

# A Ptolemaic coffin from Sharuna in the Mallawi Museum

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## Abstract

This study focuses on a wooden anthropoid coffin from the Kom el-Ahmar/Sharuna site. According to the inscriptions on the coffin, it belonged to a lady with no titles referring to her social or job status, but since she owns a coffin, she is from a prestigious social class. The coffin is preserved in the Mallawi Museum, El-Minya Governorate, under inventory number 315. It is displayed in Hall 2, showcase 6. This paper discusses the decoration of this object (inscriptions and scenes) with the aim of identifying the style of the Sharuna coffins in particular and those of Middle Egypt in general, analyzing the characteristics of the cursive hieroglyphic signs, and attempting to establish the genealogy of the deceased's family.

*Keywords:* Cursive Hieroglyphic, Coffin, Thebi-Seb, Osiris, lid, Sons of Horus

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تركز هذه الدراسة على تابوت خشبي بشكل آدمي من موقع الكوم الأحمر/شارونا. ووفقاً لنقوش التابوت فإنه يخص سيدة بدون ألقاب تشير إلى مكاناتها الاجتماعية، ويتضح من هذا أنها كانت من طبقة متوسطة. هذا التابوت محفوظ حالياً في متحف ملوي بمحافظة المنيا برقم 315 ومعرض بالمتحف في خزانة رقم 6، قاعة رقم 2. يتناول هذا البحث دراسة زخارف هذه القطعة الرائعة (مناظر ونصوص) بهدف تحديد طراز توابيت موقع شارونا بصفة خاصة ومصر الوسطى بصفة عامة، وتحليل خصائص العلامات الهيروغليفية المختصرة، ومحاولة الوصول إلى سلسلة نسب عائلة المتوفاة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهيروغليفية المختصرة، تبي-سب، أوزير، غطاء التابوت، أبناء حورس

## 1. Introduction

Sharuna Kom el-Ahmar is an archaeological site located on the eastern bank of the Nile in Middle Egypt (Kessler 1984: 532), about 3 km south of the village of Sharuna and about 60 km north of the city of El-Minya (González et al. 2009: 265; Huber 2017: 1; Ewais 2023: 1; Arnold 2004: 221). The ancient Egyptian name of Sharuna is *Hwt-nswt* (Gomaà 1984: 88-89), which is continued until the Ptolemaic Period (Schenkel & Gomaà 2004: 29-30). Sharuna was the capital of the 18<sup>th</sup>, Upper Egyptian Nome. The archaeological remains of Kom el-Ahmar/Sharuna consist of the Pharaonic

rock-cut necropolis dating to the end of the Sixth Dynasty (Smolenski 1907: 149-153), First Intermediate Period, and Ptolemaic Period (Huber 2017: 2)<sup>1</sup>, as well as the remains of a Ptolemaic temple built by Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II (Gestermann 1992: 26, pl.3. e; Huber 2017: 5; González et al. 2009: 266). The tombs and their courtyards were also reused in the Late Roman- Byzantine

<sup>1</sup> The tombs had been reused in the Ptolemaic period, and numerous vertical shafts, up to 8 meters deep, are cut into the old tomb chambers as well as in their courtyards, see: Huber, B., "Sharuna." The Encyclopedia of Ancient History (online), in: Bagnall, R., Brodersen K. and Champion C. (Eds.), Malden, 2017, p. 2.

period by Christians as houses, workshops, storage rooms, stables, and cemeteries. Another Ptolemaic cemetery was later reused during the Romano-Byzantine era (Huber 2017: 2; Schenkel & Gomaà 2004: 29-30). This coffin is distinguished by a range of textual and iconographic features that provide significant evidence for the study of funerary thought in Middle Egypt, particularly at the site of Sharuna. It serves as a valuable case study for the inscriptions and decorative program of the Sharuna coffins, enabling systematic comparisons with other examples from the same site or neighboring regions. Although only a few coffins from Sharuna have been discovered or published (Ewais 2023: 1-22), the study of this coffin underscores its considerable scholarly importance and sheds further light on local funerary practices in the region during the Greco-Roman period.

## 2. Description

An anthropoid wooden coffin of Sharuna, Minya, Middle Egypt, belonging to a lady named *Tbi-sb*; is registered under inventory no. 597 in Mallawi Museum (display no. 315, showcase 6, Hall 2). The coffin is made of wood covered with plaster and dates to the Ptolemaic Period. It measures 168 cm in height and 45 cm in width (at the chest). The coffin is painted in red, green, yellow, white, and black. The artist who decorated it followed traditional iconographical patterns. The coffin consists of a lid and a case. The decorative scheme of the lid is divided into three sections: the upper section includes the head and chest; the middle section contains the abdomen; the lower section comprises the two legs and feet. The case bears two vertical lines of

hieroglyphic inscriptions on both long sides. According to the Mallawi Museum label, a decomposed skeleton of the mummy and damaged gilded remains of a cartonnage are preserved inside the coffin<sup>2</sup>.



A) Left Side    B) Front Side    C) Right Side

**FIGURE 1:** (a-c) Scenes and inscriptions of the coffin.

### I. The lid

#### I.1. Front, upper section (fig.1.b)

According to the Mallawi Museum registration, the coffin's false beard is now Missing; this is unacceptable because there are motifs on the neck. The face of the coffin is painted red. The outlines of the eyes, the circular pupils, and the eyebrows are painted black, while the eyeballs are painted white. The wig is a striped tripartite type, painted in black and white. The wig is a striped tripartite type, painted in black and white. Some

<sup>2</sup> This information is obtained from the museum's register

damage is visible on the head, where the plaster has fallen away, revealing the wood beneath. The facial features, framed by large ears, resemble those of a man rather than a woman, as the deceased has been conventionally transformed into Osiris. Nine geometric bands with different decorative patterns are carved between the two lower ends of the wig (Sousa 2018: 59, fig. 4). The coffin is distinguished by a large, elaborately painted traditional collar that covers the entire chest and extends down to the level of the abdomen (Cooney 2015: 288; Ivanov 2017: 5). This *wsh*-collar is composed of parallel semicircular rows of varied ornamental motifs, including circular, wavy, triangular, and rectangular patterns, as well as flower-shaped designs. It terminates on both shoulders with falcon heads crowned with sun discs. The floral broad collar depicted at the top of the coffin was common on anthropoid coffins from the Middle Kingdom to the Roman Period, consisting of ornamental bands; these collars imitated actual beaded collars and sometimes extended as far as the lower abdomen of the coffin lid (Niwinski 1988: 67; Valentine 2013: 70-71). The *wsh*-collar served not only as a decorative element of the coffin but also as an amulet, being composed of rows of floral symbols, leaves, and beads. Each floral motif carried its own symbolic significance (Jørgensen 2001: 26).



**FIGURE 2:** The cracks in the wig where the plaster fell off.

## I.2. Front, middle section (Figures 1b and 3)

This section covers the abdomen and contains a central scene depicting a kneeling winged goddess—usually Nut (Cooney 2015: 271; Ivanov 2017: 5) but identified here as Isis—facing left with outstretched arms in a gesture of protection. Both wings extend beyond the edges of the coffin. She is shown in aspective view, with her head in profile except for one frontal eye, outlined in black like her eyebrow. She wears a yellow sun disc on her head, a red dress, and a red headband. The body of Isis is painted in yellow, white, and black color. Above her outstretched wings, a horizontal inscription (I.2.A) mentions the name of the deceased and her parents. Below her wings, several inscriptions form six vertical lines on both sides (I.2.B1–2). At the right end of Isis’s wings sits a falcon-headed god in a squatting mummiform posture, probably holding a feather (now destroyed), while at the left end sits an ibis-headed god in a similar squatting mummiform form, also holding a feather.



FIGURE 3: Front, the middle section of the lid.

### I.3. Front, the lower section (Figures 1a-c and 4 a-b)

This section is divided into four parts: the figures on the far-right side, the corresponding texts, and a central offering formula—specifically a *htp-di-nsw* formula—that begins directly beneath the block border on which Isis is kneeling and extends to the lower edge of the coffin. The first central part consists of seven columns of hieroglyphic inscriptions (I.3.A), written in green and black on a white and brown background, running from right to left. The columns of text are flanked by lateral panels decorated with three registers, each outlined in green and black lines, depicting the Four Sons of Horus represented on the two lateral sides of the coffin. The other two lateral sides of the coffin lid are decorated with representations of standing figures (Ivanov 2017: 7). Each side contains three depictions of the Sons of Horus, as indicated by both the accompanying figures and inscriptions. The right side begins at the top with Hapi, shown as a mummiform deity with a baboon head (partly damaged). The second register depicts Imesti, also in mummiform, with a human head, while the lowest register represents Duamutef as a mummiform God with a jackal head (Valentine 2013: 34). All three deities are portrayed standing, holding *Mꜣꜣt*-feathers and strips of green linen bandages in their hands. The left side also consists of three registers depicting three of the Sons of

Horus. The upper register shows Imesti as a mummiform deity with a human head (Valentine 2013: 30-31). The middle register represents Duamutef as a mummiform deity with a jackal head, while the lower register depicts Qebehsenuf as a mummiform God with a falcon head that is now damaged (Valentine 2013: 39- 40). All three gods on both sides hold a feather and a strip of fabric in their hands. In front of each figure, an inscription identifies the deity by name.



A) the scenes on the right-side



B) the scenes on the left-side

FIGURE 4: a-b the scenes on the right and left sides of the coffin.

The fourth part is an upside-down scene depicted above the foot area of the coffin. It represents two black-painted jackals seated face to face on a naos-shaped pedestal (Ivanov 2017:7). Each jackal wears a red *sꜣ*-sign around its neck. The naos-shaped pedestal is painted in red, green, and black. Between the two jackals

runs a reversed vertical line of hieroglyphic text (I.3.B).

## II. The case (Figures 1a-b)

The case of the coffin is undecorated and divided into two symmetrical sides. Each side is occupied by two vertical lines of hieroglyphic text (II A-B), starting at the top, parallel to the head, and ending at the foot of the coffin. Each column is enclosed within a narrow frame, and both columns together are surrounded by a broader frieze decorated with evenly spaced horizontal lines enclosing narrow bands between them.

### Outside bottom panel of the coffin

According to the information provided by the Mallawi Museum, the exterior bottom panel of the coffin is undecorated. Due to the poor condition of the object, it was not possible to lift it for photographic verification, for fear of damaging the plaster layer.

### The preservation status of the coffin

The coffin is generally in a good condition, although several areas show damage in the form of longitudinal cracks in the lid due to the contraction of the joined panels. The largest crack runs along the right side of the coffin lid and has resulted in the loss of part of the scenes depicting the gods in this area. A smaller, corresponding crack appears on the left side of the lid. The case of the coffin also bears a crack on each side, extending from the head to the foot. These fractures have caused sections of the coloured plaster layer to fall off. Two major cracks are visible on the lid: the first begins at

the lower right edge of the wig and extends downward to a point above the foot, while the second originates beneath the necklace on the left side and descends to meet the first crack along a transverse line. In the head part, where the ancient gap filler and paint ground have fallen off, it is possible to see several pieces of wood that had been joined together to form the face and wig parts. This is a common feature in wooden artifacts, in which artists often used gap fillers for filling cracks, holes, missing parts, or hiding carpentry mistakes (El Hadidi 2015: 143-154). In the past, cracks or gaps were treated using various materials and techniques, especially gap fillers (El Hadidi and Fawzy 2025: 297-310). However, as long as the environmental conditions are appropriate, and the coffin is being periodically monitored and examined, there is no need to introduce any new materials to the coffin. As a preventive conservation measure, and if funding is available, the showcase itself, in which the coffin is exhibited, can be simply upgraded (Almaghrabi and El Hadidi 2025: 1107-1133). Should under any condition the layers start to flake and fall off, a professional conservator would need to either consolidate or re-adhere the layers carefully (Badr, Ali, and El Hadidi 2025: 43- 52).

### Inscriptions

All the inscriptions on the surface of the coffin were written in cursive hieroglyphs, which were closer to hieratic. The texts were written in black and green ink.

### The texts of the lid:

**I.2.A. Above the wings of the seated goddess:**



*Dd mdw in 3st (wr.t) Wsir Tbi-sb s3.t n Nb-nht-iwf-ḥw-w3 ms n nb.t pr Kʿrʿm*

Recitation by Isis the great<sup>(a)</sup>, Osiris Thebi-seb the daughter of *Neb-nʿkht-iʿḥf-ḥkh-wʿ*, who was born of the mistress of the house Karam.

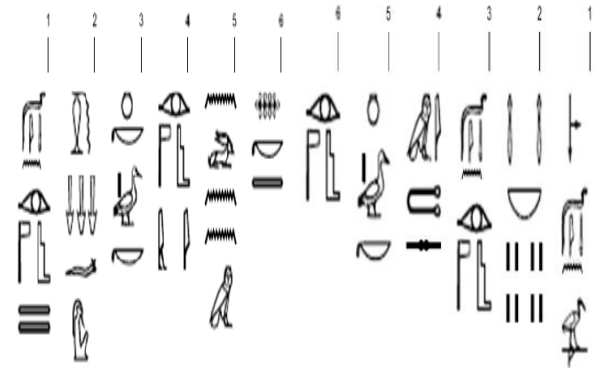
**Commentary**

a. The text here is erased and not visible. There is a broken part after the name Isis. The space is enough to insert one of Isis's

famous epithets, namely,  $\overset{x}{\sigma}$  *wr.t* (the Great).

**I.2.B1-2. Under the wings of the goddess Isis:** Figure 3

Six short vertical lines of text appear on both sides beneath the outstretched wings of the seated goddess. Each text corresponds to a seated deity: Thot together with Imesti (who is not depicted) under the left wing of Isis, and Qebhsenuf, with a falcon head, under her right wing.



**I. B 1. Right side:**

*Dd mdw in Dḥwty ʿ3 ʿ3 nb Ḥmnw*

*Dd mdw in Wsir Imsti ink s3.k Wsir*

Recitation by Thot<sup>(a)</sup> the great twice, Lord of Hermopolis.

Recitation by Osiris Imesti: I am your son Osiris<sup>(b)</sup>.

**I. B 2. Left side:**

*dd mdw in Wsir Kḥh-snw.f ink s3.k Wsir ii.n.(i) wnn.n.(i) m s3.k*

Recitation by Osiris<sup>(c)</sup> Qebhsenuf: I am your son Osiris: I have come<sup>(d)</sup> and <sup>(1)</sup> will be as your protection<sup>(e)</sup>.

**Commentary**

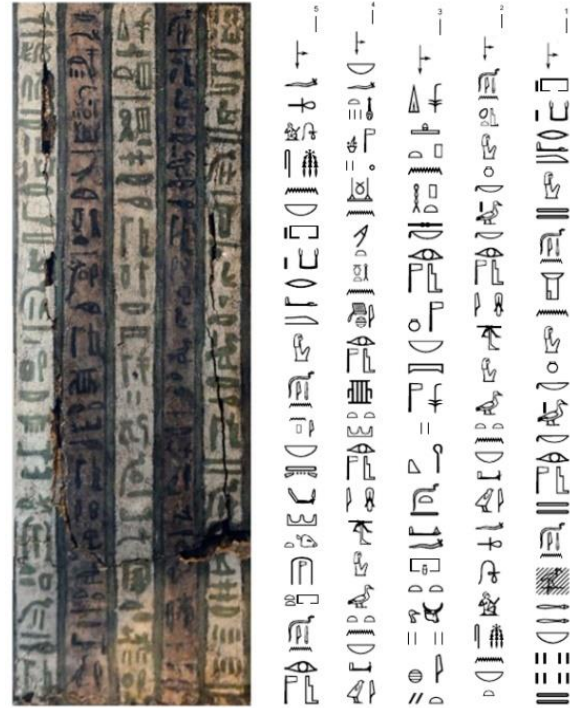
- a) Thoth, together with the other deities depicted on the sides of the coffin, serves as a protective entity against the forces of evil in the afterlife (Cooney 2017: 270).
- b) This is an abbreviated formula in which the title of Osiris is mentioned and should have been followed by the name of the deceased (cf. text no.I.3), as it coffin. However, the lack of space

around the figure of the seated goddess seems to have led the scribe to stop there.

- c) The vertical texts on the coffin (Figures 4a-b and Figure 5) display two horizontal lines separating the inscriptions for each of the Four Sons of Horus, just as similar horizontal lines separate their figures in the accompanying scene on the two sides.
- d) This formula completely appeared on the coffin of the New Kingdom (Abdelsattar 2018: 25-28) and continued in abbreviated form until the Ptolemaic Period, such as the coffin GEM 32598 (Ewais 2023: 10-11). The same formula protection was mentioned on the canopic jars with varied verbs (Reisner 1967: CGC nos. 4091, 4098, 4100, 4101, 4102).
- e) The text B2 left is written in retrograde style (Sherif 2001: 12).

**I.3. Central section (Figures 1b and 5):**

I.3.A. This section consists of five vertical lines running from right to left. The first two lines (1-2) form a single unit, to be read with the second line preceding the first. The remaining three lines (3-5) constitute another unit, as follows:



**FIGURE 5:** The lower section of the lid.

2. *Dd mdw in 3st ink s3.k Wsir Tbi-sb s3.t n Nb-nht-iwf-ḥw3 ms n nb.t*

1. *pr Krꜥm Dd mdw in Nb.t-hwt ink s3.k Wsir Dd mdw in Dhwtj 3 3 nb Hmnw*

3. *hꜣpw-di-nsw n Pth-sk(r)-Wsir ntr 3 nb pt nsw ntrw hꜣ3 dt di.f prt-hrw (n) ihw 3pdw iht*

4. *nb.t nfr.t (m) sntr mnht mrht n im3hw Wsir hnty imntyw Wsir Tbi-sb s3.t n Nb-nht-iwf-Ḥ. ḥw3 ms n nb.t pr K3rꜥm Dd mdw in Inpw nb t3-dsrt hnty sh-ntr Dd mdw in Wsir*

2. Recitation by Isis, I am your son Osiris Thebi-seb the daughter of *Neb-nꜥkht- iꜥhf- ḥnkḥ*, who was born of the mistress of

1. The house Karam. Recitation by Nephthys, I am your son Osiris. Recitation by Thot the great twice, lord of Hermopolis.

3. An offering which the king gives<sup>(a)</sup> to Ptah-Sokar-Osiris<sup>(b)</sup>, the great god<sup>(c)</sup>, lord of the sky, the king of gods, the ruler of


the eternity, he gives invocation offering of bulls and birds.


4. Every good thing from incense, fat for the Revered One Osiris who is foremost the west and for Osiris Thebi-seb the daughter of *Neb-n<sup>c</sup>kht-i<sup>c</sup>hf-*

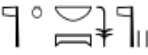


5. Ankh, who was born of the mistress of the house Karam. Recitation by Anubis lord of the necropolis, the foremost of the mumification tent<sup>(d)</sup>. Recitation by Osiris<sup>(e)</sup>


### Commentary:

(a). *htpw-di-nsw* formula is a relatively standard Egyptian coffin text, forming a heading (Allen 2010: 366; Valentine 2013: 25-26).

(b).  Ptah, Sokar, and Osiris have been unified into one God since the Middle Kingdom (Leitz 2002: III, 176-177).

(c). The title *ntr-<sup>c</sup>3* of Osiris is usually written as 

(Abdelmoniem, A. M. et al. 2022: 20, fig. 4). However, in the coffin studied here, the same title is repeated three times with the same spelling  as the sign following  the *ntr*-sign can be read only as <sup>c</sup>3, since it is a common title of Osiris. Because it was written in hieratic, the scribe confused the form of the  *nw*-vessel with that of the column <sup>c</sup>3. In addition, he used the letter *k* instead of the *nb*-sign.



(d). Anubis  Lord of the necropolis (lit. the sacred land), the foremost of the mumification tent. This title of Anubis is attested four times on the coffin sides.

The title *nb t3-dsr* has been attested since the Old Kingdom to refer to the sacred ground or the necropolis where the dead were buried (Gauthier 1927: IV, 40. Wilson 1997: 1120). From the New Kingdom onward, Anubis became known as the Lord of the Necropolis (Leitz 2002: I, 398).

The second element, *sh-ntr*, appears in

several variant forms (



, and  ) in the inscriptions on the coffin. In the funerary context, the *sh-ntr* of Anubis is already attested in the Old Kingdom (Gardiner 1911: 18. §16,3; Manassa 2007: I, 176; Pyr. 2012b-c; 1122c), referring to a chamber or section of the valley temple complex that included the purification hall and the cult place. The main embalming rituals were performed in this location (Wilson 1997: 890). The title is associated with Anubis in his role as the purifier of the deceased during the embalming process (Hoffmeier 1981: 175-190; Manassa 2007: I, 176; Gardiner 1911: 18. §16, 3).

(e). This utterance is incomplete; it mentions only the name of Osiris and does not include the name of the god.

### I.3B. Texts on side panels (sons of Horus)

The main function of these gods, depicted as mummiform figures on the right and left sides of the coffin, is to protect the viscera of the deceased and his mummy (Leitz et al. 2018: 50; Fahim and Favez 2020: 28; Rouvière 2002: 244; Mathieu 2008: 10). Imesti, Duamutef, Qebhsenuf, and Hapy are best known as the four deities represented on canopic jars, who protect the liver, stomach, intestines, and lungs, respectively (Redford 2002:134). The Sons of Horus were arranged on the abdominal area of mummiform coffins, associating their figures more closely with the organs they were meant to protect. This was particularly the case during the Third Intermediate and Late Periods, when canopic equipment was largely eliminated from burials and the organs were returned to the body. The association of these deities with their

respective organs thus became even more crucial to funerary beliefs (Partridge 1994: 82; Rocheleau 2012: 119).

**I.3B.1. Text on the right side (three sons of Horus): (Figures 1a and 1c)**

Right side



*Dd mdw in Hpi*

*Dd mdw in Wsir Imsti*  
Osiris Imesti.

*Dd mdw in Wsir Dw3-mwt.f* Recitation by  
Osiris Dwamutef.

*Dd mdw in 3st* Recitation by Isis<sup>(b)</sup>.

**I.3B. Texts on side panels (sons of Horus): (Figure 1a)**

*Dd mdw in Wsir Imsti* Recitation by  
Osiris Imesti <sup>(c)</sup>.

*Dd mdw in Wsir Dw3-mwt.f* Recitation by  
Osiris Dwamutef.

*Dd mdw in Wsir Kbh-snw.f* Recitation by  
Osiris Qebhsenuf.

**Commentary:**

(a) It is noteworthy that Imesti and Duamutef are mentioned twice in the side

Left side






Recitation by Hapi<sup>(a)</sup>.

Recitation by

inscriptions of the coffin, unlike the other Sons of Horus, who appear only once on each side.

(b) Although Isis is not depicted in the scene, the formula mentions only her name, without any epithet or title.

(c) The name of Imesti is written without the sign  at the beginning of the name. Also, as is usual in the name of Imesti, the letter  precedes the letter  the feet scene: (Figure 1 b).

The decoration on the foot of the coffin consists of a pair of jackals reclining on shrines, facing inward, or sometimes facing toward the feet (Valentine 2013: 78-79; Redford 2002: 21, 381; Eslam 2021: 116-127). Between the two jackals, which are shown seated upon a naos-shaped pedestal, a vertical column of hieroglyphic text is inscribed:



*Dd mdw in Inpw nb t3-dsr(t) hnt sh-ntr*

Recitation by Anubis Lord of the necropolis, the foremost of the mumification tent.

**II. The inscriptions of the case**

The two long sides of the coffin case are bordered by bands of geometric ornamentation. Between the decorative borders on each side run two vertical lines of hieroglyphic text, separated by a central vertical line painted in green, extending from right to left.

**II A1-2. Coffin right side text: (Figure 1c)**




1. *ḥtp-dī-nsw n Pth-sk(r)-Wsir ntr ʿ3 nb pt nsw ntrw ḥk3 dt di=f prt-ḥrw (n) ihw 3pdw ih.t nb.t nfr.t sntr mnht mrht n im3hw Wsir ḥnty imntyw Wsir Tbi-sb s3.t n Nb-nht-iwf-ʿnh-w3 ms n nb.t pr K3rʿm dd mdw in Wsir Imsti*


2. *dd mdw in Hpi ink s3=k Wsir Tbi-sb s3t n Nb-nht-iwf-ʿnh-w3 ms n nb.t pr K3rʿm dd mdw in Inpw nb t3-dsrt ḥnty sh-ntr dd mdw in Kbh-snw.f ink s3=k Wsir dd mdw in Wsir Dw3-mwt.f ink s3.k Wsir Tbi-sb s3.t n Nb-nht-iwf-ʿnh-w3*



1. An offering which the king gives to Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, the great god, lord of the sky, the king of gods, the ruler of the eternity, may he give invocation offering of bulls, birds, every good thing from incense, clothes, fat for the Revered One Osiris who is foremost the west, Osiris Thebi-seb the daughter of Neb-nakht-iauf-ankh-wa, who was born of the mistress of the house Karam. Recitation by Osiris Imesti.

2. Recitation by Hapi, I am your son<sup>(a)</sup> Oisirs Thebi-seb the daughter of Neb-nakht-iauf-ankh-wa, who was born of the mistress of the house Karam. Recitation by Anubis lord of the necropolis, the foremost of the mumification tent. Recitation by Osiris Qebehsenwef. I am your son Osiris. Recitation by Osiris by Dwamutef I am your son Osiris Thebi-seb the daughter of *Neb-nʿkht-iʿhf-ʿnkh-wʿ*.

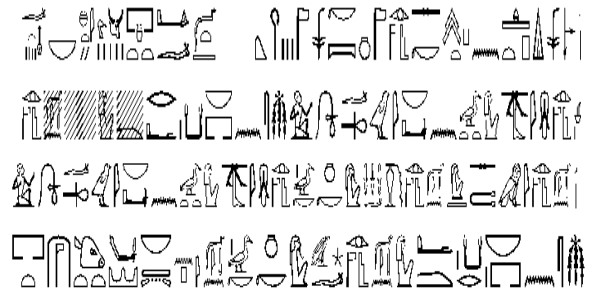
## Commentary:

(a). In all the texts on the coffin relating to the Sons of Horus, the word  is written consistently, except in the case of Hapi, where it appears differently as

 The scribe made a mistake in

the form of the vessel  used in the word 'ink', replacing it with a different vessel sign  (W10).

## II B1-2. Coffin left side text: (Figure 1a)



1. *ḥtp-dī-nsw n Pth-sk(r)-Wsir ntr ʿ3 nb pt nsw ntrw ḥk3 (spʿse) dt di=f prt-ḥrw (n) ihw 3pdw ih.t nb.t nfr.t sntr (n) Wsir Tbi-sb s3.t n Nb-nht-iwf-ʿnh-w3 ms n nb.t pr K3rʿm .... dd mdw in Wsir*


2. *dd mdw in Wsir Imsti dd mdw in Wsir Kbh-snw.f ink s3=k Wsir Tbi-sb s3.t n Nb-nht-iwf-ʿnh-w3 ms n nb.t pr K3rʿm dd mdw in Wsir Dw3-mwt.f ink s3=k dd mdw in Inpw nb t3-dsrt ḥnty sh-ntr*


1. An offering which the king gives to Ptah<sup>(a)</sup>-Sokar-Osiris, the great god, lord of the sky, the king of gods, the ruler of the eternity, may he give invocation offering of bulls, birds, every good thing and incense<sup>(b)</sup> to Osiris Thebi-seb the daughter of Neb-nakht-iauf-ankh-wa, who was born of the mistress of the house Karam .... Recitation by Osiris.

2. Recitation by Osiris Imesti. Recitation by Osiris Qebehsenwef. I am your son Osiris Thebi-seb the daughter of Neb-nakht-iauf-ankh-wa, who was born of the mistress of the house Karam. Recitation by Osiris by Dwamutef, I am your son. Recitation by Anubis lord of the necropolis, the foremost of the mumification tent.

## Commentary:

(a) In the inscription the scribe misgendered Ptah's name, writing it as

. He appears to have confused Ptah with Hapi, resulting in an incorrect



orthographic substitution  (text IIA-1).

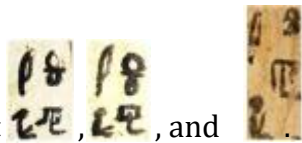
(b) The *ḥtp-dī-nsw* formula here appears as a slightly abbreviated version of the




formula on the right side of the coffin. This seems to be due to the vacant space following the word *dt*, which compelled the scribe to shorten the text. He also omitted the word *im³hw* before the name of the deceased.


**General commentary:**


**The coffin’s owner and her family**

The names of the deceased, together with those of her parents, are inscribed in almost all the texts on the coffin, in hieroglyphs of varying sizes. The name of the deceased woman is partly obscured. Ranke attested only the two names  and  (Ranke 1935: 390). This name represents only the first part of the woman’s full name, with the orthographic variation occurring in the initial element, which here includes the sandal determinative. The final sign in the name presents a problem, as it is written




in hieratic script , , and . I propose two possible interpretations. The first suggests that the sign may represent




a man carrying the sky . In this case,


the sign  does not seem to hold any significant meaning within the context of the name, as the verb *tw³* (“to lift,” “to raise,” or “to carry”) (Wilson 1997: 1127) does not yield a coherent sense in this construction.


Accordingly, the name would read as

 *Tbi-tw³*.


In the second interpretation, the latter part of the name may consist of the sign

 combined with the letter  and the determinative of legs , thus forming

the name  *Tbi-sb*. The first element of the name, *Tbi*, means “to provide with sandals” (Dickson 2006: 249; Faulkner

1991: 304) while the final element  *sbi* means “to travel/ to go/ to send” (Lesko 2004: II, 25). Therefore, the full name may be translated as “the one who provides sandals for travel” or “the sandal- wearing traveller”. I adopt this second interpretation for the name of the deceased in the present study.

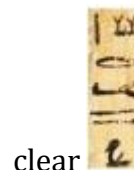
The name of the deceased’s father is also unattested in Ranke; however, only the first part of the name is known, and it has been attested since the New Kingdom (Ranke 1935: 186). There is no known parallel for the complete name of the

father  *Nb-nht-iwf-³nh-*


*w³*. It is likely that the name appeared only during the Late Period or the early Ptolemaic Period and was confined to



Middle Egypt. Although the syllabic element *iwf-³nh* is known as a component of personal names (Ranke 1935: 14, 409, 410, 412). The mother’s deceased name is



clear  =  *K³r³m*. It attested

from the Late Period as  (Ranke 1935: 347).

**The deceased family:**

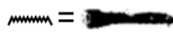
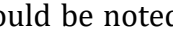


*Nb-nht-iwf-³nh-w³*  =  *Kr³m*



 *Tbi-sb*


**Paleographical and philological commentary:**


The entire inscription on the coffin was written in cursive hieroglyphic script. The


signs are nonuniform in size, varying throughout the coffin. The scribe adjusted the size of the signs according to the available space, but at times he miscalculated and extended beyond the designated frame of the line (II B, line 2). The cursive script appears in coffin inscriptions and religious texts from the Middle Kingdom onward (sherif 2001: 11-12). However, the blending of two script types is frequently observed on Ptolemaic coffins (Ewais 2023: 1-22; Abdelfatah and Serry 2015: no. BAAM. 608.), reflecting a continuation of the traditions of the Second and Third Intermediate Periods (Handoussa 1988: 111). Moreover, the text follows the hieratic convention of being oriented rightwards (Díaz Iglesias-Llanos 2023: 14).

Most of the signs on the coffin were written in cursive script and hieratic. Some signs were rendered in the form of simple dashes, such as letter  =  and letter  = . It should be noted that certain signs on the coffin appear in a purely hieratic form, as is the case with

the signs  *dd mdw in*,  *prt-hrw*,

and  *Dw3-mwt.f*, etc. In the last example, it is noticeable that the *mwt* sign is written in two separate parts.

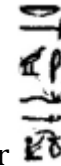
In addition, at the end of the utterance of each of the Sons of Horus depicted on the coffin—whether on the front or the two sides—the scribe placed two horizontal strokes  to separate the speech of



each deity . These separating strokes run parallel to the ground line upon which the deity stands.

Some of the signs were written entirely in hieratic, such as the first syllable of the name of the coffin's owner, the desert sign in the title of Anubis, the incense




vessel sign, and the bull's head sign in the word *hnt*. Additionally, certain vertical signs were rendered horizontally, most






notably the *nh*-sign  in the name of




the deceased father  where it appeared as . There is also evidence of metathesis in some words. For example, in the name of the god Imesti, the letter *s* is placed after the letter *t*, reversing the usual order.

The scribe placed some letters of words inconsistently, without adhering to the prescribed writing square. This phenomenon appears in several positions, such as in line 4 of the front

text:  *(prt-hrw*  *), line 6 (*sh-ntr*  *),*  
line 1 on the right side of the case (*hnt-**

 *imntt*  *), line 1 of the case, left side (*hnt*  *),*  
and line 2 (*ht*  *, nfrt*  *).**

The scribe left several texts on the coffin incomplete. For instance, some passages begin with the phrase *dd mdw in* in “Recitation by” followed by the name of a god or goddess, but the utterance is not

completed (I.2, line 6; I.3.A, line 7). 

### Confusion and Mistakes

The scribe demonstrates a degree of confusion in the use and orthography of certain signs. Notably, a graphic similarity between the signs *nb* and *k* appears to have led to occasional interchange between them, with *k* being substituted for *nb* and vice versa (II.A2).

Furthermore, the scribe marked the *k*-sign with a central black dot, perhaps as an additional distinguishing feature.



He employed a single determinative to denote both divinities and personal names, whether those of the deceased woman or her parents. The following table illustrates these orthographic inconsistencies:

Text number	Mistake	Correction	Notes
I.B			The scribe is confused between <i>k</i> and <i>f</i> .
I.B I.3 B II. A II. B			The letter <i>t</i> is preceded the letter <i>s</i> .
I.3.A II.A1 II.A2			The name of Sokar was written without the final letter <i>r</i> .
I.3.A II.A1 II.A2			The scribe confused the hieratic form of the <i>mw</i> vessel with that of the <i>ϣ</i> column. In addition, he used the letter <i>k</i> in place of the <i>nb</i> sign.
I.3.A II.A1 II.A2 II.B1 II.B2			The scribe added a black dot in the center of the sign <i>k</i> .
I.3.A II.A1 II.B1			The scribe replaced the <i>hrw</i> -sign with a vessel, and added two letter <i>t</i> .
I.3.A II.A1 II.B1			The letter <i>f</i> is preceded the <i>nfr</i> -sign.
II.A1			The letter <i>h</i> is replaced by a circle.
II.B1			The scribe confused the letter <i>h</i> with sign N90.
II.B1			The scribe added a sign to the name Ptah that does not belong to the original name, apparently confusing it with the <i>hp</i> sign.
II.A1			The letter <i>r</i> is preceded the <i>t</i> .
II.A1			The scribe used the sign <i>nht</i> in place of the letter <i>ϣ</i> .
II.A1			The scribe replaced the letter <i>ϣ</i> by the sign <i>di</i> .
II.A1			The letter <i>f</i> is preceded the <i>di</i> -sign.

TABLE 1: Confusion and mistakes

### The Hieroglyphic signs:

Although most of the signs used to write the texts on the coffin are hieratic, some are rendered entirely in hieroglyphs. The most significant of these fully detailed signs are the following:

- 1- The *htp-di-nsw* formula appears three times on the coffin, as



follows , , and . It should be noted that most of the signs in the formula are written in full, detailed hieroglyphs.

- 2- The *st*-sign and the eye sign in the name of Osiris were written in



their original forms (e.g., ,

, and ), whether preceding the names of the Sons of Horus or the name of the deceased

- 3- The letter *h* is also inscribed fully.

- 4- Likewise, the *w*' sign is rendered in

a hieroglyphic form (e.g., ,

, and ).

- 5- Additionally, the letter *m*

and appear in the name of Imesti.

- 6- The *s3*-sign and .

Based on hieratic papyri, it is probable that a few coffins were produced in response to individual requests, whereas the majority were made in stock. In the case of premade coffins, the spaces reserved for the owner's name were left blank until the coffin was purchased, at which point the owner's name and titles were added in these vacant areas (Kockelmann 2018: 72; Hassan 2025: 230).

It appears that the name of the deceased was most likely added at a time separate from the remainder of the coffin's decoration, after the scenes had been drawn. The coffin was produced with a generic decorative scheme, allowing it to be personalized later when purchased. The inscription was clearly executed by a hand different from that of the main decoration and may have been added some time after the rest of the coffin was completed (Valentine 2013: 64-65). This is evidenced by the fact that the scribe did not consistently adhere to the customary writing squares, with some words appearing out of order within their designated frames. It is also worth noting that variations in the handwriting of certain words suggest either changes in the scribe's execution or the intervention of a different hand adding names on the sides of the coffin after the deceased was identified. This phenomenon is particularly evident in proper names, whether of divinities or individuals, as illustrated in the following examples:

Position & name	Front	Utterance of Horus' sons	Right side of the case	Left side of the case
Deceased name				
Father's name				
Mother's name				

Dwa-mut-ef				
Imesti				

TABLE 2: The variations in the handwriting of the same name

It is evident from Table 2 that the name of the deceased woman was written six times in different ways, particularly in the third

sign, which varied between , ,

, and . Likewise, the horizontal knot in the first sign is sometimes

present and sometimes absent .

As for the father's name, it appears six times on the surface of the coffin. On one occasion, it was written without the *nb* sign on the right side of the case. Additionally, the *nh* sign in all versions of his name was placed in a horizontal

position . Likewise, the last *w3-* sign of the father's name is written in


multiple ways (e.g., , , , , and ).

The mother's name is inscribed five times on the sides of the coffin. It was written consistently, except for the letter *ḥ* which the scribe occasionally confused with signs of similar shape, such as and . Furthermore, the letter *ḥ* in the *ḥ* name was written twice in reverse .


The signs and in the name of






Duamutef also exhibit variations  
The first sign *dw3* is written in an unusual manner, resembling the word

*w3h*  while the *mwt*-sign is written in



two separate parts , the body and the feet.

Finally, the name Imesti appears once

without the letter , and he scribe generally placed the letter  before the letter  in the name, except on one occasion on the left side of the case.

### Characteristics of Sharuna coffins:

This provides an opportunity to highlight the characteristics of Middle Egypt and the distinctive local features of Sharuna coffins, particularly in the distribution of decorations, the inscriptions, and the forms of the hieroglyphic signs.




Coffin	Mallawi museum	Museum of the Bibliotheca Alex. BAAM 608	Grand Egyptian Museum (32598)
Triple wig	✓	✓	✓
Beard	X	X	✓
The large collar	✓	✓	✓
The winged seated goddess	✓	✓	✓
Horus's sons on the sides of the coffin	✓	✓	✓
Two Anubis, seated on a shrine at the feet of the lid	✓ With a text belonging to the two figures	One Anubis Without a text	✓ Without a text
vertical axial texts with Htp-di-nsw formula	✓	✓	✓
Texts on the two case sides	✓	a tall serpent is represented on both sides	✓
Cursive hieroglyphic script	✓	✓	✓
Distinguished signs 	✓ Dot inside k-letter	X	✓ Dot inside k-letter
The <i>ai</i> -sign as <i>nw</i> -sign		X	

TABLE 3: Characteristics of Sharuna coffins

### Conclusion:

The iconographic program and the funerary texts decorating the coffin of *Tbi-sb* can be associated with the Sharuna site. Two other coffins from the Sharuna necropolis have been identified (Figures 6 and 7): one currently housed in the Archaeology Museum of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (Abdelfatah and Serry 2015: 90–91), and another preserved in the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM 32598) (Ewais 2023: 1–22). All three coffins share several features with the coffin studied here, including the relatively simple decorative program of the lid, the depiction of a winged goddess accompanied by side texts in columns, the representation of the Sons of Horus on both sides, and the combined cursive script blending hieroglyphics and hieratic, with an increased use of hieratic signs in some texts. Notably, the coffin of *Tbi-sb*, together with the coffin in the Archaeology Museum of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, includes a scene of two jackals facing each other while crouching on a shrine.

The signs are nonuniform, varying in size throughout the coffin. The scribe adjusted the dimensions of the signs according to the available space and, in some cases, miscalculated the spacing, causing the text to extend beyond its intended frame. Although most of the signs used to inscribe the texts on the coffin were hieratic, certain signs were rendered entirely in full hieroglyphic form.

It appears that the name of the deceased, along with those of her family members, was inscribed on the coffin only after its purchase. The name of the individual intended for interment within it was added in each instance according to the spatial limitations available for its inclusion.



**FIGURE 6:** The coffin of the Archaeology Museum of Bibliotheca Alexandrina, about: Abdelfatah and Serry 2015: 90-91, no. BAAM. 608.



**FIGURE 7:** Grand Egyptian Museum (32598) coffin, about: Ewais 2023: fig. 1.

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