

A Pottery Coffin Mask from Egypt ?



An un-curated artefact
from
Cyfartha Castle Museum
(CCM 199 996)



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A fragment of a larger piece – possibly a pottery coffin

24cm wide
20cm high
10cm thick

Nile River Clay

Multiple parts –
Base
Face
Hair and Ears

Damage to nose, hair and chin



Rim-type finish to upper edge.

Thickness of main body - 19-22mm.

Damage to nose, brow and chin.

No evidence of applied colour.

White powdery substance on areas
of surface – pine tar residue ?





Anthropoid style (c.f.
grotesque style)

No beard – a missing
detail, or possibly made for
a woman or child ?

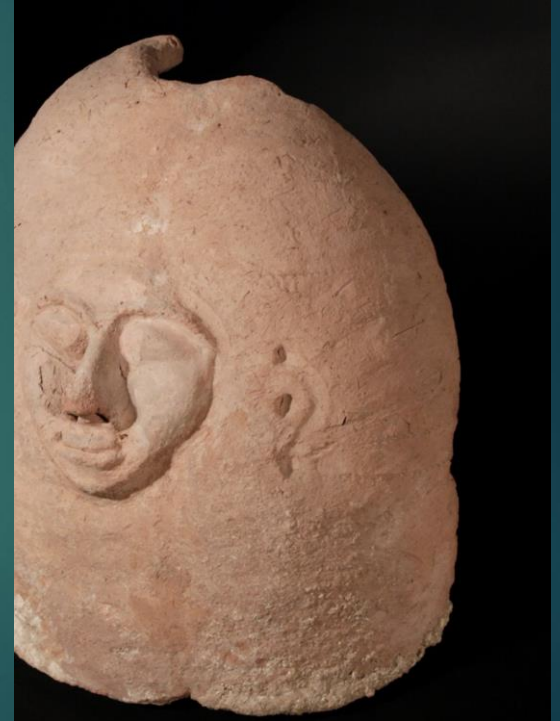
Two areas of incised detail
- split between lips (ref.
'Opening of the Mouth
Ceremony')
- Pierced Right ear – (left
earlobe missing)

Other types of Anthropoid coffins:

Rounded 'heads'.

Flat base.

Pithoid-type rim at top (no
image).





Regular radius to rim

Calculated diameter of rim: 452mm

Regular horizontal ridges across the back –wheel-thrown or finished ?

Wheel thrown or coil wound ?

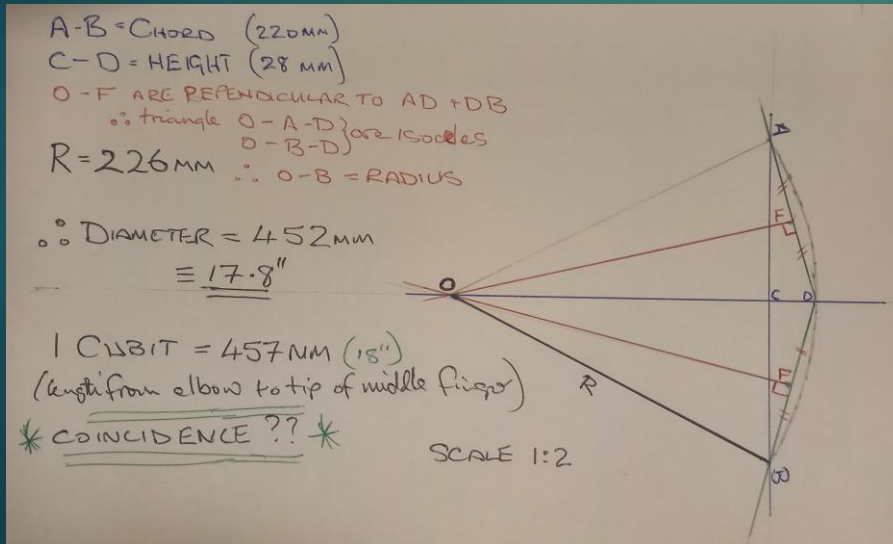




Fig. 4. Excerpt from Luxor inscription, writing: "Lady of Builders (*nb.t iqd.w*)."

Image: Klotz, 2013:172

Commonly held that wheel-thrown pottery originated in 27th Dynasty (ca. 650 BC).
(Klotz, 2013:171)

In 2007 new inscription found at Temple of Luxor (Rameses II, 19th Dynasty, died ca.1213BC) referring to Lady of Builders showing construction or finishing of a large vessel.

(Klotz, 2013:172)

Large pots possibly made in sections and 'luted' together.

(Nicholson and Shaw, 2000:126)

Anthropoid coffins chiefly found in the Delta, Fayum and Nubia

(Dothan, 1978:100)

Future Research



Experimental Archaeology:	make pots using coil-wound and pot-thrown techniques.
Anthropology:	Object biography, Object itinerary.
Egyptian studies:	Hieroglyph research regarding 'Lady of Builders' and "qd-h'w" (he who models the body).
Materials Science:	Petrographic analysis of material fabric to locate object more precisely. Test for residues

....and much more!

Bibliography

Docherty, S.K. (2015). "The origins and Use of the Potters Wheel in Egypt". Oxford: Archaeopress.

Dothan, T (1978). *Excavations at the cemetery of Deir el-Balah* in "Qelem", vol.10. Available at: <https://jstor.org/stable/43587093>. Last accessed: 01.02.2023.

Klotz, D. (2013). *The earliest representation of a potters kick-wheel in Egypt* in "ENiM" 6, 2013, pp.169-176. Available at: <https://recherche.unive-montp3.fr/egyptologie/emin>. Last accessed: 06.02.2023.

Nicholson, P.T. and Shaw, I. (2000). "Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Notes to accompany presentation (not all spoken to directly in the presentation). Bibliography as above (slide 9).

Slide 1: Title.

The provenance of the artefact is, at best, uncertain. It has been in storage at Cyfartha Castle Museum and Art Gallery for some time. The accession number is 199996. Another number, initially identified as 325 is evident above the left ear. KZ suggested that this might be 32S (or similar) which could indicate it is a part of the Southey Collection (Southey visited Egypt in 1901 and was posted there and around the Eastern Mediterranean prior to his death during WW1). If this is a part of his collection, then the artefact could have been obtained from anywhere in this region.

Slides 2 and 3: The artefact.

Measurements by TK.

Suggested by KZ to be a fragment of a pottery coffin lid.

Immediately obvious was the multi-layered construction of the face, the smooth interior surface and the 'pithoid'-type rim. This would appear to have taken a lid and – due to its generally clean condition – if this was a coffin, never to have had a lid sealed to it.

No images were able to be found of this type of pottery coffin and only a 1978 paper by Trude Dothan (Hebrew University in Jerusalem) could be found to make any reference to them.

Dothan suggests typologies and construction techniques:

Coffins were built up with the wound coil technique which was also often used to make pithoi. A section was removed at the leathery stage of drying to form the lid. The features were applied at this stage (Dothan 1978:99). Some have a pithoi-type rim whereas others have a round hole or none. Dothan notes that greater care was taken to finish and fire the lids than the bodies (Dothan 1978:99). Cylindrical in shape, tapered and with a square base, sometimes extended to take the feet. Up to 1970mm length and 1950 – 2320mm circumference (620 – 740mm diameter [TK]) (Dothan 1978:99). Low temperature firing, causing crumbly and mottled material (Dothan 1978:99).

Group A – “mummy-shaped” (sic), Group B – head and shoulders not defined. (Dothan 1978:100).

Dothan’s paper refers to work at Deir el-Balah in Canaan but notes that these types of coffin originated in Egypt (Dothan 1978:100).

A ‘yellowy-white’ powdery substance is recognised as possibly a pine tar residue in Bruce-Mitford (1975), “The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial, vol.1” and whilst this is unlikely to be what is evidenced on the artefact, it should be preserved and could be tested for.

Slide 4. Oblique view.

TK noted the incised detail to the lips and the pierced corners to the mouth and pierced ear. KZ identified the pierced ear dating object to NK.

Lack of beard suggests female or adolescent, although damage further back in chin area could account for this.

Slide 6. Geometry.

The regularity of the radius of the rim and the very clean finish internally, together with the clear 'rilling marks' (c.f. Doherty, 2015:81) really do suggest a wheel-thrown construction, despite Dothan's comments about high-quality finishing of coil-wound pots. Allied to this, the cohesive nature of the fabric – with no voids to suggest filling around coils – would seem to indicate the use of a wheel at some stage in the construction. This set me thinking about the diameter of the artefact and some trigonometry plus a scale drawing (1:2 ; the original is in my scrapbook) suggests a diameter of 452mm – 1 cubit (within 5mm). A coincidence?? Certainly smaller than Dothan's evidence and another possible indication that this was for a small female or an adolescent.

Slide 7. Hieroglyphic evidence.

Klotz' paper potentially pushes back the introduction of the kick-wheel by some 600 years. Text is on the Eastern architrave of the courtyard in Ramses II temple at Luxor (Klotz, 2013:171).

Nicholson's evidence regarding the luting together of smaller sections to produce a large, wheel-thrown pot is persuasive that pot-thrown items of this size were possible at this time (Nicholson and Shaw, 2000:126). A classic case for some comparative techniques in experimental archaeology!

However – further reading of Doherty does suggest that the joins of coils can be difficult to discern! (Doherty, 2015:70). TK 09.02.23.