

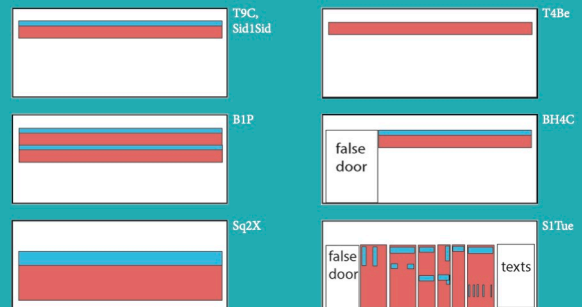
# Frieze Inscriptions

– only text describing objects or something more complex?

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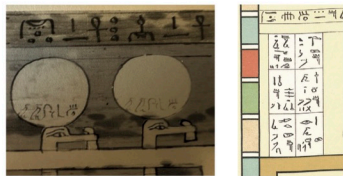
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Object friezes are an essential part of coffin decoration, particularly during the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom. These figurative elements serve not only a decorative purpose but also represent an accumulation of objects which should be available for the deceased in the afterlife. The depicted objects can be identified as utensils used for cultic acts during the funerary ritual, some of them are also attested archaeologically. The objects do not appear in pictorial form only, but they often have accompanying inscriptions to name or specify their type, or to mention their material or their amount. These “frieze inscriptions” vary in content and placement in relation to the depicted objects. The layout, e.g. the arrangement of depiction and text, can also differ considerably.



Examples of different layouts on back and front sides of coffins

## Material



Left: coffin T9C, detail (photo by the University of Chicago in the archives of the Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden); right: coffin Sid1Sid, detail (after Petrie, Sedment I, pl. XVIII)

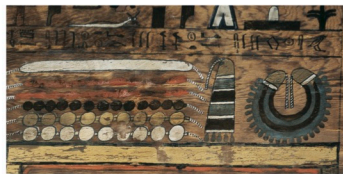
by black lines into four separate fields containing inscriptions that allow the contents to be identified as different types of fabric/cloth:

*p3k.t* 'fine linen', *h3d.t* 'white (cloth)', *3sr* 'a kind of linen', *nfr.w* 'good cloth'. Similar inscriptions are attested on other coffins, too, like the one of Khenty-Khety (Sid1Sid).

On the coffin of Mentuhotep/Buau (T9C), the objects depicted are specified in terms of their materials. After naming the object itself, the materials from which the object should be made are mentioned. It is noticeable that many of the objects are made of at least two different (valuable) materials: *'nh n(y) h3d 'nh n(y) nbw ...* 'silver 'nh-mirror, gold 'nh-mirror, ...

A very clear specification is found on the last object of the frieze, a box designed as a simple white rectangle. It is divided

## Quantity



Coffin Sq2X, detail (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, ÆIN 1615; photo Ole Hammar)

As on the inner coffin of Gemniemhat (Sq2X), the objects can be specified in terms of their quantity. Here, for example, 20,010 vessels are mentioned in the case of the *nw* vessels on the south side, and 323 for the *menites* on the west side. Numbers given per object vary and are not standardized in any way.

## Personalization



Left: coffin T4Be (AEM 01154; © SPK-SMB, ÄM 1154; Foto: S. Steiß); right: coffin T9C (photo by the University of Chicago in the archives of the Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden)

owner, and are not altered for the new user. Such personalizations of objects are also attested in tomb decoration (e.g. Beni Hasan, Tomb 2) and on archaeological objects (e.g. on mirrors).

The coffin T4Be bears the inscription *jm3h.w 'Inj-jit-f* 'the revered one, Intef' on a mirror located on its west side. The same kind of inscription, *jm3h Bw3w*, appears on several objects depicted in the frieze of T9C (e.g. on *hs.t*-flasks or mirrors). Such inscriptions personalize the objects by mentioning the name and, in some cases, the titles of the owner of the coffin, linking them specifically to the individual. In cases of secondarily used coffins, these objects often retain the original inscription with the name of the first coffin

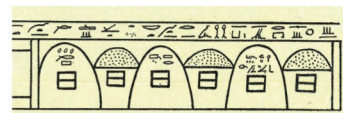
## Titles of spells



Coffin T9C, detail of the object frieze on the north side with the cursive inscriptions (photo by the University of Chicago in the archives of the Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden)

On coffin T9C are inscriptions below the tables of the object frieze that cite the titles of two pyramid spells, thus linking the objects on the tables (containers for oil; incense) with ritual acts: *r3.w n.w m3h.t n 3h m hr.t-ntr* 'Utterances of anointing for an 3h in the necropolis' *r3.w n.w 3ntr n hr.t-ntr* 'Utterances for incense of the necropolis' They mention central objects that are found in pictorial form on the tables above. The inscriptions create a direct link between the image (on the tables) and the text (in the text columns below) describing rituals connected to the depicted (and mentioned) objects. The central ritual utensils are thus repeated in various manifestations. They are attested also on wall decoration, e.g. in Harageh, where the wall decoration, in most parts, mirrors the coffin decoration.

## Content and amount – granaries, boxes



Coffin B1P (E 10779 A) in the Louvre (after Jéquier, MIFAO 47, 302, fig. 785, omitting the inscription in the lower part of the granaries)

On the coffin of Sepi (B1P), the granaries carry inscriptions mentioning their content, and often the amount of the commodity stored within them is noted as well. Similar labels can occur on boxes containing, e.g., incense or natron, or on bags and boxes containing different kinds of cloth.

## “Heading”



Coffin Sid1Sid (after Petrie, Sedment I, pl. XVIII)

recognizable by black dividing lines, partly by clear spaces between words. The inscriptions identify and specify the depicted objects of the frieze below.

The unique beginning of the frieze inscription on the coffin of Khenty-Khety (Sid1Sid) characterizes all the objects mentioned below as elements of a “document, being a *db3w.t* of the necropolis” (Willems 1988). The following inscriptions are located exactly above the respective objects whereby the assignment to the individual objects is partly

## Summary

- **Most common inscription:** identification or specification of the depicted objects and the material they are made of
- **Placement:** in a line above or around the objects; in rare cases on the objects themselves
- **Quantity:** varies, numbers can range between very low and hundreds of thousands
- **Heading:** only attested once

- **Personalization:** only few attestations; supra-regional phenomenon that is also attested in tomb decoration and on archaeological objects
- **Utterances or titles of spells:** rarely attested, link objects with texts; belong to the group of inscriptions with very individual characteristics
- **Content and amount:** granaries and boxes can be inscribed with their content and also the quantity stored therein which are both not visible to the viewer