

# THE EGYPTIAN COFFINS OF THE SOCIEDADE DE GEOGRAFIA DE LISBOA: THE PATRIMONY AS A RESOURCE

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## Summary

In the year 1891, Mohamemed Abd el-Rassul, the most famous thief of Egyptian antiquities, discovered the collective tomb of the priests of Amun, which contained more than 150 mummies lavishly equipped with some of the most splendid and rich sarcophagi ever discovered in Egypt. This fabulous archaeological discovery happened quite hazardously only ten years after the discovery of the famous royal cache, also located on the cliffs of Deir el-Bahari, that delivered about 50 mummies. This huge discoveries separated only by a decade created serious troubles to Georges Daressy, the superintendent of the removal and inventory of the coffins from Bab el-Gussus, and to M. Grébaut, that was at that time the Director of the Service des Antiquités. The outstanding number of monuments that were brought to light in this tomb led the Egyptian authorities to spread it by a number of European and American scientific and museological institutions. They were then divided and delivered to sixteen countries where they still are exhibited in museums like the Louvre Museum, the British Museum, the Kunsthistorisches Museum, or the Berlin Egyptian Museum, among others. Unfortunately, unlike their European or American counterparts, the antiquities sent to Portugal were never studied or even presented to the public. This lot of antiquities included the funerary equipment of four individuals that once belonged to the priesthood of Amun, the Egyptian elite of the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty. Beyond its archaeological value, the Egyptian antiquities of the Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa are an important documental repository both from the political and religious point of view. The iconographic program depicted on the coffins is the result of the political instability of that period. In previous periods these depictions were normally painted or engraved on the tomb walls. The predator activity of tomb robbers led the priests of Amun to choose their coffins to support the religious scenes that once decorated tomb walls. Besides that, the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty was a period of a great religious flourishing that was expressed in the complexity of its iconographic resources. The great profusion and diversity of the images and symbols depicted on these coffins are due both to political

instability and also to the religious speculation. The study of these materials reveals to be crucial not only to Portugal, but also to the international scientific community, since it will enable precious data to a network of scientists and museological institutions that, although spread over the world, have the common responsibility to study and preserve this patrimony. In this way, the global understanding of this finding is also dependent of the Portuguese contribution to the study of this important archaeological resource.

**Key words:**

Egyptian, Coffins, Iconography, tomb.