

A PAPYRUS FRAGMENT WITH AN EMBALMING SCENE FROM THE PUSHKIN MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of the Ancient Orient of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts keeps the museum's papyrus collection. It is a part of the former collection of Vladimir Golenishchev, which the Museum of Fine Arts (since 1937, the Pushkin Museum) acquired in 1909 and which arrived at the museum in April 1911.¹ The papyrus collection is diverse and contains ancient Egyptian papyri (hieroglyphic, hieratic, demotic), as well as Coptic, Greek, Pahlavi, Hebrew, and Arabic manuscripts. Golenischev made some of his purchases from European dealers and even at auctions; however, he acquired many objects during his scientific travels, and some of them came from Upper Egypt, particularly Luxor and Akhmim. As far as we know, Golenischev did not leave much documentation regarding the time and place of the acquisition of the majority of papyri and other objects of his collection: we can find some information in the card catalogue of his collection, and some mentions in his reports at meetings of the Oriental Department of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society.²

The fragility of the material and the difficulty of reading texts on papyri largely influenced the fact that several remained unpublished for a long time,

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1 Васильева 2017: 48.

2 Голенищев 1987: 143–75.

but those that were rapidly published became widely known: Hymns to Diadems, a Mathematical Papyrus, the Onomasticon of Amenemope, and the Journey of Wenamun. Several copies the Book of the Dead and the Amduat from this collection were displayed on the exhibition *The Way to Immortality* in 2002 and were published in its catalogue.³

Among these is a fragment of the funerary papyrus with vignettes from the Book of the Dead, the so-called ‘Fragment of a papyrus with an embalming scene’ (inv. I. 1b 23(КП = ИГ 4623), fig. 1). The fragment is 74.5 cm in length and 17.4 cm in height; the quality of material is common for papyrus – the colour of the papyrus is light with some more thick, rough and visible brownish fibers; the colours of the painted figures in comparison with the background seem to be dark. The entire composition is illustrated only with one register of images, with a thin monochrome double border at the top and bottom. Ten figures are depicted: the deceased laid on a lion-shaped bed, tended by Anubis, Isis and Nephthys kneel at both ends of the bed, a falcon-headed god in a double crown, Min-Amun, Isis behind the throne of Osiris, the ibis-headed Thoth and Amamat. For several years, the papyrus was on permanent display in the Egyptian Hall of the Pushkin Museum, becoming one of the key objects of the collection thanks to the sustained interest of visitors. Although a visitor favourite, little is known about the papyrus; its centre of production is unknown and its attributed date (12th–10th centuries BC) caused questions. This prompted a reassessment of the date of this museum object and, if possible, an attempt to define its place of production.



FIG. 1: Fragment of a papyrus with an embalming scene. Pushkin Museum, inv. I. 1b 23(КП = ИГ 4623), Late period (?). Size: 17.4x74.5x0.5 cm.

It is worth noting that papyrus inv. I. 1b 23 has no hieroglyphic or hieratic text; the text could have been possibly located on the initial vignette, if the papyrus ever had any. In the case of uninscribed and decontextualised museum objects for which there is no provenance information, there is only one way to make the proper attribution of such artefacts without using technical, physical

3 Путь к бессмертию 2002: 71–74.

or chemical methods. Central to the study are therefore the stylistic features of the illustrations and the iconography of the scene, reliant on different comparanda. It also can be useful to compare this papyrus fragment with some thematically related objects from the same collection, because some of them perhaps could derive from one place or period.⁴

PUSHKIN MUSEUM INV. I. 1B 23(КП = ИГ 4623) AND COMPARANDA

Such an embalming scene is typical of some vignettes of the Book of the Dead. This contains a funeral bed with lion heads on which lies the deceased in the form of a mummy. Anubis is bent over the dead person, holding a cup with some incense in his left hand. Next to Anubis' hand, the *ba* flies away from the body while the four canopic jars in the form of the figures of the sons of Horus stand under the bed, and kneeling figures of Isis and Nephthys flank the scene.

The deceased's mummified body lying on a bed can be found on different papyrus vignettes illustrating various chapters of the Book of the Dead. For example, on the famous papyrus of Ani⁵ of the Nineteenth Dynasty, the body of the deceased is shown in the illustration composed in the form of a frieze to Chapter 1. His body is laid on a bed placed in a boat, set on the funerary bier, where his wife mourns him (the goddesses Isis and Nephthys are located on either side of the bed).⁶ In the vignette to Chapter 17, where the body of the deceased is shown on a bed under the canopy, the scene is framed by two vultures wearing the emblems of Isis and Nephthys.⁷ In the vignette to Chapter 89, the deceased's *ba* hovers over its mummy, in a full-size vignette representing the wabet or burial chamber. On the vignette to Chapter 151, Anubis tends the body of the deceased.⁸

An abridged version of Chapter 151B in the Memphite papyrus of Nebseni,⁹ an early (Eighteenth Dynasty) version of the Book of the Dead, tells of the 'laying of the hands' by Anubis on the 'lord of life' (with the determinative *sdr*). And on a papyrus of the Twenty-first Dynasty – the papyrus of the singer of Amun-Ra Muthotep¹⁰ in the illustration to Chapter 151, the deceased is represented lying on a bed with Anubis bent over him, and in a vignette to Chapter 182 – the body of the deceased is shown on a bed in a naos, surrounded by gods, but without Anubis; in the upper and lower

4 Cyril Aldred (1980: 9) wrote in the introduction to his *Egyptian Art*: 'Egyptian works of art may be dated on stylistic grounds...in the case of uninscribed fragments, found out of their proper context, there is no alternative method that can be employed.'

5 London, British Museum EA10470,5: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10470-5.

6 Anubis can also be shown standing above the body of the deceased, with Isis and Nephthys by its sides. Naville 1886: Pl. III. P.e. (Louvre III.36 = inv. no. 3132 Nebqed) Dévéria, Pierret 1872.

7 In vignettes to Chapter 17 a *ba* hovering over the deceased may also be present. Naville 1886: Pl. XXVIII D.a. (Dublin, Trinity College, IV).

8 Рубинштейн 1976: 129–44.

9 London, British Museum EA9900,21: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA9900-21.

10 London, British Museum EA10010.

registers appear images of the inhabitants of the Netherworld – the guardians of the deceased – with knives, snakes and lizards in their hands.

In his study of the Nineteenth Dynasty papyrus of Nakhamun,¹¹ where Anubis bends over the body of the deceased as in the vignette to Chapter 1, Naville notes there are many variants (with a mourning wife; the image of the bed on the sledge and without; the presence and absence of Isis and Nephthys, as well as the embalming Anubis) and the use of the embalming vignette here is atypical. This vignette appears most frequently with Chapter 151.

Another interesting comparandum is the papyrus of Kerasher,¹² which contains the texts and vignettes of the Book of Breathing dating from the reign of Emperor Augustus (c. 1st century BC).¹³ In the lower register of the third sheet, we see Anubis at work, laying his hands on the body of the deceased. The style of the figure of Anubis is similar to the image on the Moscow fragment.

The bed has a similar shape, although at the bottom there is only one vessel that does not have an anthropomorphic shape, and the sons of Horus are absent here, but Isis and Nephthys are posed as mourners by the ends of the bed. However, the colouring is very different: in contrast to the Moscow fragment, which mainly uses reddish-brown with pink, in the London papyrus the emphasis is on bright ochre and intense green, accompanied by white.

It is worth noting that these scenes are also present as paintings on the walls of Theban tombs. The vignettes to Chapter 1, depicting Anubis in front of the deceased (laying hands on him, opening his mouth and eyes) are found in the Ramesside tombs of Deir el-Medina and Dra abu el-Naga (TT 1, 2, 218, 219, 286, 290).¹⁴ M. Saleh mentioned the tomb of the vizier Paser (TT 106) in Qurna of the reign of Sety I – Ramses II, where there is an illustration to Chapter 89 – painted raised relief with Anubis bending over the deceased and with an image of a flying ba.¹⁵ There is a vignette to Chapter 151, depicting the *wabet*, for example, in TT 96 in Sheikh Abd el- Qurna (tomb of Sennefer, reign of Amenhotep II).¹⁶ There are no images of the vignettes of the Chapter 182 in Theban tombs of the Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties.¹⁷ This chapter

11 Berlin, Egyptian Museum, P. 3002; Naville 1886: Pl.V. B.a.; see also Munro 1997.

12 London, British Museum EA 9995, 3: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA9995-3.

13 Budge 1899: 39–43, pls I–III; Herbin 2008: 39–45, pl. 23.

14 Saleh 1984: 10–11.

15 Saleh 1984: 51–52.

16 Saleh 1984: 84.

17 However, T. J. Allen noted an exception. Allen 1974: 196. This is the vignette for chapter 182 in TT 296, the tomb of Nefersesheru (reign of Ramses II). This is a short version of the chapter with a vignette, which, however, is very different from the one described above. Shown here is the Thoth with symbols of power and breath. He leads the deceased with his hands in a welcoming gesture to Osiris, who is in the naos. The four sons of Horus are shown standing on a lotus flower. Piehl 1886–1903: 95–101, pl. CXXII o. Thus, a version of the Twenty-first Dynasty is formed on a different basis and it obviously differs much in composition.

was included in the set of chapters of the Book of the Dead later, so the presence of this chapter is a sign that a papyrus should be dated to the Third Intermediate Period (as in the case of the papyrus of Muthotep).

However, judging by the style of the figures, the colours preferred by the artists and the use of full-sized vignettes without text accompaniment, the papyrus can most likely be classified as a ‘mythological papyrus’,¹⁸ the composition of which can contain both images and scenes from the Book of the Dead as well as from other ‘Netherworld books’, which became widespread on papyrus after the end of the New Kingdom, and mostly without any texts.

DATING THE PAPYRUS

In an article published in 1939, Vsevolod Avdiev, who later became head of the Oriental Department of the Pushkin Museum, compared the composition of the Moscow fragment with some random objects that were known to him from publications he could find.¹⁹ And, thus, using these examples as comparanda he dated it to the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period (a term which was not in use in the mid-20th century).

The scene of embalming performed by Anubis is most fully preserved on this fragment – it can be conditionally attributed to the Chapter 1B of the Book of the Dead. In the light of all the above mentioned analogies, we need to give more detailed description of the scene. The deceased lies (head to the right) on a special embalming bed in the form of a lion with an elongated body and upward curled tail. The lion paw legs of the bed are placed on stands resembling lotus flowers – a typical feature of Late Period images of funerary equipment, beginning from the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. Under the bed are the four sons of Horus, shown as mummified anthropomorphic figures, not as canopic jars.

To the right and to the left of the bed are kneeling mourners: Isis and Nephthys, identifiable by the hieroglyphic signs on their heads. Their location is not typical: usually Isis is placed at the foot of the bed, and Nephthys at the head; here their location is reversed so Isis is at the head and Nephthys at the foot. The goddesses are sitting on pink-toned mats, they wear round short ‘Nubian/Saite’ period wigs, and are dressed in clothes that leave their generous bosoms exposed. They also wear broad collars around their necks, and bracelets are shown with dark stripes on the forearms and wrists. Their large oval eyes with a pupil, sharp features with a long nose and small lips and chins testify to a dating of the papyrus between the Twenty-sixth Dynasty (7th–6th centuries BC) and the Ptolemaic era (4th century BC).

¹⁸ Piankoff, Rambova 1957.

¹⁹ Авдиев 1939: 120.

The embalming scenes of the deceased and Anubis with this set of characters and details are also characteristic of imagery on the funeral inventory, in particular, on the coffins and cartonages of the Late Period. In the collection of the Pushkin Museum there are several objects stored there since 1924, when the Museum-Institute of the Classical Orient was closed. Avdiev also described some of them in his above-mentioned article.²⁰ The first is a cartonnage plaque for a mummy (Pushkin Museum, inv I. 1a 864) (fig. 2). The fabric base of the plaque is very thin, has some damage and is not preserved completely. However, the structure of its decoration allows a correlation with a typical design of a coffin lid, starting below the necklace: at the top is a winged scarab, below a winged figure of Nut, in the centre there is a scene with the image of the deceased on the bed, and under this scene is a composition divided in two by a column of hieroglyphs. On each side of the inscription are two standing figures of the sons of Horus, facing the inscription containing the name of the deceased – Nesy-Khonsu.



FIG. 2: Fragment of a cartonnage mummy-cover (Pushkin Museum, inv I. 1a 864).

²⁰ Авдиев 1939: 107–22.

The central scene shows the deceased on a lion-shaped bed, under which stand rounded canopic jars with the lids in the form of the heads of the sons of Horus. The composition does not contain an image of Anubis. The ba, with its large wings downturned, soars over the mummy. Nephthys stands at the head of the bed, and Isis at the foot; despite damage to the area, it is evident that the sons of Horus are grouped behind them, in pairs, as in the lower scene. Behind Isis are Duamutef and Imseti; behind Nephthys, Hapi and Kebehsenuf. Avdiev dated this fragment to the Nineteenth Dynasty, although stylistically it is a much later object, especially since cartonnage plaques for the mummy became widespread only in the Ptolemaic epoch.²¹



FIG. 3: Fragment of a cartonnage mummy-cover (Pushkin Museum, inv. I. 1a 1241).

An apron, once part of a cartonnage ensemble (Pushkin Museum, inv. I. 1a 1241) (fig. 3), contains a scene that is reminiscent of the image on papyrus I. 1b 23. The deceased lies on a lion-shaped bed, with the lion's tail curling over at the foot. Anubis, who stands in front of the bed in the foreground, leans over the deceased. One of his hands is laid on the body; the other is raised, holding a simple cup and a thin strip, apparently not of bandages, but probably of red leather. It seems that this is a stola placed on the neck and the breast of the mummy after the mummification and all preparations are completed, meaning that the deceased had joined the world of the gods. Behind Anubis, a ba is shown very schematically, it can be understood by its location and in comparison with other similar iconographic examples.

The goddesses are not marked with their special signs; however both have solar disks on their heads and are shown here as mourners with their hands raised to their heads. Under the bed are four vessels of conical shape, without

²¹ Taylor 2001: 243.

detail; this shape is used for offering vessels, and only their number indicates that these are canopic jars. Thus, the most important and detailed feature in this scene is the gesture of Anubis: that is, the laying of hands on the body of the deceased, and raising the embalming vessel with the stola.

Avdiev noted that the image of Anubis holding an embalming vessel in his outstretched hand is a characteristic of later objects.²² As an comparative, he mentioned the case of the mummy of Artemidorus²³ of the 1st century AD and a mummy-case with Greek inscription also from Hawara.²⁴ These analogies testify that this iconography is the most persistent and widespread and exists until the Roman Period.

The third analogy is a fragment from a cartonnage case for the whole mummy (Pushkin Museum, inv. I. 1a 1286) (fig. 4). It depicts a winged sun disc, then a wesekh collar, below which is a winged scarab, then further down is the mummification scene, and at the bottom is a register containing images of six seated figures holding *w3s* sceptres facing a standing figure in the shape of a mummy. There are some interesting details in the mummification scene: Anubis holds a vessel in his hand, but is not shown bending or with a stola, and he is dressed in a very long skirt, the folds of which are shown in schematic vertical lines.

Isis and Nephthys are absent here, and the four figures that stand in pairs at the head and foot of the bed can be considered as the sons of Horus. They are all anthropomorphic, and have no identifying signs, but the figure standing closest to the head of the bed wears the crown of Osiris, an



FIG. 4: Fragment of a cartonnage mummy-cover, detail (Pushkin Museum, inv. I. 1a 1286).

²² Авдиев 1939: 118.

²³ London, British Museum, EA 21810. The scene is made using gilded overlays. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA21810.

²⁴ Cairo Museum, CG 33221.

atef, but without horns. There are only three vessels under the bed, since the skirt of Anubis, standing behind the bed, is wide and occupies a lot of space.

It is also worth noting the colours of all these cartonnages, which have the characteristic ‘powdered’ tones of the Ptolemaic period. Of particular interest is the cartonnage fragment I. 1a 864 (fig. 2): here, a distinction is clearly made between green and blue, and deep red colour. The light yellow figures of the children of Horus in the lower frieze on a gray-blue background look very impressive and resemble an imitation of relief overlays or an attempt to revive dark backgrounds. These are typical of the Saite Dynasty, which in turn imitates the dark backgrounds of the Old Kingdom. The combination of light backgrounds in the other registers, the blue and green plumage of the wings, and accents highlighted in red creates a sense of variety and richness of decor.

This scene is also present on two Ptolemaic coffins from the Golenishev collection, exhibited in the Pushkin Museum. One of them is anthropoid, with a gilded face, beautifully preserved, and belonged to a woman Tashet (Pushkin Museum, inv. I. 1a 5302) (fig. 5). On its cover, in addition to various scenes, which include extracts from the ‘Books of the Netherworld’ and Amduat, is a scene of mummification. The scene is shown reversed to the other examples discussed here, with the head of the bed to the viewer’s left, and Anubis also facing left (or the object’s proper right, and Anubis also facing right). Anubis holds an embalming bowl, but the deceased (shown as a man with an Osirian beard²⁵) has already risen and rolled over onto his stomach on the bed.

On the end of the lid at the foot of the *krsw*-coffin of Hor-Unnefer



FIG. 5: The coffin of Tashet, detail (Pushkin Museum, inv. I. 1a 5302).

²⁵ In the text, the name of Tashet is also repeatedly accompanied by a male determinative, which indicates usurpation or, alternatively, the purchase of an already finished beautifully designed coffin. However, this question is still open. Work on a detailed publication of the coffin and its mummy is now in progress.

(Pushkin Museum, inv. I. 1a 5250) (fig. 6) is a scene of mummification of the deceased. He is shown on the bed as a mummy with what appears to be the head of a baboon. Anubis, stands behind the bed, with a cup in one hand, touching the deceased's chest with the other. The sons of Horus stand in pairs at either end of the bed. Those closest to the bed (Hapi at the foot, Amseti at the head) assist Anubis, holding similar cups in front of themselves. Under the bed are four canopic jars with figured heads. Isis and Nephthys flank this scene, kneeling and raising their hands in a mourning gesture. Due to damage, unfortunately, one cannot see the signs on the heads of the goddesses, but, judging by the colour of the dresses, Isis is shown at the foot of the bed and Nephthys at the head.²⁶



Fig. 6: The coffin of Hor-Unnefer, detail (Pushkin Museum, inv. I. 1a 5250).

Avdiev made an interesting remark about the composition with the embalmment scene (since he considers it alone, and not the entire composition of the papyrus fragment). He wrote: "Thus, the main ideas of the lamentation of the deceased, his magical protection, embalmment and reunion of his body with the soul are found not only separately, but also in combination with each other, fully resembling a complex of combined hieroglyphs."²⁷

Having examined the above examples, we can see how scenes depicting a bed with the body of the deceased, initially illustrating various chapters from funerary texts, were used in different contexts but over time began to merge into a single pictorial complex containing all these concepts together. In addition, this composition is enhanced by fine details, which, however, were mostly inconsistent from one example to another and even, apparently, optional, without impoverishing the meaning of the image.

This pictorial motif had such an important semantic sense in the decor of the funerary equipment that at last, on Late Period objects – in the decor

²⁶ These goddesses are also shown as mourners on the other side of the lid: Isis wearing a green dress and Nephthys wearing red.

²⁷ Авдиев 1939: 117.

of the lids of anthropoid coffins, and on mummy-coverings – this scene became the quintessential image of the whole composition. And in the papyrus graphic art one can observe how this scene from the Book of the Dead entered the repertoire of mythological papyri and, later, the Roman period Book of Breathing. This testifies to its importance – not a surprise, since this composition combines the most important concept for the funerary context.

On the papyrus of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts I.1b 23 (fig. 1), several key characters are associated with the embalming scene, but at the right part of the composition it contains some other depictions of gods connected with the iconography of the illustration that usually accompanies Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead: the so-called ‘Court of Osiris’ with weighing the heart of the deceased. There is Osiris seated on a throne, facing right, with Isis standing behind him. In front of them Thoth reports to Osiris about the deceased who has arrived into his kingdom. The last figure on the extreme right is Amamat (‘the devourer’), whose head is turned towards the weighing scales, the image of which was either not preserved or was cut off by the merchant along with the other scenes on the papyrus for a separate sale.

However, the papyrus may not have been very not long and may have featured only a few scenes. Unfortunately, neither the last scene, nor the initial vignette depicting the deceased, where his name and the name of the composition could have been written, have been preserved. Between the two described scenes that relate to the funeral papyrus, are two more characters: on the left, a standing god with the head of a falcon (Horus, Ra or Ra-Harakhti) wearing a double crown, and to its right an ithyphallic image of the god Min-Amun crowned with two tall ostrich feathers. Behind Min-Amun is a small offering table with two heads of lettuce, an attribute of this god indicating his vitality and masculine power.

The comparanda described above have helped bring forth a revised date for this papyrus based on stylistic features, colour combinations, and iconography. The detailing of faces, the forms and proportions of female figures, the use of pink along with the rest of the dark (blue, black and ochre-brown) colours, and the additional scene with the image of Min-Amun, suggest a date in the Late Period (7th–4th centuries BC) or, most likely, the Ptolemaic period (4th–1st centuries BC). Furthermore, this ‘additional’ Min-Amun figure and use of a light pink colour that was typical for Akhmim objects can also point at the possibility that this papyrus comes from a workshop of Akhmim,²⁸ a large centre for the production of funerary goods at this time. Golenishchev acquired several items from Akhmim for his collection and this also points towards this site as the original production centre.

²⁸ The collection of the Pushkin museum contains several objects from Akhmim.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Pushkin Museum's funerary papyri continue to be studied. In addition to publication in the catalogue of the exhibition *The Way to Immortality*, the Pushkin Museum's collection of papyri of the Book of the Dead have been studied by museum staff and Russian Egyptologists, as evidenced by the works of V. Avdiev,²⁹ M. Mathieu,³⁰ R. Rubinstein,³¹ M. Chegodaev³² and others. The Pushkin's funerary papyri have also entered the database of the Bonn Totenbuch-Projekt, initiated by I. Munro, and several publications in academic Russian-language proceedings and papers of conferences,³³ including international ones,³⁴ have been devoted to the many types of ancient Egyptian papyri. ✎

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29 Авдиев 1939: 117.

30 Матье 1957: 344–62.

31 Рубинштейн 1938: 293–308; Рубинштейн 1976: 129–43; Рубинштейн 1979: 72–87.

32 Чегодаев 2004; Чегодаев 2014: 350–62.

33 Лаврентьева 2006: 69–102; Лаврентьева 2005: 149–66; Лаврентьева 2007: 51–52. Лаврентьева 2009: 159–63; Лаврентьева 2011: 124–38; Лаврентьева 2012: 148–51.

34 Lavrentyeva 2017: 325–28.

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