



BAB EL-GASUS IN CONTEXT

REDISCOVERING THE TOMB OF THE PRIESTS OF AMUN

Edited by
**Rogério Sousa, Alessia Amenta
and Kathlyn M. Cooney**

«L'ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER

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ROGÉRIO SOUSA

THE TOMB OF THE PRIESTS OF AMUN
AND THE 'RESTORATION' OF THE THEBAN NECROPOLIS

With its 153 burial sets, the undisturbed Tomb of the Priests of Amun stands out as one of the largest and most exceptional tombs from the Theban necropolis. And yet, it has been poorly studied, as it has remained largely inaccessible. After the clearance of the tomb was completed in February 1891, the shaft was again filled up with the debris Eugène Grébaut had removed and it remained inaccessible until reopened in 1924 by Herbert Winlock of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Winlock subsequently used the empty corridors of the tomb as a magazine for the storage of artefacts found during the excavations he directed at Deir el-Bahari.¹

Later on the shaft became refilled with debris and it was not until 1969 that the Polish Mission at Deir el-Bahari opened the tomb once more. Ten years later, in 1979, the Egyptian Antiquities Organization granted the Polish Mission permission to use the empty tomb for storing finds being made in the thoroughly ruined Thutmose III temple at Deir el-Bahari.² At that time a plan was made by Rafal Czedner, which is so far the most updated plan of the tomb.³ Recently the mouth of the shaft has been arranged and protected with a removable cover, but no access has been granted to researchers willing to pursue further studies on the structures of the tomb.

It is the goal of this paper to integrate the so-far described features of the tomb with the available information on its find, namely with the results obtained from comparative studies carried out by the present author on coffin decoration.

1. THE TOMB OF THE PRIESTS OF AMUN: FORMAL FEATURES

The access to the Tomb of the Priests is gained by an 11 metres deep shaft located on the northeast of the first courtyard of Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahari. The mouth of the shaft was carefully concealed under an elaborate protective system which

¹ WINLOCK 1922.

² LIPINSKA, 1993-1994.

³ LIPINSKA, 1993-1994: 52.

was found intact by Eugène Grebaut.⁴ A burial chamber, certainly of an earlier date, was excavated into the northern wall of the shaft, eight meters below the surface.⁵ At the bottom of the shaft, sealed with mud bricks,⁶ a door opened to a long undecorated corridor hewn out of the rock, 1.70 to 1.90 meters wide, and of a similar height. This corridor was 93 meters long and led south, to the Main Chamber. Here, a Secondary Chamber was excavated to the east wall.

At a short distance from the Main Chamber (76.2 meters from the entrance) a second, nearly perpendicular passage was carved at a lower level, two meters below the floor of the main gallery. It is 52.4 meters long and 1.50 meters wide. This Transverse Gallery was left unfinished (Fig. 1).⁷

Unlike the Royal Cache,⁸ the galleries of the Tomb of the Priests were finely carved. The walls, ceilings, and floor display regular surfaces, providing an enormous area for the storage of burial assemblages. Despite the undecorated walls, it shows rather sophisticated solutions from an architectonic standpoint. It was provided with what seems to have been an efficient lighting system. Along the Longitudinal Gallery, seven niches were cut into the east wall for lamps.⁹ These niches were carved at 1.50 m from the floor and still showed vestiges of white wax which had melted and run down the wall. The Transverse Gallery presented four niches cut into the north wall for lamps. The Main Chamber was also provided with a niche for a lamp carved into the western wall.

However, by far the most interesting feature of the tomb consists in the sophisticated defensive device created to protect the funerary chambers. On approaching them, the corridor leads to a stairway, which abruptly narrows to half the width of the Longitudinal Gallery, creating a deep shaft on the western side (Fig. 2). If he would not fall into this trap, the potential intruder would eventually walk down the stairway finding himself before the Transverse Gallery. In this way, the funerary chambers would stay hidden in plain sight. The sophistication of this system not only shows that the collective nature of the tomb was planned from the beginning as it was clearly used as a way to enhance the security of the most important interments.

Given the structure of the tomb, at least three stages of construction can be identified. The first stage would have been materialized in the construction of the shaft and the adjacent burial chamber. Later on, one decided to enlarge the tomb, deepening the shaft and carving the Longitudinal Gallery and the two burial chambers. Finally, in a third stage, the Transverse Gallery and its stairway were carved.

⁴ DARESSY, 1900, 146; SOUSA 2018b, 21-22.

⁵ DARESSY 1907, 142.

⁶ DARESSY 1907, 142.

⁷ It is possible that a burial chamber might have been planned for this corridor, see NIWIŃSKI 1984a, 74.

⁸ See GRAEFE and BELOVA 2006, 207-217.

⁹ The location of these niches is carefully indicated by Daressy in the plans published in 1900: 146.

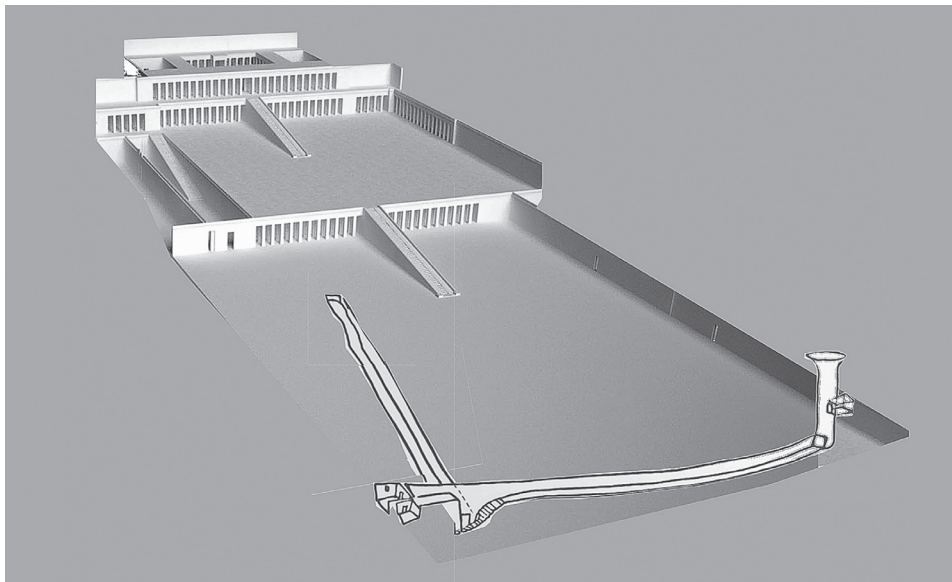


Figure 1 : The galleries of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun and the Temple of Millions of Years of Hatshepsut (composition by the Author).

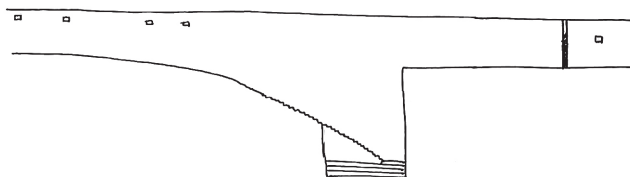


Figure 2 : The Tomb of the Priests of Amun: The stairway leading to the Transverse Gallery (drawing by the Author).

Dating each of these stages is more difficult. For certain authors, the shaft and its burial chamber were excavated in the early 18th Dynasty,¹⁰ while the remaining underground galleries were excavated in the late 21st Dynasty. As none of the grave goods found in the tomb can be dated later than the pontificate of Psusennes, it is reasonable to assume that it was closed during his pontificate.¹¹

¹⁰ DARESSY 1900, 144.

¹¹ NIWIŃSKI 1988, 26; NIWIŃSKI 1984a, 74-75.

Given the concentration of high elite burials belonging to the descendants of the High Priest Menkheperre found in the burial chambers, it has been argued that it was during this pontificate that an old tomb was reused and extended to accommodate the burials of his family.¹² Only later on it would have been enlarged to accommodate other interments.¹³ Other authors, on the other hand, admit a later dating for the construction of the tomb. Niwiński admits that it was hewn during the pontificate of Psusennes and argues that it was carved from the beginning as the burial ground for the priests of Amun.¹⁴ In fact, it is unlikely that the tomb was first intended as a family burial ground alone, as happened with TT 320. The length of the Longitudinal Gallery clearly shows that it was prepared from the beginning as a large-scale burial ground.

Such a complex work demanded a considerable amount of time and effort, and for this reason it is not too farfetched to admit that construction works begun during at least the pontificate of Pinedjem II. This would also be consistent with the composition of the burials, as the tomb holds the burials of his immediate relatives. In fact, the Secondary Chamber held the interments of his brother Tjanefer A (and his wife and sons), while the Main Chamber presented the burials of two of his brothers, Hori and Ankhefenmut. The exact nature of the relationships between the individuals buried in this chamber is unknown, but it is possible their wives had been buried in this location too. Heretweben, niece of Pinedjem II and granddaughter of Menkheperre, was buried in this chamber too.¹⁵ Therefore, the tomb can be seen as a burial ground for the close relatives of Pinedjem II – and for his entourage – and not necessarily for the descendants of Menkheperre, which changes slightly the sociological significance of the tomb.

2. THE ‘RESTORATION’ OF THE THEBAN NECROPOLIS: FIRST STAGE

The tomb was excavated at the bottom of a deep shaft. Thus, from the technical standpoint, the enormous amount of debris hewn out of the rock had to be lifted up to the surface, which considering the total area excavated in the tomb represented a tremendous effort. Building such a large tomb must have had a bold impact in the Theban society from this period, as nothing of this size had been built since at least the reign of Ramesses VI (1143-1136 BC).¹⁶

Such an effort is even more striking when we pay attention to the previous patterns of occupation of the Theban necropolis during this period. In regnal years 8-15 of

¹² DARESSY 1900, 144; ASTON 2009, 198; NAGUIB 1990, 118.

¹³ NIWIŃSKI 1988, 25; ASTON 2009, 198.

¹⁴ NIWIŃSKI 1988, 25.

¹⁵ BROEKMAN 2018, 17.

¹⁶ Compare with the structure of the royal tombs in REEVES and WILKINSON 1996, 165.

Rameses IX Libyan nomads succeeded in disturbing the peace in Thebes. This period witnessed the first wave of tomb robberies well documented in the Tomb Robbery Papyri.¹⁷ At this stage, however, only the 17th Dynasty royal burials in Dra Abu el-Naga and some private tombs were robbed. During the reign of Rameses XI the crisis that gripped the Theban area in the previous decades deepened even further: persistent trouble with Libyan gangs, famine (the ‘year of the hyenas’), further tomb robberies and thefts from temples and palaces, and even civil war.¹⁸

With the *wehem mesut* begins the ‘Renaissance Era’ (1080-1069), an expression that had also been used at the beginning of the 12th and 19th Dynasties to indicate a new beginning after a period of chaos.¹⁹ It is clear that in times of scarcity the Theban necropolis represented a major source of instability. During the New Kingdom, this vast territory was transformed into an incredibly rich area, one that became extremely difficult to control in times of social and political instability.

Perhaps encouraged by Rameses XI himself,²⁰ the Libyan military cast took control of the powerful Temple of Amun-Re. With Herihor the Valley of the Kings was no longer used as a royal necropolis. Rameses XI died in Year XI of the *wehem mesut*, but he was not buried in his tomb of the Valley of the Kings (KV 4) and his mummy, together with those of Piankh and Herihor, remains to be found.²¹ Most interesting is the evidence suggesting that during the pontificate of Pinedjem I, son of Piankh and successor of Herihor, the tomb of Rameses XI was used as a workshop for the recycling of funerary materials removed from the tombs KV 20 (Hatshepsut), KV 34 (Thutmose III) and perhaps KV 38 (Thutmose I).²²

This period also witnessed to important ritual changes in the Theban necropolis. In Year 5 of the *wehem mesut*, Wenamun was entrusted by Herihor with the important mission of acquiring wood in Byblos for the construction of the new sacred barque of Amun.²³ Undertaking this enterprise in times of instability, proved to be a distressful event, as faithfully described in the report of Wenamun and the motifs behind this project must have been overwhelmingly important. It is doubtful that this mission was triggered by conservation issues regarding the sacred barque of Amun. The historical sources state that this venerable relic had been renewed during the reign of Thutmose III (1479-1425 BC), thus nearly 400 years before. Although this length of time may explain

¹⁷ PEET 1930.

¹⁸ DODSON 2012, 9.

¹⁹ ASSMANN 2002, 289.

²⁰ SOUSA 2018d.

²¹ CLAYTON 1994, 171; REEVES 1990.

²² REEVES and WILKINSON 1996, 173; DODSON 2012, 25.

²³ GARDINER 1932. This papyrus was bought by Golénischeff in 1891, in Cairo. Despite the literary character of the text, one should not overlook the historical character of the events reported in this autobiographical report.

the need for renovation, an object crafted in fine cedar wood, preserved under very controlled conditions in a dry climate may in fact be kept in perfect condition during thousands of years, as oftentimes Egyptian archaeology shows.

It is thus possible that another reason triggered the need to craft a new barque. It is known, that during the reign of Thutmose III, the sacred barque of Amun was enlarged in order to prevent its use in the funerary Temple of Hatshepsut thus making the ‘Sacred Horizon’ (*djeser akhet*) of Thutmose III, the only possible destination at Deir el-Bahari for the barque of Amun to rest during the Beautiful Feast of the Valley. However, by the end of the 20th Dynasty, a landslide seriously damaged this temple. As a result of this catastrophic accident, the Temple of Hatshepsut became the only intact temple at Deir el-Bahari and, for this reason, it was necessary to build a new barque, one that could fit in this smaller sanctuary.

The report of Wenamon is clear in showing that these changes coincided with the *wehem mesut*.²⁴ The organization of such a mission during the Renaissance Era is certainly more than just a coincidence, and it may in fact resume the ambitious program of renovation put forward by Herihor. Under the sacred effigy of Amun-Re, the new sacred barque crafted for the Beautiful Feast of the Valley can actually be seen as a symbol for the entire program of renovation of the Theban necropolis as a whole.

Thus, it is possible that the catastrophic event that occurred on the cliffs of Deir el-Bahari may have been seen as a turning moment in history, one that could have demanded a full ‘restoration’ of the sacred territory of the necropolis. For centuries, the royal character of the necropolis dictated the definition of different funerary clusters, forming the ‘Valley of the Kings’, the ‘Valley of the Queens’, the necropoleis of the nobles and the necropolis of the workmen’s village. The new theocratic political system implemented by Herihor during the *wehem mesut* faded away the significance of the royal patterns previously in use, allowing different patterns to emerge. The Theban necropolis had now two main centers. In the south, the city of Djamet grew inside the enclosure walls of the Temple of Ramesses III (Medinet Habu), as the villagers of Deir el-Medina moved there seeking protection. From then on, this area grew in prestige as the Small Temple of Amun became increasingly associated with the ‘Mound of Djeme’, where rituals relating to the creative powers of Amun took place.²⁵

In the northern part of the necropolis, the former Temple of Hatshepsut became the focal point of the Beautiful Feast of the Valley and the area around it turned into the privileged funerary ground for the priests of Amun.²⁶ Several caches containing

²⁴ GARDINER 1932.

²⁵ TAYLOR 2000, 363.

²⁶ This pattern would prevail during the Third Intermediate Period, when burial sites were built within (or next to) the enclosure walls of a temple. This is superbly shown in Tanis, where the royal necropolis was located within the sacred precinct of Amun. DODSON 2012, 42.

‘yellow coffins’ were found in close vicinity of Hatshepsut’s temple.²⁷ The excavations of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York conducted by A. Lansing and H. Winlock at Deir el-Bahari brought very important discoveries. In the 1923-24 season, Winlock discovered two small caches. One of these caches (TT 59) had been excavated during the 18th Dynasty for Minose, then reused for Henuttaui F, during the first half of the 21st Dynasty.²⁸ A similar cache (TT 60) was discovered nearby.²⁹ This cache was named the ‘Tomb of Three Princesses’³⁰ and there were found six coffin sets, most of them dating from mid to the late 21st Dynasty, together with other smaller objects.³¹

In the 1928-29 season, to the north of the second court of the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari the expedition of the Metropolitan Museum discovered the tomb of the Queen Merytamun (TT 358).³² Inside, among others, the coffin set of Nanny was found, dating from the first half of the 21st Dynasty.³³

The picture provided by these finds suggests that during the 21st Dynasty the tombs previously excavated in the area of Deir el-Bahari composed a network of small caches. Although only a few of them had been found intact by archaeologists, given the available data collected so far, it seems logical to admit that many other small caches existed in the area.

These caches differ from the previous private tombs by not having been provided with a superstructure. In this aspect they emulate the royal tombs from the New Kingdom, whose superstructure was to be found in the Temples of Millions of Years built next to the fertile land flooded by the Nile. In this case, they were symbolically, and certainly ritually, related to the *Djeser djeseru* (‘The most sublime’) the Temple of Million Years of Hatshepsut, as Niwiński suggests.³⁴

The new pattern of use of the necropolis thus supposes that religious taboos regarding the protection of the older funerary grounds had been neutralized, allowing the Temple of Amun to openly dismantle them in order to reassure stability in the area. It is never too much to emphasize that, besides the obvious material gains from controlling these resources, emptying the tombs was a crucial step towards stabilizing the area, which was not a minor concern for the new Theban ruling elite.

²⁷ WINLOCK 1942, 22-24; NIWIŃSKI 1988, 28.

²⁸ ASTON 2009, 198.

²⁹ ASTON 2009, 199-202.

³⁰ WINLOCK 1942, 24-28.

³¹ NIWIŃSKI 1988, 28.

³² ASTON 2009, 202.

³³ NIWIŃSKI 1988, 28. The excavations of the Metropolitan Museum of Art conducted by A. Lansing and H. Winlock revealed several caches in Deir el-Bahari in an area close to the Tomb of the Priests (TT 59, TT 60, TT 358). See WINLOCK 1942.

³⁴ Personal communication.

By the Year 10 of the *wehem mesut*, Piankh invested Butheamun, the scribe of the necropolis, with the mission of inventorying thoroughly the resources of the necropolis, i.e., its tombs and funerary goods.³⁵ Besides the royal tombs, the Theban hills were roamed looking for old tombs, and marks were left stating the condition of each tomb, such as a large *wedjat*-eye or *nefer*-signs, perhaps signifying ‘intact’ or ‘good’.³⁶ Nearly 4000 of these graffiti were found testifying the thoroughness of the search for tombs which could be released for recycling. It is not too much stressing that these operations were not seen or recognized as a concerted operation of robbery but rather as a necessary operation carried out within the reformative spirit of the *wehem mesut*. Moreover, this operation is often presented as a ‘restoration’ and it would remain one of the key aspects used by the high priests of Amun to reaffirm their authority during the 21st Dynasty. This is particularly clear in one of the best documented practices of this period, the ‘restoration’ of the royal mummies from the New Kingdom. They were first stored in caches installed in former royal tombs. Herihor established a cache in the Tomb of Horemheb (KV 57). On the other hand, Pinedjem I established a cache within the Tomb of Seti I (KV 17) and transferred the first batch of mummies to the Tomb of Amenhotep II (KV 35).³⁷ Other tombs of the royal necropolis were provisionally used as storerooms for funerary artefacts and workshops. Two graffiti above the entrance to KV 49 mention quantities of temple linen brought to the tomb by the scribe Butheamun, suggesting that the tomb had been employed as a storeroom for linens used in the restoration of royal mummies.³⁸

Many of the royal mummies seem to have remained stored in funerary workshops for a while as many of them present docketts referring to restoration works carried out under the authority of different high priests.³⁹ It is interesting to note that a number of the linens employed to wrap the mummies previously had been temple donations.⁴⁰ More than pious acts, these restoration works have to be understood as bold political statements of the new Theban ruling elite. The high priests of Amun were in fact the devoted keepers of the venerable relics of the Pharaohs of old, being able to keep them safe, protected and pure.

Under Pinedjem I, the reburials of Ramesses II, Amenhotep I, Ahmose-Nefertari, took place in the cliff-tomb of Queen Inhapi together with those of Thutmose II, Hatshepsut, Thutmose III and presumably Thutmose I. Most of the royal mummies,

³⁵ On Butheamun see CAVILLIER 2016 and CAVILLIER 2018.

³⁶ REEVES and WILKINSON 1996, 205.

³⁷ REEVES and WILKINSON 1996, 205.

³⁸ REEVES and WILKINSON 1996, 206.

³⁹ GOFF 1979.

⁴⁰ REEVES and WILKINSON 1996, 203.

rewrapped and docketed were kept within a handful of easily guarded caches – KV 17, KV 35, and KV 57.

One interesting aspect of the dismantling of the Royal necropolis is the removal and reuse of the royal burial equipment. The best known example is the reemployment under Pinedjem I of the two royal coffins provided by Thutmose III for the new tomb of Thutmose I. These coffins had been entirely reworked under Pinedjem I, and in their finished state the original ownership was wholly undetectable.⁴¹ Important pieces of evidence of how the funerary goods were used by the high priests of Amun were found in the royal tombs of Tanis. In the intact tomb of the Tanite King Psusennes I, son of Pinedjem I and brother of Masaharta and Menkheperre, was found the innermost sarcophagus of Merenptah, as well as a beautiful private anthropoid sarcophagus dating from the late 18th Dynasty.⁴² Probably most, if not all, the jewelry found in the tomb, including the funerary mask and the silver anthropoid sarcophagus, had been reused from Theban royal burials too.⁴³

This clearly shows the final destination of some of the funerary goods taken out of the Theban tombs, which were used in the diplomacy of the Theocratic State of Amun with its neighbors, in this case the Northern Kingdom. It is also important to note that the importance of these artefacts is not confined to their material value. In fact, the sacramental value of these highly revered objects was surely far more important given the sacredness they were associated with. A royal sarcophagus was certainly traded to the Northern Kingdom as a sacred and much revered ‘relic’ carrying with it much of the sanctity previously attributed to the Valley of the Kings. Thus, the reuse of a royal sarcophagus in the context of a Tanite royal tomb could have implied the symbolic transfer of the sacredness associated with the Valley of the Kings to the royal burials at Tanis.⁴⁴

The sacramental value detected in the objects reused in Tanis, was certainly even stronger around the royal mummies themselves. Besides the political prestige associated with them, their restoration provided Theban imaginary with a new source of sanctity and magical efficacy. A series of funerary papyri found in the Tomb of the Priests of Amun contained spells whose efficacy was guaranteed by the rubric ‘The book that was found at the neck of the mummy of King Ramesses II in the necropolis’.⁴⁵ Clearly, royal funerary equipment by virtue of its holy associations was immanent with a magical

⁴¹ DODSON 2012, 52.

⁴² IKRAM, DODSON 1998, 262.

⁴³ TAYLOR 2000.

⁴⁴ In fact, the temple and the city itself, revolved around the practice of reuse, as its buildings were formed with reused materials brought from Pi-Ramesses.

⁴⁵ REEVES and WILKINSON 1996, 206.

potency which was widely acknowledged and employed as a result of the dismantling process.⁴⁶

Dismantling the royal necropolis thus empowered the High Priests of Amun, of Libyan ascent, with a new source of charisma, which was at least as bolder as the material gains themselves, a source that was surely used to magnify their prestige not only among their neighbors, but also within Thebes, enhancing the acceptance of the new political order by the local community.

3. THE 'RESTORATION' OF THE THEBAN NECROPOLIS: SECOND STAGE

Our understanding of the human remains found in the Tomb of the Priests is seriously compromised given their current state of preservation. From the 154 mummies⁴⁷ originally found in the tomb, Daressy only published a brief summary of what he had found in 93 mummies.⁴⁸ Only a small group of these mummies had been studied from a medical or anthropological perspective.⁴⁹ For this reason, the few insights provided by Georges Daressy and Elliot-Smith reveal precious information.

The mummies found in Bab el-Gasus were normally wrapped in a shroud decorated with a large sketch depicting Osiris.⁵⁰ Mummy-braces are often included in the decoration of the mummy either bend over the mummy itself or on its outer wrappings. Nearly fifty of these objects provided historical references. The High Priest Pinedjem II is the most frequently quoted (23 mummies), followed by Menkheperre (11 mummies) and Psusennes (10 mummies). The Tanite kings Siamon and Psusennes II were both mentioned only once.⁵¹ This scenario may suggest that the mummies buried in Bab el-Gasus belonged to individuals that lived in different moments in time. However, it is perhaps more accurate to admit that these mummies were 'restored' under the authority of different high priests. This means that these mummies remained in storage for a relatively large period of time, pretty much as the royal mummies did. In fact, material evidence was found corroborating this view. In the mummy of a young woman (A.24), Daressy reports that insects were found within it suggesting that it remained 'in storage' during an undetermined length of time before its definitive wrapping.⁵²

⁴⁶ REEVES and WILKINSON 1996, 206.

⁴⁷ One of the burial sets, A.83, contained two mummies, probably a mother and a child.

⁴⁸ DARESSY 1907, 22-38.

⁴⁹ DARESSY 1902, 152-154; DARESSY 1902b, 155-157; DARESSY 1903, 150-155; ELLIOT-SMITH 1903, 156-160; ELLIOT-SMITH 1906, 155-182.

⁵⁰ DARESSY, 1907; ASTON 2009.

⁵¹ SOUSA 2011, 85.

⁵² DARESSY 1907, 23.

An identical scenario is found in coffin decoration. An undisturbed archaeological site such as the Tomb of the Priests should reveal a sample of objects dating from the same period, and even more so since this burial ground was active for a relatively short period of time. Given the late dating of the Tomb of the Priests, we would expect to find coffins displaying the same layout.⁵³

However, this is not by all means what we find in the corpus of coffins of this tomb. The stylistic analysis of the burial assemblages so far studied makes clear that there is no uniformity in terms of style or layout.⁵⁴ In fact, the tomb revealed objects dating back from the late Ramesside Period⁵⁵ to the late 21st Dynasty.⁵⁶ Even in the same coffin set objects with different dating can be easily found, suggesting that they were assembled opportunistically, as if sorted out from the objects available at a given storeroom.⁵⁷

How should we interpret and understand these clues?

We know that illicit usurpation of funerary goods occurred during the mid-21st Dynasty. A mummy-cover in the British Museum testifies to the illicit appropriation of funerary artefacts, with an inscription recording the restoration of the lid to its rightful owner after necropolis officials had removed it from the tomb and reinscribed it for another individual.⁵⁸ The situation must have grown into such an extent that perhaps during the pontificate of Menkheperre, one decided to open the small caches at Deir el-Bahari and rescue their funerary goods and mummies in order to put them in a safe location. A few of these caches (TT 59, TT 358) managed to escape this ‘rescue’ operation and were found intact by Winlock.

Following the patterns detected with the royal mummies, it is possible that the materials removed from the Theban caches had been dealt with in special workshops. For the moment it is unclear where these workshops were located, but it is quite possible that they were based within the walls of Djamet. In fact, we know that some of the royal

⁵³ On the evolving nature of coffin decoration in the 21st Dynasty, see SOUSA 2018; SOUSA 2018c.

⁵⁴ SOUSA 2017a; SOUSA 2018a; SOUSA 2018c.

⁵⁵ The coffins produced during the first half of the 21st Dynasty are more naturalistic in style. In such objects, the artist pays great attention to the depiction of the anatomical details and the figures are depicted in relatively spontaneous compositions. The garments are white and liminal elements are not used. Short inscriptions are used instead, filling in the upper areas of the vignettes or the empty space between the figures. See SOUSA 2018c, 175.

⁵⁶ Coffin A.56, outer coffin from A.60 and inner coffin from A.15. The coffins produced during the late 21st Dynasty show a consistent sample of features. The style tends to be sketchy, if not cursive, and figures are rendered with highly standardized features as if depicting hieroglyphs, rather than individuals. Another common feature is the dark coloration of the garments and the inclusion of an increasing number of liminal elements between the figures. The depiction of the deceased is often impersonal and a kingly figure is depicted instead.

⁵⁷ A.60, A.136. DARESSY 1907.

⁵⁸ TAYLOR 2001a, 181.

mummies had been transferred to Medinet Habu. A docket found on the wrappings of Ramesses IX, notes that his body was rewrapped at the administrative headquarters of the Theban necropolis, in Djamet.⁵⁹ It is therefore possible that the mummies of the priests had also been ‘rescued’ and transferred to a safer deposit.

Such a rescue operation demanded a massive storage of goods. For the sake of efficacy, coffins and mummies were probably separated and stored in different magazines. Coffin sets of better quality seem to have been stored more carefully, normally with the mummy-covers kept inside the coffin.⁶⁰

Given this scenario, it is quite natural that during this period, burials ceased to be carried out at all. Thus, newly prepared mummies probably joined the same magazines where the rescued mummies from the first half of the Dynasty were stored. During this length of time, both older and new mummies were ‘restored’ by adding wrappings or inscribed dockets, after the usual practice detected in royal mummies. Daressy reports the finding of papyri between the wrappings of the mummies. It is unclear if the ‘rescued’ mummies already presented these materials or if only the ‘new’ mummies were prepared with them. We know that at least 46 mummies contained a papyrus scroll.⁶¹ These papyri were usually placed between the legs of the mummy and sometimes on the chest,⁶² around the abdomen,⁶³ or legs.⁶⁴

4. REDEFINING THE OWNERSHIP OF FUNERARY GOODS

One of the most intriguing aspects of the coffins uncovered in Bab el-Gasus is the anonymous character of a large part of them, even in the most splendid ones. The outer coffin from A.15 is particularly revealing.⁶⁵ Although this is visibly a high quality item, the object remained anonymous despite the spaces left blank to write down the name of the deceased in the inscriptions of the lid and the case. The name of its ultimate owner, the Chantress of Amun Djedmutiusankh, was found by Georges Daressy on the Osirian shroud only.

Occurrences like these abound and make clear that even superb coffins were produced without the previous commission of a specific individual. Obviously not all the anonymous coffins reveal high standards of craftsmanship and indeed it is easy to find poor levels of quality in anonymous artefacts.

⁵⁹ REEVES and WILKINSON 1996, 206.

⁶⁰ SOUSA 2018a, 537-538.

⁶¹ DARESSY 1907.

⁶² A.81, A.98, A.127. DARESSY 1907.

⁶³ A.113, A.127, A.150. DARESSY 1907

⁶⁴ A.152. DARESSY 1907

⁶⁵ SOUSA 2018a.

The anonymous character of these objects suggests that their assignment to a particular individual did not result from an individual acquisition – in that case, we should expect that at least the name of the deceased would be written on it. It is therefore likely that anonymous coffins were commissioned by a group, who would then redistribute them to its own members. Since rarely any mention is made to the family of the deceased, such a group should be none other than the clergy of the Temple of Amun itself, who ordered the craftsmanship of objects displaying a distinct degree of quality, perhaps with the purpose of redistributing them to its members according to their rank.

This idea clearly challenges our vision regarding the ownership of funerary artefacts in ancient Egypt. In fact, during the New Kingdom, private coffins are produced under commission and in most of the cases reflect the social status of the owners.⁶⁶ This pattern seems to have been kept during the first half of the 21st Dynasty, as most of the coffins from this period show that they were specifically crafted to be used by a certain individual.⁶⁷

However, by the mid-21st Dynasty, possibly after the reopening of the Theban caches, this pattern changed drastically. In Bab el-Gasus the usurped coffins preserve the name of the previous owners, perhaps aiming at enhancing the association of the deceased with a (prestigious?) ancestor. Other coffins reveal in their inscriptions a space left empty so that the name of the future owner could have been inscribed later on, while others don't reveal any interest in mentioning the deceased at all.

It is thus clear that during the second half of the 21st Dynasty, most of the coffins were crafted and/or recycled for the corporation of Amun and not under commission for an individual or a family. Exceptions to this rule are found amongst the members of the highest elite but for most of the burials, coffin decoration shows the deceased merely as an anonymous member of the priesthood of Amun, as if describing his social role rather than his individuality.

Evidence of this is abundantly found in coffin decoration, but the most interesting examples are found in the reuse of male coffins by women. When a coffin originally crafted for a man was prepared to be reused by a woman, usurpation included more than just changing the name of the deceased and normally involved surgical interventions aiming at reshaping the coffin according to the gender of the new 'owner'. Despite the obvious importance of this process, it is interesting to see that amongst the coffins found in Bab el-Gasus this process was often left incomplete, as if

⁶⁶ This is seen in the use of precious materials and in the quality of craftsmanship, rather than in the decoration itself.

⁶⁷ See, for example, the coffin set of Tabasety. SOUSA and NØRSKOV (forthcoming). In the 21st Dynasty social status is reflected in the elaboration of iconography, see COONEY 2014.

male features added ‘value’ to the burial equipment, a practice that might have been first put forward by powerful women such as the Divine Adoratrice Maatkare, who included in her burial equipment typically male features, such as fists and terminals decorating her wig, while excluded typically female features, such as breasts.⁶⁸ Reversely, recycling female coffins for male users is a rare phenomenon or, perhaps better said, it is more difficult to detect, as the recycling process was normally completed.⁶⁹

These procedures had been frequently seen as resulting from a careless and hasty recycling process. However, the patterns of occurrence in the Tomb of the Priests are so consistent that we should at least put forward the hypothesis that they actually had a sociological meaning.

The fact is that, even when any trace of recycling is detected, women are featured in the ‘yellow’ corpus in the most revolutionary way, as for the first time they are depicted on their own, without any reference to their husbands, sons or ancestors. This is clearly a break with the pictorial tradition of Theban tomb decoration. During the New Kingdom, women are featured escorting their husbands, playing a secondary role, while men perform rituals.

This classical definition of gender roles is clearly challenged in the ‘yellow’ corpus. At first this change is subtly presented, with women keeping a secondary role, escorting a male god (normally Thoth) and playing the sistrum (Fig. 3).⁷⁰ However, this discretion would soon give place to an open depiction of women as agents of the cult, carrying out ritual actions on their own (Fig. 4). We should keep in mind that performing divine rituals is typically a male role and these images painted on coffins featured nothing less than empowered women ‘showing off’ virile roles.⁷¹ This trend eventually led to striking scenes, featuring the female deceased mourned by her own ‘widow’.⁷²

This ‘virile’ status seems to have been highly appreciated by powerful women, such as Maatkare Mutemhat, the Divine Adoratrice of Amun.⁷³ It is interesting to point out that showing off male attributes by women was not something entirely new in

⁶⁸ DARESSY 1909, Pl. 39.

⁶⁹ See JAMEN in this volume (Fig. 13 – Outer lid of A.135).

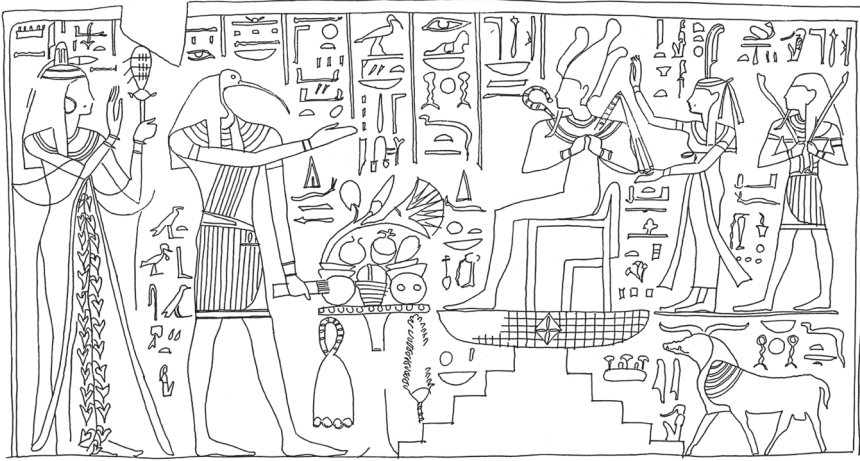
⁷⁰ See coffin set of Tabasety in SOUSA and NØRSKOV (forthcoming).

⁷¹ There were, however, illustrious antecedents of this practice, as royal woman from the New Kingdom, such as the Nefertari, the royal wife of Ramesses II, featured in her tomb performing rituals before the gods, which was always a male prerogative. She goes even further, receiving cult from her first born son.

⁷² This is explained because the repertoire of scenes was designed after the Osirian interpretation of the funerary ritual and thus required from the deceased the acquisition of a male identity and status.

⁷³ The 21st Dynasty witnessed to the prominence of women in the temple cult, with several important religious offices fulfilled by the wives and daughters of the high priests at Thebes. See TAYLOR 2000, 360. See also NAGUIB 1990.

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Figure 3-4 : Above – Coffin of Tabasety (Inv. no. 8527). Antikmuseet in Aarhus. Below – Inner coffin of Henuttaui (A.136. Inv. no. SGL – AC-517) Geographical Society of Lisbon (drawings by the Author).

Thebes. In fact, the homonym Queen Hatshepsut Maatkare, absorbed male features to empower herself in her role as Pharaoh. Thus she might have played a role in the adoption of male attributes by the Divine Adoratrice Maatkare. This practice may have been emulated by lower ranked women simply by using incompletely recycled objects. This subtle ‘virilization’ of women seen in coffin decoration probably strengthened the definition of their status, as priestesses serving in the Theban temples.

The previous remarks have shown that a personal attachment between an individual and the body container is not detected in most of the burial sets found in Bab el-Gasus. Moreover, the deceased becomes depicted in a rather impersonal manner. However, it is interesting to find amongst the female burials a careful definition of women as empowered members of the Theban priestly community.

Thus coffin decoration revolves around the definition of the collective identity of the priests and priestesses of Amun and not the individuals themselves. This explains why coffin decoration did not turn itself into a meaningless process and kept evolving continuously until the end of this period. Certainly the individuals themselves did not play any role in the decoration of coffins, but exactly because of that, each one of the priests could relate to the scenes featured on the coffins as if they were sacred chambers where he/she was depicted performing rituals and showing the required esoteric knowledge of his/her rank.⁷⁴

Thus, coffins were used by the priesthood of Amun as positive statements of discrimination of this social group, as a whole. It is reasonable to accept that the Temple of Amun controlled the workshops and managed the funerary artefacts as a 'communal' property aiming at redistributing them to their members, probably according to their rank.

5. THE 'RESTORATION' OF THE THEBAN NECROPOLIS: THIRD STAGE

The construction of new tombs, such as the Tomb of the Priests, reveals a turning moment in the pattern of occupation of the Theban necropolis. With this tomb a totally different phenomenon emerges in the Theban necropolis: the excavation of a new funerary site designed from the start to be used as collective burial ground. The decision of building such tombs was probably taken after using TT 320 to hold the interments of the High Priest Pinedjem II and his immediate family.⁷⁵

The decision to build a collective burial ground presupposes a new awareness of the Theban priesthood as a coherent social group, with a strong sense of collective identity. Such awareness is probably related to other important corporative achievements, such as the construction of communal houses for the priests of Amun in the sacred precinct of Karnak itself. The houses of this priests' quarter were built in mudbrick on the East bank of the sacred lake. They vary in size (58 m² for the smallest, 176 m² for the biggest), and are well individualized, showing typical features known from terraced houses.⁷⁶ And yet the buildings are contiguous, suggesting that strong bonds were maintained between these individuals by sharing the same space, and the same way

⁷⁴ In the outer cases from A.60 and A.56, the iconographic program is clearly borrowed from temple decoration in order to suggest the identification of the coffin with a temple. Identical process is used in the coffin 25021, kept in the Vatican Museums. See GASSE 1996, pl. XXVIII. Not hazardously, the inspiration in the Books of the Amduat is behind many of the iconographic elaborations involved in coffin decoration. See DUARTE 2014, 89. See also LIPTAY 2014, 75-76.

⁷⁵ GRAEFE 2003. Only during the 22nd Dynasty, during the reign of Shoshenq I, 40 royal burials from the New Kingdom were added. NIWIŃSKI 1984a, 80. See also DODSON and IKRAM 2008, 273.

⁷⁶ MILLET and MASSON 2011, 7.

of life. It is therefore interesting to see that a corporative identity of the priests of Amun was emerging, and not only at the funerary level. Therefore, a collective burial ground such as Bab el-Gasus, may not result from defensive purposes alone, but from a new awareness of this social group, with an identity of its own.

The new collective tombs would thus provide a transversal sample of this corporation. Probably during the pontificate of the High Priest Psusennes,⁷⁷ one decided to fill in the Tomb of the Priests of Amun. At this stage, the individuals responsible for the management of this burial ground had to decide who would be buried in the tomb. The burials found in the funerary chambers are clear in showing that the most important individuals belong to the family of the High Priest Pinedjem II, namely his brothers Tjanefer and Hori, his niece and even one of his daughters, Maatkare. Besides this close entourage of the High Priest, who else would be buried in the tomb?

As we have seen, the composition of the burials is heterogeneous in every aspect. Getting an identical composition of men and women seems to have been a criterion behind the decision making of the managers of the tomb. The number of young adults seems to be high, but elderly people were included too, as well as children. One woman was buried together with a child, “which is a very rare circumstance” in an Egyptian burial (thinking of Carter/Carnarvon excavations at DeB).⁷⁸ Mummies previously rescued from older caches may have been included too.

Once the mummies were selected, it was then necessary to refurbish them with new funerary equipment. The examination of the burial assemblages from Bab el-Gasus reveals different ways to form a coffin set. In general, the inner coffin and the mummy-cover were taken from an original funerary ensemble.⁷⁹ However, other assemblages are formed using objects without any connection between them, as if taken hazardingly out of the available resources in a given storeroom. This explains the eclectic combination of cases, lids, and mummy-covers, as we often detect in the burial assemblages found in the tomb (A.60,⁸⁰ A.136⁸¹).

The use of outer coffins seems to have increased by the late 21st Dynasty and that might explain the combination of older objects with later outer coffins (such as we observe in A.15 and A.60).⁸² When a burial assemblage was formed, the available objects in the storerooms were thus combined according to practical reasons. From this view results that in most of the internments, the association of a particular mummy with a certain coffin set occurred long after the death of the individual.

⁷⁷ NIWIŃSKI 1988, 118.

⁷⁸ A.83.

⁷⁹ See coffin set of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110) in SOUSA 2017a. SOUSA 2018a.

⁸⁰ SOUSA 2018a.

⁸¹ SOUSA 2017a.

⁸² SOUSA 2018a.

The same pattern of reuse is detected in other funerary artefacts such as the cloths that wrapped the mummies. Trying to identify the mummy using the information found in these sources can be misleading, as on some mummies were found cloths inscribed with different names, suggesting that textiles were also recycled from previous burials.⁸³

Moreover, it is not certain that the quality of the funerary equipment can be used to assess the rank of the individuals. Once again our judgement on this subject is severely affected by the present situation of the human remains. However, the few reports left by Daressy on this subject show that a rich coffin set could be associated with a poor mummy,⁸⁴ and sometimes a good mummy could be found within a poor coffin set.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the 154 individuals buried in the tomb probably provided a transverse coup of the Theban elite, revealing something like a 'priestly community' exactly in the way that it could be expected to be found in a corporative burial ground.

Once in the tomb, the coffin sets were arranged against the walls, usually in pairs, with one coffin set on top of the other. Between the coffin sets, if not above them, were positioned wooden Osiris statues equipped with papyri. Vessels, stelae, *ushebti*-boxes, baskets, and canopic jars were found on the floor. Daressy reports that *ushebti*-boxes were located sometimes far from the respective coffin set,⁸⁶ suggesting that coffins and *ushebti*-boxes were not brought together to the tomb, but positioned inside the tomb on separate events.

The arrangement of the burials in the tomb must have required a great deal of time. Given the 'pit' created when the Transverse Gallery was carved, the burial sets positioned in the funerary chambers had to be moved up using ladders and ropes. Moving in this area of the tomb was not exempt from dangers, as on approaching the funerary chambers, the stairway abruptly narrowed to half its width, creating a shaft on the west-hand side. For these reasons, the deposition of burials in the funerary chambers and in the Transverse Gallery must have progressed slowly.

Given that accessibility inside the tomb had to be granted, it is logical that the first internments to be positioned in the tomb would have been those located in the burial chambers. It is here where the most important burials were found. The prominence of the titles held by Tjanefer A certainly contributed to acknowledge this burial as the most important of the tomb. However, when we look at the archaeological evidence a different picture emerges. The burials of Tjanefer A and his immediate family were found piled up in the Secondary Chamber. In the Main Chamber the concentration of burials is lower. In this chamber, the statues of the divine mourners, Nephthys and Isis were found,

⁸³ See burial assemblage A.20, in SOUSA 2018a.

⁸⁴ See A.15 in SOUSA 2018a, 532.

⁸⁵ See A.20 in SOUSA 2018a, 532-533.

⁸⁶ Sometimes several types of *ushebti*s were found in the same container, but in other cases it was not possible to match the name on the objects to their original burial assemblage. See DARESSY 1907, 12. Some collections of *ushebti* were found in baskets, while others had simply been left on the floor.

which suggests that the main burial was also to be found here, with these statues standing at its head and feet, as they are often depicted in the vignettes of Chapter 151 of the Book of the Dead.⁸⁷

If that was the case, then the burial of Hori (A.143) is the most likely to perform this role, as in fact it stands out as the most magnificent found in the tomb (Fig. 5). Moreover, the exceptional features of this coffin set are so remarkable, that it makes this group one of the most splendid examples from the “yellow” corpus as a whole. One of the most intriguing features found in this burial assemblage is the depiction of the royal scepters, an attribute missing in all of the coffins from the ‘yellow’ corpus. We should note here that not even the coffin set of Pinedjem I displayed these attributes.⁸⁸ Another striking feature is the composition of the coffin set, which presents three wooden coffins, an exceptional circumstance in the ‘yellow’ corpus, where the innermost coffin replaces the mummy-cover. To our knowledge this is unique in the ‘yellow’ corpus and requires a deeper inquiry, which is beyond the scope of the current paper. In any case, during the 21st Dynasty, the absence of the mummy-cover in high elite coffin sets is only to be reported amongst the royal burials in Tanis. Thus, in several aspects, the burial of Hori notoriously presents a royal ‘aura’ and this remains a riddle, given the relatively modest titles presented in his equipment.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the use of three anthropoid coffins is clearly borrowed from the imaginary of the royal nested assemblages from the New Kingdom. Despite this retrograde look, the layout of the coffin set of Hori stands out as one of the most elaborated, not only making use of a sophisticated program with esoteric allusions to the imagery of the Books of the Amduat, as it integrates the latest trends of coffin decoration. In many ways, the design of this coffin set can be considered the founding stone for the development of the new layout of coffin decoration during the 22nd Dynasty.⁹⁰

Last but not least, the gilded outer coffin of Hori was left undisturbed, while the inner coffins were plundered and their faces and hands were ripped off to remove the gilded foil, a practice also attested in the Royal Cache. However, it is important to mention that the outer coffin of Hori was the only gilded coffin found intact in the Tomb of the Priests, which somehow suggests the importance of his status.

⁸⁷ See in this volume Éva Liptay. It is to be noted that these goddesses do not perform the role of guardian deities and thus are unlikely to have been positioned flanking the entrance to the Secondary Burial Chamber.

⁸⁸ His fists grasp *tjet* and *djed*-signs.

⁸⁹ By comparison, the burial equipment of Tjanefer A presents what can be considered an attempt to produce an ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘archaizing’ layout. Particularly telling in this respect is the mummy-cover displaying a large falcon deity embracing the lower section with its wings (NIWIŃSKI 1988, pl. VIII), a motif that is rooted in the *rishi* coffins.

⁹⁰ SOUSA 2018, nos. 22-23. Note also that the use of the third coffin instead of the mummy-cover is already paving the way for the subsequent use of cartonnage cases during the 22nd Dynasty.



Figure 5 : Outer coffin of Hori (A.143). Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29619) (photo by the Author).

The examination of the mummy of Hori revealed that it was plundered in antiquity. For unknown reasons, its examination by Daressy was not completed. When listing the results of the examination of the mummy of Hori (A.143), Daressy states that “*le démaillotement n’a pas été terminé*”, without referring the reasons for such an unexpected and awkward occurrence.⁹¹ Knowing how methodical Daressy used to be, this circumstance is deeply disturbing. Another intriguing fact regarding this coffin set is that it was never given General Catalogue Numbers, which perhaps prepared its oblivion on behalf of someone’s collection.⁹² These intriguing facts perhaps explain why this exceptional coffin set was never fully acknowledged with the boldness it deserves.

⁹¹ DARESSY 1907, 36-37.

⁹² LIPINSKA 1993-1994, 48-60. A similar situation occurred with two other coffin sets: those of Gatseshen, and of an anonymous priestess, the daughter of a high-priest. In the latter case, only the outer lid has been preserved, while the outer coffer and the inner coffer and cover are missing. See also the paper by Niviński in this volume.

6. COFFIN DECORATION AS A 'RESTORATION' STRATEGY

The 'yellow' type preserves, almost in a phylogenetic way, a selected sample of features handed down from the *rishi*, the 'white', the 'black' type and the 'festive dress' type. Despite this phylogenetic continuity, one should not forget that the 'yellow' type represents, in many ways, a deep break from tradition. From the iconographic point of view, the main distinction of the 'yellow' type consists in the depiction of the living image of the deceased in the decoration scheme of the coffins.⁹³ This triggered the use in coffin decoration of the huge resources available in tomb and temple decoration.

Another important distinction is the role that evolution played in the 'yellow' type. While the former models had a very stable scheme of decoration, the quintessence character of the 'yellow' type lies on the openness and dynamic nature of its scheme. We may distinguish three main moments, or 'stages', in the evolution of the 'yellow' type⁹⁴.

BASIC SCHEME (TYPE I). This stage is visible from the late Ramesside Period to the first half of the 21st Dynasty (Fig. 6). The basic scheme preserves a naturalistic style, with large figures clad in white folded garments. The composition is light with the space between the figures left empty or inscribed with short label-inscriptions. The coffins are normally crafted under commission and a great attention is given to the inscription of the name and titles of the deceased, not only in the main inscriptions but also in the form of small captions that accompany the vignettes.⁹⁵ From the symbolic standpoint, the lid features a heavenly gate, where the deceased, featured in festive garment, is figured as a performer of rites. This is the layout associated with the creation of small caches in the area of Deir el-Bahari (TT 59 and TT 358).

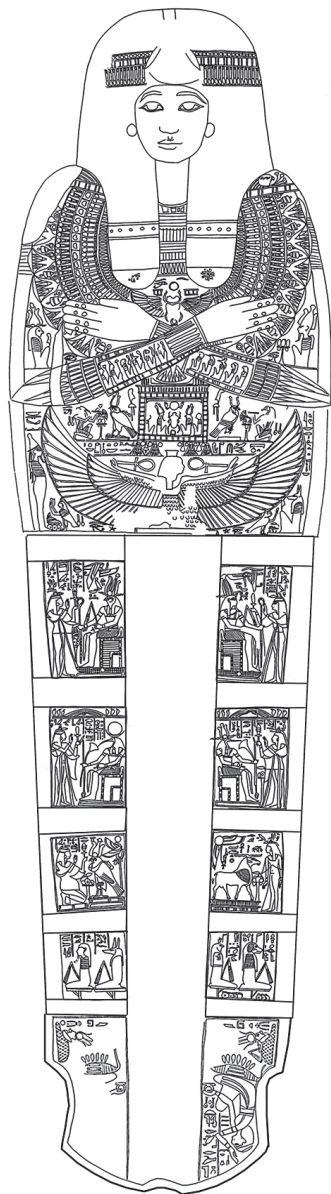
CLASSICAL SCHEME (TYPE II). Is typically found in coffins dating from the mid-21st Dynasty (Fig. 7). The style is increasingly schematic and the main figures are smaller. The composition is heavy with the space between the main figures filled in with liminal elements. Gradually, the depiction of the deceased also changes: instead of the white garments, he/she wears dark and tight clothes. The variety of subjects is heavily reduced on the lid, which is mainly concerned with Osirian scenes, while the scenes featured on the case increase in complexity and diversity. The general layout of the lid now suggests the plan of a burial chamber. At the same time, the deceased becomes depicted as a lethargic Osirian deity. This is the layout associated with the period that witnessed the recovery of the previous burials and it is possible that the coffin now recreated the (inexistent) tomb, as they could have been stored in the premises of the temple's precinct, perhaps in the form of funerary storerooms.

⁹³ SOUSA 2018c, 39-42.

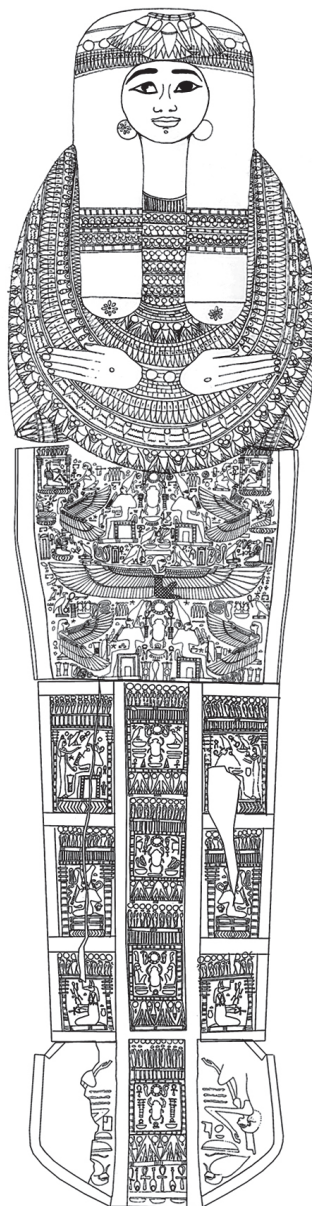
⁹⁴ SOUSA 2018c.

⁹⁵ SOUSA and NØRSKOV (forthcoming).

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Figures 6-7 : Left – Basic scheme. - Coffin of Tabasety, Antikmuseet in Aarhus, Inv. no. 8527.
 Right - Classical scheme. - Coffin of Djedmutiuesankh, Geographical Society of Lisbon, Inv. no. SGL – AC-517 (drawings by the Author).

COMPLEX SCHEME (TYPE III). Is detected in coffins dating from the late 21st Dynasty (Fig. 8). The general layout of the lid evolved in such a way that an equivalence seems to be established with temple decoration. Parallels with sacred ceilings or walls are easy to detect. In this process, the role performed by the liminal elements is further increased and they not only outnumber the main figures as their size equals them. In the latest forms of the ‘yellow’ type, the liminal elements eventually became the ruling elements of the compositions. The ‘liminization’ of coffin decoration⁹⁶, previously described as *horror vacui*⁹⁷, is the expression of a ‘desire for fullness’, and literally fills in the coffin with the sacred substance of the Duat, enhancing its holiness. This desire for holiness and ‘fullness’ came together with the increasing anonymous character of the coffins, which were no longer crafted under commission for a particular individual, but rather for the members of the priesthood of Amun, which now formed a coherent social group with an identity of its own. This is the layout produced during the period that witnessed the construction of the collective tombs and later caches (TT 60). At this stage the coffin seems to be designed as to provide a sacred ‘crypt’ of the Duat where the deceased is depicted as a ‘deity among deities’.

During the 21st Dynasty, coffin decoration achieved outstanding levels of complexity and elaboration. The craftsmanship of these objects became a cutting-edge industry which was only paralleled by tomb decoration during the 18th and 19th Dynasties. In fact, it is widely accepted that the integration of pictorial subjects used in tomb decoration in coffin decoration originated the architectonisation of anthropoid coffins.⁹⁸ In terms of funerary pragmatics, the transfer of pictorial schemes from tomb decoration to coffin decoration had important consequences for the latter since it also involved a transfer of skills from the construction site to the workshops. To our understanding, the prevalent role that innovation played in coffin decoration during the 21st Dynasty reflects the influence of the tradition of the Ramesside tomb builders, an input that became increasingly important with the growing inability of the Theban elite to commission the construction of new tombs. At this point, it is important to bring to our discussion the role that innovation played in the tradition of Theban tomb decoration during the New Kingdom. The evolution of the decorative programmes of these monuments reveals that innovative arrangements were favoured as a way to highlight the status of the tomb owners.⁹⁹ It is possible that by excelling others in the search for new decorative schemes – which in itself required knowledge of the funerary tradition – the tomb owner

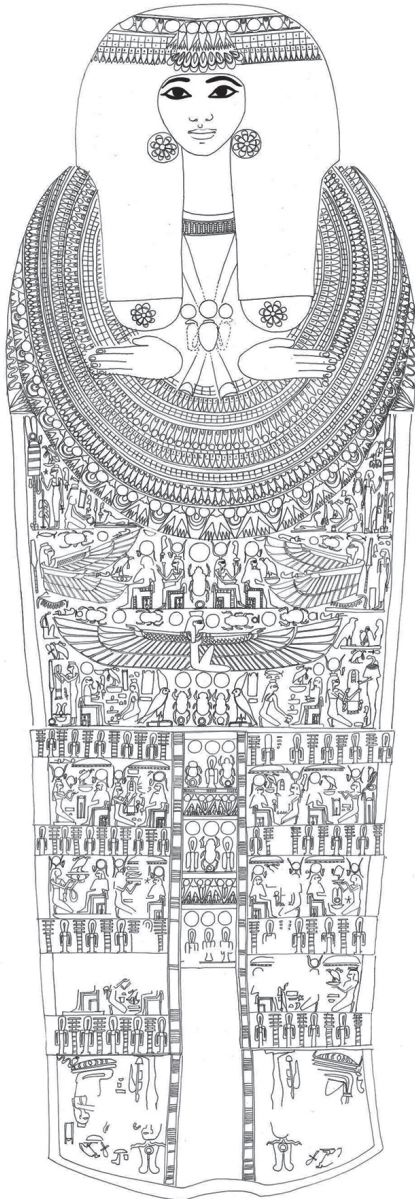
⁹⁶ SOUSA 2018c, 203.

⁹⁷ NIWIŃSKI 1988, 99.

⁹⁸ VAN WALSEM 1997, 358-359.

⁹⁹ ASSMANN 2003, 292-305.

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9.

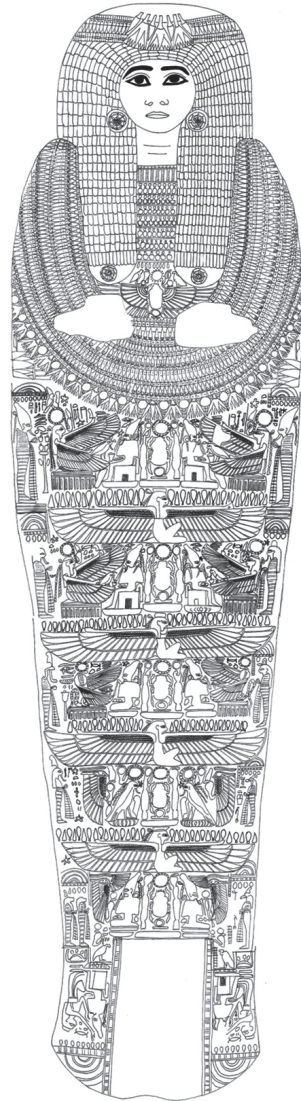


Figure 8-9 : Complex scheme. Left – Outer coffin of Butherkhonsu, Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, ÄS 6271. Right – Inner coffin of Djedmutiuesankh, Egyptian Museum of Florence, Inv. no. 8524 (drawings by the Author).

added status to his tomb as his own memorial.¹⁰⁰ As Cooney pointed out, the elite burials of the 18th Dynasty do not show any interest in showing innovative designs in terms of coffin decoration, as these concerns were focused on the decoration of the ‘public’ areas of the tomb, i.e., the funerary chapel (COONEY 2014).

After the Amarna Period, coffin decoration absorbed the distinctive ethics that shaped tomb decoration. However, during the 21st Dynasty, innovation in coffin decoration did not express individualistic values but rather enhanced the status of a social class as a whole. Hence, there is an important distinction between these two phenomena. Unlike tomb decoration which during the New Kingdom served as a memorial for the individual, during the 21st Dynasty, coffin decoration provided a memorial set for a social group within the Theban theocratic state. Until the 19th Dynasty, ‘the tomb was the most conspicuous signifier of rank’.¹⁰¹ From the 20th Dynasty onwards, the coffin assumed much of the traditional symbolic role of the tomb, but it definitely ceased to celebrate the individual, privileging the definition of the dominant social group instead.¹⁰²

The evolution towards complexity detected in coffin decoration parallels the phenomenon of reuse. At least 30 coffin sets show clear signs of usurpation, even amongst the most important burials, such as those from Maatkare (A.132), and Ankhefenmut (A.140), both daughter and son of Menkheperre. The practice of preserving, at least partially, the identity of the former owner of the coffin is noteworthy. This is the case of the coffin set of Djedmutiuesankh (A.110), which was first prepared for Shedsutauepet, who judging by the decoration of her coffin set lived in the mid-21st Dynasty.¹⁰³ In this case, the name of the previous owner was maintained in some of the inscriptions, as if this reference on itself added value to the object.

Sometimes the coffin set preserves the name and titles of the first user but the identity of the last owner is completely neglected. Such is the case of the coffin set of Khonsumes (A.22), crafted during the first half of the 21st Dynasty and later hastily recycled to be used by an anonymous woman.¹⁰⁴ This situation is by all means exceptional, particularly amongst women.

As Cooney pointed out, these are just the more visible manifestations of reuse and certainly fully redecorated objects certainly hidden an older dating.¹⁰⁵ The evolving

¹⁰⁰ These innovations are first detected through the use of the traditional motifs in new or unexpected settings, which soon involved the decoration of the funerary chamber itself. This process gave rise to an extraordinary development of new decorative schemes which – beginning with the decoration of the funerary chamber – started to use the vignettes of the Book of the Dead in the decoration of the tombs, including the cultic areas of the superstructure. This was the scheme in use during the 19th Dynasty.

¹⁰¹ TAYLOR 2018, 349.

¹⁰² SOUSA 2019, 158-162.

¹⁰³ SOUSA 2017a.

¹⁰⁴ SOUSA 2018a.

¹⁰⁵ COONEY in this volume.

nature of the ‘yellow’ type and its exceptional growth in complexity thus seems deeply related to the ‘restoration’ carried out in the Theban necropolis under the Theocratic rule of the High Priests of Amun. The outstanding levels of complexity achieved in the ‘yellow’ corpus were thus thoughtfully created as an identitarian statement of the Theban priests and priestesses, as a coherent social group. This quest for complexity and sacredness in coffin decoration took place precisely when the patterns established during the first stage of renovation of the Theban necropolis were abolished, the caches were emptied and the coffins and their mummies were rescued and kept in safe deposits. Given this scenario, funerary workshops carried out a heavy recycling of older coffins, which might have been seen as part of the new ‘restoration’ program implemented during the mid-21st Dynasty onwards. More than just taking over the coffins produced for their ancestors, the priesthood of Amun ‘restored’ them by adding sacredness and elaborating on the identity and status of the priests of Amun. These representations surely contributed to assure social control and maintained internal cohesion in the Theban priestly elite. Such cohesion eventually materialized in the creation of corporative burial grounds, such as we find in Bab el-Gasus.

7. CONCLUSION

The archaeological evidence found in the Tomb of the Priests suggests that the final composition of the find resulted from at least three main stages of the occupation of the Theban necropolis during the 21st Dynasty.

From the Renaissance Era until the pontificate of Pinedjem I the tombs of the Theban necropolis dating from the New Kingdom were emptied and stripped of their goods.¹⁰⁶ Reused tombs in the area of Deir el-Bahari hold small caches. The funerary equipment found in these burials is highly individualized, suggesting that it was normally crafted under commission.

In the mid-21st Dynasty, perhaps during the pontificate of Menkheperre, the Theban necropolis was again under pressure, with usurpations and tomb robberies. Decision was made to reopen the tombs and rescue their internments. Mummies and funerary goods were then stored in the magazines of the former royal funerary temples, such as Medinet Habu. From this moment onwards, the craftsmanship of new coffins, the recycling of reused coffins and the storage of reused objects began to be managed by the priesthood of Amun.

By the time of Pinedjem II a different pattern emerged with collective tombs being built. The High Priest was buried with his closer family members, and with his immediate

¹⁰⁶ REEVES and WILKINSON 1996, 207.

ancestors, the High Priests of Amun, and the Divine Adoratrices. Other burial grounds of the necropolis reveal that it fully became a corporative property, as Bab el-Gasus superbly shows. This period witnessed massive reburials. Mummies were refurbished with funerary goods, most of them in a very impersonal way, redistributed by the Temple of Amun. The hastiness that surrounded the closure of the Tomb of the Priests of Amun led to a great number of interments that were left unburied. Those, were then buried in smaller caches, reusing older tombs. The coffins found in the Tomb of Three Princesses (TT 60), all of them of latter date, were probably buried at this time. Some of these caches were no longer confined in the area of Deir el-Bahari and could be found in reused tombs from Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, and Dra Abu el-Naga.¹⁰⁷ Eventually, during the 22nd Dynasty, the Ramesseum became the main burial place for the priesthood of Thebes.¹⁰⁸

The history of the Theban necropolis during the 21st Dynasty is deeply shaped by the need to master and control social instability. Although still striving with these problems, the Tomb of the Priests of Amun and the smaller caches formed by the end of this period show a turning moment, when this goal seems to have been accomplished, at least partially.

All in all, the information collected thus far clearly shows that by the late 21st Dynasty, funerary artifacts were managed as corporative goods, being produced, recycled and redistributed centrally by the Temple of Amun. It is important to point out that the collective nature of the Tomb of the Priests is somehow faded away when assimilation to the concept of 'cache' is attempted which is, in itself, misleading when associated with this particular tomb. According to Elias, a coffin cache is defined as "a cluster of roughly contemporaneous coffins which is associated with a solitary and confined burial zone (a single chamber or hall). Implicit in connection with the term 'cache tomb' is the notion that interments are added to the burial zone over an extended period, the tomb being entered on a repeated basis until perceived as 'filled'".¹⁰⁹ Cache tombs usually involve the reuse of former private, individual tombs to accommodate a variable number of burials. This means that, in order to be used as a 'cache', the tomb is divested of its original purpose and subsequently occupied by intrusive burials. Although this concept can be useful to describe the pattern of occupation of TT 320, where in fact both the royal mummies from the New Kingdom and the interments of the High Priest Pinedjem II and his family, were intrusively buried in an older tomb, it hardly describes the phenomenon occurred in the Tomb of the Priests of Amun. With exception of the original burial chamber excavated during the New Kingdom, Bab el-Gasus was entirely carved in the late 21st Dynasty. Moreover, the original burial chamber did not play any relevant role in Bab el-Gasus, as it was left without any interments. Clearly,

¹⁰⁷ See new discoveries at the reused Tomb of Userhat, housing a heterogeneous collection of coffins.

the users of Bab el-Gasus, did not regard the original burial chamber as part of the priests' burial ground and did not reveal any interest in using it. The expression 'collective tomb' thus seems more suitable to describe Bab el-Gasus, given the specific collective purpose it had from the outset.

This distinction is important, as it brings important consequences from the sociological point of view. Collective tombs are rare in Egyptian archaeology and in Thebes the historical antecedent of this type of funerary site is to be found in the Tomb of the Sons of Ramses II (KV 5),¹¹⁰ which literally held the sons of the Pharaoh. It is therefore interesting to relate the creation of this new type of burial ground during the theocratic State of Amun with a new ideological definition of the status and identity of the priests of Amun. As a collective tomb, Bab el-Gasus reveals a new understanding of this community as a ritual 'brotherhood' of men and women serving under the theocratic rule of Amun, i.e. the 'king of gods'.¹¹¹ This may have implied that a new awareness was rising amongst the priesthood of Amun regarding its identity as a privileged social group.

In fact, the individuals buried in Bab el-Gasus formed something like a rather heterogeneous 'community', and probably gathered people that lived in different moments in time. Assuming that older burials had been simply dismantled so that their funerary equipment could have been used by the newer generations can be misleading. The mummies of the priests have been the objects of a 'restoration' process, similar to the observed in the royal mummies. Having been 'rescued' from previous caches, these mummies were 'restored' and equipped with new or reused equipment. Of course, the tomb also included new interments which had never been buried previously and had been stored in the temple magazines during the second half of the dynasty.

More clues on the growing importance of the representations of the priests and priestesses as a coherent social group can actually be detected in coffin decoration, which conveyed a multi-layered system of signs encoding representations of status, religious beliefs and ritual knowledge fundamental for definition of the collective identity of the priesthood of Amun.¹¹² In fact, the profuse visual imagery featured on 'yellow' coffins does not show any interest on the individuals themselves, but on their characterization as members of the Theban elite.

Fragments show that some of them represented the deceased as a living, pointing out to the early Ramesside Period, while the style of most of them clearly suggests the early 22nd Dynasty, thus shortly after the closing of Bab el-Gasus.

¹⁰⁸ NELSON 2003, 91.

¹⁰⁹ ELIAS 1993, 145.

¹¹⁰ WEEKS 1999, 240-241.

¹¹¹ SOUSA 2014, 107.

¹¹² SOUSA 2014, 107.

The development of complexity detected in coffin decoration greatly reflects the need for self-segregation of the priestly community. Hence, coffins became the privileged media to convey the corporative values of the priesthood of Amun. In times of economic scarcity, funerary goods were an important way to assure abidance and conformity of the Theban elite to the ‘Libyan’ regime implemented by Herihor during the Renaissance Era. Assuring the personal adherence of the Theban elite to ‘Libyan’ authority thus seems to have been a major concern of the high priests of Amun.

Until the end of the 21st Dynasty, funerary goods remained an exclusive property of what may truly be seen as the ‘corporation’ of Amun. As a collective entity, this corporation was managed by the descendants of the ‘Libyan’ generals who could even take ‘oracular’ decisions concerning the transmission of property amongst its members. Concerning funerary goods, specifically, this corporation commissioned the craftsmanship of new coffins and ordered the recycling of ‘rescued’ artifacts, aiming at using them as a tool to assure control of its own members. In times of instability, the absolute control of funerary artifacts, gave to the corporation of Amun a powerful resource to the assure adherence of the Theban elite to its values and rules.

Tomb and coffin decoration became thus designed as a collective property, with the coffin transformed into a sacred place, an ideal ritual setting for the Theban priesthood rather than an object for private use. The extraordinary iconographic development that took place in the decoration of coffins and the paramount role performed by collective tombs during the late 21st Dynasty is the continuing result of the awareness of the Theban priesthood of Amun as a coherent social group, one could almost say, a ritual ‘brotherhood’, bounded by strong feelings of loyalty and serving under the theocratic rule of the ‘Libyan’ high priests of Amun.

With the 22nd Dynasty, new patterns came about in the Theban necropolis. In coffin decoration, two diverging trends formed the stola corpus¹¹³ and the composite burials involving cartonnage cases.¹¹⁴ In both categories, burial assemblages are now visibly crafted under commission and once again we witness the return of the individualistic pattern of use of funerary goods. This shift is consistent with the rise of the new dynasty and the reestablishment of the pharaonic rule in Thebes.¹¹⁵ A stronger royal authority over the south during the reigns of Sheshonq I and his successors seems to have faded away the collective patterns put forward in Thebes during the second half of the 21st Dynasty. The ‘yellow’ corpus then became obsolete.

¹¹³ VAN WALSEM 1997.

¹¹⁴ TAYLOR 2000, 365.

¹¹⁵ TAYLOR 2000, 365.

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