

Ernest Renan's Discoveries were Followed by a Host of Others

In 1887, a wave of new excavations was launched after an article in the *American Journal of Archaeology* announced the discovery of new sarcophagi at *Ayaa* near the village of *Helaliyeh* to the north-east of Sidon. Hamdi Bey, the Director of the Ottoman Empire's Museum of Constantinople¹⁰ exhibited an important collection of sarcophagi two of which were typically anthropoid in design. The sarcophagus of General Pen-Ptah who was re-employed by the king of Sidon and priest of Astarte, Tabnit I (end of 6th century and beginning of 5th century BC) and the unfinished anthropoid coffin generally attributed to 'Amo' Astarte the wife of Tabnit. They are both currently housed in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul.

Further discoveries were made at *Bramieh*, *Ain Zeitoun* and *Mieh Mieh*.¹¹ However, the largest collection of anthropoid sarcophagus was found in 1901 by the American School of Oriental Research¹² at *Ain el Helwé* near *Magharat Abloun*. The nineteen sarcophagi are, all together known as the "Ford Collection" named in honor of the Director of the American School who later donated them to the Beirut National Museum in the underground galleries of which they have resided since 1937.

Two more sarcophagi were to be discovered in 1914 by Georges Contenau¹³ in the village of *El-Merah* to the north of Sidon. In 1963, even more sarcophagi were added to the Ford Collection from *Magharat Abloun*¹⁴ also in the region of Sidon close to the area where the Eshmunazor II sarcophagus was found.

Not all of the valuable items (jewelry, seals, combs, mirrors, etc...) deposited in the sarcophagi were recovered. "Upon entering these burial vaults, wrote Ernest Renan,¹⁵ what strikes you is the spectacle of depredation wreaked upon them. Not a single sarcophagus had been spared. Often, objects discarded by the plunderer are found near the sarcophagus..."

The Beirut National Museum contains certain archaeological material found in the tombs. Some of it has been publicly documented and some remains unpublished. A closer look at them should reveal priceless information relating to both the funereal rites and the daily routines of Phoenician life from the end of the 6th century to the middle of the 4th century BC.

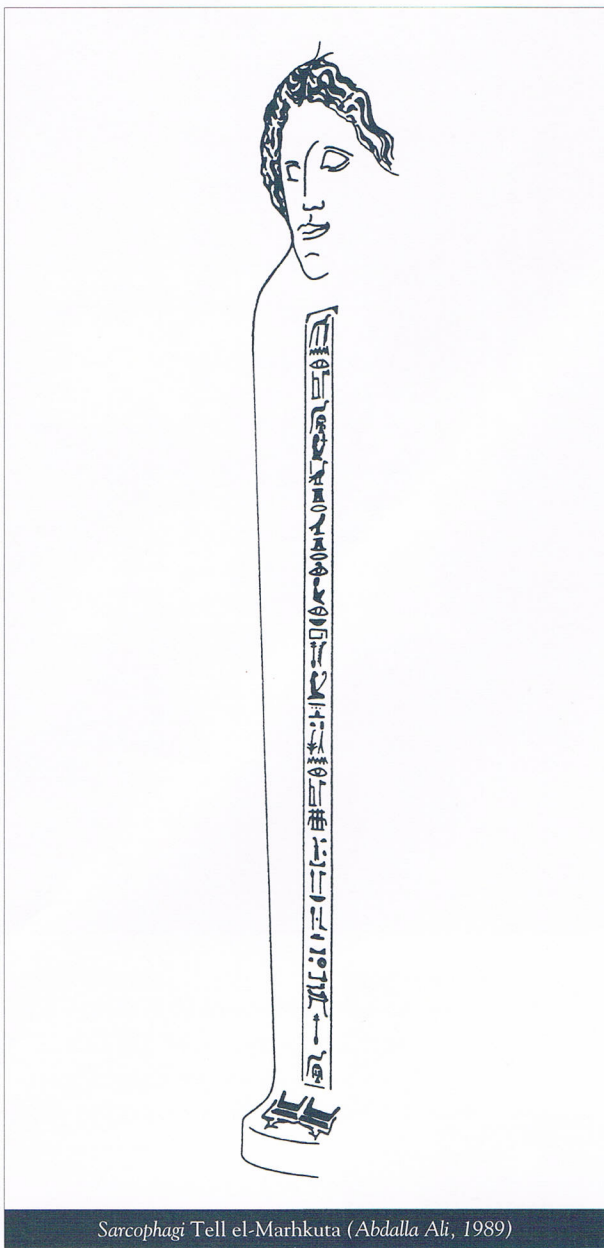
The publication of a yet unattested fragment of a marble sarcophagus of the "Sidonian" type recently provided the opportunity to detail a few new findings on this sculptural class¹⁶. Of special interest to the present topic is the discovery of an anthropomorphic coffin at Tell el-Mashkuta (e.g. *Djeku/Pi-Aton*, *Bibl. Pitom?*) on the Phoenician overland trade route to Egypt which passed through Gaza and led to the Delta via Er-Reqeish, Tell el-Herr/*Migdol* and Tell Abu Sefa/*Silé*, whence the caravans followed a northern track.¹⁷ The lid bears an Egyptian inscription translated by the excavator, Abdalla Ali, as follows: "Djedhor, son of Geremgeret made by the Mistress of the House Neferrenpet." Found in a mud-brick tomb of a Ptolemaic cemetery, this coffin was originally destined for a female client, but appeared to contain the mortal remains of a man.¹⁸

If the hieroglyphs and their disposition tie-in with local prototypes of the Persian age, both the wavy hair-style and physiognomy of the head on the lid betray Sidonian manufacture. As a mere comparison with examples now in the National Museum of Beirut points out, an identical combination of these features indeed characterizes the output of a workshop active during the transitory decades between the outgoing 5th-early 4th century BC, supplying more precisely the concessionaires of the *Ain Helwé* necropolis.¹⁹

Finally, it should be added that however rare, this is most likely not the only early Ptolemaic instance where a Sidonian coffin was re-used by a resident of ancient Egypt. The upper part of the lid of an anthropomorphic sarcophagus from Sakkara now in Berlin has indeed been connected with a stele from the same find-spot mentioning the (Phoenician?) police-inspector Khahapi. In the latter case, however, the surviving part is unfortunately too fragmented to establish whether an hieroglyphic text had equally been added to the lid...²⁰

Notes

- ¹ J. FERRON, "Sarcophages", *Dictionnaire de la civilisation phénicienne et punique*, Turnhout-Paris, 1992, p. 391-392
- ² M. L. BUHL, "L'origine des sarcophages anthropoïdes phéniciens en pierre", *Atti del I Congresso Internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punici. Roma, 5-10, Novembre 1979*, I, Roma, 1983, p. 200 and E. GUBEL, "A new Sidonian Coffin Head in the U.S.A.", *Studia Varia Bruxellensia, ad orbem graeco-latinum pertinentia*, III, 1994, p. 86
- ³ E. KUKAHN, *Anthropoide Sarkophage in Beyrouth und die Geschichte dieser sidonischen Sarkophagkunst*, Berlin, 1955, p. 32-54 and 58-60
- ⁴ M. L. BUHL, *op.cit.*, p. 200-202
- ⁵ J. ELAYI, "Les sarcophages phéniciens d'époque perse", *Iranica Antiqua*, 23, 1988, p. 277-278
- ⁶ M. YON - A. CAUBET, "Arouad et Amrit VIIIe-Ier siècles av J.C. Documents", *Transeuphratène*, 6, 1993, p. 60-61
- ⁷ A. HERMARY, *Amathonte II. Testimonia 2: la sculpture*, Paris, 1981, p. 85-86
- ⁸ S. MOSCATI, "Les sarcophages", *Les Phéniciens, Palazzo Grassi*, 1988, Paris, 1989, p. 292-295
- ⁹ E. RENAN, *Mission de Phénicie*, Paris, 1864, p.401, 410, 412
- ¹⁰ O. HAMDI BEY - S. REINACH; *Une nécropole royale à Sidon*, Paris, 1892, pl. XLI, 3, 11, pl. XLIII, XLIV
- ¹¹ O. HAMDI BEY - S. REINACH, *op.cit.*, n° 84, 86, 87, 91, 92 and N. JIDEJIAN, *Sidon Through the Ages*, Beirut, 1971, p.138, 139-141
- ¹² C.C. TORREY, "A Phoenician Necropolis at Sidon", *The Annual of the American School of Oriental Research*, I, 1920, p. 1 to 27
- ¹³ G. CONTENAU, "Mission Archéologique à Sidon (1914)", *Syria*, I, 1920, p. 217-221
- ¹⁴ R. SAIDAH, "Chronique", *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth*, XX, 1967, p. 164, 165
- ¹⁵ E. RENAN, *op.cit.*, p.412
- ¹⁶ E. GUBEL, *op.cit.*, p 83-98
- ¹⁷ D.F. GRAF, "The Persian Royal Road System in Syria-Palestine", *Transeuphratène* 6, 1993, p. 161-165 and E. GUBEL, "Phoenician Foundations in Archaeological Perspective", *apud* S. MAZZONI - E. BRESCIANI (ed), *La città in Vicino Oriente*, Pisa, 1994 (forthcoming)
- ¹⁸ M. ABDALLA ALI, "A marble sarcophagus from Tell el-Mashkuta", *The Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*, XIX, 1989, p. 48-49
- ¹⁹ E. KUKAHN, *op.cit.*, p. 45-6, 75-7 B. 18-21, resp. K 21-2, 45-46
- ²⁰ E. GUBEL, *op.cit.*, p. 86-89 with note 2



Sarcophagi Tell el-Marhkuta (Abdalla Ali, 1989)

Only two of the anthropoid sarcophagi found in the Lebanon are inscribed and they are those of the Sidonian Kings Tabnit I and his son Eshmunazor II. Both date back to the beginning of the 5th century BC. They were imported from Egypt and the Tabnit sarcophagus still bears the hieroglyphic inscriptions etched by its previous owner.

The eight-line inscription on the Tabnit sarcophagus is essentially a curse on any future thieves of the tomb. The one on Eshmunazor's sarcophagus has 22 lines making it the longest royal Phoenician inscription. Apart from a similar curse, its inscriptions offer some interesting information on the cordial relationship that existed between the King of Sidon and his suzerain counterpart, the King of Persia. An entente thanks to which the Sidonians enjoyed an extension of their territories that included Dor & Jaffa in Palestine. We also learn that Eshmunazor had several temples built and dedicated to the gods Eshmun and Astarte and that both king and queen fulfilled the role of High Priest to the gods.