

Agnieszka Ewa Kowalska

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THE WOODEN ANTHROPOID COFFIN FROM BURIAL 335

Agnieszka Ewa Kowalska

Excavations by the Polish-Egyptian Archaeological Mission at Saqqara in the area extending west of the funerary complex of Netjerykhet have so far brought to light 353 human burials, most of them from the Greco-Roman Period.¹⁾ A specific group among the discovered burials is formed by those in wooden anthropoid coffins.²⁾ One of these is Burial 335, discovered in 2002.³⁾

The coffin was discovered next to another anthropoid case in a layer of sand above the roof of the Old Kingdom rock-cut chapels (square 1715) (cf. *Fig. 6* on page 117 in this volume). It is made of relatively thin (ca. 1.5 cm) wooden planks, joined with small wooden pegs, covered with a thin layer of plaster and polychromed (*Figs. 1, 2*). It measures 121 cm in length, the width ranging from 26 cm at the foot end to 34 cm at shoulder

level; the maximum height is 22 cm. The coffin as such is quite well preserved, there being only small cracks and damaged sections at the feet. The planks themselves are in fair condition, but most of the joints have been destroyed due to peg decay and the pressure of the mass of sand accumulated above the coffin. The polychromy, however, is severely damaged: Traces of color are visible only on the mask and the wig, while the paint on the body has been lost.

Attached with wooden pegs to the facial part of the coffin is a separate mask (*Fig. 1*). It represents a human face in a wig that covers the upper part of the forehead. The features are carved with care but coarse, the modeling lacking in finesse that lends an air of unintended severity to the expression. The forehead is flat without the eyebrows indicated in relief and it is set

1) Cf. K. Mysliwiec, "The Ptolemaic Period Cemetery in West Saqqara", in: A Tribute to Excellence. Studies offered in honor of E. Gaál, U. Luft, L. Török, (ed. T.A. Bács), *Studia Aegyptiaca* XVII (Budapest 2002), 349-357. For the excavations in the necropolis, see K. Mysliwiec et al., *EtTrav* XVII (1995), 177-203; K. Mysliwiec, *PAM VIII, Reports 1996* (1997), 103-109 and the following volumes.

2) Numerous burials dating from approximately the same period, laid directly in sand, some of them in wooden coffins, with scarce or no additional equipment have been found in various places of the Memphite Necropolis, see e.g.: E. Strouhal, "Secondary Burials in the Area of the Mastaba of Ptahshepses at Abusir", in: Preliminary Report on Czechoslovak Excavations in the Mastaba of Ptahshepses at Abusir (Prague 1976), 85-89, figs. 40-41; L. Bareš, "Coffins of Secondary Burials from the Site of the Mastaba of Ptahshepses", in: Preliminary Report..., op. cit., 91-93, figs. 42-43; L.L. Giddy (with H.S. Smith and P.G. French), *The Anubieion at Saqqara II. Cemeteries* (London 1992), 33-61 and 87-90, Pls. 36-44; E. Strouhal, L. Bareš, *Secondary Cemetery in the Mastaba of Ptahshepses at Abusir* (Prague 1993), 45-60; Fr. Janot, C. Bridonneau, M.-Fr. de Rozieres, L. Cotelle-Michel, Chr. Decamps, "La mission archéologique du musée du Louvre à Saqqara: une nécropole d'époque tardive dans le secteur du mastaba d'Akhetetep", *BIFAO* 101 (2001), 249-291.

3) See report by K. Mysliwiec in this volume.



*Fig. 1. Wooden anthropoid coffin from Burial 335
(Photo M. Jawornicki)*

low over bulging eyes that have the outer corners markedly downturned. Black paint accentuates the corners, as also the pupils of the eyes. The cosmetic lines prolonging the eyebrows (practically parallel to the edge of the wig) descend toward the temples and join the cosmetic lines outlining the edge of the eyeball. The cheeks are flat, the cheekbones marked indistinctly. The facial part is clearly separated from the headgear, which protrudes slightly before the forehead and was painted blue. Ears are marked by vertical protrusions devoid of any further modeling, attached at the rear of the cheeks flush with the wig lappets. The nose is narrow and straight, the nostrils not indicated. The thin-lipped, slightly protruding mouth looks tight-drawn. The lower contour of the face is distinctly rounded.

The wig lappets take on the form of oblong planks with rounded upper ends. Made separately, they are affixed with wooden pegs to the upper surface of the coffin on both sides of the mask. The mask retains the following traces of polychromy: blue on the wig, white on the face; and black contours bordering the eyes. Apart from the mask and the wig lappets, there are no traces of carved decoration on the surface of the coffin.

Buried in this coffin was the mummy of a male, c. 25-35 years old; the bones, very poorly preserved, were found lying inside a compact mass consisting of bandages and mummified tissues.⁴⁾

Analogies to our coffin are not dated securely on archaeological grounds.⁵⁾ Neither does the context of our excavation – a stratum heavily disturbed by robbers at a later date⁶⁾ – permit this burial to be dated any more precisely than to the end of the Persian or the beginning of the Ptolemaic Period.

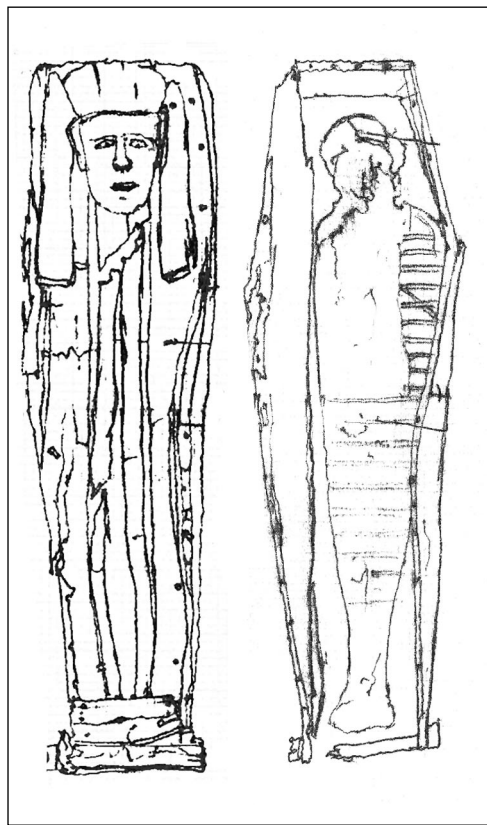


Fig. 2. *Wooden anthropoid coffin from Burial 335 (Drawing A. Kowalska)*

4) The information has been kindly provided by the expedition's anthropologist Prof. Dr. Maria Kaczmarek.

5) Cf. A. Niwiński, "Sarg NR-SpZt", *LÁ V*, col. 434-468; S. Ikram, A. Dodson, *The Mummy in Ancient Egypt* (Cairo 1998), 240-242.

6) Pottery found in the vicinity of Burial 335 is the chief dating criterion (pers. comm. T.I. Rzeuska), supplemented by the fragmentary bronze figurines originating from the same archaeological layer, cf. report by K. Mysliwiec in this volume.