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*Re-united wooden fragments of the coffin of The
Samaref Priest Horudja
Late Dynastic Period, 26th Dynasty, c. 664 –
525 B.C.*

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EGYPTIAN

Re-united wooden fragments of the coffin of the Samaref Priest Horudja

Late Dynastic Period, 26th Dynasty, c. 664 – 525 B.C

Sycamore fig or Acacia wood

Upper part:

H 47.9 x W 13.6 x D 5.4 cm

H 18 7/8 x W 5 1/3 x D 2 1/8 in.

Lower part:

H 46 x W 15 x D 6 cm

H 18 7/8 x W 6 x D 2 1/8 inch

Provenance

Upper part:

Chakib Slatine, Paris, acquired 1975;

Private collection, Paris, acquired 1977;

Ede Gallery, London, sold at the TEFAF Art Fair March 2020.

Lower part:

Chakib Slatine, Paris, acquired 1975;

Private collection, Paris, acquired 1977;

Private collection, FranCe, before 1985;

sold in public auction in Paris, March 2023.

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The relief is a tall, narrow wooden corner post forming part of a rectangular anthropoid sarcophagus belonging to Horudja, a Sameref priest active during the 26th Dynasty. The post is carved from a dense, reddish-brown hardwood, likely acacia or sycamore fig, and displays a single vertical register of hieroglyphic inscription incised in low relief., and black tones, now largely lost but still visible in recesses along the carved signs.

The front face is smoothly dressed and carved with careful, elegant hieroglyphs typical of the Saite Period's revivalist classicism, reflecting the archaising tendencies of Dynasty XXVI. The back of the post is roughly chiselled, with four mortise-holes corresponding to dowels that once secured it to the wooden frame of the coffin. The post is split vertically along the grain but retains structural integrity; the surface shows fine craquelure and minor losses at the upper and lower edges.

The object represents the reunited upper and lower segments of the same vertical post, now brought together for the first time in over fifty years. The join between the two sections is purposely kept visible in the mounting. The proportions and curvature of the edges confirm its function as a corner element framing the coffin front.

The Inscription

The column of hieroglyphs, read from top to bottom, is part of a funerary invocation for the deceased Horudja, son of Iahtefnakht and Khaatirbint, whose full titulary appears on related fragments. The text carved along the vertical register preserves the opening of the traditional offering formula (*hṯp dī nsw*), one of the most widespread invocations in Egyptian funerary culture. It reads: "An offering given by the king (to) Osiris, Foremost of the Westerners, the great god, Lord of Abydos, that he may give bread, beer, oxen, birds, ... alabaster, clothing, ... and all good and pure things..." This formula expresses the belief that the deceased could partake eternally in the offerings presented to the gods. By invoking Osiris under his epithet "Foremost of the Westerners" (*hnty imnt.t*)—lord of the necropolis and ruler of the blessed dead—the text situates Horudja's coffin firmly within the Osirian cult of resurrection. The mention of the king at the start of the formula reflects the ancient notion that all offerings to the gods were made under royal authority, even in private monuments. This invocation thus ensured Horudja's perpetual participation in the divine cycle of renewal and his reception of the sustenance necessary for eternal life in the West.

This formula is part of the standard quartet of protective utterances by the Four Sons of Horus, traditionally placed on the sides of coffins and canopic equipment. The text parallels that recorded in the Drouot 1977 catalogue and on the larger coffin planks published by Hans Wolfgang Müller (*Münchner Ägyptologische Studien* 5, Berlin 1969, no. A 186, pp. 128–129). The original glass-paste inlays would have contrasted vividly against the dark wood, producing a luminous script symbolic of rebirth and divine illumination.

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Fig. 1: Both fragments are from the same sarcophagus, showing the titlature, Bonham's London, 28 November 2018, lot 186 and Sotheby's New York, 15 December 2016, lot 17

The post belongs to a wooden anthropoid coffin of the Late Dynastic Period, specifically the Saite Dynasty (26th Dynasty). Stylistically, the use of coloured glass inlay for hieroglyphs on dark wood relates closely to the technique observed on the coffin of Djedthutiefankh from Tuna el-Gebel (now Museo Egizio, Turin, inv. C. 2241), as well as to the famous inlaid wooden shrine of Petosiris from Hermopolis (Cairo Museum, JE 44973). (this glass inlay isn't preserved on these fragments). Hans Wolfgang Müller (1969, p. 128–129, A 186) describes a nearly identical wooden strip from the Kofler-Truniger Collection (Lucerne), likewise decorated with hieroglyphs of inlaid glass-paste in blue, green, black and white, forming part of a funerary shrine. Müller notes the parallels with Horudja's coffin, emphasising the Saite revival of polychrome inlay, a hallmark of late Egyptian craftsmanship that sought to imitate precious-stone hieroglyphs.

The present post fits precisely within this group, both technically and iconographically. The use of inlaid glass-paste (instead of paint) was particularly valued in the Delta and Middle Egypt, where such work was associated with elite priestly workshops connected to Heracleopolis Magna and Fayum.

The Sameref Priest: Function and Status

The title Sameref (sm3-r.f), literally “he who loves him”, is a ritual priestly office attested since the Old Kingdom and revived in Late Period contexts. The Sameref priest had a dual role: as a filial figure ensuring the mortuary cult of the deceased father, and as a liturgical officiant responsible for the “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony. By the Saite Period, the title also functioned as an honorific epithet, designating priests attached to specific temples—in this case, likely that of Herishef (Heryshef), the ram-headed creator god of Heracleopolis.

The inscription confirms that Horudja's mother, Khaatirbint, was a “musician of the god Herishef”, reinforcing the family's temple association. This situates Horudja

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within a hereditary priestly lineage, an important element of social continuity in the religious elite of the Saite renaissance.

Comparable examples of Sameref coffins include those of Pa-di-Usir, Petosiris, and Djedthutiefankh, all of which display similar liturgical inscriptions invoking Osiris and the Sons of Horus for protection and resurrection (cf. Taylor, *The Theban Coffin Project*, British Museum, 2001).

Comparatives

- Coffin of Djedthutiefankh, Tuna el-Gebel (Museo Egizio, Turin, inv. C. 2241): wooden surface inlaid with blue-green glass hieroglyphs (see Museo Egizio Catalogue, 2015, p. 255).
- Inlaid wooden shrine fragment, Lucerne, Sammlung Kofler-Truniger (Müller, *Münchener Ägyptologische Studien* 5, no. A 186): similar dimensions and technique.
- Sarcophagus of Petosiris, Hermopolis Magna (Cairo JE 44973): close stylistic and technical comparison in glass-paste inlay.
- Coffin of Horudja, fragments sold Drouot 1977, lot 89: cedar wood with engraved and inlaid hieroglyphs naming the same individual.

These parallels confirm the current post's attribution to the same coffin ensemble. The Saite period witnessed a deliberate revival of classical Middle Kingdom forms, characterised by elegant, well-proportioned hieroglyphs and a deep concern for textual orthodoxy.

Historical and Art-Historical Significance

The present corner post is a rare surviving example of Late Period wooden sarcophagi. Its survival in two complementary fragments - now reunited for the first time in over fifty years - is of exceptional significance. The upper section, once in the Chakib Slitine Collection (Paris, 1975), and the lower section, have been confirmed through matching grain, dimensions, and alignment of hieroglyphs.

This reunion restores the integrity of one of the four corner posts that once framed the sarcophagus of Horudja. The reintegration not only reconstructs part of the coffin's original architectural coherence but also allows renewed study of the decorative programme and liturgical function. Other elements of the same coffin, including planks with extensive funerary texts, remain in private collections, awaiting comprehensive documentation.

Such fragments bear witness to the refined religious art of the Saite renaissance, where the interplay of luminous inlay, fine carving, and sacred inscription transformed the coffin into a microcosm of divine protection. Horudja's title and texts encapsulate the Late Period's deep theological reflection on rebirth, protection, and continuity between priesthood and divinity.

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