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# ЕГИПЕТ И СОПРЕДЕЛЬНЫЕ СТРАНЫ

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## **‘Faces’ of Deir el-Banat**

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The author makes an overview of masks of Ptolemaic coffins coming from the southern necropolis of Deir el-Banat (Fayoum). Despite the fact that the necropolis was used for a relatively long period, the masks represent a homogenous collection, which can be divided into two groups — with painted decoration and without it. Both groups display variations in grade of material, level of detail and craftsmen skills. The style and pattern of decorated coffin masks generally correspond to ones of mummies’ cartonnage masks of the same time.

*Keywords:* Fayoum, Deir el-Banat, Ptolemaic period, necropolis, rhomboid coffin, mask, art of Greco-Roman Egypt.

The site of Deir el-Banat is located in a desert area in the south-eastern part of the Fayoum oasis. It is situated 3 km east of the village Ezbet Qalamshah and 1,5 km north of the monastery of Archangel Gabriel at Naqlun. Deir el-Banat is a large area that includes remains of a ‘nunnery’<sup>1</sup> and two vast necropoli extending to the north and to the south of the ‘monastic’ complex. According to the archaeological data, the site was continuously occupied from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>2</sup>.

Archaeological exploration of the site started in 1980 by the Fayoum Inspectorate of the Supreme Council of Antiquities<sup>3</sup>. In 2003 the work was continued by the Russian Archaeological Mission to Deir el-Banat<sup>4</sup>. The research was mainly carried out in the southern

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<sup>1</sup> Grossmann 1991; Krol 2005: 213–216.

<sup>2</sup> Krol 2005: 216.

<sup>3</sup> The missions were headed by Dr. Aly Mohammad Ahmed El-Baziedy (seasons 1981–1982, 1995) and Dr. Ahmed Abd El-Aal Mohammad (seasons 1982–1983, February — April 1984 and November 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Organized by the Centre for Egyptological Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (CES RAS), the mission is directed by Dr. Galina A. Belova. For progress reports see Belova, Ivanov 2019; Белова 2017; Tolmacheva 2017; Орфинская 2015; Voytenko 2012; Васильев, Боруцкая 2009, etc.

necropolis, where in 1980–2017 more than 1500 graves were excavated. Approximately 30 % of the graves date to the Greco-Roman period<sup>5</sup>.

Ptolemaic graves<sup>6</sup> contain from one to four interments. Bodies of the dead were mummified<sup>7</sup>, decorated with cartonnage elements (helmet masks, collars, ‘aprons’, foot cases, etc.) and laid in coffins. Most of the coffins are wooden anthropomorphic-shaped ones. They belong to the ‘rhomboid’ (*Dreiecksärge*) type<sup>8</sup>, which is characterized by an elongated hexagonal shape of the chests copying the main outlines of the human body. Narrow and low in the head part, the coffins become wide and high in the shoulders and breast; the thinnest and lowest point is in ankles, a protruding, high segment for the feet of a deceased person follows. The coffins consist of two parts: a flat bottom with low (2–3 cm high) borders, on which a mummy was laid, and a high lid covering the body and forming the main volume of the chest. Similar ‘rhomboid’ coffins were found at Gurob<sup>9</sup>, Gamhud<sup>10</sup>, El-Hibeh<sup>11</sup>, El-Deir<sup>12</sup>, Antinoe<sup>13</sup>, Saqqara<sup>14</sup> and other sites.

The coffins were generally made of thin irregular in shape wooden boards that were roughly fitted together. The level of carpentry was average: craftsmen used simple joints and a large number of dowels to keep pieces together. Chinks between the boards, cracks in the wood and carpenters’ faults were fixed with mud plaster<sup>15</sup>.

Approximately half of the coffins were decorated with polychrome painting. Its subjects were typical: the lid bore depictions of winged deities protecting a deceased, the trial of Osiris, a scene of mummification, gods sitting in a bark; the Sons of Horus were placed on sides of the coffins; the bottom was decorated with a representation of a standing goddess.

The coffins were of three standard sizes: ‘medium’ (c. 180 cm in length) ones were the most common, while ‘large’ (c. 190 cm) and ‘small’ (c. 165 cm) chests were used less often. It is likely that the coffins were produced for sale. As far as the vast majority of them were not inscribed, they did not require any personalization. Given the varying grade of materials and level of craftsmanship, it can be assumed that there were ‘more expensive’ and ‘cheaper’ coffins. This difference could also correspond to economic rises and falls of the area of Deir el-Banat in antiquity, which had an immediate effect on local workshops, but the idea of social differentiation should not be discarded completely.

<sup>5</sup> This is a rough estimation based on the results of excavations of 370 graves conducted by the Russian mission; due to the fact that burials of the Byzantine period are hardly distinguished from Roman ones, the real percentage is probably higher. Similar observations are made for cemeteries at Fag el-Gamus (Evans et al. 2015: 213–214); Kellis (Brand 2019: 95), etc.

<sup>6</sup> For problems of dating see Белова 2017: 2. The earliest date — the 3<sup>rd</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC — derives from papyrological data and pottery analysis. Cf. Фридманн 2015, her dating of mummy masks is based on stylistic features.

<sup>7</sup> For patterns of mummification see Белова 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Győry 2007: 912–914; Niwiński 1984: 456, Abb. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Yoyotte et al. 2018: 558–559, fig. 2. Though W. M. F. Petrie did not keep complete coffins, the fragments that were brought to London are quite similar to the material from Deir el-Banat (Grajetzki et al.).

<sup>10</sup> Kamal 1908; Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest: 51.2112 (Kóthay 2017: pl. 57, fig. 1), 51.2018/2 (Kóthay 2012: pl. 51, fig. 3).

<sup>11</sup> Archaeological Museum, Cracow: AS/2441 (Babraj, Szymańska 2000: 118–119 (no. 84); Kóthay 2012: pl. 51, fig. 4).

<sup>12</sup> Dunand 2010: 150–158; Dunand 2015: 301–305.

<sup>13</sup> Musée des Beaux-Arts et d’Histoire naturelle, Châteaudun: 83-SDA-429 (Lintz, Coudert 2013: 148–149); Musée d’Art et d’Archéologie, Guéret: 900 (Lintz, Coudert 2013: 150); Musée de l’Hôtel Bertrand, Châteauroux: 3444 (Lintz, Coudert 2013: 151).

<sup>14</sup> Myśliwiec 2008: pl. 84, 101, 116–119, 125, 130–131, 217–218.

<sup>15</sup> More technical details are discussed in Ivanov 2017: 2–5.

The coffins had minimal carving decoration: there was a mask that had been made separately and attached with dowels to the front part of the cover. It was placed within a carved outline of the front strands of a tripartite wig. As far as such masks are a detail that presents on each coffin, it is worth paying special attention to their technological and stylistic features.

The masks vary in quality of the material and by level of a carpenter's skills; this agrees with quality of entire coffins. The masks were carved in lapidary style, showing the main facial features (eyes, a nose, cheeks and a chin). The degree of detailing as well as craftsmanship most likely corresponded to welfare of the family of a deceased.

Some masks were made of a solid piece of wood (fig. 1, a, c), which required a larger workpiece, both in plain dimensions and in thickness. Such masks were quite rare: their production was problematic due to the lack of proper wood. With minor exceptions (fig. 2, a) they were attached to coffins that remained unpainted because after applying a primary and paint layers solidity of the mask could be hardly noticed by an observer. These masks display carpenters' efforts to carve the main facial features and to smoothen sharp lines (a nose, cheeks, brows), still in most cases both remained rough-hewn. One of the masks (fig. 1, a) has carved ears. This was not common as making masks with ears required a larger piece of wood, and usually ears were made separately and attached by sides of the face directly to a coffin's lid.

There were also less skillful masks made of a solid workpiece. These were made of smaller and thinner pieces of wood and thus had smaller size. Frequently faces were irregular in shape and had less protruding noses; eyes and lips were shown with deep scratches. In some cases the nose was made separately and attached to the mask with dowels.

The majority of masks were made of several panels (2–4 pieces), whose size corresponds to the diameter of an average trunk of a tree (5–16 cm) used to produce boards. The middle part of the face with a protruding nose most likely was made of a half-beam, which fits the idea of wasteless use of scarce resources. The panels were joined together with dowels, the cracks filled with mud plaster.

Quality of composite masks also varied. Few of them were a result of careful work and certain attention to details like brows, a nose and lips of proper shape and even nostrils (fig. 1, b, d). Most of the masks display simplified features: eyes and brows are marked with sharp outlines, noses are angled and pyramidal in shape, lips and a chin are shown as a narrow prominence below the nose with incised grooves indicating a mouth line and a border between the lower lip and the chin.

Noses of approximately half of the masks were made separately and doweled to their place. In most cases such noses were carved of small branches of a tree (diam. 3–5 cm) and have a conical shape (fig. 1, e; 2, e). Sometimes all protruding parts were made as one separate narrow piece that included a nose, a mouth and a chin (fig. 1, f).

Masks of undecorated coffins from Deir el-Banat have a number of parallels; for example masks from W. M. F. Petrie's excavations at Gurob<sup>16</sup> and El-Deir<sup>17</sup> also display the same features. However the masks from Gurob are more diverse in style and generally show better sculpting.

<sup>16</sup> Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, London: UC 55096–55118. <sup>17</sup> Dunand 2012: 356–357.



Fig. 1. Masks of undecorated coffins: a — 09/0206; b — 06/0022; c — 256/02/001; d — 08/0072; e — 10/0015; f — 10/0022



a



b



c



d



e



f

Fig. 2. Masks of painted coffins: a — 06/0025; b — 03/0045; c — 03/0040; d — 06/0024; e — 317/02/001; f — 08/0021

It is worth mentioning that plain masks lack beards or any other attributes of gender, and this made such coffins universal. Faces of painted coffins were of different colors — from white and yellow to pink and brown. One can suggest that the choice of color was related to the Egyptian tradition to represent women white-skinned, while men were shown with darker skin. Unfortunately, our archaeological data is insufficient to validate this theory.

The drawing on the mask roughly followed its actual sculptured shape. On the majority of masks only eyes — as the most important feature of a face — were drawn. Brows and the outline of eyes were made in black, the sclera was shown in white, and the pupil was marked in black (fig. 2, a; 3, b, e). The mouth could be drawn as a single red line between the lips (fig. 2, b, d–f; 3, a, c, d). Such a laconic style of painting corresponded to the lapidary carving of the faces. Some masks have additional details like black eyelashes (fig. 2, c), locks of hair going down from under the wig (fig. 2, a, b), eye blood vessels (fig. 2, b; 3, a), a flush on cheeks (2, d, e; 3, a, d, f), nasolabial grooves (fig. 3, a, d), mouth folds (fig. 3, c, d); a chin could be stressed with a spiral (fig. 2, b), circle (fig. 3, c) or simple dot (fig. 2, e; 3, a, d). In most cases the faces were outlined in red.

Masks of painted coffins show a deceased in simple tripartite wigs (fig. 2, a–e); some masks are decorated with a ‘crown of justification’, a circle diadem with seven jewels and an *wdjat*-eye (fig. 3, a–c)<sup>18</sup>, or with a diadem with a scarab (fig. 3, d) or a lotus blossom (fig. 3, e–f). In funerary context these symbols are strongly related to ideas of victory over the death and rejuvenation; they also have an apotropaic meaning.

The mastery of drawing is average; some masks display rather poor skills of an artist (fig. 2, d–f; 3, f), which correlates to the quality of drawing on the entire coffin, the grade of the wood used for this chest and the level of a carpenter’s skills. Taking into account that such coffins were found in regular graves, i. e. ones typical in size, construction and location, some of which also contained chests of average and higher quality, there is an impression that either we deal with the (cheaper?) work of apprentices or these burials were made during periods of decline of the necropolis’ workshops.

The style and pattern of decoration of coffin masks are rather close to ones of cartonnage helmet masks of the Ptolemaic period<sup>19</sup>. Due to the lack of evidence (mummies with well preserved helmet masks come from unpainted coffins; in other cases coffin or cartonnage masks were damaged by robbers), it is hard to trace this resemblance on Deir el-Banat material. In a very few instances of pairing<sup>20</sup>, despite a slight difference in a pattern of decoration (presence or absence of certain facial features or diadems, etc.), the style of the masks is rather similar.

Further study of decoration of coffins and cartonnage pieces, as well as a new material coming from excavations, will hopefully provide more information on artistic styles, their sequence and give some insight into organization and activities of workshops at the necropolis of Deir el-Banat.

<sup>18</sup> Derchain 1995: 228–230 (type VI); Riggs 2005: 81–82.

<sup>19</sup> Фридманн 2015: 98–103, etc.

<sup>20</sup> For example in the burial 1 of the grave 140.



a



b



c



d



e



f

Fig. 3. Masks of painted coffins: a — 06/0001; b — 320/F/001/01; c — 322/0/001; d — 09/0081/002; e — 07/0020; f — 334/F/001

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## «Лица» Дейр-эль-Баната

С. В. Иванов

В статье сделан обзор масок саркофагов птолемеевского времени, найденных в ходе археологических раскопок на южном некрополе в Дейр-эль-Банате (Фаюмский оазис). Несмотря на относительно длительный период использования некрополя, маски представляют собой довольно однородную группу и разнятся преимущественно наличием или отсутствием живописи. Внутри каждого из этих двух типов маски отличаются качеством материала, из которого они сделаны, степенью детализации изображения и уровнем мастерства художника. Стилистика росписей на саркофагах в целом соответствует особенностям выполненных в технике картонажа масок мумий того же времени.

*Ключевые слова:* Фаюмский оазис, Дейр-эль-Банат, птолемеевское время, некрополь, саркофаги, маски, искусство Египта греко-римского времени.

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