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Ramesside White-Type Mummy Boards

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# The (Re)Discovery of a Mummy Board from Deir el-Medina: Insights into Late Ramesside White-Type Mummy Boards

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JAUME VILARÓ-FABREGAT\*

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the (re)discovery of a mummy board from Deir el-Medina in the on-site storerooms. Its white lower section, devoid of iconography, represents a rare type of late New Kingdom mummy board, which coexisted with the more traditional type featuring iconography across the entire surface. By comparing the mummy board with additional covers from Deir el-Medina and other Theban necropolises, which share similar characteristics, it sheds light on decorative practices of the time, addressing a previously overlooked type of object. Furthermore, the analysis of the titulary of individuals associated with these materials provides insights into socio-cultural dynamics and the potential influence of social status on funerary decorative solutions. This study contributes to expanding the understanding of Egyptian funerary practices during the late New Kingdom.

**Keywords:** Ramesside, Deir el-Medina, coffin, mummy board, white decoration.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article porte sur la (re)découverte d'une couverture de momie de Deir el-Médina dans les magasins du site. Sa section inférieure blanche, sans iconographie, constitue un type rare de couverture de momie de la fin du Nouvel Empire, coexistant avec le type traditionnel qui comporte une iconographie sur toute la surface. L'objet est comparé avec d'autres couvertures de Deir el-Médina et des nécropoles thébaines qui présentent des caractéristiques similaires.

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Ce faisant, l'étude met en lumière les pratiques décoratives de l'époque, à travers un type d'objet jusqu'ici négligé. L'analyse de la titulature des individus associés à de tels objet fournit des informations sur les dynamiques socioculturelles et l'influence potentielle du statut social sur les choix décoratifs funéraires. L'étude proposée contribue ainsi à la compréhension des pratiques funéraires égyptiennes à la fin du Nouvel Empire.

**Mots-clés :** époque ramesside, Deir el-Médina, cercueil, couverture de momie, décoration blanche.



## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper delves into the (re)discovery of a Ramesside mummy board originally excavated by Bernard Bruyère's team in 1929 at Deir el-Medina (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Recently, the object resurfaced in tomb TT217 (Inv. No DeM\_2023\_TT217M\_0053), which has been repurposed as a modern storeroom on-site. It was found by the members of the Medjehu team during the Deir el-Medina Mission d'étude et de conservation, a French mission operating under the auspices of the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO).<sup>2</sup>

Distinguished by its predominantly white lower section,<sup>3</sup> devoid of iconographical scenes, this mummy board represents a unique type briefly utilized towards the end of the New Kingdom in the Theban area. It coexisted with the more traditional type of covers, characterized by iconography and texts adorning their entire surface, typically set against a yellow background. This conventional decorative style persisted into the Twenty-First Dynasty and came to typify the characteristic yellow type covers of the period. In contrast, the use of the white type mummy board fell out of favor.



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FIG. 1. Front view of the mummy board (DeM\_2023\_TT217M\_0053).

<sup>1</sup> BRUYÈRE 1929, p. 13; BRUYÈRE 1930, pp. 31–32.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Cédric Larcher, director of the mission, for granting me the opportunity to take part in the mission and for his support in publishing this research. I would also like to thank Gersande Eschenbrenner Diemer, director of the Medjehu Project, for welcoming me to her multidisciplinary team. Additionally, my sincere thanks go to all the members of the Project for their invaluable contributions and discussions on wooden objects from the site, especially to Lisa Sartini, who is in charge of studying the coffins preserved on site.

<sup>3</sup> The term “lower section” is derived from the coffin topography and terminology as established by Rogério Sousa (2017, pp. 2–4; 2018a, pp. 43–46), whose vocabulary is followed in the present study.

The present study contextualizes the subject mummy board within its archaeological framework, tracing its biography since Antiquity and its excavation history. It compares it with other artifacts featuring similar decoration, whether they originate from the same site and have been (re)discovered in on-site storage rooms, or from additional finds in other Theban necropolises.

Furthermore, an analysis of the titulary associated with objects featuring this type of decoration sheds light on the societal status attributed to individuals owning such artifacts over time. The aim is to elucidate the decorative and funerary practices prevalent during the later stages of the New Kingdom in the Theban area, thus contributing to a better understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of the period by investigating a type of mummy board previously overlooked due to its scarcity in examples.<sup>4</sup> By providing additional examples, some of which are mentioned for the first time, this study fills a gap in current scholarship and expands the knowledge of this particular aspect of ancient Egyptian funerary practices and coffin decoration.

### The Medjehu Project

The present study is part of the ongoing research conducted by the Medjehu Project, an interdisciplinary initiative led by Gersande Eschenbrenner Diemer and involving a team of woodcraft specialists. The primary objectives of the Project include documenting, analyzing, and preserving Ancient Egyptian wooden artifacts, with the goal of enhancing the understanding of woodcraft production in the Theban area and contributing to the broader investigation of woodworking practices along the Nile. Furthermore, the project seeks to investigate the socio-economic networks associated with woodworking craftsmanship in ancient Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

Within the French mission operating in Deir el-Medina, the team focuses on wooden artifacts preserved in funerary structures repurposed in modern times as storerooms. These structures have yielded a wealth of unpublished wooden objects, many of which were excavated by the team led by Bernard Bruyère. The inventory of wooden artifacts found within the archaeological site is significantly more diverse and extensive than previously acknowledged. It includes items and object typologies not well represented in museum collections, which have traditionally been the focus of study for objects originating from the site.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> This situation is not surprising, considering the scarcity of coffins and mummy boards from the Twentieth Dynasty compared to those from the Twenty-First Dynasty. This phenomenon has been attributed to the practice of reusing older coffins during the Twenty-First Dynasty (See COONEY 2019, p. 99). For a discussion of the known Ramesside coffins and mummy boards, see COONEY 2007, pp. 397–484; COONEY 2017.

<sup>5</sup> ESCHENBRENNER DIEMER 2023.

<sup>6</sup> See ESCHENBRENNER DIEMER et al. 2021 for the results on the multidisciplinary study of the New Kingdom black coffins originating from the site.

## 2. THE DISCOVERY OF THE MUMMY BOARD BY BERNARD BRUYÈRE: BURIAL CONTEXT AND LOCATION

The mummy board was unearthed in 1929 and initially documented by Bernard Bruyère in his excavation diary (Fig. 2),<sup>7</sup> later appearing in one of his publications regarding the excavations at Deir el-Medina.<sup>8</sup> His writings provide valuable insights into the original context of the object, including its associated burial equipment and mummified remains.

In his report from 1929, the entry dated Saturday, March 9th, which describes part of the development of the excavation in the area designated by Bruyère as “K2,”<sup>9</sup> reads: “[...] *La partie sud du chemin NS qui longe à l’est la chapelle du gébel et on trouve là à 1 m ou 1 m. 25 sous le sol un cercueil androïde enfoui en terre, tête au sud. On le laisse provisoirement en place [...]*” Subsequently, in the entry dedicated to Sunday, March 10th, again referring to the activities conducted within the “K2” area, Bruyère wrote: “*On exhume le cercueil entrevu hier à 1 m. 75*<sup>10</sup>

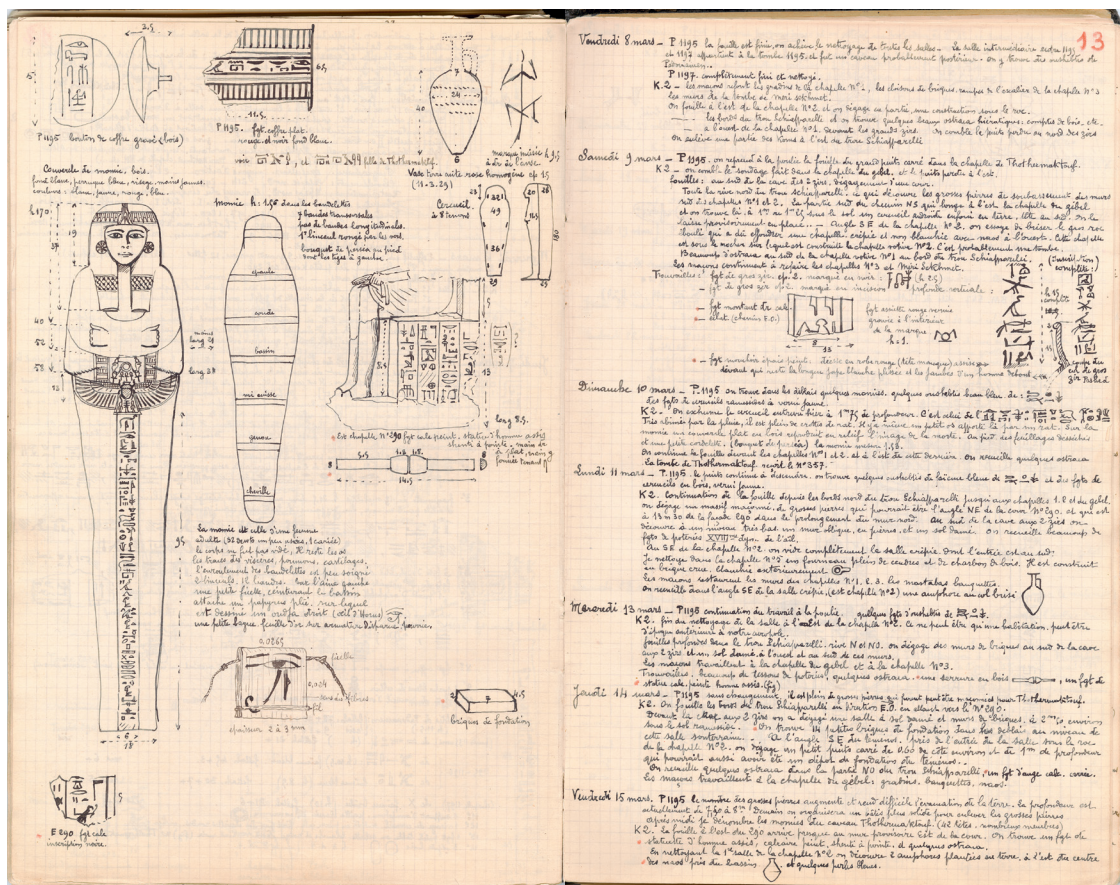



Fig. 2. Manuscript from Bruyère's excavation report documenting part of the works of 1929 in Deir el-Medina.

<sup>7</sup> BRUYÈRE 1929, p. 13. I express my gratitude to Cédric Larcher for giving me access to these unpublished documents, including the archival photographs featured in this paper.

<sup>8</sup> BRUYÈRE 1930, pp. 31–32.


<sup>9</sup> For information on this area (“Kom 2”) in Deir el-Medina, see GASSE 2000.

<sup>10</sup> This measurement differs from the previously mentioned one, but it is the one that also appears in Bruyère's publication of the find (BRUYÈRE 1930, p. 31).

de profondeur. C'est celui de l'  Très abîmée par la pluie, il est plein de crottes de rats. Il y a même un petit os apporté là par un rat. Sur la momie un couvercle plat en bois reproduit en relief l'image de la morte. Au pied, des feuillages desséchés et une petite cordelette. (bouquet de perséa) la momie mesure 1.53 [...].”

Fortunately, alongside these excavation notes, Bruyère provided detailed illustrations and precise measurements of the wooden mummy board and part of its associated materials and mummified remains in the adjacent page of the excavation notes. The illustration of the mummy board is particularly detailed, offering valuable insights into elements such as the headband and mask, which are now lost, and the inscription, which was originally almost complete. These aspects can be observed on the archival photograph of the object (Fig. 3). Both detailed documents prove invaluable for reconstructing the object, especially considering its incomplete preservation today.

With respect to the mummified remains associated with the mummy board, in his report, Bruyère depicted the wrapped mummy and provided some details about the deceased. He wrote: “*Momie h: 1.56 dans les bandelettes. 7 bandes transversales. Pas de bandes longitudinales. 1<sup>er</sup> linceul rongé par les vers. Bouquet de perséa au pied dont les tiges à gauche.*”

To illustrate the arrangement of the transversal bands along the body, Bruyère designed the mummified body and carefully marked the location of these bands. Below the illustration, the author provided specific information about the mummy: “*La momie est celle d'une femme adulte (32 dents un peu usées, 1 cariée) le corps ne fut pas vidé. Il reste les os, les traces des viscères, poumons, cartilages, l'enroulement des bandelettes est peu soigné. 2 linceuls. 12 bandes. Sur l'aîne gauche une petite ficelle, ceinturant le bassin, attache un papyrus plié sur lequel est dessiné un oudja étroit (œil d'Horus) . une petite bague, feuille d'or sur armature. Disparue, pourrie.*” Below this description, Bruyère provided an illustration of the small folded papyrus, which featured an *wdꜣt* eye on its front. The illustration included measurements of the original object and its associated characteristics as found.

Finally, albeit briefly and with smaller size compared to the other information and designs dedicated to the mummy board, mummified remains, and associated funerary equipment, the page features a sketch of the anthropomorphic coffin of the burial, along with measurements and the only written specification being “*Cercueil. à 8 tenons.*” Although it is impossible to verify this, it is possible that, due to the state of preservation and the lack of identifiable iconography and texts on the funerary container, Bruyère was not interested in it, or that there was not enough space on the page to include more information.

Regarding the specific location of the female coffin, Bruyère initially noted in his diary the general area as “K2.” However, in the official publication of his works in Deir el-Medina



FIG. 3. Archival photograph of the mummy board (O4\_0271).

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in 1930, detailing the excavations of the previous year, he provided more precise information about the exact discovery site:<sup>11</sup>

*“Près de l’entrée de la chapelle du dessinateur, n° 1212,<sup>12</sup> exactement à l’est du massif de maçonnerie appliqué contre le mur sud, et à 1 m. 75 de profondeur, était enfoui en terre un cercueil androïde féminin, en bois peint et couvert de verni jaune. Il reposait ainsi, la face tournée vers le ciel, la tête au sud, les pieds engagés sous le mur qui limite la ruelle montant à la falaise. Les textes inscrits sur le couvercle et la cuve n’ont pu être entièrement déchiffrés en raison des dégradations résultant d’un long séjour en terre. Par bonheur, le cercueil contenait un couvercle-planche posé sur la momie, à l’aide duquel nous avons pu identifier le corps de la femme [...]”*

Archival photographs taken on site show the coffin during the excavation process (Fig. 4).

Upon examining the map provided in Bruyère’s publication,<sup>13</sup> an unusual symbol, represented as +, is observed at the exact location of the burial. While speculative, this symbol could potentially mark the unusual location for the coffin, although other explanations are plausible. The mummy board itself does not bear any modern markings that were sometimes added on the objects upon discovery to indicate their provenance. Additionally, archive images of the coffin, still in its original location, offer no further insights into its origin. However, given the detailed description provided by Bruyère, there is sufficient reason to trust his account.

Concerning the burial equipment, Bruyère offered a more comprehensive description of the related items in the publication, focusing particularly on the papyrus linked to the body:

*“Une mince cordelette, ceinturant le cadavre à la hauteur des hanches, maintenait sur l’aine gauche un petit papyrus plié et replié sur lui-même en plusieurs épaisseurs. Un oudja, oeil droit, était dessiné à l’encre noire sur la surface visible. Le papyrus déplié mesure 0 m. 15 de largeur, 0 m. 085 de hauteur, et contient un texte en hiéroglyphes de Basse Époque, copié à l’encre noire, et orné d’une vignette représentant un lion bicéphale marchant et, devant lui, une fleur de lotus d’où sort une forme humaine momifiée.”*

Upon reading Bruyère’s writings, one may speculate whether the mummy and associated papyrus belonged to Henetdjefawaset, as Bruyère mentions that the papyrus included a text in Late Period hieratic. However, the whereabouts of the papyrus remain unknown, casting doubt on the accuracy of Bruyère’s information about the date of the object. If indeed accurate, it suggests that the mummy was buried in earlier funerary containers reused for that burial.

The unique location of the burial raises questions about whether it was a secondary burial intended to be there, utilizing and reusing a previous area meant for a different purpose, without a shaft or proper enclosure, or if the coffin was placed there by someone else after the actual burial of the individual within. In fact, the burial site appears to have been hastily

<sup>11</sup> BRUYÈRE 1930, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> The so-called “*chapelle du dessinateur*” (1212), part of the “Kom 2,” is situated in the north of tomb TT290–291 (BRUYÈRE 1930, pp. 18–19, pls. I, IV).

<sup>13</sup> BRUYÈRE 1930, pl. I. I am thankful to Aliénor Roussel for drawing my attention to this mark in the publication and for initiating the discussion on the place of origin of the burial.

arranged, possibly following tomb plundering or expropriation, as previously suggested by Bruyère.<sup>14</sup> In any case, this practice became typical of the Twenty-First Dynasty, wherein earlier structures were often reused for burials.

Unfortunately, only the mummy board associated with the burial has so far been (re)discovered. The details concerning the damaged iconography and texts on the coffin, even at the time of discovery, remain unclear. Despite archival images existing, none offer glimpses of the coffin's decoration, and the subsequent publication following the discovery provide no further insight, mentioning only that it was yellow varnished. As for the unwrapped mummified remains and any other additional objects that may have been part of the burial, their existence and whereabouts remain unknown. They could potentially await (re)discovery, whether within the west bank or elsewhere.



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FIG. 4. Archival photographs depicting the coffin on-site (04\_0293, 04\_0270).

14 BRUYÈRE 1930, p. 32.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE MUMMY BOARD

The wooden mummy board (Fig. 1) measures 170 cm × 38 cm at its maximum points and is adorned only on its front side, with the underside remaining undecorated. On the front side, the lower section bears a vertical inscription referring to the female owner, named Henetdjefawaset. However, the gender markers typical of anthropoid covers during the late New Kingdom, which persisted into the Twenty-First Dynasty and typically identify the owner as male or female,<sup>15</sup> are not consistently coherent throughout the object. This suggests, as discussed further below, and along with the presence of an earlier layer of decoration visible on some degraded parts, that the mummy board was originally prepared for a male individual and later modified for Henetdjefawaset.

As far as the decoration is concerned, although the headboard has suffered significant damage, with parts of its headband, along with the mask, detached (these parts were additional wooden pieces, as can be seen from the remaining holes in the mummy board), remnants of the painted headband can still be observed on the lateral sides of the object (Fig. 5). It originally featured a row of persea tree buds<sup>16</sup> with a lotus bud hanging from the forehead of the object.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, painted remnants of typical female earrings and a plain blue wig are present. The wig's lappets, adorned with reticulate patterns on their central area, extend to the area of the breasts, despite the absence of the latter in both decoration and/or volume, a gendered mark that would be typically characteristic of a cover prepared for a female owner (Fig. 6).

Between the lappets, a short collar adorned with horizontal bands is observed. Beneath it, a representation featuring a solar disk at the center flanked with cobras, *nfr* signs, and *wdꜣt* eyes is depicted. These motifs rest atop *nb* bowls. Below these representations, a large floral collar extends below the hands, draping over the chest of the anthropomorphic object, and covering the arms and forearms. This floral collar is composed of three bands of persea tree buds, the same floral pattern as on the headband.

The hands, painted yellow, are wooden carvings affixed to the cover, over the chest, in a mummiform pose. They are clenched in a fist, consistent with the gender marker typically associated with male covers.

Below the floral collar, the central panel depicts a pectoral on the abdomen of the anthropoid object, with its necklace hanging from the floral collar. Between the strips of the necklace, a solar disc is flanked by cobras wearing the *ꜣtf* crown, with an *'nb* sign hanging from their bodies. Three similar *'nb* signs also hang from the solar disk. Suspended from the necklace,

<sup>15</sup> SOUSA 2018a, pp. 35, 38, 48–54, 61–63, 76–77.

<sup>16</sup> For the description of the patterns associated with the headbands and floral collars of anthropoid coffins from the New Kingdom to the Twenty-Second Dynasty, see VAN WALSEM 1997, pp. 109–110, 115–116, 122–123; SOUSA 2018a, pp. 59, 97.

<sup>17</sup> The additional wooden element featuring part of the headband and the lotus bud is now lost, but the representation of the lotus bud can be observed in Bruyère's design of the mummy board (Fig. 2) and the modern picture taken of the object upon discovery (Fig. 3).

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FIG. 5. Lateral view of the headband of the mummy board.

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FIG. 6. Headboard and central panel.

there is a representation of a winged scarab, spanning the width of the mummy board with its wings. Below the forelegs of the scarab, a *dd* sign flanked by *tjt* knots is depicted atop a reed mat. A vertical inscription runs from this point to the end of the object, featuring the following inscription (Fig. 7):



*Dd mdw in Wsir nbt pr šm'yt n Imn-R' nsw ntrw Hnt-dfš-W3st  
m3'(t) hrw h3 mwt=i Nut psšt dnḥwy(=t) m hr=i di=s htp dfš(t)  
[...]*<sup>18</sup>

Words to be spoken by the Osiris, the lady of the house, Chantress of Amun-Ra, king of the gods Henetdjefawaset, justified, she says: “Descend, my mother Nut, spread both your wings on my face. May she give offerings and provisions [...]”

The inscribed invocation, calling upon Nut’s protective embrace for the deceased, is a distinctive feature observed in this specific area of both lids and mummy boards from the New Kingdom and later periods.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, although not present on this particular artifact, anthropoid covers from this era—and especially those from the Twenty-First Dynasty—often incorporate the depiction of the winged Nut in the central panel, associated with the speech, thereby intensifying the interplay between text and imagery.

The adorned sections of the object feature their decoration against a yellow background. Notably, these areas lack varnish—a detail that will be explored further below. In striking contrast to the decorated parts, the likely intentional omission of decoration in the areas surrounding the inscription, central panel, and floral collar, all painted entirely in white, demands attention. This distinctive decorative approach, particularly notable in the lower section of mummy boards and less commonly seen on lids, represents a defining characteristic of the late Ramesside period’s stylistic repertoire.

This aesthetic coexisted with the more traditional decorative type, distinguished by its abundant iconography covering the entirety of the object’s surface, typically on a yellow background, showcasing the dynamic range of decorative techniques employed in funerary practice. This evolutionary trajectory



FIG. 7. Nut’s protective invocation and mention of the deceased.

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<sup>18</sup> While some parts and signs of the inscription have been lost over time, they can still be reconstructed using Bruyère’s design of the object and the archival photograph. Additionally, the partial cleaning of the inscription area, previously covered with dust and biological remains, revealed new signs at the end of the column, which were not visible to Bruyère.

<sup>19</sup> For a study on the goddess Nut, see BILLING 2002. In the presented example, the formula is derived from Pyramid Texts utterances PT 356 and PT 368 (ALLEN 2005, p. 3, §145, 82, §199b). For additional references to texts associated with Nut on later coffins, see ELIAS 1993 III, pp. 601–615.

eventually led to the emergence of the yellow type associated with the Twenty-First Dynasty, characterized by an abundance of *horror vacui* and increasingly complex decoration throughout the Dynasty's duration. Notable features of this evolution include the enlarging floral collar as the Dynasty progresses and the central panel gaining additional registers.<sup>20</sup>

As discussed further below, delving deeper into this particular decorative approach reveals potential religious implications, hinting at impacts on beliefs systems or ritual practices during this period. Furthermore, it provides insights into the social statuses of individuals associated with such mummy boards.

#### 4. MANUFACTURE AND MATERIALITY OF THE MUMMY BOARD

In terms of the construction of the object's support, the mummy board was crafted with a rectangular main central plank that extended the entire length of the object (Fig. 1). Additional wooden elements, serving as parts of the headband and mask, were attached to the upper portion of this plank, each secured with three holes—although both parts are now lost (Fig. 6). The hands were likewise affixed to this main plank using dowels, one per hand. While the entire mummy board was nearly intact when discovered, as observed in the archival picture (Fig. 3), the main plank is currently fractured into four parts, along with the absence of the headband and mask.

Notably, as seen in the archival picture, an area around the lower part of the inscription displays a gap and losses that extend throughout the inscription and its surrounding areas. Interestingly, beneath the large gap, the decoration and preparation layer(s) are lost, revealing an ancient small piece of wood that is still visible and originally filled an existing gap in the wood (Fig. 8). This indicates an old repair, suggesting that when the plank was used, part of the wood was already degraded in some parts and required fixes. The manufacturers likely opted to add *muna* and possibly small pieces of wood to provide support for the plaster, creating reinforcement. Although this practice is observed only once on the object, it is likely that a similar scenario occurred in the large gap that is now lost. In fact, in the archival picture,



FIG. 8. Ancient repair on the object.

<sup>20</sup> NIWIŃSKI 1988, pp. 68–69. For the evolution of the central panel, see SOUSA 2018b.

fissures are already visible in that area, indicating perhaps the presence of a significant amount of plaster and possibly a piece or pieces of wood to support it underneath the pictorial layer(s). The exact timing of this repair(s), whether they occurred during the original creation of the object for the unknown male individual or during a later redecoration for Henetdjefawaset, remains unknown.<sup>21</sup> In any case, the presence of an older restoration, whenever it took place, sheds light on the conditions of the wood used and its associated economic circumstances.

The already deteriorated wood, combined with the impact of discovering the object, likely aggravated and led to the current damage of the main plank and contributed to the losses in specific areas around the inscription and the overall mummy board.<sup>22</sup> As for the missing headband and mask, their fate remains unknown, and it is uncertain whether their disappearance is linked to degradation or other trafficking practices that were not uncommon at the time. They may also be awaiting (re)discovery in storage. However, the exact timing of these modern deteriorations and losses is unknown.

Affixed to both sides of the main plank are two pieces each (Fig. 1), serving to emulate the anthropomorphic form of the deceased with the object. On both sides, the upper piece is larger, while the one beneath is smaller, stacked one on top of the other to achieve the intended effect. Presently, on the left side,<sup>23</sup> both pieces are clearly visible, whereas on the right side, the lower piece remains attached to the main plank, not only secured by dowels but also by layers of preparation and decoration, resulting in partial visibility on the underside of the object.

Additionally, on the lower part of the mummy board, specifically on its right side, there would have been a small rectangular attachment, now lost, intended to complete the plank in that area. The reason for the necessity of including this small piece, whenever it occurred, remains unknown, perhaps due to the previously mentioned degradation of the main plank or other factors related to manufacturing or subsequent modifications.

All these additional pieces attached to the main plank were secured with dowels. Setting aside the main plank, the use of several small wooden pieces sheds light on the economization of wood and manufacturing practices.

Regarding changes to the mummy board, in addition to the previously mentioned decorative alterations, some manufacturing indications suggest wood modifications, although they seem unrelated to the subsequent modification of the object for Henetdjefawaset. One such indication is a hole visible next to the right earring on the side of the cover (Fig. 5). This hole, having no relevance to the purpose of the mummy board, was not utilized for any attachment during the funerary use.

<sup>21</sup> Two decorative layers are visible on the object, although this does not necessarily imply that the object was not subjected to additional modifications or that the wood was not repurposed from previously used materials for uses beyond funerary contexts.

<sup>22</sup> As discussed, Bruyère observed severe damage to the coffin associated with the mummy board, caused by exposure to the effects of rain and contact with rat droppings during its extended period buried in the ground (BRUYÈRE 1929, p. 13; BRUYÈRE 1930, p. 31). This undoubtedly contributed to the deterioration of both the coffin and the associated mummy board, as evident in the archival photo showing signs of humidity degradation on the mummy board. Moisture may have penetrated through the inner coffin, hastening the deterioration process. Over time, the degradation of the mummy board has worsened, with modern biological implications, compounded by damage incurred after Bruyère discovered the coffin.

<sup>23</sup> The terms “left” and “right” when referring to the funerary object are based on the perspective of the mummy that was once associated with the object.

On the opposite side of the main plank, there are at least three additional holes, which are not visible unless one removes the two additional small wooden fragments that conceals them, and similarly, do not serve any attachment purpose. Interestingly, the additional two wooden planks on that side, used to create the anthropomorphic shape of the deceased, utilize other holes aligned with the same holes on the opposite side that are attached to their respective two wooden additional elements.

Furthermore, these four holes on the main plank, devoid of any apparent reason, one on the right side and three on the left, are evenly spaced from each other. They could be attributed to a manufacturing error during the object's preparation, likely for the male individual, or to the possibility that the wood had previously been used in another context, possibly even funerary, or for other unknown reasons.

A similar situation is observed with the lower attachment on the left side, where there is a whole passing through the small piece, but it does not extend through the main central plank (Fig. 9). This hole, also lacking any functional purpose, suggests that not only the main plank may have had previous alternative uses, but also the small wooden pieces utilized in shaping the object. However, it is important to note that mistakes during manufacture cannot be entirely ruled out.

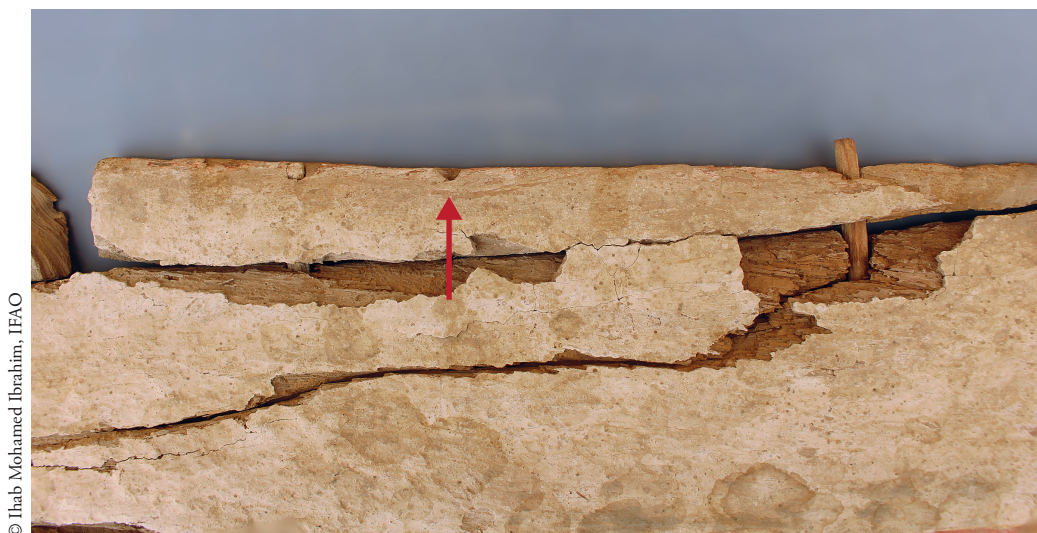
Regarding the wood species used in the manufacture of the object,<sup>24</sup> most of the planks are crafted from *Ficus sycomorus* (sycamore fig), except for one. The lower piece on the left side of the object, attached to the central main plank (Fig. 9), is made of *Tamarix sp.* (tamarisk). While speculative, this difference in material, along with the presence of an additional hole on the piece without any practical purpose for the mummy board, suggests that this fragment may have been previously employed for another purpose and repurposed and/or modified for the mummy board.

As for the analyzed dowels, they are crafted from *Acacia nilotica* (Egyptian acacia). These indigenous wood species are commonly used for the construction of coffins and mummy boards, particularly those dating back to the Twenty-First Dynasty, which have undergone more extensive analysis.<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that the use of acacia for the dowels is common, likely due to its hardness and durability,<sup>26</sup> making it well-suited for their purpose of structural support and joining fragments to help keep the object intact.

<sup>24</sup> The analysis of the wood species constituting the various wooden fragments of the mummy board, along with the interpretation of the samples, was performed on site by Gersande Eschenbrenner Diemer. The goal was to study the object from a multidisciplinary perspective. I am grateful for her generosity in sharing the results of her study. The protocol for the microscopic analyses took into account the state of conservation and accessibility of the artifact's various constituent parts (upper part, middle of the stem, base, tenon, and pegs). Each element was sampled by manually cutting the wood with razor blades, primarily in hidden areas between the connections of the various parts of the artefact to avoid visible damage. Several small samples (1 × 1 × 2 mm) were taken on-site along the tangential, transverse, and radial sections of the wood. Each sample was then rehydrated in clear water before being placed on a thin glass slide and examined under a portable optical microscope at different magnifications (X20 to X100). Each sample was photographed, enabling the collection and comparison of data useful for identifying the botanical taxon of the examined wood.

<sup>25</sup> ASENSI AMORÓS 2017, p. 46. Part of these analyses fall under the Vatican Coffin Project (VPC), an international multi-institutional initiative directed by Alessia Amenta, which has conducted extensive scientific studies and material testing on numerous coffins to gain insight into their production and manufacturing techniques (AMENTA 2014).

<sup>26</sup> ASENSI AMORÓS 2017, pp. 45, 47.



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FIG. 9. Arrow marking a manufacturing hole without any functional purpose.

Finally, regarding the varnish,<sup>27</sup> which was typically used during that period to cover decorations set against a yellow background, it is noteworthy that the motifs and inscription on this object lack any varnish. This absence is surprising, especially given the association of the mummy board with an inner coffin, now lost, that was described as yellow-varnished in Bruyère's publication.<sup>28</sup> This observation raises questions about the priorities for varnishing funerary elements that were part of the same set. However, there is not enough information available to ascertain if the inner coffin associated with Henetdjefawaset's mummy board was originally decorated for her, reused and redecorated, or simply reused without modification. Interestingly, archival pictures (Fig. 4) reveal that, unlike the mummy board, the lid of the inner coffin includes hands associated with female covers,<sup>29</sup> although none of the decoration on the object can be observed. Furthermore, the object also features arms and forearms in relief, a characteristic absent on the mummy board. It would not be surprising if the inner coffin and mummy board were decorated at different times and perhaps even in different locations, regardless of their intended original owner. Consequently, the presence of varnish on the coffin does not necessarily imply that the action was specifically intended for Henetdjefawaset.

The absence of varnish on the mummy board, combined with its crude manufacture and decoration, featuring a reduced color palette, as well as the partial modification from male to female, provides insights into the quality of its commission for Henetdjefawaset. As discussed below, the white decorative type of mummy boards, featuring less iconographical and textual elements than the contemporaneous traditional type, does not necessarily imply lower status. Such objects, although typically varnished at least partially, were often used by high-status

<sup>27</sup> The Medjehu Project also aims to study the resin varnishes and other mixtures found on coffins and other grave goods. I am grateful to Margaret Serpico, who is responsible for this aspect within the Project, for our discussions regarding the absence of varnish on the mummy board and its possible significance.

<sup>28</sup> BRUYÈRE 1930, p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> Regarding this aspect, it is important to note the absence of breasts and earrings, typically associated with female individuals, although this may be linked to the degradation of the object over time.

individuals. In contrast, Henetdjefawaset held the title of a simple Chantress of Amun, and while her female titulary may not accurately reflect her true status as it does with male individuals, her lower status is evident in the quality of her overall burial. If one assumes that the deceased was Henetdjefawaset, the method of mummification used for the body associated with the burial, as described by Bruyère,<sup>30</sup> which did not involve the removal of organs from the body, as well as the quality of the associated wrapping, aligns with the suggested status of Henetdjefawaset. Ongoing studies on mummified remains in Deir el-Medina are anticipated to provide deeper insights into this aspect.<sup>31</sup>

In conclusion, the adoption of this particular decorative approach for Henetdjefawaset suggests that despite, although she was probably not part of the high elite,<sup>32</sup> either she, the individual who commissioned her mummy board, or the decorator may have aspired to emulate the prestigious customs and preferences of the elite during that period.<sup>33</sup> Although speculative, this symbolic gesture could have been an attempt to elevate Henetdjefawaset's status symbolically, aligning her burial with those of higher-ranking individuals.

## 5. ANCIENT DECORATIVE MODIFICATION OF THE ARTIFACT

Evidence on the object suggests that it was originally intended for a male individual but later underwent alterations and redecoration for a female individual. Firstly, the earrings on the object are painted rather than being modeled with plaster and subsequently painted, which is commonly observed for such details. Additionally, the mummy board lacks the representation of breasts, a feature typically found on covers from that period intended for female individuals (Fig. 6). However, these characteristics could be attributed to various factors, not necessarily indicating ancient modifications to the object, such as a lower quality craftsmanship, limited resources, or time constraints.

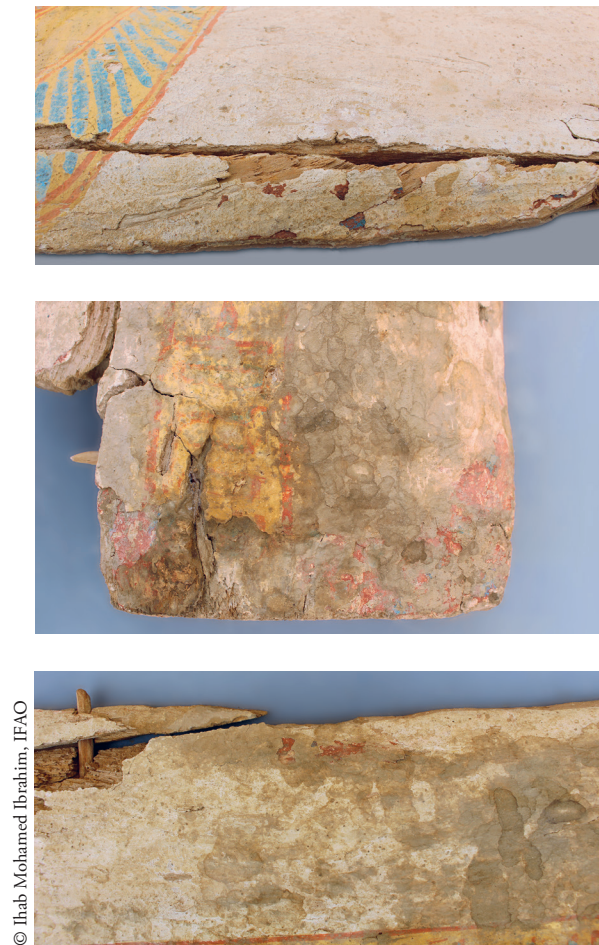
<sup>30</sup> BRUYÈRE 1929, p. 13; BRUYÈRE 1930, p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> The examination and study of mummified remains preserved on site is being conducted by Anne Austin and Mélie Louys. Notably, studies on mummification techniques related to individuals from Deir el-Medina are being reevaluated. For example, it has been traditionally suggested that during the later part of the Eighteenth Dynasty, none of the known bodies of Deir el-Medina workers and their families, including notable figures such as Kha and his wife Merit, underwent preservation measures beyond basic wrapping (DODSON 2000, p. 98). This has led to the suggestion that suboptimal mummification may not necessarily be attributed solely to the deceased's status but could also occur due to various other unknown reasons. However, more recent studies contradict this interpretation, suggesting that Kha and Merit were not poorly mummified but instead underwent specific mummification practices (BIANUCCI et al. 2015). Although these observations cannot be generalized, they indicate a more complex picture and underscore the need for further studies on this matter. Previous statements must also be revised using modern techniques.

<sup>32</sup> Her burial, as described on Bruyère's excavation report (BRUYÈRE 1929, p. 13), included a small gilded ring. This indicates that although she had access to gilding material, it was probably utilized modestly, mainly for decorative purposes on the ring, rather than for crafting the entire piece from solid gold. This suggests that while she may have been part of a lower elite class with access to certain luxury items and a respectable burial, her social status may not have reached the level of the high elite.

<sup>33</sup> This practice is also observed during the Twenty-First Dynasty, as evidenced by the coffin of Tamutmutef (*Tj-Mwt-Mwt-f*) (Museo Egizio, Turin: Cat. 2228; CGT 10119.a-b, CGT 10120) (NIRWIŃSKI (ed.) 2004, pp. 117–125, pls. XXXIII.2, XXXIV–XXXVI), which emulates, albeit in a lower quality, a decorative style and approach typically reserved for the coffins associated with the very high elite and individuals linked to the High Priest of Amun, such as the coffin of Meritamun (*Mrt-Īmn*) (Egyptian Museum, Cairo: E 29704 + 29734 [CG 6176, 6175, 6197]) (SOUSA, VILARÓ-FABREGAT forthcoming).

A more compelling indication of ancient repurposing of the object is evident in the clenched fists, a characteristic typically associated with male covers. This strongly suggests that the object was originally intended for a male individual. Further evidence of this repurposing is found beneath the final layer of decoration, where remnants of a previous decorative layer are visible in areas where damage has occurred. On the lower section, beneath the current white decoration, remnants of decoration characterized by red and blue pigments can be observed (Fig. 10). This decoration was likely associated with a bead net pattern, a feature observed in the lower section of some mummy boards from the late New Kingdom onwards.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, remnants of a blue underlayer are visible on the headband (Fig. 5), indicating that it likely belonged to the previous decoration. Hence, it can be inferred that the object underwent a process of replastering and complete repainting at some point.



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FIG. 10. Superposition of two decorative layers on the object.

<sup>34</sup> For instance, consider the late Ramesside cartonnage mummy board of Tashedamun from TT61 (Inv. Reg No 2003. Ca.004; SCHREIBER 2006, p. 187, n. 2; Inv. N. I.4.42: SCHREIBER 2015b, pls. XVI, XXII). For a textual, iconographic, stylistic and contextual analysis of the object, see SCHREIBER 2006; SCHREIBER 2018, p. 194. Interestingly, the white type of decoration is uncommon during the Twenty-First Dynasty, whereas the red beat type is relatively more prevalent in wooden mummy boards from the period (NIWIŃSKI 1988, p. 82), for reasons yet unknown. Of note, the decoration of the lower section covered either with white paint or featuring a reticulate pattern imitating a bead-netting shroud does not vary depending on the gender of the deceased.

Furthermore, the mummy board features the carving of the forearms, a detail already documented by Bruyère in his excavation diaries (Fig. 2). However, these carvings are currently obscured by part of the floral collar, necklace, and white paint (Fig. 6), thereby deviating from their original intention of portraying the deceased with forearms crossed on the chest in a mummiform pose. The carving of the forearms extends from the male wooden hands to the end of the curvature coinciding with the position of the elbows as intended on the object.

Considering the alterations undergone by the object, it is plausible to suggest that initially, the mummy board featured carved and depicted forearms. However, during the redecoration of the object, for unknown reasons, a decision was made to cover that area with new decoration instead of adhering to the prior arrangement.

As argued by Kara Cooney,<sup>35</sup> the practice of coffin modification and/or reuse during the Twentieth and early Twenty-First Dynasties typically did not effectively conceal the original construction of the support, nor did it commonly involve the removal of the older decoration before applying a new pictorial layer. Additionally, the modification of the support may have sometimes required more wood modification than the craftsperson's time and/or resources would allow. This constraint often obliged the craftsman to preserve the old wood modelling in a redecorated piece. However, this scenario evolved over the course of the Dynasty.

It remains uncertain whether there was any connection between the previous owner of the object and Henetdjefawaset. Equally uncertain is whether the object was utilized by the previous male owner or if it underwent modifications, for unknown reasons, before being used. Additionally, the exact duration between the initial and subsequent decoration phases remains unknown, as well as whether they occurred in the same location. These unanswered questions underscore the complexity of coffin modification and/or reuse, as well as the challenges involved in dating funerary objects from that period, considering the various factors and perspectives. The process of reuse and modification often leads to a mix of styles and multiple interventions on the same object, spanning different moments, which complicates efforts in typological seriation.<sup>36</sup>

## 6. TENTATIVE DATING OF THE LAST DECORATIVE LAYER ON THE OBJECT

When examining the chronology of the object, as well as coffins in general, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of multiple developmental phases within the same artifact—such as manufacture, preparation, and painting. This complexity significantly complicates the process of dating, as these stages may have occurred independently and at different points in time. Moreover, as evidenced, the object itself could have undergone modifications over time, further complicating efforts to establish its historical timeline.

Regarding the decoration of the mummy board for Henetdjefawaset, there is a dearth of information concerning its precise moment of adornment. No associated documents pertaining

<sup>35</sup> COONEY 2019, pp. 100–101, 104–105.

<sup>36</sup> COONEY 2018, p. 74.

to the owner shed light on this matter. However, the decoration of the object does provide some indications. Its resemblance to the typical decoration approach, characterized by a white lower section found on numerous objects dated to the late Ramesside period, suggests a potential chronological correlation within a similar timeframe.

To support the argument for dating the decoration associated with Henetdjefawaset to the late Ramesside period, several significant features emerge. These include the presence of a simple headband, the depiction of the *nfr*, *wꜣꜣt* and *nb* motifs beneath the wig of the deceased, a simple floral collar with three rows of floral patterns, and the arrangement of the central panel with two registers, complemented by a single line of inscription.

However, a significant discrepancy with the proposed chronological framework arises from the absence of depicted forearms and/or arms of the deceased, a characteristic typical for this period.<sup>37</sup> As mentioned earlier, such features would likely have been present in the previous decoration of the mummy board, originally intended for a male individual, as suggested by the presence of initially carved forearms. The transition in decoration from one phase to another remains ambiguous, raising questions about why the new decoration covered this area without incorporating the expected features customary for the period. Factors such as constraints in time, resources, or skills may have influenced this decision. However, while these explanations are plausible, the exact reasons remain unknown and are speculative without firm supporting evidence.

Furthermore, it is notable that there is no representation of a winged female goddess on the central panel. Instead, a simplified depiction of a winged scarab replaces the anticipated figure. This deviation from tradition prompts further inquiry into the rationale behind this choice. Once again, this underscores the complexity of defining typologies for these types of objects and categorizing them within closed typologies, as there is a multitude of variations among them that may correspond to unknown reasons.

## 7. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COVERS WITH WHITE DECORATION ON THEIR LOWER SECTION

The figure below (Fig. 11) catalogs identified covers, encompassing both mummy boards and lids, with lids being relatively rare, exhibiting a common decorative approach notably characterized by white decoration on the lower section. These artifacts originate from Theban sites such as Deir el-Medina and other necropolises, shedding light on the widespread use of this decorative approach in the Theban area and its association with several individuals buried on different sites. While the Theban origin of some items can be inferred from associated information regarding the owner, the exact place of discovery remains unknown. Undoubtedly, the number of known examples will continue to grow as future excavations yield new discoveries, and as previously overlooked material stored in museums and storerooms is published.

<sup>37</sup> VAN WALSEM 1993.

Owner	Origin	Element	Support
Pa-[...]shepes-[...] ( <i>Pz-[...]šps-[...]</i> ) <sup>38</sup>	El-Khokha TT400, Structure 5, chamber 2 (2014.Ca.006)	MB <sup>39</sup>	C
Shedwyduat ( <i>Šd-wy-dwꜣt</i> ) <sup>40</sup>	El-Khokha TT400, Structure 5, chamber 2 (2014.Ca.004)	MB	C
Panakht-[...] <sup>41</sup> ( <i>Pz-nḥt-[...]</i> )	El-Khokha TT400, Structure 5, chamber 2 (2014.Ca.015)	MB	C
Henuttawy ( <i>Hwt-tꜣwy</i> ) <sup>42</sup>	El-Khokha TT400, <sup>43</sup> Structure 5, chamber 2 (2014.Ca.001)	MB	C
Unknown (not preserved?) <sup>44</sup>	Deir el-Medina (DeM_2021_M12_0163, DeM_2021_M12_0164, DeM_2021_M12_0232, DeM_2021_M12_0515) <sup>45</sup> (Fig. 12)	MB	C
Unknown (not preserved?)	Deir el-Medina (DeM_2021_M12_279) (Fig. 13)	MB	C
Takhaensetep[...]? ( <i>Tꜣ-hꜣ-n-štp[...]</i> ) <sup>46</sup>	Deir el-Medina (DeM_2021_M12_176, DeM_2021_M12_177, DeM_2021_M12_178, DeM_2021_M12_179) <sup>46</sup> (Fig. 14)	MB	C
Unknown (not preserved?) <sup>47</sup>	Deir el-Medina (DeM_2021_M12_587) (Fig. 15)	MB	C
Khaemipet ( <i>Hꜣ-m-ipt</i> ) <sup>48</sup>	Unknown Theban origin (Private collection of B.P. Harris, briefly on display in the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina (No inv. Number))	MB	W
Nesiamon ( <i>Nsy-ꜥmn</i> ) <sup>49</sup>	Unknown Theban origin (City Museum, Leeds [D. 426-426.a.1960]) (Fig. 16)	MB <sup>50</sup>	W

FIG. 11. Covers exhibiting a white lower section.

<sup>38</sup> SCHREIBER 2018, p. 190 [6].

<sup>39</sup> MB = Mummy board; IL = Inner lid; C = Cartonnage; W = Wood.

<sup>40</sup> SCHREIBER 2018, pp. 188–190 [4].

<sup>41</sup> SCHREIBER 2018, p. 191 (fig. 7)–192 [10].

<sup>42</sup> SCHREIBER 2018, p. 187 [1].

<sup>43</sup> In addition to the mummy boards listed in the table as originating from TT400, three more mummy boards featuring white lower sections were discovered in the same room: 2014.Ca.002, 2014.Ca.013 and 2014.Ca.014 (SCHREIBER 2018, pp. 187–192 [2, 8, 9]). However, they are not considered in this study due to the unavailability of photographs.

<sup>44</sup> “Not preserved?” indicates that the name is presently unknown due to the fragmented nature of the item. Additionally, it is uncertain whether the name would have originally been featured on the object or not.

<sup>45</sup> Special thanks go to the team led by Marie-Lys Arnette for cataloguing and documenting the hundreds of cartonnage fragments preserved in Deir el-Medina, as well as to Younes Ahmed for the attachment and conservation of the fragments that were originally part of the same object.

<sup>46</sup> Fragments DeM\_2021\_M12\_176 and DeM\_2021\_M12\_177 are connected, as are fragments DeM\_2021\_M12\_178 and DeM\_2021\_M12\_179. The two groups exhibit the same paleography, decoration, and characteristics in the support material and stratigraphy. This indicates that these fragments were likely part of the same object. However, the additional fragment(s) that would connect these groups are unknown or lost.

<sup>47</sup> Following the title ending with *st mꜣꜣt*, there is the sign *wn*, yet it remains uncertain whether it constitutes an additional title or is part of the name of the deceased.

<sup>48</sup> LACOVARA, BAUMANN 2005, pp. 50–51.

<sup>49</sup> SCHMIDT 1919, p. 129, figs. 670–673; NIWIŃSKI 1988, p. 145 [220]; DAVID, TAPP (eds.) 1992; WASSELL 2008; VAN WALSEM 2000, pp. 347–348; COONEY 2007, pp. 470–472; LIPTAY 2011, pp. 13–14.

<sup>50</sup> Its lower section was originally painted white (OSBURN 1828, p. 2, pl. I; DAVID, TAPP (eds.) 1992, pp. 90–91; WASSELL 2008, p. 8). Unfortunately, it suffered severe damage from a bomb blast in 1941 during WWII hostilities, leading to subsequent black paint application, presumably to conceal the damage. For a pre-war photograph of the object, see DAVID, TAPP (eds.) 1992, p. 91, fig. 25.

Owner	Origin	Element	Support
Panebmontu ( <i>P3-nb-Mntw</i> ) <sup>51</sup>	Unknown Theban origin (Musée du Louvre, Paris (E. 13046))	MB	W
Ankhef ( <i>nb=f</i> )	Unknown Theban origin (Bodryddan Hall (No inv. Number))	MB	W
Shed[...] ( <i>Šd[...]</i> ) <sup>52</sup>	Sheikh Abd el-Qurna TT97, chamber I (No 71)	MB	W
Unknown (not preserved?) <sup>53</sup>	Deir el-Bahari, MMA 6o (D/III.4)	MB	W
Unknown (not preserved?)	Deir el-Medina (DeM_2024_TT217M_0112)	MB	W
Henetdjefawaset ( <i>Hnt- df-W3st</i> ) <sup>54</sup>	Deir el-Medina (DeM_2023_TT217_0053) (Fig. 1)	MB	W
Unknown (not preserved?)	Deir el-Medina (DeM_2023_TT217M_0026)	IL	W
Horpesh ( <i>Hr-pš</i> ) <sup>55</sup>	Bab el-Gasus (Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE 29715 (CG 6072))	IL	W
	Bab el-Gasus (Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE 29715 (CG 6071))	MB	W
Padikhonsu ( <i>P3-di-Hnsw</i> ) <sup>56</sup>	Unknown Theban origin (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon [H 2320]) (Fig. 17)	IL	W
	Unknown Theban origin (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon [H 2321]) (Fig. 17)	MB	W

FIG. 11 (continued). Covers exhibiting a white lower section.

During the latter part of the Twentieth Dynasty, an evolution in the decoration of mummy boards took place. The emerging design, which characterizes the materials under discussion, coexisted both temporally and spatially with earlier traditional Ramesside designs and decorations featured on the lower section (Fig. 16). The simultaneous presence of multiple divergent designs and decorative approaches during this period reflects the diversity and complexity of the materials. The manufacturing of the analyzed mummy boards also exhibits variability, with both wood and cartonnage being employed concurrently in their creation during the timespan covered by the materials under discussion. By the beginning of the Twenty-First Dynasty and throughout its duration, wood became the exclusive material for manufacturing mummy boards, though the reasons for this shift remain unknown.

The choice between wood and cartonnage might have been influenced by the likely higher cost of wood compared to cartonnage,<sup>57</sup> suggesting a correlation with the higher economic

51 NIWIŃSKI 1988, p. 164 [330], pl. 3B; VAN WALSEM 2000, p. 348.

52 MOND, EMERY 1929, p. 69, pl. LXVII b. The authors refer to the object as an “inner lid,” though this term is used in their publication for mummy boards. The quality of the published picture makes it impossible to determine the full name.

53 NIWIŃSKI 1985, p. 209, fig. 1b; KAMRIN 2020, pp. 811–812. Andrzej Niwiński associated the object with an inner coffin, although there is not enough iconographical nor textual evidence to corroborate such an association.

54 BRUYÈRE 1929, p. 13; BRUYÈRE 1930, pp. 31–32.

55 DARESSY 1907, p. 10 [A. 97]; NIWIŃSKI 1988, p. 129 [133]; NIWIŃSKI 1995, pp. 90–94, pls. XVII.2, XVIII.1.

56 JAMEN 2016; JAMEN 2017; DAUTANT, JAMEN 2017, p. 132 [30]; TARASENKO 2019, p. 97.

57 COONEY 2007, pp. 198–199.



12.



13.



14.



15.

FIG. 12. Fragments of the cartonnage mummy board DeM\_2021\_M12\_0163, DeM\_2021\_M12\_0164, DeM\_2021\_M12\_0232, DeM\_2021\_M12\_0515.

FIG. 13. Fragment of the cartonnage mummy board DeM\_2021\_M12\_279.

FIG. 14. Fragments of the cartonnage mummy board DeM\_2021\_M12\_176, DeM\_2021\_M12\_177, DeM\_2021\_M12\_178, DeM\_2021\_M12\_179.

FIG. 15. Fragment of the cartonnage mummy board DeM\_2021\_M12\_587.



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FIG. 16. Lid and mummy board of Nesiamon (City Museum, Leeds (D. 426-426.a.1960)).



© Lyon MBA, photos by Alain Basset

FIG. 17. Lid and mummy board of Padikhonsu (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon (H 2320, H 2321)).



class or status of the owner. However, this may not have been the sole determining factor, as specific individual preferences, variations in chronology, or other unknown factors could have played significant roles in material selection.

Information about the coffins associated with the presented mummy boards is scarce. Only the coffins associated with Nesiamon (City Museum, Leeds [D. 426-426.a.1960]) (Fig. 16), Panebmontu (musée du Louvre, Paris [E. 13029]), Ankhef (Bodrhyddan Hall [no inv. Number]), Horpesh, and Padikhonsu (Fig. 17) are known. While the first three follow a traditional decoration on the lids, those of Horpesh and Padikhonsu also incorporate the innovative design with a white lower section. The reasons behind this discrepancy are explored further below.

As for the rest of mummy boards, their associated coffins were likely made of wood.<sup>58</sup> The scarcity of coffins associated with mummy boards featuring this unique decoration

<sup>58</sup> Only very few remains of these anthropoid wooden coffins have been found in the tombs, as exemplified by the fragments found in el-Khokha associated with the discussed burials, which were heavily looted (SCHREIBER 2015a, p. 50; SCHREIBER 2018, p. 194), in contrast with the large amount of cartonnage mummy boards that survived.

perhaps indicates that they were reused during the economically recessive period following the New Kingdom.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the arrangement and decoration on the lower section of their associated lids, whether they followed the traditional design or exemplified the innovative design, cannot be known as none have survived or been identified. Considering this potential coffin reuse, this raises the question of whether mummy boards were reused less frequently or if cartonnage mummy boards, in particular, were less frequently reused because of the nature of their materiality.

## 8. CHRONOLOGICAL SPAN OF THE DECORATIVE APPROACH

Unfortunately, there is limited information available concerning the chronological data associated with the decoration of the objects presented in Fig. 11. However, a subset of this corpus is linked to additional documents or archaeological contexts that offer insights into the chronological timeframe of the individuals buried alongside them.

Regarding the chronological data related to the cartonnage mummy boards examined from tomb TT400 (Structure 5, Chamber 2) in el-Khokha, their associated archaeological context indicates a timeframe corresponding to the late Ramesside period. This determination relies on stylistic details and chronological data obtained from specific objects, such as pottery, shabtis, and a fragmentary shabti jar found in association with the burials.<sup>60</sup> This chronology holds significance not only for the cartonnage mummy boards discovered in that chamber and analyzed in this study but also for other materials attributed to the same coherent group due to their decorative similarities.

The exact moment of the emergence of the decorative innovation on the lower section remains unknown, but the mummy board of Pa-[...]-shepes-[...] may represent a transitional object indicating an earlier step towards the new design. Its lower section features novel white compartments segmented by vertical and horizontal red bands without texts. Traditionally, these bands, found on both lids and mummy boards, exhibit texts and emulate bandages, symbolizing the transfigured state of the deceased.<sup>61</sup> The owner of the mummy board, identified as a scribe of the Treasury [of the domain of] Amun (*sš pr-hd n [pr] Ḳmn*), could be the Pamedushepesnakht documented in the first and second years of the reign of Ramesses VII with the same title.<sup>62</sup> Considering that this mummy board may be a transitional piece, the beginning of the reign of Ramesses VII could be the *terminus post quem* for this innovative decorative design.

Related to the mummy board of Pa-[...]-shepes-[...] are at least two fragmentary cartonnage mummy boards of unknown individuals from Deir el-Medina. The first corresponds to the fragments DeM\_2021\_MI2\_0163, DeM\_2021\_MI2\_0164, DeM\_2021\_MI2\_0232, and DeM\_2021\_MI2\_0515, while the second corresponds to the fragment DeM\_2021\_MI2\_279. Although

<sup>59</sup> NIWIŃSKI 1988, p. 13; COONEY 2011, pp. 31–36.

<sup>60</sup> SCHREIBER 2006, p. 191; SCHREIBER 2015a, pp. 48–52; SCHREIBER 2018, pp. 187–199.

<sup>61</sup> SCHREIBER 2018, p. 194.

<sup>62</sup> SCHREIBER 2018, p. 198.

nothing is known about their archaeological context, they feature similar compartments. However, unlike the mummy board of Pa-[...]-shepes-[...], the examples from Deir el-Medina present inscriptions associated with these lateral bands, though it remains unknown if this implies slight chronological implications or not.

The division of the white lower section into red compartments is not the sole iconographical variation observed among these objects. It is uncertain if there are chronological implications, but some examples, coinciding with their owners all being female, features lappets of large polychromed stolae hanging down from the abdomen. Instances include the mummy board of Shed[...] from Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, that of Shedwyduat from el-Khokha, and that of the anonymous woman from MMA60. Whether this is a mere coincidence or indicative of gender distinctions or creative agency remains unknown. Similarly, the existence of a relative chronological sequence among these objects is uncertain, with only the object from el-Khokha being associated with a rather precise chronological timeframe.

Regarding other chronological data associated with the objects under discussion, though lacking a known archaeological context and precise origin, the mummy discovered inside Nesiamon's coffin set was found equipped with stolae depicting Ramesses XI, even though the coffin set's manufacture and/or decoration might predate his reign.<sup>63</sup> The chronological information from the stolae on Nesiamon's mummy aligns with the late Ramesside burials in TT400.

Considering the remarkable decorative similarities (manufacture, layout, motifs, scenes, details, texts, paleography) between the coffin sets of Nesiamon and Panebmontu,<sup>64</sup> as well as between their mummy boards and the mummy board of Khaemipet, a similar chronology can be proposed for the decoration of the funerary equipment of all three individuals, as three sets were likely decorated concurrently. Given the innovative iconography on the objects associated with the individuals, specially the lids and boxes associated with Nesiamon and Panebmontu, which feature a trend towards *horror vacui* and include novel iconography leaning towards the typical arrangement of decoration on yellow coffins from the early Twenty-First Dynasty, the materials can be dated towards the transition to the Twenty-First Dynasty.<sup>65</sup> This suggests that the white-type decoration at least persisted until the end of the New Kingdom.

Regarding the funerary materials associated with Ankhef, Horpesh and Padikhonsu, little is known about their owners, and additional material that could help determine the timing of decoration of their associated materials is lacking. However, while the coffin of Ankhef exhibits late Ramesside iconographical characteristics,<sup>66</sup> those of Horpesh and Padikhonsu present features possibly indicating their origin during the Twenty-First Dynasty. Furthermore, they are the only examples that include an inner lid featuring the same decorative approach as the mummy board.

In the case of Padikhonsu (Fig. 17), the presence of stola-like features on the coffin, along with the inclusion of a falcon, vulture, and winged solar disk, and the concealing of the forearms, deviate from traditional patterns. Similarly, Horpesh's covers display highly decorated floral collars and central panels, as well as the concealment of part of the forearms. If this

<sup>63</sup> Stolae can only provide dates for mummies, not coffins (VAN WALSEM 1993, pp. 20–21, 30; VAN WALSEM 2000, pp. 347–348).

<sup>64</sup> NIWIŃSKI 1988, p. 164 [330]; VAN WALSEM 2000, p. 348.

<sup>65</sup> VAN WALSEM 2000, p. 348; COONEY 2007, pp. 248, n. 48; 470, n. 46; 484.

<sup>66</sup> For certain features of late Ramesside coffins, see NIWIŃSKI 2019, p. 61.

suggested relative chronology with respect to the other discussed artifacts is true, it is unknown if the later occurrence of the pattern could have resulted from archaization or reinterpretation of tradition with new trends of the time. It is also worth considering if the fragments of the inner lid, adorned with white decoration on its lower section, documented in Deir el-Medina (DeM\_2023\_TT217M\_0026), were decorated during the Twenty-First Dynasty. Perhaps the difference in dating would explain why lids from that moment were found with such decoration while those associated with mummy boards of the late Ramesside period were not, for reasons yet unknown.

In any case, regardless of the moment of decoration, there appears to be a connection between the social status implied by the titles of the male owners and the selection of this type of decoration, an aspect that will be discussed further below.

## 9. CRITICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCLUSIONS

Unlike traditional late Ramesside decoration, which is elaborate, the white sections are simpler. However, as discussed further below, the titulary of individuals owning such covers suggests they held significant status in Theban society, indicating that social status may have influenced specific decoration choices.<sup>67</sup> Although speculative, it is proposed that the inclusion of this specific decoration served to enhance and visually distinguish the owners during presumed social competitions associated with rituals, even though their exact nature remains unknown. The visual impact of these white covers likely conveyed the owner's high status to any potential audience.

Regarding Henetdjefawaset, while her burial suggests that she did not belong to high society, the low-quality decoration pattern of her mummy board may have been an attempt to imitate elite styles. This observation provides a nuanced perspective on ancient Egyptian society and funerary practices, highlighting not only the lives of the elite but also the aspirations and adaptations of individuals from lower social ranks.

<sup>67</sup> This novel line of inquiry into the potential influence of owners' social status on the choice of decorative styles and patterns represents a key outcome of the author's PhD dissertation, "Social Signifiers and Creative Production in the 20th and 21st Dynasties: (Re)Discovering the Individual in Yellow Coffin Decorative Models" (Scuola Superiore Meridionale, Naples, 2024). The research explores the underlying reasons behind specific decorations and their potential social significance, proposing that yellow coffin decorative models were intentionally chosen based on the social status of the owners of the funerary containers. This status was conveyed partly through the titles and social designations of the deceased, thereby expressing their class and professional roles. Although the conclusions remain partly speculative, as little is known about the exact nature and organization of workshops during this period—which would certainly vary depending on the context—the available evidence suggests that individuals with similar statuses often adopted specific and similar decorative patterns for their coffins. The social rationale and significance of iconography in coffin decorations indicate that these patterns were tailored for specific clients based on their social standings. This line of investigation opens new social perspectives for further exploration and discussion.

### 9.1. Potential influence of the owners' social status on decoration

Although secure chronological data and archaeological context are lacking for most of the materials under discussion, the analysis of the titulary, when preserved, indicates potential status relationships and connections among the owners (Fig. 18). The female titulary includes honorific and generic titles,<sup>68</sup> whereas the male titulary reveals the individuals' official roles and institutional affiliations, providing insights into their social status and roles within Theban society.

The overlapping functions and/or institutions associated with these individuals suggest a complex social network, highlighting the interconnectedness of elite circles in Theban society. Furthermore, there appears to be a relationship between socio-cultural dynamics and the potential influence of social status on the innovative funerary decorative approach exhibited on their respective covers, even if not all the covers were decorated simultaneously or within a short time frame, as suggested for some examples.

It is important to acknowledge the interpretative difficulties and uncertainties that arise from relying solely on owner titles on the studied objects as sources. A more in-depth investigation of additional contextual elements and funerary materials, including their materiality through scientific analysis, archaeological contexts, and additional textual sources related to the owners, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of their actual status and relationships. Unfortunately, these diverse data sources are unavailable (or not yet identified) for the presented examples.

Owner	Known titulary	
Pa-[...]shepes-[...] (P3-[...]šps-[...])	<i>šš pr-bd n [pr] Ḳmn</i>	Scribe of the Treasury of [the Domain of] Amun
Shedwyduat (Šd-wy-dwꜣt)	<i>nbt pr; šmꜣyt n Ḳmn</i>	Mistress of the house; Chantress of Amun
Panakht-[...] (P3-nbt-[...])	<i>[...] pr Ḳmn</i>	[...] Domain of Amun
Henuttawy (Ḳnwꜣt-ꜣwy)	<i>šmꜣyt n Ḳmn-Rꜥ nsw ntrw</i>	Chantress of Amun-Ra king of the gods
Unknown (not preserved?) (DeM_2021_M12_587) (Fig. 15)	<i>[...] m st mAat wn [...]</i> <sup>69</sup>	[...] in the Place of Truth; One who opens [...]
Khaemipet (Ḳꜣ-m-ꜣpt)	<i>šš wꜣb htp n ntrw nbw</i>	Scribe who presents offerings to all the gods

FIG. 18. Titulary associated with individuals owning covers featuring white lower decoration.

<sup>68</sup> GRAEFE 1981, p. 48; NAGUIB 1990, pp. 19, 235–239.

<sup>69</sup> See *supra*, n. 46.

Owner		Known titulary
Nesiamon ( <i>Nsy-Īmn</i> ) (fig. 16) <sup>70</sup>	<i>it-ntr</i> ; <i>it-ntr mry</i> ; <i>w' b n Mnṯw-R' (nb) Wṯst</i> ; <i>sš hwt-ntr n Mnṯw-R' nb Wṯst</i> ; <i>sš hwt-ntr n Mnṯw-R' nsu ntrw</i> ; <i>sš wṯh htp n ntrw nbw Mḥw</i> <i>Šm' w</i> ; <i>sš ḥsb kṯw n pr Īmn-R' nsu ntrw</i> <i>Mwt Ḥnsu</i>	God's father; God's father, god's beloved; Wab-priest of Montu-Ra, (lord of) Thebes; Scribe of the temple of Montu-Ra, lord of Thebes; Scribe of the temple of Montu-Ra, king of the Gods; Scribe who presents offerings to all the gods of Upper and Lower Egypt; Scribe of the Accounts of the Cattle of the Domain of Amun-Ra king of the Gods, Mut and Khonsu
Panebmontu ( <i>Pṯ-nb-Mnṯw</i> ) <sup>71</sup>	<i>it-ntr mry-ntr</i> ; <i>it-ntr mry-ntr n Mnṯw-R' nb</i> <i>Wṯst</i> ; <i>w' b 'uy</i> ; <i>wn 'juy m st wrt</i> ; <i>ḥry sṯṯ m išd šps</i> ; <i>ḥry-ḥb tpy n Mnṯw nb Wṯst</i>	God's father, god's beloved; God's father, god's beloved of Montu-Ra, Lord of Thebes; The one with pure hands; One who opens the doors in the great place; Master of secrets of the noble Ished tree; First lector-priest of Montu, lord of Thebes
Ankhef ( <i>'nb=f</i> )	<i>w' b</i> ; <i>w' b 'z 'k [n pr Īmn?]</i> ; <i>sš n pr Īmn-R' nsu ntrw</i> ; <i>ḥm-ntr? Mrt-sgr?</i> <sup>72</sup>	Wab-priest; Wab-priest with access [to the Domain of Amun?]; Scribe of the Domain of Amun-Ra king of the gods; Prophet? of Meretseger?
Shed[...] ( <i>Šd[...]</i> )	<i>nbt pr</i> ; <i>šm'yt n Īmn-R' nsu ntrw</i>	Mistress of the house; Chantress of Amun-Ra king of the gods
Unknown (not preserved?) (MMA 60, D/III.4)	<i>nbt pr</i> ; <i>šm'yt n [...]</i>	Mistress of the house; Chantress of [...]
Henetdjefawaset (Fig. 1)	<i>nbt pr</i> ; <i>šm'yt n Īmn-R' nsu ntrw</i>	Mistress of the house; Chantress of Amun-Ra king of the gods
Horpesh ( <i>Ḥr-pš</i> )	<i>ḥry-ḥb nty st mṯ' t</i>	Lector-priest in the Place of Truth
Padikhonsu ( <i>Pṯ-dī-Ḥnsu</i> ) (Fig. 17)	<i>w' b</i> ; <i>ḥry-ḥb n pr Īmn</i> ; <i>wty n pr Īmn</i>	Wab-priest; Lector-priest of the Domain of Amun; Embalmer of the Domain of Amun

FIG. 18 (continued). Titulary associated with individuals owning covers featuring white lower decoration.

<sup>70</sup> The titles *it-ntr mry* and *w' b n Mnṯw-R' (nb) Wṯst* are only featured on his coffin and not on his mummy board.

<sup>71</sup> The title *ḥry-ḥb tpy n Mnṯw nb Wṯst* is also attributed to Panebmontu but is only featured on his coffin and not on his mummy board.

<sup>72</sup> It is important to note that Ankhef likely repurposed a previously decorated coffin, which was then modified for his use. Along with adding the titles associated with Ankhef, the name of the previous owner was erased. However, some of the previous titulary was retained for unknown reasons, although it remains uncertain whether Ankhef also held all of those roles or not. These titles include *wḥṯ n pr Īmn* (butler of the Domain of Amun); [...] *Īmn-R' nsu ntrw* ([...] of Amun-Ra king of the gods); *w' b n Īmn* (wab-priest of Amun). It is worth mentioning that only a partial analysis of the unpublished object was conducted, and future complete access to the object may provide new insights.

Upon analyzing the titulary of male owners, many of whom held prestigious scribal offices in administration or religious institutions, evidence of high-ranking status emerges, with some occupying even more important priestly roles such as Lector-priest. Contrasting this with the decoration on their associated covers, which exhibit a distinctive style, one can observe high-status titles not typically seen on more traditionally decorated mummy boards of the same period, intended for individuals of lower status.

This constellation of data raises the question of whether the decorative choices for the lower sections of the mummy boards could be linked to the social status of the owner, rather than being determined by other factors. Were these elements more innovative and perhaps associated with higher-status individuals who were the first to request or be subject to experimentation and/or innovation with their funerary equipment? Did this choice influence the social rituals and display practices during the funerary procession?

Of course, it is plausible that this correlation is merely coincidental, and the choice of decoration for the lower sections of the mummy boards could have been influenced by a variety of complementary factors, such as the preferences of the commissioners or other yet-to-be investigated motivations. However, if the male titulary indeed corresponds to the social status of the deceased, the decorative solution on the lower part of female mummy boards likely aligns with the social status of their respective husbands. There is no surviving information about the family ties that may have existed between the occupants of TT400, as the genealogy and filiation of the deceased are not typically inscribed on Ramesside coffins and mummy boards,<sup>73</sup> but that cannot be ruled out considering the choice of the iconography of the female individuals without any associated high status titulary.

This observation underscores the complexity of understanding the social statuses of female individuals solely based on their titulary. While titles offer valuable insights, they may not always provide a comprehensive understanding of an individual's social standing. However, cross-referencing titulary with the material culture found in their funerary context can sometimes offer supplementary information. By examining the objects and decorations accompanying the deceased, researchers can gain further clues about their societal roles, affiliations, and perhaps even their relationships with higher-status individuals.

However, regarding the mummy board of Henetdjefawaset, although she may not have held high-ranking status, her mummy board suggests a level of emulation of the elite classes. This indicates that individuals from lower socioeconomic strata were not merely passive observers of elite customs but actively imitated and adapted them to their own circumstances. This phenomenon underscores the dynamic interactions and cultural exchanges that occurred within ancient Egyptian society, where practices and symbols from the upper echelons permeated throughout various social strata, albeit in modified forms.

73 SCHREIBER 2015a, p. 50.

## 9.2. Religious and symbolic significance of the white lower section

In contrast to the covers with iconography across the entire surface, the mummy boards under discussion present iconography, often varnished, solely on the upper section and central panel. Their lower section adopts an innovative style, lacking iconography and painted white. The positioning of the hands, the omission of feet, and the simulation of the white shroud on the lower section suggest that the mummy boards represent the deceased elevated to the Osirian mummiform appearance.<sup>74</sup>

The deliberate emphasis placed on the white color is evident, as the majority of examples feature selective application of varnish on the deities, the floral collar, the hands of the cover, and the inscriptions, but never on the white background. Although the exact reasons for this choice are unknown, it appears to create a deliberate contrast between varnished areas and the unvarnished white background.

This new decorative approach and symbolism differ from the style observed at the beginning of the Ramesside period on the so-called festive-type coffins. The covers associated with these coffins depict the deceased in a living image,<sup>75</sup> showcasing them in ceremonial wigs with braiding motifs and a pleated, fringed white festal dress that resembles living attire. This depiction reveals body contours and even the feet, with arms and forearms not in a mummiform position.

In conclusion, this paper contextualizes the mummy board of Henetdjefawaset from Deir el-Medina within both temporal and spatial contexts, examining its decoration and modifications over time. The distinctive white lower section of the board represents an innovative decorative category briefly utilized during the late Ramesside period, with indications of limited use during the Twenty-First Dynasty. This study sheds light on this largely under-researched decorative style, providing insights into late Ramesside decoration in the Theban area and its iconographical evolution, particularly regarding mummy boards. Future research should seek additional materials to broaden this corpus, which is currently limited by the partiality of the analyzed examples. Further investigation will be crucial in validating hypotheses about the socio-cultural dynamics of the period and the possible influence of social status on coffin decoration, thereby enhancing the understanding of funerary practices and decorative traditions of the period.

<sup>74</sup> SCHREIBER 2018, p. 192.

<sup>75</sup> COONEY 2009, pp. 105–108; SOUSA 2018a, pp. 32–37.

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