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# The Layered Life of JE26204: the Construction and Reuse of the Coffins of Henuttawy

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## Abstract

In the Twenty-first Dynasty, ancient Egypt was facing a number of economic, political, and religious challenges and transformations. To compensate for a lack of imported resources and subsidized incomes, the Egyptian people were robbing and reusing the tombs of their predecessors. Royal coffins and mummies were collected by priests and placed in tomb caches, supposedly for their protection. In this article, the authors show how a detailed material analysis of the coffins in these caches can help reveal the social history of Egypt at this time. The coffins of Queen Henuttawy prove to be a combination of Eighteenth and Twenty-First Dynasty construction and decoration, and may provide insight into the actions of Third Intermediate Period priests. Following these pieces through to their modern excavation and display in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, it is evident that these objects continue to impact lives, acquiring additional layers of history and social significance.

## Keywords

Coffin, Henuttawy, reuse, Third Intermediate Period, woodworking

خلال فترة حكم الأسرة الواحدة والعشرون واجهت المملكة المصرية عدد من التحولات و التحديات الاقتصادية، السياسية والدينية. ولتعويض شح الموارد المستوردة والدخل المحدود قام المصريون بنهب وإعادة إستخدام قبور أسلافهم. فجمعت التوابيت والمومياءات الملكية بواسطة الكهنة ووضعت في مخابئ القبور، وربما كان هذا التصرف بغرض حمايتها. في هذه الورقة، يوضح المؤلفون كيف يمكن للتحليل التفصيلي للتوابيت الموجودة في هذه المخابئ أن يساعد في كشف التاريخ الإجتماعي لمصر في تلك الفترة. فقد أثبتت توابيت الملكة حنوطاوي بأنها مزيج من تصميم وديكور الأسرتين الثامنة والحادية والعشرين. وربما قد تعطينا فكرة متكاملة عن تصرفات كهنة الفترة الوسيطة الثالثة. وبتأنيق هذه القطع عبر تنقيبها وعرضها بالمتحف المصري بالقاهرة، يمكننا أثبات أن هذه الأدوات لا تزال ذات تأثير على الحياة بإكتسابها مزيداً من الأهمية التاريخية والإجتماعية.

The coffins of Henuttawy are currently in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG61026/JE26204; figs 1–3).<sup>1</sup> The inner coffin, relieved of most of its decoration, lies behind glass next to its relatives. Most of the coffins in this row on the museum's first floor were found in the Royal Cache in Thebes, Deir el-Bahari's Theban Tomb 320 (TT 320). These objects have survived to the present in various states of preservation, though few reflect the condition with which they were originally deposited in the cache, nor the perfection of their original construction before gilding and other elements were stolen. As for the outer coffin, only the case can be located, and it now sits in an attic where few have

viewed it since the examinations of Georges Daressy in 1909. The mummy that once inhabited these coffins is in yet another room of the Egyptian Museum, alongside other well-preserved remains of royalty and the uppermost Egyptian elite. The separate pieces of this assemblage each tell a different story. Together, they serve as records of different sets of actions – including original creation, reuse, and perhaps theft – impacting the lives of different individuals. Together they bear witness to a varied history of death, discovery, and intrigue, both ancient and modern. Through the technical analysis of the construction and reuse of the coffins of Henuttawy, along with a discussion of the human remains, the layered life of these objects begins to unravel,

<sup>1</sup> Due to changes in the museum record system, some publications, for example, E. Graefe and G. Belova (eds), *The Royal Cache TT 320: A Re-Examination* (Cairo, 2010), list the JE accession number for the coffins as 26224. The numbers used in this publication were taken directly from the Egyptian Museum records, as 26204.

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Fig. 1. Outer coffin case of Henuttawy (photo: R. Campbell, © Egyptian Museum Cairo).



Fig. 2. Inner coffin case of Henuttawy (photo: R. Hiramoto, © Egyptian Museum Cairo).

demonstrating the potential that ancient Egyptian coffins represent for a better understanding of ancient Egyptian technologies, society, and religion.

### Coffins and the Third Intermediate Period

At the end of the New Kingdom, Egypt's prosperous empire was weakening. The combination of internal power struggles, the collapse of trade routes, and invading 'Sea Peoples' put too much pressure on an already weakened economy and a newly decentralized and competitive Ramesside social structure.<sup>2</sup> After the death of Ramesses XI, the unified rule of Egypt effectively collapsed, giving way to the Third Intermediate Period. Power became

divided between the Twenty-First Dynasty kings who were ruling in the northern Delta, and by the High Priests of Amun in the south.<sup>3</sup> Due to these hardships, Egypt's economy was particularly weak, and the steady imports of gold from the south and goods from the north, including Lebanese cedar, were no longer dependable.<sup>4</sup> One of the many effects this had on Egyptian society was the inability to provide immense royal burial assemblages constructed from fresh materials, particularly from fresh wood.<sup>5</sup> Already by the Twentieth Dynasty, people had turned to their family tombs in the hills of western Thebes to reuse the burial goods of their ancestors, as suggested by examples of coffin reuse dating to this period.<sup>6</sup> By the Twentieth

<sup>2</sup> Cooney is currently focusing on the newly decentralized distribution of elite power in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties. At this time, King's Sons and Daughters were openly named, even if they did not reach the rank of Crown Prince. Female royal power as King's Sisters and King's Daughters was also lessened, and court competition may have eliminated the king himself, according to the Harem Conspiracy Papyri documenting actions against Ramesses III (forthcoming in 2020 as 'Ramesside Egypt', in N. Moeller, D. T. Potts, and K. Radner (eds), *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East*). However cf. A. Dodson, *Afterglow of Empire: Egypt from the Fall of the New Kingdom to the Saite Renaissance* (rev. edn; Cairo, 2019), 6–9; Larger discussions of Late Bronze Age socioeconomic destabilizations are found in C. Broodbank, *The Making of the Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean from the Beginning to the Emergence of the Classical World* (Oxford, 2013), 445–505.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the historical context, if not the larger sociopolitical reasons for the destabilization, see Dodson, *Afterglow of Empire*.

<sup>4</sup> K. Cooney, 'Changing Burial Practices at the End of the New Kingdom: Defensive Adaptations in Tomb Commissions, Coffin Commissions, Coffin Decoration, and Mummification', *JARCE* 47 (2011), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Arbuckle MacLeod has been studying the woodworking traditions and use of timber during this period. Discussion will be published in a forthcoming article, C. Arbuckle MacLeod, 'The Creation of a Third Intermediate Period Coffin: Coffin EX 1997-24.4 in the Denver Museum of Nature and Science', in M. Koons and C. Arbuckle MacLeod (eds), *The Science and Stories of the Ancient Egyptian Coffins and Mummies in the Denver Museum of Nature & Science* (Denver, forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> K. Cooney, 'The End of New Kingdom Egypt: How Ancient Egyptian Funerary Materials Can Help Us Understand Society in Crisis', in U. Rummel and S. Kubisch (eds), *The Ramesside Period in Egypt: Studies into Cultural and Historical Processes of the 19th and 20th Dynasties, Proceedings of the International*



**Fig. 3.** Inner coffin lid of Henuttawy (photo: R. Campbell, © Egyptian Museum Cairo).

Dynasty, events had reached a more dire and competitive turn, as some took to more risky and illicit activities including theft from royal burials resulting in the public interrogations and trials preserved in the Tomb Robbery Papyri.<sup>7</sup> The stakes were high for everyone in the later Twentieth Dynasty, even for Egyptian leaders, and there is evidence that the High Priesthood of Amun started opening royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings at this time as a means of funding their regime.<sup>8</sup> Metal, particularly gold, was pulled from tombs, ostensibly to be reworked into new objects. Elaborate coffins were stripped of their inlay and gilding. These coffins could be reused without changes, they could be renamed, or they could be extensively redecorated. Alternatively, coffins could be deconstructed into wooden planks to provide material for the construction of an entirely new object.<sup>9</sup> In the midst of all this reuse, theft, and

recycling, the High Priests of Amun began to collect all the royal mummies (and some of the royal coffins that they had not reused themselves), now stripped of their amulets, pectorals, masks, and golden toe and finger stalls, to place them in a series of different tomb locations, each eventually finding his or her way to one of at least two caches, one in the Valley of the Kings' tomb of Amenhotep II (KV 35) and the other in the Deir el-Bahari bay of cliffs (TT 320). In the latter tomb, the High Priests had themselves and their close family buried as well, in reused coffins, in the company of kings and queens of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Dynasties, positioning themselves as protectors of these sacred remains. It is within this complicated context that the coffins of Henuttawy were discovered.

### The Royal Cache DB320

On 6 July 1881, Émile Brugsch, an Egyptologist with the Egyptian Antiquities Service, was led to a tomb that contained the mummies and coffins of some of the most famous kings and personalities of ancient Egyptian history. His guide was Mohammed Abder Rassul, one of four brothers who had discovered the tomb years before. These men had been illegally removing items from the tomb to sell on the antiquities market, and eventually their actions raised suspicions. Much as had happened during the reign of Ramesses IX when theft was discovered, these men were tortured and interrogated beginning in April 1881. After mounting pressure from the authorities, and a number of family disputes, Mohammed agreed to sell out his brothers and reveal the location of the tomb. Within the secret chamber were found the mummies and coffins of such renowned individuals as Seti I, Ramesses II, alongside High Priest of Amun and King, Pinedjem I who was accompanied by his wife, the queen Duathathor-Henuttawy – frequently referred to simply as Henuttawy.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, because of fear for his safety and that of the objects, Brugsch ordered that the contents of the tomb be removed as quickly as possible. His letters show that the whole clearing was accomplished in less than 48 hours.<sup>11</sup> The reports regarding the contexts and contents of the coffins within the tomb are therefore problematic and debatable;<sup>12</sup> nevertheless, the limited evidence provides insight into the complicated ancient history of the tomb and the position of Henuttawy within it.

*New Research Trends in the Iconography and Symbolism of Ancient Egyptian Coffins* (Oxford, 2014), 46–7.

<sup>10</sup> G. Maspero, *La Trouvaille de Deir el-Bahari* (Cairo, 1881), 5; E. L. Wilson, 'Finding Pharaoh', *The Century Magazine* 34:1 (1887); D. Bickerstaffe, 'History of the Discovery of the Cache', in E. Graefe and G. Belova (eds), *The Royal Cache TT 320: A Re-Examination* (Cairo, 2010), 13–19.

<sup>11</sup> In E. David, *Gaston Maspero, 1846–1916: Le Gentleman Égyptologue* (Paris, 1999), 96.

<sup>12</sup> G. Maspero, *Les Momies Royales de Deir el-Bahari* (Paris, 1889); E. Graefe, 'Final Re-clearance of the Royal Mummies Cache, DB320', *KMT* 15:3 (2004), 54, 57; Bickerstaffe, in Graefe and Belova (eds), *Royal Cache*, 20–2.

*Symposium held at Heidelberg, 5th to 7th June, 2015* (SDAIK 41; Wiesbaden, 2018), 63–89.

<sup>7</sup> T. E. Peet, *The Great Tomb-Robberies of the Twentieth Egyptian Dynasty, Being a critical study with translations and commentaries of the papyri in which they are recorded*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1930).

<sup>8</sup> N. Reeves, *Valley of the Kings: The Decline of a Royal Necropolis* (London, 1990); N. Reeves, *The Complete Tutankhamun: The King, the Tomb, the Royal Treasure* (London, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> K. Cooney, 'Ancient Egyptian Funerary Arts as Social Documents: Social Place, Reuse, and Working towards a New Typology of 21st Dynasty Coffins', in R. Sousa (ed.), *Body, Cosmos and Eternity:*

Among the many debates regarding TT 320 is the date of its original construction. Aston has convincingly argued that it was carved in the Eighteenth Dynasty, probably for Ahmes-Nefertiry, based on the pottery found within the tomb, and its similarity to other Eighteenth Dynasty tombs.<sup>13</sup> Graefe and Belova have argued that either Pinedjem II or his wife Nesikhons was the earliest intended owner, and Graefe and Bickerstaffe have expressed doubt at Aston's reinterpretation, maintaining their suggestion for the later date for the primary burial, but acknowledging that construction may have begun in the Eighteenth Dynasty, but ultimately not used at that time.<sup>14</sup> The other coffins, some dating to as early as the Seventeenth Dynasty, were transported to this tomb over a number of years, from many different locations. Hieratic graffiti on the tomb walls, and on the coffins of Ramesses I, Seti I, and Ramesses II give the dates and names of individuals involved in their reburial.<sup>15</sup> Most of the coffins were stripped of their decorative gold, and only a few precious burial objects accompanied these royal figures to their new resting place. As is frequently lamented by scholars, the exact placement of these coffins within the tomb is uncertain and debated, which is unfortunate, as it may have provided a better understanding of the history of the tomb and the date at which the coffins were interred.<sup>16</sup> Maspero and Brugsch's publications of the tomb and its finds note that Henuttawy's coffins were found close to the entrance;<sup>17</sup> however, many discrepancies in the details of this excavation have been noted by Graefe, who suggests, among other issues, that the entrance corridor was too small for coffins to be close to the entrance.<sup>18</sup> While this further complicates our interpretation of the coffins' context, Henuttawy's do, at least, seem to be one of the last coffin sets transferred to TT 320, probably at a similar time to those of her husband, Pinedjem I.<sup>19</sup> Since the discovery of the cache, scholars have worked to recover those objects from the tomb sold by the Abder Rassul brothers, by that point scattered into collections throughout the world. Despite all of this, the state of the original assemblages remains difficult to reconstruct.

<sup>13</sup> D. Aston, 'TT320 and the key of Queen Inhapi – A Reconsideration Based on Ceramic Evidence' *GM* 236 (2013); D. Aston, 'TT358, TT320 and KV 39. Three Early Eighteenth Dynasty Queen's Tombs in the Vicinity of Deir el-Bahari' *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 24 (2015), 15–22.

<sup>14</sup> Graefe and Belova (eds), *Royal Cache*, 50; E. Graefe and D. Bickerstaffe, 'Die sogenannte königliche Cachette II320 war keinesfalls das Grab der Ahmose-Nofretere!' *GM* 239 (2013), 115–19.

<sup>15</sup> Maspero, *Mummies*, 520–1, 551–4, 57–9; J. Černý, 'Studies in the Chronology of the Twenty-First Dynasty' *JEA* 32 (1946), 25–8.

<sup>16</sup> Černý, *JEA* 32; Reeves, *Valley of the Kings*, 183–92, 200–3; K. Jansen-Winkel, 'Zur Geschichte der "Cachette" von Deir el-Bahari', in R. J. Demarée and A. Egberts (eds), *Deir el-Medina in the Third Millennium AD. A Tribute to Jac. J. Janssen* (EU 14; Leiden, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Maspero, *Trouvaille*, 7; Maspero, *Mummies*, 576.

<sup>18</sup> E. Graefe, 'Noch einmal: Emil Brugsch und seine Ausräumung der Königlichen Cachette TT320' *MDAIK* 67 (2011), 101–4.

<sup>19</sup> Graefe and Belova (eds), *Royal Cache*, 56–8.

## The burial assemblage of Henuttawy

Henuttawy's original burial assemblage included, at the very least, an outer coffin, an inner coffin (see figs 1, 2, 3), her mummy, and additional artifacts. While the full complement is no longer recoverable, a number of objects belonging to the queen have been found on the market or through successive excavations of TT 320. These include a shroud, a hair pin, a single sandal, a wig, leather braces or straps, an embalming plate, a mirror and box, four canopic jars, an Osiris figure, two papyri, two ushabti boxes, and numerous ushabti.<sup>20</sup> The parts of the assemblage that were present at the time of the discovery is unclear as Maspero's description of the coffins and mummy in 1889 is somewhat ambiguous. The initial publication seems to imply that the lid and case of both coffins were found during the excavations,<sup>21</sup> however, in 1909 Daressy stated that the outer lid was not recovered, and it is not part of his publication.<sup>22</sup> Whether Maspero was mistaken or not, the Cairo Museum currently has no record of receiving the lid of the outer coffin, and so it cannot be included in the following analysis.

Henuttawy's names, as well as her unique combination of titles, are included on a number of her objects. She was the King's Daughter, King's Wife, King's Mother, Lady of the Two Lands, Mistress of the Two Lands, Daughter of the Great Royal Wife, First Chantress of Amun, Mother of the Great Royal Wife, Mother of the High Priest of Amun, and Mother of the 'Generalissimo'.<sup>23</sup> Selected versions of these titles and her name were found on the interior of the case of both her outer and inner coffins, and a fragmentary list of titles was found on the inner lid. They were also inscribed on the mummy shroud and her gold embalming plate. We can therefore be quite certain that, in the Twenty-First Dynasty, the following elements belonged to the same woman, Duathathor Henuttawy.

## The mummy of Henuttawy

The mummy of this queen is remarkable, and has been the subject of several discussions of the mummification practice.<sup>24</sup> Although a new investigation of the mummy is not part of the current project, discussion of selected features of

<sup>20</sup> E. Loring, 'The Dynasty of Piankh and the Royal Cache' in E. Graefe and G. Belova (eds), *The Royal Cache TT 320: A Re-Examination* (Cairo, 2010), 67.

<sup>21</sup> Maspero, *Mummies*, 576.

<sup>22</sup> G. Daressy, *Cercueils Des Cachettes Royales. Catalogue Général Des Antiquités Égyptiennes Du Musée Du Caire, Nos. 61001-61044* (Cairo, 1909), 64.

<sup>23</sup> Maspero, *Mummies*, 576; A. Dodson and D. Hilton, *The Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt: A Genealogical Sourcebook of the Pharaohs* (New York, 2004), 205–6.

<sup>24</sup> S. Ikram and A. Dodson, *The Mummy in Ancient Egypt: Equipping the Dead for Eternity* (New York, 1998), 126. K. M. Cooney, 'Objectifying the Body: The Increased Value of the Ancient Egyptian Mummy During the Socioeconomic Crisis of Dynasty Twenty-One', in J. Papadopoulos and G. Urton (eds), *The Construction of Value in the Ancient World* (Los Angeles, 2012), 139–60.

the remains is necessary as it affects the interpretation of the coffins within which she was buried. The body of Henuttawy was unwrapped on 29 June 1886. Maspero and his team found her names and titles written in red ink on her shroud, along with an image of Osiris. When she was unwrapped, Maspero found the mummy damaged and clearly robbed. A few elements, however, had been left with the body: a hair pin, leather straps at the neck embossed with 'high priest of Amun, Menkheperre', and a leather sandal.<sup>25</sup> As was the practice in the Third Intermediate Period, the embalmers had packed the skin in order to make the mummy appear full and more lifelike. Unfortunately in this case, the Queen's face was overstuffed with a fat and soda mixture, which caused the skin of her cheeks to tear.<sup>26</sup> Conservators have since repaired this damage, rendering the face whole once more. She was given a black wig for the afterlife, made from string rather than human hair, which was unusual.<sup>27</sup> Still in place on the mummy was a gold plaque that covered the embalmers incision, on which was inscribed the name of the deceased.<sup>28</sup>

There is disagreement as to when the damage to the mummy occurred. The mummy does seem to have been rewrapped when it was brought to the tomb. It is therefore possible that the majority of the damage was done prior to this action, in antiquity, as is suggested by Graefe.<sup>29</sup> Maspero, however, believed that much of the damage was done by the Abder Rassul brothers in the 1800s (CE). This seems to be due to the fact that a papyrus written for queen Duathathor-Henuttawy had been purchased by Auguste Mariette a few years earlier in Suez.<sup>30</sup> As papyri were frequently buried with the bodies of their owners, often within the mummy wrappings themselves, Maspero most likely decided that the papyrus had appeared on the market only after the brothers had taken the papyri from the mummy; nevertheless, it is most likely that both the original and secondary tombs of Henuttawy were robbed multiple times, and so both scholars may be correct. The question of who committed this unwrapping and theft is further complicated by the final state of the coffins, as well.

## Analysis of the coffins of Henuttawy

### The outer coffin

The case of the outer coffin is 2.15 m long, with a maximum width of 71 cm, and maximum height of 41 cm.<sup>31</sup> The coffin shape is anthropoid, and the contours of the body, the head, shoulders, hips, and legs are defined. The back of the case is not flat, but includes the shaped lower edge of the tripartite wig, the lower back and buttocks. The head end of the coffin

is rounded into the shape of an over-large wig, while the foot end is flat. The exterior of the case was originally plastered, overlaid with linen, and plastered again. Decorative gilding was then applied, then blue paint, and finally yellow varnish and additional painted details. The blue paint makes up the background of the coffin decoration, while the gilding was applied in bands, and in the shape of *wadjet* eyes and deities – the four sons of Horus, Thoth, and a now unlabeled jackal, likely to be Anubis, on the case sides.<sup>32</sup> Discoloration and the combination of blue paint and varnish have since rendered the blue a dark, blackish-gray color, and most of the gilded bands or inscriptions have been scraped off the coffin by those wishing to reuse the gold, leaving large areas of exposed wood. The gilded images of deities and *wadjet* eyes, however, remain. The back of the head was decorated with a blue and gold striped wig, much of which has also been removed. The top of the head was once decorated with figures and/or hieroglyphs – Daressy suggests a goddess kneeling atop a *nbw* sign<sup>33</sup> – but this no longer remains. On the exterior foot end is a *djed* pillar flanked by *waset* hieroglyphs; these images are not gilded. The interior of the coffin is painted red and decorated with a large, polychrome, anthropomorphic *djed* pillar. Only the pillar has been varnished. A column of text down the center of the pillar carries Henuttawy's name and titles.

It is the large amount of exposed wood that makes it possible to comment on the construction of the coffin without the use of radiographic imaging (see fig. 4). There is little reason to doubt that the case of the outer coffin was made largely from cedar, as is suggested by Daressy's published identification of the wood species.<sup>34</sup> A preliminary, noninvasive investigation with a Dino-Lite, a low-powered digital microscope, indicates that the planks were made from softwood timber, though detailed analysis was not possible as we were unable to take physical samples for species identification. The sides and the base of the coffin are made of long planks of this wood, joined together with dowels and tenons in mortises, while the foot end is connected with dovetail joints. The head end of the coffin is made with smaller pieces of wood that the craftsman or team of craftsmen joined using a combination of dowels, tenons in mortises, and cordage (see fig. 4, 1c). Daressy states that the cordage is animal gut.<sup>35</sup> The rim or edge of the coffin base has been damaged, and is only intact at the head end. Here, however, the wood has also been altered since the original construction. While the flat edges of the joint pieces of wood have been smoothed in every other area of use on the coffin, rough chisel and adze marks are present in the rim above the head. The chiseling also cuts through a mortise and the dowel that originally held a tenon in place. As the modified edge was then painted red, this wood modification was clearly not due to the later removal of gilding or the modern opening of the coffin (see fig. 5). In addition, the

<sup>25</sup> Maspero, *Momies*, 576–7.

<sup>26</sup> Maspero, *Momies*, 577; Ikram and Dodson, *The Mummy*, 126, 329.

<sup>27</sup> Ikram and Dodson, *The Mummy*, 126, 329.

<sup>28</sup> Ikram and Dodson, *The Mummy*, 329; Loring, in Graefe and Belova (eds), *Royal Cache*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> Graefe and Belova (eds), *Royal Cache*, 50.

<sup>30</sup> A. Mariette, *Les papyrus Egyptiens du Musée de Boulaq* (Paris, 1876), pls XII–XX; Maspero, *Momies*, 512–13.

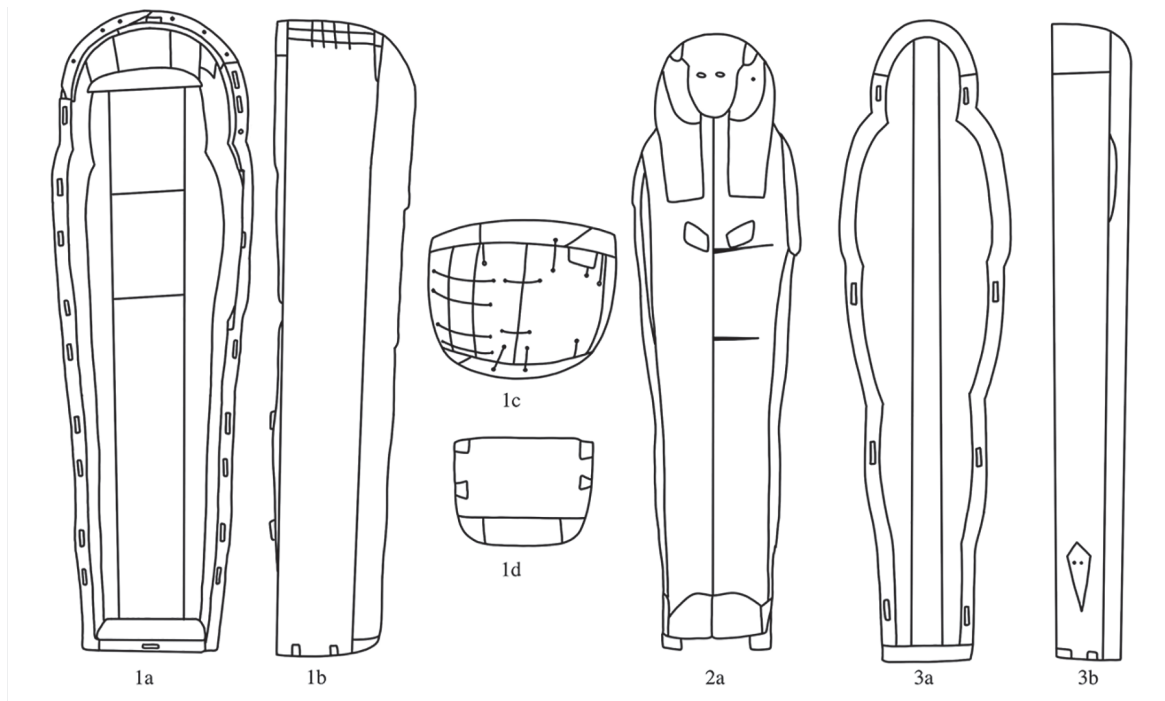
<sup>31</sup> Daressy, *Cercueils*, 64.

<sup>32</sup> Maspero described the coffin as having a green background when discovered, but this was likely the blue under the yellow varnish. Maspero, *Momies*, 576.

<sup>33</sup> Daressy, *Cercueils*, 64.

<sup>34</sup> Daressy, *Cercueils*, 63.

<sup>35</sup> Daressy, *Cercueils*, 63.



**Fig. 4.** Coffin construction diagrams: 1a. Outer case interior; 1b. Outer case exterior; 1c. Outer case back of head, showing ties; 1d. Outer case exterior foot end; 2a. Inner coffin lid; 3a. Inner coffin case interior; 3b. Inner coffin exterior (image: C. Arbuckle).

interior of the coffin's left side and edge seems to have been reshaped, as it is much thinner in section than on the coffin's right side. These modifications were done prior to the interior decoration, suggesting a preparation for the Twenty-First Dynasty coffin decorative updates and reuse. These alterations were likely done to fit an inner coffin (of the Twenty-First Dynasty) and lid that had not been made to fit this (Eighteenth Dynasty) coffin. Also visible on the coffin case's edges, on both the left and right sides, is a dovetail-shaped space, like a mortise. This space is similar to that seen on Eighteenth Dynasty boxes as part of a locking mechanism;<sup>36</sup> however, we cannot be certain about this interpretation without the lid. In total, the outer coffin case appears to be made from approximately 16 or 17 separate pieces of wood. This does not include dowels or tenons.

The overall shape of the coffin, with the rounded back and over-large wig is typical of the later Eighteenth Dynasty. This is true, too, of the exterior decoration, with gilded bands separating deities and *wadjet* eyes. The inner decoration, however, is more typical of the Twenty-First Dynasty, when depictions of *djed* pillars and winged deities became common in the interiors of coffin cases.<sup>37</sup> This suggests that the coffin was originally constructed in the late Eighteenth Dynasty, and was modified, redecorated, and reused in the Twenty-First for Henuttawy. The original construction and decoration are, however, quite unusual. The construction of Eighteenth Dynasty coffins is not well published, but the use of cordage for joining is rarely noted for coffins produced in the New Kingdom; indeed, this method is much

more common in rectangular coffins of the Old and Middle Kingdoms. In Daressy's publication of the coffin sets from the Royal Cache, the technique is mentioned in association only with this coffin and the oversized example of Queen Aahotep, which is, however, of a very different size, shape, and construction, but which was also found in the Royal Cache.<sup>38</sup> The few Eighteenth Dynasty coffins whose construction has been explored are joined only with dowels, tenons, and mortises (for example, Turin Prov. 0718 and London EA6661). The use of cordage in this instance suggests that either this was a practice unique to the workshop responsible for the coffin, or that the craftspeople were experimenting with new methods. Without further comparative examples, little more can be said on the subject at this time.

While the style of the decoration is largely consistent with the 'black' coffins of the later Eighteenth Dynasty, it cannot go unnoticed that the coffin is not in fact black, but blue. Usually the high-quality gilded coffins produced at this time were finished with thick amounts of black pitch and/or dark pistacia resin, which was probably a reduced yellow pistacia varnish.<sup>39</sup> It seems, therefore, that there was a variety of choices available to commissioners interested in having a dark Eighteenth Dynasty coffin with golden bands. Those individuals unable to afford expensive black varnish may have ordered black and yellow paint instead, finishing

<sup>38</sup> Daressy, *Cercueils*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the ideology of black varnish, see Cooney's forthcoming article, 'Coffins as Tombs and Tombs as Coffins: Style Development, Style Choice, Innovation, and the Display of Social Power', in B. Bryan (ed.), *Proceedings of the 2016 Theban Workshop on Tombs and Tomb Painting* (forthcoming).

<sup>36</sup> G. Killen, *Ancient Egyptian Furniture* (Modern Egyptology Series; Warminster, 1980), 12–13.

<sup>37</sup> J. H. Taylor, *Egyptian Coffins* (Aylesbury, 1989), 43.



**Fig. 5.** Modified and repainted red edge of outer coffin case (photo: R. Campbell, © Egyptian Museum Cairo).

with the lighter, yellow varnish (for example, London EA29580 and London EA6661).<sup>40</sup> Either the owner of this coffin was unable to afford the condensed, black resin after spending their budget on gilding, or they simply desired a varnished blue instead. Egyptian blue paint, although among the most expensive of Egyptian pigments, was almost certainly cheaper than imported and condensed pistacia resin.<sup>41</sup> Another possibility exists, namely, that this blue decoration was applied only in the Twenty-First Dynasty, along with the inner decoration, all of which was finished with a coating of yellow varnish. Still, it remains possible that the Twenty-First Dynasty reusers only added the yellow varnish to previously existing blue and gold decoration, because, if the coffin was indeed painted anew, the Twenty-First Dynasty craftsmen retained the original layout and used an archaizing style. If Twenty-First Dynasty reusers repainted new exterior decoration on the case, but in an archaic Eighteenth Dynasty style, it represents a rare exception to the usual style of coffin case decoration in the Third Intermediate Period, characterized by dense and complicated polychromy.<sup>42</sup> As the accompanying inner coffin was

decorated in the popular and colorful Twenty-First Dynasty fashion, it seems more likely that the outer coffin decoration was original to the Eighteenth Dynasty and that changes were only made to the interior because of the necessary recarving. This conclusion demands that we rethink what the Eighteenth Dynasty ‘black’ coffin was meant to represent ideologically, if it could also be blue.

### *The inner coffin*

Both the lid and case of the inner coffin survive. The length of this coffin is 2.01 m, with a maximum width of 55 cm. The height to the top of the face (the feet no longer survive) is 54 cm, and the height of just the case is an average of 30–31 cm.<sup>43</sup>

The lid of the coffin is anthropoid in shape. It is badly damaged as a result of the scraped removal of gilding, but much of the form is still visible. Little of the face has survived, but it clearly once had eyes of inlaid blue paste, plus other materials, ostensibly. Elements of a carved wig remain. The shoulders and elbows of the body have been carved into the overall form, and the hands originally crossed the chest, but are no longer in place. The shape of the hips and calves has also been subtly molded into the coffin form. The footboard is now missing.

The decoration of the coffin was added in several layers. A pink colored base layer of paste seems to have been applied first, then a white plaster, linen, more white plaster, gilding, paint and varnish. Little of the decoration now remains. The

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *Egyptian Coffins*, 33; A. Dodson, ‘On the Burial of Maihirpri and Certain Coffins of the Eighteenth Dynasty’, in C. Eyre (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Egyptologists, Cambridge, 3–9 September 1995* (OLA 82; Leuven, 1998), 335, n. 27.

<sup>41</sup> For cost information on pigments, see K. M. Cooney, *The Cost of Death: The Social and Economic Value of Ancient Egyptian Funerary Art in the Ramesside Period* (Leiden, 2007), 112, 117, 153–6.

<sup>42</sup> There are coffin cases decorated in a simplified manner in the Third Intermediate Period, with the sons of Horus and *djed* pillars separated by bands of inscription. Niwiński has termed these ‘type-D’, and they include Cairo JE29666, and JE29670 (A. Niwiński, *21st Dynasty Coffins from Thebes: Chronological and Typological*

*Studies* (Mainz am Rhein, 1988), 88, pl. XVIII); however, these are painted on a white background, have extra horizontal bands of inscription, and differ in other ways to the type seen here and in the Eighteenth Dynasty.

<sup>43</sup> Daressy, *Cercueils*, 65.



**Fig. 6.** Hair-like fibrous material used in the inner coffin's construction (photo: R. Campbell, © Egyptian Museum Cairo).

face was originally framed by a blue or black wig, into which wavy strands of hair were carved. In infrared images, the lappets fluoresce, which suggests that they were originally painted with Egyptian blue. Gilded bands were depicted on the lappets of the wig, similar to what is seen on the Ramesside coffin of Henutmehyt (London EA48001), for example. Fragments of gold at the edges of the black lappets suggest that a gilded floral collar was once present. Gilded falcon heads remain on the shoulders. Also still in place on the chest is part of a gilded scarab, and below the arms is a gilded, ram-headed scarab, flanked by winged goddesses.<sup>44</sup> The only other remnant of decoration is a central band of inscription. These hieroglyphs, listing Henuttawy's titles, are yellow, painted on a blue background, and covered with varnish. The interior and the rim of the lid are painted red.

The construction of the lid is visible thanks to the removal of the majority of the decoration (see fig. 4). Inspection with a Dino-Lite at the head of the coffin revealed a diffuse porous hardwood. A more precise identification is not possible without sampling, though Daressy's publication suggests that sycamore fig was used for this coffin set.<sup>45</sup> The body of the coffin was made up of long planks of wood joined with dowels. The face, wig, and hair are constructed through the joining of numerous smaller pieces. Here, substantial amounts of plaster also help to build up the shape of the features. A few of the damaged pieces of wood around the face do resemble the shape of a vulture head-dress, which may have been recarved to a more basic wig during reuse, though in its current state, we cannot be certain. In total, the lid of this coffin was made from approximately 16 pieces, which includes the now missing hands. Where pieces of wood were attached, a glue or adhesive

was used. This substance seems to have included hair-like fibers, which still cling to the coffin (see fig. 6). The interior edges of the larger pieces of joint wood also appear to have been painted red before being joined, the same color as the rim and the interior. The exposed interior joints at the feet make this particularly evident. This is seen frequently on Egyptian coffins, and was likely an apotropaic practice.<sup>46</sup> There are several elements in the construction that suggest either repair or reuse of the wood, before being integrated into this coffin. Nonfunctional dowel holes filled with plaster are found in the pieces making up the face and wig. On one of the long planks of wood in the body, there are also long straight gouges in the wood, filled with smaller pieces of wood and plaster (see fig. 7). These filled gouges go across the grain, suggesting that they are not natural splits in the timber, but remnants of previous craftsmanship. These cuts reach the long edge of the plank, but do not continue on the adjoining piece, again suggesting that they were present before the wood was used to construct this particular iteration of the coffin. It is possible that these gouges were left during a previous shaping process, as axes could be used to

<sup>46</sup> C. Arbuckle MacLeod has seen this practice on coffins at least as early as the Fifth Dynasty (for example Turin S13964), though a red interior is seen even on Early Dynastic coffins as well. The color red has 'Sethian' associations (R. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* [Chicago, 1997], 147), which can be used to ward off evil and bad spirits in an apotropaic function. During the Middle Kingdom and into the New Kingdom, as an extension of this function, the joints of coffins were also occasionally inscribed with spells to ward off evil and to summon the gods to protect the stability of the coffin and its inhabitants (as seen, for example, on Boston 20.1822 and Turin Prov.0718). See also A. Bettum, *Faces within Faces: The Symbolic Function of Nested Yellow Coffins in Ancient Egypt* (PhD Thesis, University of Oslo; Oslo, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> A similar scarab formation can be seen on coffin Cairo JE29667.

<sup>45</sup> Daressy, *Cercueils*, 63.



**Fig. 7.** Gouge on a single plank from the inner coffin lid (photo: R. Campbell, © Egyptian Museum Cairo).

create guidelines while carving, to ensure that adzes and chisels did not remove unintended pieces of wood.<sup>47</sup> Alternatively, the gouges may have been related to deep cuts made for inlays.<sup>48</sup> That these lines reach the edge of the plank but do not continue on the next piece is indicative of a previous use of the wood. The ledged rim of the coffin is also not the same width, in section, all the way around, which may suggest that the lid was reshaped to fit a new case, but this is uncertain.

The case of the inner coffin follows the same basic anthropoid shape of the lid, with the shoulders, elbows, hips, and calves carved into the construction, as is typical of a Ramesside or early Twenty-First Dynasty coffin. It also seems to have once been heavily gilded, judging by the fact that much of the exterior decoration has been cut or scraped away. Here, as with the lid, the lowest layer of the decoration was a pink paste, followed by white plaster, linen, more white plaster, gilding, and paint. In some areas, the fibrous, gluey substance may also have been laid down as a base layer, on top of the pink paste, though it is unclear why this was deemed necessary. Given the rough removal of the exterior surface, very little of the exterior decoration can now be discerned on this coffin. Fragments of black or varnished blue paint and gilding can be seen, but little more can be described. The interior of the coffin case is painted red,

as is the underside of the coffin lid, and decorated with a varnished, polychrome figure of Nut, standing on a *nebu* sign. In a vertical column on her skirt are painted the names and titles of Henuttawy.

The coffin case was largely constructed from long planks of wood edge joined with dowels. The footboard was joined with dovetailed sections, and the curved top of the head was carved from a single piece of wood. This wood, too, seems to be made from a hardwood, though the anatomy was particularly difficult to see with the Dino-Lite. One of the planks on the coffin's left side seems to have been repaired – a large rhomboid-shaped patch was added. This may have been done to replace a large, loose knot in the wood, or as a repair from a previous use of this timber. In total, including the patch, the case was made from approximately 12 pieces of wood, not including dowels and tenons. A stepped ledge has been carved into the edge of the coffin. Since its initial completion, this ledge was reshaped, as is readily visible at the head, removing much of the stepped edge. Again, the width of the coffin sides and edge is not consistent, and so may demonstrate a reshaping to fit a new coffin lid.

Overall, the inner coffin seems to have been shaped and decorated in a style consistent with what is frequently seen in the early Twenty-First Dynasty. Although there are Ramesside features, there is not enough evidence to argue for a reused Ramesside coffin. Niwiński suggests that the lid belongs to his type II-a, though acknowledges that the total gilding is atypical.<sup>49</sup> The patches in the lid suggest that the wood was reused before being included in the con-

<sup>47</sup> We are grateful to Julie Dawson and the team working on coffins at the Fitzwilliam Museum for this suggestion.

<sup>48</sup> Similar marks can be seen, for example on 'Coffin A' in O. J. Schaden, 'The Amenmesse Project: Season of 2009 (The KV-63 Coffins)', *ASAE* 87 (2014), fig. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Niwiński, *21st Dynasty Coffins*, 71–2, 116.

struction of the coffin. The reshaping of the ledge on the coffin, and the gouges in the lid plank, are the best indicators that the pieces may have been reused from different contexts.

### The history of the coffin set

Having analyzed the construction and decoration of all the pieces, it is now possible to comment on the set as a whole. The difference in the shape, construction technique, and decoration of the inner and outer coffins suggests that they were originally completed at different times and by different workshops. Especially telling is the use of different materials; the pink paste and glue-like substance, for instance, is found only on the inner coffin. The timber too, is significant. As noted, cedar was difficult to acquire in the Third Intermediate Period. A more definitive identification of the wood is necessary before we can be certain, but based on Daressy's stated identification, and the preliminary identifications made with a Dino-Lite, it is likely that the outer coffin was made of imported cedar, which would have been more readily available in the earlier New Kingdom. The rounded, modeled shape of the back of the outer coffin is associated with the Eighteenth Dynasty, as is its banded decoration. The shape and style of decoration of the inner coffin, with its carved elbows and forearms, is indicative of later time periods. It is therefore most likely that the outer coffin was created in the Eighteenth Dynasty, while the inner coffin was made in the early Twenty-First, perhaps out of reused, local wood. The modifications to the stepped case ledges and the addition of interior decoration on both coffins, however, were probably completed during the Twenty-First dynasty at the time of the burial of Henuttawy, as her names and titles were found on each piece in the set.

The context of the coffins of Henuttawy within TT 320 makes its reuse in the Twenty-First Dynasty all the more likely. Cooney's investigation of the royal coffins (consisting of 31 pieces) found in this tomb has so far revealed that 100% of the Twenty-First or early Twenty-Second Dynasty coffin sets display at least some circumstantial evidence suggestive of reuse, while 80.6% exhibited clear, strong evidence for reuse (see fig. 8). This data is in keeping with the larger investigation of the coffins from the Twenty-First Dynasty. Cooney's analysis currently includes 188 coffin sets from this period, of which 71.81% demonstrate reuse (see table 1). As additional coffins are added to this selection, and new methods of analysis are discovered to analyze examples in more depth, this number continues to rise.

The layered history of Henuttawy's coffin set thus far spans four dynasties, or approximately 300 years; however, it does not end at Henuttawy's burial. At some point subsequent to the interment, probably still during the Third Intermediate Period, thieves, or perhaps sanctioned individuals with the blessing of the Amun High Priesthood, took apart the coffin set and used adzes to remove large areas of gilding.<sup>50</sup> Whoever these people were, they seem to

have had at least some degree of respect for the Egyptian gods and the deceased. The images of deities were avoided in the outer coffin, as was the central scarab pectoral, winged goddesses, and the central band of inscription on the inner lid. This suggests that perhaps these elements were seen as essential to the function of the coffin. The importance of one's name and titles in ancient Egyptian beliefs, for instance, is well attested. This also implies that the people removing the gilding had some degree of knowledge about what was being removed, as well as some connection to the deceased contained inside. Either they were literate thieves, educated craftspeople, both, or, perhaps, they were priests.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, we argue that the selective removal of gilding, and the fact that coffins were reused by the highest members of the Egyptian clergy, suggest that Egyptologists should reconsider their frequent use of the term 'thieves' to describe the individuals that removed gold from tombs.

The best evidence that the Theban priesthood was involved in the reuse of coffins and decorative materials is that many of the same High Priests of Amun were buried in reused coffins. The Royal Cache is testament to their recycling throughout the Twentieth, Twenty-First, and early Twenty-Second Dynasties. That there was illegal and state sanctioned removal of goods from burials is clear from the letters and legal texts of the earlier Twentieth Dynasty. For instance, letters between high ranking officials and the *Medjay* police force show that the state was at least occasionally profiting from looting.<sup>52</sup> The inscriptions left by the priests on the coffins moved into the Royal Cache provide no details of the nature of their reuse, stating only dates of movement and the names of the people responsible.<sup>53</sup> These hieratic docketts and inscriptions do not even state directly that the move was primarily meant for the protection of the coffins and their royal inhabitants: that has been our assumption. The direct discussion of the reuse of coffins and decorative materials thus seems to have been taboo, even if the action itself was seen as necessary. The coffin set of Henuttawy indicates that the Twenty-First Dynasty High Priesthood of Amun made use of older wood and older coffins from a variety of time periods and Theban tomb locations, all opportunistically put together into updated coffin sets for their dead family members.

If we date the moment of the Royal Cache's establishment by the latest coffins in the tomb, then these coffins were all placed into this hidden cliffside tomb in early Twenty-Second Dynasty, perhaps in one action. The move of all of these collected coffin sets (and their mummy inhabitants) may actually mark the end of the controlled reuse of these coffins by the priesthood. Indeed, it was in the early

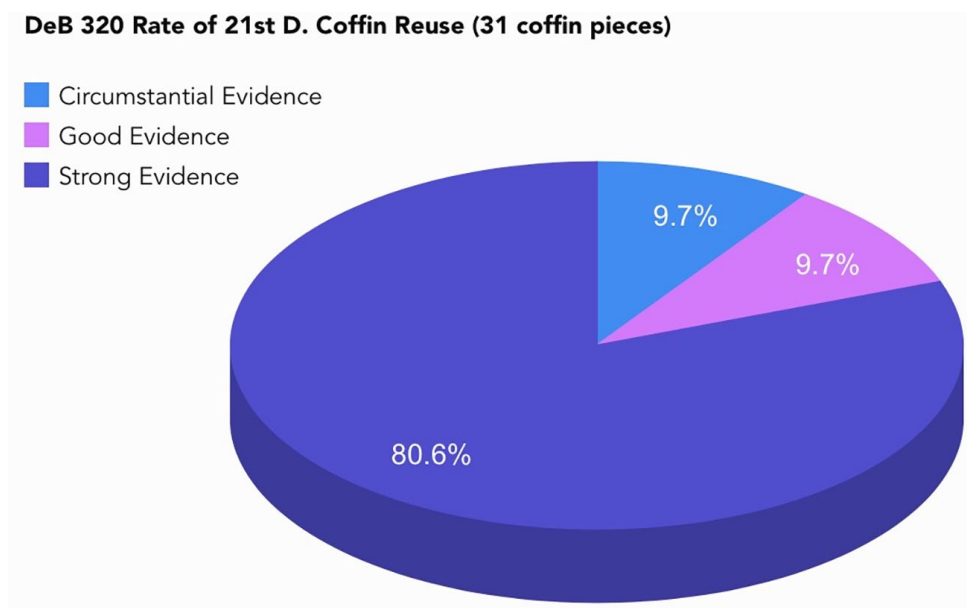
*Archaeology* [Sebastopol, 1998], 652). His suggestion is likely based on the opinion of Maspero that the brothers are responsible for much of the damage to the coffins and the mummy.

<sup>51</sup> Aidan Dodson also notes that the selective damage of coffins from TT 320, where the gods are left untouched, was probably done by the individuals responsible for their reburial (Dodson, *Afterglow of Empire*, 62–3).

<sup>52</sup> P. Berlin 10487, P. Berlin 10488, P. Berlin 10489: F. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt* (Atlanta, 1990); Cooney, *JARCE* 47, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Maspero, *Mummies*, 57–9, 520–1, 551–4; Černý, *Studies*, 25–8.

<sup>50</sup> Dennis Forbes is no doubt incorrect in suggesting that the gold was taken by the Abder Rassul brothers (D. Forbes, *Tombs, Treasures, Mummies: Seven Great Discoveries of Egyptian*



**Fig. 8.** Rates of coffin reuse in TT 320.

**Table 1.** Rates of coffin reuse in the Twenty-First Dynasty.

| Provenance                              | Coffins | 0  | 1  | 2  | 3  | TBD | Reuse % |
|-----------------------------------------|---------|----|----|----|----|-----|---------|
| Bab el-Gassus, Deir el Bahri, Thebes    | 69      | 11 | 20 | 6  | 32 | 0   | 84.06%  |
| MMA Tombs 59, 60, 358 & Pit 1016        | 18      | 4  | 2  | 0  | 12 | 4   | 77.78%  |
| Royal Cache Deir el-Bahri 320           | 31      | 0  | 3  | 3  | 25 | 0   | 100%    |
| Totals:                                 | 118     | 15 | 25 | 9  | 69 | 4   | 87.29%  |
| Totals for reuse with high confidence:  | -       | -  | -  | 9  | 69 | -   | 66.10%  |
| Total of analyzed 21st Dynasty coffins: | 188     | 45 | 36 | 18 | 81 | 8   | 71.81%  |

Twenty-Second Dynasty when coffins shifted to new styles and shapes, making the reuse of all of these pieces difficult. Coffins of the Twenty-Second Dynasty incorporated thicker timbers, often left bare, showing their grain, uncovered by plaster and painted polychromy. Why and how this abrupt and stark transition in coffin style took place is debated,<sup>54</sup> but it is as if coffin commissioners of the Twenty-Second Dynasty now wanted to advertise that they were *not* reusing coffins or coffin timber. Egyptian invasions of the Levant suggest that not only had socioeconomic conditions improved, but also that new materials were coming into Egypt again. All of this made the reuse of these older coffins, whether from the Eighteenth or Twenty-First Dynasty, not only very difficult, but unnecessary. The Royal Cache represents the removal of coffins from the arena of recycling. And still, as the priests put these coffins into the hidden tomb, they took one last tax, made one last sweep,

removing gilding as expedient, leaving some essential decoration on the coffin, but removing other elements deemed unnecessary, like inlaid eyes of bronze or gilded hands.

### Conclusions: Coffins as social documents

In ancient Egypt, coffins were seen as integral components of the elite burial assemblage. They are found in tombs and pits from all periods of Egyptian history, and in all regions. A close analysis of these objects therefore has the potential to reveal social practices and beliefs for the upper echelons of Egyptian society. It is clear that styles and preferences from various periods are only standardized to a certain degree, but that there was also room for personal choices, or at least opportunistic reuse that gives the appearance of such agency. The original construction and decoration of the outer coffin of Henuttawy's set is unique; perhaps as more detailed coffin analyses are published, we may begin to question the current concept of what is 'typical' for Egyptian coffins and rethink descriptors like 'black' coffins. Because so much of the gilding was removed from both inner and outer coffins, it

<sup>54</sup> K. M. Cooney, 'Ramesside Body Containers of Wood and Cartonnage from Northern Egyptian Necropolises', in V. Vershoor, A. J. Stuart, and C. Demarée (eds), *Festschrift for René Van Walsem* (Leiden, 2017), 279–98.

has also been possible to comment on the reuse of the wood used in their creation. The reuse of wood was not uncommon at any point of Egyptian history, though it is most evident in the coffins of the Third Intermediate Period. This reuse demonstrates the economic instability of this time, and reminds us that dating objects by style alone can be complicated and problematic. Indeed, do we even characterize the coffin set of Henuttawy as Eighteenth Dynasty or Twenty-First? Which dynasty has the priority in the Egyptological mind? The selected removal of gilding from the coffin highlights economic stress, to be sure, but it also calls into question our assumptions about the individuals responsible. It is certainly unfair, or at least overly simplistic, to interpret each case of stripped coffins as the work of sacrilegious thieves.

Our interpretation of coffins and their place in Egyptian history is only possible if they can be recovered and carefully studied. The dramatic tale of the Abder Rassul brothers and the fate of TT 320 demonstrate the impact that Egyptian objects continue to have on the lives of modern individuals. Coffins have a layered history that deserves to be understood and told. As Egyptologists, we have a responsibility to care for these artifacts that have come into contact with innumerable individuals over their long lives. We should push scholarship forward and continue to re-examine each piece in detail as new technologies and methods of investigation emerge; however, it is also important to recognize that coffins have been part of a profitable looting scheme for millennia. While they are priceless artifacts that help us to understand the history of humanity, they are still objects, and they are not more valuable than human lives. The physical torture of the Abder Rassul brothers was unnecessary and unacceptable, as was the disrespect of the local Egyptian workers demonstrated in early publications.<sup>55</sup> As Egyptologists working within Egypt, we have the responsibility to help the communities living alongside this rich history, and to encourage them to reconnect to their heritage and participate in the protection and study of ancient Egyptian objects. As the life of the coffins of Henuttawy demonstrates, these pieces are powerful, dynamic symbols with a layered history that continues to develop and leave a lasting impression on every individual with whom they come into contact.

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<sup>55</sup> Wilson, *The Century Magazine* 34:1, 7–8; Bickerstaffe, in Graefe and Belova (eds), *Royal Cache*, 25.