An Unpublished New Collection of Soul Houses Housed in the Agricultural Museum, Cairo

Marzouk Al-sayed Aman

Abstract:
The paper entitled ‘An Unpublished New Collection of Soul Houses Housed in the Agricultural Museum’ deals with an important part of the funerary equipment. In brief, it draws attention to a Collection of soul houses currently housed in the Agricultural Museum. This collection has great importance because it tells us the story of the evolution of soul houses.

In this paper, the author tried to publish an unpublished new collection of soul houses. The evolution, the design and date of them are examined. The offerings that were found in relief in these houses are noted.

Key words:
Soul Houses, Funerary equipment, Burial customs, Deceased, Trays of offerings, Hut chamber, Two-storied soul house, Terrace, Shelter, Roofs, Stairs, Doorways, Tanks of water Liquid vessels, Columns, Storehouses, Offerings

1 I would like to express my thanks to the general inspector of expositions and Agricultural Museums, Mr. Mohamed Alaa, also I want to thank the director of the Cairo Agricultural Museum, Mr. Mohamed Ezzat, for giving me permission to publish this objects and for providing the photographs. Further thanks are due to the General Union of Arab Archaeologists referees for their comments; the present text owes much to their recommendations.

* Egyptology Department, Faculty of Arts, Assiut University dr-aman2010@hotmail.com
Introduction

Among the Agricultural Museum's collections of ancient objects can be found a collection of soul houses. Pottery models of houses were usually placed beside the mouths of the shaft-burials of comparatively poor individuals$^2$ of the end of the Old Kingdom$^3$, the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom (2181-1650BC); they were essentially an elaborate form of offering table.$^4$ F. Petrie was able to trace the evolution of soul houses from simple pottery trays (imitating stone offering tables) to later more elaborate examples consisting of models of houses, the forecourts of which were strewn with food offerings.$^5$

There is also space for storing water and grinding grain. Soul houses symbolically provisioned the deceased and housed the soul. Soul houses have much value, on account of the part they played in the burial customs of the ancient Egyptians and of the light they throw on Egyptian domestic architecture.$^6$

The author will study and classify these objects into three categories: Category-1: trays of offerings, Category-2: a- trays with hut chamber, b-trays with terrace and columned shelter, Category-3: Soul houses.

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The commentary on the models

*Category-1: trays of offerings*

(fig.1a) A rectangular pottery tray of offerings, photograph of the Museum

(fig.1b) line-drawing by the author
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Obj. 1, (fig. 1a,b)

Reg. no. 667
Dimensions: Its length is 46 cm.
Archaeological site: Unknown
Substance: Pottery
Dating: Middle kingdom

Description: A rectangular pottery tray of offerings, it was copied from the stone table of offerings. This tray has a border and a tank on it, with two parallel water channels, this style often occurs at Dendereh, on the right of the tank there are four models of the grain offering storehouses or coned loaves of bread, behind the tank are offerings in relief: a hunch, a bull's head, ribs or a vegetable waistband, and some loaves. Petrie mentioned that the trays began as simple tanks just before Eleventh Dynasty, and the models of food were added later.

It is noted that this tray resembles the primitive house, pictured in the hieroglyphic sign pr 'house, but in the last sign the doorway in the middle.

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7 This tray is an imitating to stone offering tables. Cf. Petrie, 'The Soul-House in Egypt', Man, Vol. 7 (1907), 113.
10 Cf. W. Helck, 'Seelenhaus', LA, V, 811
11 Cf. W.M.F. Petrie, Gizeh and Rifeh, 16.
12 W. Helck, in: LA, V, 807-8
14 Cf. A. Badawy, A History of Egyptian Architecture, I, Cairo, 1954, 56, fig. 53 above-left
(fig.2a) An oval tray of offerings, photograph of the Museum

(fig.2b) line-drawing by the author

Obj.2, (fig.2a, b)
Reg. no. 670
Dimensions: Its length is 33 cm.
Archaeological site: Unknown
Substance: Pottery.
Dating: Middle kingdom
Description: An oval tray of offerings, some parts of it are missed. Two models of grain offering storehouses or coned loaves, a bovine head, a haunch, ribs and a vegetable waistband are on the tray. Four channels for liquids were incised on it, two horizontal intersect two vertical. Maybe they symbol the sign $\heartsuit\, \text{nh}$.  

$^{15}$Cf. Helck, in: LA, V, 811
A rounded tray of offerings, photograph of the Museum

Obj.3, (fig.3a, b)
Reg. no. 666
Dimensions: Its height is 33 cm.
Archaeological site: Unknown
Substance: Pottery.
Dating: Middle kingdom

A rounded tray of offerings, with a border around, a horizontal channel for liquid, and another vertical with a gutter were excavated on the tray; they like the letter T. Helck mentioned that this style was indicative of the area of Armant. One can see well modeled figures of an animal thigh, a leg of beef, a loaf, and other offerings.

16 Helck, in: LA,V,806, (Fig.1b)
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Category-2: a- trays with hut chamber, b-trays with terrace and columned shelter

(fig.4b) line-drawing by the author

(fig.4a) A circular tray of offerings with a hut chamber, photograph of the Museum

Obj.4, (fig.4a, b)

Reg. no. 672
Dimensions: Its diameter is 29 cm.
Archaeological site: Unknown
Substance: Pottery.
Dating: Middle kingdom

Description: A circular tray of offerings with a hut chamber, offerings of sacrificial animal with bound members, haunch, ribs\(^{17}\) or vegetable waistbands\(^{18}\), and some loaves occupied the courtyard. A Hut chamber\(^{19}\) stood at the end of the courtyard. The top of the hut is rounded with a cornice to it. A water channel excavated in the court along a central axis. It seems that this tray developed into terrace with columned shelter which developed into soul-houses.

\(^{17}\) Cf. Petrie, *Gizeh and Rifeh*, 16.
\(^{18}\) Helck, in: *LA*, V,807-8
(fig.5a) Tray with terrace and columned shelter, photograph of the Museum

(fig.5b) line-drawing by the author
Obj.5, (fig.5a, b)
Reg. no.       668
Dimensions: Its height is 33 cm.
Archaeological site: Unknown
Substance: Pottery.
Dating: Middle kingdom
Description: Tray with terrace and columned shelter:

This tray developed into soul-house. The tray became a courtyard, entered by a doorway, furnished with a tank in the middle\(^1\), with two parallel water channels and gutter. Offerings of a bull's head, haunch, loaves, and other food occupied the courtyard. A hut stood at the end of the courtyard\(^2\), and an awning between side walls and rests on one cylindrical column. The top of the hut is rounded with a cornice to it. The awning was erected as a shelter against the sun and the dampness of cool nights\(^3\). A water-jar was put on a stand in one side of the hut. The hut was furnished with a chair\(^4\). Stands or places for water-jars occupied three sides of the court. The staircase opens onto the roof of the portico through a gap in the outer balustrade. \(^5\) The roof is enclosed by low walls.

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\(^1\)Cf. Petrie and Quibell, *Naqada and Ballas*, 42, pl. XLIV(4).
\(^2\)Cf. Petrie and Quibell, *Naqada and Ballas*, 42, pl. XLIV(4).
**Category-3: Soul houses**

(fig.6a) A copy of soul house with terrace and two ventilators, Agricultural Museum, No.677, photograph of the Museum

(fig.6b) The origin, soul house with terrace and two ventilators, Egyptian Museum, No. 38970

Marwa Abdel Razek, *The Study of the Houses of Ba in Ancient Egypt Applied in the Egyptian Museum, Master's Thesis*, Faculty of Archaeology Cairo University 2015,211, fig.266. (The thesis in Arabic)
Obj.6, (fig.6a, b, c)
Reg. no. 677
Dimensions: Its height is 37.5 cm.
Archaeological site: Rifeh
Substance: Pottery
Dating: Twelfth Dynasty, Middle kingdom.
Description:

A copy of soul house with terrace and two ventilators (fig.6a): the house stands at the back of a court. A rectangular water tank excavated in the court along a central axis. Such an arrangement was actually found in the mansions of Twelfth Dynasty at El lahun. The portico runs in front of the house between side walls and rests on two cylindrical columns. A door opens from the portico into the rooms. The stairway in one flight ascends to the terrace. The vaulted opening of the ventilator (Arabic,
mulqaf) appears at each side of the terrace immediately behind the wall of the portico. The space between the ventilators is enclosed by a low balustrade which is interrupted in the center.  

(fig.7a) Two-storied soul house, photograph of the Museum

Obj.7, (fig.7a, b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reg. no.</th>
<th>678</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Dimensions:</td>
<td>Its height is 38.5 cm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archaeological site:</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance:</td>
<td>Pottery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating:</td>
<td>Middle kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description:</td>
<td>Two-storied soul house\textsuperscript{11}, this is the most elaborate type of house, where the whole area of the ground floor is surmounted by a second story. The stairway ascends along the lateral wall to reach the second story. This is unusual style of house without a portico in the second story. The stairway leads directly to the door of this story. In front of the ground floor, a court enclosed by two balustrades. The entrance of the court and house open without parapet wall. Three parallel water channels excavated in the court along a central axis. In front of the house, on the left, are offerings in relief: a leg of beef, an animal thigh, some water vessels, and a table loaded with breads.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General commentary:

The evolution of soul houses

The development of soul houses appears to have been in the following order:
At first (from the prehistoric age to the V Dynasty) a mat was laid on the grave with a pan of food upon it.\(^{12}\)

Then, afterwards, this offering was carved in stone (from the III Dynasty onward) as a table of offerings to give permanent satisfaction for the soul.\(^ {13}\) The upper surfaces of offering tables were often carved with the loaves, trussed ducks and vessels required by the cult, so that the stone-carved images could serve as magical substitutes for the real food offerings, usually with the additional back-up of the hieroglyphic offering formula and lists of produce.\(^ {14}\) Often there were cups, grooves or channels cut into the surface so that liquids as water, beer or wine could be poured on to the table.\(^ {15}\) The stone table was then copied as a pottery tray of offerings, see figures 1-3. To the tray was next added a shelter, copied from the Bedouins tent; next a shelter on columns; then a hut was put into this portico; then chambers were copied; wind openings (Arabic, mulqafs) were then added; roof courts followed; and then verandahs on the roof; next we see complete two-story houses; and these lastly were furnished with pottery models of couch, chair, stool, fireplace, water jars, and the figure of a woman making bread.\(^ {17}\) The complex forms with shelters, staircases, and upper stories, probably belong to the Twelfth Dynasty.\(^ {18}\)


\(^{13}\) Petrie, in: *Man, Vol. 7* (1907), 113.


\(^{16}\) Rowe, in: *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin, Vol. 6, No. 32* (Apr., 1908), 18

\(^{17}\) Petrie, *'The Soul-House in Egypt*, *Man, Vol. 7* (1907), 113; Petrie, *Gizeh and Rifeh*, 15.

These pottery houses were included in burials to magically provide shelter and food for the deceased\textsuperscript{19}, and prevent souls wandering back to the village.\textsuperscript{20} The rock-cut or stone-built tombs of the wealthiest Egyptians were much grander dwellings for the souls of their owners.\textsuperscript{21}

**Architectural elements**

**Roofs:**

Roofs are vaults (fig.4); sometimes the flat roof was used (fig.6), especially when the house consists of two stories (fig.7). On account of the need to the roof, a flat curve can be tolerated for the vault over the ground floor (fig.5).

**Stairs:**

Stairs are always external. They mostly rise along the left side wall in the court\textsuperscript{22}(figs.5, 7) or feature flights of steps on the right ascend to the trace (fig.6). They led to the upper floor directly or through a door (fig.7).

Sometimes the staircase opens onto the roof of the portico through a gap in the outer balustrade (fig.5).\textsuperscript{23}

The stairs have a religious value. It was mentioned that the deceased climbs a ladder to the sky in order to unite with the gods of eternity in the underworld.

\begin{center}
\textit{štkt n.f $β$-rdw r pt pr $f$ im r pt}
\end{center}

"The steps (stairways) were built to him, to ascend on sky there."

\textsuperscript{19}G. Pinch, \textit{Magic in Ancient Egypt}, London 1994, 153,fig.82
\textsuperscript{20}Petrie , in: \textit{Man, Vol. 7} (1907), 113.
\textsuperscript{21}Pinch, \textit{Magic in Ancient Egypt}, 153
\textsuperscript{24}pyr.365a
It was mentioned too in CTVII, 33a that the deceased climbs sky
on the so-called stairs.

\[i3k \cdot f \ hr \cdot s \ m \ rn \cdot f \ pw \ n \ m3kt\]
"May he climb on the so-called stairs"

**Columns:**
Columns are cylinders (fig.6), sometimes with rounded base
(fig.5) set upon flat floor. Sometimes they are topped with palm
form capitals (fig.5), and occasionally with an abacus.  

**Doorways:** Doorways were generally built with stone lintels,
though Flinders Petrie found evidence for arched doorways as
well as for vaulted roofs made of bricks at the 12th dynasty city
the two styles were found in this collection of soul houses.

**Cornice:** The characteristic cornice of most Egyptian buildings,
consisting of a large cavetto molding decorated with vertical
leaves, and a tours molding below.

**Tanks of water and liquid vessels**
Water was the primeval matter which brought forth everything.
In the mortuary cult the water was linked to the idea of
reanimation and it liberated one from the paralysis of death .
So one can see in the tomb of Seshathotep (Giza, Fourth Dynasty)

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25 *CTVII,33a*
Middle Kingdom, and The Second Intermediate Period ,* 17.
27 [www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/building/elements.htm](http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/building/elements.htm)
28 Cavetto is a type of architectural molding that curves inward towards a wall. It gets its
name from the Italian for “to hollow,” and features a concave curve that represents at least
one-quarter of a circle or more. This trim serves both an aesthetic and functional purpose
within a room. It acts as a decorative element or transition piece, and also helps to hide gaps
and seams at walls, ceilings, or doors. Cavetto molding is most commonly associated with
ancient Egyptian architecture, where it was used to create cornices along the tops of a
building. [www.wisegeek.com/what-is-cavetto.htm](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-cavetto.htm)
29 M. Lurker, *An Illustrated Dictionary of The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt* (London,
1996), 127.
the deceased seated at an offering table before the 'Butler of the Great Jar-Stand' who proffers a jar\textsuperscript{31}. The sources of water vary on trays of offerings and soul houses such as, a tank of water with two parallel water channels, which often occur at Dendereh\textsuperscript{32} fig.1, four channels for liquids, two horizontal intersect two vertical, a style which was indicative of the area of Armant\textsuperscript{33} fig.2, a horizontal channel for liquid, and another vertical, they like the letter T, fig.3, A water channel excavated in the court along a central axis fig.4, a tank of water and two parallel water channels and gutter, moreover many jars of water fig.5, A rectangular water tank excavated in the court along a central axis, Such an arrangement was actually found in the mansions of Twelfth Dynasty at El lahun\textsuperscript{34} fig.6, three parallel water channels excavated in the court along a central axis and some liquid vessels fig.7.

**Various kinds of offerings** (food and drinks)

**Sacrificial animal with bound members:** The roping and throwing a bull is a necessary preliminary to its slaughter. When its legs are tied tightly together, the head is upward and backward the butchers enable to slain it\textsuperscript{35}. So one can see many of an animal thigh in the butchering scenes in the tombs as offerings\textsuperscript{36}, and also many of an animal thigh models on trays of offerings and soul houses, see figs.3, 4, 5, 7.

Cattle were slain by cutting the throat with knives; they were bled, then skinned\textsuperscript{37}. After the animal was skinned, it was disemboweled and the butchers then dismembered the various

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Petrie, *Gizeh and Rifeh*, 16.
\textsuperscript{33} Helck, in: *LA, V*,806, (Fig.lb)
\textsuperscript{36} Wilson, in: *JNES, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Oct., 1944)*, Pl.XIV.
parts, as bull's head, leg of beef, haunch, rib cage and other select organs with fair accuracy. Select pieces were presented as offerings or exhibited as 'filets' or joints suspended from ropes in 'meat shops'\textsuperscript{38}.

**The head of an ox** was considered one of the preferred objects of the offering list, which supplies the deceased with his favorite food. It also has a symbolic meaning as it represents the cutting of the god Seth’s head who transformed himself into a bull, to be able to pursue Isis \textsuperscript{39}. Thus, offering a head of an ox to the deceased could mean that no evil can block his way during his journey in the Netherworld\textsuperscript{40}.

**Ribs**\textsuperscript{41} and **vegetable waistbands**\textsuperscript{42}: Währen mentioned that, the incised forms \(\text{\includegraphics[width=1cm]{onion.png}}\), which were found on trays of offerings or soul houses (like figs.1, 2, 4) cannot be explained definitively, but based on observation he, thinks that they are oval loaves, placed on top of each other on small pot. He listed these forms under the name of pancakes and pastries.\textsuperscript{43}While Helck say that they are Vegetable waistbands\textsuperscript{44}. But Petrie considered them ribs\textsuperscript{45}. One sees that in the trays of offerings or soul houses that contain these forms; they mostly have two models of them each time. At the same time there are also oval loaves on these trays and soul houses so it is likely that one of these two forms is ribs and the other is vegetable waistbands, especially onions or lettuce.

**Onions:** In ancient Egypt onion is mentioned as one of the funerary offerings as early as third and fourth dynasties. Onions are depicted on the banquet tables for great feasts –both large and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Darby9} Darby, Ghalioungui and Grivetti, *Food, the Gift of Osiris*, I,147,figs.3.37- 3.39.
\bibitem{Aisha9} Aisha M. Abd alaal, 'A Late Middle Kingdom Offering Table Cairo Temp. No. 25.10.17.1', in: *MDAIK*,62,2006,5
\bibitem{Petrie} Cf. Petrie, *Gizeh and Rifeh*, 16.
\bibitem{Helck} Helck,'Seelenhaus', *LA*,V,807-8
\bibitem{Helck} Helck, in:LA,V,807-8
\end{thebibliography}
peeled onions are slender, immature ones. They were among the offerings placed upon the alters of the gods, together with gourds, cakes, beef, goose or wild fowl, grapes, figs, wine and the head of the victim. Frequently a priest is holding onions in his hand or covering an alter with a bundle of their leaves and roots. In ordinary offerings they were bound together in a single bundle. On the other hand, it is reported that certain priests abstained from them as unlawful food⁴⁶.

**Lettuce:** Lettuce and onions were planted in gardens in ancient Egypt⁴⁷. Lettuce was regarded as an aphrodisiac, which explains its popularity as an offering, to preserve sexual effectiveness meant to preserve life⁴⁸. So, lettuce was represented with pointed leaves and stem in the offering scenes⁴⁹. As lettuce was considered an aphrodisiac it was featured in the yearly festival of Min, the ithyphallic god of fertility and procreation.⁵⁰ In this festival one can see men carrying erect lettuce plants on platform with stylized representation of lettuce garden. They follow the statue of Min in the procession⁵¹. Lettuce was shown also in special depictions of Amun, as in the temple of Luxor, which identified him with Min⁵².

**Loaves:** Bread was important among grave goods⁵³. Bread which was represented on the soul houses was often rounded (fig.7) or coned loaves or possibly cakes (fig.4). Not only people need

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⁴⁷P. E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan, I*, (London1893), pl.29
bread in the otherworld but also gods too. It was mentioned in the pyr.866a

$t3.km t3 ntr imyt hwt wsht$

"Your bread and god's bread come from the wide hall"

**The conclusion**

Soul houses are pottery models of houses were included in burials of comparatively poor individuals of the end of the Old Kingdom, the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom. This study illustrates the development of soul houses from simple trays of offerings to the complex forms of soul houses with shelters, staircases, and upper stories.

The forecourts of soul houses were strewn with food offerings as coned loaves of bread, tied bulls, bulls' heads, hunches, ribs' and vegetable waistbands (onions and lettuce). Often there were cups, grooves or channels cut into their courtyards so that liquids as water, beer or wine could be poured on.

Soul houses symbolically provisioned the deceased and housed the soul. They played a great part in the burial customs of the ancient Egyptians and they throw light on Egyptian domestic architecture.

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54 *pyr.866a*
مجموعة جديدة غير منشورة من مساكن الروح محفوظة بالمتحف الزراعي بالقاهرة

د. مرزوق السيد أمان

ملخص البحث:

يتعامل مع جزء مهم جدا من الأثاث الجنائزى في مصر القديمة وباختصار أنه يلقي على مجموعة جديدة من مساكن الروح محفوظة في المتحف الزراعي وهذه المجموعة مهمة جدا لأنها تخبر المختصين عن فكرة مساكن الروح وعن قصة تطورها. وهذه المجموعة عبارة عن نماذج لصوانى قرابين وبيوت مصنوعة من الفخار كانت توضع بجوار مداخل الدفنات الفقيرة نسبيا في نهاية عصر الدولة القديمة وفي عصر الانتقال الأول وعصر الدولة الوسطى.

لقد تطورت هذه المساكن عن موائد القرابين الحجرية، ففي البداية كانت عبارة عن صوانى للقرابين من الفخار تقليداً لتلك الموائد المصنوعة من الحجر. وبعد ذلك ظهرت نماذج مساكن مصنوعة من الفخار وكانت أفنتها مملوءة بالقرابين وأماكن لتخزين الماء والسواكن وأغراض أخرى. وكانت هذه المساكن تمود المتوفى رمزيا بالقرابين كما كانت مسكنه لروحه ومن ذلك اخذت مسمى "مساكن الروح". ولقد كان لهذه المساكن أهمية كبيرة حيث أنها أدت المختصين بعلومات عن عادات الدفن في مصر القديمة في تلك الفترة كما أنها أدتهم بطريقة غير مباشرة بمعلومات عن العمارة السكنية في مصر القديمة.

وفي هذه الدراسة فان البحث قد قسم هذه المجموعة إلى ثلاثة أجزاء الأول صوانى القرابين، الجزء الثاني صوانى للقرابين وفيها نواحيها كنوخير صغير ونوع آخر من الصوانى توجد بجهته شرفة تحميها الأم (تمثلان الحلقة الوسطى بين صوانى القرابين البنتية ومساكن الروح الخالصة) ثم الجزء الثالث مساكن الروح سواء ذات الطابق الواحد أو الطابقين.

كما تناول البحث بالدراسة الطرز المختلفة لتلك المساكن وكيفية تطورها وكذلك العناصر المعمارية لهذه المساكن كل على حدة وكذلك القرابين الموجودة في أفينتيها.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

مساكن الروح، معدات جنائزية، عادات الدفن، الموتى، صوانى قرابين، كنو، مسكن روح ذو طابقين، شرفة، مأوى، أسطح، سلالم، بوايات، أوانى للسوائل، خزانات للمياه، مخازن، قرابين

dr-aman2010@hotmail.com

استاذ مساعد كلية الآداب جامعة أسيوط