyses of the pigments yielded interestingly contrasting results.²¹ A red layer was extensively used on both covers. On the British Museum example, analysis revealed that this was minium, a pigment typically used during the Roman Period, while hematite, a common pigment in use in Egypt since the Predynastic period, was found on the Berlin cover.²² The presence of different types of pigments suggests that a variety of techniques and materials was being used concur-

rently. However, it does not exclude the possibility that both covers could have been produced in the same workshop or by the same group of artists, exploiting all resources available.²³

The Berlin shrine coffin ÄM 17127 (coffin 3 in Rubensohn's notes) was found in a room also containing two other coffins, both with curved lids decorated with a large figure of Osiris. Coffin 2 belonged to a sistrum player in the temple of Herishef named Isis-Weret and is now in Berlin (ÄM 17188), while coffin 1, produced for an unknown man, was apparently very much destroyed and left in situ (FIG. 9).²⁴ The latter was placed obliquely on top of the two others and was seemingly the last coffin to be buried in this chamber. It is not possible to tell how much time separated each burial, nor if the child, the woman, and the man were related in any way. However, the three pieces had internal arched constructions at the head end, suggesting a vertical positioning, which seems to be confirmed by the presence of a board over the foot end of coffin 1 that would have helped maintain the mummy inside the base when standing. This board is decorated with scenes over two registers: the top register shows the deceased as an Osiris protected by Isis and Nephthys under a linear pattern that recalls the curved cornice of a shrine. All figures are identified, although the name of the owner of the coffin is unclear.²⁵ The observations made on these three coffins suggest that although of different designs all three were meant to stand upright, clearly not in the tomb, as is indicated by the photograph taken shortly after their discovery, but more likely at some time preceding the burial. Hypotheses about where these coffins may have been stood up will be discussed below.



FIGURE 9: Base of the coffin (coffin 1) found with the shrine coffin of a boy and the rectangular coffin of a woman in room 12, from Abusir el-Meleq. Courtesy Rubensohn Archive at the University of Basel.

STANDING COFFINS AND DIVINE SHRINES

The type of coffin designed to stand in vertical position is not unique to room 12 of tomb 13, but is attested in several Roman burials excavated by Rubensohn at Abusir el-Meleq, where many coffin



FIGURE 10: Shrine coffin Berlin ÄM 17148, from Abusir el-Meleq. Courtesy Rubensohn Archive at the University of Basel.

types were produced and buried conjointly. Among “standard” coffins, many show arched internal structures and vertical frontal panels, possibly evidencing their use in a standing position. Interestingly, the examples attested at Abusir el-Meleq show a wide range of styles, shapes and

forms, which are linked by the presence of these otherwise rather unusual additional elements. I will not provide here an exhaustive list of coffins of these types, but will present a few examples to highlight their diversity.

Among the different types, the so-called shrine coffins are the most commonly found. Even in this category the shapes are diverse. The shrine coffin Berlin ÄM 17127, which was built with double doors opening to the whole height of the coffin, has already been discussed. The walls of the shrine coffin Berlin ÄM 17148 (Fig. 10) are vertical, unlike ÄM 17127, whose walls slope inward at a slight angle.²⁶ The coffin does not seem to have been extensively decorated, except for a dotted line following the edge on the front, and two superposed sun disks guarded by a uraeus on each side that embellish the top of the coffin where it ends in a cornice-like structure.

In the same category, the coffin Berlin ÄM 17039 is also of great interest. It was produced for a man named Padikhons whose mummy was enclosed inside a cartonnage case (Berlin ÄM 17040; FIGS. 11–12).²⁷ Both mummy and cartonnage were then lost during World War II. The wooden coffin was built to enable the upper half to be opened with a double shutter. The frontal side does not seem to have been decorated, with the exception of a line of text at the extreme top and one at the bottom, as well as a winged sun disk topped with a row of uraei. Blue, red, yellow, and black (?) bands decorate the edge on each side and would have been invisible when the shutters and plank were still in place.²⁸ The scenes decorating the sides and the back consist of Egyptian compositions traditionally reproduced on funerary artefacts. They include a large scale Osiris figure at the back and scenes showing the unification of the *ba* with the mummy on the sides. A palette of vibrant colours, mainly blue, red, yellow, white, and black, was used to paint this coffin. The inner structure of the coffin does not have an additional arch. The outline of the mummy was painted in red on a white background. On the sides, the red paint stops approximately where the front plank would have started. It is difficult to tell at this stage whether the red outline was painted when the mummy was already inside the coffin or at an earlier stage. We can also wonder about the significance of this red outline, whose colour could suggest a solar association.



FIGURE 11: Coffin and mummy of Padikhons Berlin ÄM 17039 and ÄM 17040, from Abusir el-Meleq. Courtesy Rubensohn Archive at the University of Basel.

The purpose of the four handles—two on each side—is not very clear, as they would have been relatively impractical for carrying the coffin, being aligned vertically when the coffin was horizontal. We could imagine that they were meant to help set the coffin back up and down (from horizontal to vertical position and vice versa), but that would suggest that they were only of very limited use. Their number

and orientation could be explained if poles were meant to be inserted through the handles, allowing the coffin to be lifted vertically, using four carriers, two on each side, to maintain stability. This option would fit perfectly with the rest of the decoration—the orientation of all scenes and motifs matches with the upright position of the coffin—and would suggest that the coffin and its occupant could have

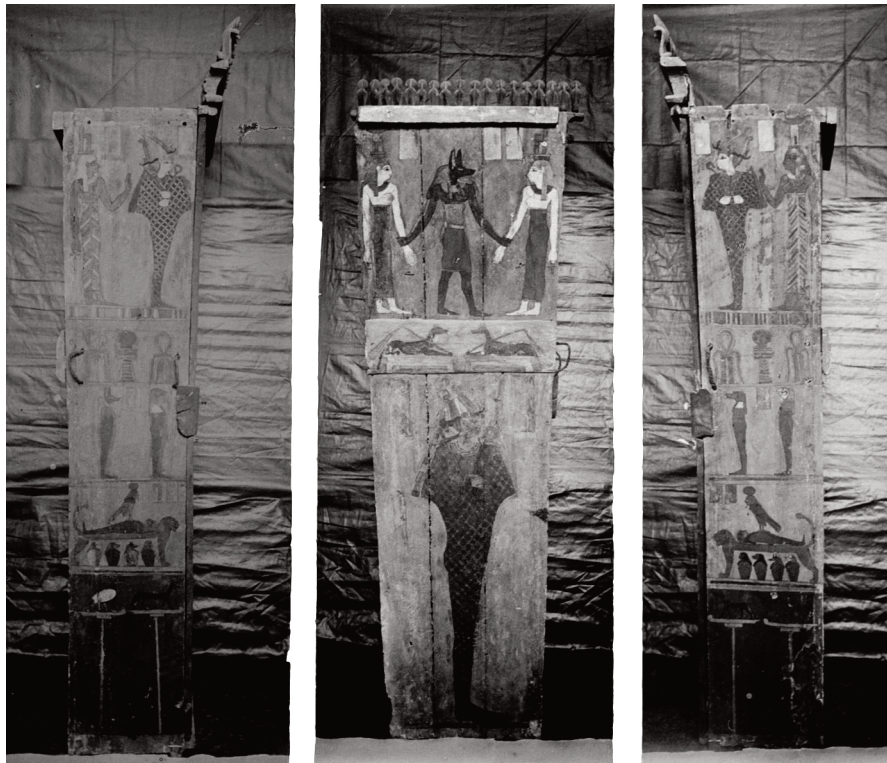


FIGURE 12: Sides and back of the coffin of Padikhons Berlin ÄM 17040, from Abusir el-Meleq. Courtesy Rubensohn Archive at the University of Basel.

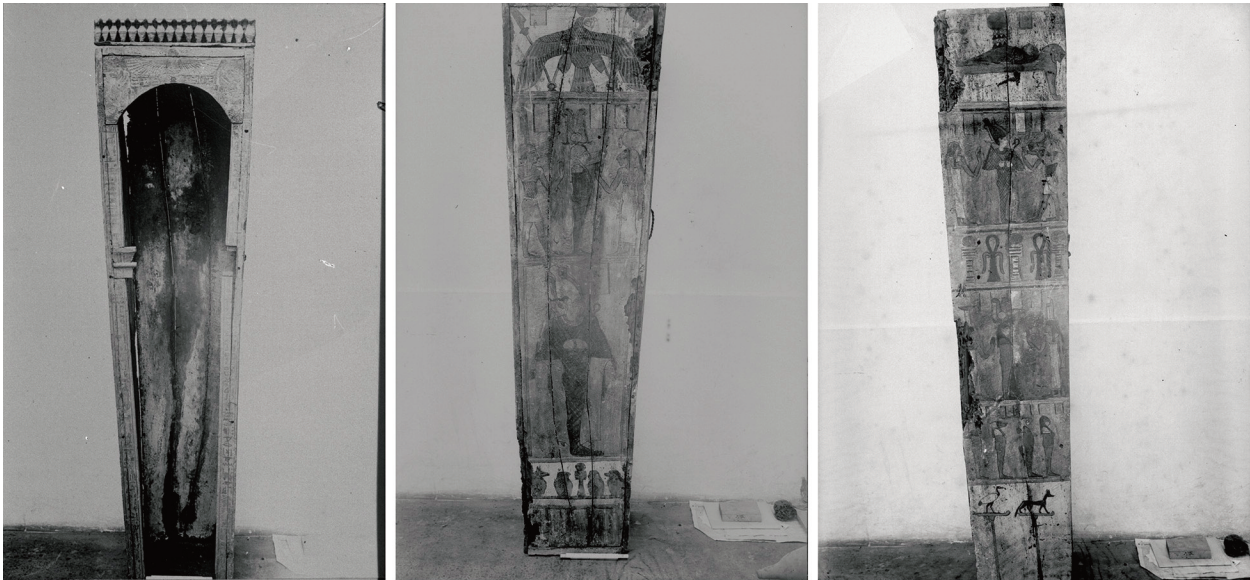


FIGURE 13: Front, left and back views of the coffin of Banebdjed Cairo JE 36805, from Abusir el-Meleq. Courtesy Rubensohn Archive at the University of Basel.

been carried as part of a procession, possibly during the funerary cortege.²⁹ Although this last option would best explain the presence of these handles, we cannot completely dismiss other hypotheses. These handles, aligned with the decoration in order to disturb the coffin as little as possible, could have served multiple purposes.³⁰

Two other coffins were found in the tomb with Padikhons (tomb 4): they belong to his sons, suggesting a belief that members of the same family could be reunited after death by being buried in the same grave.³¹ Banebdjed's coffin is now held in Cairo (JE 36805; FIG. 13).³² This coffin is also in the shape of a shrine, with a winged sun disk and a row of uraei on top, and typical Egyptian funerary imagery on the sides and back. Similar handles in rope were placed on the sides. Small holes pierced throughout the height of the frame suggest that doors or shutters were originally attached, although they do not seem to have survived.³³ However, instead of the regular bands on the frontal edges, two columns of hieroglyphs run along the jambs on each side. At mid-height, the frame is interrupted by the insertion of a small element that recalls the shape of a temple cornice. It was possibly meant to emphasise the separation between the top shutters and the bottom frontal plank. The upper part of the coffin was also provided with an arched element, similar to what has been seen on other examples. Padikhons's other son, Sematawi, was also supplied with a coffin of the shrine type (Berlin ÄM 17041).³⁴ It was built with a very similar structure to that of the two coffins described above: that is, it included an internal arched element on top, Egyptian motifs on both sides and back, possible doors or shutters on top of a frontal plank which are suggested by holes probably meant to maintain the frontal elements with dowels, among other things. All three coffins are not exactly rectangular, but are wider at the top than the base when standing. The mummies of the two brothers do not seem to have been preserved, but Rubensohn mentions in his notebook that Sematawi was wearing a cartonnage mask in linen, while Banebdjed's mask was in papyrus.³⁵ Despite the difference of material, the use of cartonnage recalls the full case covering the mummy of their father, confirming—if confirmation is still needed—the similarity between the models used for these three ensembles.

These “shrine coffins” were certainly meant to be upright, as their structure and decoration suggest,

but they are not the only type that could be positioned vertically. The coffin Berlin ÄM 17665 shows that this structure could be adapted to all sorts of materials, and surprisingly even to coffins made of palm-leaf basketry. This rectangular coffin with vaulted lid has an internal arched structure at one end of the base.³⁶ Evidence seems to suggest that the requirement of an upright position could have compelled the remodelling of coffin types originally designed for horizontal use by modifying their internal structure. For example, the coffin Berlin ÄM 17188 consists of a rectangular base and a vaulted lid decorated with a large figure of Osiris wearing the *atef*-crown. This coffin, already mentioned above, was found in chamber 12 of the tomb of Harsaphes, along with the cover Berlin ÄM 17126 and shrine Berlin ÄM 17127, which were instrumental in the attribution of the cover EA 55022 to Abusir el-Meleq. Rubensohn recorded in his notes that the coffin ÄM 17188, referred to as coffin 2, had an arched internal structure, recalling the structures already described in the shrine coffins.³⁷ The orientation and location of the external decoration on the lid and the two sides containing traditional Egyptian motifs also point towards an upright position. Interestingly, two handles were also located on each side, suggesting a similar use and method of transport to that of the coffins discussed above. The coffin Berlin ÄM 17618 shows a very similar structure and decoration. Photographs confirm that, in addition to the internal arched element at the head, the coffin was also provided with a front panel maintaining the feet.³⁸ Another coffin was reportedly found in the same grave (tomb 13, chamber 8). There is unfortunately no existing photograph of it, but a drawing by Georg Möller shows a large image of Osiris, also with an *atef*-crown, filling most of the surface of the lid (FIG. 14). The figure is surrounded by what looks like a shrine with a cornice and winged sun disks on top crowned by a row of uraei. Thin pilasters have painted horizontal bands on the sides. Each one of these elements recalls the decoration of the various coffins described above. It certainly seems that the coffin was conceived as a shrine, not only symbolically but also architecturally, as it contains many of the traditional Egyptian architectural features (pilasters and cornice) and motifs (uraei and winged sun disks). This sacred place was unsurprisingly dedicated to Osiris, who regularly appears on external decoration (lid or back of the base). But a depiction of Osiris does not seem to have

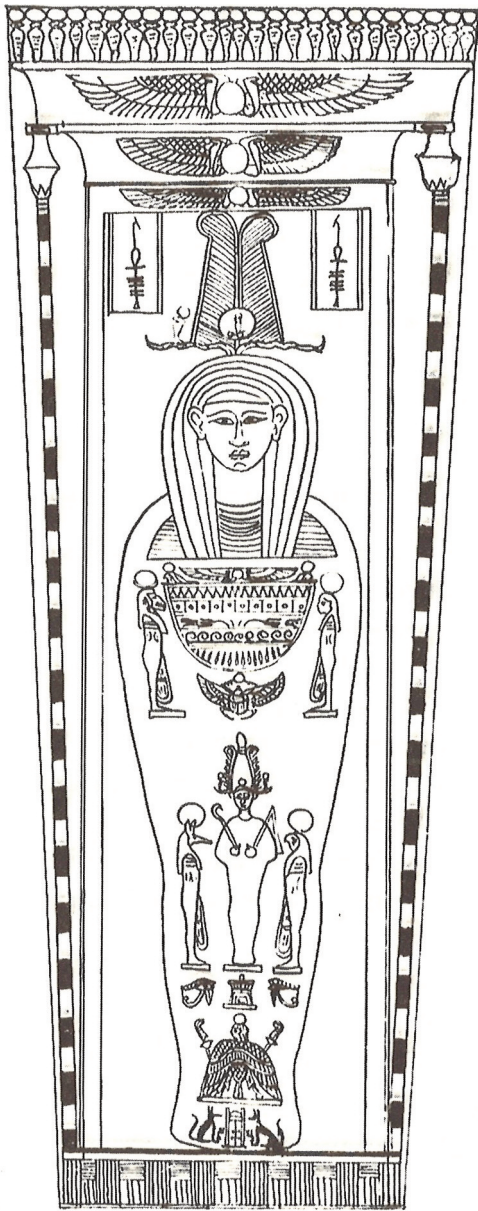


FIGURE 14: Drawing of one of the coffins found in the chamber 8 of tomb 13 at Abusir el-Meleq (from Georg Möller's excavation diary; for a recent publication, see Parlasca 2015, 64, fig. 3).

been essential for a shrine to be effective: the mummy would be enshrined and empowered as a new Osiris, and the gilding—revealed, for example, from traces on the British Museum cover EA 55022—would convey the new divine status of the deceased.

Other types of coffins, such as box-coffins or post-coffins, found at Abusir el-Meleq seem to bear no evidence to suggest that they were meant to be upright at any point.³⁹ This lack of evidence does not exclude the possibility completely, especially since their structure is as yet not fully documented. If we consider that only some inner coffins would have been able to stand, the variety of shapes observed here could reflect different ritual practices or funerary traditions, all potentially impacting the shape of a coffin. Here the coffin needs to serve as a shrine to Osiris, who is going to benefit from the rites. By association, the deceased would have direct access to his divine transformation. The coffin therefore needs to be standing to both contain some architectural principles of sacred buildings and fit the mummy, a physical manifestation of the divine statue in front of which the ritual will be performed.⁴⁰

The role played by shrine coffins seems similar to that of outer coffins: to enclose cartonnage or a cover that would in turn replace the inner coffin.⁴¹ The changes observed might result from the new function of these coffins as standing shrines. They could reflect an adjustment to a change in funerary rituals or practice. The coffin as shrine could also be understood as a step further, a manifestation of a notion that already appears on horizontal coffins: several examples from Abusir el-Meleq have an element on one of their short panels that could be interpreted as doorways.⁴² They can be recognised by their general square/rectangular shape, framed by two pylons and a cavetto cornice, with the focus on the gods depicted at the centre of the scenes.

Such scenes are also present on artefacts produced outside the Abusir el-Meleq area. Numerous coffins, shrouds and other funerary goods seem to have virtually enclosed the mummy in a shrine. A few examples will be provided here. A colourful façade appears on the Theban canopy of Montsuef, an unusual piece of funerary furniture, evoking a temple with its various columns, cornices and uraei.⁴³ We are potentially seeing here a practice similar to what appears on the coffins from Abusir el-Meleq: the canopy would enclose the mummy in a temple-like space. Another example, also from the Theban area, is the funerary bed Berlin ÄM 12442.⁴⁴ This dramatically reproduces five nested doorways, again with columns, cornices and uraei, topped by a larger row of uraei and a winged sun disk occupying the whole width of the panel. The two lion-headed

pylons forming the legs of the bed could be considered a supplementary portal. At the centre of this complex structure appears a small figure of Osiris, a reminder of the purpose of the object as a shrine to the cult of the god, just as the standing shrine coffins enclose the image of the deified deceased. This nesting and concealing of the mummy/god was a way to define and empower a sacred space by making what was enclosed hidden, secret and sacred.⁴⁵ It would not only ensure the transformation of the deceased as an Osiris and divinely empower him/her, but also make sure that he/she was worshipped and would receive offerings essential to an eternal survival.

OWNERS AND EVIDENCE OF WORKSHOPS

Despite the great quantity of material found in a known archaeological context, we surprisingly know very little about the owners of the coffins discussed above. Unfortunately the physical remains of these individuals are generally not preserved. While some were evidently in a poor state of preservation, most seem to have been considered of no value regardless and were probably unwrapped in situ.⁴⁶ The names and titles recorded on some coffins generally indicate a priestly background. For example, Padikhons (ÄM 17039) was a *hrj sšt*³ and *w'b ntr*, while Isis-Weret (ÄM 17188) was apparently a sistrum player.⁴⁷ Although they do not seem to have belonged to the highest stratum of Egyptian society, the owners of these coffins all seem to have been members of the local elite and were probably living in relatively similar circles. This potentially provides a hint to the background of the owner of the British Museum cover. Some are clearly related, sharing the same titles and even the same tomb chamber (such as Padikhons and his sons).

Just as it is difficult to gather information on the owners of these coffins, it is also difficult to recognise the artistic fingerprints of the craftsmen who produced them. The great variety in materiality of these coffins shows a very innovative craftsmanship. If all show similar shapes and use, none employ all of the defining characteristics described above, but combine some of the essential features, such as an arched internal structure, an upright orientation for the decoration, a decoration at the back (and possibly not on the external surface of the foot board), the shape of a shrine, or the presence of shutters, a frontal panel, and a row of uraei on top.

The general shape of each structure also varies greatly: it is either rectangular or trapezoidal, while the lid can be vaulted or in the shape of doors, covering the whole height or just the top half, and with or without the front vertical panel and the internal arched element. This is not the place for a thorough study of the decoration of these coffins. However, it is worth mentioning that the painters employed a great deal of variation in their work. While some examples are totally lacking in decorative motifs (for example ÄM 17127), a cursory overview reveals that none of the coffins seems to reproduce identical scenes. Large figures of Osiris are among the most common features (often reproduced on the back or the sides of the coffins), but the attributes of the god and the style of the figure vary on each example. One motif seems recurrent throughout the corpus: a *djed* pillar topped with a sun disk regularly alternates with the motif of the *tjt* amulet. The association of *djed* and *tjt* appears commonly on funerary material, especially during the Roman period. However, the representation of the *djed* pillar directly attached to a sun disk is less common and could reflect a local trend.⁴⁸

The variety of style, shape and decoration tends to suggest that the families of the deceased made use of very creative local craftsmen.⁴⁹ It is important to note that this does not take into account the time span of production, which has not yet been established, as an extensive study of all coffins would be required first. Such a study would help determine whether the variety observable in the coffins is the result of an evolution over time or reflects the practice of several workshops.⁵⁰ It is also at this stage impossible to know whether the coffins were produced following models or were bespoke. The financial means of the family of the deceased would also have greatly influenced coffin production, especially in the choice of material: for instance, a palm-leaf coffin would have most likely cost less than a wooden one. The choice of construction from multiple bits of wood that constitute the cover EA 55022 could also reflect an economic decision. Questions of personal choice or taste—of the artisans or of the customers—could also be taken into account. Finally, an artist constructing or decorating a piece would likely deviate from the work of his colleague next door, even if they were working from the same model. The study of coffin

production in the Fayumic region during the Roman period would certainly help scholars understand the social and professional horizons of both the artists and their clientele.

COFFINS IN CONTEXT: A NEW OR LONGSTANDING TRADITION?

STANDING COFFINS AND THE OPENING OF THE MOUTH RITUAL

The long-standing ritual of the Opening of the Mouth (*wpt-r3*) is known from many texts and depictions. Scenes representing the ceremony started

to be reproduced during the New Kingdom, but reflect much earlier practices. The Opening of the Mouth was performed on mummies, coffins, statues, and any objects that would need to be brought to life and animated.⁵¹ When carried out on a mummy, the ceremony usually took place at the entrance of the tomb—or in the *wsh*t court—where the mummy “was taken one last time out of the coffin” and placed standing up.⁵² Texts reveal that the mummy was facing south—facing the sun at midday—and therefore facing Ra, who was bathing the deceased with his rays:⁵³



FIGURE 15: The ceremony of the Opening of the Mouth in front of the tomb of Hunefer, British Museum EA 9901.5, from Thebes. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The day of burial, striding freely to his tomb. Performing the Opening of the Mouth at the [...] in the House of Gold, set upright on the desert soil, its face turned to the south, bathed in light on earth on the day of being clothed.” (Theban Tombs 178 and 259)⁵⁴

The iconography tends to confirm the general situation and shows that the ritual was also likely performed on coffins. On the papyrus of Hunefer (British Museum EA 9901.5; FIG. 15), the deceased is represented upright in front of his tomb, attended by priests and mourners holding tools used to perform the Opening of the Mouth ritual. The mummy is supported by Anubis, suggesting a need to prevent it from falling. If these texts and depictions describe a ritual happening during the New Kingdom, they can also inform us on a practice carried out over millennia, and we cannot exclude the possibility that such a ritual could have influenced the shape of coffins in later periods. We notice, for example, that between the New Kingdom and the Roman period anthropomorphic coffins could often stand up—at least temporarily—thanks to the presence of a foot case that provided enough stability for the piece to be set up. The size of these foot cases can also be increased to an exaggerated degree. To give one example, the coffin of a girl dating to the beginning of the Roman period and coming from Middle Egypt has a particularly lengthy foot box (British Museum EA 29587; FIG. 16).⁵⁵ The natural upright position of this coffin seems to be confirmed by the scenes decorating the sides of the base, which are only clearly seen when the coffin is in a vertical position. The extended foot case was certainly not produced to be filled by the feet of the mummy—it is simply too big—but more likely to provide stability when standing up. This piece also recalls the British Museum cover which was the starting point of this study: both represent the deceased as a living individual in their daily clothing, and neither is directly associated with Osiris because neither is presented in mummified form.

The combination of all the elements discussed above confirms the existence of a distinctive tradition of standing coffins, which needed to be upright for at least a short period of time during the performance of the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. Clearly established by both text and iconography, the practice of standing coffins is confirmed by evidence of adaptation in the structure of the coffins

themselves. This need to set up coffins has an Egyptian resonance—especially when compared to the Opening of the Mouth ritual—and could reflect the resurrection of Osiris, erected to a vertical position. The employment of coffins as statues is not unique to Abusir el-Meleq, and the practice can be encountered on coffins from many other necropoleis. However, the British Museum cover, and more generally the assemblage from Abusir el-Meleq, could also have been influenced by foreign practices that were integrated into the local funerary tradition throughout Egypt.

HELLENISTIC IMAGERY AND ROMAN PRACTICES

Despite clear connections between the British Museum cover—as well as the many coffins from Abusir el-Meleq discussed here—and Egyptian coffin manufacture and practices, foreign influence on this piece is iconographically undeniable: the clothing the man is wearing and the style of the carving suggest Greco-Roman influences. Foreign imagery is often combined with Egyptian motifs on coffins, shrouds, portraits, and masks. Here the Greek naturalism is combined with the Egyptian motif of a *ba* bird. Moreover, the individual who was buried in this cover was likely mummified, another connection with Egyptian traditions.

How significant was foreign influence on the production of a cover such as this one? We are perhaps seeing a merging of two traditions: on the one hand the practice of mummification and magically protecting the dead by enclosing them in coffins, and on the other hand the use of memorial figures on display for the family and/or the local community; in other words, enacting the preservation of the body through mummification alongside the preservation of memory by exhibiting the image of the deceased.⁵⁶

Large-scale Hellenistic figures of the deceased were placed on display at funerals and in tombs,⁵⁷ while ancestral busts or masks would stand in cupboards or shrines in Roman homes.⁵⁸ A reinterpretation of these foreign practices is possible in the material from Abusir el-Meleq discussed here. These examples were, however, clearly not meant for long-term display, since they ended up buried inside a tomb; but they could equally well have been visible for a certain period of time, and at least during the funerary ceremony, if not longer.

The British Museum cover is not only part of the tradition of Greco-Roman memorial images on



FIGURE 16: Front and proper left views of the coffin British Museum EA 29587, from Middle Egypt. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

display, but is also representative of contemporary Greek art. Its naturalistic form is the obvious starting point here, as well as the Greek clothing style it portrays. This style of dress was common during the Hellenistic period and could be worn in two ways: the arm could be free or in a sling, as is the case here. These two configurations have different meanings: the first reflects a posture of acting and the second a posture of waiting to act. The arm sling tends to predominate and has been interpreted as a more modest representation. It was also more straightforward to carve.⁵⁹ This position appears regularly in statuary. The statue of Claudius Diogenes from Aphrodisias, for example, depicts him with a box of rolls deposited near his feet.⁶⁰ The combination of both posture and rolls suggests his literacy and oratorical skills. This is precisely the symbolism reproduced on the British Museum cover: the arm position and the roll held in the left hand suggest a Greek education, and their inclusion here seems to suggest the merging of local funerary traditions with newly imported iconographic rules.

The roll of papyrus, as an attribute chosen by the person commissioning the piece, is not a unique feature among the surviving examples of funerary art from Roman Egypt.⁶¹ One very similar piece is a limestone statue of a man, seemingly from Oxyrhynchus, now in Edinburgh.⁶² It represents a standing man with attributes very similar to those of the man on the British Museum cover, among these his clothing, the position of his body and the inclusion of a papyrus roll. The main difference is, of course, the material of the piece from Oxyrhynchus, which is made of limestone rather than wood. Just as was the case with many similar sculpted stelae from Oxyrhynchus, it would have originally marked the burial place of its owner, who would likely have chosen which attributes he or she wanted to be identified with for eternity. These might have reflected the deceased's profession or status.⁶³ As is common with statues like these, the Edinburgh piece originates from the art market and its archaeological context is lost. In addition, the original locations of the sculpted niches in which these statues would have been situated are generally unclear. Regrettably, Petrie, who excavated at Oxyrhynchus, does not provide much information relating to the discovery of the statues he found: in fact, he only mentions a subterranean complex.⁶⁴ What unites these figures is their standing position:

in their niches they would have appeared to be welcoming visitors and potential offerings and could thus have had a similar purpose to that of the Abusir el-Meleq coffins and shrine, at least for the period of time during which they were accessible.⁶⁵ The differences perceptible between the material, the location of display, and the degree of contact with the deceased they enabled are possibly evidence of the regionalism so perceptible in Egypt during the first two centuries CE. Local styles and practices would have been seen, already in antiquity, as an expression of the inhabitants' identity.⁶⁶

The owners of elaborate sculpted niches, such as those which housed the stelae from Oxyrhynchus, are usually thought to have been part of the most prosperous strata of the society: that is, potentially the Greek, Roman, and Hellenized Egyptian local communities.⁶⁷ Yet even if it does not inform us about the identities of their owners, the composition of these stelae reinforces the notion of cultural synergy, which was certainly widespread in the Roman Empire, combined here with local reinterpretations to enable the creation of unique pieces. By being publicly visible, at least for some time, they would establish the status of the deceased and his or her family in the society. Such processions were an excellent opportunity for relatives to advertise their wealth, especially in association with a powerful Hellenized imagery that would impact the local society even more fully.⁶⁸

In addition to people settling in Egypt during the Greek and Roman periods, material culture, artists, and craftsmen were travelling as well. With all these movements, cultural and religious ideas started merging. This is particularly apparent in the funerary art that was developed in Egypt during the Roman period. The British Museum cover is without doubt a by-product of cultural assimilation between Greeks, Romans and Egyptians. Naturalistic portraits, masks, and coffins were also a way to claim a Greco-Roman identity without downplaying local beliefs or excluding Egyptian practices.

THE DECEASED ON DISPLAY

Many questions around the display of standing coffins and mummies still remain. The need for an upright position during the Opening of the Mouth ritual could obviously be one explanation for the manufacture of coffins that could stand. But this is definitely not the only explanation, and others can

be advanced. When excavating the cemetery at Hawara, Petrie noticed that many mummies seemed worn and battered, as if they had been exposed for a certain amount of time.⁶⁹ He thus suggested that these mummies had been prepared and kept in a domestic environment—in the atrium of a house, for example—as long as deemed necessary.⁷⁰

Although this theory has been largely accepted, Dominic Montserrat has proposed alternative hypotheses.⁷¹ Reflecting on Petrie's observation that many of the mummies seem to have been damaged before being buried in their final resting place, he disagreed with the suggestion that they were placed in private houses, arguing that most living quarters were too small for a gathering of deceased family members. Instead he suggested they could have been stored in purpose-built structures, such as chapels, possibly within the necropolis, where family and friends could continue to visit their deceased relatives in a location where cult for the ancestors and funerary banquets could concurrently take place.⁷² This theory would certainly help explain the shape of the coffins developed at Abusir el-Meleq, where local craftsmen could have sought to prevent worn and damaged mummies by manufacturing more robust coffins in the shape of shrines, which might also have served as direct recipients of cultic activities. Unfortunately, it is for now not possible to state if evidence of wear and exposure is visible on the Abusir el-Meleq coffins, several of which suffered badly during World War II. In addition, the typical length of exposure for the mummies is not clear. Montserrat suggested that mummies would have been transferred when "too decrepit for display" or when the local community was not able to identify the individuals anymore.⁷³ This hypothesis is not supported by the evidence from Abusir el-Meleq, where families could still be buried together,⁷⁴ and the length of display could vary. Alternatively, the mummies could have been buried a few months, or years, after the funerals—leaving time for further mourning, ceremonies and banquets to take place—or, more practically, not until the tomb was ready.⁷⁵

Unfortunately, the archaeological evidence for these overground structures is scarce. Montserrat mentioned that the remains of circular and rectangular chapels were found at Hawara.⁷⁶ Such a chapel has not yet been found in the necropolis of Abusir el-Meleq, where thorough surveys and

excavations would certainly reveal much about life in the area in the Greco-Roman period. Another interesting example is a pavilion excavated in the necropolis of Marina el-Alamein.⁷⁷ Attached to an underground hypogeum, the pavilion consists of various rooms, including a banquet room at its centre. We might see here the development of a type of less private structure that could be shared collectively, and not only by an extended family or other ensemble of people. An example of just such a structure is perhaps provided by the large hypogeum of Kom el-Shoqafa in Alexandria, which had a communal space for banquets.⁷⁸ Many superstructures in stone and brick are also known from the necropolis of Tuna el-Gebel; they all seem to sit directly on top of the pits where the bodies were buried.⁷⁹ These structures would not necessarily have needed to be in stone or brick, but could have been built in a lighter material that might not have survived.⁸⁰ As the Fayumic sites discussed here still require further exploration, we can therefore at this stage not exclude or confirm archaeologically such a theory. Still, it remains tempting in light of the evidence already discussed.

CONCLUSION: ABUSIR EL-MELEQ AS A PLACE OF EXPERIMENTATION

The study of the British Museum cover confirms that a number of local and foreign traditions—Roman, Greek and Egyptian—interacted with each other in its construction and decoration. Roman Egypt in general, and this cover in particular, shows great proofs of acculturation, wherein the frontier between populations becomes in some aspects less clear-cut.⁸¹ The changing identity of the population is reflected in the use of Egyptian and classical forms of expression. The attraction to Greek forms conveys a potential quest for local prestige, while Egyptian traditions continue to strongly influence the funerary practices. Given the multiple layers of influence, the origins and identities of the deceased are often more difficult to determine.

If this study has raised many questions—and perhaps more than it has answered—it has also showed the uniqueness of Abusir el-Meleq during the Roman Period, when artists and workmen were experimenting and developing new forms, adapting ancient traditions and merging them in the production of unique coffins. These reveal a unique adaptation of material and shape that is in no way

possible to generalize for the rest of Egypt.⁸² During the Roman Period, traditions and conventions could also be developed at the local level.⁸³ It is therefore not surprising that the development of such unusual coffins is confined to the Abusir el-Meleq area. What is perhaps even more noteworthy is the variety of their forms, structures and designs, which perhaps show a commitment to innovation, or more likely to finding the best shape given the financial means of the relatives, the skills of the workmen and the use of the coffin from procession to burial. The cover EA 55022 reflects perfectly the outstanding skills of the person who produced this divine image of the deceased as part of both long-established and emerging traditions.

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NOTES

¹ The cover was initially studied and conserved as part of the development of the touring exhibition *Egyptian Mummies: Exploring Ancient Lives* (Antoine and Vandenbeusch 2016, 183; Vandenbeusch 2018). The use of the term "coffin cover" will be further discussed below.

² Throughout this paper, the terms "right" and "left" will refer to proper right and proper left.

- ³ Walker and Bierbrier 1997, 36. It has also been dated to the first half of the 1st century CE (Riggs 2005, 153).
- ⁴ Analysis showed that it consists of a degradation product of beeswax.
- ⁵ The piece measures 178 cm (height), 44 cm (width), and 30 cm (depth). The foot case measures 17 cm (height), 32 cm (width), and 30 cm (depth).
- ⁶ I would like to thank Caroline Cartwright, scientist at the British Museum, for the wood identification. Some of the dowels could not be accessed. For more information on sycamore-fig wood and its use, see Cartwright 2016.
- ⁷ This number includes dowels still in situ. In addition, fourteen holes without dowels filling them have been located. The figure does not take into account the modern screws located at the bottom of the base. The cover has not been CT scanned. However, the bare wood makes the dowels easy to identify.
- ⁸ There are two holes on each side—at the level of the shoulders and of the ankles/feet—that could have had a function different from that of the others. They are larger and symmetrical.
- ⁹ I am grateful to Joanne Dyer, scientist at the British Museum, for analysing the multiple layers on various sections of the British Museum cover and for discussing with me the results presented here.
- ¹⁰ There are also traces of shellac, possibly applied as part of the conservation work.
- ¹¹ Hagen and Ryholt 2016, 229–230.
- ¹² For a summary of the successive excavations, see Germer, Kischkewitz and Lüning 2009, 179–190; Stövesand 2012, 15–34. Abusir el-Meleq is well known for its constant (past and modern) looting. See, for example, Vittmann 1981.
- ¹³ Room 12 in tomb 13 according to Rubensohn's numbering system; see Parlasca 1966, 55–56, fig. 5; 2015, 63–65.
- ¹⁴ The Berlin cover and coffin have been published several times: see Riggs 2005, 148–155 and 276 with bibliographical references.
- ¹⁵ Germer 2014b, inv. 17188.
- ¹⁶ Heavily restored, it was then partly destroyed during World War II.
- ¹⁷ The terminology used to describe such pieces is not yet clearly defined and what seems to be a coffin lid could be better described as a cover—or a board—to be inserted upright in a shrine coffin (or even a coffin cabinet).
- ¹⁸ Analyses performed by Joanne Dyer.
- ¹⁹ The child, generally interpreted as a boy, is depicted with short hair, a bun on top of the head, and long hair falling over the shoulders. On this hairstyle, see Riggs 2005, 153–154. For similar buns that could also be worn by girls and women, see, for example, Grimm 1974, 85 and pl. 92.
- ²⁰ Riggs 2005, 275, no. 65, where it is described as a coffin fragment. Riggs provides previous bibliography. See also Parlasca 2015, 72–73, fig. 11.
- ²¹ It has not been possible to scientifically analyse the wooden mask, but the presence of a white layer, probably a type of gesso, largely covered with gilding, points to the possibility that the British Museum cover could have been layered with much more gilding than the few remaining traces suggest.
- ²² On these substances, see Lucas 1962, 348; Blom-Böer 1994, 66; Lee and Quirke 2000, 113–114.
- ²³ An in-depth analysis of these substances for a broader ensemble of coffins might help answer these questions.
- ²⁴ See notes and comments in Germer 2014b, inv. 17188.
- ²⁵ The only photograph at my disposal suggests that this name possibly includes [...] *hns* [...].
- ²⁶ On ÄM 17148, see Grimm 1974, 113, pl. 125.
- ²⁷ See Kischkewitz 1991, no. 129. The cartonnage shown in the coffin does not belong to the same ensemble, but is an earlier example from Thebes, dating to the Third Intermediate Period. See also Germer, Kischkewitz, and Lüning 2009, 182, fig. 289.
- ²⁸ They are still preserved on the photographs taken immediately after the discovery but have since been removed. They might have been damaged during the war.
- ²⁹ Similarly, it seems that a group of chests from Akhmim could have been carried using poles inserted directly into the width of the structure:

- see, for example, British Museum EA 18210 and EA 18211. On these chests, see Tillier 2016. On masks in funerary processions, see Taylor 2013, 188, no.132 and Bazin Rizzo 2014, 36.
- ³⁰ Such handles can also be found on other coffins from Abusir el-Meleq, such as Cairo JE 36805, discussed below.
- ³¹ Nothing excludes the possibility that the man, woman, and child found in chamber 12 of tomb 13 and discussed above were also related.
- ³² See Germer 2014b, inv. 17039. Germer refers to this coffin as JE 36806. I thank Katharina Stövesand for drawing my attention to this confusion.
- ³³ Similar holes also appear on the edge of the coffin of Padikhons, the doors of which are now missing.
- ³⁴ Germer 2014b, inv. 17041.
- ³⁵ Germer 2014b, inv. 17039.
- ³⁶ Another similar standing coffin, also made of reed or a similar material, has a very distinctive shrine shape with a possible row of uraei on top, a frontal panel on the lower part, and an opening on the upper part where the cartonnage of a mummy is visible. The provenance of this coffin is not mentioned by Schmidt, who only indicates a location in the vicinity of Cairo (Schmidt 1919, 255, fig. 1495).
- ³⁷ Germer 2014b, inv. 17188.
- ³⁸ Germer 2014b, inv. 17618.
- ³⁹ Box-coffins: see, for example, Germer 2014b, inv. 17106 or 17655; post-coffins: for example, Germer 2014b, inv. 17051 or 17656. We cannot exclude the possibility that the anthropomorphic inner coffin found in the coffin ÄM 17106 could have stood upright. See Germer 2014b, inv. 17107.
- ⁴⁰ Riggs 2005, 154–155.
- ⁴¹ See Parlasca 1966, 119.
- ⁴² See, for example, Berlin ÄM 17197, ÄM 17051 and ÄM 17669 (Germer 2014b). A very interesting parallel, seemingly also from Abusir el-Meleq, occurs on the rectangular outer coffin of Wed-jasemataui, dated to Dynasty 26: on the head-side panel two *wedjat* eyes are enclosed in a shrine-like shape topped with two winged sun disks. See Siegmann 2012, fig. 5.
- ⁴³ Edinburgh A.1956.353; Manley and Dodson 2010, 123–124.
- ⁴⁴ Riggs 2005, 142–146; Kurth 2010, 139 and 146–147.
- ⁴⁵ Bettum 2012, 28–30.
- ⁴⁶ Rubensohn mentions regularly in his diary “zerfallene Mumie,” as well as discoveries made directly on the mummies, including gold plaques placed on eyes and tongues, suggesting that the mummies were unwrapped, at least partly. See, for example, the entry for 17 January 1904 in Germer 2014a, 83.
- ⁴⁷ For further examples, see Germer 2014b, *Titel*.
- ⁴⁸ This motif appears for example on ÄM 17039, ÄM 17041, and JE 36805 (with and without the *tjt* amulet on the latter coffin). It also occurs on earlier coffins from Abusir el-Meleq, such as Rostock inv. 148.I.1. See Stövesand 2012, figs 6, 10 and 14, and 84–90 for a discussion on the symbolism of the motif’s association with both sun and moon. In addition, it appears in other areas: for example, in the Third Intermediate Period cartonnage from Sedment, Greenock, McLean Museum and Art Gallery, 1987.395 (Stövesand 2012, fig. 54); the interior of the base of the 25th–26th Dynasty coffin from Thebes Copenhagen AEIN 1522 (Jørgensen 2001, 233); the wall of a Roman Period tomb in Tuna el-Gebel, in the second room of house 21 (Venit 2016, 115–116, figs 4.6 and 4.7). The few examples presented here are insufficient to reach any conclusion, but further research would possibly help in validating the idea that a *djed* + sun disk motif was developed and reused locally at Abusir el-Meleq and in its surroundings, from where most of the examples seem to come.
- ⁴⁹ The inventiveness of northern production is already attested during the Late Period (Stövesand 2018, 400).
- ⁵⁰ It is also worth noting that a variety of products could have been manufactured by the same craftsmen. See Riggs 2002, 95–99.
- ⁵¹ Otto 1960; Assmann 2005, 310–329.
- ⁵² Assmann 2005, 310.
- ⁵³ On the southern orientation as reflecting “the order of the universe,” see Raven 2005, 40. During this transitional phase, the deceased is

- not only in union with the sun, but is reuniting with his/her *ba*, which is perhaps the notion underlying the depiction of the bird on the panel of cover EA 55022, if this idea was not already lost by then. See, for example, Coppens 2010.
- ⁵⁴ Translation in Assmann 2005, 318.
- ⁵⁵ Walker and Bierbrier 1997, 35–36; Russmann 2001, 109–110; Riggs 2005, 247–250. There are multiple examples—from various periods—that could feed the discussion, but an extensive examination of this material seems outside the scope of this paper. Coffins from the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period are reasonably stable when in a standing position, sometimes with projecting foot boards (see, for example, Schmidt 1919, especially 118, no. 608, and 124, no. 662), while Late Period coffins regularly have rectangular boxes at the foot end that could certainly aid stabilisation if a coffin was set upright (see, for example, Brech 2008). Extreme foot case projection became more frequent during the Roman Period, not only on coffins, but also on mummies: see, for example, the mummy of Artemidora from Meir dating to the end of the 1st century CE (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 11.155.5; Riggs 2005, 112–113), which has not only horizontally placed decoration but also a scene showing Anubis and a Greek inscription under the feet, suggesting that the decoration was not meant to be viewed only vertically. For a similar mummy, see Cairo 33137, published in Schmidt 1919, 239, no. 1382. Coffins ending in a stabilising box shape continued to be produced after the Late Period and were clearly in use during the Roman Period; see, for example, the coffins found in Deir el-Bahari with their distinctive foot boxes (Riggs and Depauw 2002). We can also wonder if the outline in coffin Cairo 41001bis would have served a similar purpose and kept the mummy straight in the coffin (Moret 1913, 38, fig. 16).
- ⁵⁶ Cultural influence leads to hybridisation, or cultural entanglement as per Philipp Stockhammer, who notes that “encounters with otherness” can bring appropriation and transformation (Stockhammer 2012). This entanglement between various beliefs and practices could have driven the inhabitants of the Fayum area to produce and use artefacts such as those discussed here.
- ⁵⁷ Riggs 2005, 148.
- ⁵⁸ Toynbee 1971, 47–48; Walker and Bierbrier 1997, 36. Masks and portraits could also be worn or held during funerary corteges: see Toynbee 1971, 47.
- ⁵⁹ On this posture see Smith 1998, 65–67.
- ⁶⁰ Smith 1998, 67, fig. 1.
- ⁶¹ See, for example, fragmentary shroud Louvre N 3408 (Walker 2000, 116–117, no. 74), shroud Moscow 4229/II a 5749 (Parlasca 1966, fig. 35.1; Riggs 2005, 277–278, no. 72, pl. 8), mask Louvre E 12379 (Grimm 1974, pl. 56.1), wall painting in the tomb of Petosiris, Qaret el-Muzawaqqa, Dakhla (Riggs 2005, 162, fig. 76), wall painting in “Tomb of 1897,” Cemetery C, El-Salamuni (Riggs 2005, 165, fig. 77). For an example outside of Egypt, see Gschwantler 2000, 19, fig. 5. More generally on papyrus rolls in funerary depictions, see Tarasenko 2017.
- ⁶² Edinburgh, National Museums Scotland A.1971.674: National Museums of Scotland, “Citizen of Oxyrhynchus,” < https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/collection-search-results/?item_id=302985 >, accessed 6 October 2018.
- ⁶³ See, for example, Parlasca 1978.
- ⁶⁴ Petrie 1925, 17.
- ⁶⁵ Statues similar to those found in Oxyrhynchus have also been associated with Abusir el-Meleq: see Brandl 2007, 56, fig. 17.
- ⁶⁶ Thomas 2000, 38–39.
- ⁶⁷ Thomas 2000, 35–36. The debate over the identity and ethnicity of both the inhabitants and the mummified individuals of Roman Egypt is outside the scope of this paper. For a summary, consult, for example, Riggs and Baines 2012; Vandorpe 2012.
- ⁶⁸ What could have been seen as an advantage in Abusir el-Meleq would have been perceived differently elsewhere in Egypt. The need to belong to the Greco-Roman milieu appears to have been much less pressing in the Theban area, for example (see Riggs 2005, 175–244), while seemingly more acute in the northern parts of Egypt.

⁶⁹ Petrie 1911, 2.

⁷⁰ Petrie suggested that mummies had been stored this way for up to two generations. According to him, this would explain the group burials, in which delicately prepared mummies seem to have been carelessly piled up in pits (Petrie 1911, 2–3). The keeping of mummies in the domestic environment is also suggested by Diodorus Siculus (I, 92), while Cicero simply states that mummies were kept in homes (*Tusculanae Quaestiones*, lib. i.; see Pettigrew 1834, 15).

⁷¹ Montserrat 1997, 38–39. Cornelia Römer has also re-examined the question (Römer 2000), focusing specifically on the literary sources. If we accept the theory that mummified individuals were kept in domestic surroundings, we also have to accept “dass die Vorstellung von der Erneuerung des Lebens durch das Werden zu Osiris vollkommen in Vergessenheit geraten sei” (Römer 2000, 156), and this does not appear to be conceivable.

⁷² It has also been suggested that the period of time between the death of a person and their burial could have been affected by a lack of money—to pay the embalmer’s bill, for example—or the absence of a family member (Montserrat 1997, 38). On questions relating to the time period between death and burial, see also Borg 1998, 78–79. To give one example, the stela of Petobastis-Imhotep (British Museum EA 188) indicates that the deceased was only buried seven years after his death. This delay, a possible consequence of the turmoil that followed Cleopatra VII’s death and the Roman conquest of Egypt (Rusmann 2001, 252), seems to confirm that lengthy periods of time could intervene between death and burial.

⁷³ Montserrat 1997, 39.

⁷⁴ See, for example, the case of Padikhons and his two sons (above).

⁷⁵ Dunand 2007, 176.

⁷⁶ Montserrat 1997, 39.

⁷⁷ Daszewski 1997.

⁷⁸ Venit 2002, 127–8.

⁷⁹ Lembke 2012.

⁸⁰ More work needs to be done not only on the physical structures in which these funerary rituals would take place but also on commemorative practices for the dead, which would certainly have influenced how the British Museum cover and other standing coffins were used and perceived. On the memorialization of the dead with Deir el-Medina as a case study, see Meskell 2003.

⁸¹ The term “coculturation” is perhaps more appropriate to the situation of Roman Egyptian funerary practices. See Curtin 2010 for the use of this word in a modern context.

⁸² There is always a danger to generalize, but one must remember that culture can vary extensively depending on location, function, social customs and behaviour. This was shown, for instance, by Ian Morris, whose examples demonstrate a great deal of variety in burial practice, between cremations and inhumations of adults and children, in the cemeteries of nearby Greek settlements (Morris 1992, 18–19).

⁸³ See, for example, the Theban attitude toward funerary art and classical influence in Riggs 2005.