

Clappers:

Cyfarthfa Castle, Merthyr Tydfil – 2018.994

Material - Wood

Condition - Cracks on right hand and damaged fingernails

Period - 6th Dynasty onwards (Most likely Middle Kingdom)

Provenance - Egypt (?)

Collected by - Major Harry Hartley Southey, soldier in WWI.

Collection donated to the museum by his family after his death in the Battle of Gaza.

Dimensions -

Left Hand- Length: 39.5cm width: 5.5cm (at widest) Circumference (arm): 9.6cm

Right Hand – Length: 40cm width: 5.5cm (at widest) Circumference (arm): 9.5cm ¹

Object analysis by Saskia Judd.



Cyfarthfa Castle clapper - 2018.994 (Zinn, 2021)



Cyfarthfa Castle clapper - 2018.994 (Zinn, 2021)



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¹ Zinn, K. (2021) *Cyfartha Castle Clappers* 2018.994 .

Description and discussion:

These items are generally thought to be used to play music and in dances, there is however debate around their use. These objects are referred to as 'clappers' and thought to be played in pairs, replacing hand clapping. They are the first instruments used by the Ancient Egyptians². The clappers consist of two separate straight pieces of wood measuring 39.5 and 40 cm long and 5.5 cm wide at their widest point³. They have been carved in the form of near identical forearms with hands.

Devoid of discernible wrists, the palms are the widest part of the objects which taper into long forearms. The fingers have been carved with closed fingers which are rounded. The only main definition besides the fingers is that of the fingernails which are very crudely represented as a cut away portion at the end of each finger. The wood itself is heavy inferring a rather high density and good quality wood. They are dark



Cyfarthfa Castle clappers (Zinn, 2021)

brown in colour with black stains. The exact wood is unknown. The form of the objects give an idea of the 3D shaping of a hand but are not an exact likeness to a human forearm but rather show a more stylized image which was represented in much of the Ancient Egyptian artistic repertoire. This specific example is lacking any great detail as can be seen in other examples. The simplicity may be down to them being made for a poorer person in the community but an alternative explanation is that they were incomplete when deposited. Without knowing the provenance of the items they may have been abandoned mid way through the creative process. The idea that they are incomplete is strengthened by Morris's 2017 chapter on middle kingdom clappers where she states that the nails and knuckles were usually carved onto them as well as bracelets. Every other example which has been examined in this investigation has demonstrated this so may indeed indicate that the Cyfarthfa Castle clappers are incomplete. On most other sets of clappers it is usual to see a small drill hole at the

² Dadrian, E (2010) Let there be Music! Musical Instruments in Ancient Egypt. Available at: <https://rawi-magazine.com/articles/ancientmusic/> (Accessed on: 8th January 2021)

³ Zinn, K. (2021) *Cyfarthfa Castle Clappers* 2018.994 .

opposite end to the hands so they could be strung together, this is not present in this example, and may be due to the size and scale of this specific set.

Clappers have a complicated but quite clear link to the funerary sphere of Ancient Egypt. One of the main links is Hathor. Her face is present on many of the more elaborate examples. This indicates a connection to the afterlife and death as Hathor was the Goddess of Death in Thebes and is said to have helped the deceased through the afterlife.⁴ From excavation notes we have of provenanced clappers a majority came from three sites which were major centres for the Cult of Dead Kings in Abydos, Thebes and Lisht.⁵ This is where the largest caches have been with the most notable site being Tutenahkamun's tomb. The fact that the clappers have been discovered in tombs shows that they must have had some significance in the afterlife, to have been included in the funerary assemblage. Furthermore, the presence of the clappers in images in tombs, depicting such events as the mirror dance, highlights their further importance in the funerary sphere.

The more elaborate versions of clappers are usually made of ivory, more specifically hippo ivory. The straightness of the Cyfarthfa castle clappers may be due to the use of wood. Trees and planks of wood are normally naturally straight, whereas hippo ivory and tusks are naturally curved so could offer some explanation for different forms. Furthermore, the curve of ivory clappers may be symbolic as they look similar to ivory apotropaic knives or wands. The apotropaic wands have a connection to birth as they depict birthing scenes and deities so might offer a link between (re)birth and the afterlife. One of the figures shown on the apotropaic wands is usually Taweret, who is the



Ivory clapper (Louvre. 2021)

⁴ Hill, J. (2008) Hathor. Available at: <https://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/hathor/> (Accessed on: 12th January 2021) and Wood, C (2014) 'Hathor Death on the Nile, Life on the Broads', *Quest*. 178 (June).

⁵ Morris, E. (2017) 'Middle Kingdom clappers, dancers, birth magic, and the reinvention of ritual'. In ed. Gianluca Miniaci, Marilina Betrò, Stephen Quirke *Company of Images: Modelling the Imaginary World of Middle Kingdom Egypt (2000-1500 BC)*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, pp. 285-335.

goddess of childbirth and is shown as a hippo. This further links to connotations of birth and rebirth as the Ancient Egyptians saw the hippos as a symbol of rebirth due to them disappearing under the water and reappearing.⁶ The clappers are also said to be played in birthing chambers which again gives a direct link between the clappers and birth.⁷ This does lead to the question of why the Cyfarthfa Castle clappers are straight and made of wood. A possible explanation to this may be down to the fact that Hathor in some myths gave out water to the deceased from Sycamore trees (Hill, 2008). This was quite a feat as trees were rather sparse in Ancient Egypt so wood was almost rare. In a conversation with Katherina Zinn (2021) she indicated that the wood would have been imported. Ivory would have still been more expensive than wood, however. Examples of clappers have been found in other areas of the Mediterranean such as Palestine and Greece, for example.

There is a scholarly debate surrounding the clappers which involves the gender of the people who would use them. Morris (2017) states that the clappers were usually used by women. Similar items better described as 'batons' were used by men, violently⁸. Kappel agrees with this proposal⁹. Mostafa Kamal also states that women played the clappers but much more specifically non - royal women¹⁰. Lexona believed both genders

⁶ Stunkel, I. (2017) *Hippopotami in Ancient Egypt*. Available at: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/hipi/hd_hipi.htm (Accessed on: 12th January 2021)

⁷ Morris, E. (2017) 'Middle Kingdom clappers, dancers, birth magic, and the reinvention of ritual'. In ed. Gianluca Miniaci, Marilina Betrò, Stephen Quirke *Company of Images: Modelling the Imaginary World of Middle Kingdom Egypt (2000-1500 BC)*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, pp. 285-335.

⁸ Morris, E. (2017) 'Middle Kingdom clappers, dancers, birth magic, and the reinvention of ritual'. In ed. Gianluca Miniaci, Marilina Betrò, Stephen Quirke *Company of Images: Modelling the Imaginary World of Middle Kingdom Egypt (2000-1500 BC)*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, pp. 285-335.

⁹ Kappel, C. (2016) *Ancient Egyptian Harp*. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/31747764/Ancient_Egyptian_Harp_Its_origins_and_status_within_the_Ancient_Egyptian_society (Accessed on: 19th January 2021)

¹⁰ Mostafa Kamal, S. (2020) 'Social Status of Non-Royal Women through Their Non-Religious Occupations in Ancient Egypt' *Journal of Tourism, Hotels and Heritage*. 3(1)(Winter and Spring) P. 40-62

played the clappers which were used as instruments¹¹. On the other side of this debate lies Bayoumy who states that the clappers were a male instrument and sistrums were female¹². Ruiz also agrees to this idea but goes further by placing them in a different area of life which is that of 'labour music' which was played by men whilst other men crushed grapes or laboured in the fields¹³.

The clappers have many implied usages from the limited but varied evidence which has been found. It is difficult to establish whether the clappers had a ritual or everyday use. Clappers have been argued to have ritual importance¹⁴ in areas such as funerary beliefs however, it is difficult to prove when so little is known about the objects. The hand symbolism, associated with Hathor's role as the instrument of Atum's creation¹⁵, and other references to Hathor found on most other examples strongly suggests a ritual use.

Due to a lack of provenance the Cyfarthfa Castle clappers are very difficult to date. The clappers must at least be of Middle Kingdom origin as this is when the first hand shaped clappers appeared.¹⁶ Clappers were most popular in the New Kingdom so may be from this period but this is unlikely as by this time the more beautiful examples took precedence.

¹¹ Lexova, I. (2000) *Ancient Egyptian Dances*. USA:Dover Publications

¹² Bayoumy, T. (2020) , 'Music Bands in the Old Kingdom'. *Journal of Tourism, Hotels and Heritage*. 1(1)(Autumn) Pp. 40-45 Available at:
https://journals.ekb.eg/article_125085.html (Accessed on: 19th January 2021)

¹³ Ruiz, A. (2001)*The Spirit of Ancient Egypt*. Algora Publishing

¹⁴ Wilkinson, J.G. (1836 first published 2005) *Ancient Egyptians (2 Vols)*. Routledge:New York

¹⁵ Sufi, T. (2015) On the many roles of Hathor. Available at:
<https://www.spiralnature.com/spirituality/many-roles-hathor> (Accessed on: 18th January 2021)

¹⁶ Louvre (2021) Pair of Clappers. Available at:
<https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/pair-clappers> (Accessed on: 12th January 2021)

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