



ЕГИПЕТ И СОПРЕДЕЛЬНЫЕ СТРАНЫ EGYPT AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

Электронный журнал / Online journal

Выпуск 1, 2023

Issue 1, 2023

DOI: 10.24412/2686-9276-2023-00002

Statuary of the tomb of Tjay (TT 23)

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There are a few statues of the tomb owner and the Osirian triad in the interior of the tomb of Tjay in the Theban necropolis (TT 23, 19th Dynasty). The figures are carved out of the massive of rock and sunk into walls inside niches. As far as they are not detachable from the walls, these images can be considered high relief rather than true sculpture-in-round. Besides these statues, the tomb contained other figures, fragments of which were identified among loose blocks scattered around the tomb. These figures were standing alone statues, the most probable original location of which was the courtyard of the tomb.

Keywords: Theban necropolis, the tomb of Tjay, TT 23, tomb-temple, mortuary cult, statuary, figure of recumbent jackal.

Tjay, who was the chief of the Bureau of correspondence of king Merenptah, built his burial place at western Thebes. Despite the relatively short reign of his lord, Tjay had enough time to construct and decorate his tomb. Nowadays known as TT 23, it is located in the lower enclosure of Sheikh abd el-Qurna near the tombs of viziers of the 18th and 19th Dynasties. The design of the tomb was typical for the elite of the Ramesside period: it had a pylon that opened the passage to a sunken courtyard; moving further a visitor entered a gallery of rock-cut rooms and finally reached a sanctuary, which was the last room of the gallery (fig. 1). Tjay himself rested in a burial chamber that was situated 17 m below the sanctuary and could be accessed through a crudely hewn sloping passage.

Because of poor quality of the limestone rock, where the tomb was cut, ancient builders used a more durable material, sandstone, to erect a supporting structure and to face some walls of the courtyard. In a later period due to natural and anthropogenic factors most of the sandstone elements had lost their original position and were probably reused elsewhere in the necropolis. Some fragments remained laying around and were collected by sir R. Mond (1867–

1838), who excavated the tomb in 1905¹. The stones were examined by N. de Garris Davies (1865–1941), and some were recorded in his notes dated 1914–1915². This work was continued by the Egyptian scholar F. Haikal in the 1980s³, who also made a big effort to find joints and assemble some of the blocks. The task is still important for the Russian Archaeological Mission in Luxor, which started its work in the tomb of Tjay in 2006 under the direction of G. A. Belova⁴.

In total there are 1056 registered fragments. Most of them were parts of wall-facing blocks, and have remains of painted relief. Analysis of these pieces allows one assuming that they are the missing parts of the tomb decoration and can be returned to their initial location. Another group of stones is comprised of fragments of architectural elements: columns, pillars, architraves, door jambs, lintels and various mouldings. These are the basis for reconstruction of the architectonic ensemble of the tomb complex.

A few stones do not fit these two groups as they belong to pieces of sculpture. The presence of statuary in the tomb context is not surprising: it had appeared in the Old Kingdom mastabas and throughout Egyptian history remained an important part of the funerary cult. A statue of the deceased was considered to be his double, and thus it was an object of veneration. Coming from the afterworld and being embodied in a figure, the soul of the dead could emerge in the sacred space of the tomb chapel and receive offerings. In the early periods of Egyptian history a statue of an owner of some tomb was hidden from view in a small room (*serdab*), in later tombs such figures were exposed in a more prominent position as beneficiaries of mortuary rituals. The walls of the chapels were decorated with reliefs supposed to animate pictures of a happy and prosperous earthly life and to ensure sufficient provision for the tomb owner in the afterlife. Thus the open space of the tomb (contrary to the inaccessible burial chamber) was a place for veneration of the dead, commemorating them and performing funerary rites.

In the post-Amarna period, the concept of sacred space of the tomb changed. The deceased were still honoured in their tombs, but were also represented worshipping gods. The focal point of the cult had shifted from bringing offerings solely to an honoured dead to venerating him and deities. Representations of the tomb owner had a double function. First, they memorised him, which was an important prerequisite for the eternal afterlife. Second, they played the same role as statues of private persons in temples: despite their physical absence, the dedicators were nonetheless virtually present and taking part in ceremonies. Most temples were overcrowded with such statues, and there was certainly competition for available space; that is why the idea of a personal worshipping place in private tombs was accepted by the elite. As was pointed out by J. Assmann, “the Ramesside tomb is now understood first of all as a sacred place where the deceased enjoys the proximity of the gods”⁵. The laconic tomb architecture adapted the layout of temples and transformed into an ensemble of pylons, courtyards with colonnades and galleries of inner rooms⁶. This phenomenon reached its extremity by the end of the New Kingdom and was best expressed by an official of the 20th Dynasty Imiseba, who called his tomb “a temple of Amun-Re”⁷, while the high priest of Amun Amenakht decorated his tomb with Hathor columns that had been previously used only in a temple context⁸.

¹ Collins 1976: 34.

² Davies MSS 40: loose sheets; MSS 37: 13–18.

³ Haikal 1985.

⁴ Ivanov 2018: 11.

⁵ Assmann 2003: 52.

⁶ Kampp-Seyfried 2003: 7–10; Budka 2020: 56–59.

⁷ Bács 2011: 12. See also Tawfik 2007; Rummel 2018: 260–264; 2020: 280–283.

⁸ Rummel 2018: 252.

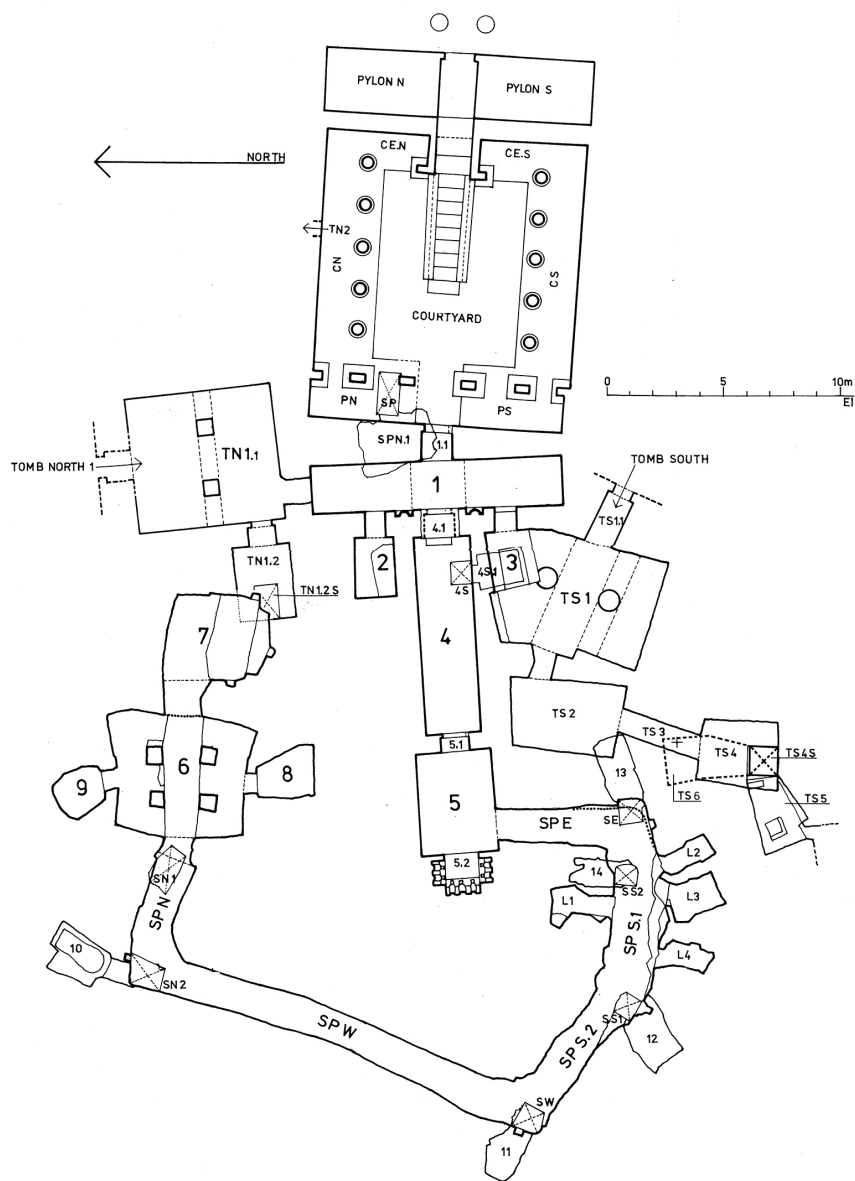


Figure 1. Plan of TT 23 and adjoining structures. Drawing by D. Eigner

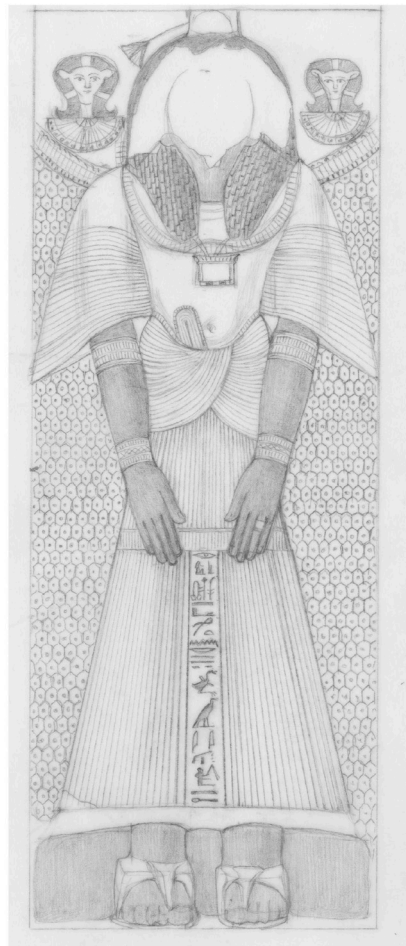
The tomb of Tjay was decorated with a few statues. First, after entering the tomb, a visitor faces two life-size figures of Tjay hewn in special niches by the sides of the main passage towards the sanctuary (fig. 2–3). The man stands upright with arms stretched down, and hands resting on an apron over his hips. Tjay is wearing a loose garment with sleeves covering arms from shoulders to elbows, and sandals on feet. The dress is made of fine tightly pleated linen. The tomb owner has an elaborately braided wig topped with an aromatic cone and decorated with a lotus blossom. Tjay's personal adornment includes a fingering on the right hand, wide bracelets and armlets on both arms; a broad collar and a pectoral on the chest. The southern figure has a naos-shaped pectoral, while the northern one has a bat-amulet pendant. In the centre of the apron a column of inscription says the figures are of "Osiris, royal scribe of dispatchers of the Lord of the Two Lands Tjay, true of voice". Tjay's feet below the apron are somewhat massive, though this is not noticeable at the first glance. The sculptors and painters paid great attention to details, showing individual pleats of dress, the braids of wig, and beadwork of jewellery. Both figures are similar, and the major intentional difference between them is the shape of the pectorals and the mirrored orientation of signs in the inscriptions. On both figures the face of Tjay is damaged as a result of both robbers' activity and natural factors; otherwise, the statues have no significant losses.

The sanctuary of the tomb has three sculptural groups. Along the western wall, the main place is occupied by a sitting triad: Isis, Osiris and Horus (fig. 4). Osiris is the central figure, he is wearing atef-crown and a traditional dress. The arms of the god are crossed on the chest holding the royal regalia. Isis is sitting to the left of Osiris, her right hand rests on the back of her husband, while the left one lies on her knee. Isis is represented in a tight dress with a girdle tied around her waist; she wears a tripartite wig topped with a sun-disk and cow horns crown. Horus, who is sitting to the right of Osiris, is shown in the same attire as Isis embracing his father with his left arm. The god wears a feathered corselet and the double crown.

By the southern and northern walls dyads represent the tomb owner with his wives (fig. 5–6). The seated couples are dressed in loose garments of thin tightly pleated linen. Elaborate wigs of the depicted persons are topped with aromatic cones. It is likely that each statue had a column of inscription running above the dress from the knees to the feet of the figures. The female image of the southern dyad has the remains of a dedication to Osiris by "the mistress of the house, [chantress] of Amun, chief of harim of Sebek, [Raya true of voice]".

The statues of the sanctuary were carved out of limestone massive. As far as they are not detachable from the wall, these images can be considered as high relief rather than true sculpture-in-round. The poor quality of the stone required applying a thick layer of plaster that made it possible to shape the images and work on their facial features. Unlike the figures at the tomb entrance, where small details were carved in stone, the details of the figures in the sanctuary are shown in paint. Unfortunately, all figures, and especially the faces were badly damaged. A few missing fragments were found within the modern fill of the sloping passage, they can be replaced in course of forthcoming conservation work.

Some loose blocks belong to life-size human statues and do not match any existing figures of TT 23. These are a head of a god (Appendix No 1), a statue base with a front part of a left foot (Appendix No 2). These fragments may belong to the same figure of a deity, but as far as there is no direct joints we treat them as separate pieces. One should also consider the possibility that the fragments are random and might come from neighbouring tombs, as inscriptions on some of these stones are fragmentary and show no direct connection to Tjay.



0 10 50 cm

Figure 2. The statue of Tjay. Room 1, southern niche. Photo by S. V. Ivanov, drawing by O. V. Vingolts



Figure 3. The figure of Tjay. Room 1, northern niche. Photo by S. V. Ivanov, drawing by O. V. Vingolts



Figure 4. Triad of the gods Isis, Osiris and Horus in the sanctuary of TT 23



Figure 5. Figures of Tjay and his wife Raya in the southern niche of the sanctuary



Figure 6. Figures of Tjay and his another wife in the northern niche of the sanctuary

On the contrary, a figure of a recumbent jackal (Appendix No 3), the rear part of which was collected from several joining stones, was inscribed with the name of Tjay. This sculpture was a free-standing piece, as it has no visible attachment to a niche or pillar.

The appearance of a figure of a canine in a private tomb context is rather remarkable. Though there is a number of jackal statues, coming in particular from the sacred animal necropolis at Saqqara⁹, the one from Tjay's tomb is an obvious reference to a royal mortuary temple. The processional ways of the temples of Amenophis III, Ramesses II and Merenptah were decorated with stone figures of sphinxes and jackals. Similar to the famous wooden statue from the tomb of Tutankhamun¹⁰, the canines were represented recumbent upon a high pedestal in form of a shrine. The god protected an image of a king that stood between his stretched forepaws¹¹. Unfortunately, the front part of the statue from TT 23 has not been preserved but it probably looked similar to comparable sculptural representations coming from private tombs of the Ramesside period in Saqqara¹².

The size of the figure was relevant to that of its prototype from the animal kingdom. Thus, it was not too large, however, it is hard to imagine it standing inside one of the inner rooms of the tomb. A more probable location for the figure would be the open courtyard of the tomb. This assumption also fits the idea of putting the statue on a kind of processional way as was the case in the royal mortuary temples.

As far as the design of Tjay's tomb adopted a number of temple features, its courtyard could also be furnished with statuary like it was customary in temples. Most scholars, who study Theban necropolis, focus their attention on tomb architecture, decoration and texts, while the original location of standing-alone sculptures is not well recorded. This is due to constant ancient and modern human activity in the necropolis, which resulted in removal or destruction of all valuable objects. Judging by the layout of contemporary Memphite tombs, where figures of men and gods were found in context¹³, in TT 23 the statuary could be placed east of the pillars of the portico or in small niches in its corners or in corners of the collonade.

It is remarkable that during excavations of the courtyard in 1905 R. Mond found an 18th Dynasty statue of a certain Sennetjer, who was depicted holding a stela with a funerary prayer¹⁴. A fragment of a figurine of a sitting couple found among loose blocks in TT 23 (Appendix No 4) can also be dated to the 18th or early 19th Dynasty. Though the courtyard of TT 23 accumulated a big number of objects from various periods that were not directly associated with Tjay¹⁵, it is probable that these items originate either from the neighbouring tombs¹⁶ or were brought to the court intentionally.

Starting from the Ramesside period tomb courtyards were also a place for self-expression: biographical records and daily life scenes of the tomb owner that had previously been

⁹ Hastings 1997: 42–43 (no 153–161).

¹⁰ Egyptian Museum, Cairo: JE 61444.

¹¹ De Saintilan 1995; Bryan 1997: 77 (no 49), Jartz 2001: 23.

¹² Cf. a falcon protecting a royal figure from tomb X (Raven et al. 2015: fig. 10) and Harthor from the tomb of Netjeruymes (Zivie 2003: pl. 52–55).

¹³ For example, the tomb of Horemheb (Martin 1989: 55–60; Schneider 1996: 75–78); the tomb of Tia and Tia (Martin 1997: 14–15), etc.

¹⁴ The British Museum, London: EA 65340. Collins 1976: 34, fig. 4; Stewart 1967: 36, pl. III.2. A more reliable description and recent photographs are available at the museum's website at https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA65340 (last accessed on 15.03.2023).

¹⁵ Collins 1976: 34.

¹⁶ Ivanov 2021: 36.

hidden in inner rooms of the tomb were now exposed in an open area¹⁷. Like popular temple sanctuaries, the tombs attracted pilgrims, who gave due to the gods and tomb owners. The tomb of Tjay probably was rather popular, as can be seen by ancient visitors' graffiti left on its walls¹⁸.

It is plausible that some of the seemingly unrelated objects were introduced to TT 23 as a result of pilgrimage or similar activities. Statues, stelae and other items of someone's funerary cult could be moved to a more prominent and (or) a better preserved tomb where the soul of the deceased had more chances to receive its offerings or to stay in close proximity to the gods. The tomb owners, in their turn, increased the popularity of their monuments by gathering such an "audience".

¹⁷ Hoffmann 2018: 173.

¹⁸ The visitors' graffiti of TT 23 have been and studied by Ch. Raggazoli (Raggazoli, in print).

Appendix

Fragments of the sculpture from TT 23

1. *Head of a god* (fig. 7)

Reg No: R1S 11/0136

Material: sandstone

Dimensions: height 29 cm, width 21 cm, depth 19 cm

Head of a statue, the face part is badly damaged. On the sides edges of a crown are visible: it starts as a straight line on the forehead, lowers at the temples then turns around the ears, and reaching the cheekbone runs straight to the back of the head. As far as the upper part of the crown is missing it is hard to say whether it was a lower part of the atef-crown of Osiris, or it was the headdress of Amun.

It is likely that the figure had a back pillar, as can be suggested by an even break at the reverse side of the head.

2. *Fragment of a statue base* (fig. 8)

Reg No: R1S 4/0103

Material: sandstone

Dimensions: height 23 cm, width 37 cm, depth 21,5 cm

Front left corner of a rectangular base of the statue with remains of the left foot on top. The person was shod in sandals: their front strap and the sole are still well recognisable. Toenails and other lesser details are thoroughly shown. Traces of brownish paint of the same tone as on the statues of Tjay from inside the tomb indicate that we deal with remains of the representation of a male.

The exterior side of the base is decorated with a relief representing a person facing right towards an offering table with a duck(?) laying upon other food provisions (bread?). The man and the offerings are separated with a column of inscription.



Performing "an offering which the king gives"...

Relief of the male figure and some hieroglyphs still have remains of paint, the pattern of glyph colouring (blue for R4, pink for X8, etc.) is similar to the pattern of TT 23 decorative program. The style of the figure and the relief also suggest that the statue could originate from the tomb of Tjay.

3. *Fragments of the figure of a recumbent jackal* (fig. 9)

Reg No: R4/0277

Material: sandstone

Dimensions: height 36 cm, width 22 cm, depth 51 cm

Fragments of the figure of a jackal recumbent upon a rectangular (high?) base. Tail of the canine is lowered straight down.

The figure was assembled of four joining pieces; there are also three loose fragments that have no joints but certainly belong to this statue or a similar one. The front part is missing completely. A rough estimation of the original size of the figure is c. 60+x cm (height)×22 cm (width)×c. 100 cm (depth).

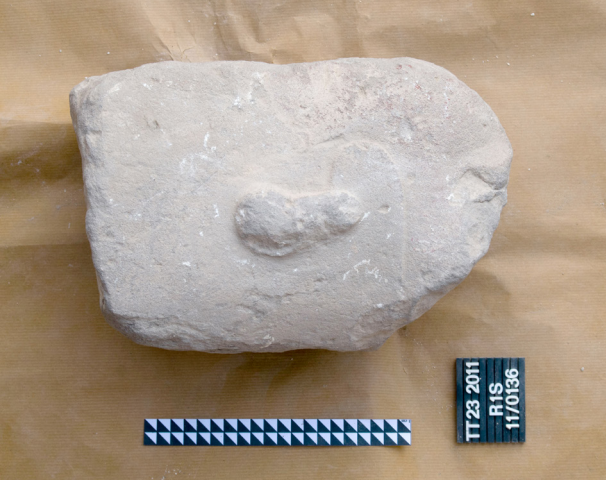


Figure 7. Head of the god Osiris or Amun (Appendix No 1)

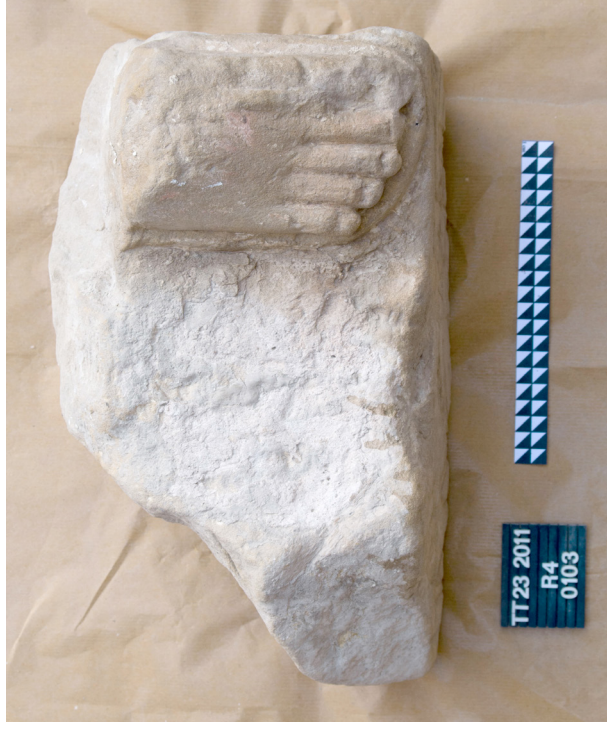


Figure 8. Base of the statue with remains of the left foot (Appendix No 2)

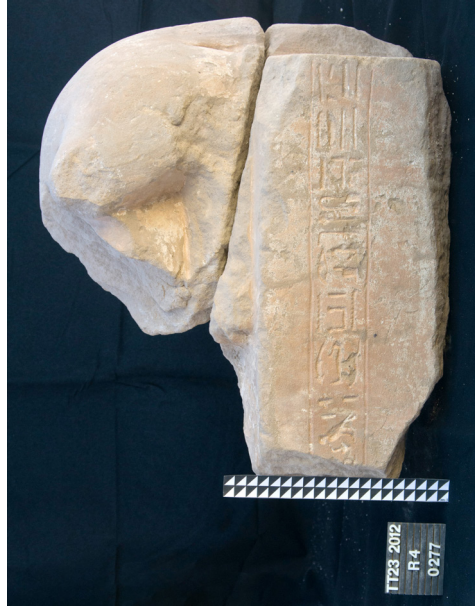


Figure 9. Fragments of the figure of a recumbent jackal (Appendix No 3)



Figure 10. Remains of the figure of a sitting couple (Appendix No 4)

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Скульптура из гробницы Чаи (ТТ-23)

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В интерьере гробницы Чаи в фиванском некрополе (ТТ-23, XIX династия) имеется несколько скульптурных изображений владельца гробницы и осирической триады. Статуи высечены в скальном массиве и расположены в нишах. Поскольку они неотделимы от стен, правильнее называть их горельефными изображениями. Помимо этих образов гробница была украшена отдельно стоящими статуями, части которых обнаружены в ходе разбора фрагментов ее архитектурных элементов. Вероятнее всего, эти скульптуры были установлены в открытом дворе гробницы.

Ключевые слова: фиванский некрополь, гробница Чаи, ТТ-23, гробница-храм, заупокойный культ, фигура лежащего шакала.

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Ivanov S. V. Statuary of the tomb of Tjay (TT 23) // Egypt and neighbouring countries 1 (2023): 12–30. DOI: 10.24412/2686-9276-2023-00002.