

Complete Anthropoid Cartonnage Coffin
Early 22nd Dynasty, 925-875 B.C.

177 x 41 cm (69 $^{3}/_{4}$ x 16 $^{1}/_{8}$ inches)

Cartonnage, Pigments

This cartonnage internal 'mummy' is known as an 'suhet' (egg). It was manufactured widely during the Third Intermediate or Libyan Period. The original intent was to cover the deceased, and to be placed inside one or more nested wooden coffins. This particular example is a beautiful small-faced type and clearly made for a high-status female. Her name is possibly preserved in the main text column located on the lower third. The main surface colour is yellow tan, a somewhat unusual choice for this area, which was more often painted white once the 22nd Dynasty fully advanced.

A column of text runs down the lower leg and can be transliterated as:

'Htp-di-nswt n Wsir xnty Imntyw nTt aA nb AbDw(t) di=f pr bA k r.s aA sHtp m hrw'

Translation: 'A boon-which-the-king-gives to Osiris, foremost of the westerners, great god, lord of Abydos, that he may cause your Ba to go forth to you (lit. 'her') Aa-sehotep(ti) today'.

The cartonnage is in extraordinary condition, with the painted decoration still bright and clear. The top third depicts the head, with a moulded face in which the only painted lines are large, expressive eyes with a touch of red at the corner caruncles and elegant eyebrows. It is surrounded by a heavy, stylised wig and a headdress of winged plumage, below which is a large usekh (or wesekh) collar. The style of the head and wig are consistent with the region of norther Upper Egypt. Below are symbols and deities taken from the rich ancient Egyptian funerary iconography, designed to accompany the departed on their journey to the afterlife and protect her for eternity there.

The quality of painting is finer on the front of the cartonnage than on the back, with more colours and detail and more elegant lines. This could reflect the cartonnage's role in the funerary rites for the deceased, as the workmanship on the front of the cartonnage would have been visible to the observers in the rites.

A red band runs up the back of the cartonnage, with evenly spaced holes either side of a split. This is where the cartonnage would have been laced-up once the mummy was inserted. A first-hand account of the opening of a similar cartonnage in 1821 in the Hancock Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, describes "original lacing in the back of the cartonnage as having the thickness of a raven's quill, passed through holes spaced at regular distances of about an inch and covered by a strip of canvas-like cloth."[1] A similar first-hand account of the opening of another 22nd Dynasty cartonnage case belonging to Pa-Di-Mut (21st January, 1901) describes that it "had been sewed up at the back from near the head to about half way down, the stitches being about an inch long."[2]

The cartonnage has been dated to the early 22nd Dynasty as most of the iconographical and stylistic choices fit firmly with that period, with a few differentiations which show the artist's stylistic sensibility with the 21st Dynasty, namely the use of yellow ground, the floral bands as horizontal separators, the anthropomorphic Ankh-signs, Wedjat-eyes which are given wings and arms, and space filling by means of sepulchral containers and seated figures.

The cartonnage shares two very unusual decorative elements with another cartonnage, that of An-ankh-ret, now in the McLean Museum and Art Gallery, Greenock, Scotland. These are; the inclusion of the ba-figure, the figure to the left on the fourth figural horizon, which takes the form of a bird with the head and arms of a man, holding a flail. This ba-figure represents the deceased, and is hailing the goddess Neith. The second is the red wrap on the legs of the Four Sons of Horus. Both these elements are unusual enough to make it likely the cartonnages originated in the same place - Sidmant, immediately west of Herakleopolis.

Exhibitions

Arts Antiques de Haute et Basse Egypte, Galerie Philippe Dodier, 1 Rue de Brémesnil, 50 Avranches, France, 1st July – 31st August 1968.

Literature:

Arts Antiques de Haute et Basse Egypte, Galerie Philippe Dodier, France, 1968.