

A THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD OPENWORK PIECE OF FUNERARY EQUIPMENT FROM THE CHAPEL OF HATSHEPSUT AT DEIR EL-BAHARI

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Abstract: A set of wooden figures representing female deities with painted fronts and flat backs was identified in the archaeological material coming from recent excavations in the Chapel of Hatshepsut. The fragments were scattered through the shafts of Third Intermediate Period date. Most probably they had once formed a single piece of funerary equipment from one of the burials. Remains of nine figures were distinguished. These were divided into two groups by size. The small-scale figures had outstretched arms, while the big-scale ones were shown with one arm raised and the other lowered alongside the body. They are presumed to have been attached to a flat wooden background. Both iconographical types are attested in the decoration of mortuary equipment from the New Kingdom on, though no object decorated with the same set of goddesses has been found so far.

Keywords: Deir el-Bahari, Third Intermediate Period, funerary, openwork craft, Hatshepsut

Excavations in the Chapel of Hatshepsut were one of the objectives of fieldwork during the 2003/2004, 2005/2006, and 2006/2007 seasons of the Polish–Egyptian Archaeological and Conservation Mission in the Hatshepsut temple at Deir el-Bahari. Entrances to six shaft tombs were discovered while cleaning the pavement: S.7A/82, S.7B/82, S.7C/82 in the western part of the Chapel and S.1/04, S.2/07, S.3/07 in its eastern part (Szafrński 2005: 229–230; 2007a: 246–248, Fig. 5; 2008: 274–276;

2010: 258–259). In addition, a Late Roman/Coptic tomb, S.1/07, was found covering the mouth of the shaft S.3/07 (Szafrński 2010: 256–259). Remains of typical Third Intermediate Period funerary equipment from the fill of the shafts were dated to the Twenty-third to Twenty-fifth Dynasties (Szafrński 2007a: 248–251; 2008: 276–280).¹

One of the most interesting objects coming mainly from the shafts situated in the western part of the Chapel of Hatshepsut

¹ Objects of similar workmanship found earlier on the Upper Terrace came from shafts in the Main Sanctuary of the Temple (Pawlicki 2000: 165–166) and the Northern Chapel of Amun (Szafrński 2001: 196–199; Barwik 2002: 198–199; 2003).

were wooden figures representing female deities with painted convex fronts and flat backs (for a preliminary report on this material, see Stupko 2008). All the pieces were found in very fragmentary state, although some were put together to form almost complete figures. Remains of altogether nine different figures were collected.

Catalogue

Figure 1. Seshat [Fig. 1]

Provenance: S.7A/82, S.7B/82 (face).

Measurements: H. 44 cm; Th. 0.6–1 cm.

Female figure facing right, dressed in a leopard skin over a red dress, and a dark green/blue *wesekh* collar. The emblem and arms of the goddess are missing. Her face,

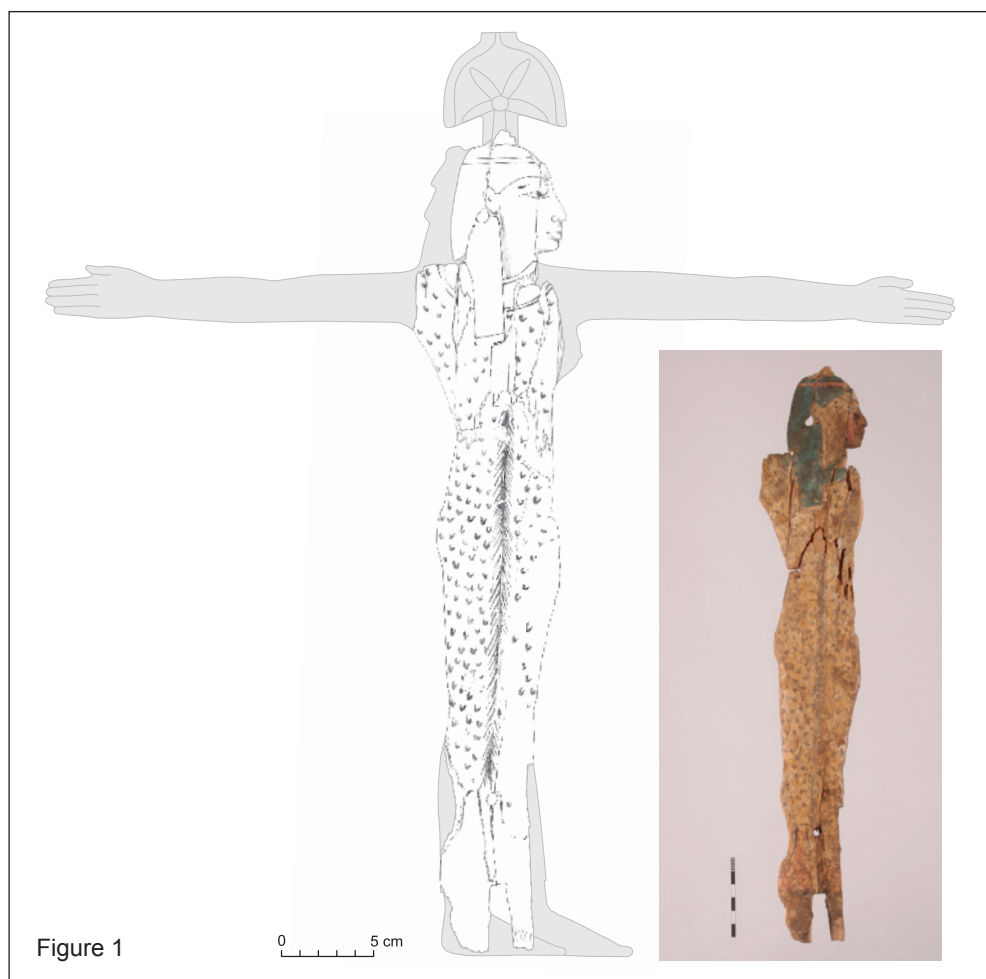


Fig. 1. Figure 1. Seshat, reconstruction drawing; inset, current state of preservation of the figure (All drawings A. Stupko-Lubczyńska; all photos M. Jawornicki)

made separately using a different kind of wood, was glued to the rest of the figure. The leopard skin was painted white with black patches and a strip of black fur along the animal's back. The skin color of the goddess, while difficult to establish, was lighter than yellow, probably light green. Her hair was dark green/blue with a red fillet.

Figure 2. Seshat [Fig. 2]

Provenance: S.7A/82.

Measurements: L. 19.5 cm (left arm), 12 cm (right arm); Th. 0.5–0.8 cm.

Partly preserved figure facing right; arms (the right one broken below the elbow) with a leopard-skin on the shoulders and one fragment of torso fitting the right arm. The leopard skin painted white with black

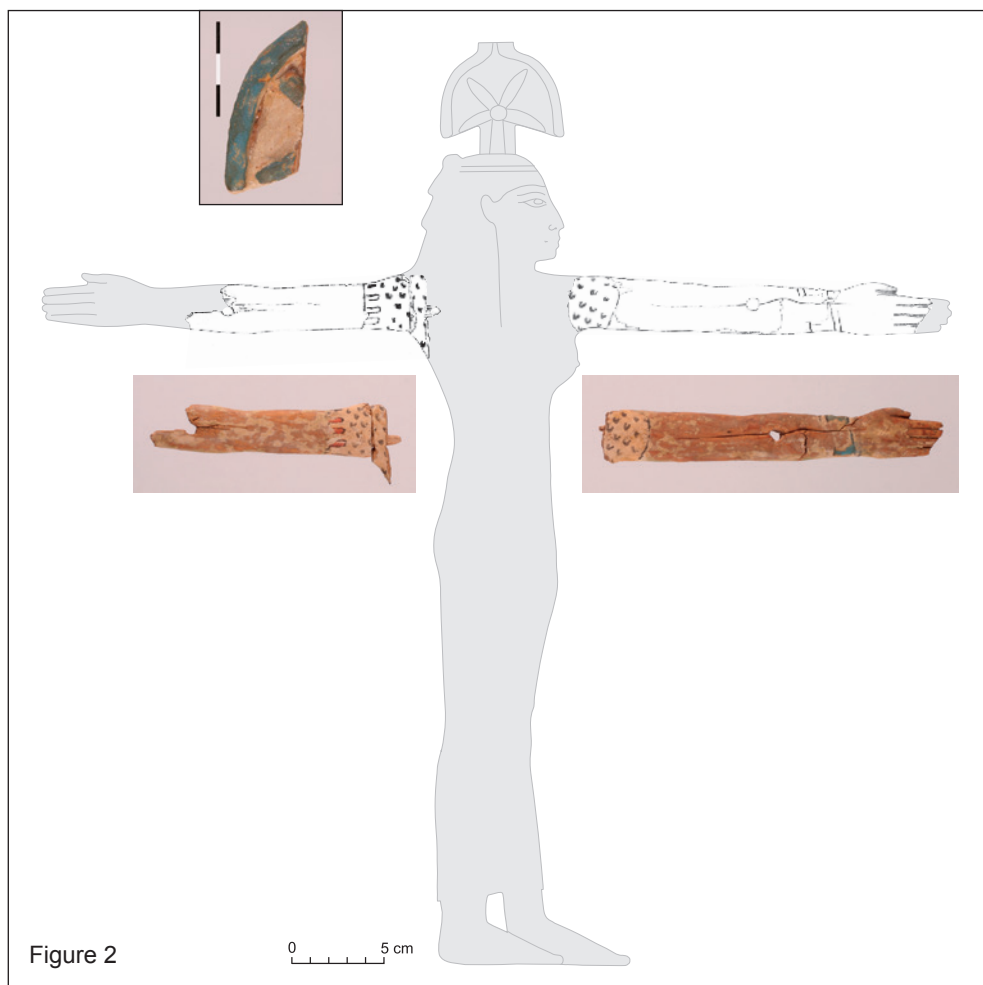


Fig. 2. Figure 2. Seshat, reconstruction drawing; lateral insets, current state of preservation of elements of the figure; top left inset, fragment of a head emblem, from this or possibly another figure

patches and red claws(?). A bracelet painted dark green/blue on the preserved wrist of the left arm. Light green skin color, preserved in traces. The fragments came from a different figure of Seshat than Figure 1, because the arm tenons of the former and the mortises cut in the torso of the latter are of different size; moreover, the fragment of torso fitting the right arm of Figure 2 is not missing from the body of Figure 1.

A small fragment of a Seshat emblem (H. 5.5 cm and Th. 0.6–0.8 cm) [Fig. 2, top left inset], painted dark green/blue and white, found in the fill of S.7A/82, could be attributed to one of the two figures.

Figure 3. Neith [Fig. 3]

Provenance: S.7A/82, S.7C/82.

Measurements: H. figure (reconstructed) 44 cm; H. emblem 6 cm. Arm span

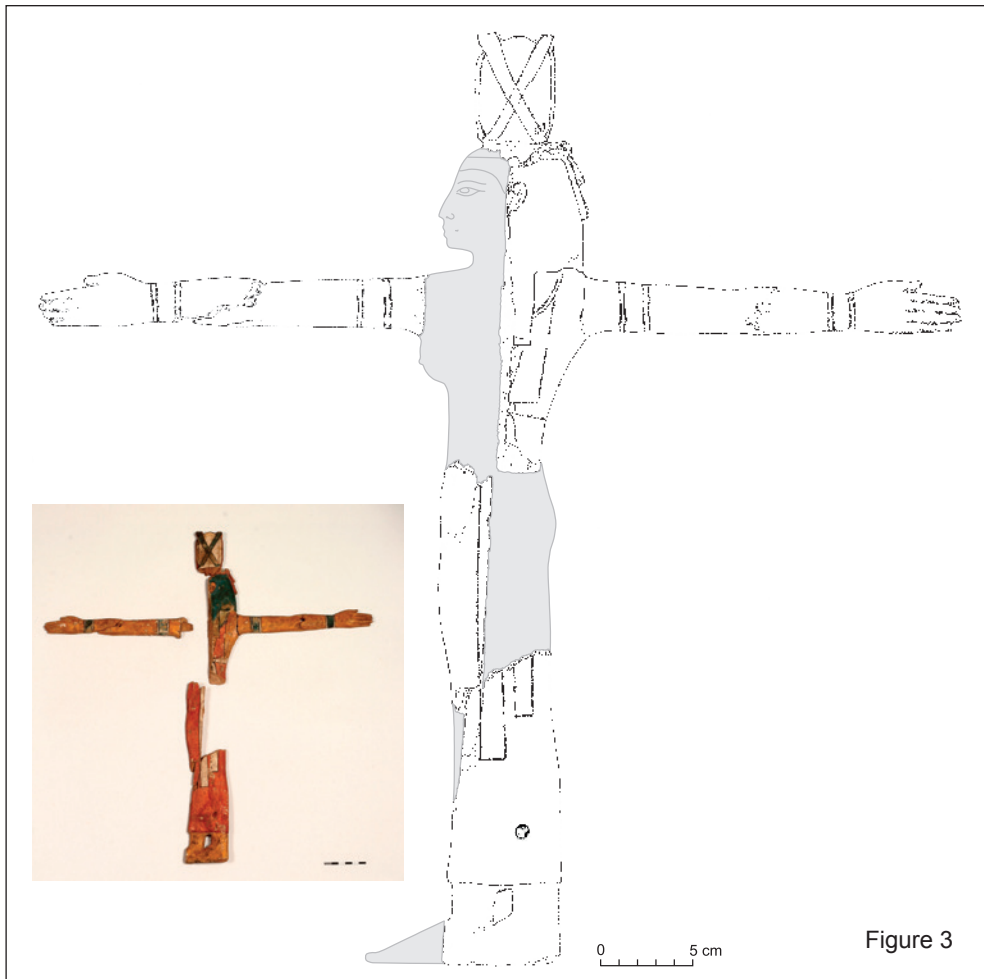


Fig. 3. Figure 3. Neith, reconstruction drawing; inset, current state of preservation

(reconstructed) approximately 48 cm; Th. 0.6–1 cm.

Female figure facing left, in a red dress tied with a white scarf around the waist. Light green *wesekh* collar on her neck, dark green/blue bracelets on her wrists and forearms, all five items of jewelry rimmed with white. The skin of the goddess is yellow, her hair dark green/blue, the emblem dark green/blue and white (Szafranski 2007b).

Figure 4. Unidentified goddess [Fig. 4]

Provenance: S.7B/82.

Measurements: H. 9.5 cm; Th. 0.7–0.9 cm.

Lower part of a figure facing left. Left foot painted light green and a fragment of red dress preserved.

The following four figures (5–8) are preserved only as head emblems.

Figure 5. Selkit [Fig. 5]

Provenance: S.7A/82.

Measurements: H. 6 cm; Th. 0.5 cm.

Scorpion-shaped element, emblem of the goddess facing right. Colors: red, white.

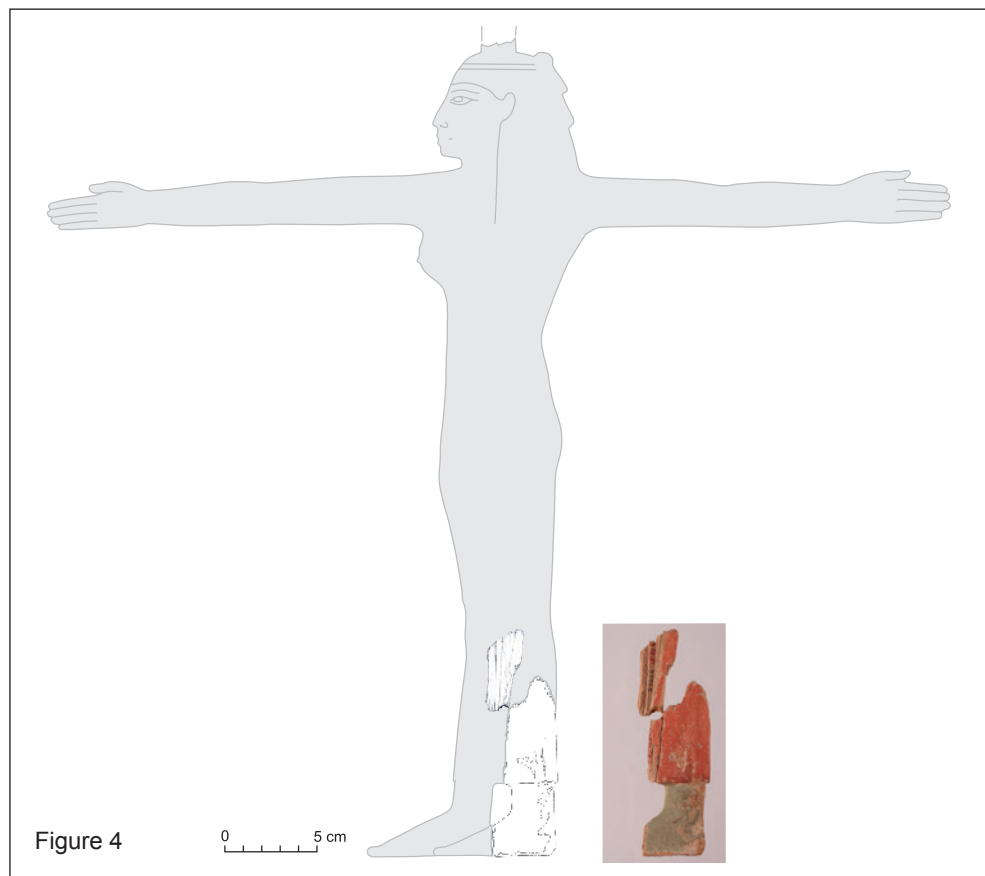


Fig. 4. Figure 4. Unidentified goddess, reconstruction drawing; inset, current state of preservation

Figure 6. Seshat [see *Fig. 5*]*Provenance:* S.7A/82.*Measurements:* H. 7.5 cm; Th. 0.7–0.8 cm.

Emblem of the goddess. Colors: light green, white.

Figure 7. Isis [see *Fig. 5*]*Provenance:* S.7A/82.*Measurements:* H. 8 cm; Th. 0.6–0.7 cm.

Emblem of the goddess facing left. Colors: dark green/blue.

Figure 8. Nephtys [see *Fig. 5*]*Provenance:* S.7A/82.*Measurements:* H. 8 cm; Th. 0.6–0.8 cm.

Emblem of the goddess facing right. Colors: dark green/blue, white, red.

Figure 9. Unidentified goddess [*Fig. 6*]

Provenance: S.1/07 (one fragment), S.7B/82 (remaining fragments).

Measurements: H. 33.5 cm, Th. 0.6–1.2 cm.

Upper part of a female torso turned to the right. Head, arms and lower part of the figure are missing. The skin of

the goddess is green, her hair blue with a yellow stripe in its lower part. The dress, tied with a white scarf around the waist, is red, rimmed with a “checker”-shaped ornament consisting of red, dark green and yellow rectangles separated by white-black-white vertical stripes. The same motif decorates the shoulder strap of the dress, the colors in this case being blue, red, yellow, black and white. The *wesekh* collar consists of two broad strands, red and dark green/blue fringed by a row of tear-shaped green/blue beads. Narrow white strands divide the elements of the collar from one another.

The figure was undoubtedly bigger than those measuring 44 cm in height, this judging by the proportions of the complete image [see *Fig. 1*], which reached 64 cm together with emblem. Her right arm in all likelihood was lowered along the body, while the left one was raised. Among the bigger scale emblems only that of Nephtys (Figure 8) [see *Fig. 5*] could be attributed to the figure under discussion, as it faces right like the piece in question.²

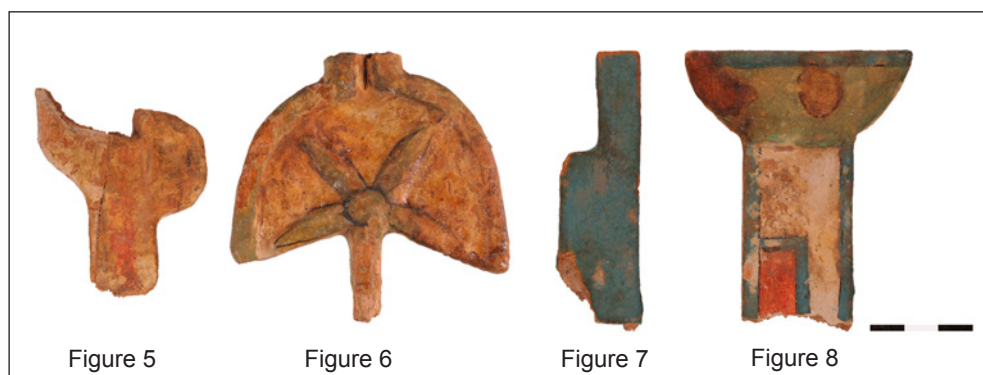


Fig. 5. Figures 5 to 8. Head emblems of Selkit (5), Seshat (6), Isis (7) and Nephtys (8)

² The emblem of Isis (Figure 7) faces left and that of Seshat (Figure 6) would require the body to be dressed in a leopard-skin, to fit the iconography of the goddess.

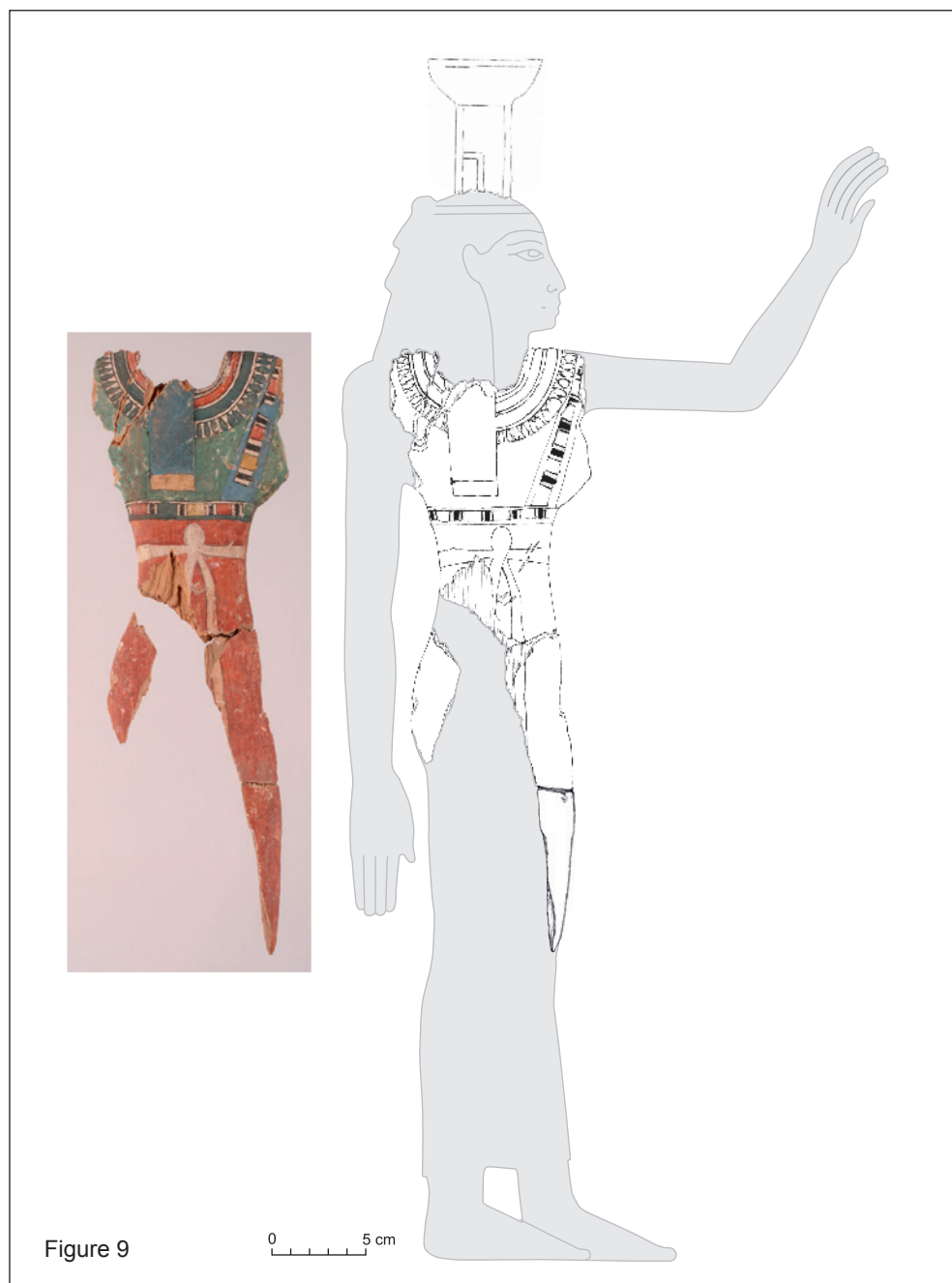


Fig. 6. Figure 9. Unidentified goddess, reconstruction drawing; inset, current state of preservation

To sum up, the collected pieces fall into two groups, larger and smaller, assigned on the basis of emblems and figure measurements. The group of small-scale figures consists of five items, three facing right (Figures 1–3) and two facing left (Figures 4, 9). The large-scale

group presents three emblems (Figures 5–7) and one partly preserved figure facing right (Figure 9). Considering that most of the fragments from both groups were found in shaft S.7A/82, it is likely that that was their place of original deposition.

COMMENTARY

The iconography and the repertoire of goddesses constituting the set in question deserve brief commentary. The images of female deities with arms outstretched derive from representations of Isis, Nephtys, Neith and Selkis appearing as guardians of the four sons of Horus, the keepers of the canopic jars. The four goddesses represented with this gesture are known as three-dimensional statuettes standing guard around the great wooden shrine enclosing the canopic chest of Tutankhamon (Piankoff 1955: Pls 10–12) or, more often, on the sides or enfolding corners of the New Kingdom and later canopic chests (Ikram and Dodson 1998: Pls 411, 413, 423). From the Eighteenth Dynasty on the corners of sarcophagi also started to be adorned with the goddesses (Ikram and Dodson 1998: Pl. 366).

Regarding the set found in the Chapel of Hatshepsut, one is made to wonder by Seshat appearing as many as three times (twice in the small-scale group). On the whole, the goddess is seldom present in mortuary contexts (Wilkinson 2003: 167), although to believe some religious texts, she occupies a fairly important place with regard to the deceased, acting as the one who opens for him the gates into the Realm of the Dead (CT 10: I,33–34),³

clothing him as his mother (CT 68: I,290) or erecting a house for him in the Field of Offerings (CT 297: IV,50; CT 355: V,2; CT 709: IV,340; BD 57, 152).

The last aspect, connected with the building activity of the goddess, seems to be of particular importance in the context of our research, as it corresponds to that of Nephtys collecting together members of the deceased identified with Osiris. The association of these two goddesses is attested for the first time in the Pyramid Texts (PT 364 §616a–c), where the following words are said to the king: “Nephtys has collected all your limbs for you in her identity of Seshat, lady of builders, and has made them sound on you” (Allen 2005: 80). A similar text known as CT spell 778 is attested on two Middle Kingdom coffins from Thebes (T6C and T10C). In both cases, the inscription surrounds a figure of Nephtys with raised arms, represented on the foot side of the chest, corresponding to a figure of Isis shown in the same pose, placed on the opposite, head side (CT 778: VI,410 and note 4). The same motif is known from the canopic chest belonging to king Djehuty (Seventeenth Dynasty), two sides of which were inscribed with a paraphrase of the spell in question (Dodson 1994: 149).

³ In this case Seshat is paired off with the god Wepwawet (Lapp 1994: 236).

These pieces of evidence seem to explain the appearance of Seshat in a pair with Isis, occupying the place of Nephtys which can be observed on two *qrsu*-coffins of the Late Period (CG 41002 and CG 41011), now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Small figures of Isis and Nephtys with their arms stretched out were represented on their short sides, at the bottom of the corner pillars, to be seen from the head side; figures of Isis and Seshat were shown on the opposite side (Moret 1913: 140–141, Pls VII–VIII).

When considering the function of the object that the figures from the shafts in the Chapel of Hatshepsut had once decorated, one should take into account some details of their workmanship. On the better preserved examples, it was observed that the body together with the head emblem was made of one piece of wood, while the arms were prepared separately and joined by tenons fitted into special rectangular holes cut in the torso. The front sides of the figures were carved with details in relief, overlaid by *gesso* and painted; the flat back sides were left plain. Round holes for wooden pegs were drilled in the heads, arms and legs of the figures. Traces of an adhesive substance were observed on the same level on the backs, along with remains of reinforcing wooden strips to which the figures were fastened. The top and bottom sides of the figures were left unpainted, indicating the presence of a kind of frame around the figures of the goddesses, joining their emblems and feet.

In some respects, the workmanship of the described fragments is similar to that of wooden figural elements from openwork mummy casings dated to the period from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Dynasty (Raven 1991: 38–39,

Pls 10, 39, 43, Cat. 25; 2005: 76, Pls 94, 100, Cat. 52; Landa and Lapis 1974: No. 105, Inv. 787; Bruyère 1926: Figs 117–118). But the set in question could not belong to an object of this kind for a number of reasons. First, the figures from the Chapel of Hatshepsut are bigger than the figural elements making up the said mummy covers, which were only about 25 cm high. Moreover, the latter elements were slightly curved, reflecting the shape of the wrapped body, while the figures of the goddesses are flat. Additionally, the arrangement of the mummy casings corresponds to the general decoration pattern of contemporary coffins and cartonages: winged goddesses placed on a chest and a number of deities standing beneath in a few registers (Niwinski 1984: 440). The iconography of the goddesses from the Chapel of Hatshepsut is different. Finally, the whole surface “covered” by the figures in question (supposing that they constituted one object) would be much bigger than that of a mummy casing. If so, some other openwork piece of bigger size and with flat surfaces should be taken into consideration.

A prominent example is the lion bed of Panedjemib from the Ptolemaic Period (Cairo Museum No. 3263), with its canopy rising above the frame of the bed itself, decorated with a group of seated deities on its long sides and with representations of a winged Isis and Nephtys with their arms outstretched on the short sides (Grimm 1975: 23, Pls 76–77). Another piece (although without figural representations) is the funeral canopy of Montuemhsaf dated to the Roman period, found in his undisturbed grave in Qurna (Rhind 1862: 111–112; Manniche 1987: 90–91, Fig. 77;

Riggs 2003: 192–193). This is an example of openwork shrine made of painted wooden papyriform columns supporting the roof. It might have sheltered the mummy lying on a sledge or boat during a mortuary procession, as it was found in the upper chamber of the tomb, apart from the body placed in a granite sarcophagus. Both examples, the lion bed and the funeral canopy, are approximately 2 m long on their longer sides (2.25 m for the bed, at least 2 m for the canopy, although the exact dimensions are not known).

Judging by these examples, the object decorated by the set of figures in question may be reconstructed as a box with a frame of two longer and two shorter sides, to which the figures were attached. Two

fragments of wooden planks painted red, furnished with pegs, were found in shaft S.7A/82 [Fig. 7]. They could be interpreted as structural elements of such a construction, although the surface on which the figures stood seems to be dark green/blue, traces of this color being visible in the form of a thin line on the unpainted bottom side of the figure of Neith (Figure 3) (Stupko 2008: Fig. 2).

If these assumptions are correct, the large-scale figures seem to have been placed on the shorter sides in pairs, facing one another, with one arm raised and the other one lowered alongside the body: Isis and Nephtys on one side, Isis (missing) and Seshat on the other.⁴ If so, the width of the shorter side would be no less than 78.5 cm.

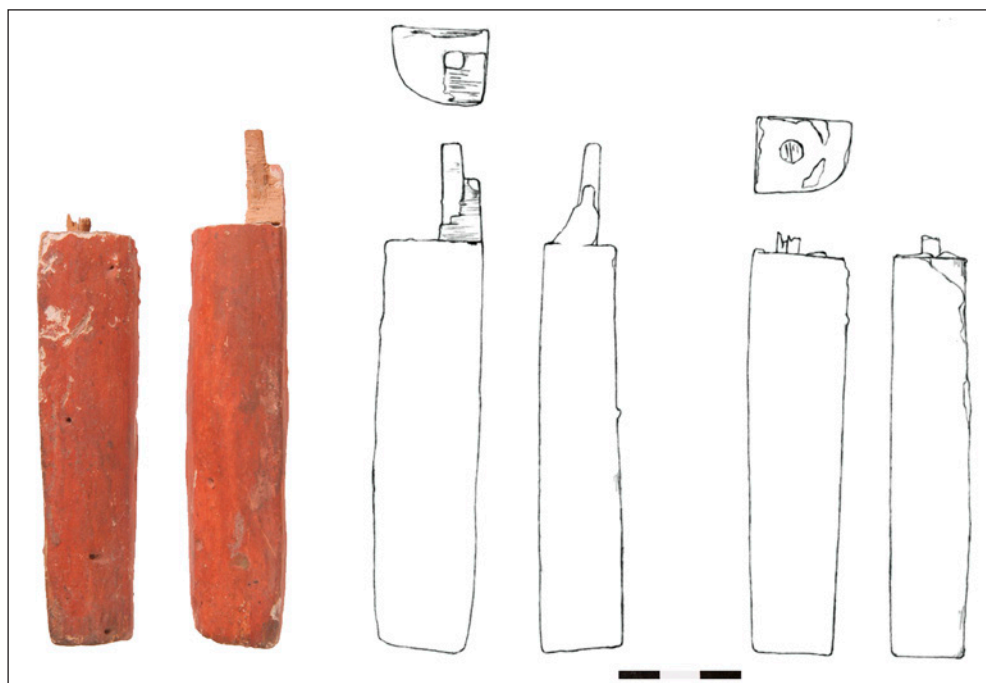


Fig. 7. Fragments of wooden planks: structural elements(?) of a reconstructed openwork object

⁴ The attribution to the sides was based on the decoration of the above mentioned coffin CG 41002.

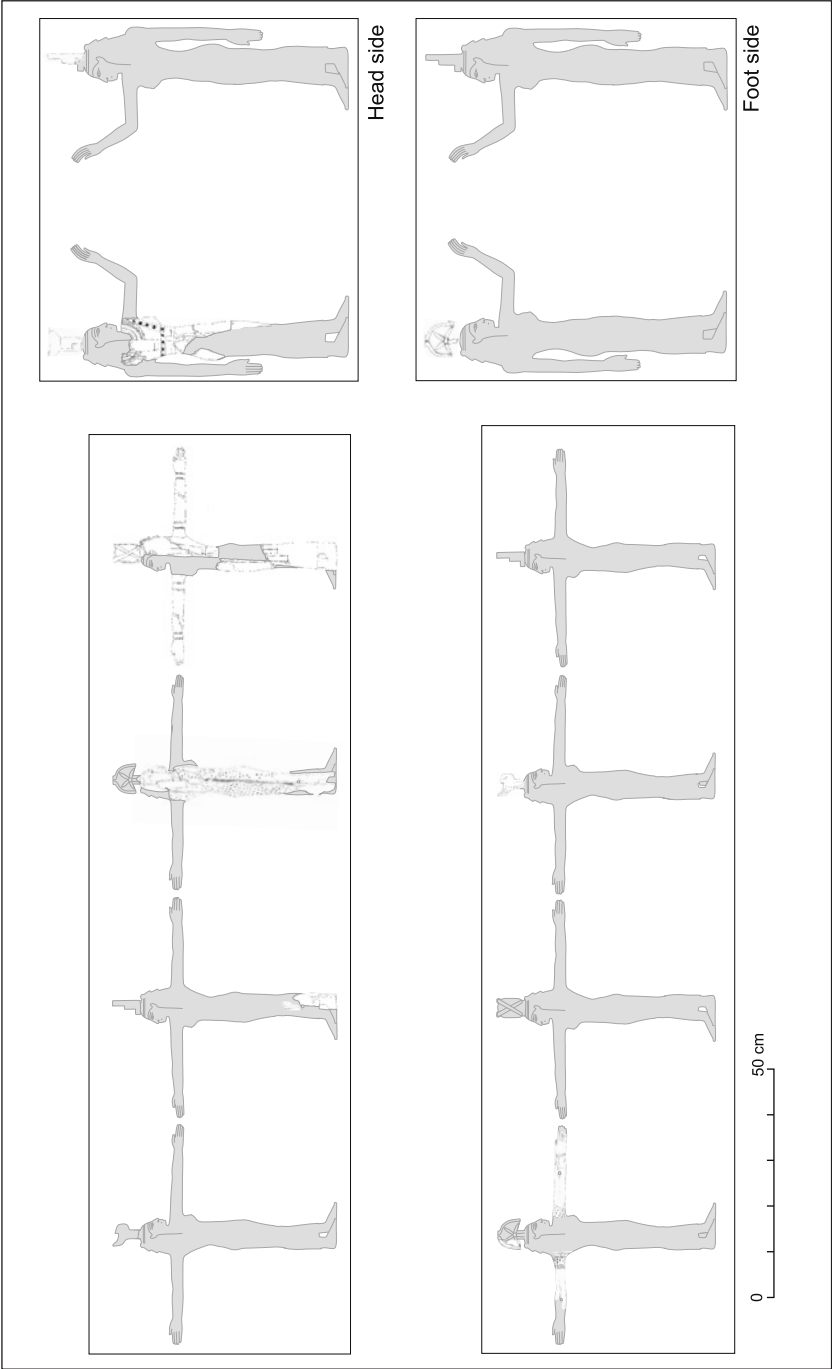


Fig. 8. Theoretical reconstruction of the arrangement of goddess figures in the openwork object
(Reconstruction drawing A. Stupko-Lubczyńska)

Scenes showing some vertical motif, such as the *djed* pillar, the fetish of Abydos or the figure of Osiris placed in the center, flanked by two goddesses with one arm raised in a gesture of protection, are well known from the coffins and cartonnages of the Third Intermediate and Late Periods (Koefoed-Petersen 1951: Fig. LIX; Gasse 1996: Fig. XXXVIII; Taylor and Strudwick 2005: 58–59).

Assuming that the reconstruction of the short sides is correct, one could presume a decoration of the long sides with the small-scale goddesses. This group now consists of five figures: Neith, Selkis, two Seshats and one unidentified goddess in red dress. Only three of them are preserved sufficiently to confirm the same gesture of outstretched arms. The arm span of these examples approximates to 50 cm. If the dimensions of the reconstructed object were close to that of the openwork examples noted above (2 m length), and if all of the figures were of the same shape, four of them would fit on one side. The set

thus would consist initially of eight figures, three of which are now missing. As for assigning specific figures to the lateral sides, placing them all facing in one direction seems impossible due to the presence of two figures of Seshat facing right that could rather not be located on one and the same side. Assuming that the two sides were decorated with an identical set of goddesses, our proposal is to place them in pairs one facing another, so that there are two pairs of goddesses attributed to each side: Seshat with Neith and Isis with Selkit. Similarly to the suggested arrangement of the large-scale figures, Seshat would stand here for Nephtys.

Thus, it is possible to reconstruct the short and long sides of the presumed object, although due to the fragmentary condition of the figures and missing the back to which they would have been attached, the present arrangement [*Fig. 8*] should be treated as merely a suggestion until a similar and more complete object is discovered and published.

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