



Fig. 2. Paddle-Doll, rear view.
CCM187.996, (Authors own photograph, 2020)



Fig. 3. Paddle-Doll, left hand side view.
CCM187.996, (Authors own photograph, 2020)

Fig. 1. Paddle-Doll, front view. CCM187.996 (Authors own photograph, 2020)

Paddle Doll

Cyfarthfa Castle, Merthyr Tydfil CCM187.996

Object Type: Figurine

Material: Painted Wood

Period: Middle Kingdom - First Intermediate Period (?)

Region: Thebes, Egypt (?)

Dimensions: Height: 19.5 cm, Width:4.7cm (at the widest), Thickness: 0.7cm

Object analysis by **Elizabeth Bull**

This figurine is made of a long, thin piece of light wood that broadens into a rounded base, morphologically suggestive of a truncated woman - a common genre of figurines in the Middle Kingdom.¹ Compared to similar paddle dolls found this one is incomplete but relatively well preserved; the original shape is more or less intact save for a splintered sections, both at the bottom and at the 'shoulders'; suggesting the pre-existence of arms (like fig. 6). We know from other examples that the doll would have had a head of hair made from unfired clay beads, either attached by a thread or incorporated into a fabric head (fig. 5). The wood is relatively bare except a few symbolic references to costume and gender in black and red paint, the design of which is very simplistic. Nonetheless this allows us to speculate that the doll was made from Cedar of Lebanon through such identifiable features as the visible, straight grain and light colour.² The length of the body bends to the right at the waist making it asymmetric, even when factoring in

¹ Morris, 2011

² TRADA, 2020

the chipped-off section on the lower half; perhaps intentionally to portray movement, or due to working with the grain of the wood.

Around the neck collars and necklaces are painted in black and red, like the dotted line around the lower body which was representative of a cowrie shell girdle. Over the shoulders on the back of the doll are what appears to be two braids, however whether these are meant to represent hair or the ends of the neck ornaments is uncertain. The pubic region is enlarged, outlined in black and red paint to exaggerate this feature, identifying the figure as female and stressing an importance on reproductive organs and therefore fertility.

Compared to other known paddle dolls, this doll is less ornate and more crudely made, from this we can speculate multiple reasons as to the identity of the doll, however its function must first be discussed.

Paddle dolls have been known of since 1907, when Garstang identified them as children's toys, attributing their abstract form to their 'youthful maker',³ an attitude that was not revised until later in the 20th century when Winlock suggested their potential representation as groups "dancing girls".⁴ Since then there has been increasing evidence to link paddle dolls with troupes of cultic dancers and funerary beliefs between the 6th and 13th dynasties.⁵ Such troupes as Khener dancers share both locational and symbolic similarities with paddle dolls which Morris explains in her paper *Paddle Dolls and Performance*. Nearly all paddle dolls are found around Thebes or from Theban tombs and other sites with a strong association to cults of Hathor.⁶ It is this association that forms the foundation for the interpretation of these dolls; from the 4th dynasty there has been a formalised connection between Khener dancers, cults of Hathor and the royal funerary cult,⁷ alluding to her role in the revival of her father, Ra, during the tale of the Contending of Horus and Seth.⁸

Given that the Pharaoh was supposed to be the son of Ra, it became common practice from the 6th century to have troupes of khener dancers recreate the moment when Hathor revived her father through the revelation of her genitalia. By embodying Hathor, a goddess who intrinsically linked the dancers to the afterlife and rebirth, dancers would recreate this moment and would, in essence, revive the king's soul; in the words of Morris: '*the quintessential ways to channel the goddess and to honour her was to dance*'.⁹ The significance of the female gender in relation to Hathor, the Lady of the Vulva, is reflected in the representations of gender in paddle dolls with the majority of painted dolls bearing breasts and/or pubic triangles¹⁰ which would have been revealed by the dancers at a peak moment of the dance.¹¹ It has therefore been suggested that dolls such as this one would have been included within the graves to represent Khener dancers who would



FIG. 5: PADDLE DOLL (BM EA6459)



FIG. 6: PADDLE DOLL

³ Garstang, 1907. Pp. 152

⁴ Winlock, 1947

⁵ Morris, 2011

⁶ Morris, 2011

⁷ Hawass, 1995

⁸ Pinch, 2004

⁹ Morris, 2011. pp. 84

¹⁰ Tooley, 1989

¹¹ Kinney, 20088

perform for and thus revive the soul of the deceased.¹²

Secondly, Khener dancers were often strongly associated with beaded girdles and wide, banded collars.¹³ Unlike our paddle doll, most dolls have some kind of representative dress similar to that of the dancers, however it is known that the majority of dancers preferred plain white linen.¹⁴ I therefore conjecture that the lack of portrayal of a dress is either in reference to this plain linen or because the symbolism of this doll was so minimalist that only the girdle and collar, considered 'hallmarks' of the dolls,¹⁵ was necessary to associate the doll with the dancers.

The depositional trends of the dolls should be discussed in order to effectively consider all interpretations of this doll. There is a trend for dolls to be assembled in 'groups' of 2 to 10+ within tombs, mimicking khener troupes, some of which include a smaller, unpainted doll that is suggested to represent the young trainees that were often depicted with the dancers. It is tempting, therefore, to assume that due to the lack of decoration, in particular the breasts, on the doll and potential braided hair on its reverse side, that this doll represented one such trainee. However, the pubis of this doll is clearly decorated with hair suggesting sexual maturity and could not be representative of a trainee.

Finally the association between the composition of khener dancers and the counterpoise of a menat necklace (fig.4), which is suggested to morphologically represents Hathor,¹⁶ by truncating the figure the attention is drawn to the exaggerated vulva and the doll becomes a similar shape to a menat counterpoise.¹⁷ It was further speculated that the gentle shaking of the doll, as you would the menat necklace, would produce a soft noise to appease and placate the goddess, however the composition of the doll would be too delicate for vigorous shaking.¹⁸ Although the body of this paddle doll only alludes to a menat counterpoise, it still would have had clay bead hair that calls to mind this shared musical function.

This doll is unlike many dolls in terms of ornateness and therefore I conjecture that this one was either for regular cultic use, deposition on tombs of the lower class or one of the paddle dolls given or sold to Thebans who attended temple rights or took part in rituals to commemorate their contact with the divine.¹⁹ Regardless of the more simplistic quality, it is important to remember the symbolic nature of Egyptian society when interpreting this doll.



**FIG. 4: MENAT COUNTERPOISE
(MMA 11.215.450)**

¹² Morris, 2011

¹³ Morris, 2011

¹⁴ Morris, 2011

¹⁵ Morris, 2011

¹⁶ Tooley, 1989

¹⁷ Barguet, 1953

¹⁸ Capel, 1997

¹⁹ Morris, 2011.

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