

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

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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 parallelisms, 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

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