

Canaanites employed at both sites seem to have been inspired by the cultic activities there. Canaanite tombs of this period include a large number of Egyptian scarabs bearing images and names of gods, but there is no evidence for the actual worship of these gods by Canaanites, nor is there clear evidence for the existence in Canaan of temples dedicated to Egyptian gods. Rather, the evidence suggests that, as in the Hyksos Period (but on an even larger scale), the Canaanites incorporated Egyptian prestige symbols into their cultural sphere but did not adopt Egyptian religious beliefs.

References:

Albright 1941; Cornelius 1994; Cornelius 2004; Dothan 1979; Dothan 2008; Oren 1973; Tazawa 2009.

Anthropoid Coffins / Eran Arie

The discovery of anthropoid pottery coffins in excavations throughout the country has generated a great deal of scholarly attention. The coffins, cylindrical and life-size and larger, were produced using the coiling technique. Their upper parts are fitted with a lid exhibiting a human face and arms in a variety of styles. The lid was cut from the coffin before it had completely dried, and thus it fit the coffin perfectly. Through the opening that was created, the body of the deceased, along with funerary gifts, was inserted. Some of the lids and coffins still bear traces of paint: the faces were painted white, the lips or cheeks red, and the eyes black or yellow. Each of the differently designed lids exhibits at least a few of the following features: a wig, a lotus flower on the forehead, eyes, eyebrows, a nose, a mouth, a chin, an “Osiris” beard, cheeks, ears, arms, and hands. These details were achieved by the application of additional lumps of clay to the smooth lid or by engraving. A protrusion at the lower part of the coffin usually represents feet; it is reasonable to assume that this also made it possible to stand the coffin upright during production. In rare case, realistic feet are depicted.

To date, 130 complete and fragmentary anthropoid coffins have been found within the borders of Canaan: In official excavations at Deir el-Balah (south of Gaza), only four tombs containing such coffins were unearthed (Tombs 114, 118, 119, 301). Besides these, 33 coffins (with their lids) and an additional

11 lids in the Israel Museum Collection (most originally in the Dayan Collection and presumably from Deir el-Balah) have been published (fig. 20). A coffin in the collection of the Hecht Museum, Haifa, and lids in the Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem, all probably originating in Deir el-Balah, are still unpublished. In addition, an anthropoid coffin made from chalk was found in the course of salvage excavations at the site (Tomb 111), the only stone anthropoid coffin to have come to light in the country thus far. Unfortunately, robbers had already destroyed its lid where the face had been in order to reach the treasures inside (and the coffin itself was robbed at a subsequent date). Finally, in the Egyptian fortress excavated at Deir el-Balah, northeast of the cemetery, twenty additional fragments of coffins were found. Tests performed on the coffins from Deir el-Balah revealed that some had been discovered near the kilns in which they had been produced. Thus to date, the number of coffins and lids (including fragmentary ones) from Deir el-Balah stands at around 75. Two additional complete lids are known from Lachish (Tomb 570), also in the southern part of the country. Besides this, it was recently established that one of the published fragments from Lachish was actually three fragments from three separate coffins. At Tell el-Farah (South), two complete coffins were excavated (Tombs 552 and 562) as well as the fragment of a third coffin (Tomb 935). It appears that these coffins were reused in a later context, since they were discovered with later pottery inside them. A concentration of anthropoid coffins was also found in the northern part of the country. At Beth Shean, the expedition from the University of Pennsylvania found evidence for some fifty coffins in the northern cemetery at the site. Two coffins were found intact along with their lids, whereas the remainder of the evidence consisted of lid fragments. The coffin fragments were discarded by the excavators, and thus it is possible that the actual number of anthropoid coffins was even greater than reported. The fragments were found in some ten rock-hewn tombs, robbed already in antiquity, alongside the remains of the original funerary gifts that had been deposited there. Finally, besides the evidence from Beth Shean proper, at Tel Midrash (Tell el-Madrassa), just south of the site, a single lid fragment was found on the surface of the tell, and recently, a complete anthropoid coffin was discovered in the course of salvage excavations conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority at Tel Shadud in the Jezreel Valley (see no. 51).

It is customary to divide the coffins into two main types: The first type includes coffins in which the head and shoulders are clearly delineated, similar to the wooden and stone coffins used for embalmed bodies that have been discovered in Egypt. The second type consists of cylindrical coffins, in which the head and shoulders are not delineated. The lids are also divided into two types: the naturalistic type, with clearly marked outlines around the face and almost sculptural facial features; and the grotesque type, without clear outlines, and in which the lid is just a background for facial features, creating an unnatural impression, almost a caricature. At Beth Shean, the naturalistic type was preferred, whereas at Deir el-Balah, most of the lids belong to the grotesque type. At any event, it appears that the images depicted on the lids symbolized the deceased, though they were not meant to be individual portraits.

In short, to date, only five coffins have been discovered in situ (four at Deir el-Balah and one at Tel Shadud). It is thus difficult to reach clear-cut conclusions regarding the customs surrounding interment in such coffins. However, it is interesting that in Tel Shadud, only a single body was placed in the coffin, while at Deir el-Balah, the coffins held more than one body each. Analysis of the bones from the Deir el-Balah coffins indicates that each held the remains of a least two adults, and usually one or two more. This is a surprising finding considering the capacity of the coffins and the relatively small size of the openings. In the case of the single coffin from Tel Shadud, the bones of cattle, sheep, pigs, and fish were also found; these animals may have been buried in the coffin along with the deceased as provisions for the afterlife.

The rich funerary gifts found in the tombs that were unearthed in official excavations support the assumption that the numerous similar items that reached the antiquities market in the late 1960s and 1970s were robbed from Deir el-Balah. The gifts included assemblages of Canaanite pottery, Egyptian-style pottery (see fig. 17), imported Egyptian pottery, and imported pottery from Cyprus and Mycenae (Greece). Luxury items such as alabaster, bronze, and glass vessels, gold and carnelian jewelry, and scarabs, amulets, and figurines were also found. Most of these objects were imported from Egypt, others were imitations produced in Canaan. Of particular interest are the local imitations of the Egyptian *Shabti* figurines, discovered

at both Beth Shean and Deir el-Balah, the role of which was to perform the *corvée* work of the deceased in the afterlife.

Who was buried in the anthropoid coffins found in Canaan? Up until a few decades ago the customary response was that these were the coffins of Philistines. This view was based on the fact that above the heads of a few of the figures modeled on the lids of the coffins there were what appeared to be feathered hats, similar to those worn by the Philistines depicted in Egyptian reliefs. By contrast, a thorough analysis of the coffins from the cemetery at Beth Shean revealed that the date of the coffins should be moved back to the thirteenth century BCE – before the arrival of the Philistines in our area. Since then, the coffins from Deir el-Balah and Tel Shadud also came to light, and today it is clear that the anthropoid coffins are to be associated with Egyptian rule in Canaan at the end of the Late Bronze Age, the thirteenth–twelfth century BCE. Burial in anthropoid coffins was a longstanding Egyptian tradition. Most of the anthropoid coffins of New Kingdom Egypt were made of wood or stone, and a great deal of effort was devoted to their design. In these coffins the body of a single individual was interred after it had been embalmed. In the Nile Delta, especially in its eastern part, and in northern Sinai, pottery anthropoid coffins were found, similar to those from Canaan. For example, at Tell el-Yahudiya and Tell Basta (Bubastis) in the eastern Delta, and at Tell el-Borg in northern Sinai, coffins very similar to the ones from Canaan, though containing embalmed bodies, came to light. The motifs appearing on the Canaanite coffins – the lotus flower, the wig, the “Osiris beard,” and the positions of the arms – are also undoubtedly of Egyptian origin. It therefore appears that the anthropoid coffins from Canaan reflect an Egyptian burial custom or the imitation of one by the Canaanite elite. Of course, not only the coffins reveal a connection to Egypt but also the rich burial gifts that were deposited in them, including a wide range of Egyptian or Egyptian-style everyday vessels and, even more importantly, objects related to Egyptian beliefs about the needs of the dead. At the same time, it is interesting that among the obvious Egyptian influences on the coffins, a lack of understanding of Egyptian phenomena on the part of those responsible for the Canaanite coffins is notable. For instance, though one of the coffins from Lachish bears an inscription in Egyptian hieroglyphs (fig. 21), attempts to read the inscription

[Fig. 20] Anthropoid coffins from Deir el-Balah. IMJ, Gift of Laurence and Wilma Tisch, New York, purchasers of the Dayan Collection



revealed that it was written by an individual who did not realize that he produced a meaningless combination of signs. Moreover, it is impossible to determine how the deceased understood the meaning of the local *Shabti* figurines that were deposited in the tombs, and whether they knew their original meaning in Egypt. The complex significance of the coffins and their accompanying burial goods only increases in the face of the results of the anthropological analysis of the bones of the deceased interred at Deir el-Balah, which revealed a similarity between the populations buried at Deir el-Balah and in Lower Egypt, in contrast to the population of Canaan during this period. However, it is important to recall that Egyptian sources indicate that burial outside the land of Egypt was viewed by the Egyptians as an abomination that must be avoided.

There is no doubt that the anthropoid coffins found in Canaan are the result of the cultural contact between Egypt and Canaan at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Nor is there any doubt regarding the high status of the interred – considering the effort required to produce such coffins and, of course, in light of the rich burial gifts they contained. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to resolve the issue of the identity of the deceased interred in these coffins. How can we determine whether they were Egyptians or Canaanites wishing to emulate Egyptian funerary customs in the spirit of the period? Perhaps a combination of both possibilities should be considered. In any event, the two concentrations of coffins, one in the vicinity of Beth Shean and the other in the vicinity of Gaza, suggest that the origin of the phenomenon lies in these centers of Egyptian rule. It is important to recall that Deir el-Balah was also an Egyptian fortress in those days, which presumably fell under the authority of the Egyptian administrative center in Gaza. Both Beth Shean and Gaza were inhabited by a large population of Egyptian officials, scribes, and military personnel, whose role was to secure Egyptian suzerainty over Canaan. It is reasonable to assume that in their deaths, these individuals preferred to be buried in accordance with the Egyptian customs and beliefs that they held throughout their lives. However, like other Egyptian phenomena that were adopted by the Canaanite population, it is also possible that burial in anthropoid coffins was adopted among the Canaanite elites toward the end of the period of Egyptian rule over the land.

References:

Dothan 1979, 98-104; Dothan 1982, 252-88; Dothan 2008, 94-116; Dothan and Nahmias-Lotan 2010; Oren 1973, 101-50; Ornan 1986, 118-23.



[Fig. 21] Lower part of an anthropoid coffin from Lachish bearing an imitation of an Egyptian inscription. IAA. 1938-767