

## CONSERVATION PROCESSES OF A WOODEN COFFIN COVERED WITH A BLACK RESIN LAYER AND COLORED MATERIALS IN DAHSHUR ARCHAEOLOGICAL AREA

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### Abstract

*This paper describes the results of a multi-technological analytical protocol performed on the painted surface of an Egyptian wooden coffin and documents the conservation processes of a wooden coffin covered with a black resin layer and coloured materials in Dahshur Archaeological Area dating back to the late period. It uses visual observation, optical microscopy (OM), technical imaging, 2D and 3D programmes, and a scan made using an electron microscope coupled with an Energy Dispersive X-ray (SEM-EDX), X-ray diffraction (XRD). Wood identification was also carried out. The results showed the use of yellow ochre for the yellow painted layer; the ground layer was calcium carbonate with gypsum, and the fabric layer was linen. The conservation processes of the wooden coffin included mechanical and chemical cleaning; reassembling the separated wooden parts, ground layer, and black resin layers; filling the edge of the ground layer; and consolidating the wood, black resin, and painted layer. The conservation processes included mechanical cleaning using soft brushes, chemical cleaning using xylene and distilled water for the black resin layer and ethyl alcohol and distilled water for the painted layer, stabilisation of the separated ground layer using Paraloid B72, filling the cracks of the ground layers using glass microballoons with Paraloid B72, and consolidating the painted layer with nano-silica with Klucel G (hydroxypropyl cellulose) (0.5% concentration).*

**Keywords:** Polychrome Wooden Coffin; Black Resin; Restoration; Nano Materials; Reassembling

### Introduction

Wood is one of the key materials in archaeological research [1]. Degradation mechanisms are active during long-term exhibition and storage due to temperature, moisture, and lighting effects; thus, a stable (controlled) environment should be provided for wooden objects [2].

The materials used for these processes proved to be stable and retrievable by many researchers. The general requirements of wood consolidation materials include reversibility,

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compatibility, and re-treatability [3]. The use of nanosized metal preservatives allows for deeper penetration and more homogenous uptake of particles in the wood [4]. The main reason to use nanotechnology in wood science and technology is the unique characteristic of nano-based materials being able to penetrate deeply into wood substrates effectively, which, in turn, alters the wood's surface chemistry. This use subsequently causes an improvement in the wood properties [5]. The conservation of the coffin has great importance to future generations [6].

The studied coffin was found in the Dahshour storeroom and measured 190cm long, 51cm wide, and 55cm high. It consists of the body and lid. However, the lid was broken into more than 16 pieces. Due to the difficulty of assembling them in the previous restoration, they were wrapped and placed inside the coffin. The body of the coffin was separated because of the damage to the tenon. In addition, there was a missing part on the left side of the body and the lid, and the face of the lid was missing. The outer surface of the coffin was covered with a textile layer at some parts under the preparation layer, and the black resin layer was decorated with painted layers (yellow, red, and blue), while the inner surface was covered with a yellow-painted layer. The painted layers suffered from many deterioration aspects, including flaking, cracking, and missing parts. It was covered with a thick layer of dust resulting from bad storage inside the storerooms of the Dahshour Archaeological Area. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the pigments, ground layer, and black resin layer, identify the wood species used on the coffin, and provide necessary information for suitable conservation work using 2D and 3D documentation and different techniques [7, 8].

## Materials and Methods

It is used to identify the condition of the wooden coffin, using the examination with the naked eye in order to diagnose the existing manifestations of damage [9-12].

The coffin was documented using computer software to illustrate the decoration of the painted layer on the black resin layer.

Photographic documentation was used to document the current state of the coffin and the aspects of damage. The images were also used in 2D and 3D documentation using a smartphone camera and a Sony A6000 digital camera.

Agisoft PhotoScan program was used for photogrammetric documentation to make a 3D model of the images [13, 14] because there must be an overlap among the photos [15].

Adobe Illustrator CC 2014 was used to highlight the decoration of the black resin layer.

*Microscope - Inverted Microscope Carl Zeiss AG Cell Culture PNG* was used to identify the wood species. Thin sections were obtained in the three principal anatomical directions: Transverse (TS), tangential (TLS), and radial (RLS) [16-20].

The surface of the coloured materials and the stratigraphic composition of the preparation layer and black resin were studied using a USB Digital Microscope with a magnification capacity between 20 and 500× [21, 22].

The samples were examined under the stereomicroscope in order to describe their color and general structure (surface condition, presence of color grains and black resin, number and thickness of the various layers, etc.) [23-26] by stereo microscopy (Zeiss Stereo Discovery V 20, equipped with Axio Cam MRC5).

Upright microscopes have been used to identify the type of textile material using Zeiss Upright microscopes-Axio Imager. M1 equipped with AxioCam camera MRC5.

SEM-EDX was applied to characterize the elemental composition of the layers of the black resin layer and yellow pigments. Analyses were performed by means of a Quanta 250 FEG with SEM-EDX (Energy Dispersive Xray Analyses). The accelerating voltage was 30kV [27-29].

XRD is the most consistent technique for the identification of crystalline materials, allowing for the identification of each component in a mixture [30-33], Panalytical X, pert pro

PW 3040/60 with Scan Axis: Gonio Cu-target tube and Ni filter at 40kV and 30mA were used. (X'Pert Highscore) software was used for identifying the components of the ground layer and yellow pigment [34].

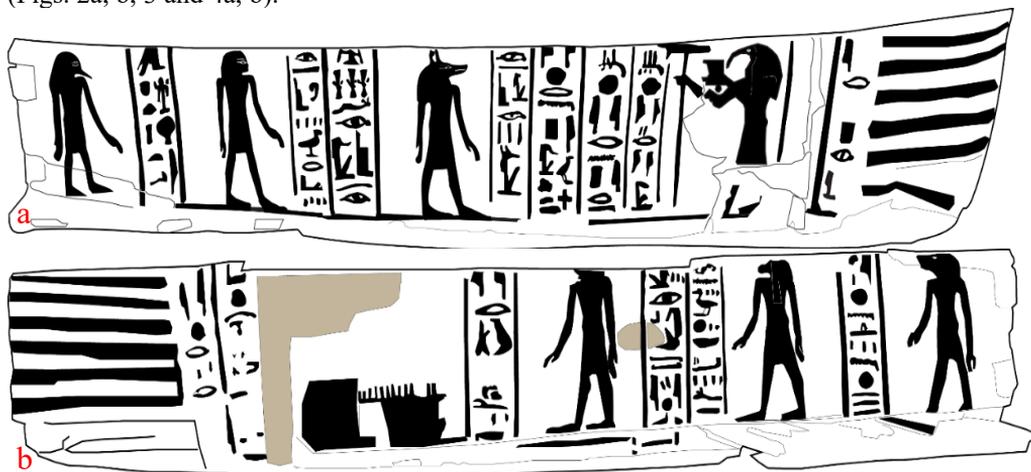
**Results and discussion**

The coffin was in bad condition. It was previously restored by primal AC33. It was covered with a thick layer of dust (Fig. 1a-e). Bad storage plays a major role in deterioration because wooden artifacts undergo complex alteration and degradation during aging [35]. There was a lot of damage to the coffin, e.g., separations, loss of the ground and painted layers (Fig. 1f), and missing parts from the head area because of the bad condition of the coffin.



**Fig. 1.** The deterioration of the coffin and missing parts and previous restoration:  
 a) fading of the black resin layer; b) broken parts of the lid of the coffin;  
 c) Previous restoration intervention; d) fading of the black resin layer;  
 e) Previous restoration intervention; f) missing parts

Two-dimensional documentation was used to identify the decorations on the surface of the coffin, as well as to identify the places of the previous restoration used in the completion (Figs. 2a, b, 3 and 4a, b).



**Fig. 2.** 2D documentation of the inscriptions of the wooden sarcophagus: a) the right side; b) the left side

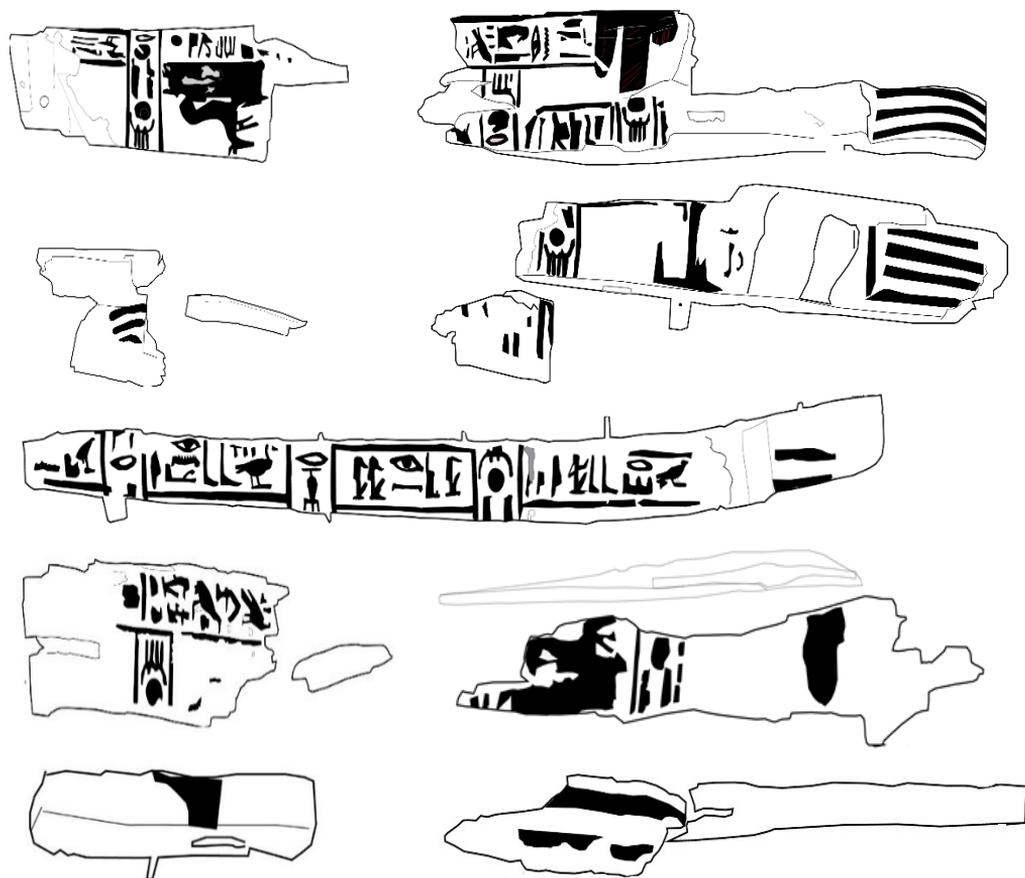


Fig. 3. 2D documentation of the lid of the wooden coffin

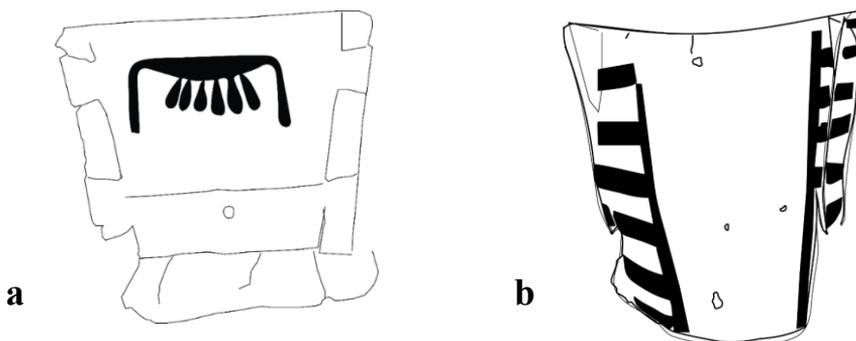


Fig. 4. 2D documentation of the lid of the wooden coffin:  
a) the head area; b) the foot area

### *Photogrammetric documentation*

To accurately document the condition of the coffin and save the 3D modules in the Dahshour archaeological area's archive (Fig. 5), the 3D modules enabled computer users to view all sides of the coffin. This could make it easier for the conservator to monitor changes to the coffin's surface. The ancient Egyptian cultural treasure can be seen by experts and regular people alike by uploading the 3D module to the Internet [36].

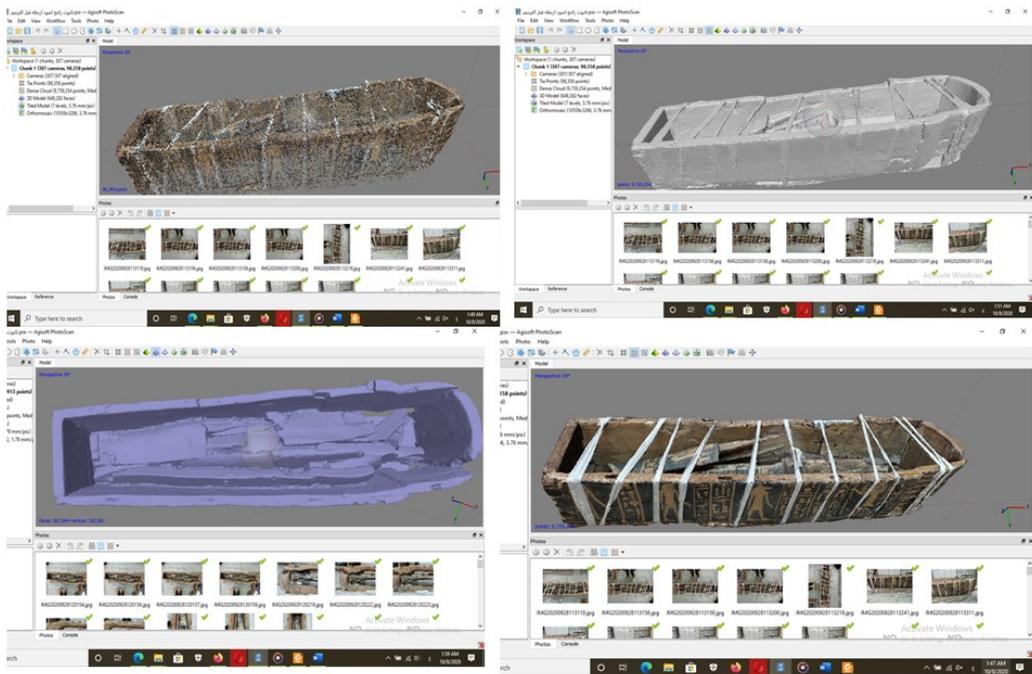


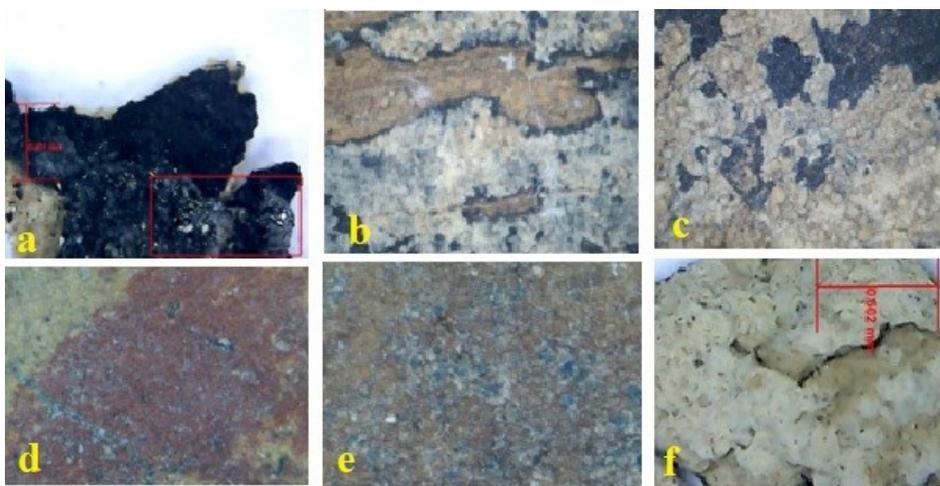
Fig. 5. Stages of producing a 3D model of the coffin

### *Black resin layer*

The OM (Optical Microscope) of the black resin layer showed that these black resin layers were covered with shiny layers resulting from the previous consolidation materials and covered with a white material as a result of the previous restoration (Fig. 6a,b).

The SEM of the black resin layer revealed crystallization of salt grains on the surface and the uneven surface of the black resin layer, as well as deterioration of parts of the surface. EDX of the black resin layer (Fig. 7a) showed the elements carbon (C) and oxygen (O), resulting from the organic materials used in preparing the black resin layer, and the presence of sodium elements (Na) and chlorine (Cl) due to the presence of sodium chloride salt on the surface of the black resin layer. The EDX wasn't useful for the analysis of the black resin layer, so research must exclude it.

The digital microscope revealed deterioration and loss in the layer of coloured materials and the presence of a black resin layer, on top of which is the yellow-colored material and also above it the layer of the red-coloured material. Also, there are some cracks and fine cracks in the red-coloured material in the lower part of the centre of the coffin (Fig. 6d).

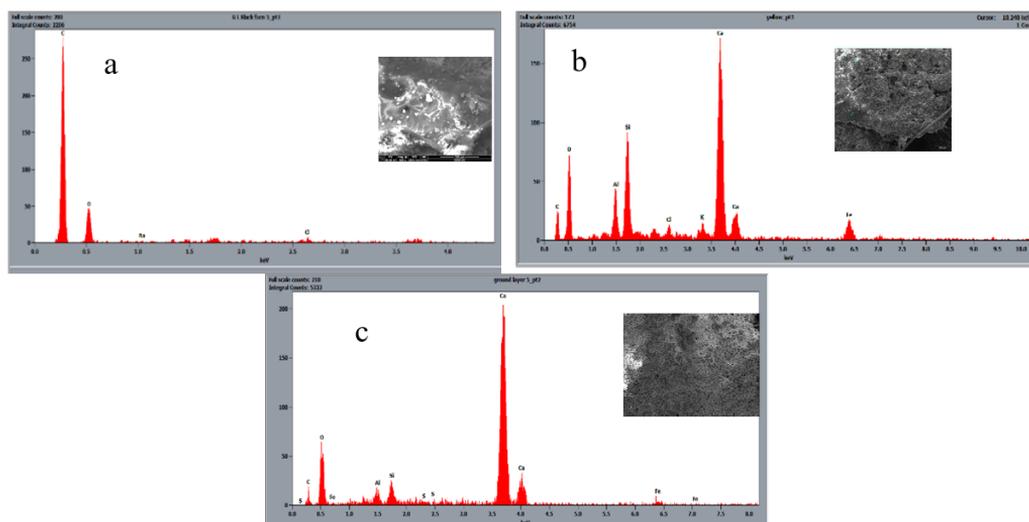


**Fig. 6.** Optical photomicrographs showing the course morphology of the black resin layer and painted layers surface used in the coffin: a and b) the black resin layer; c) the yellow pigments; d) red pigment; e) blue pigment; f) the ground layer

**The pigments**

The OM of the yellow pigment on the top of the black resin layer showed loss, damage, cracks, and microcracks, as well as parts of the reinforcing material used in the previous restoration.

OM of the yellow pigment on top of the black resin layer shows loss, damage, cracks and microcracks (Fig. 6c), as well as parts of the reinforcing material used in the previous restoration. The SEM of the yellow pigment on top of the black resin layer shows the heterogeneity of the surface of the coloured material as well as the effect of the reinforcing material used in the previous restoration. In the EDX analysis (Fig. 7b) of the yellow pigments on top of the black resin layer, it was found that carbon (C), calcium (Ca), and oxygen (O) are due to the calcium carbonate compound used in the ground layer and the lack of good coverage of the coloured material used. The blue color of the coffin lid is in a deteriorated condition and show signs of loss and fading (Fig. 6e).



**Fig. 7.** SEM-EDX spectrum of a) black resin layer, b) yellow pigment, c) ground layer



Moreover, the cylinder consisted of a thin interior channel filled with protoplasm and surrounded by fibroblasts. Flax fibre cells were characterised by enlarged walls of cellulose and adhered to each other as well as to cells surrounding the pectos [41-50].

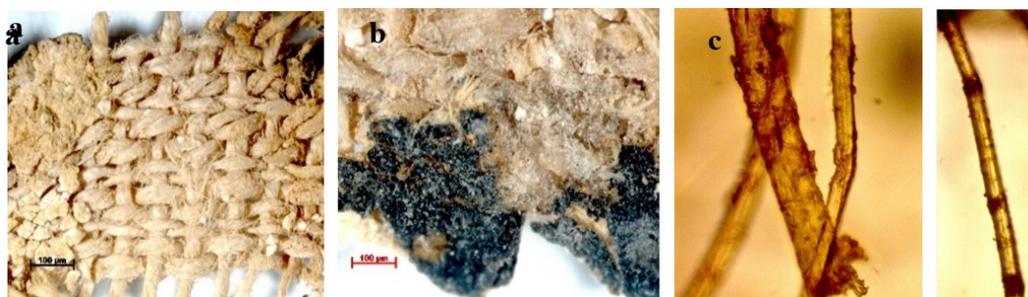


Fig. 9. The fiber on the wooden coffin ground layers

**Identification of Wood Species**

Examination by a light microscope was used to identify the type of wooden stand in the coffin after making the necessary sectors. It was found that the coffin consisted of sycamore wood.

*Ficus sycomorus L. (Moraceae – Fig. 10)*

The growth ring was indistinct or absent. The wood was diffuse-porous. Vessels were solitary or in radial multiples of 2 to 4. The mean tangential diameter of earlywood vessel lumina was 100-200µm. There were less than 5 vessels per mm<sup>2</sup>. Fibres were septate and nonseptate, thin- to thick-walled. Tension wood was present. Apotracheal parenchyma was diffuse. Axial parenchyma vasicentric was often confluent or in bands more than three cells wide.

Rays were of two distinct sizes, and larger rays were commonly 4 to 10 seriate. Ray cells procumbent had 1 to 4 rows of upright and square marginal cells. Prismatic crystals were present in axial parenchyma cells.



Fig. 10. Microphotographs of the wood sections showing the anatomical characteristics of *Ficus sycomorus*: a - Transverse section (TS); b - Tangential section (TLS); c - Radial section (RLS).

***Quercus cerris L. (Cupressaceae – Fig. 11)***

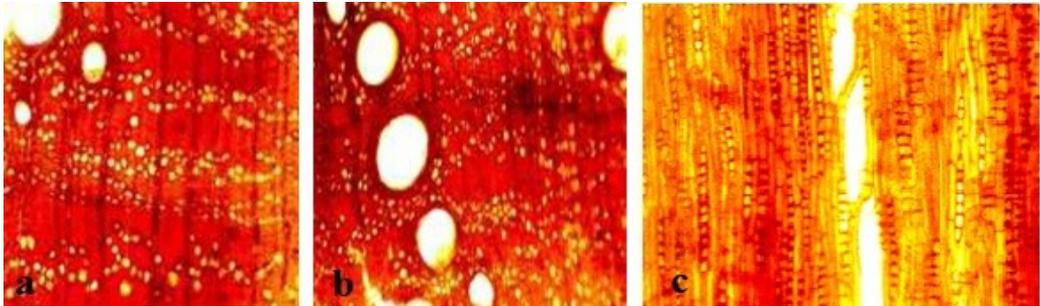
*Transverse section*

Growth ring boundaries were distinct by the difference in vessel size between latewood and earlywood and by radially flattened latewood fibers. Wood rings are porous. Vessels were in a diagonal and radial pattern, predominantly solitary. The mean tangential diameter of

earlywood vessel lumina was more than 200µm, 5–20 vessels per mm<sup>2</sup>. Fibres were thin- to thick-walled. Axial parenchyma diffused into aggregates. Apotracheal parenchyma was in narrow bands or lined up to three cells wide.

Rays had two distinct sizes. Larger rays were commonly more than 10 seriate and more than 1mm high. Aggregate rays were present.

All ray cells were procumbent. Prismatic crystals were in ray parenchyma cells.



**Fig. 11.** Microphotographs of wood sections showing the anatomical characteristics of *Quercus cerris L.*:  
a and b - Tangential and longitudinal section (TLS); c - Radial longitudinal section (RLS).

## Treatment and Conservation

### *Surface Cleaning*

Soft brushes and rubber pumps were used to remove the loose dust on the lid and base of the coffin (Fig. 12a). Klucel G was used for the complete assembly of the base of the coffin (Fig. 12b), and Paraloid B72 (15%) was used for injecting cracks inside the wooden coffin (Fig. 12c).



**Fig. 12.** Conservation process of the wooden coffin: a) Mechanical cleaning; b) During the application of Klucel G; In preparation for the complete assembly of the base of the coffin; c) During the injection of cracks inside the wooden coffin

Xylene and distilled water (1:1) were used for the chemical cleaning of the black resin layer (Fig. 13a-f). There was a remarkable change in the appearance of black resin after the previous restoration (Fig. 13c). A whitish layer was formed on the surface. It was decided to opt for the chemical cleaning of the black resin layer after making several tests.

### *Adjustment and reassembly*

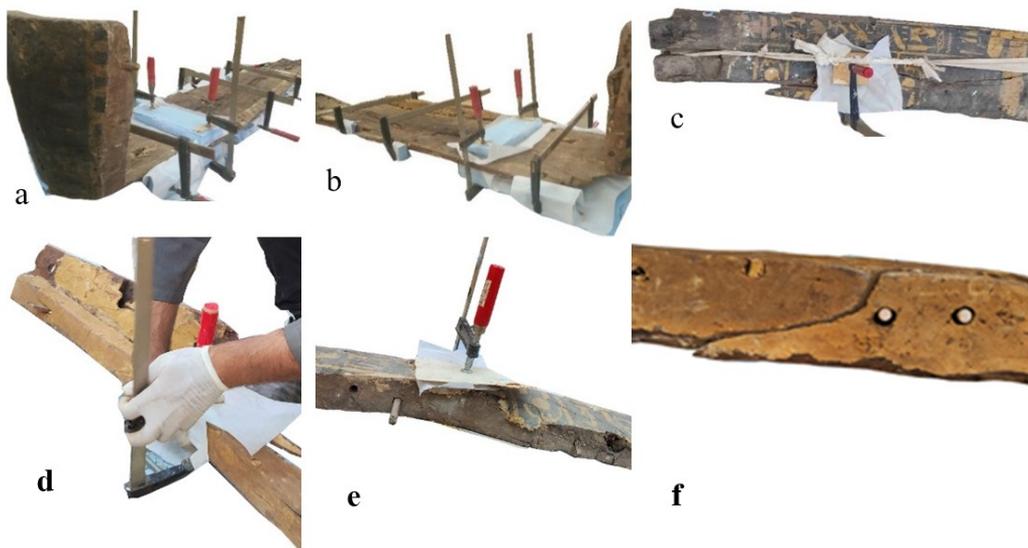
During assembling the parts of the wooden coffin, the uneven surface of the coffin base was observed. Therefore, an adjustment was made to the base of the coffin by using Klucel G

(1%). Three times, some blocks of different weights were placed on the base of the coffin to return it to its original shape and complete the reassembly of the coffin (Figs. 13-22).

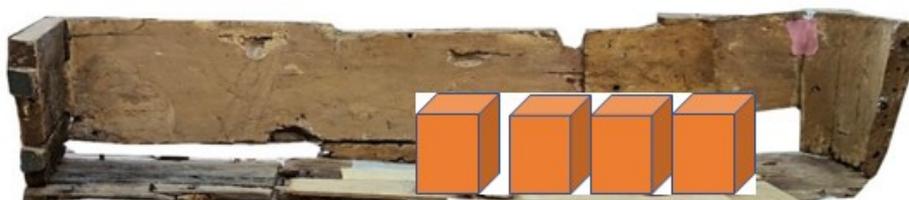
These parts were separated, and the condition of the tenon and mortise deteriorated, and sometimes there was a break in the wooden coffin. Therefore, the broken dowels were removed and replaced with new dowels, and the separated and broken parts were reassembled again using paraloid B72 (50%). While reassembling the wooden pieces, beech wood dowels were used because of their great hardness and suitability for the size of the coffin. They were used at different lengths. We removed the dowels used from balsa wood in the previous restoration because they were very weak, and some were broken.

**Loss Compensation**

Cotton was used in paraloid B72 (15%) in acetone to fill the voids in the wooden coffin. After complete drying, a glass microballoon was used in paraloid B72 (15%) to level the surface and prepare for the colouring process of the completed parts [51-55].



**Fig. 13.** a, b) assembling the coffin base parts; With metal swaddles, and a paraloid B72; c-f) Reassembling part of the coffin lid



**Fig. 14.** Laying the loads on the base of the coffin from the inside to straighten out

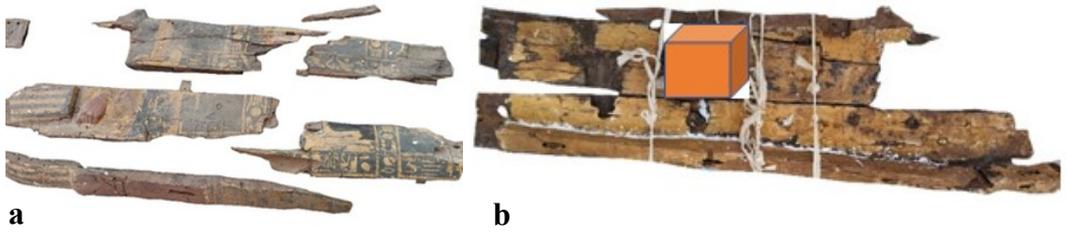


Fig. 15. a) the coffin lid parts before restoration; b) the coffin lid inside during the reassembly process



Fig. 16. During the assembly of the coffin lid

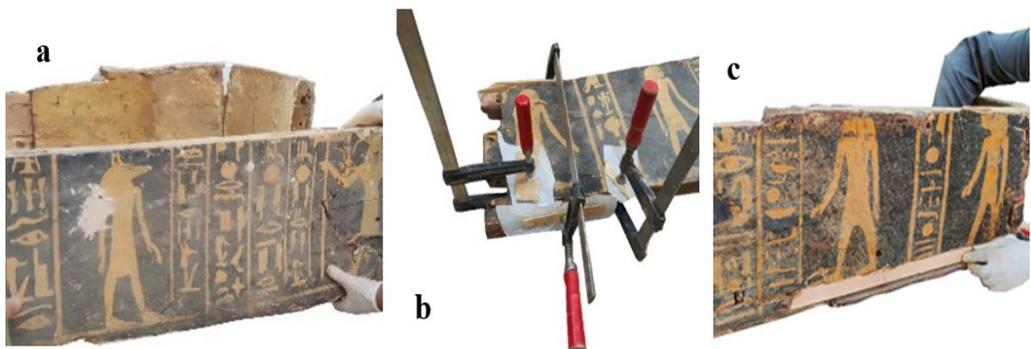


Fig. 17. Coffin reassembly process: a, b) the right side; c) the left side



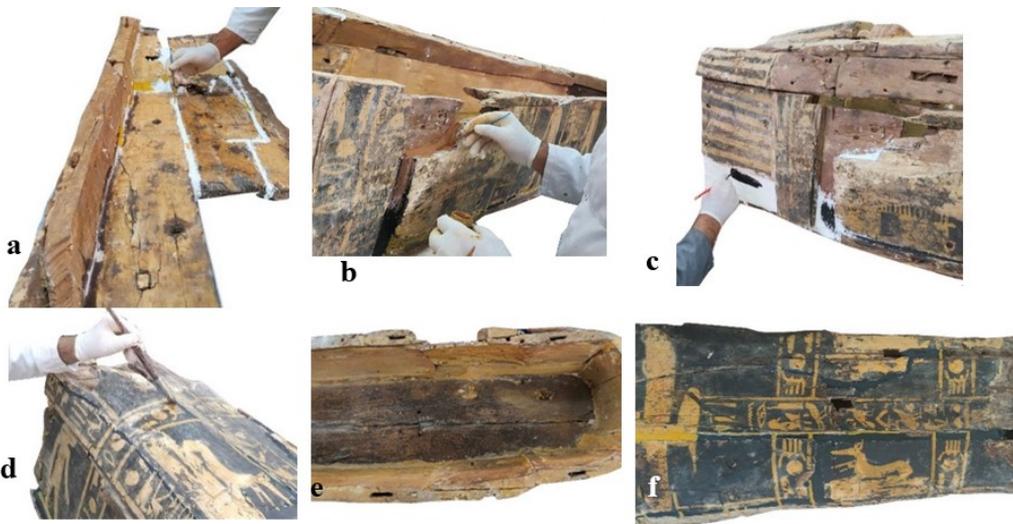
**Fig. 18.** a) the base of the coffin after assembling the base part; b) the left side of the coffin during the process of preliminary assembly of the coffin; c) the coffin during initial assembly, left side, from the inside; d) during the initial assembly and installation of new dowels, to reinstall; e) after strengthening the missing part on the left side of the coffin, in the head area; f) after assembling the right side of the coffin



**Fig. 19.** During filling cracks and separations using a glass microballoon:  
 a) the right side of the coffin; b) the base of the coffin; c) the lid of the coffin from inside



**Fig. 20.** The coffin, after reassembly and completing the missing part:  
 a) the left side; b) the right side; c) the coffin base, from the inside;  
 d) the lid of the coffin, from the inside



**Fig. 21.** a-c) during the colouring process of the glass microballoon; d) during the consolidation process of the black resin layer; e) the coffin base, from the inside, after restoration; f) the lid of the coffin, after restoration



**Fig. 22.** The outside part of the foot area: a) after the process of completing the microballoon, b) after the restoration process

The coffin base was reassembled from the inside by making a dowel in the broken parts, and paraloid B72 (50%) was used to inject the dowel from the inside to complete the installation process at the base of the coffin. There was a large separate part, urging the use of a dowel with a length of 15cm to reinstall because of the large size of the separate part [56, 57]. After the assembly of the parts, the base was completed. The left side of the coffin was reassembled, and other dowels were made instead of the broken ones in the coffin (Figs. 23 and 24). The dowels used in the previous restoration were removed because of the wrong assembly and the weakness of these dowels, which were unsuitable for the size of the coffin. Therefore, new dowels were made to fit the size of the coffin, and the left side was initially assembled. Paraloid B72 was used in the final assembly to install the dowels, and deep cracks were injected into the coffin.



**Fig. 23.** The places of the modern dowel that was installed during the assembly process are: a) the left side of the coffin; b) the right side of the coffin; c) the base of the coffin, from the inside; d) the lid of the coffin, from inside and outside; e) the head area of the coffin



**Fig. 24.** The left side of the coffin, from the outside, before the assembly process; b) the base of the coffin, from the inside, before reassembly; c) the right side of the coffin, from the outside, before the assembly process; d) the lid of the coffin, showing the components of the lid, before reassembly

**Consolidation**

From the experimental study of the different consolidation materials and after making the appropriate evaluations, the lowest colour change rate of nanocellulose and nanosilica was 1% in water to consolidate wood samples (Fig. 25). Therefore, nanocellulose was used with 1% Klucel G to consolidate the coffin from the inside using the brush. The consolidation process was done for the black resin layer and the coloured materials with 0.5% nanosilica in alcohol.



**Fig. 25.** The coffin after restoration: a) the right side of the coffin; b) the left side of the sarcophagus; c) the coffin lid from inside; d) the coffin lid from outside

A wooden support was used inside the coffin after restoration to support the lid from the inside. It was made without the use of chemical materials. To make it removable or modified in the future, silicone paper was used to isolate the new wooden stand used for the reinforcement from the wood of the coffin (Fig. 26).



Fig. 26. The coffin after restoration: a) the head of the coffin area; b) the coffin foot area.

## Conclusions

The paper presents the investigation and documentation of the coffin and documents the conservation process. The coffin suffered from several deterioration phenomena, including damage to the coffin, separations, loss of the ground and painted layers, and missing parts because of bad storage and previous conservation. Therefore, a 2D programme was utilised to illustrate the decoration of the black resin layer, and a 3D programme was used to make a 3D model of the coffin. Optical microscopy was applied to investigate the surface of the black resin and painted layers. In addition, wood was identified as Sycamore (*Ficus sycomorus*), and tenon was *Quercus cerris L.* (Cupressaceae).

The phases of restoration were documentation, mechanical and chemical cleaning, consolidation, reattaching the ground layer to the support, and filling the ground layer edges. Paraloid B72 (50%) was used for the reassembly of the ground layer, while a mixture of microballoon, Paraloid B72 (15%), and earth pigments was used to maintain the edge of the ground layer. Nanocellulose was used with 1% Klucel G to consolidate the coffin from the inside using the brush. The consolidation process was done for the black resin layer and the coloured materials with 0.5% nanosilica in alcohol.

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