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## **A Coffin Dispersed: Case-study of 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty Coffin Fragments (Timișoara 1142–1146, Budapest 51.325)\***

**Abstract:** Study of the iconography and texts on sections of a 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty coffin in the collection of the Museum of Banat in Timișoara, Romania, shows that the vignettes as well as the texts are unusual for such coffins. A notable feature is that the deceased is nowhere shown on the fragments, and bands of text (that on other coffins end with the name of the deceased) fill the entire area leaving no room to add the personal name. The lack of a name, the corrupt texts, unusual iconography, and the lack of varnish may reflect the lack of resources of the coffin's owner. A fragment in Budapest (51.325) is shown to join the Timișoara coffin sections. The dismantling/sawing of an object to make it more portable and saleable reflects an established practice of late 1800s and early 1900s Egyptian antiquities market.

**Key words:** Egypt, 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty, anthropoid coffin, vignettes, Abydos fetish, Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, Thoth

### General Comments

In the Museum of Banat in Timișoara (Romania)<sup>1</sup> are four fragments (Sections A-D, see below) of an unprovenanced wooden (perhaps sycamore, *cf.*

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<sup>1</sup> Branislav Anđelković is indebted to Dan Leopold Ciubotaru, former director of the Museum of Banat in Timișoara, for the opportunity to study the coffin fragments in October 2011 and April 2013, and to Nicoleta Demian who provided information concerning object's present registration number (1142–1146), name of the donor, and the date when the donation was made. Thanks are also due to Zoran Marcov for his help

Liptay 2011, 65) coffin, donated in 1908 by Max Herz (Herz Miksa) (*cf.* Dawson and Uphill 1972, 140). The fragments are brightly painted in blue, red, and green on an unvarnished white ground.<sup>2</sup> The vignettes are arranged horizontally in a single register. A color-block border, at the top and bottom of the coffin, frames the figurative decoration. A heavy blue line separates the upper border from the vignettes. The scenes are separated by vertical columns of text. The density of the design elements, by the standard of other 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty coffins, is low, with areas around figures left blank. The flesh of the deities is green or more rarely red. The decoration is not modeled. The head area of the coffin is painted with broad stripes (see Niwinski 1988, xvi, 84). The interior is not decorated. However, some sort of quick, unfinished sketch-like drawing and markings in red are visible in parts of Sections C and D. White ground coffins of 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty are fairly rare. According to Niwinski (1988, 90) they make up only 5% of the known examples.<sup>3</sup>

The decoration, or at least what remains of it, is distinctly different from 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty coffins from Thebes that typically have scenes of the weighing of the heart, the Four Sons of Horus in shrines, the tree goddess, and the Hathor cow emerging from the western mountain. Among the unusual and rare features of the Timișoara coffin are the four goddesses who flank the Abydos fetish, decorative details of the fetish itself, and Thoth presenting braziers to a deity (perhaps Osiris). The figures were sketched in red, and then the other colors, mainly green, with some blue details added. As is typical of Ramesside coffins (Cooney 2007, 217), the skin of the gods (other than Thoth, Qebehsenuef and Imseti) is green. The hieroglyphs were written in red, and then many of them embellished and reinforced with green. Overall, blue is used sparingly, other than in the color-block border and the line that separates it from the vignettes and vertical texts.

No images of the deceased, or references to his (or her) name, are preserved, which may suggest that the coffin was purchased „off the rack“ and that it was never customized for its owner (see especially comments for Section B). The coffin is to be dated to early 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty (*ca.* 1039 B.C.).<sup>4</sup>

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and cordiality. Last but not least, Branislav Anđelković is grateful to Javor Rašajski who started it all. Coffin fragments have previously been only briefly mentioned in Glodariu, Alicu, Cihó and Igna (1988, 24–25, nos. 89, 91–93, pl. XII).

<sup>2</sup> Liptay (2011, 66) suggested, in regard to Budapest 51.325 which joins the Timișoara coffin (see further below, and note 6), that the lack of varnish may reflect the lower economic resources of the coffin owner.

<sup>3</sup> According to Kathryn M. Cooney (personal communication, August 20, 2014) this is an inner coffin. Liptay (2011, 65) reached the same conclusion about Budapest 51.325.

<sup>4</sup> Glodariu, Alicu, Cihó and Igna (1988, 24–25, nos. 89, 91–93) dated the Timișoara coffin fragments to 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty. Niwinski (1988, 114) and Liptay (2011, 65) also dated

## Section A

This section (fig. 1. Section A) is arch-shaped (semicircular), made from a single piece of wood. The upper edge is flat and plastered. The lower edge is oblique. Two peg holes are on the coffin's right side, and two on the left. Another three pegs are on the lower side (inner surface) to attach the coffin bottom. Section A made up the curved head of the coffin basin (trough) and joins section B.

Dimensions: L. 33.4 cm (in straight line, across from left to right edge); H. between 32.7 cm and 34.5 cm; trunk T. max 3.9 cm (min 2.25 cm); max radius of the head area is *ca.* 18 cm.

Decoration: both surfaces (inner and outer) were plastered. A color-block border at top and bottom (made of vertical squares and bars) frame nine black stripes on a white ground. The interior is undecorated, but has a layer of gesso.

## Section B

This section (fig. 1. Section B) consists of three pieces of wood (numbered here 1–3, bottom to top) that make up the left proper side of the basin (trough) at the curved area of the neck. Another piece (now lost), originally fit at the bottom to complete the height of the coffin side. A peg to attach the lost piece emerges from the bottom of piece B1. A large tenon, secured with a wooden peg, is in place in a mortise hole on the top edge. Three pegs are on the view's right. The left side has been cleanly sawn off, presumably in modern times.<sup>5</sup> Section B joins A. The use of several small pieces of wood to create the neck area of the coffin can also be seen on Vienna 5156 (Egner and Hauslauer 2009, 107).

Dimensions: W. between 15 cm and 15.6 cm; total H. *ca.* 31 cm (without tenon that is protruding for the next 4.5 cm above the upper edge); plank T. 3.7 cm.

Decoration: both the interior and exterior surfaces are plastered. The interior is not decorated. The left side of B has broad stripes that represent the wig, with the color-block borders at the top and bottom seen on Section A.

Two lines of vertical text read left to right (the first line is only partially preserved; the signs are both red and green, many of the green signs are outlined in red).

Left: *ḏd mdw [i]n im3hy hr R<sup>c</sup>Hr-3hty...*

Right: *ḏd mdw [i]n im3hy hr Wsir hnty Imntyw-Wnn[nfr]...*

the adjoining section in Budapest to 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty. Note however that another coffin with a common decorative feature (see note 7), has been dated to Pinudjem II, so to the late 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty.

<sup>5</sup> Probably in the late 1800s or early 1900s, based on the history of the acquisition of the Timișoara fragments and the adjoining Budapest fragment.

Left: Recitation by the one revered by Re Horakhty...

Right: Recitation by the one revered by Osiris, Foremost of the Westerners, Wen[nefer]...

Similar brief texts appear in the vertical bands on the vault of the tomb of Sennedjem at Deir el Medina (TT1) (Bruyere 1959, 57). In the tomb, the vault bears two series of five texts. The first and last in each series begins with the more usual formula *dd mdw [i]n Dḥwty* followed by *Wsir Sn-ndm m3<sup>c</sup> ḥrw*, „Recitation by Thoth ‘May the Osiris Sennedjem be justified.’“ Texts 2–4 in Sennedjem are similar to those seen on the coffin, namely *dd [mdw in] im3ḥy ḥr* [god’s name] followed by *Wsir Sn-ndm m3<sup>c</sup> ḥrw*, „Words said by the one revered by [god’s name] (namely) the Osiris, Sennedjem, justified.“ However, the texts on the coffin omit the name of the deceased, another indication that the coffin was probably made without a specific person in mind. We take the sign that looks like a truncated *ntr* sign for the backbone with spinal cord (Gardiner sign F39), otherwise known as the *im3ḥ* sign. The same abbreviated texts, written more clearly, also appear to the left of Vignette 3 of Section C.

## Section C

This section (fig. 2) (left proper side, middle section of the basin [trough]) is made up of three long planks and a fragment of the fourth plank (on the viewer’s left). The upper edge has two mortise holes to receive tenons. The lower edge has some five broken pegs and peg holes to be fixed either to another horizontal plank or to the coffin bottom. Since the planks were not of regular shape, the gaps between were filled with linen cloth, glue, and plaster (as seen at the inner side [coffin interior], below the fourth plank). The planks are fixed to each other by tenons with lateral safety pegs as well as by peg joints. The precise meter length of this section and the clean cuts on both ends suggest that the coffin was cut into pieces sometime in modern days.

Dimensions: L. 100 cm; H. 32.5 cm; T. 3.62 cm.

Decoration: both the interior and exterior of the coffin were plastered. The interior is not decorated, however there is what appears to be a quick, unfinished sketch-like drawing in red. The preserved decoration is arranged in three vignettes that are bordered top and bottom with a multi-colored block pattern and separated by vertical texts. The left side of this section joins a fragment of a coffin in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest (Egy 51.325).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> We thank Jonathan Elias, AMSC Research, who first suggested this join, and also Katalin Kóthay, Curator of the Egyptian collection at The Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, for supplying a photo of their fragment. The fragment is published in Liptay (2011, 65–66, 104, 115 [with additional bibliography]). The fragment bears a Geb-Nut

Vignette 1: Two pairs of goddesses flank an Abydos fetish (Osiris' totemic emblem/symbol), and raise a hand in adoration. A small figure appears at the left of the base of the pole as if supporting it. The hind quarters of two jackels are shown part way up the pole.<sup>7</sup> The goddesses to the left of the fetish can be identified by their crowns and the texts as Nephthys and Isis, although their epithets are very hard to make out.<sup>8</sup> The headdress of the goddess to the right of the fetish preserves traces in red which appear to be a scorpion, hence identifying her as Selket. Although the figure to the far right wears the headdress of Nephthys, because she is paired with Selket, it seems reasonable to suggest that she should be Neith (with the wrong identifying headdress), completing the group of the four female guardians of the deceased. Both pairs of goddesses are dressed identically in checked dresses embellished with dots, but the color of the sashes alternates red and blue. Each goddess holds an ankh sign. The vignette is framed by two lines of vertical text to the left and three to the right.

Text above goddesses on the left:

1. *3st*
2. *hry-ib nw (?)* or *nw (?)*
3. *Nb-*
4. *hwt*

1. Isis
2. who is in ...(?) of (?)
- 3–4. Nephthys

The texts above the goddesses on the right are illegible. Above the figure of Nephthys is a hieroglyph in blue, the only place on the fragments where that color is employed for a text.

Vertical texts to left of the goddesses:<sup>9</sup>

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scene, which is much more typical of the decoration of 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty coffins. The Budapest fragment was acquired in Egypt by Bonifác Platz, a Hungarian Cistercian monk, between 1896 and 1908, about the same time (1906) that the Romanian sections were acquired. We thank Dr. Kóthay for the accession information. Liptay (2011, 65) suggested that the Budapest fragment „was the last scene on the foot end of the right side“. With the join to the Romanian section, it is apparent that it is probably the last vignette on the left (proper) side. Another section, with texts, is now missing.

<sup>7</sup> Jackals on the pole of the fetish are also seen on the coffin of Paduamen (CG 6233–6235) from the Bab el-Gusus, dated to the reign of Pinudjem II (Hornung and Bryan 2002, 160). We thank Jonathan Elias for this observation and reference.

<sup>8</sup> Note also the unusual way Nephthys' name is written, with the *nb* sign within the *hwt*, as noted by Jonathan Elias (personal communication, September 25, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Line 1 is closely paralleled by the first line of the text on the left side of Budapest 51.325, however the text is so corrupt and there are significant losses in the same areas of both versions, so that even with two variants, we (like Liptay 2011, 65, 104, 115)

1. *p3 n im<sup>c</sup> h3r gbt (?)*
2. *r<sup>c</sup>m-<sup>c</sup>i///s///<sup>c</sup> sw wd3t (?)*

1. The one of...
2. Illegible

Vertical texts to the right of the goddesses:<sup>10</sup>

1. *hw (?) dw3.f... f3i (?) n.k w3d-wr (?)*
2. *r i n hwwt(?) i... mdw (?)*
3. *... iw.f špss Wn-nfr dt sp sn*

1. ...that he may praise... who has sailed (?) the Great Green for you (?)
2. ...people(?)...words (?)
3. ...that he may be august [like/ before?] Wennefer forever and ever

Vignette 2: Shrine topped with cobras with sun disks. Inside the shrine is a figure of Osiris flanked by figures of Isis. Osiris wears the usual *atef* crown and holds a scepter topped with <sup>c</sup>*nh*, *w3s*, and *dd* signs. The goddesses raise a hand in adoration of the god and touch him with their other hand. They are dressed in similar dresses, although the dress on Isis on the right has blue dots on the skirt, and their sashes are alternately red and blue.

Text above and behind the goddess to the left:

*3st.....igrt (?)*

Isis [mistress?] of the...realm of the dead (?)

Text above Osiris:

*Wsir nb nhh*

Osiris, Lord of Eternity

Text above the goddess to the right:

*3st nb(t) nhh*

Isis, Mistress of Eternity

Vignette 3: Thoth, with sun disk on his head, holds two white rigid vertical objects, probably braziers, to a figure seated on a block throne. Thoth wears a pleated kilt above which he wears a garment with green sides and perhaps pleated fabric on his chest. The seated figure's face, arms and legs are green.

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cannot translate it. We thank Malcolm Mosher and Marcus Müller for their assistance in trying to make sense of it.

<sup>10</sup> The first two lines are damaged and perhaps corrupt, and we could not translate them.

He wears a red garment on his torso and a kilt that is detailed with a diamond pattern. He holds a *w3s*-staff in his left hand and an *ḥn* in his right. The area of his head is badly damaged, but the uraeus to the left and traces of a tall crown, painted blue, suggest that he wore an *atef* crown. A bull's tail is shown in front of his legs. The area above his head, where an identifying caption would have appeared, is so abraded that the figure cannot be identified with any certainty. However, the block throne and the presence of the bull's tail, and the green tone of the skin which is shared by most of the other deities on the coffin, and the possible *atef* crown indicate that the figure must be a god rather than the deceased. Compare to a seated figure with bull tail and *atef* on a coffin of 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty in Vienna (6269) (Egner and Haslauer 2009, 192) that is labeled „Osiris“. Similar compositions of Thoth offering to a god on a block throne appear in mythological papyri of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty (Piankoff and Rambova 1957, nos. 8–9). There, the figure is either Osiris or Atum, but in both cases, the seated figure holds a crook and flail. Both of the scenes on the papyri appear in the context of the weighing of the heart. Two offering stands, painted black, are between the figures. A large bunch of flowers is shown on top of the offering stands.

Three vertical lines of text<sup>11</sup> are to the left, and six are above the figures.

Text above the seated figure:

1. Illegible
2. *ntr* 3
3. *nb m3t*

1. Illegible
2. the Great God
3. Possessor of Maat

Text above Thoth:

4. Illegible
5. *Dḥwty* (?)
6. *nb*
4. Illegible
5. Thoth (?)
6. lord

Texts to left:

1. *ḏd mdw [i]n im3ḥy ḥr Rḥr 3ḥty m...*
2. *ḏd mdw [i]n im3ḥy ḥr Wsir ḥnty [Imntyw]*
3. *ḏd mdw [i]n im3ḥy ḥr Pth-Skr-[Wsir?] nb*

<sup>11</sup> See also comments for the texts on fragment B.

1. Recitation by the one revered by Re-Horakhty in...
2. Recitation by the one revered by Osiris, Foremost [of the Westerners]
3. Recitation by the one revered by Ptah-Sokar-[Osiris?], the Lord

Vignette 4: Only parts of two lines of vertical text that originally accompanied another vignette are preserved.

Right: *...ms..*

Left: *...rp...nhh di(t).sn h3 m t hnkt h3 m ht [nbt]*

Right: Untranslatable

Left: ...eternity<sup>12</sup>...that they may give a thousand of bread and beer, a thousand of [every] thing.<sup>13</sup>

## Section D

This section (fig. 1. Section D) (fragment of the right proper side of the coffin basin/trough) is made up of two planks. The upper edge is flat and plastered. Two pegs are on lower edge. Both surfaces (exterior and interior) were plastered. The interior is not decorated aside from an unfinished sketch-like line drawing in red. The cleanly cut edges suggest that it was cut down from the right proper side of the coffin trough in modern times (see note 5).

Dimensions: L. 35 cm; H. 30.1 cm; T. between 3.6 cm and 4.05 cm.

Decoration: The Four Sons of Horus stand before Horus or Re as a falcon wearing an *atef* crown. The faces of Qebehsenuef (human-headed with false beard) and Imseti (ape-headed) are red, while the faces of Hapi (jackal-headed) and Duamutef (falcon-headed) are green. The falcon stands on a standard. Behind the falcon is a winged cobra on top of a lily plant. The Sons of Horus wear broad red sashes and their bodies are alternately colored dark blue and blue green. The scene is framed left and right with lines of vertical text.

Texts above the Four Sons of Horus:

<sup>12</sup> The beginning of the left text on the coffin was probably the name and epithet(s) (ending in „eternity“) of the gods who grant funerary offerings.

<sup>13</sup> The left text is paralleled by the text on the right side of Budapest 51.325 (Liptay 2011, 65, 104, 115) however, the lines preceding it do not help clarify the reading of the right line on the coffin. The three lines on the Budapest 51.325 fragment read: 1. [Words said by the one] revered by Ptah-Sokar-Osiris who is in 2. Shetyt, that he may give a thousand of bread ... a thousand of beer... 3. a thousand of cattle, a thousand of fowl, a thousand of incense, and a [thousand of] every [good and fresh] thing.



1. *Ḳbh-snw.f ntr nfr ntr... ʿ3 nb*<sup>14</sup>

2. *Imsti*

3. *Hpy s3 Wsir*

4. *[Dw3] mut.f*

1. Qebhsenuf, the good god, the great [and ?] god, the Lord

2. Imseti

3. Hapi, son of Osiris

4. [Dua]mutf

Two vertical lines of text behind Horus/Re, facing right:

Right: *Pth-Skr-[Wsir] hry-ib štyt*

Left: The text is now illegible having been destroyed when the board was cut down.

Right: Ptah-Sokar-[Osiris] who is in Shechyt

Left: Illegible

Two lines of text behind the Son of Horus, face right and so they relate to the vignette that originally was to the right. Much of the gesso and pigment has flaked off, leaving only a few legible signs (*Ir...irt...*) which cannot be translated.

## Conclusion

In addition to museums and other institutions with major collections of Egyptian antiquities (over 1000 pieces), there are many lesser known museums with more modest holdings that are mostly unpublished and are consequently overlooked. Publication of these smaller collections (e.g. Anđelković 2002), is important not only for making this material known to a larger audience, but also, in some cases, allowing fragments in different collections to be joined and recontextualized. This is clearly the case here, and it is a pleasure to be able to conceptually re-unite these early 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty coffin fragments from the Museum of Banat in Timișoara with fragment 51.325 from the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest).<sup>15</sup> Studies of neglected collections (e.g. Anđelković and Demian, forthcoming) lead to a better reconstruction and understanding of ancient Egyptian culture (including various facets of the Egyptian ‘funerary industry’), and they also give insight into the practices of the late 1800s and early 1900s Egyptian antiquities market and the dispersal of artifacts.

<sup>14</sup> In line 1, an indistinct sign for another adjective, is between *ntr* and *ʿ3*.

<sup>15</sup> It would not be surprising to find additional fragments of this very same coffin in some other museum/collection.

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*Rzasuti kovčeg: slučaj fragmenata kovčega 21. dinastije  
(Temišvar 1142–1146, Budimpešta 51.325)*

Proučavanja ikonografije i hijeroglifskih tekstova na fragmentima (inv. br. 1142–1146) drvenog kovčega iz 21. dinastije, koji se čuvaju u Muzeju Banata u Temišvaru (Rumunija), pokazuju prisustvo vinjeta i natpisa neuobičajenih za kovčege tog vremena (početak tzv. Trećeg međuperioda, oko 1039. godine p.

n. e.). Primetan je, na obrađenim fragmentima, izostanak prikaza pokojnika, a i tekstovi, koji se na odgovarajućim mestima na drugim kovčezima inače završavaju imenom pokojnog vlasnika, napisani su tako da ne ostavljaju prostor za dopisivanje imena preminulog. Nedostatak imena, izvesna odstupanja u hijeroglifskom tekstu, neobična ikonografija i izostanak završnog sloja laka možda ukazuju na slabo materijalno stanje pokojnika. Kovčeg tipološki pripada retkoj grupi kovčega sa belom osnovom, koja čini tek oko 5% kovčega 21. dinastije. Fragment kovčega 51.325 koji se čuva u Muzeju primenjenih umetnosti u Budimpešti može se odgovarajuće spojiti sa jednim od fragmenata iz Temišvara, te se svakako radi o delovima istog kovčega. Fragmente u muzeju u Temišvaru poklonio je Maks Herc 1908, a fragment u muzeju u Budimpešti poklonio je Bonifacije Plac 1906. godine. Svi fragmenti kupljeni su u Egiptu. Činjenica da je originalni kovčeg isečen, krajem 1800-ih ili početkom 1900-ih godina (dužina najvećeg fragmenta iz muzeja u Temišvaru je precizno jedan metar), i da su se njegovi delovi našli u ponudi trgovaca starinama, svedoči o praksi rastavljanja i/ili sečenja izvornih staroegipatskih predmeta radi lakše prodaje i transporta, uobičajenoj na tadašnjem tržištu egipatskih antikviteta.

*Ključne reči:* Egipat, 21. dinastija, antropoidni kovčeg, vinjete, fetiš Abidos, Oziris, Izida, Neftis, Tot

*Un cercueil épars: Étude de cas de la 21<sup>e</sup> dynastie.  
Fragments du cerceuil (Timișoara 1142–1146, Budapest 51.325)*

L'étude de l'iconographie et des textes sur les parties du cercueil de la 21<sup>e</sup> dynastie dans la collection du Musée du Banat à Timișoara en Roumanie montre que les vignettes aussi bien que les textes sont inhabituels pour de tels cercueils. Une particularité notable est que le défunt n'est nulle part montré sur les fragments et les rubans du texte (qui dans d'autres cercueils se termine par le nom du défunt) remplissent tout l'espace ne laissant pas de place pour ajouter le nom de la personne. L'absence de nom, les textes corrompus, l'iconographie inhabituelle, et l'absence de vernis pourraient rendre compte de l'absence de données sur le propriétaire du cercueil. Il s'avère qu'un fragment à Budapest (51.325) peut être réuni avec des parties du cercueil de Timișoara. Le démantèlement/ sciage d'un objet afin de le rendre plus portable et vendable signale une pratique établie du marché des antiquités égyptiennes de la fin des 1800 et le début des années 1900.

*Mots clés:* Égypte, 21<sup>e</sup> dynastie, cercueil anthropoïde, vignettes, fétiche Abydos, Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, Thoth

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Fig. 1. Sections A, B, and D.  
Photos courtesy of the Museum of Banat in Timișoara.



Fig. 2. Section C. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Banat in Timișoara.