

An Early New Kingdom Coffin from Abydos

Wolfram Grajetzki

University College London

Dedicated to Eberhard Holzhäuer (1927-2015)

IN 1899 JOHN GARSTANG started excavations at Abydos and uncovered parts of the cemetery area that Flinders Petrie labelled ‘E’,¹ south west of the funerary enclosure of the Second Dynasty king Khasekhemuy, and part of the ‘North Cemetery’.² The burials found date from the Old Kingdom to the Roman Period, with especially many tombs belonging to the Second Intermediate Period and New Kingdom. The publication of the excavations appeared already in 1901 but was highly selective: only rarely were all objects of one single burial presented.

Garstang found in the tomb that received the number 281 the fragments of a coffin and he described these briefly, publishing photographs and drawings of the two long sides. Garstang dated the burial to the 13th Dynasty and mentioned that a ‘blue marble vase’ was found with the coffin. He also published a mirror, coming from the tomb.³ The tomb is briefly mentioned as ‘pit tomb’.⁴ It is visible on the published map as part of the cemetery that is described on the map with ‘pit tombs’. There is shown among several shafts a double shaft with the label 281. There seems to be a second shaft 281 on the map. However, the printing quality is not that good and it seems more likely that the other number is 231, as 230 and 232 are nearby.

The objects from the tomb are today in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Except for the coffin fragments, all finds are quite small, giving the impression that only portable objects were brought to England. The anhydrite (“blue marble”) vase most likely belongs to 13th Dynasty. The other finds, such as a serpentine vase, kohl tubes, scarabs, pottery vessel and a ring belong to middle or late 18th Dynasty. Therefore, the dating of the burial is problematic. Garstang’s description is confusing: “The two-handled vessel shown in the same photograph, was found in a disturbed pit tomb with the pieces of wood coffin. Its form is unusual, at any rate for this period; indeed, it suggests some influence not Egyptian, which might have been a ready explanation for its appearance in an XVIIIth dynasty deposit. Yet it is made of blue

¹ I am grateful to Helen Whitehouse and Janine Bourriau for helping me to locate the small finds from tomb Abydos E. 281 and to Paul Whelan for reading an early draft of the article. My thanks goes to Lucilla Burn for permission to publish the photos from the Fitzwilliam Museum.

² For a general map, see B. KEMP, R.S. MERRILLEES, *Minoan Pottery in Second Millennium Egypt*, Mainz am Rhein, 1980, 106, fig. 36; compare J. RICHARDS, *Society and Death in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge, 2005, 140, fig. 61.

³ J. GARSTANG, *El Arabah: A Cemetery of the Middle Kingdom, survey of the Old Kingdom temenos; graffiti from the temple of Sety*, London, 1901, pl. XVI.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

marble, which was commonest in the Middle Kingdom; and it is of exquisite proportion and finish, work characteristic in particular of the XIIth dynasty. Since also, it was found with Middle Kingdom objects, in a tomb surrounded by others of that date".⁵

However, with the exception of the anhydrite vase, all object now in museum collections, fit a date of the tomb to the 18th Dynasty. Not much can be said about the burial. It was most likely a multiple burial with at least two, perhaps three individuals, as remains of three coffins were found. The mirror and the cosmetic objects discovered are more typical for burials of women, but appear in male burials too.⁶ The texts on the coffin refer to the deceased as a male: the male version of 'you' (.k) is used in the short formulas. The two pairs of eyes might belong to two mummy masks, or even to one anthropoid coffin and a mummy mask. The latter option might point to a single individual buried here: a burial with an outer box coffin, an inner anthropoid coffin and a mummy mask.

The coffin [figs. 1-8]

Data: Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum E.283.1900, Gift of the Egyptian Research Account.
Dimensions: front side 1: H 42 cm; L 187 cm; back side: H 33 cm; L 111 cm; ends: H 38 cm; L 36 cm;
Material: painted wood

Bibliography: J. Garstang, *El Arabah*, 8-9, 34, pls. X (photograph), XI (drawing); M. Werbrouck, *Les pleureuses dans l'Égypte ancienne*, Brussels, 1938, 99; J. Bourriau, *Pharaohs and Mortals*, Cambridge, 1988, 94, no. 75; E. Vassilika, *Egyptian Art*, Cambridge, 1995, 38, no. 15; B. Lüscher, *Untersuchungen zu Totenbuch Spruch 151*, Wiesbaden, 1998, 116, Abb. 40; C. Lilyquist, *Ancient Egyptian Mirrors from the Earliest Times through the Middle Kingdom*, MÄS 27, Berlin, 1979, 40, n. 451 (mentioned; dated to the late Middle Kingdom).

Garstang only published the two long sides of the coffin. However, in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge there are also the relatively well preserved short ends. The lid and the bottom are lost. The coffin is decorated on the outside with figures and inscriptions. The background of the coffin was painted white, now mostly gone. The hieroglyphic text lines next to the figures are all in black. These columns are framed by black lines. The figures are standing on a black base line with a second black base line under it. The upper part of the scenes are also framed by at least one black line. The figures are outlined in red/orange or on the short ends in black. However, the internal colouring of the figures does not often follow these outlines. The name of the coffin owner is not preserved and was most likely written on the lid. On comparable coffins found at Deir el-Medineh the name appears only in an offering formula on the lid of the coffin.⁷

On the fragments belonging to the left board (assuming that the head of the deceased was placed next to the eyes), at the right end, is shown one large wedjat eye over a chequerboard pattern, of red, blue and white rectangles. Left to it, several people are depicted, separated by vertical lines of hieroglyphs. Three mourning women are shown, and behind them a man and a woman bringing food offerings (?) in baskets. The last person is again a mourning woman. However, the text columns are evidently not the captions for the figures depicted.

⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁶ C. LILYQUIST, *Ancient Egyptian Mirrors from the Earliest Times through the Middle Kingdom*, Munich, 1979, MÄS 27, 97; S. TYSON SMITH, "Intact Theban tombs and the New Kingdom burial assemblage", *MDAIK* 48, 1992, 206-208.

⁷ B. BRUYÈRE, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935)*, FIFAO 15, Cairo, 1937, p. 32, fig. 13.



Fig. 1. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum E.283.1900, left side (photo © Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum).



Fig. 2. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum E.283.1900, main fragment from the right side (photo © Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum).



Fig. 3. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum E.283.1900, smaller fragment from the right side (photo © Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum).



Fig. 4. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum E.283.1900, top half of head end (photo © Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum).



Fig. 5. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum E.283.1900, lower half of head end (photo © Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum).



Fig. 6. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum E.283.1900, foot end (photo © Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum).

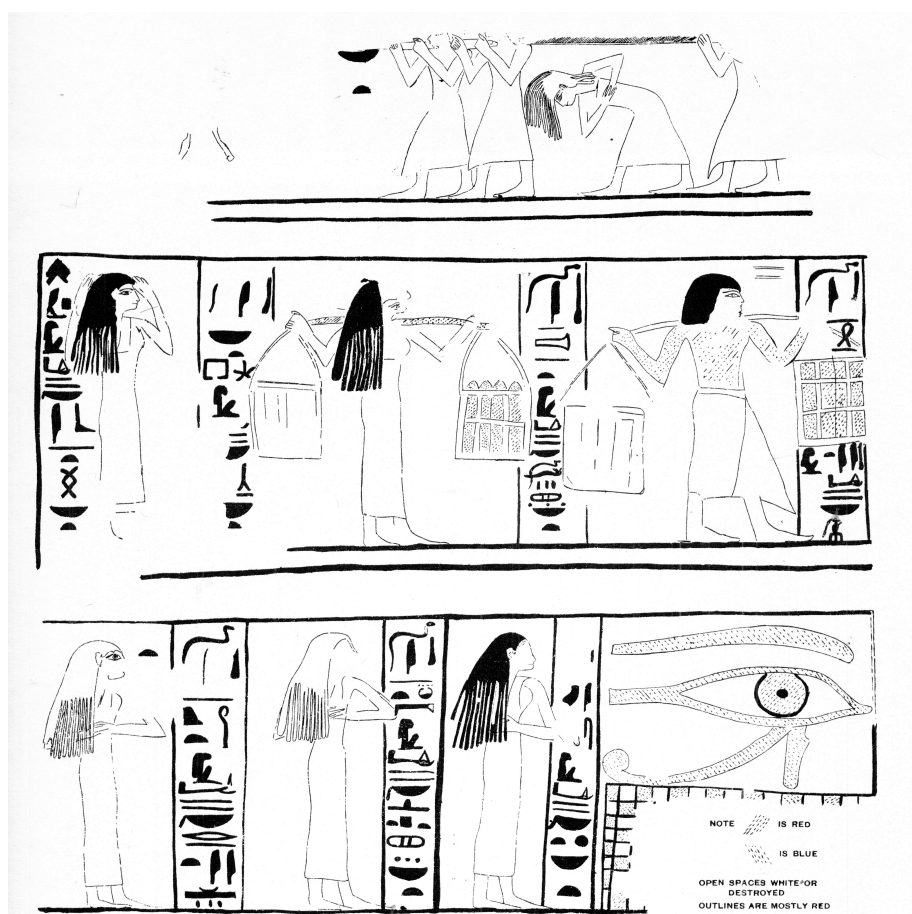


Fig. 7. Drawings of the coffin as published, (J. Garstang, *El Arabah*, 8-9, 34, pl. XI, drawing).

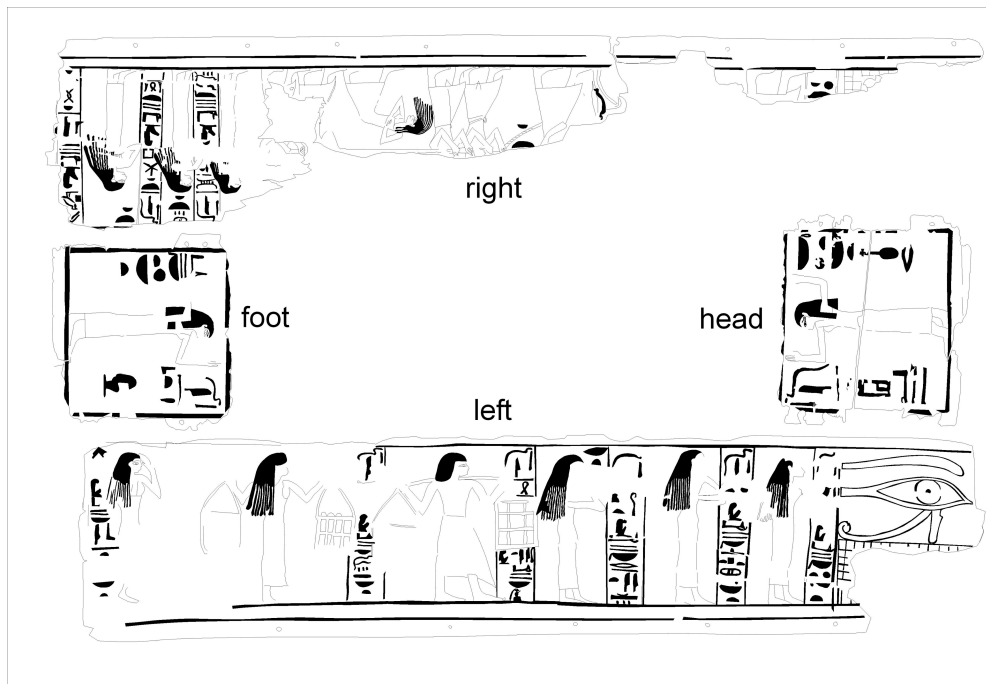


Fig. 8. Drawings of all coffin sides, made according to photographs by the author.

The texts and depictions (from right to left)

1. *[Dd] mdw in imsty dī.n.ī n.k lht nbt.*

[Words spoken by] Amset: I will give to you all things.

This follows the depiction of a standing woman in a long dress and with long black, curly hair. Her hands are placed on the chest.

2. *Dd mdw in nwt dī.n.ī n.k htpt nbt.*

Words spoken by Nut: I will give to you all food offerings.

This follows a similar woman as in no. 1.

3. *Dd mdw in hqzt dī.n.ī n.k rnpyt.*

Words spoken by Heqet: I will give to you [all] greens.

This follows a similar woman as in no. 1.

4. *Dd mdw in šntzyt dī.n.ī n.k qbh̄w.*

Words spoken by Shentayt (a): I will give to you cool things.

This follows the depiction of a man carrying a stick across his shoulders from which are

suspended two rectangular baskets or boxes. The background colour for the baskets is red.⁸

5. *Dd mdw in nît dî.n.î n.k dfzt nbt.*

‘Words spoken by Neith (**b**): I will give to you all food.

This follows a woman shown again with a stick across her shoulders with two boxes or baskets hanging from it. In the first basket is depicted food, with a row of four shallow domes protruding above the upper box edge.

6. *Dd mdw in nbt-dwzt dî.n.î n.k [sšrw] mnht nbt.*

Words spoken by Nebetduat (**c**): I will give to you [linen] and all clothing (**d**).

This follows a standing woman with both hands raised to her head. She seems to be a mourner.

7. *hpy dî.n.î n.k bnrt nbt.*

Hapy: I will give to you all sweet (things).

a. Shentayt – ‘The widow’, see *LGG* VII, 105-106. According to Leitz the goddess is attested from the New Kingdom onwards.

b. The reading of the name is uncertain. Neith appears in the same position on the right side of the coffin. On the right side there also appear Nebduat and Hapy, providing the impression that on both long sides of the coffin, the same deities are listed.

c. The deity is only known from this coffin. Nebduat – ‘Lord of the Underworld’ is already attested in the Coffin Texts, compare *LGG* III, 786-788. The name is written here as if it is ‘Lady of the Underworld’. It remains uncertain whether this is a mistake for Nebduat.

d. Only parts of the sign for ‘clothing’ (Gardiner, sign list S27) are still visible. The same phrase appears on the other side of the coffin and there is preserved ‘linen’ (Gardiner, sign list V6) .

Right board

Two fragments from the right side of the coffin are preserved.

The best preserved fragment is from the right (foot) end of the side. Three women and three columns are shown. On the left is shown a group of four men, most likely carrying the coffin of the deceased.

The first column reads in translation (from right to left).

1. *hpy dî.n.î n.k bnrt nbt.*

Hapy: I will give to you all sweet things.

⁸ A comparable figure appears on an anthropoid coffin from Thebes: B. LÜSCHER, *Untersuchungen zu Totenbuch Spruch 151*, Wiesbaden, 1998, 18 (coffin of Ahmes, MMA 14.10.2).

Next comes a standing woman, with long black, curly hair. The hands are over the chest.

2. *Dd mdw in nbt-dwzt dī.n.ī n.k mnht sšrt nbt.*

Words spoken by Nebduat, I will give to you all linen and clothing.

Next comes a standing woman, similar to no. 1.

2. *Dd mdw in nī dī.n.ī n.k dfzt nbt.*

Words spoken by Neith, I will give to you all food.

It follows a standing woman, similar to no. 1.

The next scene shows four men oriented to the left carrying something, which is now lost, but seems most likely to have been a coffin or the mummy of the deceased. There are two men at the front of the object and two at the back. The bodies of the men are painted in two variations of red, the front man is rather dark, the man behind him lighter red. At the front the remains of a cow are visible, perhaps an offering animal. Behind the cow is standing a man, only the lower part preserved. Behind him hieroglyphs are visible, evidently the remains of an offering caption, reading: ‘all’ (*nbt*). There is also a rope visible perhaps once connecting the object that is carried with the cow. Underneath this missing object is a female mourner shown walking and with her head facing downwards.

End panels

Both end panels have a depiction of a goddess, standing and with raised arms.

Head end

Dd mdw in nbt-ḥwt dī.n.ī n.k iḥt nbt nfr[t].

Words spoken by Nephthys: I will give to you all beautiful things.

Foot end

Dd mdw in zst dī.n.ī n.k iḥt nbt.

Words spoken by Isis: I will give to you all things.

The whole decoration of the coffin is thus occupied by scenes from the funeral, with mourners, offering bearers and men carrying the coffin (?). The texts on the coffin are basically concerned with the provision of food for the deceased. Different gods promise to supply provisions. It is hard to make a connection between the offerings provided by the deities and the deities. However, Nebetduat ‘the lady of the Underworld’ is providing linen and cloth. These are items used in embalming; all other items are food or drink, also attested as offerings in embalming rituals.

In comparison to other coffins from Thebes and Saqqara it is clear that the fragments belong to late 17th Dynasty or first half of the 18th Dynasty. The following details on the Cambridge fragments also occur on the other better datable examples:

1. Only one *wedjat*-eye on each long side instead of a pair.⁹ The latter is common in the Middle Kingdom. For 17th Dynasty or early 18th Dynasty examples with a single eye: G.E. Carnarvon, H. Carter, *Five Years' Explorations at Thebes. A Record of Work Done 1907-1911*, London, 1912; pl. LX.1; G. Jéquier, *Le monument funéraire de Pépi II, tome III*, Cairo, 1940, 44, fig. 34.
2. Chequerboard patterns, most likely imitating matting. Parallels: B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935)*, *FIFAO* 15, 38, fig. 18; G.E. Carnarvon, H. Carter, *Five Years' Explorations at Thebes*. pl. LX.1; CG 28108. G. Jéquier, *Le monument funéraire de Pepi II*, 44, fig. 34.
3. Depictions of mourners and people on the coffin exterior. Parallels: B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935)*, *FIFAO* 15, Cairo, 1937, p. 38, fig. 18; coffin fragment MMA 32.3.419, E. Graefe, "The Royal Cache and the Tomb Robberies", in N. Strudwick, J. Taylor (eds.), *The Theban Necropolis, Past, Present and Future*, London, 2003, 77, pl. 17.

Stylistically, the paintings of the figures seem to fit best to the early New Kingdom. The hairstyle of the female mourners with the long hair showing single curly strings is typical for the 18th Dynasty. It is well attested on funerary papyri,¹⁰ and is also known from wall paintings in tomb chapels.¹¹ A more unusual feature is the depiction of the long hair falling in front of the face of a mourner, on the right board. A comparable depiction is known from Theban tomb TT87¹², from TT82 and from the tomb of Reneni at Elkab.¹³ The long dress of the men depicted, having the tail/corner at the front, is also well known from the New Kingdom papyri and tombs, though also, if rarely, found in the Middle Kingdom.¹⁴ The simple long dress of the female mourners is typical for the Middle Kingdom and is well attested in early New Kingdom tomb paintings, but becomes rarer after Amenhotep II.¹⁵

The associated finds

I. Anhydrite vase [fig. 9, left], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2610, 8 cm x 4.4 cm.

Comments: The vase dates perhaps to the 13th Dynasty, as a vase of similar shape bears the throne name Khaneferre (Sobekhotep IV).¹⁶ Anhydrite was a popular stone for vessels especially in the Middle Kingdom,¹⁷ but the material is still attested in the New

⁹ Compare the discussion by B. LÜSCHER, *Untersuchungen zu Totenbuch Spruch 151*, 114-116.

¹⁰ I. MUNRO, *Untersuchungen zu den Totenbuch-Papyri der 18. Dynastie*, London, New York, 1987, pl. III, IV, VI, IX.

¹¹ A. MEKHITARIAN, *Egyptian Painting*, London, 1978, fig. on p. 33, fig. on p. 67, fig. on p. 75; A.G. SHEDID, *Stil der Grabmalereien in der Zeit Amenophis' II*, AV 66, Mainz am Rhein, 1988, pls. 11d, 15a; M. WERBROUCK, *Les pleureuses dans l'Égypte ancienne*, Bruxelles, 1938, pl. IV, XII and *passim*.

¹² A. MEKHITARIAN, *Egyptian Painting*, fig. on p. 45; WERBROUCK, *Les pleureuses dans l'Égypte ancienne*, pl. IV and fig. 181, p. 159.

¹³ M. WERBROUCK, *Les pleureuses dans l'Égypte ancienne*, fig. 182 on p. 159 (TT82); fig. 44 on p. 70 (Elkab).

¹⁴ I. MUNRO, *Untersuchungen*, pl. I, VII, VIII, IX; E. DZIOBEK, *Eine ikonographische Datierungsmethode für thebanische Wandmalereien der 18. Dynastie*, SAGA 3, Heidelberg, 1992, 17.

¹⁵ E. DZIOBEK, *Eine ikonographische Datierungsmethode*, SAGA 3, Heidelberg, 1992, 17.

¹⁶ A. WEIGALL, "Upper Egyptian Notes", *ASAE* 9, 1908, 107.

¹⁷ B. ASTON, J. HARREL, I. SHAW, "Stone", in P.T. Nicholson, I. Shaw (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and*

Kingdom.¹⁸ Despite the one late Middle Kingdom parallel there is the possibility that the vessel is New Kingdom.

Bibliography: J. Garstang, *El Arábah*, 7, pl. IX.

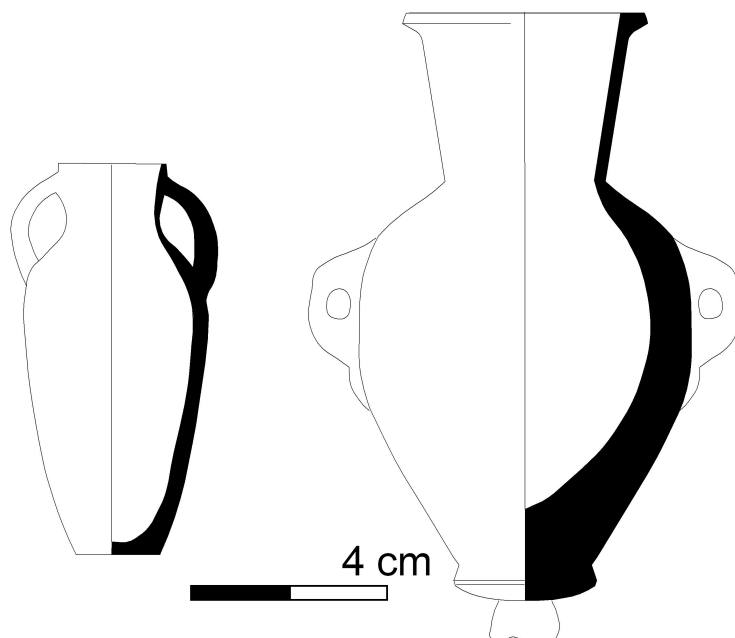


Fig. 9. The stone vessels from tomb E 281 (drawn by the author).

II. Serpentine vase [fig. 9, right], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2653, 12.8 cm high, about 9 cm from handle to handle. The vase was found broken. The rim of the vessel and the foot are much destroyed.

Comments: The exact form of this stone vessel with two handles, does not have many parallels in the New Kingdom; one example was found in a New Kingdom burial at Gerzeh.¹⁹ Most comparable vessels do not have handles.²⁰

III. Small dish [fig. 10, left, bottom], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2372, 8.5 cm in diameter, 2.4 cm high. Nile clay B, bright brown with some small inclusions. White pigment partly preserved over interior and exterior. Made on a potter's wheel but not very fine.

IV. Small dish [fig. 10, left, top], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 2373, 10.5 cm diameter, about 2.4 cm high. Nile clay B, but finer than III. White pigment over exterior. Dark brown

Technology, Cambridge, 2000, 22-23.

¹⁸ C. LILYQUIST, *Egyptian Stone Vessels, Khian through Thutmosis IV*, New York, 1995, 51 (Q).

¹⁹ W.M.F. FLINDERS PETRIE, G.A. WAINWRIGHT, *The Labyrinth Gerzeh and Mazghuneh*, London, 1912, 27, pl. XVI (18th Dynasty burial at Gerzeh); compare W.M.F. FLINDERS PETRIE, *Stone and metal vases*, London, 1937, pl. XXXIV, no. 878.

²⁰ B.G. ASTON, *Ancient Egyptian Stone Vessels: Materials and Forms*, SAGA 5, Heidelberg, 1994, 151.

clay, not particularly well made.

Comments: Such small dishes are common in Middle Kingdom burials and are still well attested in the New Kingdom.²¹

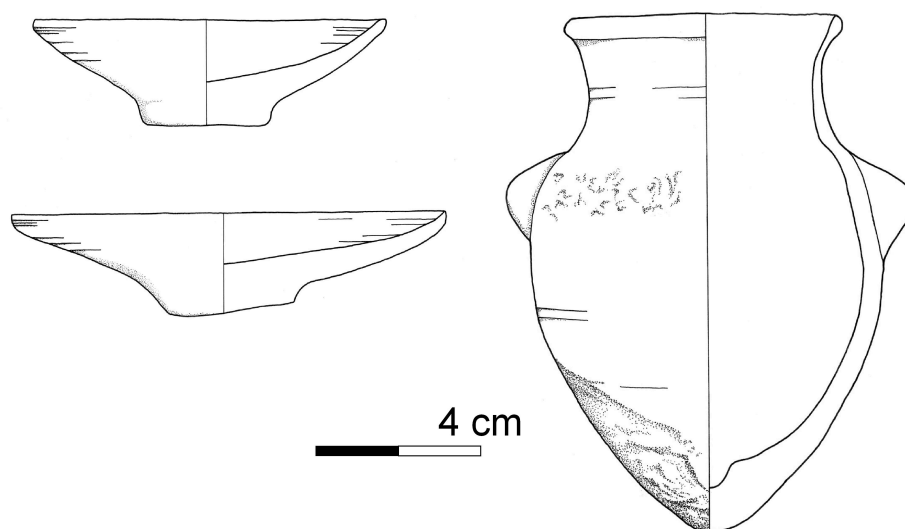


Fig. 10. The pottery from E 281 (drawn by Paul Whelan).

V. Vessel [fig. 10, right], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2504, 12.5 cm high, 6.5 cm diameter at the top. Nile clay B with very fine inclusions. Surface not very well smoothed with deep lines still visible. There are two simple handles.

Comments: Similar vessels all come from New Kingdom contexts.²²

VI. Beads [fig. 11, middle top], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 568:

1. a single, round bead, made of a black stone, about 7 mm;
2. 143 cylinder beads, of green glazed material. They vary in length between 8 and 12 mm;
3. an amorphous bead or amulet, blue faience, 6 mm;
4. a barrel shape, single light blue bead, 6 mm;
5. four 'double' beads, white material, about 10 mm;
6. a single blue bead, about 4 mm.

²¹ Similar bowls are known from the Middle and New Kingdom. R. SCHIESTL, A. SEILER, *Handbook of Pottery of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom I. The Corpus Volume*, Vienna, 2012, 884-888 (Middle Kingdom, examples), new Kingdom examples: R. HOLTHOER, *New Kingdom Pharaonic Sites. The Pottery*, Uppsala, 1977, 19; J. BOURRIAU, *The Survey of Memphis IV: Kom Rabia: The New Kingdom Pottery, Excavation Memoir 93*, London, 2010, 19, fig. 21.

²² T.E. PEET, W.L.S. LOAT, *The Cemeteries of Abydos III (1912-1913)*, London, 1913, pl. VII (tomb D 114); G. BRUNTON, *Qau and Badari III*, pl. XXIX, 212.

VII. Bronze, finger ring [fig. 11, left, top], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2609. About 2.5 cm high and 2.3 cm wide. The bezel bears the signs ‘Amun-Re’, followed beneath by a lapwing and finally at the bottom a *nb*-sign.

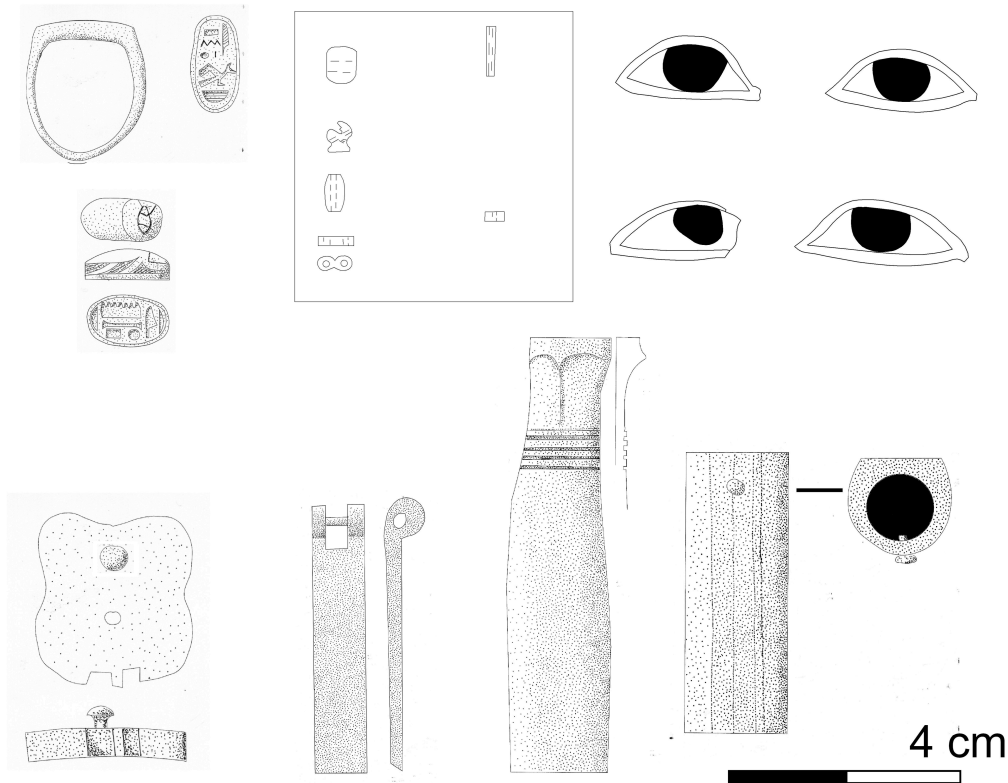


Fig. 11. The small finds (drawn by the author).

VIII. Scarab [fig. 11, left, middle], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 653, glazed steatite. 1.5 cm x 1.2 cm x 0.6 cm. On the base of the scarab is written: ‘Amun-Re’. The short ends frame the god’s name with a ‘neb’ sign.

Comments: Similar scarab decorations are very common in the New Kingdom.²³

IX. Kohl tube [fig. 11, bottom, right], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2611. Wooden kohl tube 5.7 cm x 2.1 cm. The tube is round with a flattened back, and without further decoration. At the front there is a hole with an ivory (?) peg in it. The tube still contains some kind of substance.²⁴

²³ R. ENGELBACH, *Riqqeh and Memphis VI*, London, 1915, pl. XVIII, nos. 100-102, 108; R. ENGELBACH, *Harageh*, London 1923, pl. XXI, nos. 162-166; G. BRUNTON, *Qau and Badari III*, London, 1930, pl. XXXIV, nos. 10, 23; W.M.F. FLINDERS PETRIE, *Illahun, Kahun and Gurob*, London, 1891, pl. XXVI, 23 (‘tomb of Maket’); D. DOWNES, *The Excavations at Esna*, Warminster, 1974, 66, tomb 355, nos. 6, 7.

²⁴ Parallels: G. STEINDORFF, *Aniba II*, Glückstadt, Hamburg, New York, 1937, 117, no. 3, pl. 69.

X. Wooden kohl tube in the shape of a palm column [fig. 11, middle, bottom], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2612. It is approximately 7.7 cm high, 1.9 cm in diameter at the bottom. The tube is heavily damaged at the top.

Comments: Most published parallels of this kohl tube type, are in other materials such as bone or glass.²⁵ Dated examples include one with the name of king Thutmoses IV found in his tomb in the Valley of the Kings.²⁶

XI. Wooden lid for a small box [fig. 11, left], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2614, about 3.1 x 3.2 cm, about 0.5 cm high.

XII. Wooden fragment of unknown function, 5 cm x 0.9 cm, 0.2 cm high [fig. 11, left], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2615.

XIII. Two sets of eye inlays [fig. 11, top, right], Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2607-8. The base of the eyes are made of a dark limestone, with inlays of crystalline, white limestone (for the sclera) and perhaps obsidian for the iris. They are about 3 cm long and 1 cm high

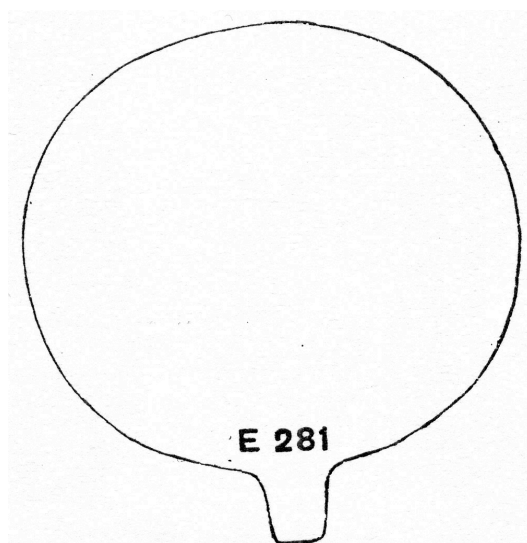


Fig. 12. The mirror, drawing (J. Garstang, *El Arábah*, pl. XVI).

XIV. Mirror [fig. 12, left] (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E 2606). About 10.5 cm in diameter. The mirror lens is arsenical copper; the rim is made of copper alloy, perhaps bronze (analysed 1971: results in the archives of the Department of Antiquities,

²⁵ J. VANDIER D'ABBADIE, *Catalogue des objets de toilette égyptiens*, Paris, 1972, 58-59, no. 177 (New Kingdom); W.M.F. FLINDERS PETRIE, *Illahun, Kahun, Gurob*, London, 1891, p. XXVII, 9 ('tomb of Maket', 18th Dynasty); SOWADA, CALLAGHAN, BENTLEY, *The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara IV. Minor Burials and Other Material*, Warminster, 1999, 47, pl. 7 (94:17) (in bone); G. STEINDORFF, *Aniba II*, 117, no. 6.

²⁶ T.M. DAVIS, *The Tomb of Thoutmôsis IV*, Cairo, 1904, 126, pl. XXVI [1] (lower plate).

Ashmolean Museum).

Bibliography: J. Garstang, *El Arábah*, pl. XVI

Coffins at Abydos from the Middle to the early New Kingdom

The Middle Kingdom was one of the heydays of coffin production. While the outside of these coffins is often rather simple, many of them are decorated on the inside with friezes of objects, offerings and longer religious texts. Many of these coffins were found at provincial cemeteries, reflecting the wealth at the courts of many local governors. The styles of coffins were different from place to place, indicating local production.²⁷ However, at the end of the Twelfth Dynasty, when local governors lost many resources, it seems that local coffin production stopped or was heavily reduced. Around the same time the inner decoration of coffins disappeared.²⁸ In the late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period only three centres of decorated coffin production remain:²⁹ the Memphis-Fayum region where there was still the capital at least in the Thirteenth Dynasty, Thebes, where the capital moved at some point at the end of the Thirteenth Dynasty; Abydos.

It seems that the coffin production in the Memphite region remained quite conservative in the late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period. The only new feature appearing here on coffins, are panels placed on the outside and containing longer religious texts.³⁰ Not all coffins of the Second Intermediate Period have these panels. The coffin of a certain Aabed was found at Saqqara and dates to the very end of the Second Intermediate Period. A dagger with the name of the Hyksos king Apophis was found in the coffin.³¹ The coffin shows some new details not attested on Middle Kingdom coffins such as the two wedjat eyes not on one side but one eye on each long side. However, the texts on show the imakhu kher (*im3hw hr*) formulas attested on coffins since the late Old Kingdom.³²

In the South, coffins show different features. New spells appear here and the number of text columns on the outside of coffins was increased, something not found in the North. However, it often remains hard to tell where certain features on coffins were originally developed. At Thebes and Abydos the Coffin Texts spells 777 to 785 appear in the Thirteenth Dynasty on coffins. They became a standard text program on certain coffins of this period. These texts are attested on three coffins from Thebes and on five coffins found at Abydos. Especially at Abydos few other coffin decoration types are attested for the period. The additional Abydos formula on one of these coffins might provide the impression that this set of spells was composed at Abydos. However, the formula may have been composed at Thebes.³³ Therefore, the place of production of the spells 777 to 785 that dominate one a part of the early Second Intermediate coffin decoration must remain open.

²⁷ H. WILLEMS, *Chests of Life*, Leiden 1988, 62-117.

²⁸ J. BOURRIAU, "Patterns of change in burial customs during the Middle Kingdom", in S. Quirke (ed.), *Middle Kingdom Studies*, New Malden, 1991, 14.

²⁹ W. GRAJETZKI, *The coffin of Zemathor and other rectangular coffins of the late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period*, *GHP Egyptology* 15, London, 2010, 95.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

³¹ Cairo CG 28198; *ibid.*, 23.

³² *Loc. cit.*

³³ M. LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, OBO 84, Freiburg, Göttingen, 1988, 55-58; my remarks on CT 777 to 785 are obsolete: W. GRAJETZKI, *op. cit.*, 103-104 (claiming these spells were composed at Abydos because the 'Abydos formula' was composed there).

Within the Second Intermediate Period the anthropoid Rishi coffin appears. The epi-centre of its development was certainly Thebes. Rishi coffins outside of Thebes are extremely rare.³⁴ Rishi coffins were replaced at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty by the ‘white coffins’³⁵ and later by the ‘black coffins’.³⁶ Rectangular coffins were still produced, but it seems that they were mainly used by people under the highest social levels. At Thebes, therefore a clear development of coffin styles is visible, from rectangular examples to anthropoid ones.

The development of coffin styles in Abydos is less clear, as not so many well preserved and recorded coffins from the site are published. Organic preservation is limited at Abydos, making it likely that a high percentage of wooden coffins is lost. Nevertheless, at Abydos were found fragments of a coffin with inner decoration typical for the mid Twelfth Dynasty, attesting to standard Middle Kingdom coffins.³⁷ The sarcophagus of Nakht dates to the very late Twelfth or Thirteenth Dynasty. It is decorated with five text columns on the long sides and two on the short ends. On the short ends are shown female mourners.³⁸ The decoration of the sarcophagus recalls coffins from other places in Egypt and it seems that Abydos followed trends known from other places. The Thirteenth Dynasty model coffin of the ‘high steward’ Nemtyemweskheth was found at the ground level of a chapel at Abydos. The decoration of the model coffin follows closely Twelfth Dynasty coffins.³⁹ Nemtyemweskheth was a high official at the royal court. It might be argued that his model coffin was produced at the royal residence, in the North. The coffin of the ‘mouth of Nekhen’ Senebhenaf is only preserved in small fragments. It dates perhaps to the middle of Thirteenth Dynasty. It is not possible to provide a secure reconstruction of the decoration scheme, but the columns on the coffin outsides bear speeches of deities, attested on coffins all around the country. A special feature are text panels on the outside with longer religious texts. Such panels are attested on only one other Second Intermediate Period coffin from Abydos,⁴⁰ but are well attested on three coffins at Lisht, one or two coffins at Dahshur and one further example at Saqqara.⁴¹ The coffin of a woman with the title *zemat-hor* ‘the one united with Horus’ has these panels too, but is also decorated with a high number of columns and the Coffin Text spells 777 to 785 (not all spells are preserved).⁴² Her coffin shows therefore a mixture of features known from Lower Egypt (the text panels) and features from Abydos (the coffin texts 777 to 785) and is in this respect unique. The combination of Northern and Southern features might indicate local coffin production at Abydos. However, too few coffins are known from this period to come to any firm conclusion. Five coffins from Abydos show the high number of text columns in combination with the coffin text spells 777 to 785.⁴³ These include even a royal coffin, perhaps belonging to king Sobekhotep IV.⁴⁴ These coffins are close to examples found at

³⁴ G. MINIACI, *Rishi Coffins and the funerary culture of Second Intermediate Period Egypt*, GHP Egyptology 17, London, 2011, 47-49.

³⁵ M. BARWIK, “Typology and Dating of the White-type Anthropoid Coffins of the Early XVIIIth Dynastie”, *Études et Travaux* 18, 1999, 8-33.

³⁶ J.H. TAYLOR, “Patterns of colouring on ancient Egyptian coffins from the New Kingdom to the Twenty-sixth Dynasty: an overview”, in W.V. Davies (ed.), *Colour and Painting in Ancient Egypt*, London, 2001, 166-165.

³⁷ J. GARSTANG, *El Arábah*, pl. XXVI.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pl. VII.

³⁹ W. GRAJETZKI, *The Coffin of Zemathor*, 13-14, pl. IV.

⁴⁰ W. GRAJETZKI, “Another early source for the Book of the Dead: The Second Intermediate Period Burial D 24 at Abydos”, *SAK* 34, 2006, 205-216, plates 5-8.

⁴¹ W. GRAJETZKI, *The Coffin of Zemathor*, 23 (Sq23X), 26 (Da6X), 27-28 (Da5X), 30-31 (L1-2Li), 28 (L9, L10).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6-9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6-9 (Aby5), 12-13 (Aby4), 42 (Aby2), 43 (Aby3) and the coffin of king Sobekhotep, see below.

⁴⁴ J. WEGNER, K. CAHAIL, “Royal Funerary Equipment of a King Sobekhotep at South Abydos: Evidence for the

Thebes, but have a different background colour. The examples at Thebes are black, while at Abydos, one has a white background,⁴⁵ and another one bears a line pattern on bright background.⁴⁶ This might indicate that the Theban and Abydos coffins were made in different workshops and most likely locally. Therefore it seems plausible that Abydos had a local coffin production, different to the one in Thebes despite the many points in common.

The precise date for many of the Abydos coffins is debatable. The coffin with the coffin text spells 777 to 785, attributed by J. Wegner to king Sobekhotep IV provides a fix point, but the attribution is not certain in the absence of a throne name.⁴⁷ All Abydos coffins with these coffin text spells might belong to a short period, to the middle of the Thirteenth Dynasty.⁴⁸ Typologically, there are no coffins yet published that are securely datable to the following period. Indeed the next coffin is that found in tomb E. 281. For the moment the coffin stands alone in the published records of coffins from the site. As noted above, it shares many features with early New Kingdom coffins from elsewhere, especially from Thebes.

The Abydos coffin from tomb E 281 creates many problems for putting it into time and space as it is at its place so far unique. Nevertheless, the box is perhaps an example of a locally produced funerary object showing some special features, not yet attested elsewhere. It is decorated all over with human figures, almost creating the impression of horror vacui. By comparison, the contemporary Theban rectangular coffins are sparsely decorated. At Thebes, on each coffin side there are often only two or three figures, separated by a wide space.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the high number of columns on the Abydos coffin is not found on any Theban coffin. The high number of columns might be influenced by the 13th Dynasty coffins with the multiple columns. As mentioned, the latter coffins were especially popular at Abydos, but are also well attested in Thebes. However, at Thebes the high number of columns does not had any impact on the rectangular coffins of the New Kingdom. The rectangular coffins at Thebes often do not bear any columns on the coffin box.

Therefore, the coffin from tomb Abydos E 281 seems to attest an early New Kingdom local coffin production. How this production functioned in practical terms must remain for the moment unknown. One option is that the coffin box was the creation of a local carpenter usually producing furniture or other types of wooden objects. The painted decorations on the coffin needed more specialized artists and well trained scribes. They were perhaps working locally, as the decoration of the coffin is so far unique. The paintings and inscriptions are certainly made by well trained artists. Hardly any other objects can be assigned to production by such a group, but this may reflect the limited preservation of wood at Abydos. Further excavations at the site and in museum stores may shed new light on this question.

Tombs of Sobekhotep IV and Neferhotep I?", *JARCE* 15, 2015, 123-164.

⁴⁵ T.E. PEET, W.L.S. LOAT, *The Cemeteries of Abydos, Part II: 1911-1912*, London, 1914, 61, pl. XIII.

⁴⁶ W. GRAJETZKI, *The coffin of Zemathor*, pl. XI (a).

⁴⁷ J. WEGNER, K. CAHAIL, *JARCE* 15, 2015, 149-158.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 155-156.

⁴⁹ B. LÜSCHER, *Untersuchungen zu Totenbuch Spruch 151*, 116-119, fig. 50-54, pls. 14-18.