

Anthropoid Coffins From Raghdan Royal Palace Tomb in Amman

by

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In April 1966 the Jordanian army, while bulldozing the grounds of the Royal Palaces in Amman, came upon what appeared to be ancient ruins. They immediately reported the find to King Hussein, who, in turn called in the Director of Antiquities, the late Dr. Awni Dajani. There then followed an excavation of the site, led by Dr. Dajani, and supervised by Asem Barghouti and M. Morshed Khadejeh. Unfortunately before the results of the dig could be published, the doctor met an untimely death. Moreover, his notes and preliminary reports were mostly destroyed in a flood which engulfed the department offices a few months later. In this report, I will use the scant material I managed to salvage from that flood.

The find proved to be an occupation settlement, dating from the Roman to the Islamic periods. In addition, a tomb which contained a number of Anthropoid coffins was found below one of the complexes. I have devoted my research to this tomb and its properties.

The tomb itself, was cistern-like in shape, having the following dimensions: mouth, 95 cm. in diameter; chamber, 145 cm. deep, 5.5 m. long, and 4.5 m. wide. The mouth, located at the center of the tomb, was well blocked with stones.

Five anthropoid coffins were found inside the tomb: four placed parallel to each other, and one perpendicular to them. All were in bad to very poor condition. Four were cylindrical ranging between 45 cm. in diameter at the bottom, and 65 cm. at the top. The length range was from 210 cm. to 175 cm. The fifth coffin was not kept because of its condition.

These reddish coffins were made of baked clay, with crushed pieces of pottery used as grits. They bore four handles on each side, which were evidently used in transporting the coffin (fig. 2, 3, 5, 6. Pl. XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV). The coffins fig. 3 Pl. XXII) had sixteen handles at the back, arranged in two rows. These seem to have served as legs to elevate the coffin when it lay down.

At the place where the head of the corpse would rest, a lid was cut out. There were four pairs of matching lug handles, one on the lid, one on the body, evidently placed to fasten the two parts together. On the exterior of the two of these lids were portrayals of the deceased (figs. 2, 3. Pl. XXI, XXII). Their noses were pointed, their eyes small and elongated, and their eyebrows were arranged in such a way as to connect up with the outline of the border of the

face. The ears were prominent and big, their lips small and straight and their beards were at a pronounce length.

The same two coffins had arms placed on the sides of the body. The other two, (figs. 5, 6. Pl. XXIII, XXII) displayed no features on their lids, nor did they bear any arms.

More than one skeleton occupied each coffin. some contained two, while other held three. One coffin (fig. 5) had a curious looking design.¹ I've assumed these to be only potter's marks. In addition, there were skeletons found in burial jars and around the coffins. In all, there were more than thirty skeletons in the tomb.

Pottery artifacts, bronze bowls, lamps and a cylinder seal were reported to have been among the finds. (I was unable to locate most of the material). studying the situation inside the tomb, I've concluded that it had been used as a secondary burial place. This hypothesis is supported by the pottery which ranged between the 10th and 7th centuries.

The discovery of anthropoid coffins in the vicinity of Amman leads naturally to a fuller study of this type of coffin found in nearby areas. Very few sites have shown this type of practice in Palestine and Jordan, however, from the evidence we have now, we can attempt to categorize them as follows:

(1) On one of the sherds of the coffin found in Sahab, is a curious incised design (W. Albright. *A.J.A.* 38 (1932) Fig. 2:8 Also the coffin found in Tumulus II in Tell el Yahudiyeh an M. design was incised upon headpiece

I. Cylindrical coffins with lids modelled in high relief with crossed arms on the lid.

This type was found in Beth-Shan,² by A. Rowe (fig. 1: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5), and in Tell el Far'ah, south,³ by Petrie, in his tombs 552 and 562 (fig. 1:10, 11). In 1938 two coffins of this type were discovered in Lachish,⁴ in tomb 570 (fig. 9:8, 9).

This type showed the head, arms and hands, and the features of the deceased either moulded before the coffin was baked, or applied and worked bands of clay on the lid. Arm positions were mostly the same, beginning near the top of the head, and bending at the elbows. In only one (from Beth Shan, fig. 1:4) the arms were shown in a stylized way. Wigs were depicted on three coffin lids from Beth-Shan (fig. 1:1, 2, 3), one from Lachish (fig. 1:9) and one from Tell el-Far'ah (fig. 1:10).

II. Cylindrical coffins with lids modelled in high relief and arms modelled at the sides of the body.

Two coffins of this type were found in Amman (figs. 2, 3) in the Royal Palace tomb. There was a great similarity between these coffins and one found in Sahab by Dr. Albright,⁵ who was able to describe its lid only. All of these coffins had modelled features rather than having features formed by applications of lumps

before baking. (Neville and Griffith. *The Mound of the Jew* (1890) P. 43.

(2) A. Rowe. *T.H.B.S.*, P. 39.

(3) Petrie. *Beth-Palet I*, pp. 6-9, Pl. XXIV.

(4) Tufnell, O. *Lachish IV*, Pl. 45.

of clay. Too, their handles served as features as well as to fasten the lids to the bodies. There is also a remarkable similarity between them in their depiction of the beards on their lids (fig. 4 reconstructed).

This second type is so far restricted to Jordan, as it has not yet been found in Palestine, and must be a later development of type 1. The workmanship of these coffins confirms the theory that there were no known artists in the area during this period.

III. Plain cylindrical coffin.

Two of the coffins found in the Royal Palace tombs in Amman (figs. 5, 6) were without reliefs. The lids had the four lug handles, with no indication of having been used for facial features, and there were no traces of arms. The eight transportation handles, four on each side of type II, are repeated here. Type II coffins are longer and wider.

IV. Elongated box with rounded ends with lid covering the whole box.

This type was found in Dhiban in Jordan.⁶ Only a small portion of the lid was found. Evidence of four handles, two near the top, and two near the bottom,

by which the lid could be removed, was evident. The face is depicted at one end of the lid. It is difficult to say whether or not the arms were depicted here, because this portion of the lid was not found. The depiction on the one end of the lid was done in more of an abstract than an artistic fashion (fig. 7)⁷

These distinctions of pottery coffins in the hilly part of Jordan and the hills and plains of Palestine might be applied as well to the tomb types in which these coffins were found. It is evident that the Palestinian tombs have similar plans. At Tell el Far'ah, "the access to the tomb was obtained by means of a stair case hewn in the rock, opening into a roughly square tomb-chamber. On entering into this chamber, one sees a wide bench formed by cutting away the rock in the middle so as to leave a T-shaped hollow, with the cross-bar of the T against the side in which the entrance is located. Two of the tombs had been enlarged by the addition of a smaller chamber also square in the rear".⁸ The same appeared in Beth-Shan and Rowe⁹ said that the graves very frequently would be broken into each other, and the hall has a rectangular recess. On the east and west are raised a step above the floor level of

(5) W. Albright. "An Anthropoid Coffin", *A.J.A.* Vol. 38, P. 297 (1932).

(6) R. Winnett and W. Beed. "The Excavation at Dhiban in Moab", *The Annual of the American School of Oriental Research*. Vol. 36-37 (1964), P. 58.

(7) Coffins similar to type 4 were found in Jerusalem dating to the second century B.C., but they did not bear the facial features depicted on the lids. (This material is not yet published. It was discovered by the Dept. of Antiquities in Shekh Jarah in Jerusalem, and in Jebel

el Hussein in Amman). These were found in a rectangular depression, and were not left just on the floor of the tomb. They were, however, quite the same as those of the 8th century B.C. and shows that this type of burial in clay coffins continued a longer time than is commonly assumed.

(8) Petrie. *Beth-Palet I.*, P. 8, Pl. XIX London (1930).

(9) A. Rowe. *Topography and History of Beth-Shan*. Vol. I. (1930).

(10) A. Rowe. *Museum Journal* (Univ. of Penna.) Vol. XIII, P. 38.

the hall.¹⁰ A similar group of tombs were found in Tabakat Fahel (Pella).¹¹ Lachish tombs are not quite the same, but the tombs of this type were found in the same site. In Jordan, the tombs of type II are cistern-like. The anthropoid coffins of the Royal Palace tomb in Amman contained more than one skeleton in each, while the reports on other sites failed to mention this detail. The question of whether mumification was really in existence at this time or not, is now raised.¹² In the Royal Palace tomb, it was clear that the bones were articulated and no evidence of mumification was found. Because the above mentioned coffins contained more than one skeleton each, it seems safe to assume the same for them as well.

The typological analysis seems to fall in a chronological sequence. It has been attested that the Lachish coffins dated back to at least the late Bronze Age, or the 13th century B.C.¹³ Then the Tell el-Far'ah coffins, which Petrie mistakenly dated between the 14th and the 11th centuries. Since then, Albright has re-

(11) Because the material of Tabaqat Fahel (Pella) dig is not yet available I am unable to describe the anthropoid coffins discovered there. These tombs in the east bank of the River Jordan, were dug by Sami Rashid, a former employee of the Dept. of Antiquities in Jordan, and I was able to visit the tombs while work was in progress. As far as I can recall, they were of type 1, and dated back to the Late Bronze Age these tombs were discovered in 1964. They revealed great quantities of imported Mycenaean pottery of the the late Bronze Age.

The graves were dug in a "hewar" rock at the belly of a steep mountain to the south side of the Seven Springs. They can be reached by a staircase hewn in the rock, leading to a square tomb's chamber. On both sides, the

examined the dates and has changed them to read the middle of the 12th century.¹⁴ The Beth-Shan coffins were placed in the 12th to 11th centuries.

From the above dates, type I of the coffins falls between the 13th and 11th centuries. Even within this particular type, traces of an evolution in the workshop are evident. Without doubt, the lids from Beth-Shan (fig. 1:1, 2, 3) are more elaborate and exquisite than the one from Lachish (fig. 1:3, 4). They show two artistic schools: the realistic and the stylized (fig. 1:4).

Types II and III come after type one in the sequence. The tomb from Sahab was dated between the 10th and 9th centuries.¹⁵ The Royal Palace tomb was dated between the 10th and 7th centuries. Since this tomb was used as a secondary burial place, type III coffins are smaller. It may be possible that type III is the second phase of the tomb (or vice-versa).

The Dhiban tomb J3 of the coffin type IV, was dated in the 8th century.

coffins were laid down. At the rear of the tomb's chamber, a smaller chamber was dug, containing one coffin.

(12) Dr. Pritchard found traces of mumification in his excavation of the tomb in Tell es' Sai'diyeh. James B. Pritchard. "New Evidence on the Role of the Sea Peoples:, **The Role of the Phoenicians in the Interaction of the Mediterranean Civilizations.** ed. by W. A. Ward (Beirut, American Univ. of Beirut). (1968) P. 108.

(13) Olga Tufnell. **Lachish IB** (Tell ed-Duweir) (1958) Pl. 45, P. 249.

(14) W. Albright. "Anthropoid Clay Coffins", **A.J.A.**, Vol. 38, P. 299 (1932).

(15) W. Albright. "An Anthropoid Coffin", **A.J.A.**, Vol. 38, P. 297 (1932).

If this supposition is correct, the chronological sequence would be as follows:

TYPE	SITE	DATE
I	Lachish	13th century
	Tell el-Far'ah	12th century
	Beth Shan	12-11th centuries
II	Sahab	10-9th centuries
	Royal Palaces	10-9th centuries
III	Royal Palaces	10-7th centuries
IV	Dhiban	8th century

This typological chronological sequence is based on the very types of coffins shown. It is quite possible future excavations will reveal further evidence to allow us to be more precise.

The problem now, as archaeology has implied, is to find the origin of these anthropoid coffins. Are they of local origin and is there any sign of foreign influence ?

The only coffins similar to the above were found in Egypt and in Nubia. Petrie and Naville¹⁶ found similar coffins at Tell Nebeshah and Tell el Yehudiyeh¹⁷ in the northern part of the Egyptian Delta. Albright was able to date Nebesheh coffins between the twelfth and the tenth centuries,¹⁸ because of the pottery found in them. The coffins of Tel el Yahudiyeh, he said, were to be dated about the 12th century. The coffin lids of Tell el Yahu-

diyeh and of Tell Nabesheh were similar to those from Tell el Far'ah (south). In the Tell el Yahudiyeh tomb, Albright showed that it contained Palestinian pottery. His observation was that these coffins of foreign peoples in Egypt must have been made in imitation of native Egyptian pottery sarcophagi. A third site in which these coffins were found, was in the Aniba Lower Nubia¹⁹ (fig. 1:4). With them was found a good quantity of Palestinian pottery.

Trude Dothan, in an article,²⁰ stated that headdresses like the one shown on the lid from Beth-Shan (fig. 1:1, 2, 3) are understood to have been worn by one group of the "Sea People", which an Egyptian artist of Ramses III shows the Pharaoh defeating on land and seas, in a famous battle sketched on the walls of Medinet Habu, in Upper Egypt. "The coffin tombs at Tell el Far'ah, Mrs. Dothan shows, are surely Philistine, and their pottery and objects have the eclectic background expected: Palestinian, Aegean and Egyptian influences mingling. Turning to the Yehudiyeh and Nebesheh tombs in the Egyptian Delta, and to comparable finds at Aniba in Lower Nubia (The Sudan), Mrs. Dothan indicates the same mixture of pottery types. She concludes therefore, that such features point to a common cultural background, probably explicable by the service of foreign mercenary groups in the Egyptian armies. Only in Palestine can these be identified

(16) Petrie, Murray and Griffith. *Tanis, Part II. Nebesheh Defenneh*. London (1888) pp. 20 f. Pls. I, III, XVI.

(17) Naville and Griffith. *The Mound of the Jew*. London (1890) pp. 5, 17, 42, 48. Pls. XII-XI.

(18) W. T. Albright. "An Anthropoid Clay

Coffin", *A.J.A.*, Vol. 36 (1932), P. 301-2.

(19) S. Steindorff. *Aniba I-II Hamburg* (1937).

(20) Trude Dothan, "Archaeological Reflections on the Philistine Problem", *Antiquity and Survival*. Vol. II, Nos. 2,3. (The Hague, Netherlands 1957). pp. 151-164.

with a definite ethnic group, i.e. the Philistines".²¹

From the unpublished material of Tabaqat Fahea, (Pella) I witnessed the discovery of the coffins, Egyptian scarab jewelery, beads, alabaster objects of different shapes of local and Egyptian origin in great quantities. In addition a good deal of Mycenaean pottery was unearthed. (This material is on display in the Jerash Museum, which is presently under construction). An imitation of the Mycenaean and locally made pottery was also found. Apparently the other tombs containing Anthropoid coffins had similar finds. Moulding of the facial features can be found in contemporary Egyptian art, the best example is at Serabit el Khedaim, in Sinai.²² In conclusion, these tombs show a combination of Egyptian, Mycenaean, Sea Peoples (Philistines) influence.

Evidently, Trude Dothan's arguments to identify "type one" anthropoid coffins with representations of Philistines is a good argument. This came, however, before the discovery of the anthropoid coffins of the Royal Palace in Amman. I believe these coffins of types II, III, and IV are of local people. We can say that type I in this series might have been influenced by neighboring countries. From the "Sea People" country, vertical strokes on the Beth-Shan and Lachish lids, indicating the common "Sea Peoples" war headdress, and the plate of gold foil, ²³ over the dead man's mouth (a custom reminiscent of burials at Mycenae, but also met surviving into the tenth century

at Tell Halaf). In addition, the great quantity of Mycenaean and Philistine pottery in some of the tombs (Pella, Tell el Far'ah, Beth-Shan) shows some evidence of a neighboring country's influence.

The Egyptian influence is clear by the depiction of facial features on coffins, the scarabs, alabaster vessels, amulets and other jewelery hieroglyphics written by local scribes on the Lachish coffin ²⁴ is further proof of that influence. In speculating on the influences indicated by these coffins and the finds, it seems that these foreign elements were inspired by the local people. Apparently this inspiration is very clear and strong at the beginning of this practice, but in later periods, it weakens, as in types II, III and IV. In these types, the appearance of local peculiarities and traditions are emphasized such as the placement of the arms at the sides, the appearance of handles, and the disappearance of the facial features completely from the lid. There was also the disappearance of the vertical strokes.

I would assume that these burials were for the chieftans of the country, who were in a position to afford foreign imported materials (those found in Egypt were for those chieftans who lived in Egypt under the control of the Egyptian Pharaohs).

The contents of Raghadan Royal Palace tomb in Aman will be discussed in a Future Paper.

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(21) G. Ernest Wright. "Philistine Coffins and Mercenaries", *Bib, Arch.* Vol. XXII (1954) pp. 54-66.

(22) W. M. Pertie. *Researches in Sinai*. New

York (1906), Figs. 100, 103, and 104.

(23) A. Rowe. *T.H.B.S.*, (1930) Pl. 39:2.

(24) O. Tufnell. *Lachish IV* (1958) P. 132, Pl. 46.

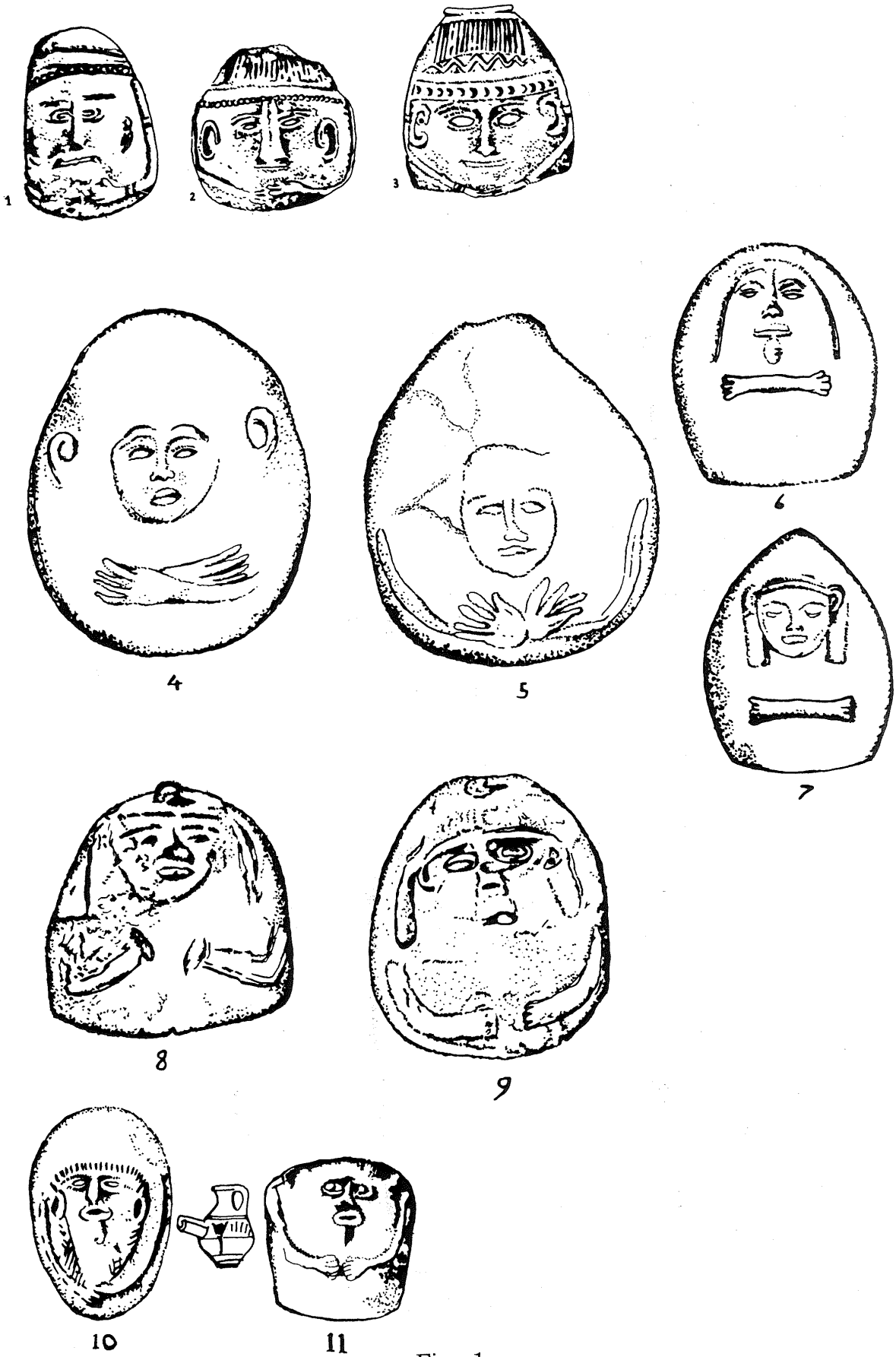


Fig. 1

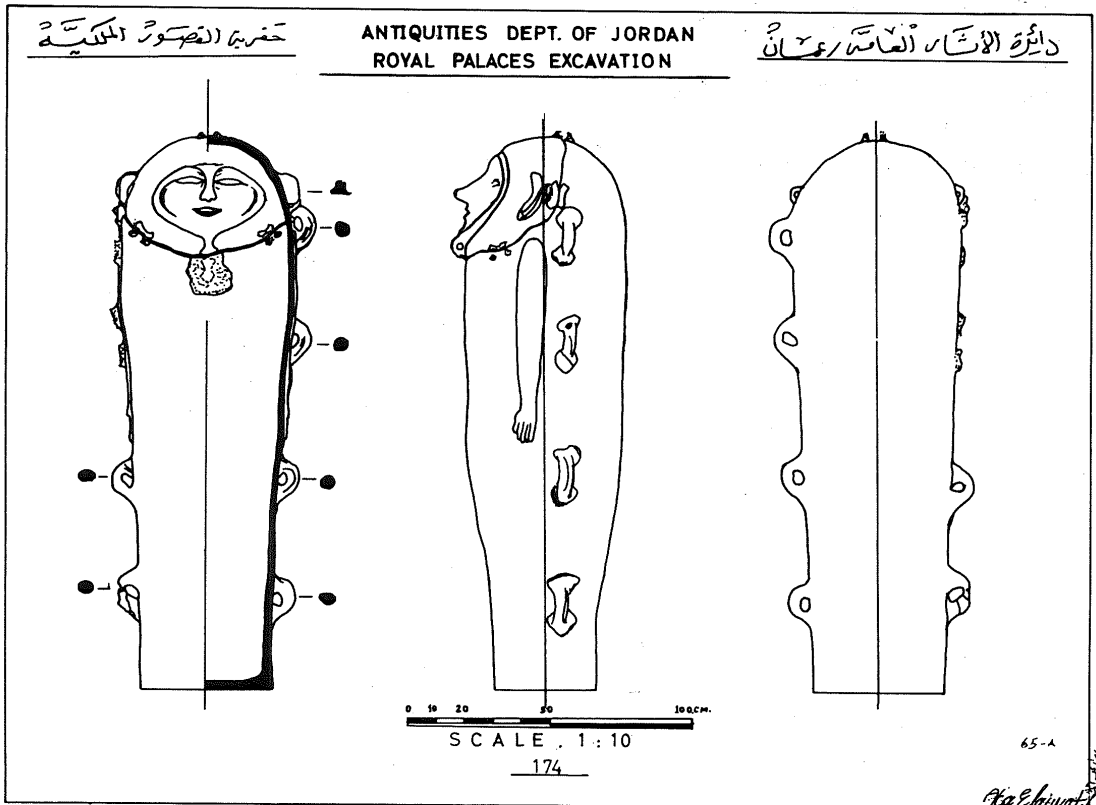


Fig. 2

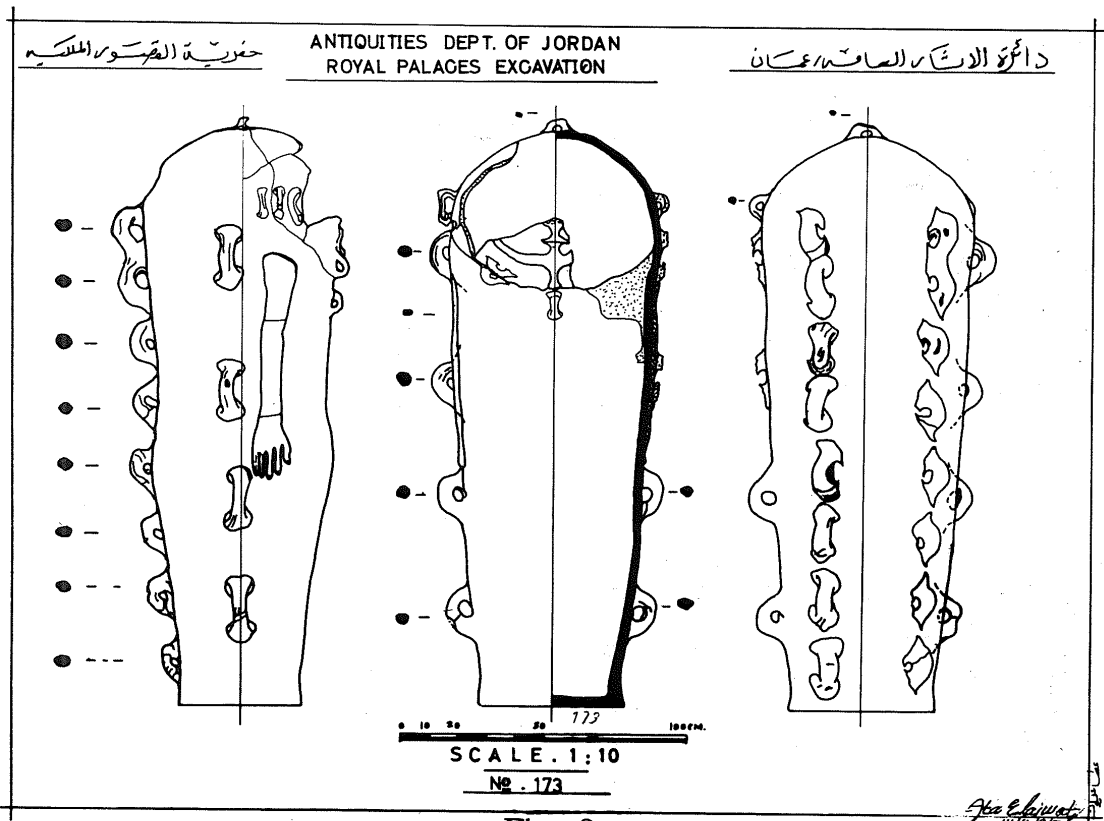


Fig. 3

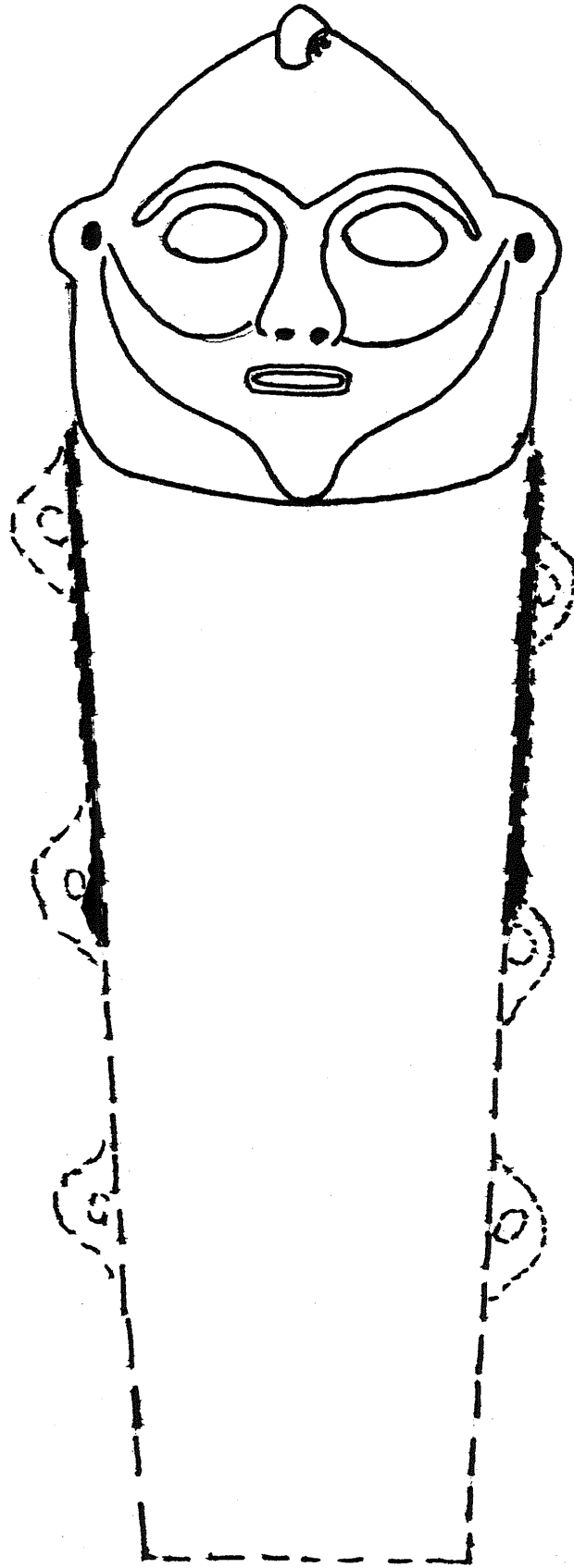


Fig. 4

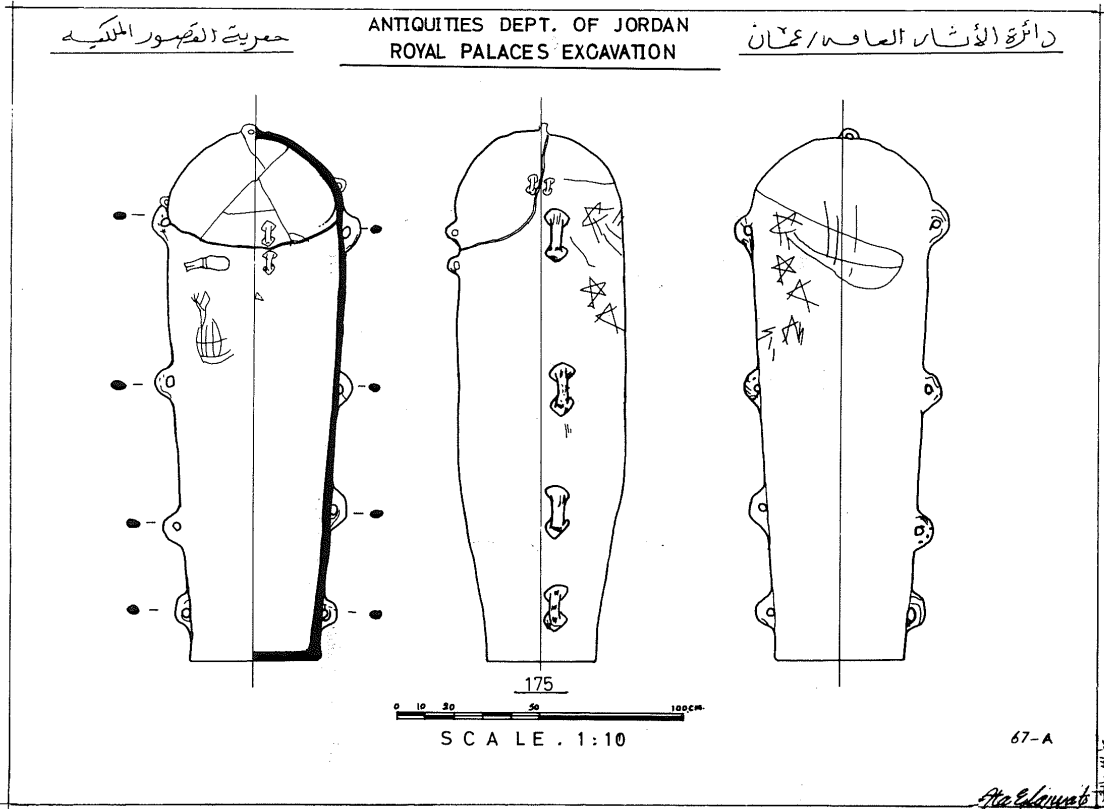


Fig. 5

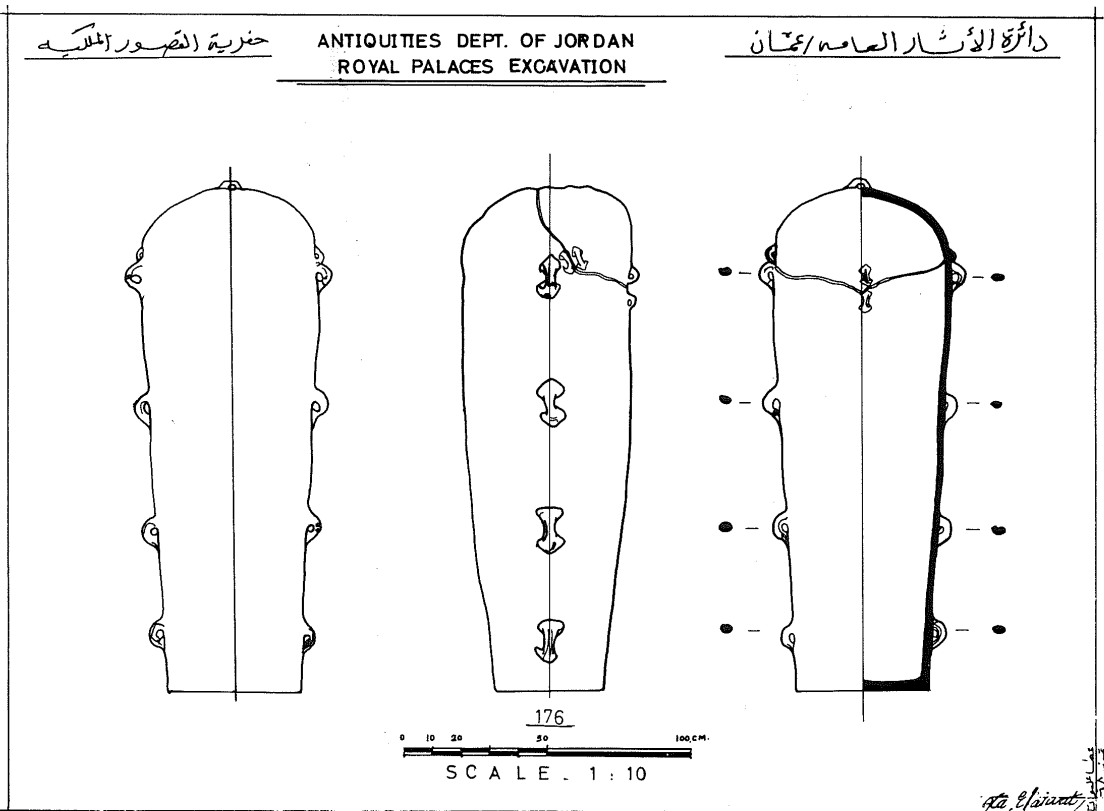


Fig. 6

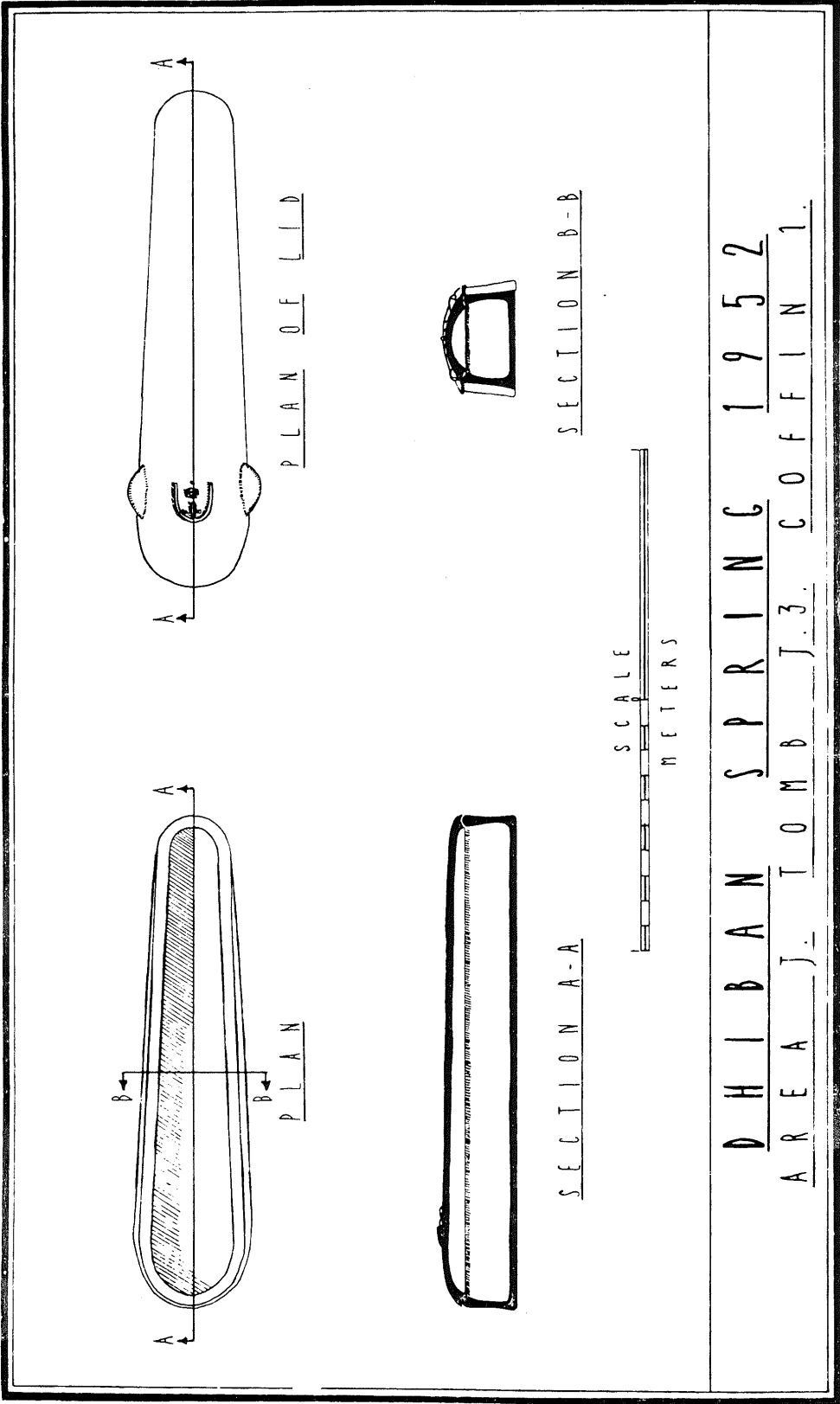


Fig. 7 : Detailed plan and sections of coffin and cover

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