



# CONNECTING COFFINS AND PAPYRI: SOCIAL IDENTITY AND 21<sup>ST</sup> DYNASTY FUNERARY ICONOGRAPHY

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## INTRODUCTION

The 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty is characterized as a time of decentralization and crisis. Egypt, with a weakened internal infrastructure, found itself blocked from traditional trade routes. All aspects of life – including mortuary culture – were affected. The economic strain on resources and materials, coupled with political instability, resulted in fairly small, undisclosed, and undecorated tombs that were shared by extended lineages. These more compact funerary assemblages consisted mainly of densely decorated coffins and papyri.

## 21<sup>ST</sup> DYNASTY OBSERVATIONS

1. With a lack of connection to traditional kingship, the Theban elite emphasized personal connections to state temples.
2. Defensive burial practices prompted the widespread use of customized funerary papyri.
3. Discrete and singular burials permitted women to utilize their own personal funerary assemblages on par with men for the first time in Egyptian history. Indeed, half of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty funerary assemblages represent women, and this, coupled with a new freedom of choice in the content of the papyri led to new and innovative ways of illustrating social identity through funerary materiality.

## GOALS AND AIMS

1. To demonstrate that there is no “ideal set” of papyri, a common belief among scholars.
2. To show that, instead, coffin reuse seems to be a factor in including a “second papyrus.”
3. To prove that there is a greater breadth of content and longer average length of women’s papyri, demonstrating unique social competition.

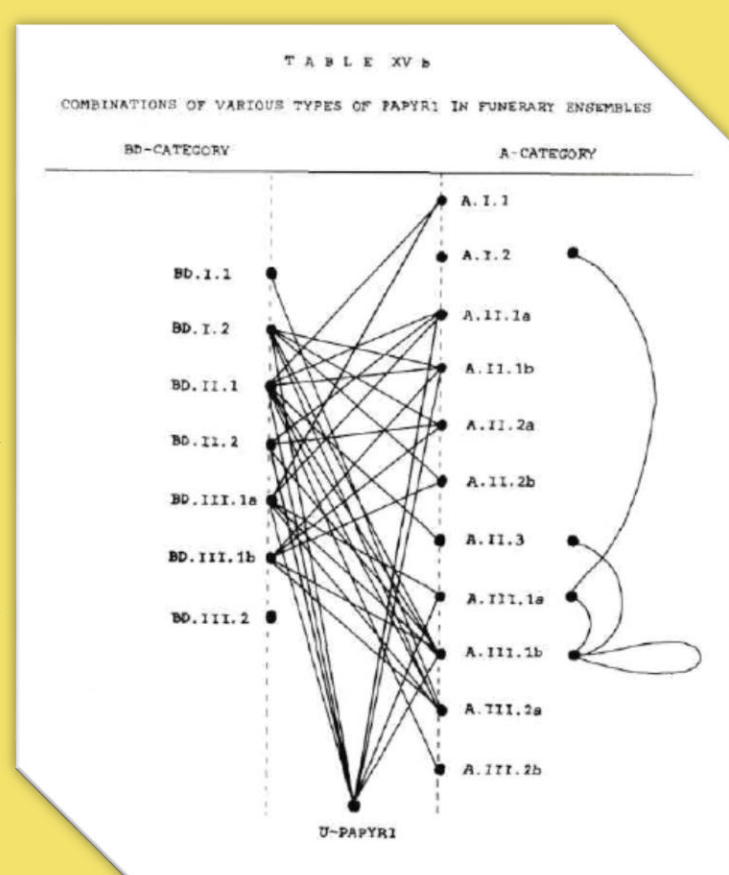
## DATASET

The following dataset was chosen for analysis, as it is some of the most archaeologically reliable data.

Location	Number of 21 <sup>st</sup> Dynasty Coffin Assemblages	Papyri	Individuals with Papyri
TT 320	Men: 4 Women: 7	17	Men: 3 Women: 6
Bab el-Gusus	Men: 72 Women: 71	128	Men: 39 Women: 34
MMA 59, 60, & 65	Men: 1 Women: 9	13	Men: 0 Women: 7
<b>Total</b>	Men: 77 Women: 87	<b>158</b>	Men: 42 Women: 47

## CURRENT UNDERSTANDING

Andrzej Niwiński’s *Studies on the Illustrated Theban Funerary Papyri of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries B.C.* is the most complete work on the subject. Niwiński’s main goal was to create a typology of papyri based on content, layout, and style, with his main categories being Book of the Dead papyri and Amduat papyri. The main conclusion was that it was considered ideal to have a pair of papyri consisting of one from each category. These categories continue to be used by scholars. Also, the notion that these papyri were highly standardized copies of the Book of the Dead and Amduat has been retained.



Niwiński, Table XVb, 440

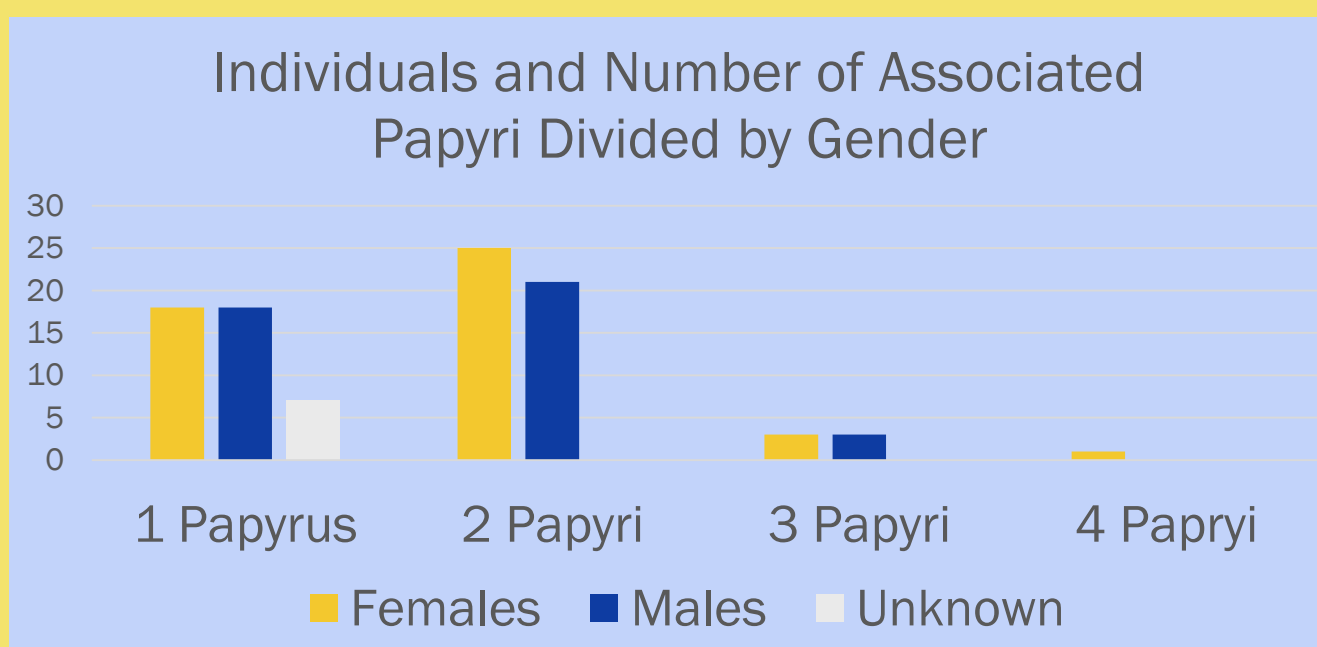
## PAIRS OF PAPYRI

It is clear that some papyri came in pairs and that the creation of those pairs were relegated to the same workshop, if not the same craftsman.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Funerary Papyri of Gautschesen, 25.3.31 & 25.3.32 Rogers Fund 1925, www.metmuseum.org

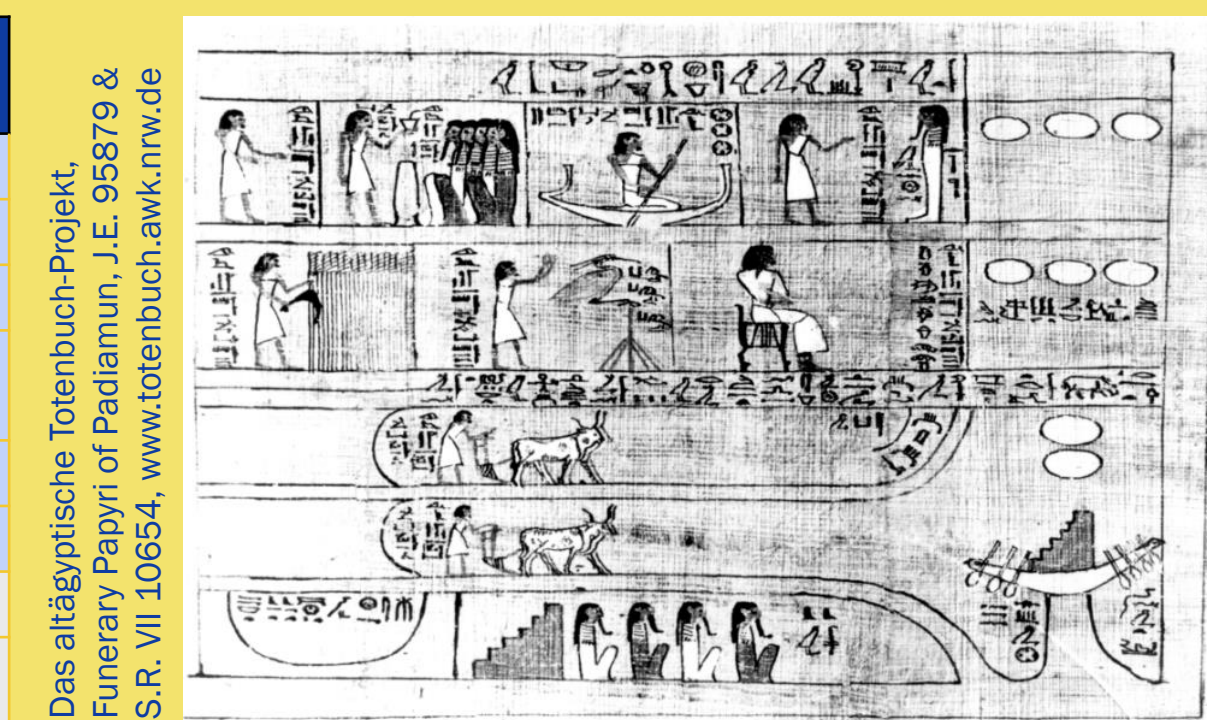
It should be noted, however, that a large portion of papyri appear to be single documents, rather than parts of a set. There are also several assemblages that have more than two papyri.



In addition, only 34 of the 53 sets of papyri (64%) fit the Book of the Dead and Amduat “ideal set” proposed by Niwiński. Instead, there is a much wider variation of content often overlooked by scholars. Some other combinations include:

- Two Books of the Dead (A.61, A.124, TG916)
- Two Amduats (A.42, A.91, A.96, A.109)
- Book of the Dead and Book of Gates (TG836)
- Amduat and Book of Gates (TG829)
- Miscellaneous Mythological Scenes and Book of the Dead (A.77, A.81, A.114)
- Book of the Dead and Book of Caverns (TG912)
- Amduat and Magical Texts (A.91)

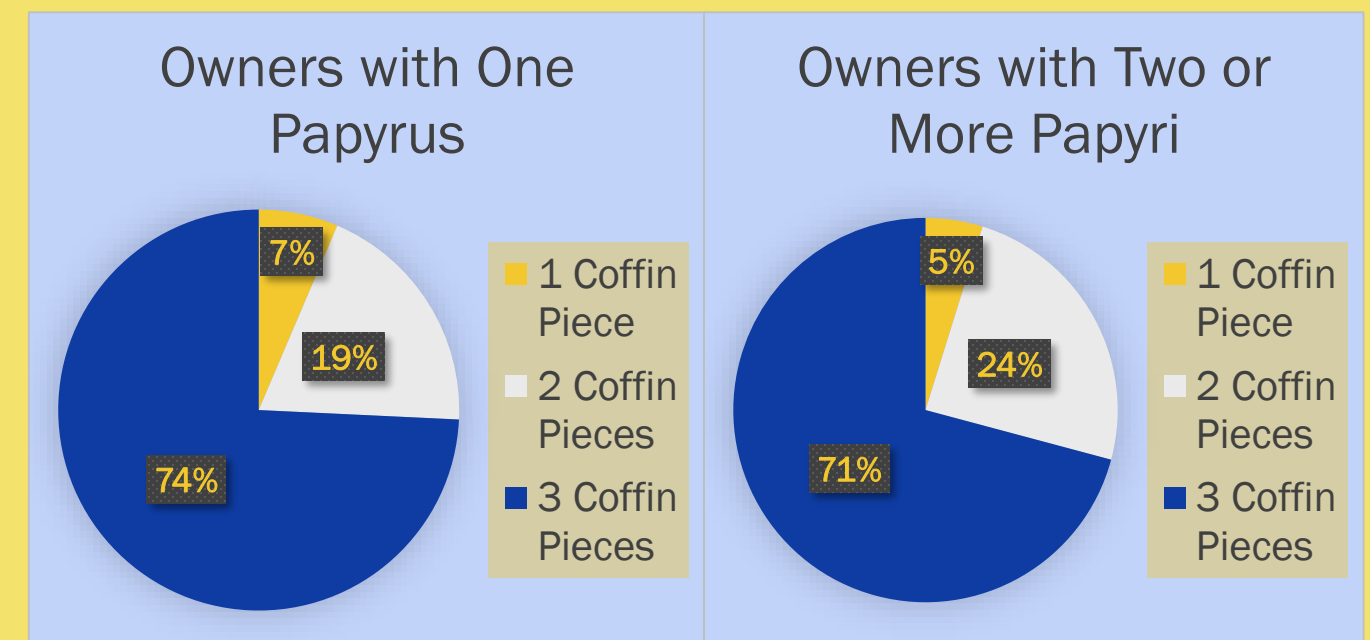
(“A” numbers refer to Daressy; “TG” numbers refer to Aston)



The above example illustrates that not all papyri were intended to be Book of the Dead and Amduat pairs. While the first papyrus is a Book of the Dead, the second contains various mythological scenes not standard of any underworld book. Niwiński categorized the second papyrus as an Amduat, even though it contains no Amduat material. Many scholars continue to use the Book of the Dead and Amduat schema regardless of validity, while others stress the uniqueness of a few non-standard sets of papyri. The use of other underworld books and unidentified mythological content, however, is much more widespread than currently recognized.

## CONNECTING COFFINS

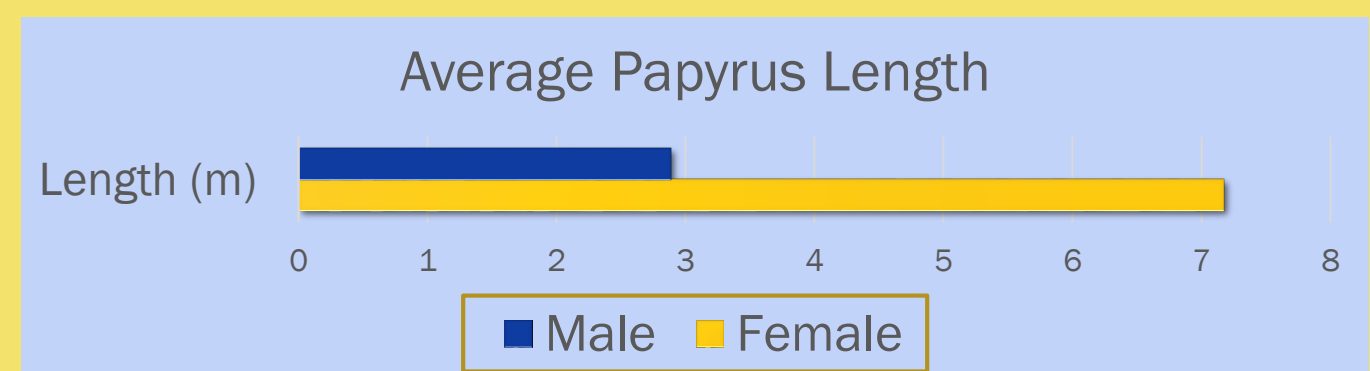
Viewing the number of papyri versus number of coffin pieces (outer coffin, inner coffin, and mummy board) per assemblage, there appears to be similar patterns between the number of coffin pieces and the number of papyri.



There is, however, a preference for two papyri when the issue of coffin reuse is considered. Coffin sets with two papyri are much more likely to display signs of reuse than coffin sets with only one associated papyrus. This second papyrus possibly alleviates an iconographic issue that many elites faced: If they were reusing coffin sets, the decoration on the pieces might not have been of that particular individual’s choosing. Barring complete redecoration, the introduction of the second papyrus would have ensured all iconographic content desired by the individual would be incorporated into his or her burial assemblage. In instances where coffins were commissioned anew, or in cases where the redecoration was complete (and thus undetectable) a second papyrus was likely not as needed to ensure full iconographic content in the assemblage.

## GENDERED OBSERVATIONS

1. Women are twice as likely to have “non-standard” mythological content in their assemblages.
2. Women have on average a longer length to their papyri with more content as compared with men.



Perhaps women utilized papyri as a form of social display and competition in a way that men did not. During the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty, temple association was highlighted by the individual, and men had a wide variety of temple titles with which they could socially compete. Women were much more restricted in this realm, and thus had to find outlets for competition elsewhere. The wider range of mythological content and the doubled average length of women’s papyri is indicative of a motivation among females to use this type of funerary materiality in a socially defining way.

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