

PROCEEDINGS
F I R S T
VATICAN
COFFIN
CONFERENCE
19-22 JUNE 2013

VOLUME 1



VATICAN COFFIN PROJECT

Reparto Antichità Egizie e del Vicino Oriente

Laboratorio di Diagnostica per la Conservazione ed il Restauro

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Coffin lid of Djedmut and details, inv. MV25008

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Rijksmuseum van Oudheden

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FIRST
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edited by ALESSIA AMENTA and HÉLÈNE GUICHARD



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The enigmatic owner of the coffins of Nespawershefyt at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge*

Helen Strudwick

In 1822, the University of Cambridge received the gift of a set of 21st Dynasty coffins from two young men who had studied at the University and who were both later to be Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge. They were Barnard Hanbury¹ (1793-1833) and George Waddington² (1793-1869). Although Waddington wrote a detailed account of their travels from Wadi Halfa down to Meroe, published in 1822 under the title *Journal of a Visit to some parts of Ethiopia*, almost nothing is presently known about their travels through Egypt.³ It is clear, however, that they stopped there, including presumably at Thebes, long enough to acquire some antiquities since, in addition to the coffin set already mentioned, the Fitzwilliam Museum also has in its collection a Ramesside granite sarcophagus from the collection of Hanbury and Waddington (Inv. Fitzwilliam E.1.1835). Furthermore, one of the fragments from the 'lost' tomb of Nebamun, now on display at the British Museum (Inv. BM EA 37981), was also collected in Egypt by Hanbury and Waddington; it was only later presented to that museum by Sir Henry Ellis,⁴ in 1833.⁵

The coffin set given to the university formed the first group of objects in the fledgling Fitzwilliam Museum's Egyptian collection and it is now accessioned under the number E.1.1822. The set consists of three elements:

- An outer coffin (lid and box) with decoration on a white background and important figures and texts varnished with a yellow resin; the interior of the base is plain dark red, with a large *djed*-pillar figure in the centre, occupying most of the base of the coffin.
- An inner coffin (lid and box), highly decorated inside and out, and fully varnished with a yellow resin; the interior of the box is dominated by a figure of the goddess of the West, and there is a *ba*-bird at the head end.
- The final element is a beautifully decorated mummy board (Fig. 1), which is also decorated on the reverse (Fig. 2). The front is varnished all over with a yellow resin, while only some elements on the reverse are varnished.

Since their arrival at the University, the coffin set has received relatively little scholarly attention. A few scenes from its decoration have been published; for example Seeber noted the depiction of the judgement of the dead scene on the exterior of the box of the inner coffin.⁶ In his 1893 Catalogue of the Fitzwilliam Museum's Egyptian collection, Budge included the inscriptions from the coffins, although he erroneously stated that the coffin set was given by the Right Hon. Charles Philip Yorke and William

* Like all the participants at the *First Vatican Coffin Conference* in 2013, I was filled with admiration for the organisation and generosity of our hosts, as well as the quality of the contributions to the conference, and would like to express again my gratitude for the chance to participate.

My thanks are due to Nigel Strudwick and Julie Dawson for their help in preparing this paper for publication. I am also very much indebted to Jaymes Sinclair for processing the photographs, which were originally taken in 2005 by Andrew Norman.

1 Dawson and Uphill 2012, 241.

2 Dawson and Uphill 2012, 562.

3 Waddington and Hanbury 1822.

4 Parkinson 2008, 11.

5 The fact that this was the year of Barnard Hanbury's death may be coincidental, but it is interesting that the granite sarcophagus just mentioned was presented to the Fitzwilliam Museum two years later, suggesting that the years immediately after his death were a time when Waddington was disposing of at least part of their jointly formed Egyptian collection.

6 Seeber 1976, 214.



Fig. 1. Mummy board of Nespawersheft, front (© Fitzwillian Museum, Cambridge).



Fig. 2. Mummy board of Nespawersheft, reverse (© Fitzwillian Museum, Cambridge).

Martin Leake, Esq.⁷ Although Leake left a number of objects to the University of Cambridge, which are now in the museum, there is no record of any association between Yorke and Leake and this coffin set in the museum's records, and one is forced to conclude that this is an error on Budge's part.

The coffins are included in the museum's introductory guide to its Egyptian collection, where there is also a photograph of a single vignette.⁸ They are also listed in Niwiński's publication of 21st Dynasty coffins, where they are again ascribed to Yorke and Leake.⁹ Apart from these few references, the coffins remain unpublished and hence are not well known at present. However, the museum has a long-standing commitment to publish them as part of the catalogue of its coffins, currently in preparation.


Niwiński has categorised the coffin elements as follows:

- Outer coffin lid IV-a
- Inner coffin lid II-a
- Mummy board II-c

The state of preservation of the coffins is very good, with the best-preserved element being the mummy board. The least well-preserved element is the outer coffin, which

seems to have suffered some wear and tear, and this suggests that the coffin set had been kept assembled until their acquisition by Hanbury and Waddington. Discolouration on the upper edge of the foot board of the outer coffin is caused by an accumulation of grease and there is a great deal of scuffing on the edge of the coffin in the region of the legs. A possible explanation for these features may be that the assembled coffins had been used as a bench, with the foot board of the outer coffin acting as an armrest.

When the coffins arrived at the museum, no mummy was inside. Indeed, as is so often the case, we know nothing of the fate of body of their owner but we should always be mindful of the fact that these objects, with all their symbolism, technological interest, and so on, were made for and commissioned by people. In keeping with this, I propose to concentrate on the identity of the owner in this paper.

The coffins are inscribed with the name Nespawersheft . The name is noted by Lieblein and Ranke, but is not recorded by either on any other monument.¹⁰ Lieblein notes, correctly, that another name is also recorded on the coffins. Although the name found most frequently is Nespawersheft, the name Nesamun also appears, with what appears at first glance to be a third possible name Nesamunemhetep, although an example of Nesamun written with the additions *m3^c hrw m htp* indicate that *m htp* is an epithet.

⁷ Budge 1893, 7.

⁸ Vassilika 1995, 90-91, no. 41.

⁹ Niwiński 1988, 133-134, no. 156.

¹⁰ Lieblein 1871, 432, no. 1354; Lieblein 1892, 888, no. 2371; Ranke 1952, 295, no. 8.

The distribution of the names is given in the following table.

	Nespawershefyt	Nesamun
Outer coffin lid	1	1
Outer coffin box	10 certain, 1 likely	3
Inner coffin lid	17 certain, 1 likely	0
Inner coffin box	18	3
Mummy board	2	8

The name Nespawershefyt clearly predominates on the coffins overall, occurring at least 48 times, while the name Nesamun occurs only 13 times and so I am inclined to see Nesamun as simply an alternative, shorter name, especially given the fact that *wr šfyt* is a well-known epithet of Amun.¹¹ It is noticeable that the name Nesamun is more prevalent on the mummy board, in places where space is particularly constricted. The name Nesamun is, however, also used on the inner and outer coffin bases and notably where space is not so constrained, while the full name Nespawershefyt is often squeezed into very restricted areas of the lids and the mummy board. This implies (a) that Nesamun was a well-established short form of Nespawershefyt's name and (b) that the scribe who laid out the texts on the coffin bases was not the same as the person who performed that function on the lids and the mummy board.

Nespawershefyt held the following titles, with their variant forms, which firmly associate him with the cult of Amun in the temple at Karnak:

<i>wꜥb</i>	<i>wꜥb</i> -priest
<i>wꜥb n 'Imn</i>	<i>wꜥb</i> -priest of Amun
<i>it ntr</i>	God's Father
<i>it ntr n 'Imn</i>	God's Father of Amun
<i>it ntr n 'Imn-Rꜥ nsw ntrw</i>	God's Father of Amun-Re King of the Gods
<i>hry hmt</i>	Supervisor of Craftsmen's Workshops
<i>hry hmt m ipt swt</i>	Supervisor of Craftsmen's Workshops in Karnak
<i>hry sšw n pr 'Imn</i>	Supervisor of Scribes of the House of Amun
<i>hry sšw hwt ntr n pr 'Imn</i>	Supervisor of Temple Scribes of the House of Amun
<i>hry sšw hwt ntr n 'Imn-Rꜥ nsw ntrw</i>	Supervisor of Temple Scribes of the House of Amun-Re King of the Gods
<i>ꜥ3 n mw n pr 'Imn</i>	Great One of the Water of the House of Amun

The frequency with which Nespawershefyt's name and titles is repeated on the coffins reflects the importance attached, at this time in particular, to an association with the temple of Amun, which had become the dominating force in the Theban area towards the end of the preceding dynasty. By

¹¹ Leitz 2002, 462.

far the most prevalent is *it ntr* and its variants *it ntr n 'Imn* (*-R^c nsw ntrw*), which occurs more than four times more frequently than *hry sšw* and its variants (see table below). It is also the only title that appears on every part of the coffin set.

	Inner coffin		Outer coffin		Mummy board	Totals
	Box	Lid	Box	Lid		
<i>w^cb</i>	2	1 + 1?			2	5 (or 6)
<i>w^cb n 'Imn</i>	1					1
<i>it ntr</i>	3	4				7
<i>it ntr n 'Imn</i>	6	10	3 + 1?		4	23 (or 24)
<i>it ntr n imn-R^c nsw ntrw</i>	10		5	1		16
<i>hry hmt</i>	1	1	1		2	5
<i>hry hmt m ipt swt</i>	1					1
<i>hry sšw n pr 'Imn</i>		1 + 1?	1			2 (or 3)
<i>hry sšw hwt ntr n pr 'Imn</i>	2	1 + 1?	1		2	6 (or 7)
<i>hry sšw hwt ntr n 'Imn-R^c nsw ntrw</i>	1					1
<i>ʕ3 n mw n pr 'Imn</i>			2	1		3

In 2005, as part of the project to re-display the Egyptian collection at the museum, the coffins were taken off display for the first time for many years. This allowed them to be carefully examined, conserved and photographed for publication, including X-Radiography of each individual element, permitting detailed examination of the construction methods and analysis of the wood, pigments and surface treatments.¹² The results of all this work will be included in the forthcoming publication of the museum's coffins, but so far sampling of the wood has revealed that the main elements are principally made of *Ziziphus spina-christi* (commonly known as Christ's Thorn or sidder) and *Ficus sycomorus* (sycomore fig), both of which occur naturally in Egypt.

A striking feature of the decoration of the coffins is the bright varnish, which is particularly noticeable on the inner coffin and mummy board. In the course of these studies, it was noticed



Fig. 3. Part of the base of the inner coffin, with darker varnished area in the horizontal text panel (© Fitzwillian Museum, Cambridge).

¹² Conservation and analyses were carried out at the Fitzwillian Museum by Julie Dawson, Trevor Emmett, Abigail Granville, Jennifer Marchant, and Lucy Skinner, with further analyses undertaken by Caroline Cartwright and Rebecca Stacey at the British Museum. This paper relies in no small measure on the results of the work they have carried out.



Fig. 4. Amended text on the interior of the outer coffin (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Fig. 5. The title ꜥ n mw n pr 'Imn before Nespawershefynt's name in the horizontal band at the top of the coffin base (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

that there are several places where the text has been varnished twice, causing these areas to appear much darker. This can be seen most strikingly on the mummy board and the foot end of the inner coffin base (Fig. 3), but it actually occurs in many areas of the coffin decoration. Closer examination reveals that in each case this darkening effect is found where Nespawershefynt's titles are written. This is not restricted to the outer surfaces of the coffin and so does not represent a modification after the body was already inside the coffins; indeed it also occurs on the inside of the box of the outer

coffin, showing that the change was made before the coffin set was finally assembled for burial.

In most places the extra varnish is extremely thick, but in a few instances one can see through it to an earlier inscription underneath. One of the clearest examples of this is to be seen on the inside of the outer coffin box (Fig. 4). The title in this area currently reads *hry sšw hwt ntr n pr 'Imn*, with *n pr 'Imn* section having remained unchanged. Here it is possible to see that there were originally a number of parallel horizontal lines under the *hwt ntr* portion of the inscription. Searching the other titles on the coffins, one finds there are two other instances of a similar group of horizontal parallel signs, at either side of the head end of the outer coffin box; in both cases, the title preceding Nespawershefynt's name is *ꜥ n mw n pr 'Imn* (Fig. 5). The title is written with five parallel wavy signs, four of which precede *n pr 'Imn*. It appears, then, that the text on the interior of the coffin box originally read *ꜥ n mw n pr 'Imn* and, in fact, close examination reveals the end of the *ꜥ* sign¹³ protruding from under the *hry*.¹⁴ Thus *hry sšw hwt ntr* has been written over the original *ꜥ n mw* with the following *n pr 'Imn* of the original text unchanged.

In other areas, it is possible to deduce how the writing of Nespawershefynt's titles has been modified, for example on the mummy board. In this case, the vertical bands of text on the centre of the board both are inscribed with approximately the same text, which in its modified form reads *it*

¹³ Gardiner 1957, sign list O29.

¹⁴ Gardiner 1957, sign list N1.



Fig. 6. Area of amended text from the central band of the mummy board: (a) Text as it appears today, (b) with original inscription superimposed (© Fitzwillian Museum, Cambridge).



Fig. 7. (a) Amended text from the base of the outer coffin as it appears in normal light; (b) The same area with the positions of the *nsw* and *ntr* signs marked; (c) The same area photographed using Visible-light Induced Luminescence imaging (© Fitzwillian Museum, Cambridge).

ntr n 'Imn w^cb hry hmt hry sšw hwt ntr n pr 'Imn (Fig. 6a).¹⁵ Close study of the inscription reveals that original titles in this area were *it ntr n 'Imn-R^c nsw ntrw ʕ n mw n pr 'Imn* (Fig. 6b), with the *w^cb* sign having been written over the Re of Amun-Re. Traces of *nsw ntrw* are visible below this in the left hand column, while part of the book-roll determinative¹⁶ in the word ʕ can clearly be seen in both columns at the bottom of the new *sšw*. Again in this inscription, *n pr 'Imn* has been preserved from the original inscription to complete the new title *hry sšw n pr 'Imn*.

The same repeated pattern of horizontal parallel lines from the title *ʕ n mw n pr 'Imn* can be discerned in another area of text from the outer coffin box (Fig. 7a), where the new inscription has been damaged and the resulting appearance is rather hard to decipher. It is apparent that the modification in this area is similar to that on the mummy board, with *w^cb hry hmt hry sšw hwt ntr* replacing (*Imn*)-*R^c nsw ntrw ʕ n mw*. The traces of *nsw ntrw* are very clear in the photograph taken with visible light (Fig. 7b), while the new inscription is equally clear in the photograph taken using Visible-light Induced Luminescence (VIL) imagery (Fig. 7c).¹⁷ Incidentally the latter shows apparent smudging of the Egyptian Blue pigment during application of the new varnish, indicating that new inscription was not allowed to dry sufficiently before varnishing took place.

A further example of modification of Nespawershefy's titles, although small, is highly significant (Fig. 8). It is also to be found on the outer coffin, at the foot end on the proper right side. As in the case of the previous example, the varnished surface has suffered some damage and both the original and the new inscription are visible, creating a slightly confusing picture at first sight. The original hieroglyphs preceding Nespawershefy's name apparently read *wsir it ntr n 'Imn-R^c nsw ntrw*, and were later modified to read *hry sšw it ntr n 'Imn-R^c nsw ntrw* or perhaps more likely (given that there are traces of varnish in the area of the words *it ntr*) *hry sšw hwt ntr n 'Imn-R^c nsw ntrw*. This indicates (a) the clear significance of the title *hry sšw*, which had to be included, while *hry hmt* was apparently only of secondary importance and could be omitted where space was insufficient for inclusion of both titles; and (b) that at this period it was more important to be shown to be connected to the temple

¹⁵ The *hry* of *hry hmt* is omitted in the right-hand version of this text.

¹⁶ Gardiner 1957, sign list Y1.

¹⁷ This technique exploits the fact that, when Egyptian Blue is illuminated by a light source visible to the human eye, it produces an intense fluorescence in the IR region (around 800-1000nm), see Verri 2009. Although the latter is outside the range of human eyesight, it can be recorded with a digital camera adapted to be sensitive to the emission, where it appears bright white on the image.



Fig. 8. Area of amended text with damaged varnish from the base of the outer coffin, showing the word 'Osiris' below a *ss* symbol (© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

of Amun-Re King of the Gods than to be linked to the god Osiris, whose name could be written over with impunity. This may have been simply a personal preference of the person or people who commissioned the changes to be made but is more probably a reflection of the importance of the cult of Amun during the 21st Dynasty referred to above.

While it is by now well established that at this period earlier coffins might be adapted for reuse,¹⁸ there is no evidence that these coffins have been modified in any way other than changes to Nespawershefyt's titles and, although the name Nesamun also occurs on this coffin, it is clear that this is not indicative of the coffin having been adapted for another person's use. Changes of title might reflect a mistake that needed to be rectified after the coffins had been completed or they could suggest a promotion. In either case, it is surely clear that the person commissioning the changes was able to read hieroglyphic writing or knew someone else who could do so. As a supervisor of temple scribes and craftsmen in the Karnak workshop, Nespawershefyt himself is likely to have been just such a person. In that position, one might surmise that would have been involved in the layout of the texts on his coffins.

It is clear that the title *ʿ3 n mw n pr ʿImn* 'Great One of the Water of the House of Amun' was less important than *hry sšw hwt ntr n pr ʿImn(-Rʿ nsw ntrw)* and *hry hmt (m ipt swt)*, since there are only two examples where it has not been amended. It is unlikely, therefore, that Nespawershefyt would have commissioned his coffins to be inscribed with this more lowly title unless it was the principal one he held at the time; if he had held the higher, supervisory offices, he would surely have had the coffins inscribed with those titles at the outset. One conclusion, therefore, is that, having reached the rank of 'Great One of the Water of the House of Amun', he thought this was likely to be the pinnacle of his career and that, with sufficient means to buy a high quality coffin ensemble, it was time to prepare for

¹⁸ Niwiński 1988, 57; Cooney 2012a, 142–143.

his burial.¹⁹ In other words, he was well organised and planned ahead. In our modern world, he would be seen as a good candidate for promotion to a more senior managerial role, and this is perhaps what happened after the decoration of his coffin set was completed. Having been promoted, it is unclear whether he would have had the coffins re-inscribed prior to his death or whether his family would have been left to deal with this. There is, however, another explanation, which seems rather improbable: I have been unable to find another example of the title *ḥ3 n mw n pr Imn*, and it is therefore a remote possibility that for some unknown reason at a certain date all examples of this title were expunged and replaced with other titles and that the evidence for this has yet to be uncovered.

If indeed Nespawershefyt was the highly organised person one envisages, it is intriguing to think about where his coffin set would have been stored prior to his death. Was there a storehouse/storehouses for coffins waiting for their owners to die and, indeed, if one lived and worked on the East Bank at Luxor, did one have to cross the river to find a 'coffin shop' or were all the coffin suppliers on the West Bank? Having secured one's burial assemblage, did one keep it at home? These questions cannot be answered here, but may provide a rich source of study in the future.

Nespawershefyt's work at Karnak would have placed his sphere of operations close to storage facilities, and scribal and craftsmen's workshops, in the area being investigated by the Centre Franco-Égyptien d'Étude des Temples de Karnak.²⁰ In a currently unpublished paper given at the University of Cambridge in February 2013, entitled *On the banks of the sacred lake: Daily life of the priests and craftsmen working in the temple of Amun in Karnak*, Aurelia Masson presented the results of recent excavations in the area to the East and South of the Sacred Lake, near the remains of workshop and storage facilities. She described evidence of scribal and craft activity, which had been found within the remains of structures close to the houses used by temple priests, some of which could be dated back to the early Third Intermediate Period. This is highly suggestive of the type of area where Nespawershefyt would have worked. Could the priestly quarters in this area also have been where he lived when he was on duty at the temple? It is very tempting to think that the 'Water of the House of Amun' refers to the Sacred Lake at Karnak but, like the other questions above, it remains speculation at present.

¹⁹ An analogous situation can be observed in the Old Kingdom, when officials had to decide the point at which they should begin to have their tombs inscribed, see Strudwick 1985, 8.

²⁰ See for example the reports of Millet 2007 and Masson 2007.

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