

Analysis of a Faience Enema Found in the Assasif Tomb No. -28- of the Vizier Amenhotep Huy: Contributions to the Study of the Mummification Ritual Practiced in the Theban Necropolis

Alberto Abello Moreno-Cid

Abstract—Mummification was the process through which immortality was granted to the deceased, so it was of extreme importance to the Egyptians. The techniques of embalming had evolved over the centuries, and specialists created increasingly sophisticated tools. However, due to its eminently religious nature, knowledge about everything related to this practice was jealously preserved, and the testimonies that have survived to our time are scarce. For this reason, embalming instruments found in archaeological excavations are uncommon. The tomb of the Vizier Amenhotep Huy (AT No. -28-), located in the el-Assasif necropolis that is being excavated since 2009 by the team of the Institute of Ancient Egyptian Studies, has been the scene of some discoveries of this type that evidences the existence of mummification practices in this place after the New Kingdom. The clysters or enemas are the fundamental tools in the second type of mummification described by the historian Herodotus to introduce caustic solutions inside the body of the deceased. Nevertheless, such objects only have been found in three locations: the tomb of Ankh-Hor in Luxor, where a copper enema belonged to the prophet of Ammon Uah-ib-Ra came to light; the excavation of the tomb of Menekh-ib-Nekau in Abusir, where was also found one made of copper; and the excavations in the Bucheum, where two more artifacts were discovered, also made of copper but in different shapes and sizes. Both of them were used for the mummification of sacred animals and this is the reason they vary significantly. Therefore, the object found in the tomb No. -28-, is the first known made of faience of all these peculiar tools and the oldest known until now, dated in the Third Intermediate Period (circa 1070-650 B.C.). This paper bases its investigation on the study of those parallels, the material, the current archaeological context and the full analysis and reconstruction of the object in question. The key point is the use of faience in the production of this item: creating a device intended to be in constant use seems to be a first illogical compared to other samples made of copper. Faience around the area of Deir el-Bahari had a strong religious component, associated with solar myths and principles of the resurrection, connected to the Osirian that characterises the mummification procedure. The study allows to refute some of the premises which are held unalterable in Egyptology, verifying the utilization of these sort of pieces, understanding its way of use and showing that this type of mummification was also applied to the highest social stratum, in which case the tools were thought out of an exceptional quality and religious symbolism.

Keywords—Clyster, el-Assasif, embalming, faience enema, mummification, Theban necropolis.

Alberto Abello Moreno-Cid is with the History and Archaeology Department, Complutense University of Madrid, 28040, Madrid, Spain; Institute of Ancient Egyptian Studies, Madrid, Spain and Project Vizier Amenhotep Huy, Luxor, Egypt (e-mail: ad.abello@ucm.es).

I. INTRODUCTION

ON the western bank of the Nile River in Luxor, in the area called el-Assasif, near the temple of Queen Hatshepsut of Deir el-Bahari, is the tomb of the Vizier Amenhotep Huy. This burial, the largest of this period in the Theban necropolis, is being excavated uninterrupted since 2009 by the Institute of Ancient Egyptian Studies, under the direction of Dr. Francisco Martín Valentín and Mrs. Teresa Bedman.

The tomb was built for Amenhotep, called Huy, who exercised the role of South Vizier in the last years of the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep III and the beginning of the coregency with Pharaoh Amenhotep IV, later known as Akhenaten. It has been dated between 1358-1353 BC [1]. Its structure, composed of a large chapel and an outer courtyard, was constantly reused in later times to the Vizier Amenhotep Huy [2], covering a chronology from the Third Intermediate Period (1069-664 BC) to the Roman period (30 BC-395 AD).

The mummification had an eminently sacred character for the Egyptians, who saw in the preservation of the body an essential practice for the afterlife. As such, his knowledge and materials were jealously preserved. For this reason, the remains that have come to us from the structures where the deceased were embalmed and the instruments dedicated to this work are very scarce. However, the tomb of the Vizier Amenhotep Huy has been the scene of some findings of this type that attest to the existence of mummification practices in its enclosure in the aftermath of the New Kingdom [3].

This study focuses on the in-depth analysis of one of these instruments, a faience enema found in a fragmentary state. This analysis is an attempt to clarify aspects of the mummification process that are currently being questioned by Egyptology; for example, the use of this type of instrument, the materials used for its construction and its use by certain social strata.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Review Stage

This research has initially focused on the study of known precedents. Several clysters or mummification enemas have been found in other archaeological excavations, although they are very rare findings. There are only a few publications referring to four of these instruments; two of them were found in the excavations in the Bucheum in Armant [4], [5], another

one in the excavations of the tomb TT 414 of Ankh-Hor in the shaft of Wahibre in Thebes (Luxor) that was published in 1982 [6], and finally the last one that was found in the tomb of Menekh-ib-nekau in Abusir, published in 2006 [7]. Since they are the only specimens known up to now, their analysis has been fundamental when facing the study of the piece found in the Tomb AT -28-.

The second fundamental task has been to establish hypotheses about the use of the faience for its construction, for which the works of Lucas [8] and Bedman [9] have been used, where the peculiarities of this material are detailed.



Fig. 1 Faience enema of the Tomb AT -28- (Photograph: Teresa Bedman)

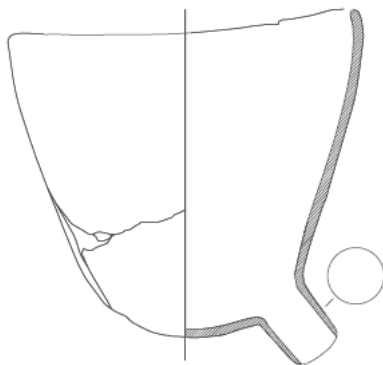


Fig. 2 Drawing showing the section of the faience enema of the tomb AT -28- (Image: Alberto Abello)

The research carried out by Janot [5], [10] in which made a reproduction of the embalming instruments belonging to Uah-ib-Ra for later testing in the actual mummification of a human being, has been of the uttermost importance for a complete understanding of the use of this tool. His results help to a great extent to understand the characteristics of the finding and have allowed contrasting the results with the chronicles contributed by the historian Herodotus [11]. The aforementioned

bibliography will be used to establish appropriate conclusions.

III. RESULTS

The artifact No. 10339 was found in a fragmentary state in the southwestern area of the courtyard (square F5) of the tomb of the Vizier Amen-Hotep Huy on November 5, 2016, at an altitude of 1.145 m. Due to its precarious state of conservation, it was necessary the intervention of the restoration department to observe this instrument in its entirety (Fig. 1).

The enema consists of the main body intended to house the liquid and which opens into its lower part in a small inclined duct that would allow its use in mummification tasks. It has a height of 15.62 cm, width of 13.51 cm and depth of 15.33 cm. The material in which it is made is faience (Fig. 2).

IV. DISCUSSION

The Greek historian Herodotus describes in the second book of his stories the three mummification processes that, according to him, were carried out by the embalmers of Ancient Egypt. His explanation in regards to the second method is as follows: "[...] For those who desire the middle way and wish to avoid great cost they prepare the corpse as follows: having filled their syringes with the oil which is got from cedar-wood, with this they forthwith fill the belly of the corpse, and this they do without having either cut it open or taken out the bowels, but they inject the oil by the breech, and having stopped the drench from returning back they keep it then the appointed number of days for embalming, and on the last of the days they let the cedar oil come out from the belly, which they before put in; and it has such power that it brings out with it the bowels and interior organs of the body dissolved; and the natron dissolves the flesh, so that there is left of the corpse only the skin and the bones. When they have done this they give back the corpse at once in that condition without working upon it anymore." [11]. In this method of mummification, the traditional incision of evisceration is not produced on the left side of the abdomen of the body of the deceased, but, as Herodotus explains, certain liquids are introduced into the abdomen through the anus for the dissolution of the viscera. This archaeological artifact proves the existence of the aforementioned technique. One of the examples is the individual 202-M, found in the Tomb AT -28-, which has no wound of evisceration and presents remains of the organs in the thoracic-abdominal cavity [3]. Even so, the chronicle of the fifth century BC historian presented a series of problems: Firstly, it is difficult to understand that a process like this, used for centuries, has not left any archaeological remains of the "syringes" used to introduce the products in the body of the deceased. In addition, Herodotus specifies that this is a less expensive process, which does not agree with the discoveries of mummies of this type in areas such as the Valley of the Nobles in el-Assasif, of great religious symbolism and accessible only to the highest social strata.

Mummification was an eminently religious process, and as such their knowledge was kept hidden for millennia, so Egyptology has needed to make arduous investigations to

unravel some of them. The instruments used for these practices had obvious importance considering that it was a sacred process that manipulated the bodies of the deceased, and they were jealously preserved by the Egyptians, so today these remains are strikingly less frequent than other objects of funerary use.

Analyzing the aforementioned cases of mummification enemas, it should be noted that the material chosen for its manufacture was copper [5]-[7]. In the case of the two that were found in the Bucheum, its large size and double border stand out, as well as the greater extension of the conduit through which the liquids came out of the container [5]. This is undoubted because the Bucheum was the necropolis of the mummified bulls Buchis (in Egyptian bakh, ba-ah or bakhu) at least since the time of Nectanebo II (c 360 BC) [12]. Given its larger size and its different morphology, it is clear that these were enemas dedicated to the mummification of these sacred animals. Therefore, only two of those found to date would be destined for mummification in humans. Regarding chronology, it is noteworthy that both enemas date from the later periods of the history of Ancient Egypt: The first one, that was found in Thebes in the tomb of Ankh-Hor dates from the XXX Dynasty [6], circa 380-343 BC, and the other one comes from the tomb of Menekh-ib-nekau in Abusir, dated in Saite-Persian Period [7], circa 664-525 BC.

In this research, the clyster belonging to the prophet of Amen Uah-ib-Ra (Fig. 3) has been used as main reference, due both to the parallelism and the extensive documentation, as well as the aforementioned copper reproduction of this object made by Janot [10].



Fig. 3 Copper enema of Uah-ib-Ra [5]

The operation of this tool is simple: the clyster would be placed in a vertical position with the duct inserted in the rectum of the deceased, and the caustic liquid would be poured into the container. In order for the liquid to come out with sufficient pressure to reach the thoracic-abdominal cavity, a skin or an animal bladder would be placed on the outer rim and the liquid would be pressed, effectively acting as the plunger of a syringe. The double flange of the two enemas found in the Bucheum would have this function [5]. Therefore, these objects could be the famous primitive "syringes" Herodotus speaks.

As for the material used, the preceding models have something in common: they are made of copper. The artifact

in which this research focuses is made of faience (Fig. 4). The faience is "glazed quart frit ware" [8], and although it may be of several colors, it is blue faience. The components of it were quartz powder, an alkali such as natrum, lime, and copper oxide [9].

It is necessary to consider the reason for the use of faience, especially for an instrument that is intended to be used repeatedly, and could possibly fracture with each use, when a more tough material was used to make the copper enemas.

The faience also had for the Egyptians, as usual, a religious symbolism: blue symbolized life and vigor, and the promise of regeneration and rebirth, related to the cult of solar-type [9]. All this was closely related to the Osirian cults that focused mummification, based on the resurrection and that emulated the first mythological mummification practiced to Osiris.



Fig. 4 The faience enema of the Tomb AT -28- (Photograph Teresa Bedman)

V. CONCLUSION

Taking into account the area of the courtyard and the height at which the piece was found, the morphological characteristics of the faience and then the specific context in which it was discovered, it can be inferred that the enema dates from the Third Intermediate Period of the history of Egypt (1070-712 BC), being the oldest known piece of this type to date.

In relation to the characteristics mentioned for the known parallelisms, it should be noted that this clyster does not have the characteristic ridge on the upper part and the shape is much more irregular. The operation would be identical and would fulfill the same function.

The fact that the faience enema is made from a less sustainable material makes it stand out from the previously discovered mummification tools, as they were made using copper and other metals. Metal is a much more practical, tough and therefore logical, construction material if the tools are to be used repeatedly by embalmers. It is obvious therefore that this material fulfilled a ritual and symbolic function, and allows the establishment of the hypothesis that it was manufactured for use in a single person, and was destroyed or buried after use.

Finally, the tomb of the Vizier Amenhotep Huy, in the Valley of the Nobles, was reused in countless times, but with a

common factor: it was the necropolis of a high social stratum. This finding would question the assertion to date that this process was reserved for the poorest or disadvantaged social strata. It also allows confirming the existence of this type of practice and deepening knowledge of mummification methods, adding a novel instrument to the small number of them that we have.

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Alberto Abello Moreno-Cid is a Ph.D. candidate in History and Archeology from the Complutense University of Madrid. He is a member of the Institute of Ancient Egyptian Studies and the Vizier Amenhotep Huy Project since 2014, the project Entorno Jamila since 2016 and the International Association of Egyptologists since 2017.

He has participated in the archaeological excavations in the tomb of the Vizier Amenhotep Huy in Luxor during 5 campaigns, in charge of the study and the documentation of the mummies of the site, and studies related to Physical Anthropology. He has participated as a Physical Anthropologist in the laboratory of Entorno Jamila project at the Complutense University of Madrid since 2016. Alberto Abello has served as professor for various institutions such as the Menéndez Pelayo International University, the University of Málaga and the Museum of Pontevedra.