

Reconstructing the biography of Egyptian coffins

Current research work of the Swiss Coffin Project

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Almost every canton of Switzerland has at least one museum owning Egyptian artefacts. There are over 30,000 objects housed in more than forty museums throughout the entire country. Although many collections include coffins (some even with their corresponding mummies), the majority of these items is largely unknown. That is why the Swiss Coffin Project was initiated in 2004 as an independent, privately funded research project with the objective of making Egyptian burial equipment in Swiss museums accessible to a wider public as well as to specialists.

In 2007, the volume «Unter dem Schutz der Himmelsgöttin» (Under the protection of the sky goddess)

The coffin set of Lady Ta-hai is one of the most remarkable ensembles in Swiss museums. All parts belonging to her burial equipment will be presented together for the first time in the publication.

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was published, presenting a selection of coffins (with their mummies) and mummy masks from sixteen Swiss public collections. The research work was continued in the following years; meanwhile, thirty museums are involved in the project, so that an expanded and updated edition of the above-mentioned volume is planned. In addition to intact coffins and mummy masks, this new edition will also feature coffin fragments as well as mummy coverings (bead-nets/cartonnages/shrouds) and portraits. The studied material dates from the Middle Kingdom to the Roman Period.

The publication, scheduled to appear in 2024, is conceived as a scientific cross-media publication combining

The coffin floor of an anonymous man was the first Ancient Egyptian object in the collections of the History Museum in Bern. Until now, it has never been studied.

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print and online resources. While the objects will be presented in a concise version in print, each item will be provided with a QR-code that allows access to its entire documentation, including a comprehensive description of every piece and its cultural-historical background, a detailed photographic documentation and drawings of all representations as well as copies of the hieroglyphic inscriptions with their transcription and translation. As in previous publications of the Swiss Coffin Project, a special focus will be placed on the provenances and the acquisition histories. Even though the publication is in German, abstracts will be given in French, Italian, English and Arabic.

To provide further information about the project, the website www.swiss-coffin-project.ch has been set up. A blog documents the team's activities and offers insights into the current research work. We are looking forward to your interest and your feedback! ■

The face part of a coffin lid belongs to the little-known Egyptian collection of the History Museum in Vevey. © Musée historique, Vevey. Photo: Swiss Coffin Project.

