

Original article

THE OUTER COFFIN LID OF AN ANONYMOUS WOMAN (JE 29622) FROM BAB EL-GASUS

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Abstract:

This paper tackles the unpublished outer coffin lid of an anonymous woman; it is exhibited at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 29622 – CG 6133). It was found in the tomb/cache of Bab El-Gasus at Deir El-Bahari. The artistic features and the decoration system indicate that it is dated to the late 21st dynasty. And according to the text on the footboard, she is the daughter of a high priest, probably Merit-Amun, the daughter of the high priest of Amun, Menkheperre. Furthermore, one cannot fail to notice the first known appearance of the representation of the *iit* sign offering until now and the rare depiction of Osiris wearing the red crown.

1. Introduction

This lid of an outer coffin of an anonymous woman, which dates to the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty, is made of wood. It was not included in Daressy’s A. list. The lid still has the stamp that Darssey used to write down the A number, but it was left empty for an unknown reason. The outer case, the inner coffin, and the mummy cover of this coffin set are missing. The study of this lid is very crucial because it belongs to a daughter of a high priest; this article will investigate who he might be and who she might be, in addition to investigating the original place of her burial inside the cache of Bab El-Gasus. This lid, along with other three coffin sets from Bab El-Gasus did not have a CG number. The coffin sets of Gautseshen JE 29635 (A. 152), Hori JE 29619 (A. 143), and Pinedjem (A. 146), the later was not given any numbers; Niwiński suggested that it was presented to Khedive Abbas Helmi II while the others were prepared to be presented, probably for the khedive or an official, but were never presented [1-3]. However, the lid JE 29622 was given a CG number later, CG 6133.

1.1. Bab el-Gasus cache

The cache, fig. (1) was found in 1891 and is situated in Deir El-Bahari, to the southeast of the temple of Hatshepsut. It is also known as the second cache of Deir El-Bahari and the cache/door of the priests. 153 coffin sets were among the 254 coffins that were found. Papyri, shabtis, shabti boxes,

etc. were also found. Before being transferred to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and museums around the world, these objects were stored at the Giza Museum [3-8].

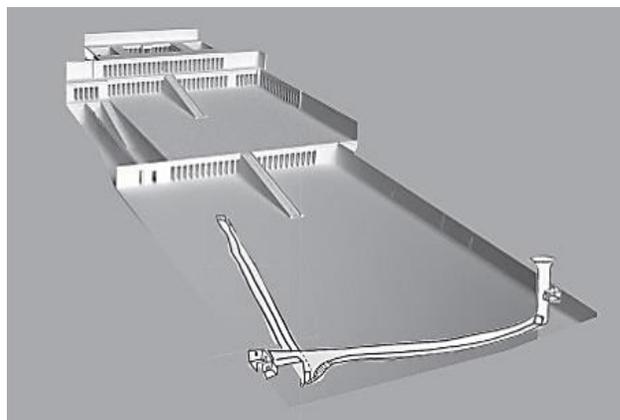


Figure (1) location of Bab El-Gasus cache [9]

1.2. The owner of JE 29622

The anonymous owner held the following titles:

  
*nbt-pr šm'yt n'Imn-R' nsw ntrw* “Lady of the house,  
 chantress of Amun-Re, king of gods”.

  
*Mn'.(t)-Hnsw-p3-hrd* “Wet nurse of Khonsu the child”.

She was a daughter of a high priest as it was attested before her titles:

*s3t n hm-ntr tpi* "Daughter of the high priest" [10].

## 2. Description

Measurements: H. 202 cm, W. 65 cm, and footboard: H. 46 cm. In the description, fig. (2) the author will describe the sections of the lid according to Sousa's study on 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty coffins.



Figure (2) the lid JE 29622

### 2.1. The headboard, fig. (3)

The face was gilded, but it was chopped off by robbers. There is a blank piece of wood that was added to the face in modern times. She wears a tripartite checkered wig (black and yellow squares) adorned with a headband consisting of two persea tree buds bindings; this is (basic scheme) type I-a of the headboard according to Sousa's typological study [11]. Perhaps there was a lotus flower or a crown of justification in the middle of the band. Also, she was wearing gilded earrings.



Figure (3) the headboard

### 2.2. The upper section, fig. (4)

Her breasts are molded below the lappets of the wig; each one is decorated with a rosette painted black. The hands were carved separately before being robbed; they were open and gilded; this was a female attribute on 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty coffins [12]. The forearms do not appear because they are covered with a wide and large collar that consists of several parts. It starts between the wig's lappets with a small checkered part, followed by U-shaped black stripes on a yellow background, then six large buds on reed registers, and the final

register is decorated with lotus flowers. There is a small pectoral above this collar that depicts two *ba* birds (one on each side) inside a shrine worshipping a *kheryp* scepter, and there is a caption *dw3t* ⋆. The elbows appear as a small triangle below the collar, decorated with squares colored black, yellow and green; probably an alternative for beads [12]. Below, there is a lotus flower.

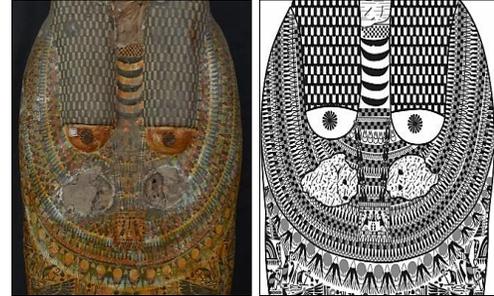


Figure (4) the upper section

### 2.3. The central panel

It follows the complex scheme, which consists of five registers extending to the footboard, omitting the lower section [11]. The registers are separated by a thick black line, with the exception of the third register, where the line is decorated with yellow stars. Some of the figures depicted are molded, for example, the sun disks and the *nebu* signs.

#### 2.3.1. The first register, fig. (5)

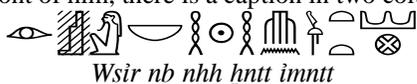
It is a symmetrical composition depicting a scarab in the middle pushing a winged sun disk flanked by two cobras with a sun disk on their heads and four *tjet* signs attached to them. Below the scarab, there are the *shen* and *nebu* signs on a checkered *neb* basket. On the proper left, Osiris is enthroned; he is green-skinned, wearing a black garment and the red crown; he is holding the crook and the flail, the *Imiut* in front of him, and a caption *nb m3't* "Lord of maat". In front of Osiris, Neith is depicted green-skinned with outstretched wings holding a *maat* feather and kneeling on a small-colored shrine. There is a modius on her head and a falcon wearing the double crown. There is a caption *n3rt* ⚡ "The great goddess", above her wing there is a vulture holding the *ankh* sign, and there is a caption *hnwt* "The lady". Between Neith's wings, a crouched human-headed sphinx with a modius on his head, he offers the *w3d* plant and *ut* sign, while on the proper right, the sphinx offers the *w3d* plant and a courgette. There is a caption that mentions the name of the goddess Nut and the title *ntr* ⚡ *nb* "The great god, the lord". He is also resting on a checkered *neb* basket, and there is a loaf in front of him. Below Neith, there is a crouching jackal wearing *sa* sign around his neck, and there is a caption *nb m3't* "Lord of maat". A lettuce before him and a courgette behind him, while on the proper right, the lettuce is omitted, and there is a loaf in front of the jackal's tail. Behind Neith, there are two registers: *The 1<sup>st</sup> register* depicts a small vaulted shrine decorated with two cobras; only one is holding the *ankh* sign. Inside the shrine, there are a vulture holding *menat* and *ankh* signs and a cobra holding the *ankh* sign and *was* scepter; both are resting on a decorated *neb* basket.





## 2.5. The underside of the lid, fig. (12)

It has two large cracks between the wooden blanks, but the inscriptions are not damaged. The joints that attach the blanks of wood are visible. Generally, the underside of the lid was rarely decorated during the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty; here, the whole surface is painted red with white inscriptions. At the head there is a curved sky sign, then a sun disk flanked by two rearing cobras, then a large figure of Osiris wearing the *atef* crown and long garment; he is holding two crooks and two flails; he is flanked by two winged *wedjat* eyes; and he is standing on a *nebu* sign between two ointment jars. In front of him, there is a caption in two columns:



*Wsir nb nhh hntt imtt*

*Osiris, lord of eternity, foremost of the west.*

Finally, a sky sign below it is a *Djed* pillar flanked by two west signs.

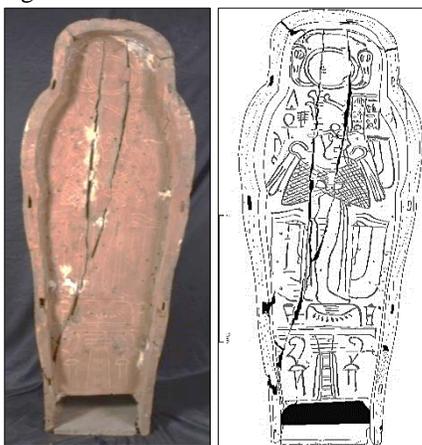


Figure (12) the underside of the lid

## 3. Results

Based on the description, and the discussion, many results were extracted as follows:

- \*) Perhaps the lid is the lid of the outer coffin of Meritamun, daughter of the high priest of Amun, Menkheperre.
- \*) There are no traces of reuse on the lid.
- \*) The lid was a product of a high-standard workshop; it was made for her burial, leaving a space for the titles and name of the owner, which is demonstrated by a small blank space at the footboard.
- \*) The lid is dated to the late 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty according to its artistic criteria.
- \*) The first appearance of the *itt* offering is attested on this lid until now.
- \*) The rare depiction of Osiris with the red crown is related to his renewal and resurrection.
- \*) The location of the lid inside the Bab El-Gasus tomb was likely corridor (E) or rooms (D).

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. The owner

The lid does not give any information about the identity of the owner except for her titles. Her high rank is demonstr-

ated by mentioning that she is the daughter of a high priest, the gilded parts of the lid, and its rich decorations. Niwiński mentioned that this lid might be dated to the reign of King Psusennes II [7,14]. He and Gómez suggested that she might be the daughter of the high priest of Amun Pinedjem II [14, 15]. However, more about her identity will be discussed later.

### 4.2. Her titles

While the title Chantress of Amun was widely spread during the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty, the title wet nurse of Khonsu the child was not common.

#### 4.2.1. The title chantress of Amun

It appeared as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty and was the most frequent title among women of different social ranks in Thebes. When *nbt pr* "Lady of the house" is added, it is an indication that she is a married woman; along with the *hsywt*, they formed the junior staff of the female priesthood. The singer-musicians were likely recruited for the quality of their voice and were trained professionally, while the singer-choristers were more numerous and were only supporters [16]. These priestly titles were related to Amun and Mut, so Onstine and Stevens mentioned that during the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty the increase in people loyal to the priesthood, which they follow, was normal [17,18].

#### 4.2.2. The title wet nurse of Khonsu the child

Naguib mentioned that there were three kinds of nurses in Egypt: the goddesses, the royal and private nurses, and the priestesses in the service of the child god. She considers the nurse-priestesses of the child god as the subordinates of the "divine mothers *mwt-ntr*" [16], i.e., mothers of the god; they gave birth to the child-God, the extension of the family, and the ever-renewed hope of life after death. So, they were assisted by the *mnwt*, whose milk provided the inheritor with food for survival [16]. The role of *mnwt* appeared as early as the Pyramid texts. Roehrig assumes that they are family members or valued members of the household [19]. It is the same concept as the relationship between the family of the high priest and the Theban triad: Amun, Mut, and Khonsu. Gómez suggested that they help bring up the divine child in ritual contexts; she mentioned that milk offerings took a prominent position in the cult inside the *mammisi*, so wet nurses of Khonsu the child probably performed similar ritual practices in the sanctuary dedicated to this child-God. She added that they were also chantresses of Amun, and some of them belonged to the Choir of Mut [15]. Gómez also suggested that the role of the priestess related to the cult of *Hnsw-p3-hrd* was probably at temple A in Mut precinct in south Karnak, and they performed musical duties as the chantresses of Amun. The women of the high priest's family played a rule with Amun's wife Mut and their son Khonsu, i.e., the Theban triad [20]. Once more, the family's principal goal was to appease the Theban triad. According to the above-mentioned females related to Khonsu's cult in general, they were dedicated maternally, as a mother, nurse, or wet nurse, to the child god, beside the chantress and priestly roles [21]. Their functions allowed them not only to exercise their priestly role but also to attain a certain authority to benefit from the privileges offered to them by these offices. The position of women in the clergy

reflected the importance of their family and their own status within the family [16]. The title “wet nurse of Khonsu the child” appeared during the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty on a coffin of Dimuteriudu at the Ägyptisches Museum in Berlin 58+1075 [7], and the papyrus JE 95836 of Meritamun, daughter of the high priest Menkheperre, although Niwiński has mentioned that it also appeared on her coffin JE 29704 (A. 71) [7], but according to Fabregat, who is currently working on the coffin of Meritamun JE 29704 (under publication), the title “wet nurse of Khonsu the child” is not attested on the coffin, only the title chantress of Amun is attested, and the title “wet nurse of Khonsu the child” appeared only on her papyrus. Finally, the limestone pyramidion of Bennebensekhauenef at the Louvre Museum D. 42 dated to the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty according to Gómez, who held the title *imy-r mn<sup>c</sup>yw n Hnsw p3 hrd* [15]. This is an indication that there were *mn<sup>c</sup>wt* more than the above mentioned. The title on all these objects was written with the  $\heartsuit$  determinative, which is omitted on this lid, tab. (1). The title *mn<sup>c</sup>(t)-Hnsw-p3-hrd* was mentioned as the name of the owner of JE 29622 at the registration collection management and documentation department of the Egyptian Museum, and on the lid’s label, as the last word of the text appears to be the name. The same idea was discussed by Dautant and Amenta; they suggest that coffin Inv. MV 25008 at the Vatican Museum is owned by an individual named *hnm-Hnsw-p3-hrd*, which was also used as a title [24]. However, the author could not trace persons who held the name *mn<sup>c</sup>t-Hnsw-p3-hrd* in ancient Egypt.

**Table (1)** Personnel who held the title “Wet nurse on Khonsu the child” during the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty)

Item	Papyrus	Outer coffin – Inner coffin
Owner	Meritamun	Dimuteriudu
Title		
No.	(EMC) JE 95836 [22]	(Berlin) 58 + 1075 [7,23]
Fig.		No photo available

### 4.3. Her identity

According to the artistic features of the lid, which are typical of the late 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty (discussed later), the doubts will revolve around her being the daughter of the high priest Menkheperre or Pinedjem II. There is a possibility that this lid is a part of the coffin set of Meritamun, the daughter of the high priest Menkheperre JE 29704=29734 CG 6176-6175-6196 (A. 71) [7], since her outer coffin is missing and she is the daughter of a high priest. Moreover, she held the same titles mentioned on JE 29622: chantress of Amun is attested on her inner coffin and papyrus, and wet nurse of Khonsu the child is attested on her papyrus. If the above mentioned assumption is acceptable, and JE 29622 is the lid of the outer coffin of Meritamun, then it is following a different style from her inner coffin and mummy cover, which show her wearing the festive dress (type IV-c accor-

ding to Niwiński), fig. (14) [7], but that was the case in other coffins; for example, JE 29699 (A. 17), a coffin set of Asetemkheb dating to the late 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty, the inner lid and the mummy cover show the deceased with the festive dress while the outer lid is type III-b [7], and an inner coffin and mummy cover at the Turin Museum Inv. No. 2228 of Tamutef dating to the late 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty, the lid shows the deceased with the festive dress while the mummy cover is type III-b [7]. Niwiński mentioned that Meritamun had another coffin set; what is left of it is the mummy cover that is stored in the basement of the Egyptian Museum JE 29734; it was gilded and was destroyed due to robbery. He suggested that JE 29704 was an alternative burial for this destroyed one [1]. According to that, the lid JE 29622 might be part of one of these two sets.



**Figure (14)** the inner coffin and mummy cover of Meritamun JE 29704, photo by author

### 4.4. The artistic criteria

There are no traces of reuse on the lid, but there is a small blank space in the middle column of the footboard, fig. (11). According to Cooney’s study on coffin reuse, generally the blank space left for the name is an indication of reuse [25]. However, this might be the case when the space is large enough for the name; here, the space is very small. The author suggests that this lid with its rich decorations was a part of this lady’s burial; furthermore, it would seem that it was already produced in a workshop. Her titles were added in the middle column of the footboard, but one cannot fail to notice the error of the artist, who could not offer enough space for the name, fig. (11). The gilded faces and hands were attested on the coffins of personnel from the family of the high priests; it was rare to find a gilded coffin outside the family. The author tracked only three non-royal family members’ coffins: the coffin of Nesamun JE 29611 (A. 148), the coffin JE 29737 (A. 144), and the coffin of Djedmutiuesamkh at the Metropolitan Museum 25.3.1-3 found at TT 60 [7]. According to Niwiński’s typological study, the lid JE 29622 is type III-c, which is dated to the late 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty [7]. That also corresponds to Sousa’s typological study on yellow coffins, according to which the lid has the following features: \*) The headboard is type I-a (basic scheme). The two floral bindings and the checkered wig (worn only by women) are typical of the late second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty. \*) The upper section is type III-c. \*) The central panel follows the complex scheme type III-c that consists of five registers extending to the footboard, which caused the omission of the lower section, which is typical of the late 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty. \*) The footboard follows the complex scheme, which is typical of the late 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty [11,12,25].

#### 4.5. The religious meaning of the scenes

Many details depicted on this lid appeared on other 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty coffins, that were the subject of study by Sousa, and other studies focused on the religious meaning of 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty coffins' scenes [11,12,25], so in the analysis of the scenes, the study will only focus on the interpretations that were not mentioned before.

##### 4.5.1. The upper part

It is decorated with the pectoral, which affords protection and rebirth to the deceased with its floral decoration, according to Sousa's opinion [12]. The author also confirms that and suggests that this part is also related to BD 81 [27] as the head of the deceased comes out of the lotus flower, demonstrated by the lotus flowers in the last register of the collar. This BD chapter aimed to turn the deceased into a lotus flower so he can be reborn like it every day at sunrise [27, 28]. Furthermore, the pectoral was related to the *ousekh* collar, which was a way to rise up to the sky as mentioned in pyr. 534 [29], and to give power to the deceased transfigured spirit in BD 158 [27,28].

##### 4.5.2. The central part

It follows the complex scheme and refers to the sky over the deceased and the solar-Osirian unity by depicting outstretched winged figures, the scarab, and other solar symbols side by side with figures of Osiris *ntr* 𓂏𓂗 [30].

##### 4.5.2.1. The representation of the *it* and *wꜣd* offerings, fig. (15)

The author thinks that every 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty coffin has a special feature that makes it unique from the others. What is special about this lid is the representation of the *it* offering along with the *wꜣd* plant depicted on the first register of the central panel. The *it* offering appeared in Kom Ombo temple and was the subject of a study published by Abdelhalim, who mentioned that it was a special feature that appeared only, and for the first time in Kom Ombo temple. The interpretation of this offering is that it affords power and protection from enemies [31], but the occurrence of the *it* on this lid shows beyond doubt that it goes back to the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty, until now. On the other hand, the term *wꜣd* refers to being green, to thrive, to be young, and to be fresh [32,33]. The reliefs of the Egyptian temples testify that bouquets of flowers played an important role in the cult of the gods; they are commonly referred to as *rdjt rnp.wt*. A large number of depictions are known from the New Kingdom to the Roman Period, which indicate the purpose of this offering was to offer health, life, duration, dominion, joy, all power, strength, eternity, and protection since it was the papyrus of life, one of the primeval plants, and a form of protection for the child of Isis while hiding [34]. The papyrus is therefore primarily a symbol of that mythical place in the swamp thicket of Chemmis in which the regeneration of life, i.e., the birth of Horus and his growing up, is localized. As a symbol of this protected, hidden place, it becomes a symbol of protection, a protective shield against all threats; it is the "papyrus of life". Moreover, the papyrus appears as a symbol of the swamp thicket, in which the renewal of

the life force of Osiris took place with the birth of Horus, or, in another perspective, the regeneration of the sun [34].



Figure (15) details from the 1<sup>st</sup> register of the central panel

##### 4.5.2.2. The depiction of Osiris with the red crown

Usually, Osiris was depicted with the white crown, the double crown, or the *atef* crown; it is rarely attested that Osiris wore the red crown [33]. For instance, on the statue of Tutankhamun as Osiris wearing the red crown and raised up by Menkeret to raise him to the sky and ensure his resurrection [35], and on the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty coffin Inv. no. 11978 (A. 149) at the Berlin museum, Osiris is depicted with the red crown during the ceremony of his *sed* festival, also related to renewal [7,36]. As well as on the outer lid of Djedptahiufankh JE 26201, found at the royal cache and dated to the early 22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty [7]. From the above-mentioned, one can conclude that this scene is related to the myth of Osiris. Horus is demonstrated by the falcon above the goddess's head; the goddess plays a protective role, demonstrated by the outstretched wings and by the sphinx presenting the *it* sign and the *wꜣd* plant, which refer to the protection from enemies; the place of the birth of Horus and the renewal of Osiris, who is depicted with the red crown of lower Egypt, where the Delta, the place of this event, is located, also depicting him as a living king after his renewal. Moreover, the falcon/Horus wearing the double crown refers to his triumph and his coronation as king of Lower and Upper Egypt.

##### 4.5.3. The footboard

It follows the complex scheme with the usual mourning scenes that are performed during the opening of the mouth ritual.

##### 4.5.4. The underside of the lid

Usually, on the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty coffins, the underside of the lid depicts a figure of Sokar, Rahorakhty, Nut, Hathour, Imentet, etc.; here, it depicts Osiris, lord of the netherworld, and the deceased is living in his realm. Sousa suggested that these figures fulfill the same role as when it is depicted on the floorboard of the case, standing behind the mummy to unify and become a god as Osiris, as the coffin symbolizes the Osirian shrine and the mummy is the statue of Osiris [11]. The red color of the underside of the lid probably is not related here to dangerous things, but it plays the same role as gold and yellow, referring to the sun of the morning and evening, which assures the rebirth of the deceased every day. It was also the color of the shrouds of Osiris, and the depiction of Osiris means a solar-Osirian unity aspect, which assures the resurrection of the deceased laying below [37, 38].

#### 4.6. The original place of the burial JE 29622 in Bab El-Gasus

Even though it is difficult to determine the original place of the burial of this lid inside the cache since it was not mentioned in Darssey's A. list, the study assumes two opinions: **1)** If that lid was a part of Meritamun's burial, then it probably was in corridor (E) with the rest of the set, fig. (16). **2)** It might be in one of the two chambers (D) at the end of the tomb that contained the burials of the family of the high priests, so since the lid is owned by the daughter of a high priest, this will be another suitable place for her burial. Unless something happened in antiquity, that resulted in moving the lid somewhere else in the tomb.

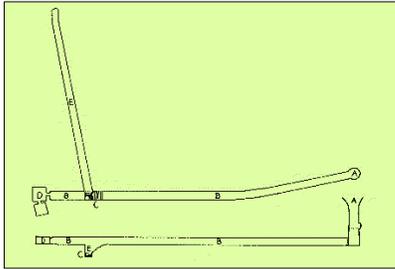


Figure (16) the plan of Bab El-Gasus cache [8]

#### 5. Conclusion

The lid JE 29622 probably was the lid of the outer coffin of Meritamun, the wet nurse of Khonsu the child, and the daughter of the high priest of Amun Menkheperre. Perhaps it was found in the corridor (E) in the tomb of Bab El-Gasus along with her inner coffin and mummy cover, or in one of the two rooms (D) at the end of the tomb, along with the burials of her family. It is significant by the first known depiction of the offering of the *iii* sign until now and the rarely depicted Osiris with the red crown, which is related to his resurrection and the resurrection of the deceased along with him. The lid JE 29622 dates to the late 21st dynasty according to its decorations, which show no traces of reuse. It was prepared and ready at a workshop for its owner, leaving only the titles and name to be added, which is demonstrated by a small blank space at the end of the middle column on the footboard after her titles. Probably there was a workshop for members of the high priest family.

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