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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PROVENANCE OF THE ZAGREB MUMMY

Summary: The famous Zagreb Mummy, on whose linen wrappings the longest known Etruscan text called *Liber linteus Zagrebiensis* (“The linen book of Zagreb”) was written, came to the Archaeological museum Zagreb together with an Egyptian papyrus containing fragmental texts of *The Book of the Dead*. For almost 160 years experts have been trying to answer the questions of the relation of this Egyptian mummy to the Etruscan text. The Papyrus Zagreb 602 written in hieratic script is one of the important traces in this research. It is in good condition and many small fragments are almost impossible to put together, but the vignette with the names of two persons to whom it was dedicated is preserved. The text reveals that the priest of the god Khnum, the nobleman Perekh-Khons was buried together with his wife Nesi-Khons probably in Upper Egypt during the end of the Late or in the Ptolemaic period. The date generally fits to the C 14 dating of the mummy, but no other data taken from it points to the assumption that the mummy was the woman called Nesi-Khons.

Key words: Zagreb, mummy, papyrus, linen, *Liber*, Perekh-Khons, Nesi-Khons.

SHORT HISTORY

The famous “Zagreb Mummy”, on the bandages of which the longest known Etruscan manuscript *The linen book of Zagreb* (*Liber linteus Zagrebiensis*) was found, still keeps its riddles after more than a century from the moment when the text was discovered. The mummy had previously belonged to Mihael Barić, a Croat who lived in Vienna in the 19th century. In 1848–49 Barić travelled to Egypt where he purchased the mummy from an unknown merchant. When he died in 1859 the mummy was already unwrapped and the bandages were separately exposed at his home in Vienna. According to Barić’s last will his successors donated both the mummy and the manuscript to the National Museum in Zagreb where the monuments finally arrived in 1862. In the Museum, the curator for archeology, Mijat Sabljarić wrote in his chronicle that the bandages were “inscribed with Egyptian letters”.

A significant growth of the Egyptian collection of the National Museum happened in 1868 when the main part of Franz Koller's collection was purchased in Prague and transferred to Zagreb. In the next year the Museum management invited the famous German Egyptologist Heinrich Brugsch to see the ancient Egyptian artifacts and help in the evaluation of the collection. Brugsch was then acquainted with the manuscript on the bandages but he did not know what language it might be. Some years later (in 1891) he wrote a letter to Jakob Krall from Berlin who at the time resided in Cairo. Brugsch informed his colleague of an interesting monument in Zagreb. Soon the bandages were temporarily sent to Vienna so that Krall could analyze them. The result of Krall's work was a book¹ in which he revealed that the bandages of the Zagreb mummy contained not an Egyptian text but an Etruscan one – the longest Etruscan inscription in the whole world.

Since that time numerous works² have been written on the meaning and heuristics of the text of *The linen book of Zagreb*. Eventually, the experts realised that the Etruscan text consisted of more than 1200 words and that it probably represented a kind of calendar or prescription of burial procedures and rites. In January 1985 the bandages were sent to the laboratory of the Abegg Foundation (Abegg-Stiftung) in Riggisberg in Switzerland, where they were reconstructed and compounded in they are currently the way displayed at the Archeological Museum in Zagreb.

A restoration procedure was likewise carried out on the mummy itself in 1998. This work was accomplished by Dr. Nazzareno Gabrielli, an expert from the Vatican Museums.

THE MUMMY

Basic research made on the mummy in the last two decades of the 20th century confirmed that the mummy is the body of a woman, 164 cm tall, whose body was treated in a way characteristic for ancient Egyptians. The x-ray analyses³ of the body

¹ KRALL, J.: Die etruskischen Mumienbinden des Agramer National-Museums. *Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-historische Klasse*. Wien 41 (1892) III 1–5.

² The most important articles were collected in the *Liber linteus zagrabiensis* (ed. A. RENDIĆ MIOČEVIĆ), a special edition of the Journal of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb (*Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu*. 3. s., vol. XIX., Zagreb 1986). The other important works: CRISTOFANI, M.: *Dizionario dell civiltà etrusca*. s.v. *Zagabria*. Firenze 1985, 339–340; LATTES, E.: Il testo etrusco della mummia di Agram. *Appunti ermeneutici. Atti della R. Accademia delle Scienze di Torino* 27 (1892); LUPPRIAN, E.: *Die sogenannten Agramer Mumienbinden. Ein neuer Versuch der Deutung ihres Textes I–III*. Seesen im Harze 1957; BURTON, R. F.: The Ogham-Runes and el-Mushajjar. *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom*. London 12 (1879); LAFAYE, G.: Liber. In DAREMBERG–SAGLIO: *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines III*. Paris 1905, 1185–1186, fig. 4458; MARTHA, J.: *La langue etrusque*. Paris 1913; OLZSCHA, K.: Studien über die VII. Kolumne der Agramer Mumienbinde. *Studi Etruschi* 30 (1962) 157–192; PALLOTTINO, M.: Questioni ermeneutiche del testo di Zagabria. *Studi Etruschi* 6 (1932) 273–281; PALLOTTINO, M.: La lingua degli Etruschi. *Studi Etruschi* 13 (1939) 332.

³ PLAVŠIĆ B.: *X-Ray Analysis of the Zagreb Mummy*. (n. 2/1) 99–103.

reveal certain details of the procedure of mummification and of the person herself. The person died at an age between 30 and 40. Her teeth and fingernails are perfectly preserved. The remains of animal bones showed that the mummy was buried with a cat.⁴ Also the remains of flowers and a necklace were added to the burial. The radiocarbon dating test was also carried out in Zagreb, in the Ruđer Bošković Institute⁵ in 1986. The C 14 dating was carried out on the linen wrappings and the results showed that their age is 2290 years, with a possible deviation of ± 45 years. The other materials found on the mummy (embalming unguents and leaves) were tested as well. Samples of leaves and other botanical material were sent to Prof. Dr. Behre, Niedersächsisches Landesinstitut für Marschen und Wurtenforschung in Wilhelmshaven in Germany, and to Dr. Paula Ruddal, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, in England. After the dendrochronological corrections it was concluded that the manuscript was produced, and the body was mummified around 390 BC (± 45 years). Already prior to the C 14 testing F. Roncalli,⁶ an expert for ancient Etruscans, concluded that the type of letters found on the *Liber* was used from the 3rd to 1st century BC.

From the moment that Krall detected that the language of the text on *Liber linteus* is Etruscan, logical questions appeared: "What is an Etruscan text doing on the Egyptian mummy? And who was the person buried in such a strange manner?" Despite the numerous researches on the Etruscan language from the manuscript from Zagreb and other textual resources, as well as the mentioned facts we know about the mummy, straightforward answers are still missing.

Since we know that it is almost certain that Barić purchased the mummy in Egypt, it would be logical to assume that it represents the body of a woman who lived in Egypt in 4th century BC. Dr. Gabrielli, who restored the mummy, also noticed during his work that the procedures carried out on the mummy in the past belong to customary Egyptian techniques used in later periods of dynastic times.

All the facts indicate that we are dealing with a mummy from the Late or Ptolemaic period when, according to historical evidence, there were numerous foreign colonies in Egypt.

THE PAPYRUS

There is one more object that provides a precious trace in the search for the identity of the Zagreb mummy. Ilija Barić (often mentioned as Elias Barich), Michael's brother, in his letter⁷ to the Croatian *ban* Šokčević, commented the great significance of the mummy. He claims the importance of the mummy is even greater

⁴ TVRTKOVIĆ, N.: On the Skull of a Cat Found Among the Fragments of the Wreath of the Mummy of Zagreb. (n. 2/1) 105–106.

⁵ SRDOČ, D. – HORVATINČIĆ, N.: Radiocarbon Dating of *Liber linteus zagrabiensis*. (n. 2/1) 83–98.

⁶ RONCALLI, F.: Osservazioni sui "libri linteï" etrusci. *Atti della Pont. Accad. Rom. di Arch. Ser. III, Rendiconti* LI–LII. Perugia 1980, 3–21.

⁷ MIRNIK, I. – RENDIĆ-MIOČEVIĆ, A.: *Liber linteus zagrabiensis*. (n. 2/1) 53–54.

since the authenticity is substantiated by “texts and drawings on the palm leaves” which in his opinion belonged to her. What he called “the palm leaves” is now known as the *Papyrus Zagreb 602*, and it is still kept in the Museum. The papyrus is a classical Egyptian *Book of the Dead* unfortunately broken into many small fragments, and as far as we know it comes from the same source as the mummy. Fortunately, the biggest preserved fragment shows the vignette and parts of different chapters from the *Book of the Dead*. On the vignette two persons (a man and a woman) can be seen standing on the right side of the drawing, praising two deities opposite them. The first god – Osiris – is shown in the manner of Egyptian syncretism as a mummy with Re’s hawk head and with a crown *atef*. The second, standing behind the lord of the dead, is Imenty, the goddess of the West, who is holding and protecting Osiris with her hands. She bears the hieroglyph of her name on the head.

The papyrus was dedicated to Perekh-Khons and Nesi-Khons. The man’s name is quite unusual and it may be transliterated as *Prh-Ḥnsw*⁸ (“The blooming Khons”) and his title is “the servant of the God Khnum”. Behind him stands a woman whose name is Nesi-Khons (*Nsj-Ḥnsw*) “the mistress of the house”. The same name is mentioned as “prophetess of Hathor” on the statue-pedestal⁹ from the British Museum. As the text says, she is protecting her husband “with her two hands” in the same way as Imenty protects Osiris.

The text has four vertical rows from left to right and three rows from the right to the left side of the vignette.

From left to right:

1. *jj=k nb k3 Jmntj sr nb dt ntr 3^c ḥk3.t jgr.t*

Praise to you, the bull of the West, nobleman, the great lord of eternity.
The mistress of the necropolis

2. *šsp= k Wsjr ḥm-ntr m Jpt-swt šhnt-pt ḥm-ntr n Ḥnmw Prh-Ḥnswm m3^c-ḥrw*

holds you. Osiris the god’s servant in the temple of Karnak one who supports the heaven the servant of Khnum, Perekh-Khons the true of voice,

3. *r Jmntj nfr.t m ḥtp m st3.t dj=s 3^cwj=s*

(let) beautiful Imenty who is pleased in necropolis she gives her two hands.

⁸ For *prh* see ERMAN, A. – GRAPOW, H.: *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache*. Berlin 1957, II 532.

⁹ The monument is listed in MALEK, J. – MAGEE, D. – MILES, E.: *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Statues, Reliefs and Paintings*. Oxford, URL://www.ashmol.ox.ac.uk/gri/s8.html, VIII. 796–797, n. 801–768–140.

4. ... [šsp] ḥn^c nb.t pr=f Nsj-Ḥnsw m3^c-ḥrw nn gm n bjn=k

... [hold] with the mistress of his house Nesi-Khons the true of voice. No sin is found from you.

From right to left:

1. Wsjr nb-ḥḥ srw nb dt ntr-^c3 ḥk3 jgr.t

Osiris the lord of eternity, the lord of necropolis.

2. Jmntj nfr.t ^cwj=s r ššp=k

Beautiful Imenty, her hands are to hold you.

HYPOTHESIS

The text reveals only that the priest of the god Khnum, the nobleman Perekh-Khons was buried together with his wife Nesi-Khons. Normally the authors who mention *The Mummy of Zagreb* speak of “the probable Etruscan origin of the Egyptian mummy”. But there is no agreement on how this connection was possible. Considering the possibility of the Etruscan-Egyptian origin of the female owner of *The Linen Book from Zagreb* it is interesting to take into account the similarities of both Egyptian and Etruscan funerary customs. In Egypt we find *Books of the Dead* placed in graves to lead the soul on its journey into the underworld. It is known that a similar custom of the Etruscans involved placing the folded *libri lintei* in tombs. This traditional act is known from Etruscan statuary. Usually the linen books are represented on sarcophagi and urns together with a representation of the buried persons. In the Etruscan culture several kinds of linen books were in use. Literature mentions *libri rituales*, *libri acheruntici* and *libri fatales*.¹⁰ It seems that the Etruscans were convinced that sacred knowledge learned from different sacred books was the key to gain power in this and in the next world. This is why the dead were shown with the linen books. However, this very idea seems to be completely comparable to an Egyptian eschatological thought concerning the tradition of sacred texts.

The fact is that no significant Etruscan colony was known noted in Ancient Egypt. But it does not mean that there wasn't one. Also it may be assumed that the Etruscans did not have a separate settlement as some other foreign people did. So if the person, a settler from Etruria (or the child of settlers from Etruria), lived in Egypt, maybe she would want to be buried in accordance with the customs of her mother's homeland. But since she was living in Egypt, she could also accept the religious ideas of the local tradition. That is one of the possible explanations of the provenance

¹⁰ On sacred books and Etruscan religion see JANNOT, J. R.: *Religion in Ancient Etruria*. (engl. trans. Jane K. Whitehead). London 2005.

of the *Zagreb Mummy*: A woman of Etruscan origin mummified in the Egyptian manner with an Etruscan linen book on her wrappings, and possibly with an Egyptian *Book of the Dead*.

The Egyptian ethnocentric worldview partly changed in the later periods. Yet during the Ptolemaic Dynasty Alexandria became a central point of a wide intercultural communication. Most foreigners who settled in Egypt were soldiers but in temples of Deir al-Bahri and Luxor there is also some evidence of foreign women¹¹ who had an important role in Egyptian society as weavers, dancers, and singers in the times of the New Kingdom. Unfortunately, the connection of the papyrus and the mummy will have to remain only an assumption, because it cannot be proved. The dating more or less speaks in favour of this connection. Text can be dated to the end of the Late or the beginning of the Ptolemaic period, which generally fits to the C 14 dating of the mummy. What speaks against this connection is the fact that no other trace of the foreign roots of the person called Nesi-Khons can be found. Especially not on the vignette of the *Book of the Dead*. So we cannot be sure whether this Egyptian text leads us closer to or away from the secret of the provenance of the *Zagreb Mummy*.

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¹¹ On foreigners in Egypt see *The Egyptians*. Ed. S. DONADONI. Chicago 1997 (ch. 8: *Foreigners* by E. BRESCIANI) 221–225.