

Name: Tim Kirk  
Student No.: 1710839  
Module No.: HPAH6026

## Cyfarthfa Castle Collections



(Images: T. Kirk)

### Cyfarthfa Castle Museum, Merthyr Tydfil.

Museum Number: CCM 199996

Object Category: Pottery fragment.

#### Description:

A fragment of a larger piece, possibly a anthropoid coffin lid. The piece exhibits a pithoi-type rim with applied detail. There is damage to the brow, the nose and the chin. This damage to the chin is important due to the lack of any evidence for a beard. Hongsheng, et. al, suggest that the Egyptian false beard may have been a representation of the sun rising over the Nile and hence symbolising the travail of the sun-god, Re, across the sky (Hongsheng, et. al.: 2017). Its omission might suggest thst the 'coffin' was made for a female. Possibly from an 'Anthropoid Type B coffin' (Dothan, 1978:100). The face and hair are made separately and applied to the rounded base layer. Thickness of the base layer is 19-22mm and the radius of

the rim suggests a diameter of around 574mm. In turn, this again suggests that the ‘coffin’ might have been made for a small female or an adolescent since, although a mummified body is somewhat shrunken from that in life, a male form would be unlikely to fit in such a small diameter vessel. However, the good condition of the rim suggests that this has never been sealed and therefore not used.

The facial features appear to have been formed by hand and with the use of blunt, rounded tools. The exception to this are the lips which have a separated, incised detail with corners pierced by a stylus-like instrument. This may be in acknowledgement of the necessity for the deceased to go through ‘Opening of the Mouth’ ceremony in order they can eat, drink and speak (Taylor, 2001:164-165). The same instrument was used to pierce the right ear (the left ear is missing). The piercing of ears in Egyptian culture is seen at its earliest in the Narmer Palette (ca. 3100BC) and was at its height in the New Kingdom (1520-1070 BC); piercing of the ears was used not only for decoration, but was also thought to protect the body against evil spirits (Mudry and Pirsig, 2007:81-84).

Pottery coffins are generally accepted to be manufactured using the ‘coil-wound’ technique (Dothan, 1978:99). This involves the coiling of ‘sausages’ of clay in a circle over each other and filling in any gaps with smaller pieces of material which are bound together with ‘slip’ – a mixture of clay thinned with water – see also Cyfarthfa Castle Collections Cy280.004 (Doherty, 2015:80). However, Klotz has suggested that the potters wheel (which was thought to have been introduced to Egypt around 650-486 BC) could have been introduced much earlier due to the discovery of an earlier hieroglyphic text in the form of an incised inscription on the temple of Rameses II at Luxor (Klotz, 2013:170-171). If this is the case then this artefact might have been produced significantly earlier than originally thought. Rameses II reigned from 1279-1213 BC (BM, 2023). Thus the hieroglyph showing the use of a kick wheel by the god Khnum may push back the date of manufacture by some six hundred years. This could explain the very smooth interior of the artefact and lack of visible voids in the fabric. Although coil-wound pottery is known to have been finished on a kick-wheel, Bourriau et. al., suggest that larger vessels were made in sections on a wheel and finished by joining together (‘luting’) with slip (Bourriau, et. al., 2000:126).

There is no evidence of colour application to the image, however there is a yellowish-white powder adhering to the face and hair in places. Whilst this could be dirt, a similar powdery residue is known to indicate the presence of pine tars (Bruce-Mitford, 1975:371).

Collection place: Not known.

Collection place notes:

A small number – ‘235’ or ‘23S’ – written above the left ear may indicate that this object is from the collection of Harry Southey (Zinn, 2016). Southey visited Egypt in 1901 and was also posted to the Eastern Mediterranean theatre during World War 1. If this is, indeed, from the Southey Collection then it may have been collected at either of these periods.

Publications: Unpublished.

Production Period: 1200-500 BCE.

Material: Nile River Clay (Bourriau et. al., 2000:121). .

Dimensions: 235mm wide  
206mm high  
105mm deep

Object Analysis by: T. N. Kirk.

## Bibliography

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