

ÄS 0310: A SMALL OSIRIS COFFIN IN MUNICH

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In the Staatliche Museum Ägyptischer Kunst (hereafter SMAEK) in Munich, there is an unusual example of a small Osiris-type wooden coffin (inventory number München ÄS 0310).¹ This small coffin was part of a private collection donated to SMAEK in 1865. According to the 1865 inventory prepared by curator Franz Joseph Lauth, the artefact was acquired in 1817–18 by Franz Wilhelm Sieber (1789–1844).² It has been described as the coffin of a child;³ however, it appears too small to have contained a small human body (child mummy) and yet too big to have contained a grain mummy, like other small wooden coffins used for this purpose. What is the function of this small coffin and to whom might it have belonged?

Description of ÄS 0310

The miniature coffin is shaped like the mummiform body of Osiris, measuring 55.3 cm high and 15 cm wide; the lid is 8.5 cm deep and the box is 9 cm deep. The base and lid of the coffin are perforated at ankle level. A third hole is visible on the case above Osiris' head. The holes in the two halves were probably used to secure the lid to the case with wooden dowels. The small coffin is made entirely of wood, believed to be either sycamore or tamarisk, and vividly painted.⁴ A legible, fragmentary inscription is present on the lid (Fig. 1).

The serene countenance of Osiris is remarkably child-like in appearance. Both face and hands show traces of green paint, a colour symbolically associated with Osiris and the renewal of life, while the jewellery is painted with yellow and red pigment, and faint traces of blue paint can also be seen just above the broad collar. The god wears the *atef* crown, coloured yellow, white, and black, and he holds the crook and the flail that are painted with yellow,

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¹ This artefact languished on a shelf in the basement of Munich's Egyptian Museum, surfacing only once in 2009 for the exhibition "Särge, Stelen und Gelehrte", WissensWelten. Die Akademie und die wissenschaftlichen Sammlungen. Bayerns. Ausstellungen. Ende März – Juni. 2009, 14. (See http://www.aegyptisches-museum-berlin-verein.de/d03.php?ausstellung_start=18.) Persistent advocacy by the author on behalf of an important Osirian artefact stored in a basement, together with the vision of the museum director Frau Dr Sylvia Schoske who allocated new display space, happily led to this piece being placed on permanent display in the museum since 25 June 2018.

² Sieber was a botanist and a military man who collected Egyptian objects. He published impressions of his Egyptian trip in Sieber, F. W. 1820. *Beschreibendes Verzeichniß der in den Jahren 1817 und 1818, auf einer Reise durch Creta, Ägypten und Palästina gesammelten Alterthümer und anderen Kunst- und Natur-Producte nebst einer Abhandlung über ägyptische Mumien*. Wien: Gräffer.

³ It should be noted that the object is not mentioned in the 1870 edition of von Christ, W. *Führer durch das K. Antiquarium in München*. München: A. Buchholz, a catalogue of the collection.

⁴ Modern cleaning was carried out by SMAEK conservator Brigitte Diepold prior to display in the 2009 exhibition.



Fig. 1: The small Osiris Coffin, ÄS 0310. © Staatliche Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, München.

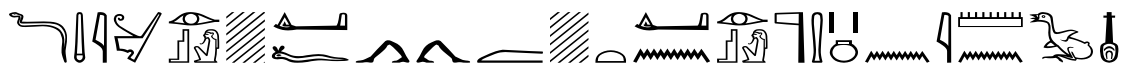
black, and red pigments. The body is painted white, interpreted as fresh linen bandages used in mummification. A vignette on the chest between the collar and the hands shows what appears to be a man on a barque, possibly capturing the owner's participation during a Ptah-

Sokar-Osiris festival.⁵ The small coffin's size and appearance can be better appreciated in comparison to coffins and other Egyptian objects amongst which it is currently displayed (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: The small Osiris coffin in the centre of the current SMAEK display, in the far back. © Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, München.

The short and fragmented inscription on the lid, a single column of hieroglyphs in the centre of the coffin, starting just below the hands and ending at feet level is an Osirian offering text: *Dd-mdw jn Wsjr /// dj=f jm///t dj n Wsjr Hm-nTr sn-nw n Jmnn tA-nfr*



Words spoken by Osiris... his gift came...gift from Osiris (to) sacred priest second prophet of Amun Tjanefer


This rare and enigmatic miniature Osirian funerary coffin appears to stand apart from the examples found in Raven's seminal typology of Osirian mortuary figures,⁶ hence the present investigation. Other small wooden coffins, according to Aston, appear to have been a common part of the burial equipment of upper-class private individuals during the Third Intermediate Period.⁷

⁵ Eaton 2006: 75–101.

⁶ Raven 1978-79: 259–96.

⁷ Aston 2009: 302.

The owner

This small coffin may have been recovered from the tomb of a Second Prophet of Amun called Tjanefer , *TA-nfr*,⁸ located at Dra Abu el-Naga (TT 158). However, two men are known with the same name and priestly titles. The first was a Second Prophet called Tjanefer, in office during the period between the reigns of Sethy II and Rameses III⁹, estimated to be 17 years. The tomb owner's piety towards Osiris is an interesting contrast by virtue of his stated role as a prophet of Amun. Such devotion seemingly rates high in Tjanefer's case as he lauds Osiris by incorporating both architectural elements (doorjamb of the innermost room, which contained a small shrine, presumably of Osiris) and iconographical elements of the god in his tomb (such as this miniature coffin) whereas others generally settle for merely being known after their death as 'followers of Osiris'.¹⁰

The other Tjanefer is known from a coffin in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.¹¹ Based on the *Karnak Priestly Annals*, this coffin was dated by Niwinski to the middle of the Twenty-first Dynasty,¹² i.e. year 40 of Pasebkhanut I, equating to year 994 BCE. In his own biographical papyrus found in the Bab el-Gasus cache, this Tjanefer states that he first served as Fourth Prophet of Amun before becoming Third Prophet. He is thought to have died early during the reign of Pinedjem II (990–969 BCE).¹³

Which Tjanefer was the owner of this Osiris coffin? The author is of the opinion that the owner was the first-mentioned Tjanefer, who lived during Ramesside to Third Intermediate periods (circa 1295-1069 BCE).¹⁴ As Tjanefer held the title of 'Second Prophet of Amun' this same title might suggest that the Munich coffin came from Bab el-Gasus, the collective tomb of the priests and priestesses of Amun in the Twenty-first Dynasty at Deir el-Bahari, also known as the "2nd Cache" (TT320, previously DB320¹⁵). According to the *Karnak Priestly Annals*, in the 40th regnal year of Psusennes I, Tjanefer served as the 'Fourth Prophet of Amun'. He was later promoted to 'Third Prophet', as mentioned in his funerary papyrus, found in his tomb at Bab el-Gasus¹⁶ (funerary papyri JE 95646 and JE 33997).¹⁷

Tomb of Tjanefer (TT158)

The tomb of the earlier-known Tjanefer preserves a wall painting showing a boat, which is similar to that drawn on the small Munich coffin. The *Hnw*-barque¹⁸ in Tjanefer's tomb features a litany bearing Sokar's name. In the passage, north wall, and second section from the east, Tjanefer presents incense and offerings to the Sokar barque.¹⁹

⁸ Broekman 2010: 126.

⁹ Kampp (1996: 447) points to a time span between the reigns Sethy II-Ramesses III.

¹⁰ Seele 1959: plate 41.

¹¹ Dodson and Hilton 2004: 209.

¹² Niwinski 2009: 148–49.

¹³ Pischikova, Budka and Griffin 2014: 42.

¹⁴ Shaw 2000: 485.

¹⁵ Graefe and Belova 2006: 207–220.

¹⁶ Dodson and Hilton 2004: 208–9.

¹⁷ See Niwinski 1988: 131, n. 142 for the coffin, and Niwinski 1989: 264, n. 33 for the papyri.

¹⁸ Hornung 1999: 58.

¹⁹ Seele 1959: 62.

A locus in the middle of the courtyard of TT158 has come to be known as an ‘Osiris bed’.²⁰ Larger depressions labelled ‘Osiris beds’ or flower beds could be the remains of small pools surrounded by vegetation that provided the tomb owner and his *bA* with the drinking pool often illustrated in tomb scenes, and visitors with a water source for libations.²¹

A wall scene from the tomb’s interior features a T-shaped water basin from which Tjanefer drinks,²² and in one of the registers the deceased is shown before altars of Osiris. On the west wall of the court, above the frieze at the entrance to TT158, a fragmentary inscription reads ‘*god’s father, pure of hands, Osiris, prophet of Amun, Tjanefer*’, a further reminder of Tjanefer’s allegiance to Osiris.²³

Tjanefer’s tomb (TT158), alongside Nebwenenef’s (TT157), suffered from vandalism,²⁴ and some burial goods had already disappeared by the time Lepsius explored the tomb in 1844.²⁵ The granite outer coffin of Tjanefer remains in the tomb chamber, probably because it was too heavy to remove, while Lepsius carried some cartonnage fragments off to the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin, as mentioned in his notes. Other items from this tomb now in museum collections worldwide include a relief block showing a blind harpist in Berlin (ÄM 20482), a relief showing what may be the head of the tomb owner (Philadelphia, Penn Museum 29-87-624), and a box fragment (Philadelphia, Penn Museum 29-86-407). The tomb was subsequently used as a quarry, and eventually enclosed in an area belonging to a Coptic monastery. From this chequered history, we may surmise that the small Munich Osiris coffin was likely removed from Tjanefer’s tomb during either the Twentieth Dynasty tomb robberies or in the 19th century, at the height of the quest for antiquities, and consequently came into Sieber’s possession.

Possible function of the SMAEK coffin

What might have originally been kept in the rough-hewn interior of this coffin? A number of possibilities can be considered. Straw doll-like objects known as Osiris ‘grain mummies’, thought to have been made from the Middle Kingdom onwards were produced with barley, emmer, and dirt, ideally moistened with water from the sacred lake at Dendera.²⁶ Grain mummies were manufactured annually and used in ritual ceremonies during the Festival of Osiris, where new grain mummies replaced those from the previous year.²⁷ These objects varied in size from 35–50 cm in length²⁸ and were placed in falcon-headed coffins in cemeteries²⁹ while miniature varieties were encased within Ptah-Sokar-Osiris statues in Late Period burials. In the fertility cult of Osiris, the function of grain mummies was presumably for continuous prosperity of the land in healthy crop growing. The North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, USA, has x-radiographed and CT scanned its grain-mummy (NCMA G.74.2.9/1-

²⁰ Also mentioned by Harrington 2013: 92; cf. Kampp 1996: 77, 448, 458.

²¹ Harrington 2013: 91.

²² Harrington 2013: 92.

²³ Osiris’ name is shown here with Gardiner’s D4+Q2 glyphs, Seele 1959: 3.

²⁴ Seele 1959: 1.

²⁵ Peet 1930: 60–62, recorded in Papyrus BM EA 10054, Recto I, 310, Robbery of the tomb of Tjanefer (TT158). Tomb robbery texts date to years 16–18 of Ramesses IX.

²⁶ Teeter 2011: 62.

²⁷ Derchain 1965: 19.

²⁸ Raven 1982: 7.

²⁹ Raven 1982: 9.

2). The x-ray revealed a speckled pattern, which is similar to that seen on other grain mummy x-rays taken by other museums. This pattern has been interpreted as the presence of grains inside the bundle, or as voids left behind in the dried mud by disintegrated grains.³⁰ A recent study by archaeobotanists at the Archaeological Museum of Krakow identified two grains used in the manufacture of grain mummies as hulled barley and emmer wheat.³¹

Many of the documented Osiriform coffins were recovered from archaeological contexts, including from the tomb of King Tutankhamun,³² and their function was identified as “amulets”.³³ Centrone included ninety-six known grain mummies in her catalogue: while the provenance of many of these objects is undocumented, several are linked to Ptolemaic-Roman period excavations at Thebes, Meidum, el-Sheik Fadl, and in the Tuna el-Gebel area.³⁴ In the author’s opinion, the Munich coffin does not seem to fit into any of the typologies referenced by either Raven or Aston.³⁵

Another type of funerary equipment related to Osiris and grains dates to the New Kingdom: the so-called ‘Osiris beds’ or, to use the terminology describing their purpose, *Osiris vegetans* or ‘germinating Osiris figures.’³⁶ These were wooden frames filled with soil and sown with seeds that would later sprout when watered and exposed to sunlight. Only a few extant examples are known, the most famous being the large figure recovered from the tomb of Tutankhamun (KV62) measuring 190 cm in length (JE 62702, Egyptian Museum, Cairo).³⁷ The Osiris beds served as a metaphor for Osiris’s need to undergo public death before his seasonal rebirth as ruler, in order to retain the status of god/king. This is analogous to the natural world’s miraculous cycle whereby a dormant grain after being buried and watered springs back into life and vigour. The SMAEK coffin, in the author’s opinion, is not an Osiris bed.

If Tjanefer’s funerary artefact had originally been a receptacle for grain seeds to sprout, it is a much larger example than other extant objects of this type, which makes it a unique piece. The Munich coffin may serve the purpose of a model of the ark or floating coffin that transported Osiris’ body on his journey through the Mediterranean, following his murder by his brother Seth.³⁸ According to the myth as recorded by Plutarch, after arriving on the shores of Byblos, this coffin transfigured itself into a “heath” tree, a shrub or small tree. In Egypt, this could include sycamore, acacia or tamarisk—any of the standard woods used in ordinary human coffins—replicating the idea that every deceased person became an Osiris after his/her death.

Another suggestion is that the hollowed interior of the miniature coffin may have encased an Osirian fetish amulet or a special document, such as a funerary liturgy papyrus.³⁹ This

³⁰ Caroline Rocheleau, personal communication.

³¹ Walthew and Mayberger 2014: 6.

³² Wilkinson 1985: 328–40.

³³ Functioning as amulets is a suggestion by this author, following Kawai 2000: 39.

³⁴ Centrone 2007: 296 and Centrone 2005a.

³⁵ Raven 1978-79: 259–96, plates 39–41; Aston 1991: 95–107; and Aston: 2009: 302–8.

³⁶ Tooley 1996: 178-9; Raven 1982: 7.

³⁷ Illustrations of this artefact are available online in the Griffith Institute’s Howard Carter Archives: see Carter 288a, <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/carter/288a.html>. The cycles of the agricultural year and of the life and death of Osiris are conjoined in ancient Egypt from the Middle Kingdom onwards, see Raven 1982: 7–38; Tooley 1996: 167–79.

³⁸ To the author’s knowledge, no other examples have been identified.

³⁹ An example can be read in Stadler 1999: 76-110.

object could also have functioned as an upright wall decoration with a hidden compartment. The mummiform depiction of the deceased in an Osirian form, fixed by a peg onto a wooden base, might equally have originally been placed in a niche in the northern wall of the burial chamber, part of a four-set of amulets protecting the chamber.⁴⁰ Whatever the correct answer, it seems at this stage of the enquiry that its construction appears to be closer to a model of the coffin of Osiris rather than a symbolic Osirian bed of granary seeds.

Summary

The aim of this paper was to demonstrate that the Ramesside prophet of Amun Tjanefer was a devoted follower of Osiris, and circumstantially the most likely owner of this unprovenanced artefact. Abundant corroborative iconographic evidence in his tomb (TT158) includes Tjanefer carrying out the priestly duties of raising a *Dd*-pillar,⁴¹ found on the doorjamb of the innermost room, which contained a small shrine (presumably of Osiris).⁴² Another scene in the tomb also shows the procession of the Osiris fetish performed by this Tjanefer, another indication of Osiris' cult.⁴³

An evocative hymn to Osiris on the stela of Amenmose (Louvre C 286⁴⁴) states that plants 'sprout by his wish' (Osiris), as a renewed fertilisation of land by sustaining life in Egypt and conquering death.⁴⁵ We find grain offerings⁴⁶ in tombs, perhaps intended as an indication of desire: that the deceased's fate or destiny can be linked to the germination of the grain disposed around Osiris figurines, thus ensuring a prosperous afterlife. The Munich coffin is an Osirian object but does not conform to Raven's guide categories,⁴⁷ used by Aston⁴⁸ in describing the two Osiris figures from the Third Intermediate Period. Identifying similar artefacts that can be closely compared with this example in size and shape, as well as collating further information on the functionality of the type of object, would be desirable. As many museum collections are not yet fully accessible and published, the quest for parallels is launched with this article. Technical research, such as dendrochronology and other wood studies, may also provide further clues; however, at present, the purpose of the delightful small coffin in Munich remains hypothetical.

⁴⁰ Raven 1978–79: 255–56.

⁴¹ Rarely attested at Thebes, see Frood and Baines 2007: 95; the depiction on both sides of the blocks, in which the deceased lifts a *Dd*-pillar is rarely documented in Theban tombs, Kampp 1996: 450.

⁴² van Dijk 1986: 12.

⁴³ Coulon 2011: 99; Seele 1959: plate IV.

⁴⁴ Dated to the New Kingdom, Eighteenth Dynasty, ca. 1550–1295 BCE. First translated by Chabas (1857: 65–81); subsequently by Ledrain (1879: plates 21–27), Roeder (1915: 22–26), Erman (1923: 187–192); and Moret (1931: 725–750). The most recent translations are by Lichtheim (1976: 81–86), and Assmann (1999: 213, 477).

⁴⁵ John Taylor's presentation at the EES Study Day in London, 10 December 2011.

⁴⁶ The 'corn-mummies' are grain-filled linen sacs, usually filled with an emmer or barley specimen, the ingredients for staple food in ancient Egypt (bread and beer). These ingredients were manufactured and hand-formatted to resemble a human body; in this case, a miniature Osiris which will ensure next years' crop prosperity. These differ from two-dimensional Osiris beds placed in New Kingdom royal tombs. For more see Raven 1982: 12–15 and Centrone 2005b. Ceramic vessels used for the "ritual sprouting" of grain were likely Middle Kingdom precursors to these; Schulz, R. 2009. 'A Corn Mummy Decoded'. *The Journal of the Walters Art Museums* 63: 5.

⁴⁷ Raven 1982: 7–38 and pls. 1–4.

⁴⁸ Aston 2009: 269–390.

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