

Aegyptus et Pannonia IX.



Acta Symposii anno 2023

BUDAPEST

Aegyptus et Pannonia IX.

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On the cover: Vase from the Zsolnay factory, © private
collection (see FULLÉR – FERÓ, fig. 14.)

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Aegyptus et Pannonia IX.

Objects and Concepts.

Proceedings of the Conference

19th-20th January, 2023, Budapest, Hungary

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THE 'OBJECTS AND CONCEPTS' CONFERENCE AND THE HEFS AEC

DR. HEDVIG GYÓRY, PHD

HEFS AEC president

The Ancient Egyptian Committee of the Hungarian-Egyptian Friendship Society (HEFS AEC / MEBT ÓEB) organised the 'Objects and Concepts' conference in collaboration with the Semmelweis Medical History Museum of the Hungarian National Museum on 19th-20th January 2023. Scholars joined the event in person in Budapest and online from around the world.

The conference aimed to provide a platform for presenting ongoing Egyptological and medical historical research projects related to artefacts, as well as results. It also offered the professional community and a broader interested audience the opportunity to become acquainted with new discoveries, as well as theoretical and methodological approaches. A key objective was to initiate dialogue among specialists in Egyptology, archaeology, ancient history, ethnography, cultural anthropology, Oriental studies and African studies. This would broaden professional perspectives, expand and share knowledge, and shape research approaches. This objective was largely achieved during the conference.

From an Egyptological standpoint, 2022 marked a dual jubilee: the 200th anniversary of Jean-François Champollion's decipherment of hieroglyphic writing, and the commemoration of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb 100 years earlier. Drawing inspiration from these events, the conference aimed to reconsider what Tutankhamun's artefacts have taught us about ancient Egyptian culture and how the decipherment of hieroglyphs has deepened our understanding of ancient perceptions of artefacts, their meanings and their uses. The presentations focused on research projects exploring the understanding and interpretation of material culture in ancient and modern societies. This was achieved by reconsidering the real or perceived meanings of objects, or by examining their function, use, and social value.

Following the period of disruption caused by the COVID pandemic, this *Aegyptus et Pannonia* conference was announced as an in-person event in the hope that academic life would return to normal. In practice, however, online

participation has become a permanent feature of scholarly communication. There was still strong demand for remote presentations, with several participants requesting the option to attend online. To a limited extent, this was accommodated, and the conference was organised in a hybrid format. In keeping with tradition, the programme included both English- and Hungarian-language sections. Nevertheless, all contributors were asked to submit written versions of their papers in English for the conference volume. The speakers included nearly equal numbers of Hungarian and international scholars. Most of the studies published in the conference volume are revised versions of the presentations and reflect the discussions held during and after the event. A few papers were omitted due to the authors' other commitments. These were replaced by a study of Bes amulets, as a continuation done on the ornamental Bes amulets during the 18th Dynasty. Abstracts submitted to the 'Objects and Concepts' conference are available in a separate booklet and on the 'Fáraók Földjén' (In the Land of the Pharaohs / ibisz.iif.hu/ozirisz) website of the HEFS AEC, in both Hungarian and English.

Thursday, 19 January 2023

10:00–10:30

Arrival and Greeting

HEFS / MEBT + HNM CCP Semmelweis Medical History Museum (SOM)

10:30–12:00 / EN

Virginia Webb: Reception and alteration: Aegyptiaca in 8th- and 7th-century East Greece through the lens of sanctuary deposits on Samos and Miletus. Import or local production?

Benedek Varga: Connections in the museum representation of the Seuso Treasure

Urška Furlan: A case study of society through the production, consumption, and circulation of amulets of the Nile Delta in the first millennium BCE

12:30–14:00 / HU

Dóra Bohacsek: „Idézzek téged, démon, bárki vagy is (...)” – Latin nyelvű átoktáblák Észak-Afrikából [“I summon you, demon, whoever you are (...)” – Latin curse tablets from North Africa]

Krisztina Scheffer – Hedvig Győry: Udzsat szem amulettek a SOMban [Wedjat eye amulets in the collection of the HNM Semmelweis Museum for Medical history]

Gabriella Vámos: „Fújtak rá cukrot, hogy ne fájjon annyira...” A cukor mint a népi gyógyászat egyik alapanyaga [“They sprayed sugar on it so it wouldn't hurt so much...” Sugar as one of the ingredients of folk medicine]

Friday, 20 January 2023

10:00–11:30 / EN

Rita Simon: The curious history of Tutankhamun's scarab

Afaf Wahba: Objects associated with burials: concept, purpose, and meaning, with examples from recent excavations in Egypt

Esther Pons Mellado: A Predynastic vessel with human and animal representations

12:00–13:00 / HU

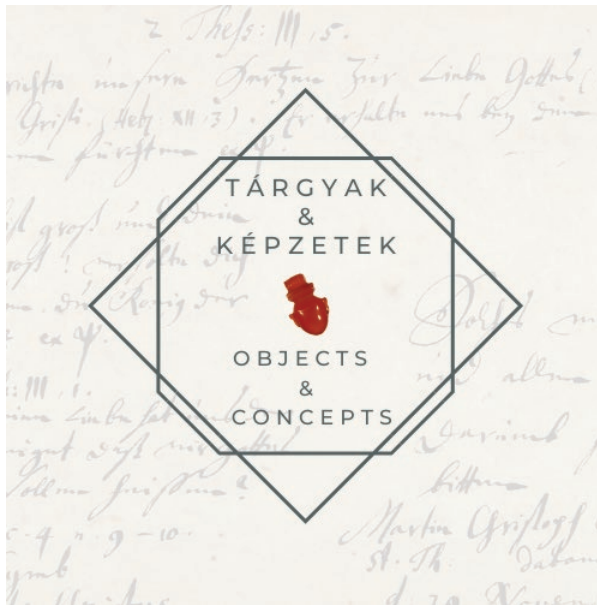
Andrea Fullér – Eszter Ferő: Tutanhamentől a szecesszióig: a Zsolnay gyár egyiptizáló díszműáruja [From Tutankhamun to Art Nouveau: the Zsolnay factory's Egyptionizing decorative goods]

Péter Véninger: Medma és Hipponion, két ókori görög város kerámia emlékei fazekas szemmel [Clay objects of two ancient Greek towns, Medma and Hipponion, with a potter's eye]

Hedvig Győry: Az év ókori egyiptomi emléke: A Thoerisz/Taweret amulettek kérdéséhez [The ancient Egyptian object of the year: To the question of the Thoeris/Taweret amulets]

13:00–13:30

Closing remarks



The title and design of the conference were linked to the double anniversary in 2022. In Hungary, as elsewhere, considerable attention was devoted to Jean-François Champollion, who used the Rosetta Stone to decipher the hieroglyphs, establish their grammatical system and identify their vocabulary. This paved the way for a new understanding of ancient Egyptian culture. Decades of intensive scholarly work have built on his results, enabling

modern audiences to read hieroglyphic texts and gain an understanding – at least in broad outlines – of the thought processes of ancient Egyptians. Nevertheless, further refinement is necessary in this field. One consequence of this breakthrough was that the interpretation of material culture reached a new level: previously uninterpretable or largely speculative assumptions were replaced by interpretations supported by textual sources or more precise approaches to perceived meanings.

The conference logo features a heart-shaped amulet inside a geometric frame, set against a 19th-century manuscript. This symbolises the ancient Egyptian belief that the heart was the key to both biological life and emotions and thought.

However, reading ancient Egyptian texts does not mean that all questions have been answered. One such issue concerns the Stela of Djedher¹ in the Museum of Fine Arts. In this stela the adoring official offering to Osiris, Isis, and Nephthys is shown – following New Kingdom models – with a balm cone on his head, yet its design suggests that its original meaning was lost in later periods. It became a cone-shaped element with branching lines emerging from it. This motif also highlights the deteriorated condition of the centuries-old models, later alterations to which were not always distinguished from the original forms by subsequent artists. By contrast, the jackal figure standing on a boat in the upper register of the stela – despite being a rare depiction – clearly symbolises Anubis's role as 'guide of the soul' in the afterlife. This role is explained from multiple perspectives in written Egyptian sources. For this reason, the stela was chosen as the backdrop for the call for papers.

Another significant anniversary in 2022 was the 100th anniversary of Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon's discovery of the treasures in Tutankhamun's tomb. The objects unearthed at that time had an enormous global impact thanks to their breathtaking beauty, unique forms and exquisite craftsmanship. Public interest in ancient Egypt in Hungary has always been intense,² as evidenced by numerous Egyptian-style monuments, such as the

1 MEKIS, Tamás, *Quelques données nouvelles sur les stèles Budapest MBA inv. no 51.1928 et Prague MN P 1636, et sur la famille de Iâhmès fils de Smendès, propriétaire de la statue Caire JE 37075*, in Coulon, Laurent, *La Cachette de Karnak Nouvelles perspectives sur les découvertes de Georges Legrain*. Bibliothèque d'Étude 16. Cairo: Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities – Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 2016, 383-395.

2 For today's interest see e.g. FERÓ, Eszter, *The Body of Nefertiti: The Curious Incident of the Little Warsawa the Venice Biennial*, in JÚNOVÁ, Adéla Macková – STORCHOVÁ, Lucie – JÚN, Libor (eds.), *Egypt and Austria X – Visualizing the Orient: Central Europe and the Near East in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Prague: Academy of Performing Arts in Prague 2016, 107-118.

Jewish cemetery in Budapest,³ the Szivárvány Cinema in Kaposvár,⁴ and the monuments in Csákvár and Hédervár,⁵ or part of them⁶. Likewise, the Zsolnay Factory's Egyptianising artefacts⁷ testify to this enduring popularity. Other Egyptian and Egyptianising artefacts illustrate this phenomenon further, including the wooden stela painted by Blanka Teleki (1806–1862). This was deciphered and published based on her painting by Emil Haeffner (1892–1953).⁸ When the stela – long thought lost – was later rediscovered, it emerged that the painting was an almost perfect copy.⁹ Further artefacts

3 FULLÉR, Andrea, *Egyiptizáló síremlékek a budapesti zsidó temetőben a 19–20. század fordulóján*. Ókor 18/3, 2019, 96-112; FULLÉR, Andrea, *Egyptianizing Funerary Architecture in Budapest*: Mladen Tomorad (ed.): *Egypt and Austria XII – Egypt and the Orient*, in *The Current Research. Proceedings of the Conference held at the Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb* (September 17th-22nd, 2018). Oxford-Zagreb 2020, 353-373

4 FULLÉR, Andrea, *A kaposvári Szivárvány Kultúrpalota egyiptizáló dekorációja*. Ókor 4/2014, 67-78; FULLÉR, Andrea, *Egyptianizing Decoration of the Szivárvány Cinema in Kaposvár*. in JŰNOVA Macková, Adéla – STORCHOVÁ, Lucie - JŰN, Libor (eds), *Egypt and Austria X. Visualizing the Orient: Central Europe and the Near East in the 19th and 20th centuries*. Prague: Academy of Performing Arts in Prague 2016, 179-191; FULLÉR, Andrea, *A kaposvári Szivárvány Mozi – A húszas évek egyiptomi stílusú mozzijainak hazai példája*, in BÁCS, Tamás – DEZSŐ, Tamás – VÉR, Ádám (eds.) *Aegyptiaca et Assyriaca. Tanulmányok az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Ókortudományi Intézetéből*. Antiqua et Orientalia 5. Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó 2015, 76-92.

5 FERŐ, Eszter, *Csákvári piramis és hédervári szfinx: a magyar egyiptománia nyomában*. 4. Ókor 2014, 55-66; FERŐ, Eszter, *Pyramids in the „Back Garden”: Some Remarks on Egyptomania in Hungary*. Lecture at *The Perception of the Orient in Central Europe (1800–1918)*. Conference *Egypt and Austria IX*, 2013. Betliar, Slovakia, 2013. október 21-23; FERŐ, Eszter, *Az egyiptománia jelensége az újkori Magyarországon, avagy hogyan kerül piramis egy Esterházy kastélyparkba?* in BÁCS, Tamás – DEZSŐ, Tamás – VÉR, Ádám (eds.) *Aegyptiaca et Assyriaca. Tanulmányok az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Ókortudományi Intézetéből*. Antiqua et Orientalia 5. Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó 2015, 59-76.

6 GULYÁS, András, *A house with winged sundisks in Peterdy street, Budapest*, in *Festschrift Gábor Schreiber*, in print.

7 See the article in this volume, and FERŐ, Eszter, *In Search of the Orient: The Zsolnay Way*, in CZERNY, Ernst (ed.): *Egypt and Austria XI – In Search of the Orient*. Proceedings of the Symposium held at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien (September 20th to 24th, 2016). Egypt and Austria – Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien - Kraków 2018, 45–57; FERŐ, Eszter, *Zsolnay-titok másképp: egyiptománia a magyar iparművészetben*. *Zsolnay's secret in a new light: Egyptomania in Hungarian applied arts*. *Belvedere* 31/1, 2019, 166-178 – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14232/belv.2019.1.11>; FERŐ, E. – FULLÉR, A. *Tűzben született lótuszvirágok*. *Egyiptizáló alkotások a Zsolnay gyárban*. Pécs: Janus Pannonius Múzeum 2023; FERŐ, Eszter – FULLÉR, Andrea, *Eosin Cat and Pyrogranite Sphinx – New Remarks on the Egyptianizing Colours of the Zsolnay Factory*, in HUDAKOVA, Lubica – HUDEC, Josef (eds.), *Egypt and Austria XIII – Between the treaties of Sistova and Lausanne: Contacts between the Orient and Central Europe in the 19th and early 20th Centuries*. Proceedings of the Conference held by the Aigyptos Foundation and the Egypt and Austria Society at Topoľčiansky (October 21st-25th, 2020). In press.

8 HAEFFNER, Emil, *Ein verschollene Stele aus der Sammlung F. Kiss in Buda*. *Oriens Antiquus*, Budapest I, 1945, 59-65.

9 See the latest publication of the Stele at MEKIS, Tamás, *Quelques données nouvelles sur les stèles Budapest MBA inv. no 51.1928 et Prague MN P 1636, et sur la famille de Iâhmés fils de Smedès, propriétaire de la statue Caire JE 37075*, in COULON, Laurent, *La Cachette de Karnak*.



in this field have been brought together in a recently published volume by the Museum of Fine Arts¹⁰.

Nouvelles perspectives sur les découvertes de Georges Legrain. Bibliothèque d'Étude 161. Cairo: Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities and Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 2016, 383-398.

¹⁰ KÓTHAY, Katalin Anna – LIPTAY, Éva, *Az ókori Egyiptom Magyarországon. Pillanatképek a magyarországi Egyiptom-képek, egyiptizálás és aegyptiacagyűjtés történetéből a 18. század kezdetétől 1939-ig, az első egyiptomi kiállítás megnyitásáig.* Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum 2025, with contributions from András Gulyás, Flóra Kevély, Katalin Kóthay, Éva Liptay and Tamás Mekis.

Motivated by the growing interest in Egyptology, our committee launched the annual 'Ancient Egyptian Object of the Year' initiative. The first object was the lotus flower in 2019; the bee from royal titulary was selected in 2020; Amenhotep, son of Hapu, in 2021; the Thoeris/Taweret amulet, which initiated the Taweret research project, in 2022; a representation of the goddess Seshat in 2023; the figure of the goddess Maat in 2024; and the Middle Kingdom soul house in 2025. These naturally formed part of the research and outreach programme for those years. Alongside this, we continued to deliver our customary public lectures at our headquarters and in schools. Our members pursued their own research, and we continued to hold our scholarly international conferences and annual student drawing competition. Selected submissions from the latter are usually displayed in an exhibition. Just a few days ago, we opened a children's drawing exhibition at the Child Museum in Cairo for the first time in our Society's history. This is the Egyptian presentation of our 2024 exhibition, 'The Holy Family in Egypt', organised jointly with the Deák 17 Gallery. This time, it was organised in Egypt with the support of the Hungarian Liszt Institute in Cairo. In addition to raising awareness, we conducted research largely related to anniversaries that year.

The Tutankhamun jubilee in 2022 was commemorated internationally and aroused widespread interest in Hungary. To mark the occasion, the Hungarian Post issued a commemorative stamp block and matching envelope¹¹ depicting the famous gold mask and nested coffins. In the background is a gold relief scene from a small shrine (JE 61481¹²) from the tomb depicting Tutankhamun and his wife, Ankhesenamun. Among the finds from this naos was a pendant depicting the standing king being suckled by Weret-hekau, the snake-bodied goddess ("*Great of Magic*"; JE 61952)¹³, suspended from a necklace. As the shrine had been found looted, it is not known whose statue it originally adorned. The Hungarian Minting Company also issued a gold-plated silver coin¹⁴ featuring Tutankhamun's mask on the front and a 3D image of his tomb on the reverse. A documentary presenting the latest research was shown in cinemas – the Italian movie 'The Temples of Art: Tutankhamun – The Latest Exhibition', which was shown from May onwards. All of these events were preceded by the international travelling exhibition 'Tutankhamun: The Pharaoh's Burial Chamber', which ran from 2019 to 2020, but unfortunately closed prematurely due to the COVID pandemic. Although it presented only high-quality replicas, it nevertheless made artefacts that were previously only known through images tangible for many

11 The blocks were printed by Pénczjegynyomda Zrt. based on the designs of the graphic artist György Kara.

12 <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/carter/108.html>

13 <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/carter/108c.html>

14 <https://www.erekmibocsato.hu/webaruhaz/tutanhamon-maszki-100-efordulo>

Hungarian visitors. Since November, the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) has presented the assemblage in all its glory.

In addition to our educational outreach work, we continued to conduct research. The jubilee gave us the chance to focus more intensively on our Nephthys Project, which centres on Egyptian mummies. Within this framework, we organised several scholarly events, including a workshop on current issues in mummy research at the Hungarian Natural History Museum, as well as a special programme at the Semmelweis Museum dedicated to Tutankhamun's mummy. The amulets¹⁵ placed on his body in multiple layers played an important role in this programme. According to the Murray-Nuttall Handlist, there were 78 pieces in total. Interestingly, only three of these depict anthropomorphic deities, none of which are in the customary striding pose. Instead, they are all seated with their knees drawn up (Anubis, Thoth and Horus), and all have plain, undecorated backs. Among the animal amulets, in addition to various snake forms, only the vulture is depicted. There are two plant amulets (leaf and double leaf) and the majority are object amulets. Several are specifically royal protective objects, such as the was sceptres, while others are rare or otherwise unknown forms: Y- and T- shapes, knots, a khepesh, a mallet, a knife, a miniature bracelet, and a rhomboid form. Well-known examples include the wadj and the ankh. There is also a striking number of djed pillars and Isis knots, with seven of each. Two amulets stand out due to their material: an iron wedjat eye and an iron headrest amulet. The latter only became common in the Saite period. Carter recorded ten further items, which he simply called "amulets". One of these is a heart bearing a crest relief, and there are several beads inscribed with Tutankhamun's name, as well as a shell. The assemblage is supplemented by two earrings.

The objects around us reflect the era in which we live and our identity, whether our lives are structured according to religious or secular principles. In ancient Egypt, these two aspects were inextricably linked, as is perfectly illustrated by amulets. They were chosen to provide protection and enhance outward appearance. Beyond religious and secular considerations, their protective and aesthetic functions were expanded by elements that shaped identity. From this perspective, fashion and social expectations also played a significant role, sometimes even overriding individual characteristics — particularly in the case of a pharaoh. It is therefore especially interesting to examine the amulets placed on Tutankhamun's body to protect him in the afterlife. Even a young pharaoh was provided with everything necessary, since he was already regarded as a god in life — a status that became even more pronounced after death.

15 <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/perl/gi-ca-qmakeres.pl?sid=41.33.51.9-1766043880&qno=1&sta=0&qtx=amulet>

The exceptionally high quality of the amulets reflects his rank, and the selection clearly reflects the period in which he lived: the transition from the Amarna reform to the Ramesside era, which emphasised individual religiosity.

As a result of the presentation of Tutankhamun's mummy, the HEFS AEC and the Semmelweis Museum have jointly initiated a project aimed at analysing the SOM amulets from historical, medical and religious perspectives. While the SOM amulets cannot rival Tutankhamun's exceptional *wedjat* eye, magnificent divine figures, or elegant papyrus columns, the everyday beauty of the SOM heart amulet likewise merits attention. Although the museum's *wedjat* eye amulets played a central role in the conference presentation, the heart, scarab, *djed* pillar and other amulets received limited attention. Nevertheless, this joint article focuses on the *djed* pillar. From a historical perspective relating to the museum's collections, it occupies a special place alongside the scarab with which it was acquired. As the scarab (*hpr* beetle) from one of Tutankhamun's pectorals is emphasised elsewhere in the volume, we have chosen to focus on the *djed* pillar instead. This symbol also played an important role in Tutankhamun's tomb. In addition to the seven *djed* amulets placed on his body, one¹⁶ was deposited in a niche on the southern side of the burial chamber in the western corner and subsequently walled up. Another pillar¹⁷ was found almost at the centre of the southern side of the fourth, innermost naos, directly in front of the sarcophagus. The solar-lunar form of the *djed* pillar also appears on one of the pharaoh's pectorals¹⁸.

The first article in the volume summarises the research of Andrea Fullér and Eszter Feró on Zsolnay ceramics, with a particular focus on the Tutankhamun series. Through their meticulous research, the authors were able to ascertain the location of numerous pieces, establish the identities of the artists, trace the origins of the motifs, and determine the sources of the images used. They also demonstrated that works produced prior to the discovery of the tomb were in fact included in the Tutankhamun series.

The author's study categorises 18th Dynasty naturalistic Bes amulets according to their iconography. Using excavation finds and museum collections

16 That is beside the head. Carter no. 260, H: JE 61379. <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/perl/gi-ca-qmakesumm.pl?sid=82.131.230.142-1766356119&qno=1&curr=260>

17 Carter no. 250, JE 61785, max. H: 56 cm – <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/perl/gi-ca-qmakesumm.pl?sid=82.131.230.142-1766356119&qno=1&curr=250>

18 Carter no. 261i – M: 12x 16,3 cm. The pectoral is representing the *djed* pillar topped by moon sickle and sun disc between Isis and Nephthys. Another pectoral in the same set has in the middle an Osiris figure, while at the third pectoral the central figure is missing. See <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/perl/gi-ca-qmakesumm.pl?sid=82.131.230.142-1766356119&qno=1&curr=261i>.

as a basis, the study attempts to map the relationships between the resulting groups, as well as their chronological and spatial distribution. The study also highlights new conceptual phenomena present on amulets predating the Amarna period.

The third article, which was also written by the author, focuses on Old Kingdom Taweret amulets. It is primarily based on publications documenting excavations conducted by Guy Brunton in the Qau-Matmar region of Middle Egypt. As well as analysing iconographic groupings, the article examines the usage of Taweret amulets across individual cemeteries, assesses usage patterns and attempts to reconstruct contemporary perceptions of the goddess based on assemblages.

Esther Pons Mellado presents a Naqada II vessel from the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid, the provenance of which is unknown. The vessel is lavishly embellished with depictions of antelopes, goats, and gazelles, whose parallel depictions are listed on a variety of other vessels. Together, these vessels vividly illustrate how the ‘green desert’ surrounding the Nile — the Sahara of today — was able to sustain such rich wildlife during the Predynastic period.

In their joint study, the author and Krisztina Scheffer trace the acquisition of the djed pillar amulet in the Semmelweis Museum’s collection, explore the possible motivations behind its purchase, and introduce the collector who once owned it. The study also provides an overview of djed pillar representations and variations of the amulet form across periods, alongside an examination of their associated Pharaonic concepts. It also takes a brief look at some modern reinterpretations of the form.

Rita Simon examines one of Tutankhamun’s pectorals, the central feature of which is a scarab crafted from Libyan Desert Glass. She discusses the discovery of this material and considers possible pathways by which it arrived in Egypt, taking into account the contemporary role of the Western Desert. She also provides a theological interpretation of the composition as a whole. Her new interpretation emphasises Tutankhamun’s solar-lunar character.

Gabriella Vámos examines the medicinal use of sugar in eye treatments in Hungary using historical and ethnographic sources, which can be traced back to domestic sources from the 16th century onwards. Her research shows that, initially, cane sugar was used primarily among aristocratic circles to treat cataracts and trachoma. From the late 18th century onwards, sugar made from sugar beets appeared in peasant eye treatments; the most recent ethnographic source of which dates to 1974.

In his contribution, Péter Véninger discusses a technical phenomenon identified during a joint Hungarian–Italian project on terracottas from the southern Italian cities of Medma and Hipponion. Votive figurines in the

sanctuaries of these cities, founded by the Calabrian Lokroi, were typically produced not by trained craftsmen, but by the dedicators themselves. This meant that, in addition to offering tangible objects, they also offered their own labour to the goddess venerated at the sanctuary.

Afaf Wahba presents an Old Kingdom burial assemblage from Saqqara, notable for its reed coffin. Although the owner was not one of the wealthiest individuals, he can still be considered relatively prosperous. His body was wrapped in domestic linen, and he was given a headrest to accompany him into the afterlife. Anthropological analysis suggests that he was a middle-aged man whose skeletal remains show signs of diseases and alterations that may indicate his occupation.

Virginia Webb compares Egyptian and Egyptianising faience objects from the Heraion on Samos and the Sanctuary of Aphrodite at Miletus (Zeytintepe). She discusses these objects in several groups, including scarabs, amulets, falcon and cat figurines, non-suspendable bird, animal and human figurines, and miniature baskets. Her analysis reveals that visitors to the sanctuaries of the two goddesses offered Egyptianising objects that were made outside Egypt and differed from each other in many respects at the two sites.

As this brief overview demonstrates, the studies in this volume examine various aspects of Egypt's material culture, including archaeology, art, craftsmanship, everyday life, religion, and the country's influence on the wider world. A study also presents an example of ethnographic methodology, tracing the origins of the Hungarian use of sugar for medicinal purposes and illustrating how economic changes can lead to significant transformations in the use and interpretation of materials over time. This diversity of examples has enabled us to fulfil our primary objective of examining the historical changes and transformations in the meanings, interpretations and functions of objects.

Unfortunately, the publication of the volume was delayed due to technical and organisational issues, including a damaged hard drive. This resulted in the publication appearing later than planned. Nevertheless, the thorough and professional research conducted by the authors, the support received, and the efforts of the other contributors made the publication possible.

Firstly, we would like to thank the speakers who delivered inspiring lectures and shared insights into their research. We would also like to thank the HNM PCC Semmelweis Museum and its Director General, Benedek Varga; the House of Nations and its President, György Kilián; as the venue providers, and all the collaborators for their hard work on the technical and organisational tasks during the conference.

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Thanks to everyone's devoted efforts, we are once again able to present readers with a high-quality publication in both print and digital formats.

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AN INTACT REED COFFIN BURIAL FROM OLD KINGDOM CEMETERY, SOUTHWEST OF THE STEP PYRAMID, GISR-EL- MUDIR, SAQQARA, EGYPT

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of an investigation into an intact reed coffin burial, one of numerous others excavated by the Egyptian archaeological missions. The remains of a male, wrapped in domestic linen and with only a headrest, were found in a small, rectangular niche in the Late Old Kingdom cemetery at Gisir el-Mudir, to the southwest of the Step Pyramid at Saqqara. Petrie excavated similar reed coffin burials at Tarkhan, but their dating to the Old Kingdom was uncertain. Since then, the publication of several other reed coffins has supported Petrie's dating to the late Old Kingdom. This burial confirms his dating and contributes to our understanding of the use of this type of coffin. The article also provides further insights into the life, possible occupation and health issues of this man during the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties in Saqqara, through the anthropological investigation of his skeletal remains.

KEYWORDS: Old Kingdom, reed coffin, headrest, anthropological analysis, palaeopathological analysis, botanical remains, Saqqara

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an archaeological and anthropological analysis of a well-preserved reed coffin burial discovered in an Old Kingdom cemetery to the southwest of the Step Pyramid at Saqqara. The aim of this investigation is to provide an anthropological reconstruction of the individual's life and death,¹ as well as examining the archaeological material found with the body: the reed coffin and its technique – it is an example of the use of botanical remains in ancient Egyptian burials and funerary practices during this period;

1 LARSEN 1997.

the headrest, which could have had domestic and funerary purposes; and the textile in which the deceased was buried. The burial's dating is established through the excavation's archaeological sequences and the ceramics.

The Saqqara archaeological area, located about 30 km south of Cairo, is one of the most famous archaeological sites in Egypt. It forms an important part of the cemetery of Memphis, the first capital of ancient Egypt. It also includes the Memphite cemetery extending from the Giza Plateau in the north to Abusir and Saqqara, and all the way to Dahshur in the south. While the archaeological importance and the wide fame that the Giza Plateau enjoys with its pyramids and tombs, the Saqqara region is particularly notable for its tombs and pyramids, which are among the richest in terms of archaeological, artistic, and historical significance. Saqqara's historical importance dates back to the First and Second Dynasties, with many later kings and officials of the Old Kingdom era being buried there. Saqqara continued to be used as a major cemetery during the New Kingdom, and its importance extended even into the Greco-Roman period.²

The cemetery discussed in the present article is located in Gisir el-Mudir, which is part of the Saqqara necropolis. It is situated a few hundred metres southwest of the Step Pyramid. The oldest large stone structure yet discovered in Saqqara, and perhaps in Egypt, was found at this site: a huge stone wall measuring 650 by 350 metres, also known as the Great Wall. Dating to the Second Dynasty, it is believed that it was possibly built by King Khasekhemwy, or even earlier.³ The first real excavations at the site were carried out by the archaeologist Abdel Salam Hussein, director of the Egyptian Antiquities Authority at the time, in 1947–1948,⁴ and the site was named 'Al-Mudir Bridge' after him.⁵

The reed coffin was discovered by an Egyptian excavation mission led by Dr Zahi Hawass and affiliated with the Ministry of Antiquities. The team has been working at this site since 2009. The cemetery contained mostly shaft tombs belonging to high- and middle-class officials from the Old Kingdom, dating back to the fifth and sixth dynasties.⁶ The archaeological excavations have yielded both mummified and skeletal human remains dating from the late Old Kingdom period. One of the burials in the cemetery contained a special type

2 PORTER – MOSS 1981, vol. 3/2.

3 MATHIESON ET ALII 1997, 53 – based mainly on the remains of the stone structure, the pottery (MATHIESON ET ALII 1997, 36, 38, 42-46: pottery dated from late 2nd to early 3rd Dynasty), and by the fact that Palermo stone line 5 mentions his «building stone *mn-nfr.t* ».

4 EL-BATAL ET ALII 2012, passim.

5 <https://egyptsites.wordpress.com/2009/02/21/gisir-el-mudir-enclosure>

6 Unpublished preliminary report of the excavation 2021, SHEHAB ET ALII, Egyptian mission, Saqqara.

of coffin. Made of reed, it was similar to one excavated by Petrie in Tarkhan, which he had tentatively dated to the Old Kingdom, though he was uncertain. As the Saqqara reed coffin was found intact with a clear dating context, this new find contributes to the confirmation of Petrie's dating of the Tarkhan reed coffin to the Old Kingdom period. In addition to confirming this, the paper seeks to enhance our understanding of Old Kingdom activities and provide insights into the life and death of this individual.



Figure 1. The reed coffin in situ in the shaft tomb. Photo by the author.

2. MATERIAL

In this study, we conducted a systematic analysis of an excavated burial. We studied the funerary equipment, such as the reed coffin technique and the headrest, and examined the skeleton. We focused on various aspects, such as sex and age estimation, stature, and the investigation of pathological

conditions and overall health status. The burial was located in shaft number 110 and burial number 67. The individual buried here was a member of a relatively middle-class social group with a lower socioeconomic status than the high-official tomb owners found in the same cemetery, who had huge, more elaborate limestone sarcophagi containing particularly significant and important objects.

This individual was interred in a small, rectangular shaft tomb measuring approximately 1.13 x 1.08 x 3.23 metres in depth. Instead of a burial chamber, there was a rectangular niche measuring approximately 1.9 metres from north to south, 1.3 metres from east to west and 1.00 metres in height. A reed coffin practically filled the space. The body was positioned in a north-to-south alignment in the coffin, with the skull at the northern end and the face oriented towards the east. The body was in a loosely flexed position, lying on the left side. This individual was buried in a rectangular reed coffin (Figure 1) and was accompanied by a wooden headrest, which was found inside the coffin. (Figure 7).

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL: OBJECTS

3.1. THE COFFIN AND ITS TECHNIQUE

The body of the deceased was protected by a coffin made this time of bundles of dry reeds. This reed coffin almost filled the whole interior of the burial niche. The most common reed in Egypt has been the *Phragmites australis*, but the *Arundo donax* and *Saccharum biflorum* were also used in ancient times, not to mention the papyrus sedge, *Cyperus papyrus*, which is often described as reed.

The oldest known reed coffins, used during the early dynastic period, resemble large baskets,⁷ with an oval cross-section. They were made by bundle coiling technique: first a bundle of reeds was created, and wrapped around with another piece of reed. The bundle was lengthened until it was as long as needed to go around in a coil, until the sides of the basket reached the desired height. The dimensions of the baskets could be varied according to their intended use. Some of the large, oval baskets appear to have been among the first equipment to protect the dead body,⁸ as did pot burials, which emerged in the end of the prehistoric period.

7 WILLS – HACKE 2010, figure 1: coiled reed basket from the Fajum, 5th mill. BC, British Museum EA 58696.

8 Such basket work coffins are already known from the Badarian culture. E.g. BRUNTON 1937, 41, no. 2706 and 2709, with overview on p. 46, and also later.

Another basket-shaped short reed coffin⁹ was found for instance in Tarkhan grave 1004, in the recess of a stairway tomb. This seems to be an intermediate case, as it has a rectangular lid. As in the present case, the deceased was put in the reed coffin in a flexed position. In this case, the position of the deceased resembled that in this Saqqara reed coffin, which is however rectangular, with conspicuous corners.

The technique used here was also different. First bundles were formed from the reed. These were placed on top of each other in lines (Figure 1) with rectangular corners made by bending the bundles. Both the coffin lid and bottom consists of six sets of reed courses or bundles (Figures 2). The lower part of the coffin (Figure 3) was in a better state of preservation than the lid. It also consists of six sets courses (bundles) of adjoining long reed units. Each bundle consists of a group of dry reed's chopsticks, that are gathered together with a braided rope in order to collect them in one bundle, so that in the end the lid and the sides of the coffin are made of six bundles, each one gathered with one rope. All six bundles are then gathered and fixed together using an even thicker rope made of palm fibres(?). The short sides consist of six similar bundles and are made with the same technique. The whole coffin is elaborated very carefully, with excellent workmanship. Its technique, position and style are dated to the Late Old Kingdom.



Figure 2. The coffin's bottom and inside sides, techniques. Photo by the author

9 PETRIE 1913, 27: based on the headrest, Petrie thinks to date the grave to Dynasty 3. Both body and coffin were brought to Cairo Museum. See at pl. XXVI, middle picture.



Figure 3. The coffin outer length side, manufacturing technique. Photo by the author.

Coffins of the same type and style (Figures 4a-b) were uncovered during the work of the Polish mission's work in the Upper Cemetery in North Saqqara,¹⁰ which also dates back to the Late Old Kingdom. Myśliwiec¹¹ mentions six cases, and says that the reed coffin in shaft 83 was wrapped three times, and that the broad white tapes, tied on top were cut and replaced by tomb robbers. Unfortunately, they took each grave good with them and left only two pieces of bone. Moreover, other reed coffins were found in this area.¹²

An intact female burial in the Abusir tomb (AS65), dated to the Late Old Kingdom, also had a reed coffin. The lower part, measuring 165 × 55-60 cm, was probably made from *Arundo donax*, as was the lid, which appears to be a simple mat. This technology seems similar to that used in the present Saqqara tomb. The bundles on the long sides were bent at right angles to shape the

10 Thanks to Salima Ikram, for her personal communication.

11 MYŚLIWIEC 2008a, 159.

12 MYŚLIWIEC 2008b, 58-62; RADOMSKA 2013, 93 also mentions 18 reed coffins.

shorter sides.¹³ The authors also state that the reeds were not bound.¹⁴ The burial contained a mud brick, which was most probably used as a headrest, as well as textile fragments, a pyramid-shaped seal amulet with a Bes-like relief, besides pottery fragments. Anthropological investigations suggest of a lowest social status woman who carried out rather strenuous physical activities.¹⁵



Figure 4a. Myśliwiec 2008b, 158, fig. 5, bottom.
The burial chamber of Shaft 86.

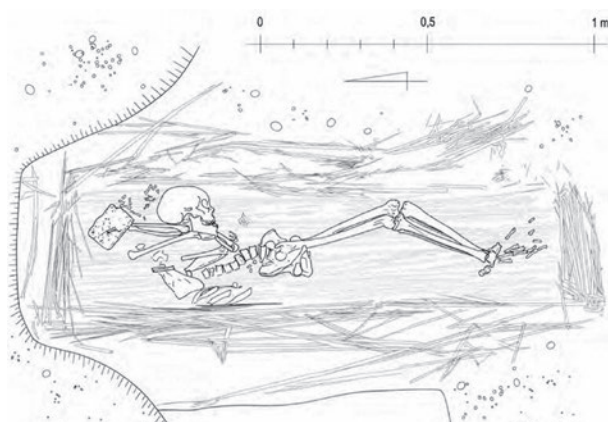


Figure 4b. Duříková et alii 2015, 70, fig. 3.

13 See also KOWALSKA 2013, 429 in North Saqqara Polish concession.

14 DUŘÍKOVÁ ET ALII 2015, 69-70.

15 DUŘÍKOVÁ ET ALII 2015, 74.

Reed coffins were thus relatively common in the Memphite region during this period. Kowalska even states, that approximately 36 % of the tombs excavated by the Polish mission in their Late Old Kingdom field by 2013 contained this type of coffin.¹⁶ In his study on these so-called reed coffins, Karol Myśliwiec¹⁷ distinguished three main types, which varied in strength due to the processing method and to the position in the burial. He also observed the presence or absence of binding material, and suggested that reed coffins might have become fashionable during the Sixth Dynasty, and been chosen for burial instead of wooden coffins by individuals not only belonging to the poorest social status. This seems especially fitting for type a, to which the coffin under investigation also belongs.

Petrie uncovered a similar example of these reed coffins,¹⁸ dating back to the Old Kingdom, in Tarkhan in 1913.¹⁹ They were found along the western side of Mastaba 2050, which dates to the First Dynasty. This coffin also dates back to the Old Kingdom, to a period after the mastaba was built, as the burial is a later addition to the structure. Pictures of other reed coffins from Tarkhan, graves 207 and 529,²⁰ have been published. Like the above example, they are long reed coffins and are also dated to the Old Kingdom. The long reed coffin technique in Tarkhan is similar to that discovered in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasty cemetery southwest of the Step Pyramid at Gisir al-Mudir. This situation supports the dating of the Tarkhan coffins to the Old Kingdom.

Reed coffins were also used in Upper Egypt, where Mostagedda²¹ yielded several examples from Dynasty 4 to the First Intermediate Period, and

16 KOWALSKA 2013 mentioned in DULIKOVÁ 2015

17 MYŚLIWIEC 2011.

18 IKRAM – DODSON 1998, 194.

19 PETRIE 1914, 6, end of no. 16, now in the British Museum, EA52887, M: 117-158 x 58,5 cm (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA52887).

20 PETRIE 1913, pl. XXV-XXVI. page 27: 207 is dated to Dynasty 3-4, while for grave 529 Dyn. 1-2 is given as probable dating.

21 E.g. BRUNTON 1937, during Dynasty 4, see 96, §120, in tomb 2800, vii and xii for men, or p. 97, in tomb 2801, during Dynasty 5 §122; p. 97, in tomb 2240, and p. 104 – Burton summarised six coffins made of reeds or twigs, and 10 others, which had reeds with them, but apparently in the form of matting only, from the 4th Dynasty; 4 composed of reeds and rope during the 6th Dynasty; and 4 coffins "of reeds, twigs, and rope, reeds and rope, or sticks, reeds, and rope" from Dyn. 9-10. He also mentions a Middle Kingdom tomb with coffin of twigs or reed (p. 114, §148, in tomb 2835), a Second Intermediate Period coffin "more likely of reeds" (p. 134, §187, in tomb 2639), and a late or Ptolemaic period one, at p. 137, §194, in tomb 3901.

sporadically later, as also did Qau el-Kebir.²² Stephan Johannes Seidlmayer²³ lists the following Sixth Dynasty tombs containing reed coffins: 677, 1141 and 5535 out of 11 reed coffin tombs. The cemetery in Matmar again contained them.²⁴ Another reed coffin²⁵ was found among the finds in the Dakhla Oasis, containing the remains of a woman from the Late Old Kingdom to the early First Intermediate Period.

It seems, therefore, that such coffins were used relatively frequently throughout the Nile valley (and perhaps in the oases) during the entire Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period.

3.2. THE HEADREST

The undecorated wooden headrest (Figure 5) comprises the three standard elements: a wide curved top, i.e. crest, sitting directly on a stout, slightly narrowing columnar and a wide, flat rectangular base. Its wood is a low-quality material, with crude workmanship. Mortar was clearly used to fix the pieces, which were doweled together by rectangular tenons. It was probably in use for a long time, as there are signs of repair on both the base and the columnar. The damage to the crest part seems to confirm this. These features indicate that the headrest was a personal item belonging to the deceased.

The height of the columnar is average, elevating the head of the sleeping person to a comfortable height while protecting it from insects and ensuring good ventilation, rather than having the head submerged in sweat. People used it under their heads when sleeping on their sides, as depicted in a terracotta statuette in Glencairn's Egyptian Gallery.²⁶ There is no more any trace of a pillow with which headrests were often made comfortable, and which was most probably put on this crest, as the use of this headrest is difficult to imagine without: it seems to be advisable to protect the head against splintering, because the wood is only roughly polished. Both padding²⁷ and

22 BRUNTON 1927, 47, where he lists one from Dyn. 4, 4 from Dynasty 5, 5 from Dynasty 6, and one with probable date of Dynasty 7-8, and mentions that such coffins are known to him from Dynasty 22.

23 SEYDLMAYER 1990, 133-139.

24 BRUNTON 1948, 30, one reed coffin in each tomb 3200 – not registered, pl. XXIV; in tomb 3205 and 3229, Dyn 5; p. 42, in tomb 2304, Dyn. 4; p. 73, §132, in tomb 631 from Dyn. 22-25 and also p.80, §148, in tombs 747 and 1200 from Dyn. 22-25. Here (p. 80) he observed, that only female and child burial contained it.

25 CASTEL – PANTALACCI 2005: 176-177, mentioned in DULIKOVÁ 2015.

26 Glencairn Museum (E1219): <https://www.glencairnmuseum.org/newsletter/2018/7/25/headrests-in-glencairns-egyptian-collection-practicality-and-protection>

27 E.g. Late Period headrest amulets, such as Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 04.2.80.

wrapping²⁸ can be taken into account for forming a pillow.

Its shape is average, and the ratio of the base to the crest corresponds approximately to what was usual at this time,²⁹ i.e. the base is fairly short relative to the upper part. The crude workmanship suggests that the owner belonged to a relatively poor population, although he was still able to provide himself with relative comfort.

The headrest was placed inside the coffin in accordance with tradition, to be positioned below the mummy's head for use in the afterlife. In fact, it was found in separate parts at the side of the coffin in front of the owner's face, ready to be assembled.



Figure 5. The Old Kingdom wooden head rest. Photo by the author.

However, this piece of furniture had more than just practical function. On a religious level, it separated the head from the earth, just as Shu separated Geb and Nut. Later, in Tutankhamun's tomb, this idea is even visualised by his headrests.³⁰ During use, it could also represent the rising sun: the head as the sun and the two sides of the upper part, i.e. the crest, as the two mountains.³¹ This concept is also described in Chapter 166 of the Book of the Dead. Here,

28 E.g. the headrest of Merit in Turin, Museo Egizio (S.08630).

29 E.g. MET 26.2.11, Saqqara, Dyn. 6, Teti Pyramid Cemetery, Tomb of Khentika, in the shaft (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/551282>); British Museum EA30413; Bibliotheca Alexandrina, BAAM Serial 0603 (<https://antiquities.bibalex.org/Collection/Detail.aspx?collection=39&a=603&lang=en>)

30 DUFFY 2016.

31 See e.g. HELLINCKX 2001.

we also learn that the headrest could prevent the loss of the head and protect against the attacks of otherworldly demons. Thus, the headrest defended the head when it was in the inactive, unprotected sleeping state. The head was so important, that in several Giza tombs of the Fourth Dynasty, separate head statues were placed in a special part of the tomb called a 'serdab'. Beside its magical protective function, of course the headrest also had a funeral purpose. Specifically, in a funeral context, lifting the head conveyed the meaning of resurrection. This explains why it was such an essential part of burial equipment, often prepared solely for the afterlife.

Thus this headrest as apotropaic device had besides its practical function to make sleeping easy, several magical ones – as an object, it warded off harmful beings, while symbolically assisted the deceased to start his new life in the Duat. .

3.3. BODY WRAPPING

The skeleton of this individual was wrapped in layers of domestic linen fabric sheets (Figure 6), instead of linen bandages. The weaving style suggests that these sheets might be originally made for everyday use, rather than for funerary purposes. The linen fabric has fringed edges and borders on most of the sheet. After wrapping the head, body and legs, the rest of the linen sheet was tied, rolled and folded around the feet and it was wrapped in a knot around them. The linen sheets had been attacked by insects and fungi, causing many holes and other damages to appear on the fabric.



Figure 6. The body wrapped in domestic linen fabric sheets. Photo by the author.

4. ANTHROPOLOGICAL MATERIAL

4.1. METHODS

To determine the sex of this individual, we employed established discriminant characteristics of the skull and pelvis, recording all dimorphic features following the criteria of György Acsádi & János Nemeskéri (1970) and Jane E. Buikstra & Douglas H. Ubelaker (1994). Age estimation relied on multiple methods, including the assessment of tooth wear,³² age-related changes at the pubic symphysis³³ and modal age-related changes to the auricular surface of the os coxae.³⁴ All measurements adhered to the guidelines provided by Buikstra & Ubelaker (1994), and age groups were determined also following their criteria for adults.

The analysis of pathological conditions encompassed the comprehensive observation and documentation of various pathologies, following the guidelines established by Buikstra & Ubelaker (1994), Don R. Brothwell (1981), Tony Waldorn (2009), Robert W. Mann & David R. Hunt (2005), and Donald J. Ortner (2003), congenital conditions recorded according to Ethne Barnes (2012), degenerative joint changes documented based on Tony Waldorn (2009), trauma and fracture documentation according to Nancy C. Lovell – Anne L. Grauer (2008) and Vicki L. Wedel – Alison Galloway (1999), and observations related to cribra orbitalia and skull porotic hyperostosis as per Tony Waldorn (2009). Additionally, stature calculations were performed using the methodology proposed by Michelle H. Raxter et alii (2008).

4.2. Anthropological analysis

This Individual was a middle age adult individual, estimated to be approximately 166 cm tall based on the methodology outlined by Michelle H. Raxter et alii (2008). The relatively well-preserved state of this individual's remains allowed for a reasonably confident assessment of the sex and age. Based on various indicators, the age estimation places this individual in the middle adult category, roughly between 35 to 49 years, as per criteria established by Jane E. Buikstra & Douglas H. Ubelaker (1994) and C. Owen Lovejoy et alii (1985). This assessment considered factors such as tooth wear patterns (Don R. Brothwell 1981) and age-related changes at the pubic symphysis, as detailed by Thomas Wingate Todd (1920) and Sheilagh T. Brooks & Judy Myers Suchey (1990). Additionally, the analysis of pelvic and cranial traits aligns with the classification of this individual as male, as indicated by Buikstra & Ubelaker (1994) and Terrell Wayne Phenice (1969).

32 BROTHWELL 1981.

33 Following TODD 1920 and BROOKS & SUCHEY 1990.

34 Following LOVEJOY ET ALII 1985.



Figure 7. The wrapped body orientated north-south alignment, with the skull to the north. Photo taken by the author.

4.3. Palaeopathological analysis

The palaeopathological profile of this individual, exhibited several palaeopathological conditions. Osteoarthritis, a common ailment observed in ancient skeletal remains,³⁵ affected some of his joint articulations, with extensive evidence, particularly affecting the joints of the right side of his body, right-hand metacarpals and phalanges. Furthermore, severe osteoarthritis and degenerative joint diseases in the right and left mandibular condyles, right radius and ulna distal epiphysis exhibited the same lesion which typically results from the loss of articular cartilage and joint surface deterioration.³⁶

In terms of spinal pathology, this individual exhibited severe osteophytic growth in the fifth and sixth cervical spine which is mostly fused

35 WALDRON 2012, 26.

36 ROGERS - WALDRON 1995.

together (Figure 8), as well as in the lower thoracic vertebrae 1, 9, 10 and 11, with the same lesion and severe pitting especially affecting the upper and lower articulation facets. Furthermore, the lumbar vertebrae 3-5 with severe osteophytic growth in the superior and inferior body and bone destruction indicating substantial degeneration in the lower back, along with compressed fracture in third and fourth lumbar body (Figure 9), with Schmorl's nodes in the lumbar vertebral body. Schmorl's nodes are associated with significant lower spine stress, resulting in bone destruction and depressions. They occur when the vertebral plate sustains damage, such as decompression of the adjacent nucleus pulposus, leading to herniation of the endplate due to the transferred load onto the annulus and subsequent bone resorption.³⁷

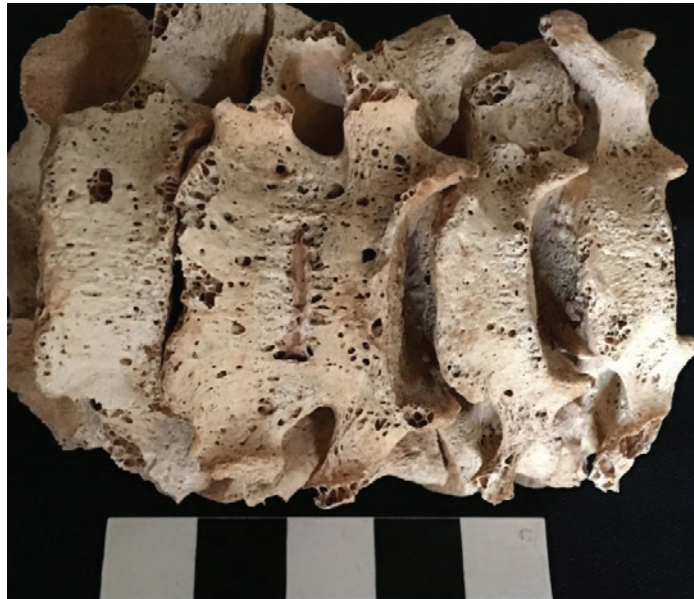


Figure 8. Spinal pathologies observed in the cervical vertebrae (C3-C7) with pronounced osteophytic growth in the fifth and sixth cervical, mostly fused together. Photo taken by the author.

This individual exhibited more than one fracture including healed fracture in the left humerus distal epiphysis and distal third (Figure 10). Furthermore, a compressed healed fracture in third and fourth lumbar.

³⁷ WALDORN 2009, 45.



Figure 9. Spinal pathologies; compressed fracture in third lumbar body accompanied with Schmorl's nodes. Photo taken by the author.



Figure 10. left humerus healing fracture. Photo taken by the author

In terms of dental health, this individual displayed a lot of dental problems including heavy attrition in his maxillary front teeth, moderate to severe calculus, in both his maxillary and mandibular teeth, while a periapical

abscess³⁸ was observed in the left mandibular canine, which might lead to the ante mortem loss of mandibular right first incisor and left first and second incisors. Periodontal diseases affected both the maxillary and mandibular teeth, affecting more his premolars and first molar. The left and right mandibular premolars attrition and wear directions (Figure 11), suggesting that he might have used these teeth as a tool. Indeed, some occupational habits result in such features in hard dental tissues, such as the extensive wear of teeth recorded in ancient craftspeople who used their teeth to make ropes and other binding materials.³⁹



Figure 11. Mandibular dental pathology. Photo taken by the author.

5. DISCUSSION

This burial dates back to the Late Old Kingdom period, the individual being a middle-aged male. He was interred in a small shaft tomb, the burial was oriented with the head to the north, facing east, in a loosely flexed position, and interred in a rectangular reed coffin equipped with a typical Old Kingdom

38 BUIKSTRA – UBELAKER 1994.

39 SCHUURS 2013.

wooden headrest consisting of three pieces and a rectangular reed coffin, while the body was wrapped in numbers of domestic linen sheets.

This individual exhibited joint diseases, including osteoarthritis and other degenerative joint diseases, with more severe arthritic changes in his right side of the body, particularly in the right hand, right feet, which might be related to the healed fracture in his left humerus, which might suggest that he was using his right side of the body more intensively. Furthermore, he exhibited a lot of dental diseases, moderate-severe dental calculus, abscesses and ante-mortem teeth lost. His poor health can be explained by his modest standard of life, which is well expressed by the modest funeral equipment:

The owner of this type of reed coffin is considered to originate from a relatively low-class social group, having a weak socioeconomic status in the cemetery. He was, however, not a really poor man, as he could afford a burial in the cemetery with modest goods, while there are also burials in the cemetery, with less quality objects, and burial which show that they were even not able to dig a shaft or niche. Thus he might be a poor middle-class official, or even a highly regarded well-paid workman having a sort of occupation related to the use of the teeth and the lower back. Such tombs come in the second place in terms of prestige and wealth if compared to the tombs of the high class officials from the same cemetery who had the financial ability and the power to obtain elaborate limestone sarcophagus with several types of rich and significant objects.

6. CONCLUSION

The archaeological and biological examination of this burial has shed light on an Old Kingdom burial practice in Saqqara, as exemplified by the reed coffin found at other sites. The tomb's owner was a middle adult male estimated to be between 35 and 49, which contradicts Brunton's observation that this type of coffin was used by women and children.⁴⁰ The body exhibited signs of osteoarthritis affecting the joints and spinal column. Furthermore, Schmorl's nodes and a compressed fracture in his lower back suggest that he engaged in heavy physical activity regarding his lower back. The wear patterns on his teeth suggest a possible occupation involving the production of rope or other binding materials. The type of reed coffin and grave goods he had collectively suggest again a lower social status than the rich, more elaborate tombs of high officials in the same cemetery.

In conclusion, this analysis has contributed to our understanding of the living conditions of middle- and lower-status Old Kingdom peoples, providing some insight into the cemetery's inhabitants during the Late Old Kingdom period.

40 BRUNTON 1948, 80.

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