

# The Second Intermediate Period model coffin of Teti in the British Museum (EA 35016)

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The British Museum possesses in the collection of the Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan a model coffin purchased in 1868 as part of the Robert J. Hay collection.<sup>1</sup> Although much of the Hay Collection comes from Thebes, the provenance of this piece is not known. It is made of two pieces of wood, one for the box, the other one for the lid.<sup>2</sup> The outside is plastered and then painted. The measurements are: length: 29.5 cm, width: 10.8 cm (10.0 cm at the head end), height: 15.4 cm (including lid). The walls are 2.5 cm thick at the short ends and about 1.0–1.4 cm thick at the long sides. At the short ends there are holes for keeping the lid on the box (Fig. 12). The box is made of one piece of wood which was hollowed out to a depth of about 6.0 cm. The box has on the underside two floor battens (2.5 cm wide) also carved out of the wood. The lid is vaulted with rectangular raised ends (each about 3.5 cm wide). These raised ends are diagonally cut on the back side only of the lid, perhaps because of the shape of the wood used (see Fig. 10). The coffin is in general well preserved, though the plaster has flaked away at some points. The inscriptions on the foot end are no longer visible (Fig. 8, Fig. 9).

The decoration is painted in black on the white plaster. The decorative pattern follows closely ‘real’ coffins of the Second Intermediate Period. At the top of the four outer sides there is a horizontal line of hieroglyphs and there are vertical text columns all around. At the front side there are eight of these, at the back nine and on each short end two columns. All animal hieroglyphs are mutilated on this model coffin, as is common for the Second Intermediate Period on objects placed in a burial chamber. The edges on the sides are framed with a black line. This black framing line appears also on the lid (see Fig. 5). On the front side there is a panel bearing two *wedjat* eyes and a *shen*-ring between them. On the head end is painted the figure of a standing woman.

The texts on the coffin are quite garbled, and no spell seems to be complete. However, in several cases it is possible to identify these broken spells from other sources. The horizontal text lines contain mainly spells also known from two royal pyramids of the late Middle Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> The columns have speeches of different gods, introduced by *dd mdw in* (‘Words spoken by’). The texts are as follows:

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank John Taylor for providing me with access to this coffin and encouraging me to publish it here. All photographic pictures and drawings are my own. A photo and short description will be found in Taylor and Strudwick, *Mummies: Death and the Afterlife*, 206–7.

<sup>2</sup> Other model coffins of the Middle Kingdom are made from several pieces and constructed almost like a real coffin: compare Arnold, *The Pyramid of Senwosret I, The South Cemeteries at Lisht I*, 147–49, and also *ibid.*, 34–39, pls 13–14.

<sup>3</sup> Willems, *Chests of Life*, 169.

**Transliteration:****Left (front) side (Fig. 1, Fig. 6):**

(top line) *dd mdw h<sup>c</sup> 3st-irt mn pn m3<sup>c</sup>-hrw m nfr-tmw  
m s3n r 3r(t) nt r<sup>c</sup> prj... (a)*

(columns, from right to left)

*dd mdw in r<sup>c</sup> rdi.n(i) ... (b)*

*dd mdw in imsti ii.n(i)...(c)*

*dd mdw in 3st ii.n(i)*

*dd mdw in nbt-hwt ii.n(i) nn...*

*dd mdw in nwt ii.n(i) htp...(d)*

*dd mdw in nit ii.n(i) ...*

*dd mdw in dw3-mwt.f ii...*

*dd mdw in 3ht [nf] rt... (e)*

**Right (back) side (Fig. 2, Fig. 7):**

(top line) *dd mdw w<sup>i</sup> inpw tp dw.fimi-wt nb-t3-dsr h3  
mn pn ... imnti ... (f)*

(the columns, from left to right)

*dd mdw in n...i...(g)*

*dd mdw in hpy ii...*

*dd mdw in psdt ndst...*

*dd mdw in*

*dd mdw in*

*dd mdw in 3st-irt rdi... (h)*

*dd mdw in qbh-snw.f ii...*

*dd mdw in*

*dd mdw in*

**Head end (Fig. 3, Fig. 10):**

(top line) *dd mdw q3 3st-irt mn pn m3<sup>c</sup>-hrw r q3i  
s3h...(i)*

(from right to left)

*dd mdw r<sup>c</sup> mn.s n ... (j)*

*dd mdw mhnt htp.k hr...*

**Lid (Fig. 4, Fig. 11):**

*dd mdw h3 3st-irt tti mn pn m3<sup>c</sup>-hrw n 3m n (k)*

between the first and second line: *tt hq3 tti m3<sup>c</sup>-hrw*

*dd mdw h3 3st-irt tti mn pn m3<sup>c</sup>-hrw (k)*

*dd mdw h3 3st-irt mn pn m3<sup>c</sup>-hrw w<sup>c</sup>b w<sup>c</sup>b m 3ht ... (l)*

**Translation:**

Words spoken: May the Osiris this NN, true of voice appear as Nefertem as the lotus at the nose of Ra, when he goes forth...

Words spoken by Ra: I gave (the beautiful horizon to NN)

Words spoken by Amset: I came ...

Words spoken by Isis: I came...

Words spoken by Nephthys: I came ...

Words spoken by Nut: I came

Words spoken by Nit: I came ...

Words spoken by Duamutef: I came ...

Words spoken by the (beautiful?) Horizon

Words spoken: the arms of Anubis, who is upon his mountain, who is in his embalming place, lord of the holy land, are around this NN ... the Western ...

Words spoken by (Anubis?)

Words spoken by Hapy: I came ...

Words spoken by the Small Ennead ...

Words spoken by...

Words spoken by...

Words spoken by Osiris: I gave ...

Words spoken by Qebehsenuf: I came

Words spoken by...

Words spoken by...

Words spoken: the Osiris this NN, true of voice is raised to the heights of Orion...

Words spoken by Ra: she may be firm...

Words spoken by Mehenet: may you be satisfied because of ...

Words spoken: O Osiris Teti, this NN, true of voice, this NN, true of voice, should not go...

Words spoken: O Osiris, this NN ...

Words spoken: O Osiris, this NN, pure is who is purified in the fields (of Iaru)



Fig. 1 Drawing of left (front) side

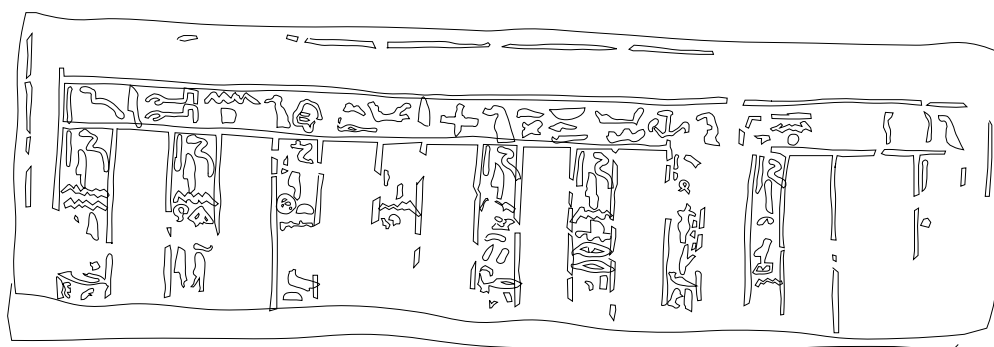


Fig. 2 Drawing of right (back) side



Fig. 3 Drawing of the head end

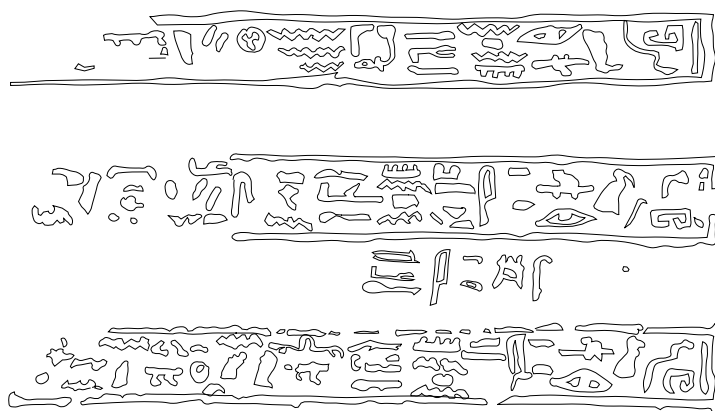


Fig. 4 Drawing of the lid

(a) This is the beginning of a spell (PT § 266a–b) focusing on Nefertem. It is found on the east side on some coffins which seem to date to the very end of the sequence of coffins in the tradition of the Middle Kingdom. In this position Coffin Text spell 788—the ‘opening of the face’ formula—is more common on coffins of the late Twelfth and early Thirteenth Dynasty.<sup>4</sup> The spell with Nefertem (PT § 266a–b) is also attested on canopic boxes.<sup>5</sup> It appears on the coffin of Khakheperreseneb Iy from Meir (M20),<sup>6</sup> where the spell is part of the ‘opening of the face’ formula. As main horizontal spell on the long east side it appears on the Theban coffin of Nub-redi-her (T7C), on the Theban coffin of Ikhet (T6NY), on three other coffins found at Thebes (T5NY, T7NY, T8NY),<sup>7</sup> on the model coffin of Khonsu CG 48404 (unknown provenance) and on two coffins found at Hu.<sup>8</sup> Together this evidence suggests that this spell replaced the ‘opening of the face’ formula at a certain point, at least in Upper Egypt, perhaps in the late Thirteenth Dynasty. However, there are at the moment too few coffins of the period published to draw any firm conclusions (only the coffin of Nub-redi-her T7C is fully preserved and published).

(b) On other coffins this spell is always placed on the front (east) side at the head end, as on the model coffin of Teti. The complete version goes: *ḏd mdw in rḥ rdī.n.ī ȝht nfrt n NN*—‘Words spoken by Ra: I gave the beautiful Horizon to NN.’ This spell seems to be one of the most important, as can be seen from this position and as it appears on several coffins of this period (Maz1, T6NY, T7C).

(c) The reading of Amset in this column is a guess, supported by the fact that Amset quite often appears on coffins at the region of the chest on the left (east) side (Maz1, T6NY, T7C).

(d) The reading of the last sign as *ḥtp* is uncertain: *wnn* is also possible. The latter word would fit better to the phrase ‘I came, that I might be in your protection’ (T7C), spoken by the Small Ennead.

(e) The ‘r’ after *ȝht* is unexpected. The ‘horizon’ is on several other coffins called *ȝht-nfrt* (Da6X, T7C). Perhaps the *nfr* sign was forgotten by the copyist, who only wrote the ‘r’ ending. The spell seems to have

<sup>4</sup> Vernus, *RdE* 28 (1976), 124; Willems, *Chests of Life*, 168; Lohwasser, *Die Formel ‘Öffnen des Gesichts’*.

<sup>5</sup> Lüscher, *MDAIK* 45 (1989), 217, fig. 28 on page 236.

<sup>6</sup> The sigla mentioned in this article follow Willems, *Chests of Life*, 19–40:

**Da2C** Nubhetepi-khered (Cairo CG 28104; de Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour I*, 110, fig. 263)

**Da4C** king Awibre Hor (Cairo CG 28106; de Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour I*, 101, fig. 241, 241bis)

**Da6X** Amenhotep (de Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour II*, 70, fig. 116–117)

**G2** unknown owner (Cairo CG 28032)

**Ha3** Zatimpy (Engelbach, *Harageh*, 24, pl. LXV, 2)

**L6** Bener (P.F. Dorman, in Arnold, *The Pyramid of Senwosret I, The South Cemeteries at Lisht I*, 34–6, 147–9)

**L7** Wahneferhotep—Lisht (Dorman, in *ibid.*, 37–9, 147–9, pl. 14)

**M20** Khakheperreseneb Iy (Kamal, *ASAE* 14 (1914), 75–7)

**Maz1** Bebut (found at Hawara, Petrie, Wainwright, Mackay, *The Labyrinth, Gerzeh and Mazghuneh*, 35, pl. XXXVII)

**T6C** Khonsu (Cairo CG 28028)

**T7C** Nub-redi-her (Cairo CG 28030)

**T10C** Senebni (Cairo CG 28029)

**T13C** Hemenhotep (coffin lid, Cairo CG 28126)

**T4L** queen Mentuhotep (Geisen, *Die Totentexte des verschollenen Sarges der Königin Mentuhotep aus der 13. Dynastie*)

**T5NY** Nefert (New York MMA 32.3.429, unpublished; Hayes, *Scepter of Egypt I*, 348)

**T6NY** Ikhet (New York MMA 32.3.430, unpublished; New York, Hayes, *Scepter I*, 347–8, fig. 228)

**T7NY** unknown (New York MMA 32.3.431, unpublished; New York, Hayes, *Scepter I*, 348)

**T8NY** Nemtyemsaf (New York MMA 32.3.428, unpublished; New York, Hayes, *Scepter I*, 348–9).

<sup>7</sup> Following: Willems, *Chests of Life*, 168, n. 167.

<sup>8</sup> The two coffins are only recorded in Mace’s notebooks: tomb 219 (notebook no. 41 Hu), tomb 511 (notebook no. 42 Hu). These notebooks are published on *The Petrie Museum Archive CD-ROM*.

been especially important, being the only one selected on the rishi coffin of king Sekhemre-heruhermaat Intef<sup>9</sup> (Seventeenth Dynasty). On T7C the spell reads: *dd mdw 3ht-nfrt htp[.t] hr.s mr.n NN*. The spell belongs to the pyramidion spells. However, on the pyramidia the ‘horizon’ is not called ‘beautiful’.<sup>10</sup>

(f) This is the beginning of the spell which is very common on the western side of late Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period coffins. The spell is attested in different versions and from coffins found in all parts of Egypt (Ha3—Harageh; T7C—Thebes; model coffins: L6—Lisht; L7—Lisht, Cairo CG 48404—unknown provenance). It is again a pyramidion spell, appearing on the west side.<sup>11</sup>

(g) On coffin T7C Anubis appears at this position.

(h) For Osiris here see again T7C.

(i) This is again a spell known from the pyramidia,<sup>12</sup> appearing on the North side, as here on the coffin and on several other late Middle Kingdom coffin.

(j) The more complete version of this spell appears on Cairo T7C: ‘Words spoken by Ra: may NN be made firm on top of the sky goddess’.

(k) I am not able to provide any parallels for these two spells on the lid. On many coffins the Nut formula appears, and the middle line could be a garbled version of that (compare T13C).

(l) The spell—Pyramid Text § 275a-c—is also known from the coffin lid of Hemenhotep (T13C) (*wʿb wʿb m 3ht 3srw wʿb rʿw m 3ht 3srw wʿb wʿb m 3ht 3srw wʿb NN m 3ht*—‘pure is the one who is purified in the marshes of Iaru, pure is Ra in the marshes of Iaru, pure is the one who is purified in the marshes of Iaru, pure is NN in the marshes’) and in a short version from the model coffin of Khonsu (Cairo CG 48404).

Model coffins seem to appear at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom and they always contained a human figure. The examples of queen Neferu (Eleventh Dynasty) were found in her tomb, and they contained wax and mud figures in the form of a naked woman. These appear to represent the queen as can be seen from the inscriptions they bear.<sup>13</sup> The coffin and the figure of Si-iah, found in his tomb at Deir el-Bahari,<sup>14</sup> belong perhaps to about the same time. In this case the figure is mummiform. Examples of the Thirteenth Dynasty have been found in contexts separate from tombs. The model coffin of the high steward Nemtyemweskheth was excavated inside a small model sarcophagus and also contained a mummiform figure. The whole group was discovered at floor level in an Abydos chapel.<sup>15</sup> The coffins and enclosed single figures of Bener (L6) and Wahneferhotep (L7) were found next to the pyramid of Senusret I at Lisht and in each case contained a mummiform figure inscribed with the shabti spell. These examples provide the impressions of dummy burials. The owners of these model coffins were most likely buried somewhere else, but they wished to be close to a certain god (Osiris at Abydos; at Lisht, Senusret I?) and therefore set up a substitute burial at the place in which they wished to be. It is even possible that some of these burials were made when the real body of an

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, *JEA* 86 (2000), pl. XX–XXI.

<sup>10</sup> Willems, *Chests of Life*, 169.

<sup>11</sup> Willems, *Chests of Life*, 169; it is also attested on the miniature mastaba of Kemez: G. Lapp, *MDAIK* 50 (1994), 251.

<sup>12</sup> Willems, *Chests of Life*, 169; compare G. Lapp, *Typologie der Särge und Sargkammern von der 6. bis 13. Dynastie*, 175.

<sup>13</sup> Hayes, *Scepter of Egypt I*, 327; compare the model coffins of the royal women Kemsit and Kawit: Naville, *Deir el-Bahari I*, pl. IX, XI.

<sup>14</sup> Winlock, *BMAA* 17, Dec. 1922, 34–5, fig. 36; Hayes, *Scepter of Egypt I*, New York, 327.

<sup>15</sup> Bourriau, *Pharaohs and Mortals*, 93–4, no. 74: whether under the floor or on the floor is not clear from the excavation photograph published there.

official had been lost, as might happen, for example, in war, a fire or drowning. Only in the New Kingdom do the model coffins seem to have been placed more regularly in tombs, from which they developed into shabti boxes.<sup>16</sup>

The decorated model coffins seem to have followed in general the development of the contemporary 'real' coffins:

**Early Middle Kingdom:** the shabti coffins of queen Neferu dating to the Eleventh Dynasty are decorated with one line of inscription on each outer side.<sup>17</sup> This is also typical for the contemporary coffins.<sup>18</sup>

**Thirteenth Dynasty (Late Middle Kingdom):** the more elaborate model coffins of the Thirteenth Dynasty (L6, L7, the coffin of Nemtyemweskheth<sup>19</sup>) have adjacent to the horizontal text line four vertical columns on the long sides and two columns on the short ends. This is similar to the coffins of the late Twelfth and early Thirteenth Dynasty.<sup>20</sup>

**Sixteenth Dynasty (Early Second Intermediate Period):** the coffin of Teti also follows the decorative scheme of its contemporaries among full-size coffins: it presents on the long sides eight (front) and nine (back) columns. This is comparable to other coffins found at Thebes (T6C, T10C, T4L, T5-8NY) and Abydos<sup>21</sup>. Only three of them are connected with a royal name. The coffins of Senebni (T10C) and of (his wife?) Khonsu (T6C) from Thebes are datable to the time of king Sewahenra or shortly after; a staff with the name of this king was found with these coffins.<sup>22</sup> This king is generally dated to the late Thirteenth Dynasty, although this is far from certain;<sup>23</sup> his few monuments were all found in Upper Egypt and it is possible that he dates instead to the Sixteenth Dynasty, defined as the line of Egyptian kings restricted to Upper Egypt.<sup>24</sup> The coffins are also similar in style to the coffin of queen Mentuhotep (T4L). This queen was most likely the wife of king Djehuty, who is also not securely dated.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Aston, *OMRO* 74 (1994), 21–54.

<sup>17</sup> Hayes, *Scepter of Egypt I*, 327, fig. 215.

<sup>18</sup> Willems type I, Willems, *Chests of Life*, 122–7.

<sup>19</sup> Bourriau, *Pharaohs and Mortals*, 93–4, no. 74.

<sup>20</sup> Compare the coffins of king Awibre Hor (Da4C) and of the 'king's daughter' Nubhetepti-khered (Da2C) with a similar design.

<sup>21</sup> Peet, *The Cemeteries of Abydos II*, 1911–1912, 60, 122–3, pl. XIII, 4, 5; pl. XIV, 15; pl. XXXVI.

<sup>22</sup> Berlev, *JEA* 60 (1974), 106–13.

<sup>23</sup> von Beckerath, *Untersuchungen zur politischen Geschichte der zweiten Zwischenzeit in Ägypten*, 65, 258, XIII 41; Ryholt, *The Political Situation in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period*, 359 (File 13/c).

<sup>24</sup> For this dynasty as a separate phase later than the late Thirteenth Dynasty (the line of kings at Itjtawy) see Ryholt, *The Political Situation in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period*, 151–62; note that there is not yet an Egyptological consensus on the use of the term Sixteenth Dynasty, and that von Beckerath places these kings within the late Thirteenth Dynasty or Seventeenth Dynasty, with no intervening Sixteenth Dynasty.

<sup>25</sup> Ryholt, *The Political Situation in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period*, 152, 259–60. All attempts to place king Djehuty within a certain dynasty depend on the assumption that his wife Mentuhotep was the granddaughter of the 'overseer of the compound' Ibiaw, dated to the reign of king Ibiaw by stela British Museum EA 1348 (Bourriau, *Pharaohs and Mortals*, 57–9, no. 45). However, the link is indirect, depending on the following identifications: (1) the 'overseer of the compound' Ibiaw with the vizier of the same name, and (2) the 'director of the broad hall' Senbehenaf, son of a vizier Ibiaw, with the vizier Senebhenaf, who was the father of the queen. Both identifications involve people with different titles and identical but popular names. These connections are possible but far too vague to arrive at any firm conclusions, especially on chronology; compare Grajetzki, *Die höchsten Beamten der ägyptischen Zentralverwaltung zur Zeit des Mittleren Reiches*, 29–30, 136, 159.

The predominant background colour of published coffins of the Thirteenth and of the Sixteenth Dynasty is black.<sup>26</sup> However, a coffin similar in style (but from Gebelein) has a white background (G2) and is richly decorated with other patterns. The rich use of certain patterns (mats or degenerate false doors), seems to be typical for the end of the Second Intermediate Period. This feature is found on the well-dated coffin of Abed, which shows a similar kind of decoration and dates to the very end of the Second Intermediate Period under king Apophis or even later.<sup>27</sup> The Gebelein coffin thus seems to be later than the black coffins cited in the preceding paragraph, as one might also suppose from its very garbled inscriptions, although poor quality is a weak argument for any dating. Even if later, it shows that the white background in combination with the high number of text columns is not without parallels.

The coffins with this high number of columns display one of two sets of texts. Several examples have the so-called Coffin Text spells 777–785,<sup>28</sup> while other examples present speeches of different gods<sup>29</sup> in connection with the pyramidion spells, which were written on the long horizontal bands. The inscriptions on model coffins tend to give abbreviated, often garbled versions of the texts found on ‘real’ coffins. The example of Teti is in this respect a good example. It presents speeches of gods. Most often only the beginning of a speech is written down, while the end is missing. The same holds true for the horizontal lines, where longer texts are presented, but they also break off in the middle of the spell.

The closest parallels for the model coffin of Teti are the coffins of the ‘king’s ornament’ Nub-redi-her (T7C) and the ‘wab priest’ Ikhet (T6NY), both from Thebes. The coffin of Ikhet offers an especially close parallel: it also has eight columns on the front side (the back side is not yet published). Both coffins (T7C, T6NY) have the Nefertem spell on the front, where coffins with fewer columns (all earlier?), have often the *wn-hr*—‘opening of the face’ formula.<sup>30</sup> The coffin of Nub-redi-her (T7C) also displays the Anubis formula on the back.

A remarkable feature on the model coffin of Teti is the appearance of ‘this NN’ (*mn pn*) instead of the owner’s name. It is in this case especially strange because before this phrase there is left a blank field for adding the name. The coffin was certainly made as a stock item, but it seems on the first glance more logical just to leave a blank space and not to add NN which had to be erased when a customer purchased the model coffin. An explanation might be that ‘this NN’ (*mn pn*) was written on a papyrus roll as a prompt to insert the personal name relevant to that funeral or mortuary rite, rather than as a phrase to be recited; it was copied on the model coffin only because of a careless or non-literate copyist or draughtsman, or was left there because the rituals associated with these spells functioned only with at least ‘this NN’ in place of the name. There are several parallels for the use of NN instead of a name: the closest in date are an as yet unpublished coffin from Thebes (T7NY) and fragments of a coffin found at Hu.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> These coffins are briefly discussed: Willems, *Chests of Life*, 117.

<sup>27</sup> Cairo CG 28108.

<sup>28</sup> Peet, *The Cemeteries of Abydos II*, 1911–1912, 60, 122–3, pl. XIII, 4, 5; pl. XIV, 15; pl. XXXVI; T6C, T10C, T4L; compare Grajetzki, *GM* 166 (1998), 29–30.

<sup>29</sup> See a list of such coffins: Grajetzki, *GM* 166 (1998), 32–3.

<sup>30</sup> Dorman, in Arnold, *The Pyramid of Senwosret I, The South Cemeteries at Lisht I*, 37–9, 147.

<sup>31</sup> Mace’s notebooks: tomb 511 (notebook no. 42 Hu), available on *The Petrie Museum Archives CD-ROM*.

On the cover there is the fragment of Teti's title: *tt-hq3*, written between the text bands. This is not a title of the Second Intermediate Period and the writing is therefore most likely incomplete.<sup>32</sup> There are two titles with these elements: *nh n tt-hq3* ('soldier of the ruler's crew')<sup>33</sup> and *3tw n tt-hq3* ('officer of the ruler's crew')<sup>34</sup>. The latter is the higher title and it seems more likely that Teti bore this one, as not many monuments of 'soldiers of the ruler's crew' are known. With the latter title Teti is a typical representative of the Upper Egyptian ruling class in the Second Intermediate Period.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Examination of the original has revealed no traces of signs in front of the title.

<sup>33</sup> Ward, *Index of Egyptian Administrative and Religious Titles of the Middle Kingdom*, 75, no. 611.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 7–8, no. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Compare the appearance of the title in the tomb of Sobeknakht at Elkab: Tylor, *The Tomb of Sobeknekht*.



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Fig. 5 View of the lid from the side



Fig. 6 The left (front) side



Fig. 7 The right (back) side



Fig. 8 The foot end

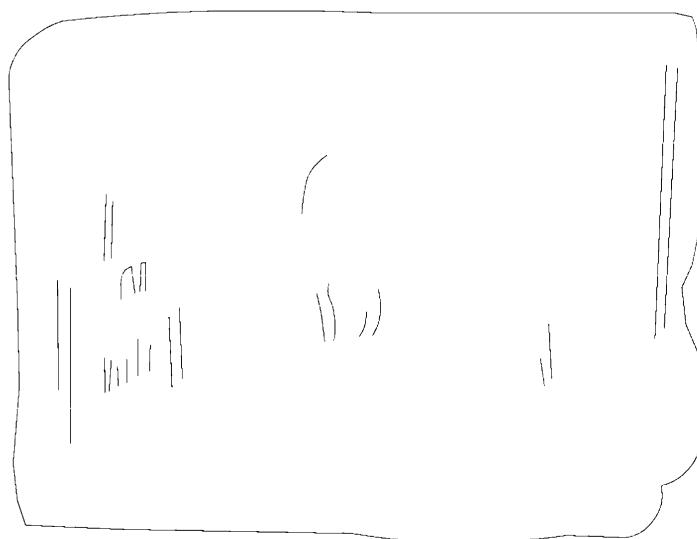


Fig. 9 Drawing of the foot end



Fig. 10 The head end



Fig. 11 The lid from above



Fig. 12 The interior of the lower part of the coffin

*The Letters of Peter le Page Renouf (1822–1897)*, edited by Kevin J. Cathcart, 4 vols. (University College Dublin Press, 2002–2004).

*A review by Patricia Usick*

Less well-known than either his predecessor Samuel Birch or his eventual successor Ernest A. Wallis Budge, the Egyptologist and Orientalist Peter le Page Renouf was Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum from 1886 to 1891. Unlike the long reigns of Birch and Budge, Renouf was acrimoniously forced out of office after five years, despite being acknowledged as an outstanding scholar. His writings were collected and published after his death by his widow and to these are now added his correspondence, published in four volumes as part of the 150th anniversary celebrations of University College, Dublin (formerly the Catholic University). Each volume is prefaced with a resumé of his life and an appendix containing brief biographies of those mentioned in the letters. Translations are given for the German letters but not the French.

Born in Guernsey, Renouf read theology at Pembroke College, Oxford in 1840 but, to the consternation of his parents, converted to Roman Catholicism in 1842 and consequently left before taking a degree, being unable to continue to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Church as required. (A list of the books he borrowed from Pembroke library is in an appendix.) He joined St. Mary's College, Oscott, near Birmingham, as a tutor, while continuing his studies in philosophy and theology.

The first of the four volumes covers his college years, 1840–46, when lively and amusing letters home describe college life and his fellow students and teachers. They also reveal the impact of the Oxford Movement, founded by the charismatic theologian John Henry Newman, on the young scholar of Arabic, Ethiopic, Hebrew and Syriac. Renouf was in contact with Newman and other prominent figures in the Anglican/Catholic debate, and by the age of nineteen Renouf had published the first of many articles on theology.

In 1846 the bilingual Renouf moved to Besançon, in France as tutor to the son of the Comte de Vaulchier, and volume two contains his letters home to his family with accounts of his daily life, his travels in France and Switzerland, and the political upheavals of the 1848 revolution; the latter is viewed from the relative calm of a provincial backwater where he developed a passion for the study of butterflies.

Volume three begins in 1854 when he moved to Ireland at the invitation of Newman to take up an academic post at the new Catholic University in Dublin where he first taught French literature, later choosing to become Professor of Ancient History and Oriental languages, because 'My favourite and persevering study is Christian Antiquity...'. The study of Coptic prompted him to teach himself the ancient Egyptian language and scripts in which he quickly became skilled. In 1857 Renouf married Ludovica Brentano and the gossip of family life now enters his letters to his parents and sister. Domestic responsibilities also brought financial worries which remained throughout his life. Renouf became an editor of the Catholic University journal *The Atlantis*, in which he published Egyptological articles and he also contributed to the editing of Sir John Dalberg Acton's *Home and Foreign Review* which had



replaced *The Rambler*, a Catholic literary journal founded by laymen. In 1859, Renouf's paper on the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs in *The Atlantis* led to a correspondence with the Revd Edward Hincks (1792–1866), a leading Egyptologist who was also the decipherer of Babylonian cuneiform. Hincks wrote 'I am glad to see that anyone is sensible of the importance of this new branch of knowledge & I think you are likely to take the lead of every one in this country.' At this time Hincks, Samuel Birch and Charles Wycliffe Goodwin were the recognised British Egyptologists of the day. Renouf continued as a prolific writer on theological matters while also publishing an *Elementary Grammar of the Egyptian Language*. In the 1860s there were few professional Egyptologists, and Champollion's decipherment was still being attacked as bogus by notables such as Sir G.C. Lewis and Dr Gustavus Seyffarth. Renouf's refutation of the latter's views resulted in 'a most thundering attack' on him by Seyffarth.

Renouf became unhappy in Dublin, and was able to obtain the appointment of Inspector of Schools in England in 1864, and the final volume covers the years in London from 1864 to his death in 1897. After so many earlier letters devoted to the intricacies of theological argument the final volume reveals a poignant indictment of Renouf's treatment by the British Museum, and continuing insights into the progress of Egyptology. Dictionaries and grammars, fundamental to any study of ancient history, chronology or culture were being compiled in these years and Renouf's 'acute and penetrating studies of ancient Egyptian philology' (Lepsius's view) and his contribution to transliteration, the pronunciation of hieroglyphs, made the breadth of his scholarship universally respected, even though Amelia Edwards could still complain of the inaccessibility of his work. She found his *Egyptian Grammar* useful but begs for an English rendering in the 2nd edition since 'some of your students may be ladies to whom Greek & Aramaic are deadly stumbling blocks, & who sigh over your Latin illustrations'.

For 22 years, while working long hours as Inspector of Schools, with special responsibility for the Catholic schools, he used any spare time to 'stick to hieroglyphics' as Goodwin had advised, studying, writing for journals such as the *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* and corresponding with his academic colleagues abroad. (We learn incidentally that the much-reproduced Illustrated London News picture showing the 1874 International Congress of Orientalists gathered round the iconic Rosetta Stone does not show Birch explaining its significance, as the caption claims, but the bearded figure of Renouf.) Beyond a reference to Brugsch as 'a careless transcriber', Renouf's letters are free from attacks on other Egyptologists or rancorous relationships; he was tolerant of error, believing that the harder one works the more mistakes will be made but that was the only way to move the study forward. The appalling events of the 1880s are therefore shocking and unexpected.

A single letter from Mrs Renouf describes their trip to Egypt in 1875 via Syria and Palestine. They visited Cairo, Asyut, Abydos and explored Thebes; Renouf copied inscriptions but, disappointingly, Mariette was not in Cairo, the museum was closed for a religious festival and Renouf returned with a debilitating attack of gout.

Despite Sir John Acton's championing him as 'the most learned man I know of in England' Renouf failed to obtain the post of Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum. However, following Samuel Birch's death in 1885, Renouf, then aged 64, was appointed Keeper of Oriental Antiquities; a role for which, as he himself said in his application, he was uniquely suited, being the only person in England competent to continue Birch's work. In the event it was the question of his salary which provided a slight hitch rather than what Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (the Assyriologist and a Trustee) called 'his foreign name' or 'his adopted creed'. The parlous state of British Egyptology compared with the number of eminent scholars in university posts in Germany is a distinct theme of the correspondence. Renouf wrote

in 1888 that 'In England the case is hopeless. No man however distinguished can make his way by Egyptology' and suggested the young Egyptologist in question should look for work in America.

Renouf seems to have attacked his new role with considerable administrative experience, great scholarship, and humour, although the letters do not reveal much about his work. While his assistant, Budge, travelled to Mesopotamia to purchase or obtain antiquities, being determined 'to "acquire" as much as I can for nothing', Renouf initially experienced a leisurely couple of months, 'But after some time people discovered that there was some one at last at the head of this department, and then began torrents of correspondence & visits from persons, many of whom, after some conversation proved to be qualified for entrance into lunatic asylums'. His years as Keeper saw the arrangement, modernization, and enlargement of the Egyptian collections and the cataloguing of cuneiform tablets and inscriptions. In 1887 his request for an assistant to deal with the influx of inscribed Mesopotamian antiquities was refused, but he had 'trained' Budge to put the Egyptian side in 'good order'. However just five years later, in 1891, he was stunned to receive a curt letter from the Principal Librarian Edward Maunde-Thompson, warning him that the museum's Trustees were demanding he leave his post because the Civil Service had now introduced compulsory retirement at 65. He was further informed that the Trustees had refused an application to 'retain our elder officers' and that if Renouf wished to contest this he must put his claim in writing. Renouf's position may not have been helped by long absences abroad. Maunde-Thompson offered to pay Renouf to catalogue the museum's papyri, but Renouf refused; it was not a proper job and in order to make up the difference between his former salary and pension he would need to work deliberately slowly. In any case it would be intolerable to work with Budge, who, he wrote privately, would never rise above mediocrity. Maunde-Thompson supported Budge, as Renouf realised (a row ensued when a member of staff describes the two as 'conspirators') and his position cannot have improved by his open opposition to Budge. Renouf wrote privately that he favoured Édouard Naville to succeed him over Budge or F.L. Griffith. Budge 'would make the Museum unapproachable to scholars whom he disliked. And he dislikes all... And we want a gentleman!' Renouf was removed despite the outraged complaints of twenty-five distinguished European Egyptologists who signed a letter of protest to the Prime Minister. Brugsch wrote that his loss was a 'mortal blow' for Egyptology. An attempt to have Renouf made a Trustee failed, making it all but impossible for him to obtain access to the Egyptian collections to continue his translation of the *Book of the Dead*. Renouf himself recommended that the department be divided into Egyptian and Assyrian sections but this did not occur until 1955.

Renouf was appalled at the promotion of Budge to Keeper in 1894. It is not entirely clear but it appears that Maunde-Thompson had taken responsibility for the department in the intervening years. In 1893 Renouf gave excoriating evidence in court against Budge, who had falsely accused Hormuzd Rassam of being corruptly involved in the illicit trade of cuneiform tablets, calling Budge a 'cowardly, mendacious, and dishonourable scoundrel'. Despite Budge losing the case, a subscription was organised to pay his damages, it did not affect his career and his subsequent promotion endorsed his integrity and merit. There was a further skirmish when Maunde-Thompson apparently accused Renouf of making improper use of official information confided by Budge, but no details were given and Renouf denied, but found himself unable to refute, what remained an unspecified charge. Renouf was knighted in 1896 for services to the British Museum and elected President of the Society of Biblical Archaeology in 1887. He died peacefully at home in London in 1897, still embittered, and declaring Budge, to the last, a charlatan and plagiarist. He was buried in Guernsey.

Over many years the letters show all the great names in Egyptology unstinting in their praise of the

quality of Renouf's contribution to philology, so that it seemed extraordinary, on reading David Wilson's *The British Museum—A History* (London 2002) to find Renouf described there as having had a 'chequered career' and being 'a second-rate scholar—not a patch on Birch, Pinches or even his new assistant E.A. Wallis Budge.' Wilson wonders why the Assyrian scholar Theophilus Pinches was not chosen instead of Renouf and states: 'We may perhaps see Renouf's appointment as a mixture of unrecorded jobbery and as a holding exercise so that Budge could succeed him when he was more mature.' The correspondence here makes it clear that following Renouf's retirement Pinches was deliberately passed over by Maunde-Thompson, who forbade him to apply for the post and then made his day-to-day life in the museum impossible by constant harassment. In contrast to Wilson, the anonymous biography, or rather hagiography, prefacing the fourth volume of *The Life-Work of Peter le Page Renouf* (Paris 1902–07), numbering his many achievements in the museum, hints darkly of opposition to his improvements, culminating in a number of actions 'contrary to his instructions' on the orders of the Principal Librarian.

The Romantic epic of decipherment, which seemingly ends with Champollion's ground-breaking discoveries, devotes less attention to the eminent scholars who followed him, slowly and painstakingly consolidating his work of grammar and interpretation. In 1863 Renouf could still write of his studies as 'a hobby', hoping that Oxford University might institute a Chair in the subject of Egyptology, which 'has never been introduced for the simple reason that Birch, Goodwin, Hincks and myself are the only Englishmen who have scientifically studied the matter.' Their names may not strike a chord today with the general public but are not forgotten by present-day Egyptologists who continue to progress the study of ancient Egyptian language and culture.