ETERNAL GAZE: THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD NON-ROYAL FEMALE EGYPTIAN COFFINS

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ABSTRACT

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Ancient Egypt has long fascinated the world with its art and architecture. People are most intrigued by the pyramids, tomb paintings, and mummies. The works that are usually studied came from the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms. Other than Egyptologists, most people are unaware of the time periods that fell between these great kingdoms. Early scholars named them the Intermediate Periods; they were times of de-unification between Upper and Lower Egypt, a politically chaotic state. They were thought of as times that did not produce great artworks, so until the last few decades these periods were not often studied.

This thesis uses three case studies to recreate the journey of a coffin belonging to three separate Third Intermediate Period non-royal women. The first case study covers the mummification process, the commissioning and decoration of a coffin set and the process involved in readying the coffin set for the funeral procession. The second case study analyzes the journey of the visible outer coffin during the funeral procession from the embalmment house to the tomb. The third case study continues the journey a Third Intermediate Period coffin set would experience by examining what happens with the coffin set as it lay in the tomb.

Through the lens of Gaze Theory and Object Agency Theory this thesis examines Third Intermediate Period non-royal female Egyptian coffins and explored their social origin of interchangeability (between object and subject). The Agency of these coffins supported and made possible social interactions and relationships. The Gaze of the coffins presented in this thesis was one of desire, a non-sexualized desire. It demanded complex relationships; trust that it would protect and carry the deceased into the afterlife, assurance that in could be the double of
the deceased, belief that it was a conduit between the dead and the living. These coffins helped to structure the ancient Egyptian’s perceptions; constraining or releasing ideas and emotions in ways that drew together the social, cosmic, and emotional links to the living and the dead in an ever changing relationship between past and present.
Dedicated to Shakie
heart of my heart
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INTRODUCTION

Ancient Egypt has long fascinated the world with its art and architecture. People are most intrigued by the pyramids, tomb paintings, and mummies. The works that are usually studied came from the Old\(^1\), Middle\(^2\), and New\(^3\) Kingdoms. Other than Egyptologists, most people are unaware of the time periods that fell between these great kingdoms. Early scholars named them the Intermediate Periods; they were times of de-unification between Upper and Lower Egypt, a politically chaotic state. They were thought of as times that did not produce great artworks, so until the last few decades these periods were not often studied.

This thesis examines three non-royal female coffins from the early Third Intermediate Period. This period lasted from 1100 BCE to 650 BCE, during which there were often separate ruling dynasties in Upper and Lower Egypt. The 21\(^{st}\)–25\(^{th}\) Dynasties ruled during this tumultuous period; however, this thesis only analyzes coffins from the 21\(^{st}\) and 22\(^{nd}\) Dynasties. These coffins are anthropomorphic in shape, yet they hide or efface the body — essentially becoming a face/head without a body — the body being hidden and covered with other decorative motifs. Most of the coffins I conducted primary research on were from the 21\(^{st}\) and 22\(^{nd}\) Dynasties; so I chose a cartonnage (case study one) from the 22\(^{nd}\) Dynasty and a complete three-piece coffin set (case study three) from the 21\(^{st}\) Dynasty. I also decided to investigate a two-piece coffin set (case study two) that is typical of the 22\(^{nd}\) Dynasty because its rather limited decoration on the outer coffin is a point of contrast to the more elaborately decorated 21\(^{st}\) Dynasty coffins. I chose to research these coffins because they seemed to highlight interaction

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\(^1\) The Third to Eighth Dynasties, 2649-2134 BCE (Robins, 8).
\(^2\) The Eleventh to Fourteenth Dynasty, 2040-1640 BCE (Robins, 8-9).
\(^3\) The Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties, 1550-1070 BCE (Robins, 9).
with the outside world, through the facial senses of sight, speech, etc., rather than constituting or replicating a complete bodily presence in the world.

I use these case studies to recreate the journey of a coffin belonging to three separate Third Intermediate Period non-royal women. The first case study covers the mummification process, the commissioning and decoration of a coffin set — with particular attention to the cartonnage — and the process involved in readying the coffin set for the funeral procession. The second case study picks up where case study one ends by analyzing the journey of the visible outer coffin during the funeral procession from the embalmment house to the tomb. Case study two also addresses the removal of the cartonnage case during the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, and the coffin set’s re-assemblage prior to being sealed in the tomb. The third case study continues the journey a Third Intermediate Period coffin set would experience by examining what happens with the coffin set — in this case, including a mummy board, inner, and outer wooden coffin — as it lay in the tomb.

I examine these three case studies primarily through two theoretical perspectives: Female Gaze Theory and Object Agency Theory. Gaze Theory is of particular relevance to ancient Egyptian coffins because of the complicated interplay of “seeing” and sightlines that these objects created. I argue that one way these anthropomorphic coffins took on their own agency and gaze was through the depiction of eyes on their surface, which allowed these objects to “gaze” out — perhaps meeting, and even challenging the gaze of their viewers. The resulting tension created between “subject” and “object” is further complicated by the fact that the two identities might have been interchangeable. The coffin as object could be viewed by a person as subject; yet when the coffin gazed out it became the subject. This active space of sight, as outlined by Gaze Theory, is not just a form of visual connection between subject/object, but a
complex relationship that the coffin initiated with the viewer. This intricate dynamic between Third Intermediate Period female coffins and viewers has not previously been investigated through the lens of Gaze Theory.

Object Agency Theory becomes relevant when considering that ancient Egyptians believed in the animate and agentive properties of artworks, with the result that the painting of realistic faces with eyes on coffins was not intended to be merely decorative, but rather to have a specific affect in the world and upon the viewer. Agency by nature is social and causative. Coffins can possess agency (the ability to cause people to act, react, or respond) within the social world as shown in the following three different case studies. Agency can be defined as the ability for motivated, reflexive action having some consequence, but necessarily an intended or expected outcome.4

In this thesis I argue that because of their Gaze and Agency, Third Intermediate Period non-royal female coffins were an active social actor in their place and time. They were publicly displayed in their local communities enroute to the necropolis and thus implemented functional and real-world social roles for the remaining family members and viewers, in addition to acting on behalf of the deceased in both the living and cosmic realms. It is organized into the following sections: previous scholarship, methodology and theoretical platforms, an overview of Third Intermediate Period funeral preparations, three case studies, and my concluding remarks. Throughout these sections, this thesis explores the complexities of a desirous agentic gaze and the relationships that result.

CHAPTER I. PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

Ancient Egypt has intrigued scholars for centuries, and much has been written about it. But the Third Intermediate Period (1100 BCE-650 BCE) was often overlooked by Egyptologists and historians due to its chaotic political state. Many art historians ignored it because no great monuments or art works were thought to have come out of it, and when they did write about it, it was to reiterate that the magnificent architecture and art of the preceding Ramesside Period was not equaled. It was not until about forty years ago that anyone really focused on the Third Intermediate Period. A few scholars then began to reconstruct the political history and turmoil surrounding the period, but few concentrated on the art. Not until very recently have Egyptologists, archaeologists, and art historians written on the various aspects of Third Intermediate Period art.

K. A. Kitchen (b. 1932), is Professor Emeritus of Egyptology and Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, University of Liverpool, England. He is also one of the most renowned experts on the Egyptian Third Intermediate Period, having written over 250 books and journal articles on this and other subjects since the mid-1950s. His book, The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 BCE) extensively records the political history and breaks down each leader and battle of the Third Intermediate Period. Although his body of work provides a great political and economic history, little of this information directly relates to the purpose of this thesis.

Sir E. A. Wallis Budge (1857-1934) was an English Egyptologist and Assyriologist who worked for the British Museum and published numerous books on Egypt. A well-known scholar, he is perhaps best remembered for translating The Scroll of Ani, better known as the
Egyptian *Book of the Dead*[^5] and for analyzing many customs of ancient Egyptian religion and language.[^6] He was a prolific writer; writing over one hundred books on Egypt, many of which are still in print today. Some modern scholars find Budge to be a controversial figure, mostly due to his acquisition practices of artifacts for the British Museum[^7], his apparent lack of his research based writings[^8], and his now outdated methodology[^9]. His abundant writings on the many artifacts he procured for the British Museum became the foundation for many studies by future Egyptologists.

John Taylor (b. 1958) is one of the current leading scholars of Egyptian artifacts within the Third Intermediate Period, especially of those owned by the British Museum, where he is currently the Curator of Ancient Egyptian art. His expertise focuses on funerary objects (particularly coffins, mummies and the process of mummification) of the Pharaonic Period and the Third Intermediate Period. Taylor has based much of his Egyptian coffin research on the iconography and mythology used to decorate them. He developed a system of identification that established a dating system that is often still used today. His categories were based on hand and arm positions, placement of the vignettes, and size and placement of the drawn on stola[^10]. Many scholars still refer to Taylor’s categories, particularly when discussing “yellow coffins”[^11] of the 21st Dynasty. Taylor’s books and writings tend to be mostly descriptive and fact based with not

[^5]: He purchased *The Scroll of Ani* during one of his frequent trips to Egypt in 1887. Ani was an Egyptian scribe from the 19th Dynasty.


[^7]: Often acquiring artifacts from looters and non-reputable antiques dealers.

[^8]: It was believed that due to the speed in which he published that he could not have done thorough research.

[^9]: Budge often destroyed or altered artifacts in order to translate and better study them. An example is *The Scroll of Ani* that was originally a 78 foot continuous scroll. Budge cut this into 37 separate pieces in order to more easily study it.

[^10]: During the Third Intermediate Period a red dyed leather stola was often placed around a mummy’s neck, it was believed to have conferred protection and divine status on the deceased. It also became part of the iconography of the mumiform coffins (Taylor, 63).

[^11]: It is still being debated among scholars whether the yellow coloration was intentional, or just a by-product of the aging varnish that the Egyptians used to coat the coffins.
much theoretical content. While this is a great way to learn about the aesthetics and topographies of coffins, it does not explore their role in the social and material culture in which they existed, as this thesis does.

A prominent scholar of women in Ancient Egypt is Gay Robins (b. 1951). A professor of Ancient Egyptian Art in the Art History Department at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia; her research builds upon the earlier studies by Barbara Watterson\textsuperscript{12} of women and their roles in Ancient Egypt. Robins has written books covering the entirety of Ancient Egyptian art but her concentration is on Ancient Egyptian women. In her book \textit{Women in Ancient Egypt}, she discussed the roles of ancient women, mostly during life. For example, she mentions the importance of women in royal families, as well as in upper class families where the matriarch of the family was often referred to as the “Mistress of the House”\textsuperscript{13}. Robins has argued that throughout most of Egypt’s history a woman had fairly equal rights under the law as compared to men, but when it came to the funerary arts, male imagery dominated. That is until the Third Intermediate Period when women were no longer just secondary figures on their husband’s stellae\textsuperscript{14}.

The Third Intermediate Period also shows a great increase in female coffins. Women expected to share in the same afterlife that men enjoyed, and they received burials basically similar to those of men. This thesis examines non-royal female coffins, which became more common in the Third Intermediate Period due to women seeking more equality in the funeral arts that Robins discusses in much of her writings. But only a modest amount has been written by Robins or any other scholar that pertains specifically to female Egyptian coffins of the Third Intermediate Period. My thesis, therefore, builds upon Robins’ research on the roles of women

\textsuperscript{14} Robins. \textit{Women in Ancient Egypt}. 157.
Lynn Meskell (b. 1967) is a professor of Anthropology at Stanford University. In most of her published research she examines the relationships of Ancient Egyptians with their material objects. In addition, she continues on the paths laid first by Watterson and then by Robins, exploring the roles of women in Ancient Egypt with a particular focus on the funerary arts. In her book *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt: Material Worlds Past and Present*, she writes that to our modern-day understanding things appear to us as just ordinary objects, yet to the ancient viewer these ordinary objects were anything but. Her research on the interactions between people and material objects, particularly of ancient Egyptian artifacts has been essential to this thesis and my argument for object agency. Consequently, in this thesis, I expand upon her work and recreate the circumstances in which an Egyptian coffin was viewed.

Salima Ikram (b. 1965), a professor of Egyptology at the American University in Cairo and the author of several books on Egyptian archaeology, frequently writes about the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. It was a collection of about two hundred spells, many of which were taken from its predecessors, the pyramid and the coffin texts. The spells from the *Book of the Dead* were elaborately adorned with vignettes that clarified and illustrated the spells that would help guide and protect the deceased into the afterlife. In her book *Death and burial in Ancient Egypt*, Ikram writes extensively on the details of mummification. Because scholars generally agree that mummification reached its apex during the 21st Dynasty, and because it was during the Third Intermediate Period that these spells were inscribed on papyri that were buried with the deceased, inscribed on amulets incorporated into the mummified wrappings and on the

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15 That is a modern term, it was believed that the Egyptians called it *Coming Forth by Day* and it was not a book in the way we think of a book today; it was a continuous scroll often fifty plus feet in length.

wrappings themselves, as well as on the coffins; a close understanding of these spells is important to my current research.

Sue D’Auria, Peter Lacovara, and Catharine Roehrig, the three authors of *Mummies and Magic: the Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt* concur with Ikram’s descriptions of Third Intermediate Period mummification procedures. These authors, however, provide much more detail of the process and construction of mummies and the enveloping cartonnage cover than did Ikram. They also discuss the reasons behind the lack of decorated tombs during the Third Intermediate Period. The coffin itself became the sole focus of all the artistic and mythological expression that was formerly bestowed on the tomb walls.\(^\text{17}\) During times of internal political turmoil in Egypt, such as the Third Intermediate Period, many tombs were looted of their funerary goods. Often the coffin was removed and reused. This permanent separation of the original occupant from the tomb and all the iconography painted on the walls meant that the journey to the afterlife would not be successful. So many decided to place these images on the coffin itself.

In this thesis I build upon the research of these and other previous scholars and I add an exploration into the fact that these coffins have an agency and the ability to project their ‘gaze’ onto the viewer. Thus, I argue, they entice the viewer into an interactive and social relationship, one that blurs and shifts the positions of subject and object. In this way, I am adding a dimension which thus far has not been given much attention. I am contributing a theoretical perspective and expanding on the previously narrow focus of gaze and object agency to Ancient Egyptian artifacts.

CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY

In this thesis I consider three case studies to investigate ancient Egyptian female coffins of the Third Intermediate Period utilizing the theoretical perspectives of Female Gaze Theory and Object Agency Theory. Since the ancient Egyptians believed in the animate and agency properties of artworks, and, as such, these coffins with their painted eyes were not intended to be merely decorative, but rather to have a specific affect in the world and upon the viewer.

Gaze Theory has a long history in psychology\(^\text{18}\), but has infrequently been used in reference to artifacts and art objects. In the past, Gaze Theory has often been applied to the power of the masculine gaze. According to this theory, men gaze at women thus making women the desirous objects of men. Men as possessor of the Gaze are the subjects who have power over women, the objects. Thus, as laid out in this theoretical framework, the relationship formed is that of binary opposites: the dominate viewer and submissive viewed. It follows, then, that if a woman gazes at a man, he becomes the object of her desire and she is said to possess a masculine gaze.

Because Gaze Theory has been based upon the exclusiveness of male sexual desire, with the female body as the passive object (who has no sexual desire of its own), it thereby gives primacy to the masculine and thus has had a limited application. In this thesis I attempt to take the sexualized aspect out of the Gaze, and concentrate on the Gaze's power to facilitate relationships and express other, non-sexualized desires. Examining the Gaze as it pertains to the female coffins in the different case studies highlights the non-gendered, non-sexualized aspect of the desirous (but not sexually-desirous Gaze), but a similar argument could be made for male

\(^{18}\) Neurologist and —father of psychoanalysis— Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), Philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), and Film Theorist Laura Mulvey (b. 1941).
coffins in the Third Intermediate Period.\textsuperscript{19} This thesis offers an alternative to binary opposite roles often created through the Gaze Theory. I argue that while the relationship created by the Gaze may have a subject and an object, these roles are not fixed, they are in fact interchangeable.

In the past, Gaze Theory has been rooted in power and pleasure; the possessor of the gaze, holds the power over the object (the pleasure) of their gaze. More specifically, Jacques Lacan declared that “the gaze must function as an object around which the exhibitionistic and voyeuristic impulses that constitute the scopic drive turn”\textsuperscript{20} — basically, he states that the Gaze must be an object of desire, producing not merely anxiety but also pleasure.

This thesis, on the other hand, argues that the object of the Gaze does not have to be an object of desire. The Gaze can produce feelings and emotions other than merely pleasure and anxiety. It is the possessor of the Gaze who has the power to induce other feelings and emotions on the part of the viewed, such as comfort and acceptance. Lacan also identifies a fundamental interchangeability in vision; the viewer as both subject and object, the seeing and the seen.\textsuperscript{21} His interpretation of the Gaze requires that the human being's subjectivity be determined through a gaze that places the subject under observation, causing the subject to experience themselves as an object under observation.\textsuperscript{22} I am going to use this theory of interchangeability on female Egyptian coffins.

In Lacan's later work, he states that the Gaze referred to the uneasy sense that the object of our gaze was somehow looking back at us of its own will. This uneasy feeling of being gazed at by the object of our own gaze, he argued, affected us in the same way as Freud's castration.

\textsuperscript{19} Due to the time constraints of research and writing on the female Gaze perspective, I did not have enough time to devote to the extensive research of the male Gaze perspective as it relates to Third Intermediate Period Egyptian coffins. However, the little preliminary research I did, leads me to believe there is a solid argument for a similar non-desirous Gaze.


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 75.
anxiety. This hypothesis has been particularly instrumental to the feminist film theorists, such as Laura Mulvey and Griselda Pollock. In the 1970s, they explored how female objects of desire in traditional Hollywood film were reduced to passive pleasure objects of the male desire, and also how the power of the Male Gaze was rooted in castration fears. Since Mulvey’s 1975 essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Gaze Theory has had a deep relationship with Feminist Theory. Socially women did not have the right to look, to stare, to gaze, or watch. They were positioned as the object of the Male Gaze. Generally in Feminist Gaze Theory the function of gazing was divided into binary opposites; activity/passivity, subject/object, male/female, viewer/viewed. This thesis argues that the interchangeability of these binaries leads to the idea that the Female Gaze can be viewed from more than one position.

Traditional feminist theorization has emphasized the possessive gaze of the presumed masculine spectator at the objectified female body. This thesis contends that the pleasure and the power of the Gaze can, in my opinion, be held and directed at any gender. I argue that the coffins of this thesis, all female coffins, can both receive either a Male or Female Gaze and project a Female Gaze (their own). The Gaze is impossible for one to maintain control of, it is ever shifting. In the field of vision, no subject’s ‘gaze’ is ever all-powerful or transcendent. The viewer can just as easily become the viewed.

One of the ways in which femininity expresses itself through these coffins is that it functions primarily as the space of sight for a mastering gaze and becomes the initiator of relationships. The women depicted function as subjects of their own looking on their activity,

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within highly specific locations of which the viewer becomes a part.”25 Yet these coffins, painted as women, representing women, do just that. They look back at the viewer, they gaze, they watch, they even stare, enticing the viewer into a relationship. They possess the power of the Gaze that has often only been attributed to men.

The human imagery of these coffins create a materialization of a social other, making the connection between the coffin (object) and viewer (subject) a social one, undeniably equivalent to a relationship between two people. A look is linked to the recognition of another person as a participant in interaction. By exchanging gazes we set our own roles in place and a momentary bond is constructed between us. The Gaze directed by the coffin invites the viewer into a relationship; conversely, the viewer reacts and returns with their own gaze, reciprocating a social relationship. This relationship is centered on a visual act and it is initiated entirely by looking. Thus supporting the concept of this thesis that the traditionally proposed binary positions of subject/object, active/passive, the viewer/the viewed are interchangeable and it is in this interchangeability that a relationship is established. This would be in accordance to Lynn Meskell’s stance that material objects, such as coffins, operate as mediums to explore the object/subject relationship, a state that lingers between physicality and visuality, between the reality of physical presence and fantasy, the empirical reality and representation.26 Marian Feldman takes it one step further, in support of my argument, and states that agency can be seen as a fundamentally social phenomenon, derived from interactions between people and people and between people and things."27

The agency of objects, as referred to in this thesis, is the ability to emotionally engage the viewer and generate social action. According to Gell, both human beings and their material products are engaged in instrumental social action, and the latter can mediate social agency. Object Agency is a relatively new thought process in regards to art history, brought to the forefront by Alfred Gell in his ground breaking book, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, which came out in 1998. Prior to this publication, the agency of objects was commonly referred to as an object's power or essence. Gell was not the first to note that objects can be powerful agents that influence people's thoughts, feelings, and actions. Nancy Munn wrote in 1973 that the Walbiri's visual representations were highly effective in eliciting emotional and causal effects from viewers of the objects. Objects are often perceived as subject-like forces, which – like human subjects – exist in time and space, and are experienced through the senses. Objects, such as the coffins in this thesis, can be powerful communicative agents which may actively evoke emotional responses and generate social action.

I argue that Gaze and Object Agency work in tandem to empower the coffins with the ability to initiate and sustain social relationships. Agency; —the affective or individual force exerted by a source of energy or action upon a recipient,” can be exercised not only by individuals, but also by social institutions and material objects. As Armstrong contends in his book *The Powers of Presence*, objects have the ability to cause and the power to evoke. He refers to this as the object's *presence*, but it can just as easily be called an object's agency.

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31 An indigenous Australian people.

In his book *Art and Agency*, Gell refers frequently of the interchangeability of an object and subject. He states that with regard to any given interaction between agents one agent is exercising agency and becomes the subject while the other is for the moment the object.\(^{33}\) The viewer can, according to Gell’s anthropological theory of art, be in a social relationship with the coffin, either as the subject or as the object in that, but for their interchangeability, there would not be a relationship. An object; in this case the coffin, must be seen in relation to some specific reception and that this reception may be active or passive, and is likely to be diverse\(^{34}\). Also writing on the interplay of object and subject, Armstrong in his book *The Powers of Presence*, takes the view material things, such as the coffins in this study, are objects. But they can also be subjects, often treated as human subjects are treated. Thus placing them in a state of tension between these binary opposites. He suggests that it is the energy of such interplay that a vital —power” is formed.\(^{35}\) The power of an object that Armstrong refers to is, in my opinion synonymous with object agency as it relates to the Third Intermediate Period female coffins of this study.

Alfred Gell, who is often referred to as the father of Object Agency Theory, put forth ground breaking concepts in his book *Art and Agency*. One such concept supports the Gaze Theory in relation to this thesis. He suggested that a mutual gazing through eye contact was a basic instrument for —intersubjectivity because to look into another’s eye is not just to see each other, but to see the other seeing you. Eye contact seems to give direct access to other minds because the subject sees herself as an object, from the point of view of the other as a subject.” It is this eye contact that brings awareness of the other as an intentional subject.\(^{36}\) More than other

\(^{36}\) Gell. *Art and Agency*. 120.
senses, the Gaze objectifies and embraces. It can impose a set distance, and maintain that
distance or it can initiate an intimacy, and maintain that relationship. I argue that these coffins,
with the power of their Agency, had the ability to possess their own Gaze. And since Egyptian
representation was highly iconic, the realistic element (their life-like face) was devised to capture
and enthrall, to render the object more divine and more magical, and to open up other channels to
a relationship.

Like any object that embodies a mixture of individual, social, and cultural ideas and
experiences, these coffins reveal the social origin of death and relationships, and the fact that
simultaneously they are part of our physical world infuse them with potent agency. Another of
Gell’s approaches to art, which emphasizes Agency, and sees in the inscribed decoration of an
object an aspect not only of that object’s function, but also the social scheme embodied by the
imagery of these coffins. Thus the human-like facial imagery on these coffins reveals to the
viewer that some sort of Agency is at work. These coffins were objects of ritual. Objects of this
type were deployed at the funeral of the deceased person and above all in the regular, often daily,
rites, when food and drink were offered to nourish her after death.

Some objects do not simply stand for a particular quality or property: they embody it.
Thus an object of material which we in the modern world consider to have intrinsic value holds
an inherent worth, which we tend to think of as more than conventional: its value is a palpable
reality.38 This statement stands true for these Third Intermediate Period female Egyptian
coffins. It was believed that through the enhancement of ritual, such as the Opening of the
Mouth ceremony, that these coffins became empowered. The public and private rituals they

37 Pollock. Vision and Difference. 50.
38 Renfrew, Colin, Chris Gosden, and Elizabeth DeMarrais. Substance, Memory, Display: Archaeology and
were involved in imbued them with agency. And most likely the coffins as enhanced objects were considered an effective and legitimate agentic carrier.

In order to discover how Object Agency and the Gaze shaped life during Egypt’s Third Intermediate Period, we must know more about the nature of the artistic agency there. The overall impact of the images on these coffins and the atmosphere and mood produced through the ancient Egyptian cosmic ideals, manipulate the viewer’s reactions. Above all, the underlying rationale for the coffin, its commissioning, function, and intended audience all determine the limits of what it once meant and what it means today. The art of these coffins had to respond to the myriad requirements and preference of the ancient Egyptian peoples. They cannot be understood without considering how the ancient Egyptians operated ideologically in constructing their identity, in managing and maintaining their reputation in life as well as in death, and in defining their social relationships.

Miller. Materiality. 54.
CHAPTER III. FUNERALS IN THE THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

In three separate case studies, I reconstruct the journey of an Egyptian woman’s coffin during the Third Intermediate Period (1100-650 BCE).\(^4\) Each case study shows different aspects of this journey. The first case study considers how a woman makes choices regarding her coffin and its decoration, the second case study examines the coffin throughout the funeral procession, and in the third case study I discuss the coffin being placed in the tomb and how it is still utilized by family once there. Funerals in ancient Egypt were social events; and through these case studies I explore the different ways in which the coffin played a social role in the lives of the living.

Most Egyptians believed that, although life was transitory, it could be preserved through renewal. If proper rituals were followed, life could be continued beyond physical death. Therefore, people of the Third Intermediate Period paid close attention to maintain traditional requirements; for example, they often saved for years for the purchase of their coffins and other funerary goods such as the *Book of the Dead*\(^{41}\) or the *Amduat*,\(^{42}\) which demonstrates how important their belief system was to them.

By the Third Intermediate Period, ancient Egyptian ideologies toward death had been developing for thousands of years, so people had many choices when it came to deciding which iconographies to have depicted on their coffins. The primary features, however, involved

\(^{41}\) The *Book of the Dead* was originally used only by the Pharaoh and other royalty. Until the 21\(^{\text{th}}\) Dynasty when the Theban Priest of Amun appropriated the royal privilege for their own. And shortly following, non-royals began to use it (Hornung, 96-97).
representational imagery depicting the deceased. An anthropomorphic coffin was viewed as an essence of the deceased, and as such, it would continue her biography, trajectory, and relationships. The images on the coffin conveyed her — identity, personality, and visual likeness — and could be called upon as an active role in society.

Ancient Egyptian culture placed enormous emphasis upon material rendering and representation as tangible evidence of individual permanence, cultural longevity and the endurance of powerful socio-religious concepts. For a society obsessed and to some degree constituted by cultural institutions of doubling and pairing, the act of doubling and mimesis was the perfect expression of Egypt’s organizing core.

Goff discusses in her book *Symbols of Ancient Egypt in the Late Period: The Twenty-first Dynasty* the ancient Egyptian use of doubling. That it appeared repeatedly in their funerary images in which a central figure is flanked by duplicate figures; such as the sun disk flanked by double uraeus or a scarab flanked by falcons. The Double Crown of Egypt is another example. Meskell writes of Egyptian doubling in her book *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt: Material Biographies past and Present*. She states that doubling was a foundational principle and practice for the Egyptians. That this double representation was a potent stand-in for the human subject and could extend one’s being and existence beyond death and into memory.

In regards to ancient Egyptian life and death the power of the double was nearly always present.

After giving the social and ideological background for the Egyptian coffin, I now examine the technical aspects, beginning with the mummification process. After death, the

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47 Pharaohs wore the Red Crown of Lower Egypt and the White Crown of Upper Egypt together that was called the Double Crown; it symbolized that the Pharaoh ruled both lands (Goff, 136).
deceased's body would have been taken to the embalmers. There, her body was built back up during the mummification process. For Egyptians of the Third Intermediate Period, success in the afterlife was founded on a specific corporeal perfection which was achieved through preservation of the body. The mummies needed to be a flawlessly preserved and idealized image of the deceased, transforming the deceased into a more perfect representation of its physical self. The embalmers would have anointed the mummy with oils to make the skin supple again, and then stuffed it with resins, cloths, wood, wool, and other substances to restore its form, and adorned it with artificial eyes, make-up, and a wig. Many of the bodies were also painted during this period; yellow for women and red for men. Facial features would then have been painted on and glass or stone eyes were inserted into the deceased's eye sockets.

The final step would have involved wrapping the body in fine linen bandages — often from textile material the deceased used in her lifetime — such as sheets, which were inscribed with spells from the Book of the Dead, and had amulets interspersed among them. The end result of this elaborate process was the mummy. More than just a corpse, the mummy was a representation of the god Osiris and a double of the entire person, one that, as the ancient Egyptians perceived it, was a supernatural power to enable travel into the afterlife. The mummification process ideally lasted seventy days, during which preparations would also have been made on the cartonnage, the coffins, and the other items that would accompany her in the afterlife.

49 Goff. Symbols of Ancient Egypt in the Late Period. 30.
50 As was typical of Egyptian art, women were yellow, a pale color, to represent them staying mostly indoors, and men were red, a darker color, to show that they were tan from working outside.
51 Ikram. Death and Burial in Ancient Egypt. 69.
53 Amulets were placed within the wrappings of the arms, legs, and torso, neck and head. The most important was the heart scarab placed on the chest. These amulets were to provide protection and to guarantee that these body parts of the deceased had a successful journey into the afterlife (Goff, 8).
54 During the Third Intermediate Period, Egyptians believed the deceased achieved rebirth after death through identification with Osiris and thus the unending cycle of transformation (Robins, 200).
Typically, ancient Egyptians planned ahead. During their life they had to ensure that all possible steps were taken to build and decorate their coffins in which their bodies would survive eternity; so that the spirit of the deceased would always have a place in which to reside. Without the coffin, the body and in turn the spirit had no place in which to rest and consequently would no longer exist. Because failure to make the necessary preparations would result in total annihilation from memory, coffins and funerary equipment were constructed and mortuary priests were appointed as early as possible, so that when death came one was fully prepared for it and was guaranteed a safe passage to the next world. One purpose of a coffin was to not only to house and protect the deceased’s body, but to function as a renewing structure that defied the limits of the earthly life cycle and promised eternal existence. These ideologies were based on the origin of the Egyptian coffin and rebirth of the dead as stated in the myth of Osiris.

During the Third Intermediate Period most of the elite were buried in a set of two or three coffins. The mummy was placed inside a cartonnage coffin case, which was then placed into an inner wooden coffin, and then into the outer wooden coffin. This coffin assemblage (with only the outer coffin visible) would then be the main attraction in the funeral procession to the tomb. Once the coffin assemblage was complete, the newly embalmed and mummified body was placed in the cartonnage case and the inner and outer coffins to await the funeral procession.

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56 Seth (king of Chaos) wanted to usurp his brother Osiris (a primeval Egyptian king). So he secretly acquired the measurements of Osiris and had an ornately decorated box built to fit him. When the box was finished, Seth had a great feast to which he invited Osiris and many others. After dinner, Seth had the box brought out and he offered it as a gift to anyone who fit in it. As Osiris laid in the box, Seth slammed the lid, nailed it closed, and poured molten lead in the seam to seal his fate. The beautiful chest, that was to become known as the very first coffin, was thrown into the Nile River. Osiris’s sisters, Isis and Nephthys pulled the trunk out of the river and resurrected Osiris. (Wiedemann, 207-211)
57 A cartonnage coffin was not molded over an artificial core which was shaped into the average dimensions of the deceased. This core was coated with coarse plaster and several layers of linen soaked in gum, covering it completely. A narrow vertical slit was left on the backside, and once the final layer of linen had been applied, this rear slit was carefully opened to remove the artificial core. Then the exterior was coated in gesso and holes were punched in the edges of the rear flaps. The mummy was inserted before the case was decorated, and the rear flaps drawn together by two strings laced through the holes from head to foot. (Taylor, 48)
The ancient Egyptian funeral developed into a particularly lengthy ritual with four basic stages: 1. the mourning on the east bank of the Nile, 2. the journey across the river, 3. the procession to the necropolis, and 4. the arrival at the tomb. The funeral procession was a very public event for many to see. From the start of the funeral procession until the end point at the tomb, many people from the deceased's life were present; looking at the coffin, interacting with it, and participating in the celebration. Coffins communicated information about Egyptian social and cultural identities, gender, and cosmic ideologies. The centrality of the coffin's role served as an immediately recognizable indication of the deceased's social status, and served to place the coffin at the center of a social relationship between the deceased and the living family and community.

Throughout this journey different people would have come into contact with the coffin, creating a community connection through shared feelings and emotions of the funeral experience. Many people came out to look at the deceased in her coffin, some even followed the procession the entire way to the tomb. Both men and women took part in the funeral procession. Friends and family of the deceased would carry or pull the coffin of the deceased from the place of embalmment along the processional route. Male officials traveled with the funeral procession, and ceremonial male dancers greeted the procession at the door of the tomb. Professional mourners, an exclusively female occupation, were hired to enhance the status of the deceased by openly grieving at the funeral. More importantly, two women were hired to impersonate the two *djeryt*, Isis and Nephthys, sisters of Osiris. Wearing a form of sheath dress and a short

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60 Ibid. 308.
62 *Djeryt* were medium-sized raptor birds. Isis and Nephthys were often depicted as women with bird-like wings for arms. Myth states they flapped their wings and the light breeze produced a vivifying breath which re-animated the soul of Osiris after being murdered by his brother Seth.
wig, they flanked the deceased's coffin, as they once did Osiris's, in the middle of the barge. The grieving family and friends followed the funeral procession from the shore and the family servants carried the items needed for use in the afterlife.

Eventually the coffin arrived at the deceased's burial place, and once there, it was placed upright, the inner cartonnage was removed from the outer coffin and stood up in front of the tomb entrance, for all to gaze upon. At this point a priest performed the Opening of the Mouth; the most important ceremony of the entire funeral, which involved the ritual reanimation of the deceased's ability to eat, speak, and see. Maintaining the deceased in the afterworld required the support of family and community members in the form of continued spells and rituals. Because of the Opening of the Mouth (explained more thoroughly in case study two) the cartonnage played a significant role in the regular, often daily, rites when food and drink were offered to nourish the deceased after her death. After the Opening of the Mouth was performed, the reassembled coffin set was placed inside the tomb. The tomb was sealed until a loved one came to visit or a family member died and their coffin would be placed in the tomb with her.

A significant component of this funerary process is the visual interaction of those attending and witnessing the proceedings. The ritual must been seen for it to be complete. The act of viewing requires a viewer. The different viewers and their interactions with the coffin will be explored further in the following case studies. As with human agents, the shifting identities of objects are shaped by their involvement in the lives of people and other objects, and by their unique historical trajectory.”

Witnesses to the journey of the coffin represented the imposition of human agency in a social setting where this coffin could be rendered as both an

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63 Assmann. Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt. 133.
64 Tyldesley. Daughters of Isis. 169.
65 The priest often wore a jackal-headed mask in representation of the funerary god, Anubis.
66 Osborne and Tanner. Art’s Agency and Art History. 97.
67 Renfrew, Gosden, and DeMarrais. Substance, Memory, Display. 47.
object and subject, active and passive. I argue that coffins themselves can also be viewers rather than simply objects to be viewed, allowing for the interchangeability of viewer and viewed. The following funeral reconstruction, through three case studies, examines the various people who viewed the coffins, the viewers’ interactions with them, and the relationships formed between the living and the dead via the coffin.
CHAPTER IV. CASE STUDY ONE: THE CARTONNAGE OF MERESAMUN

In this chapter, I reconstruct the process of how an ancient Egyptian woman commissioned her coffin and its decoration, how she was mummified, and how her coffin was readied for the funeral procession. I argue that during this journey her coffin took the position of both subject and object and was therefore animated by a Gaze that, in turn, can be read as having Agency. I explore the various stages associated with the coffin during this journey, paying special attention to her cartonnage and the people who would have come into contact with it and how their experiences were affected by its Gaze and the resulting Agency. Then I examine the social aspects surrounding the imagery and text on the body of the cartonnage coffin, with special attention to the face and eyes. Finally, I discuss how the cartonnage coffin’s Agency and Gaze help us to better understand it.

The first coffin that I examine is of the inner, form-fitting cartonnage coffin case currently on display at the Oriental Institute in Chicago, Illinois.68 This particular cartonnage belonged to Meresamun (Fig. 1), a woman who most likely lived in ancient Egypt during the 22nd Dynasty69 (945-715 BCE).70 A Singer of the Temple of Amun, Meresamun was part of a group of musician-priestesses who performed during religious rituals and festivals, one of the most prestigious jobs of an elite woman.71 Her cartonnage, the only known piece of her ensemble to still exist, presumably would have been part of a set that originally included one or two additional wooden outer coffins.

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68 The museum purchased only the cartonnage coffin, as the others in the set and their provenance is unknown.  
Meresamun would have likely been involved in the decision-making process as to how she wanted to be represented for eternity through her coffin. But also emerging in the Third Intermediate Period was a preference for personal ideas with a general positive meaning rather than specific extracts from the long-established funerary literature of the *Book of the Dead*. She would have debated between different constituency demands: personal, political, social, and cosmic. In the Third Intermediate Period, much of the coffin imagery consisted, following long established tradition, of symbols of rebirth and divine protection. A process this essential to her eternal existence would have necessitated that she follow, and possibly direct, the progress of the craftsmen and artists working toward her coffin’s completion.

She would, therefore, probably have made regular visits to the coffin workshop; visits that would have allowed her to come face to face with her eternal double, and to contemplate her existence both on earth and in the afterlife. In ancient Egypt the persistent idea of the double and dualism contributed to the foundational ideas of an entire culture and each of the objects and doubles of selves were used as substitution or operational doubles in the understanding of an afterlife. This traditional view of doubling among the ancient Egyptians helped to reinforce Meresamun’s decision to claim her coffin as her eternal double. Although the face painted on her coffin was generalized, the images and text she chose to have painted on the coffin personalized it, making it a representation of her. Through continually gazing at the coffin, Meresamun made it her own. She accepted that this coffin was to be her eternal double. Through Meresamun’s careful efforts and the knowledge that she was following tradition, this process allowed her family and friends to accept it as well.

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73 Meskell. *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt*. 118.
A set of coffins was constructed largely during one’s lifetime and as such was very much a part of life. As Meresamun’s double, her coffin was intended to stand for many things, ideas, and beliefs; it operated as a type of memory and as a means of external symbolic storage.\textsuperscript{74} The coffin came to represent Meresamun’s universe in miniature; the lid was symbolically the sky, the case symbolized the netherworld — the region ruled over by Osiris.\textsuperscript{75} The selection and location of the main decorative elements of the coffin were closely linked to Meresamun and her mummy, so that the placing of her mummy inside the coffin was the key which enabled the significance of much of the surface decoration to be clearly understood. Ancient Egyptians of the Third Intermediate Period viewed their images and inscriptions as magical. Once something was painted, written, or said out loud, it became real.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, the images on the Meresamun’s coffin would become magically active and real as they were needed; and the depictions could provide for her and her family in the afterlife.

Her coffin included traditional elements that were expected of coffins of a woman of her status, including hieroglyphs of her name and title, a floral collar, and images of some of the major deities. Following these traditions, she chose a single band of inscription running vertically down the front of the coffin, from her waist to her feet (Fig. 2). It records Meresamun’s name and title: Singer in the Interior of the Temple of Amun.\textsuperscript{77} This position was associated with the Karnak Temple in Thebes.\textsuperscript{78} Her chest is covered with a representation of traditional floral stola collar (Fig. 3). Below these collars, the Four Sons of Horus\textsuperscript{79} are depicted

\textsuperscript{74} Renfrew, Gosden, and DeMarrais. \textit{Substance, Memory, Display}. 47.
\textsuperscript{75} Taylor, John H. \textit{Unwrapping a Mummy: The Life, Death and Embalming of Horemkenesi}. (Austin: University of Texas, 1996) 65.
\textsuperscript{76} Ikram. \textit{Death and Burial in Ancient Egypt}. 171.
\textsuperscript{77} Teeter and Johnson. \textit{The Life of Meresamun}. 15.
\textsuperscript{79} They were the guardians of the four organs removed during mummification, which during the Third Intermediate Period were wrapped and then returned to the body before burial.
(Fig. 4 & 5). Each one holds a strip of cloth, perhaps a reference to mummification, and a feather; to represent that the deceased’s heart was lighter than a feather, allowing her into e afterlife. A large image of the falcon deity, Ra, is shown with the sun disk on his head and he is holding the sn/shen, the hieroglyph for eternity, in each of his talons (Fig. 6). Ra symbolizes the continuing cycle of the rising and setting of the sun that was equated with eternal rebirth, and by including his image, Meresamun was assured of her own rebirth into the afterlife.

On either side of the vertical hieroglyph band on the front at the leg area are Udjat eyes, (Fig. 7) which symbolize health and regeneration. By putting these on her coffin, Meresamun would have good health after her regeneration into the afterlife. On either side of them are winged serpents with sun disks, signifying protection into the afterlife. The serpent on the right hovers above the hieroglyphs for eternity, life, and dominion (Fig. 8), while the serpent on the left hovers over three feathers (Fig. 9). Below each serpent is the image of a ram, perhaps representing one of the creator gods. A very large hieroglyph on the lower left leg is the djed pillar (Fig. 10), which often symbolized the backbone of Osiris. Having the djed pillar on her coffin further connected Meresamun to Osiris, thus keeping with the tradition of death as rebirth.

Two images of the jackal-headed god, Anubis, are painted over the space where each foot would lie. Anubis was an Egyptian funerary god of mummification and he also witnessed the

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80 At the moment of Judgment, the deceased faced Osiris, ruler of the Underworld, and had her heart weighed against a feather. The goddess Maat, who personified “truth”, was often depicted abstractly as a feather during the Third Intermediate Period (Goff 181). Evil deeds through life made the heart heavy. If this was the case then Ammit devoured her heart. But if the person lived a good life their heart would be lighter than the feather and she would be admitted to the afterlife (Wilkinson, 84-85).


83 In the myth of Isis and Osiris, the djed pillar is Osiris’ backbone which Isis found buried in the city of Djedu (Wiedemann, 289-290). Wallis Budge believed that it was the oldest symbol of Osiris, representing his entire body not just his backbone.

84 Anubis was supposed to have been responsible for the wrapping of Osiris, and he would protect corpses from any harm.
Weighing of the Heart ceremony.\(^{85}\) And finally, the bottom of the footboard is decorated with a bull calf (one of Egypt’s most sacred animals) perhaps representing Apis, the god of strength and fertility (Fig. 11). The Apis bull was often depicted on Third Intermediate Period coffins as a powerful protector.\(^{86}\) As the double of Osiris, ruler of the underworld, it was believed that to be under the protection of the Apis bull would give the person control over the four winds in the afterlife.\(^{87}\)

At the top of all this imagery on the cartonnage coffin, Meresamun’s head is portrayed wearing the vulture headdress\(^ {88}\) that was worn by priestesses as well as by other women of high rank\(^ {89}\) (Fig. 12). A tiny vulture head is on her forehead and the bird’s wings extend down both sides of her face (Fig. 13), offering an all-encompassing and eternal protective embrace. The representation of a winged headdress over the wig on the coffins and cartonnages of non-royal women began in the late 21\(^{st}\) Dynasty.\(^ {90}\) The rules for a successful rebirth required that a representation of the person’s face be rendered on the surface of the coffin. However, although lifelike in appearance, the coffin face was not an exact physical portrait of the Meresamun; it was an idealized image of her. She has a strong, straight nose and a set mouth. Meresamun’s face engages the viewer with her Gaze (Fig. 14). Her eyes, with the pupil and iris both painted black on a white background, look directly out at the viewer (Fig. 15). The eyes are outlined in a black line that continues back to the headdress, as do her eyebrows.

\(^{85}\) From the *Book of the Dead*, Spell 30b: The Judgment of the Dead. The heart of the dead is weighed in the scales of balance against the feather of righteousness (Faulkner, 27).
\(^{86}\) According to Egyptian myth, the soul of the Apis Bull was received by Osiris and thereafter known as the Double of Osiris, or the Osiris Apis (Wiedemann, 191).
\(^{88}\) Prior to the Third Intermediate Period, the vulture headdress was reserved for goddesses and queens. It symbolized the vulture goddess, Nekhbet, a patron deity of Upper Egypt.
\(^{89}\) Teeter and Johnson, *The Life of Meresamun*. 31.
In analyzing her coffin the oval face stares out, taking in the viewer and yet also looking past the viewer, to sights that cannot be seen in the physical world; to a time and place beyond existence. The human imagery of this coffin created a re-materialization of the deceased, making the connection between the coffin and viewer a social one. This relationship was centered on a visual act and it was initiated entirely by looking. The Gaze empowers the viewer; in this social relationship, both the coffin and the viewer, take control of that power. The interchangeability of this power allowed for a mutual, intimate, and successful social relationship. Meresamun’s coffin possesses a non-sexualized, but still desirous, Gaze that wants something. It wants a relationship, it wants to be acknowledged as an active participant in the viewer’s social network and community. Its gaze wants Meresamun to accept it as her eternal double.

Ancient Egyptians intended for a coffin to facilitate the continuation of social relationships; it allowed the dead to have an active relationship with the living. Meresamun’s cartonnage, as her eternal double, was meant to be seen as a medium of communication. With her coffin as the medium, Meresamun’s friends and family could continue the relationship they had with her in life. It transmitted information about her social status, wealth, identity, gender, and cosmic allegiance.

From the ancient Egyptian perspective, death was a transitory state and it did not prevent people from involving themselves in the world of the living.⁹¹ In transcending death, the deceased within her coffin operated as an agent, creating links between living and dead members of the community. Death involved significant numbers of people in the community. Individual members grieved, performed mortuary rituals, and buried their dead. The body wrappings and

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coffins were regenerative double skins that allowed the transfigured body to emerge free from earthly imperfections.\textsuperscript{92} Ancient rituals were required to explicitly bring those functions back to the corpse, to make the dead body parallel to its living double. I argue that her face, in particular, contributed to the viewer accepting the social relationship. Its gaze made a social connection between the viewer and the viewed.

Other than Meresamun herself, the embalmers would have been next to see her mummy and her painted cartonnage case. The process of mummification was a highly ritual act that only specialists were allowed to perform. Meresamun's body would have only been seen by these few specialists during the seventy day treatment. They most likely formed a somewhat social and definitely an intimate relationship through their time with it. The embalmers would not only have looked into Meresamun's real eyes, they would have made and placed artificial ones to stand in as doubles. It was a matter not just of continuing the lifelike body of the original subject, but of radically transforming it into another kind of object. The mummified body was a material representation for the person; a physical double considered to have long-term vitality and agency.\textsuperscript{93} It both portrayed and stood in for its original, the deceased. —Their very materialness provides them with the capacity to redirect human intentions and engender reflection on the conditions and nature of being.\textsuperscript{94}

The fact that this coffin is anthropomorphic with a realistic face increased its agency far beyond that of any ordinary object. Possessing this super-enhanced form of agency allowed this coffin to captivate those who entered its intimate space. Once the ancient viewer accepted this interaction and stepped closer to gaze upon the coffin they became captivated through the return

\textsuperscript{93} Miller. \textit{Materiality}. 53.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. 60.
gaze of Meresamun, further solidifying their connection. The connection one felt in the presence of Meresamun’s coffin was brought on by the collapse of this world and another, the collapse of life and death. Just like Meresamun contemplated life and death when she stared into the face of her eternal double, so too did the ancient viewer.

Gazing into the eyes of that replication, Meresamun would have wondered if this image of herself, her double, would suffice after her death. Would it be good enough to continue the relationships with her friends and family? Would it have enough potency to assist Meresamun and her loved ones in the afterlife? This coffin was an imaginary figure, an object, which was just like the soul, the shadow, the mirror image. It would have haunted Meresamun, the subject, as her other, which made it so that the subject was simultaneously herself and yet never resembled herself again. Meresamun and her coffin became one, the subject and object visually merged in death.
CHAPTER V. CASE STUDY TWO: ANKH-TESH’S CARTONNAGE AND OUTER COFFIN

In the second case study I examine the coffin of Ankh-tesh during its journey in the funeral procession and final placement inside the tomb. Throughout this journey different people would have come into contact with Ankh-tesh’s coffin. I argue that the interactions involving her coffin were initiated through the act of looking; both by people gazing at the coffin and the return gaze of the coffin at the people. Many of these interactions kept old social relationships active or led to new ones, thus placing Ankh-tesh’s coffin at the center of these relationships. Using its potential to exercise its own agency primarily through its gaze, the coffin became a social actor. This was successful because of the fact that human social interactions have a particularly material component to them, with objects serving as intersection points in the network of social actions. The resulting socially active coffin also existed in association with specific cultural moments and contexts. Her coffin could be either active or passive in its state as a social actor.

In this case study, I examine two different types of relationships someone might have had with the coffin. One revolved around an active, objectifying Gaze that required a physical distance between the viewer and the coffin. This is a relationship that someone in the crowd watching the funeral procession might have had. The other type of relationship involved a more reactive identification with the coffin, and the person within, and thus depended on the dissolution of the physical distance between the coffin and the viewer. This second type of relationship would have been experienced by anyone actively involved in the procession, including the two djeryt on the funeral barge and then later by family members at the tomb. The Gaze was also relevant because it linked the identities of the viewer and the viewed; the viewer
then recognizes the coffin as an eternal substitute for a person. The funeral procession provided opportunities to gaze in ways and for durations that may not have otherwise been possible, appropriate, or even permitted in real life while Ankh-tesh had been alive due to social restrictions.

In Ankh-tesh’s 22nd Dynasty (943 BCE-720 BCE95), ancient Egyptians began to place their mummies in simple wooden outer coffins with little decoration and flat lids with sides that generally tapered sharply from the shoulders to the feet.96 These coffins contained a cartonnage that typically featured a carved and painted wooden face.97 Ankh-tesh’s cartonnage and outermost wooden coffin are currently in the Toledo Museum of Art’s collection (Figs. 16 & 17).

After Ankh-tesh’s mummy was placed in her cartonnage case, it was then nested within the outer wooden coffin, and placed on a sledge in preparation for the funeral procession. During the procession, which began in the morning from the place of embalmment,98 people would only have been able to see Ankh-tesh’s outer wooden coffin. Imagery on the outer coffin was limited. Only those people in close proximity to it would have been able to see the images painted on it. Since little iconography was displayed on the coffin, the chosen few were mostly traditional items. It included a series of images that provided protection to the deceased as she was reborn into the afterlife. One such image depicts the god Horus in the form of a falcon head,99 in profile, on the front of both shoulders (Fig. 18). This illustrated the Egyptian belief in a cyclical journey of life, death, and rebirth through the rising and setting of the sun. The Four

96 This change was introduced in Thebes and occurred during the reign of Sheshong I (Aston, 275).
99 Egyptian myth states that Horus was the Sun God and the Sky God; his right eye was the sun and his left eye was the moon (Wilkinson, 189-191).
Sons of Horus\textsuperscript{100} are depicted just below the wig and over the chest area, two sons on either side, to protect the internal organs.\textsuperscript{101} A centered vertical band of hieroglyphs, which in this case stated the deceased’s name and her relationship to Osiris\textsuperscript{102} (Fig. 19), runs from mid-chest down to the feet of the coffin. Shown lying on top of the hieroglyphic strip is Anubis\textsuperscript{103} in the form of a jackal (Fig. 20). This was used as a symbolic way to show that he was protecting and watching over her for eternity. During this time when coffins were very plain and generic, Ankh-tesh, like many other people, needed to personalize it, to make it hers by including specific labels and indications of her status and her relationship with the gods.

The focal point of the outer coffin’s decorative program is Ankh-tesh’s face, painted disproportionately small in relation to the rather large wig (Fig. 21). This style is due to one of two things: either this coffin was usurped from an 18\textsuperscript{th} or 19\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty Memphite tomb or it was made to replicate a coffin of the aforementioned dynasties.\textsuperscript{104} If it is the latter then this shows an attempt to recreate a style from more prosperous successful times, perhaps in an effort to bestow success to the deceased into the afterlife. Her small face appears to gaze out from beneath a falcon headress, the wings of which extend down her cheeks\textsuperscript{105} (Fig. 22), the pupils and irises of her eyes were painted black on a white background; the whites were outlined in thin black.

\textsuperscript{100} In the New Kingdom, the tops to canopic jars were depicted in the form of the Four Sons of Horus. They were: \textit{Imsety}, who guarded the liver; \textit{Hapy}, who guarded the lungs; \textit{Duamutef}, who guarded the stomach; \textit{Qebehsenuf}, who guarded the intestines. They were in charge of keeping the organs safe for rebirth into the afterlife (Wilkinson, 88-89). Canopic jars contained organs removed during the mumification process, but in the Third Intermediate Period, these were no longer used. The organs were dried out, wrapped, then placed back in the body cavity or sometimes between the mummy’s legs (Ikram, 128).

\textsuperscript{101} By including these images, the Four Sons of Horus who had protected the internal organs when they were placed in canopic jars were able to continue to do so now that the organs were being returned to the body.

\textsuperscript{102} Translated by Dr. Jean Li of Ryerson University. Ontario, Canada.

\textsuperscript{103} Anubis was a funerary god of embalming as well as Lord of the Sacred Land. In both of these roles he was a protector of the deceased (Wilkinson 187-189).

\textsuperscript{104} It was brought to my attention during a talk by Dr. Kara Cooney (at the ARCE 2014 Annual Convention) that this style was popular in Memphis during the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} Dynasties.

\textsuperscript{105} This style of headdress was once reserved only for the royal women of Egypt, but in the Third Intermediate Period elite and non-royal women began to use it on their own coffins (Teeter and Johnson, 22).
Her eyebrows were also thin black arched lines. She appears to have a strong, low nose and pursed lips, giving her a determined facial expression (Fig. 23).

The physical reality of the facial depiction on this coffin was thought to have such Agency as to give the desired corporeality upon the person at death as they entered a new realm of eternal existence. Due to the outer coffin’s limited overall imagery, however, Ankh-tesh’s projected identity would have been somewhat ambiguous. Gazing at her coffin in the funeral procession, the general public would not have been able to discern her gender. This ambiguity could have given the coffin power over the viewer; the coffin could gaze out at the people but because the coffin only has a small painted face and no other physical human features, the viewer was denied total visual access to the coffin and its identity. Egyptologists, Kathlyn Cooney believes a coffin set is a physical representation of one’s rebirth into the afterlife. The inner-most coffin, in this case the mummy board, is an image that closest resembles the deceased, the middle piece represents the deceased in her transitional stage, and the outer wooden coffin is a representation of the deceased reborn in the image of Osiris\textsuperscript{106}, which is why the gender often appears more ambiguous on this piece. By showing the deceased in the image of Osiris, the Egyptians believed that too would provide them with a successful transformation into the afterlife.

When the funeral procession reached the Nile River, Ankh-tesh’s coffin was carried onto a funerary barge. Egyptians continued to play out the myth of Osiris in their own funerals. As the original protectors of Osiris in his coffin, Isis and Nephthys, stood one at each end as they watched over him until he was safely out of the river. Once on dry land, they brought him back to life to be ruler of the afterlife. This linked them forever to the cyclical Osiris. The two

women re-enacting these roles would have been in very close physical contact with Ankh-tesh’s coffin. Unlike the general public, the two women portraying the two djeryt (Isis and Nephthys) would have ample opportunity to gaze extensively upon the face of Ankh-tesh’s coffin.

The coffin of Ankh-tesh created a community connection through shared feelings and emotions during of the funeral experience. The Gaze of the coffin was both comforting and disturbing to those who experienced it. The coffin was comforting in the fact that it offered reassurance that the social relationships from life were still intact and that Ankh-tesh continued to exist in another realm, watching over the living, continuing relationships established during her mortal life; its Gaze made those social relationships eternal. The coffin’s face created a tangible means of drawing the deceased into the realm of the living, thus making communication between the dead and the living possible. Yet it was also a bit disturbing it think that Ankh-tesh’s coffin, an inanimate material entity, possessed an eternal Gaze, always watching. The gaze of Ankh-tesh’s coffin demanded the attention, in a non-sexualized manner, of those along the funeral procession route to stop what they were doing and return its gaze.

During Ankh-Tesh’s funeral procession, many people would have seen her coffin. Everyday workmen were often excused from work for these processions, and through the evidence of Ramesside tomb paintings,\textsuperscript{107} most likely the entire village was meant to be present at the funeral procession. These casual viewers would have most likely not known Ankh-Tesh while she was alive, and most likely would have gazed upon her coffin from a distance. Everyday people just out and about would also have likely stopped what they were doing to gaze at the funeral procession, much as we do today when one drives by us. Time slows down when we take this time to reflect on deaths we have experienced in our own lives. This connects them

in social ways to the deceased in her coffin and her grieving loved ones. It is the coffin’s agency provokes this action/reaction from its viewers, making it a conduit between the living and the dead.

Upon arrival outside the tomb, her final resting place, Ankh-tesh’s coffin would have been placed upright and the inner cartonnage removed. A priest\textsuperscript{108} would have performed the Opening of the Mouth ceremony; the most important ritual of the entire funeral proceedings. The purpose of this rite, performed on the upright cartonnage, was to restore to the deceased the powers of speech, sight, and hearing\textsuperscript{109} — in short, to bring the body magically back to life. It was this ritual transformation of the passive object (the cartonnage case) to an active subject (a re-animated being) that empowered it to speak, to see, and to act, through various culturally-subscribed channels, after which it might be said to exercise its own Agency.

Many components had to be perfect in order for this transformation to be success. The correct spells from the \textit{Book of the Dead} had to be illustrated on the cartonnage coffin; spells that would assist this transformation and protect the deceased on her journey to the afterworld. The cartonnage coffin had to have the face of the deceased painted on it as well as her name written in hieroglyphs so her spirit could identify her and return to the correct coffin. Rituals had to be followed in ancient traditional form such as the two \textit{djeryt} accompanying the coffin in the procession and the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. Only after all of these things were done exactly right could the cartonnage coffin stand in as a true double of the Ankh-tesh.

It was here in front of the tomb entrance that all would gaze upon Ankh-tesh’s cartonnage for the first and last time (Fig. 24). After the Opening of the Mouth ceremony was finished, her cartonnage would be placed back inside the outer wooden coffin. The body of Ankh-tesh’s

\textsuperscript{108} The priest often wore a jackal-headed mask in representation of the funerary god, Anubis.

cartonnage followed a simple design and was covered with protective and cosmic images that would assist her into the afterlife. The head and face were especially important areas of the coffin because they signified the fundamental focus of this transformative ritual. The painted face on the cartonnage is even more realistic than the one on her outer coffin; it is painted flesh color. This helps to stress the difference between the inanimate outer wooden coffin and the more naturalistic and, following the Opening of the Mouth, a reanimated being. Ankh-tesh’s eyes are outlined in blue with black pupils and irises on a white background. Her eyebrows are once again thin black lines. She has a small round nose and lips that this time appear to be on the verge of a grin. All these details together create quite a strikingly realistic face (Figs. 25 & 26). On her chest is a large depiction of the ram-headed winged scarab beetle with a sun disc, representing the continuous cycle of rebirth, of day and night, life and death (Fig. 27). The other registers consist of images depicting the weighing of the heart (Figs. 28 & 29), the mummification process (Fig. 30), and the mummy being re-united with the *Ba*-bird (Fig 31); all scenes from *The Book of the Dead*.\(^{111}\)

These images were laid out within horizontal bands that start just above the waist and continue down to the feet. The systematic horizontal banding was meant to duplicate the actual wrapping bands on the mummified body within\(^{112}\) (Fig. 32). When her loved ones gazed upon these bands they would have been reminded of the eternal preservation of her body in the form of the mummy. This would have been both comforting and reassuring. They took comfort in the fact that her body was given such care by the embalmers and reassured that this cartonnage would preserve her for eternity, and by extension, to preserve the relationships they had with her.

\(^{110}\) Spell 30: The Judgment of the Dead; the heart of the deceased is weighed on the scales of balance against Maat’s feather of truth and righteousness (Andrews and Faulkner, 27).

\(^{111}\) Due to the high price of *The Book of the Dead* and the poor economy of the 22\(^{nd}\) the physical book was no longer buried with deceased. Instead, scenes from the book were often depicted on the coffin of the deceased.

while she was alive. This coffin set served as a container for an ancestral life force, which mediated and transmitted Agency from one generation to another, as a visualized memory that was physically conveyed when family and loved ones visited and interacted with it in the tomb. It also had the ability to absorb death and represent it as a new form of life.

Ankh-tesh’s coffin set also denoted unity and spirituality, implying that it was a social being with cultural and cosmic value. It was created to embody her memory: it came to signify the space in between states of being; past and present. As Ankh-tesh’s loved ones viewed the funeral procession and her coffin in particular, they most likely contemplated their own lives, their own deaths, and had thoughts of immortality and eternity. But as they looked upon the face of her coffin, they must have felt reassured in its eternalness, and thankful that their relationships with Ankh-tesh would endure, therefore, beyond her death. Her coffin was now her double, and as such, was an intermediary between her and her loved ones. In regards to the relationship between her coffin and its viewer, the Gaze highlighted the importance of being able to look, of having sight. Its gaze wanted the viewer to feel comfortable with the coffin as a double for the deceased, of its power to successful transport the deceased into the afterlife. The Agency of Ankh-Tesh’s coffin was increased through being viewed in both of these public and intimate rituals. Having gone through the rituals the coffin was empowered to function not only in the realm of the living but also in that of the dead as an intermediary agent able to intercede in both worlds.

Gazing and being the object of the Gaze form a powerful social force.\textsuperscript{113} When gazes meet, one cannot take without giving something in return: by gazing, the viewer also exposes him or herself. The visual properties of the outer coffin, its complex meaning and beauty, both attracted the Gaze and slowed viewing along the funeral procession, creating an ongoing

\textsuperscript{113} Sepp n en. \textit{The Power of the Gaze}. 59.
relationship between it and the viewer.\textsuperscript{114} It was the recognition of the fact that the outer coffin had the capability of being the subject seeming to gaze out and judge in its own right that gave it such Agency. And through this interchangeability Ankh-tesh’s coffin was able to be the active subject or the passive object in the social relationship. Her coffin ensemble became an actor in this social setting through the power of its Gaze.\textsuperscript{115} In this sense, her coffin set was more than a static object, provoking some kind of response from people. Through the visual iconography and the Opening of Mouth ceremony it was encoded with social and cosmic references that gave it agency. Her coffin communicated not only through elaborate symbolic systems but also through emotive stimuli.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Chua, Liana, and Mark Elliott. \textit{Distributed Objects: Meaning and Mattering after Alfred Gell}. (New York: Berghahn, 2013) 79.
  \item \textsuperscript{115} Sepp nen. \textit{The Power of the Gaze}. 71.
\end{itemize}
CHAPTER VI. CASE STUDY THREE: THE COMPLETE COFFIN SET OF HENETTAWY

The third case study explores the last phase of the journey of a Third Intermediate Period female coffin: its time while sealed in the tomb. Throughout this long journey, the coffin maintained its position as an active agent within the living world through the continued gaze and agentive interactions with living people. I argue that Third Intermediate Period female Egypt coffins played active roles and filled gaps in the social fabric of daily life and that this was accomplished because of their ability to possess the power of the Gaze, which was re-enforced by it Agency. A Third Intermediate Period coffin set elaborated on the themes of connectivity and resemblance by taking the doubling force of the visual and material as a foundation from which to "rethink how we create attachments in a world in which subjects and objects no longer stand in opposition to each other". The living relatives and the deceased's coffin had an attachment that continued while the coffin was in its tomb. The family would have visited her tomb and asked her coffin for favors in return for offerings. Coffins served as mediators between the living and the dead. And with the coffin as a conduit, the deceased could still influence the world of the living.

The last coffin set to be examined in this thesis is a complete 21st Dynasty (1094BCE-945BCE) ensemble that belonged to Henettawy, who was The Mistress of the House, Singer of Amun-Ra, and who, died when she was twenty-one years old. This set includes the outer and inner wooden coffin and the inner most mummy board. The mummy board covered the full

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116 Miller, Materiality. 10.
118 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
length of the mummy and was made of carved wood which was plastered and painted.\textsuperscript{119} This three piece set (Fig. 33), which was a typical provision for a non-royal individual during the 21\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty, is currently on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, New York.

During the Ramesside Period (1300BCE-1080BCE)\textsuperscript{120} and into the beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty a deceased woman was either buried in her husband’s tomb or, if she was not married, in her father’s.\textsuperscript{121} But as the Third Intermediate Period progressed, larger numbers of coffins were placed inside one large undecorated,\textsuperscript{122} extended-family tomb.\textsuperscript{123} Henettawy’s coffin set, therefore, would have been sealed inside her family’s tomb once the burial ceremonies were finished. Family would have made offerings to the gods so that they would provide for her in death. Henettawy’s family, friends would have seen only her outer most coffin as it lay inside the tomb.

Additionally, Ancient Egyptians believed the outer coffin was also seen by a person’s \textit{Ba} and \textit{Ka}. To them it was understood that each person possessed two distinct spirit attributes, called the \textit{Ka} and the \textit{Ba},\textsuperscript{124} which would be released from the body at the time of death. Although these lack a direct translation into the English language, the \textit{Ka} is often equated with a person’s life force.\textsuperscript{125} It was unique to every individual, a kind of double, and was often represented in ancient Egyptian images as an exact copy of its owner. After death the \textit{Ka}
remained in the tomb near the coffin,\(^{126}\) where it was nourished by the food and drink offerings left by family members.

The *Ba* has been compared to the present day concept of soul. The *Ba* remained with its owner during life, but after death it acquired special powers\(^{127}\) enabling it to move freely and independently of the body, even leaving the tomb by day. The freedom of movement of the *Ba* was a continuous theme in *The Book of the Dead*.\(^{128}\) In fact, many spells in this text declared that the deceased would go forth from the tomb as a living *Ba*, which was usually depicted as a human-headed bird (Fig. 34), an image also often portrayed on coffins. Although able to journey between and within the underworld and this world, the *Ba*-bird as Henettawy’s double, could visit the living or access the gods.\(^{129}\) Yet it could not exist independently forever and was required to return each night to the tomb to be reunited with the deceased in its coffin.\(^{130}\) In fact, both the *Ba* and *Ka* eventually needed to return to the body.\(^{131}\) If the mummy were destroyed these spirits were also destroyed unless they could take up residence in a substitute body, such as the coffin.\(^{132}\) But they would need to be able to recognize the coffin that their mummy is encased in.

The main component to ensure recognition was the face on Henettawy’s outer coffin. It was painted in a stylized image of the deceased. By doing this it acknowledged the Egyptian’s religious reasons for doing so, but also gave credence to its social effect. It allowed family and friends to recognize and accept it for religious and personal reasons, and it also allowed the *Ba* and *Ka* to recognize her and thus know where to return to. The face on Henettawy’s coffin was

\(^{126}\) Taylor. *Journey through the Afterlife.* 16.
\(^{128}\) Taylor. *Journey through the Afterlife.* 16.
\(^{130}\) Taylor. *Journey through the Afterlife.* 105.
\(^{131}\) Leca. *The Egyptian Way of Death.* 5.
decorated with an elaborate wig and headband; the wig comes down over the front of both shoulders with red and white bands wrapped around toward the bottom. Just under the wig and still in raised relief are her breasts, which was a typical distinguishing female coffin trait in the 21st Dynasty. Her ears are not shown, but she does have visible disc earrings. Henettawy’s face, as well as part of her arms and her hands, is painted in a flesh color (Fig. 35). She has a full nose and a set stern mouth. Henettawy's face is very similar on all three coffins (Figs. 36, 37, & 38).

As in the two previous case studies, Henettawy's pupils and irises are painted black on a white background, while her eyes are outlined in a thin sharp black line, as are her eyebrows. Since her face is perceived as intensely lifelike, the power of her eyes becomes particularly haunting. Its Gaze compels the viewer to come closer, to experience their liveliness, to examine the coffins in their entirety, to give them more than a mere glance. It is with this face and these eyes that the coffin gazed out at those who visited her tomb, reassuring them that she was still there looking out for their best interest, and would do so for eternity.

The rest of Henettawy's outer-most coffin is covered with images and hieroglyphs that represent scenes for the Book of the Dead and other important funerary texts that would have enabled her to journey successfully into the afterlife. In addition to imagery intended to replicate the banding of a wrapped mummy, Henettawy's outer coffin lid has an intricate pectoral imagery that comes together between the painted breasts, where two winged udjat eyes133 and two suspended uraeus cobras134 holding ankhs135 are painted. During the Third Intermediate Period, Upper and Lower Egypt were no longer united under one ruler. By depicting this set of images, Henettawy was referring back to an earlier time in Egyptian history (specifically the New

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133 One represents the eye of the day and the other the eye of the night. They were used as protectors of the dead to assist them in the triumph over the powers of darkness and death (Wiedemann, 292-293).
134 The two opposing uraeus cobra were meant to represent Upper and Lower Egypt (Wiedemann, 141).
135 Ankh was the Egyptian word for knot and life. In image form it often means give life (Wiedemann, 288).
Kingdom) of stability and safety. Perhaps by doing so, she would trying to project stability and safety for herself in her transition to the afterlife.

Below her crossed wrists, a centrally placed scarab pushing a sun disk upward is flanked by Horus falcons (Fig. 39). Again, this image was commonly used on coffins to represent the Egyptian belief in continual cycle of life, death, and, rebirth. On either side of this pectoral are figures of Anubis depicted as a jackal, wearing the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt and holding powerful scepters (Figs. 40 & 41). Below this the goddess Nut\textsuperscript{136} kneels with her winged arms outstretched in an embrace of the deceased Henettawy for eternity (Fig. 42). On the top of the thighs are scenes of Henettawy in a dress praying before Osiris (Fig. 43), asking that he grant her a successful passage into his world. The decoration of the foot-board is intriguing because the figurative scenes on this part of the lid are painted upside-down when they are looked at by a viewer. These were presumably intended to be seen by the deceased herself looking down at her own feet. They represent Isis and Nephthys mourning the death of Henettawy.\textsuperscript{137} (Fig. 44). All of these images were a necessary component for Henettawy to be reborn into the afterlife and also for her coffin to transition into her true double following the \textit{Opening of the Mouth} ceremony.

Henettawy’s inner coffin (middle piece in the set) follows the traditional “yellow” coffin motif of the 21\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty in that all available spaces were filled with figures, hieroglyphs, and symbols.\textsuperscript{138} (Fig. 48). Also typical of the 21\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty was the use of a painted wooden mummy board to lie over the deceased’s mummy. On Henettawy’s mummy board (inner-most piece in

\textsuperscript{136} Nut was one of the original few deities from the Heliopolis creation myth. She was the personification of the sky, often referred to as the Sky Mother. In this role, she swallowed the sun every night and then gave birth to it again every morning (Wilkinson, 160-162). Nut also had an association with funerary arts; since Osiris was he son, she was regarded as the Mother of the Deceased, and therefore, an eternal protector of the dead (Taylor, 10).

\textsuperscript{137} Niwinski. 21\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty Coffins from Thebes. 67.

\textsuperscript{138} Goff, Beatrice Laura. Symbols of Ancient Egypt in the Late Period: The Twenty-first Dynasty. (The Hague: Mouton, 1979) 91.
the set), the upper portion is very similar to both the outer and inner coffin, while the lower portion is designed to look like Henettawy is dressed and alive wearing a red and white geometrically printed garment (Fig. 49). Running vertically down the front of this garment is a line of hieroglyphs.

The living and the dead had a reciprocal relationship in ancient Egypt. The living relied on the dead to help them with struggles throughout their life and also to assist them into the afterlife. And the dead relied on the living to keep their memory alive, a fundamental component to their existence in the afterlife. The Egyptians believed that the living needed to continue to speak the name of the deceased, bring offerings of food, water, clothing, etc. to the deceased in order to keep them happy in the afterlife. Through the coffin’s Agency, it beckoned the viewer to enter into a social relationship. This coffin offers the viewer a glimpse into a different way of thinking about death; it offers an alternative, an afterlife, not just an end.

For those in the world of the living, then, there were recognized procedures for gaining access to both the gods and the dead. Boundaries existed, but they could be crossed. In ancient Egypt, magic and ritual were used to deal with the supernatural, both in life and death. In practice the challenges of life and death were met by the use of magical approaches which opened a more direct channel of communication with the divine. Family of the deceased must continue to bring food and drink (nourishment) to Henettawy’s coffin inside the tomb to keep these lines of communication open.

By continuing the ancient ritual practice of honoring and providing for the dead, Henettawy’s family greatly increased her chances of a successful journey into the afterlife.

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Ancient Egyptian festivals were acts of commemoration and remembrance. Incorporating the dead into the rituals of the living was equally important for maintaining both realms. The key to each was the reinstatement of dead individuals, through commemorating their lives and their continued presence among the living.\(^{142}\) Even though Henettawy was now dead, she was still able to carry on relationships with the living. The Gaze of her coffin desired to watch over them, protect them, and provide them with comfort. All they had to do was gaze upon her face on the coffin to be reminded of her eternal presence and to receive her coffin’s Gaze.

Egyptians believed that the possible continuation of selfhood depended on the physical preservation of the body, and on the memory of the self that was carried on through the actions of the living who came after the death of the individual embodied person.\(^{143}\) So long as loved ones visited Ankh-tesh’s coffin, left offerings, and continued to communicate with her through the medium of her coffin — basically treating her coffin as her double — then she would continue to exist eternally in both the realm of the living and the dead. Coffins provided the soul of the deceased with an eternal receptacle, a tangible form that could be pulled into the worldly realm by living family members so that they could offer to, and communicate with, their dead loved one.

Many family members would have written to Henettawy’s coffin for help or advice. In one such example\(^{144}\) a man in the 21\(^{st}\) Dynasty addresses a letter, not to Ikhtay, the name of his wife, but to her coffin, thus using his wife’s coffin as a communicative conduit between the living and the dead thereby granting it agency in its own right.


\(^{143}\) Ibid, 11.

O, noble chest of Osiris, the Chantress of Amun, Ikhtay, who rests under you. Listen to me. Send the message and say to her, since you are close to her:

―How are you doing? How are you?‖

The “noble chest of Osiris” refers back to the myth of Osiris being trapped in the beautiful chest by Seth and thrown into the Nile River. The deceased in her own coffin connected her to the cyclical Osiris, thus guaranteeing her rebirth into the afterlife.

In the Book of the Dead, agency is often linked to objects. One such spell states that the agency of a coffin and the spells written on it allow provisions and transformative powers to the deceased:

As for him who knows this book on earth or it is put in writing on the coffin, it is my word that he shall go out into the day in any shape that he desires and shall go into his place without being turned back, and there shall be given to him bread and beer and portion of meat from upon the altar of Osiris.

In yet another letter to the dead, a husband wrote to his wife (using her coffin as a mediator) asking for protection and assistance from her in her new realm of the afterlife. In return he will provide nourishment for her through her coffin that can, since the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, now receive these things.

How are you? Is the West taking care of you? Now since I am your beloved upon the earth, fight on my behalf and intercede on behalf of my name…Please become a spirit for me before my eyes so that I may see you in a dream fighting on my behalf. I will deposit offerings for you as soon as the sun has risen and outfit your offering slab for you.

These three letters to the dead are but a few examples demonstrating that the coffin continued to perform multiple functions after being placed in its tomb: it was active, transformative, and

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146 Faulkner, Goelet, and Andrews, The Egyptian Book of the Dead. 16.
147 Wente and Meltzer. Letters from Ancient Egypt. 215.
protective. The role of the coffin became transcendent and communicative, thus increasing its social value in both the realms of the living and the dead.

Henettawy’s coffins were multi-faceted, brought into being through production, enmeshed in ongoing social relationships, and they required continual engagement. Their powerful Agency provided them with the capacity to redirect human intentions and stimulate reflection on the conditions and nature of life and death. This is where their real agency resided; in their power to influence people’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. Henettawy’s coffins themselves demanded responsiveness and activated emotional engagement. Their effects are cumulative, but they are the direct consequence of the sustained and continuing realism of the individual depicted on them. The striving for resemblance marks their attempts to make the dead appear alive. These coffins as symbolic reminders were meant to commemorate the reconstitution of life. The viewer would see the familiar anatomy and endow it with familiar sentiments; and then, in a way, gave it life to breathe, feel, and see.
CHAPTER VII. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

During the course of this thesis I have argued that Third Intermediate Period non-royal female coffins had a real Gaze, not just a perceived gaze, or even the projected gaze of the viewer; but a Gaze in its own right. Through tradition, rituals, and connections with the living, these coffins also possessed their own Agency. This Agency caused varied reactions and responses among the ancient people who viewed the coffins. There are three main arguments within this thesis: 1. these coffins possessed their own Female Gaze, 2. they had their own Agency, and 3. that because of their gaze and agency they were able to continue old relationships (between the deceased and her loved ones) and create new ones.

I argued that the coffins in all three case studies of this thesis have the power of the Gaze. In case study one, the cartonnage coffin gazed at Meresamun, the woman for whom it stood as a double, at the craftsmen who created and decorated it, and at the embalmers who placed the mummy into the cartonnage case. By gazing at all these people, the coffin formed a unique relationship with them. This theory is supported in case study two when the outer coffin gazed out at the viewers of the funeral procession. The power of this Gaze on the viewer was affected by their distance to the coffin. The funeral procession gave the viewer the opportunity to gaze at the coffin — the deceased’s double — in ways and for durations that may not have otherwise been possible or accepted while the deceased was alive. Once at the tomb, the cartonnage was removed for the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, during which it gazed at and was gazed upon by the priest, family, and friends. After the coffin set was reassembled and placed in the tomb (in case study three), the coffin continued to gaze out. In Egyptian belief, it would gaze at the Ba
and Ka when they returned to the tomb. It would also gaze at the family members when they visited.

My second argument, that these coffins possessed their own Agency is also supported by the previous three case studies. Because of the cartonnage’s agency (case study one), Meresamun was able to accept it as her eternal double. Viewers experienced and accepted the power of its Agency to transport the deceased into the afterlife. The agency of the outer coffin in case study two caused viewers of the funeral procession to contemplate their own life and death. Viewers that interacted with the coffin from a distance identified with the coffin and the person contained within. And those individuals located at a closer physical distance to experience the power of the Egyptian cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Through the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, cartonnages such as Ankh-tesh’s (case study two) gained increased agency truly transforming it from an inanimate object into a reanimated being. And finally, the powerful Agency of a coffin set sealed within a tomb (case study three) allowed it be an active agent within the living world; in response, family members left offerings and wrote letters to both the deceased and her coffin.

My third argument is that because these coffins had both Gaze and Agency, each woman in these case studies was able to keep the relationships she had during her life active through the coffin as mediator. Their coffins also formed new social relationships with all those who gazed upon them. The living formed a social relationship with their coffins through regular visits during its construction, whereby they came to acknowledge it as their double. Similarly, the coffin facilitated the continuation of relationships between the living and the dead. Even distant viewers at the funeral procession formed brief and perhaps fleeting relationships with the coffin. The coffin remained the home base for her Ba and Ka, without it her multiple parts would not be
reunited after death. The Egyptians believed there was a very thin veil between the living and the dead. They thought the deceased’s coffin acted as a conduit between these realms. The Gaze of the coffins presented in this thesis was one of desire, a non-sexualized desire. It demanded complex relationships; trust that it would protect and carry the deceased into the afterlife, assurance that it could be the double of the deceased, belief that it was a conduit between the dead and the living.

These Third Intermediate Period female coffins were made to be durable, permanent, and eternal. These coffins, as ritual objects, were created to be the receptacles for the life-force or vital energies of the dead. Egyptian coffins were powerful and multifaceted objects that continue to have an attraction in our modern world. And yet, the intricacy of the social space in which they were originally created and viewed has yet to be thoroughly investigated. Through the lens of Gaze Theory and Object Agency Theory I have examined Third Intermediate Period non-royal female Egyptian coffins and explored their social origin of interchangeability (between object and subject). Agency by nature is social and causative. The agency of these coffins supported and made possible social interactions and relationships.

Ancient Egyptians of the Third Intermediate Period, in general, had strong focus on maintaining social relationships in both life and death. This is evident on their coffins through the emphasis on the detailed faces which possessed a Gaze while also effacing the body of the deceased. Perhaps this was because of the breakdown in government, where ties to the local community (as opposed to large-scale Egypt) were paramount, and the preservation of the illusion that the communal ties continued after death. This would also explain why male and female coffins of this period look similar — it was about desire for relationships and an eternal social life. If community is all you have, then you need to make sure that you remain a part of
that community, even after death — and a successful coffin, who can desire and demand things from the other members of your community, is what will help you maintain those social connections and bonds. Thus making these coffins vital to the structure of the ancient Egyptian’s perceptions; constraining or releasing ideas and emotions in ways that drew together the social, cosmic, and emotional links to the living and the dead in an ever changing relationship between past and present.


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