



**PROCEEDINGS OF THE XI
INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
OF EGYPTOLOGISTS**

Florence, Italy 23-30 August 2015

MUSEO EGIZIO FIRENZE

Florence Egyptian Museum

**edited by
Gloria Rosati and Maria Cristina Guidotti**



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**INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
OF EGYPTOLOGISTS XI**

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**MUSEO EGIZIO FIRENZE
FLORENCE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM**



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Proceedings of the XI International Congress of Egyptologists

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Notes on the inscribed Old and Middle Kingdom coffins in the Egyptian Turin Museum

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Abstract

The Turin collection of coffins from the Old and Middle Kingdoms, the subject of a research project by the author, mainly derives from the excavations of Ernesto Schiaparelli (at Asyut, Qaw el-Kebir and Gebelein) at the beginning of the 20th century. The analysis of the materials offers several suggestions for a funerary tradition which covers the period between the end of the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom; at the same time, the textual collection is coherent within these traditions and which go on to be the main features of the funerary culture of the Middle Kingdom. Among others, some of the research topics discussed here include:

- Archaeological contexts: these coffins confirm the prestige of the necropolis investigated by E. Schiaparelli.
- Textual data: because of the origins of the coffins, the Turin collection offers some case-studies of the funerary doctrine between the Old and Middle Kingdoms. The diffusion of the *Coffin Texts*, well known from the textual collection from the coffins of Iqer (Gebelein), is confirmed by other unpublished sources, mainly from Asyut.
- Epigraphical data from the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom scribal traditions.

Keywords

Middle Kingdom; coffin; Turin Museum; Asyut; Qaw el-Kebir; Gebelein; *Coffin Texts*

The author would like to thank the Fondazione Museo Egizio di Torino and the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici del Piemonte e del Museo Antichità Egizie for permission to study the material outlined here.

This paper presents some topics of a project on the Middle Kingdom coffins in the Turin Museum. The research does not include fragments of wooden coffins. In the references to texts and decorations, each object is identified by means of a number with the prefix 'Suppl.' (*Supplemento*, a marker used by Schiaparelli to list the objects), side [H(ead), F(oot), F(ront), B(ack), T(op)], position [O(uter), I(nner)], and the number of the line/column. The funerary literature is quoted according to the traditional system: PT = spell(s) from the *Pyramid Texts*; CT = spell(s) from the *Coffin Texts*.

The collection of coffins in the Turin Museum has a long and complex history, with origins dating to the 19th century. Bernardino Drovetti's antiquities were the primary exhibits in the new Museum, together with the first, small collection kept by the Savoia family.¹ Amongst these acquisitions, the Regio Museo di Torino catalogue, by Fabretti-Rossi-Lanzone, mentions several coffins dated from the New Kingdom to the Late Period, signifying that the older typologies of these objects were absent from the Museum's early collections.² The Turin collection was later enriched by Ernesto Schiaparelli, who undertook a wide programme of research in Egypt; he opened several archaeological fields and also purchased some items. Among the sites investigated by Schiaparelli were several necropoleis that had already contributed to the foundation of several prestigious collections, such as the Cairo Museum. Asyut, Qaw el-Kebir and Gebelein contributed a rich assemblage of material, comprising several Old and, above all, Middle Kingdom coffins. Thanks to this activity, Schiaparelli was able to fill in some periods that were still missing from

the Museum, ensuring Turin had a broader view of Pharaonic civilization.

The archaeological context of these finds still awaits a clear reconstruction: the information given by the notebooks of Schiaparelli does not always offer a clear idea of the actual provenance of many objects. This situation is significant in terms of the necropolis of Qaw el-Kebir, from where a quantity of funerary materials and equipment – for instance, the stone sarcophagus of the prince Ibu, the fragments of the stone sarcophagus of Uahka, the burial chamber of Henib with several fragments of wooden coffins, many fragmentary votive statues, etc. – were collected.³ A similar situation characterizes the archaeological context of the materials from Asyut: the new study by Marcel Zitman on the Asyut necropolis offers several suggestions for the archaeology of the site and the related materials, but probably some new data could be added thanks to a deeper analysis of Schiaparelli's documentation.

The aim of this paper is to present some aspects of the inscribed coffins from the Turin Museum, as specific case studies, which might offer suggestions about a collection of coherent materials. The nature of the written documentation perfectly respects the coeval tradition, and the typologies of the inscriptions on the sides of the coffins is well known; nevertheless some epigraphical features may be analysed in order to outline the peculiarity of some scribal trends.

Qaw el-Kebir

The material from this necropolis is represented here by the stone sarcophagus of Ibu, found by Schiaparelli in his monumental tomb (Suppl. 4264);⁴ the archaeological context of this sarcophagus offers other suggestions for the study of the Middle Kingdom funerary culture, as shown by the texts

¹ On the history of the Turin Museum: Curto 1990; on the Drovetti documents see the studies by Guichard (2005) and Donatelli (2011).

² Fabretti-Rossi-Lanzone 1888.

³ Preliminary information on the materials from Qaw el-Kebir: Lapp 1993: 292–93; on the votive objects from the nomarchs tombs: Ciampini 2005.

⁴ Steindorff 1936: 48 (6).

of the burial chamber of Henib, already published in the *Catalogo Generale* of the Museum.⁵ Another interesting aspect of the context is the presence of many votive statues, which represent the evidence for the emergence of the late cult of the deified governors (see above, note 3). The decoration on the sides repeats the architectural model of the door-system, which is clear evidence of a classical trend in the site's funerary tradition; at the same time, it could confirm the date of the burial to the late Middle Kingdom. The texts, carefully carved, sum up the liturgical context, ruled by Isis and Nephthys, together with the Two Enneads. The short ends mention the two goddesses, who give the head and protect the nomarch, while the vertical bands of the same sides mention the Two Enneads, together with the *itrt* of Upper and Lower Egypt, and some deities of the same constellations. Despite the brevity of the texts, we find here all the actors of the funerary liturgies, with particular attention given to the most traditional divine groups, also identified with the dynastic sanctuary of the Two Lands.⁶ The texts of the lid evoke an astral conception, which fits with the role of Nut as mother; these texts derive from two spells of the *Pyramid Texts* (PT 368 and 447), concerning the protection of the body. The collection of texts on the sarcophagus also comprises two *hṭp-dī-nsw* invocations which run along the front and back sides.

Gebelein

The largest group of Old and Middle Kingdom coffins in the Turin collection derives from the sites of Gebelein and Asyut; their textual tradition, as well as the phraseology, seems to be more coherent with a general trend, which is well known in the coeval necropolis. One of the most ancient samples is the wooden coffin of Ini, from his intact tomb at Gebelein (Suppl. 13268). The *ductus* of the inscriptions confirms an early date of burial, while the content of the texts has already been analysed, in order to recognize a link between the centre of Gebelein and the Theban district:⁷ indeed, the priestly titles of Ini mentions the cult of Sobek in Semenu, a Theban centre, which could be linked with Gebelein, also thanks to the cult of Hathor. At the same time, the archaeological evidence from the local necropolis testifies to the presence of some southern funerary beliefs, confirming the presence of Nubian cultural patterns in the area.

The connection of Gebelein with what seems to have been a southern funerary tradition is also confirmed by the later textual collection from the burial of Iqer. Schiaparelli found the equipment of this tomb, which comprised two coffins; the only surviving evidence of the burial is the wooden inner cover of the small coffin, with a rich collection of funerary literature from the Coffin Texts;⁸ the outer coffin cover, photographed during the excavations, was later lost.⁹ Two elements of this textual collection testify the peculiarity of Gebelein in the context of the coeval culture: the collection of funerary literature, which fits with the so-called southern

tradition, known thanks to coffins from Thebes and Aswan,¹⁰ and the hieratic *ductus* of the texts. The presence of so rich a collection of funerary literature in the coffins of Iqer is very striking: the one evidence of the Middle Kingdom funerary literature in the whole necropolis of Gebelein. This unique source also confirms the necessity of a careful approach to the coeval funerary literature, which can only partially be represented by the edition of the Coffin Texts.¹¹ Among the spells of this coffin's collection, it is particularly worth mentioning the liturgical sections, written on the short side and concerning a long list of items,¹² and the text (CT 334) concerning the doctrine of the god Ihi.¹³ Here, the role of the solar doctrine, connected with the goddess Hathor, seems to offer a perfect background for this unique elaboration, which also evokes the marshland, region connected with the border and with the cow goddess. The top of the coffin cover of Iqer also preserves a decans clock, already published by Neugebauer and Parker.¹⁴

Asyut

The evolution of the decorative programme in the Middle Kingdom coffins can easily be recognized in the large group from the necropolis of Asyut. Here Schiaparelli spent some seasons, collecting a quantity of burial equipment, among which we have the richest collection of Middle Kingdom coffins in the Turin Museum; their number and their decorative typologies offer an interesting approach to this class and its relative chronology. As noted in the previous studies, the evolution of the decorative programme recognized some patterns in the use of the texts, which includes the ornamental hieroglyphic inscriptions (outer and inner sides), and the funerary literature (inner sides).¹⁵ The difference between 'cursive' and 'ornamental' texts depends on their formal pattern, while their content does not always respect such a division; thus, some spells from the funerary/mortuary literature¹⁶ – i.e. Coffin Texts or *Pyramid Texts* – can be found within the hieroglyphic texts, and some general texts, mainly concerning ritual context, are arranged in the *ductus* of the funerary literature. As a result, the use of cursive and ornamental (or hieroglyphic) is preferred, with no reference to the content of the text. At the beginning, the ornamental inscriptions are arranged in a simple pattern that displays the inscriptions in a single band on the sides and top; gradually, the texts add horizontal lines and vertical columns, while, at the same time, the decoration of the short ends start to comprise the Sons of Horus, who also represent the four supports of the cosmic space of the coffin.¹⁷ Almost all these texts are painted on the surface of the coffin, and the signs

⁵ Ciampini 2003 (burial chamber and wooden coffin fragments); other fragments from the same burial were published later: Ciampini 2007a.

⁶ The connection of these divine groups in the liturgical context of the Middle Kingdom material has been analysed by Willems 1988: 139–41.

⁷ Brovarski 1977: 31–7.

⁸ Suppl. 15774.

⁹ Both the coffin covers were published by A. de Buck (G1T, G2T); for the spells sequence see Lesko 1979: 56–7.

¹⁰ This group of mss have been presented in Willems 1996: 1–2, 32–4. Still debated is the question of the date of the tradition, which is difficult to confirm as early Middle Kingdom.

¹¹ The Middle Kingdom funerary/mortuary literature contains significant forerunners, such as the pyramid of Ibi at Saqqara (Jéquier 1935), or the stone slabs from the burial of Bebi in Dendera (Petrie 1900: 17–18; 56–8; pls. 37–37K).

¹² Many of these items are the same as the so-called objects-frieze on Middle Kingdom coffins: Jéquier 1921.

¹³ On this spell, see Allam 1963: 144–6.

¹⁴ Neugebauer and Parker 1960: 12–13; pls. 11–13 (n. 7).

¹⁵ For some interesting observations on the decoration of the Asyut coffins, see Willems 2008: 161–5.

¹⁶ On this distinction, see below, note 19.

¹⁷ The new texts often use a classical honorific phraseology, i.e. Suppl. 8875: *hsy nb.f. D/9; mry it.f mry mwt.f hsy n niwt.f t(w)t.(ti): F/5-6*, together with the formula *imꜣḥw ḥr*.

are regularly monochrome (blue), evoking in this way an Old Kingdom epigraphical model; a clearer epigraphical typology can be recognized in some carved inscriptions, but which are not common on the Turin coffins from Asyut (Suppl. 14459; the carved signs are painted in blue). As in the coeval tradition, the inscriptions repeat the model of the *hṭp-dī-nsw*, with the distinction between the side dedicated to Osiris (front, east), and the side of Anubis (back, west).

Almost all of the Middle Kingdom coffins from Asyut in the Turin Museum have only outer decoration; the only two examples with inner decoration are the coffins of Minhotep (Suppl. 8917) and Mereru (Suppl. 8877). The decoration of the first is nearly completely destroyed, nevertheless the few remains still allow us to recognize the presence of a collection of cursive texts in vertical columns, and some few remains of scenes on the short ends. Without doubt the richest and best preserved is the decoration of the coffin of Mereru; here we find some decorative items, and cursive texts from different traditions. The inner decoration of the short ends respects the patterns of the period: the foot end – almost lost – reproduces a granary motif below an ornamental text; the head end is decorated with some funerary items and a text describing the *imzḥw* nature of the dead. The front end comprises some figurative items, together with short vertical texts: they repeat some ritual patterns which fit well with the role of the side as meeting point between the world of the living and the Netherworld. On the back side there are two registers: at the top, just under the ornamental text, there is a version of CT 154, concerning the knowledge of the Ba of Heliopolis; under it, runs a long offering list. A decans clock completes the decoration on the inner face of the top.¹⁸

A last interesting example of the Middle Kingdom tradition from the Turin collection is the long *excerpta* of mortuary literature,¹⁹ written on the top of a coffin purchased by Schiaparelli. The texts were originally written on the inner face of the side; its original position is confirmed by the traces of the ancient inner wooden elements that ensured the sealing of the different boards of the side. Later, the top was turned upside down for re-use and the ancient text was partially erased. The analysis of the texts is still in progress, nevertheless we can identify, at the beginning of the side, the sequence of CT 63–65. These spells belong to the liturgy, identified by Jan Assmann as *ī thb wr*: this is the last liturgy of the funerary ritual, in which the priest of the *st*-rite is directly evoked.²⁰ Unfortunately, the badly-preserved condition of the side prevents a reading of all the texts of the top, but what survives is surely an interesting collection of spells from the mortuary tradition of the Middle Kingdom.

Orthographic peculiarities

Some specific data concern the epigraphy and palaeography of the texts. The group of coffins from Asyut has already been the object of a study by Rainer Hannig, who elaborated a classification of the *ductus* used in the ornamental texts.²¹







¹⁸ This decans clock was not included in the edition of Neugebauer and Parker (see above, note 14); for the edition of this manuscript, see now Locher 1983; Ciampini 2007b; Detoma 2014.





¹⁹ According to the distinction of ‘mortuary’ and ‘funerary’ elaborated by Assmann 1990: 2–3.

²⁰ This is dealing with purification by means of water. For the liturgy *ī thb wr*, see Assmann 2002: 333–468.

²¹ Hannig 2006.

Several graphical solutions can be the typical indicators of the Asyut scribal tradition. Sometime these markers seem to have had a wide use, testifying to what is a more general local trend: for example, graphical inversion of signs can be mentioned, which was also typical in the Asyut cursive *ductus*; it also raises some confusion in terms of the use of determinative for male and female deities; very often the sign of the viper is mutilated, while other snakes do not have the same marker. More particular are the graphical trends, which sometimes seem to express a local idiomatic tradition:

- Ellipse of the genitive *n* in the construction *n k3 smr wꜥty* (Suppl. 14385/F) or *n k3 imzḥw* (Suppl. 8876/B).
- Episodes of metathesis of the phonetic signs are recognizable in *pt* and *nwt* (Suppl. 8656/D/2); a similar metathesis is recognizable in the writing of the feminine pron. *tn*:  (14457/T/O/2; F.2).
- In one instance there is the use of the palatal sound *t* as feminine ending (Suppl. 14457).
- Ideographical writings seem to be preferred for *rmi*:  (Suppl. 14457/T/2) and *izkb*:  (Suppl. 14457/P/2), probably depending on the space available to the scribe.²²
- Notable writings for *hntt*:  (Suppl. 8656/H/2) and *hntw*:  (Suppl. 8877/F/O/9).
- Some writings seem instead to misunderstand the correct shape of the original sign: ‘3’ written with a sign similar to  *hrw* (Suppl. 8656/D/2).

Finally, we may note a typical Asyut writing of *biz* / *biw*  (Suppl. 8807/D/1), which presupposes a proximity in the pronunciation of *b* and *n*,²³ and the use of the sign  to express the group *m + s* in  *m swt.fnb* (Suppl. 8656/T/1) and  *sm3.s t3* (Suppl. 8918/B/1).

These data offer only a partial set of information concerning a coherent class of materials in the Turin collection; the decorative programme of the coffins and the epigraphical features may give some suggestions in a wider context concerning research in the Middle Kingdom funerary culture, as well as the peculiarity of the archaeological evidence.

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²² The full writing of *izkb* can alternate with the ideography in the same ms, see Suppl. 14457/T/2.

²³ For this writing in the Asyut scribal school, see Zitman 2010, I: 258–9.

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