

Clappers, An Ancient Egyptian Artefact

What are they?

Clappers are a musical instrument that are found depicted on vessels dating back to the 4th millennium BC. They are made of various materials, usually wood, ivory or bone. (Köpp-Junk, 2018). They are most often seen with the shapes of hands at the end like in figure 2, my object. Many clappers have holes at the opposite end opposite to the hands, this is usually on the smaller clappers. Such as the pair from the image below, it is only about 6 inches, meaning that these sizes of clappers could be used in a similar way to castanets.



Figure 1 (Clapper, 25.11.05.56)

What were they used for?

Clappers were seen to be used in ancient dancing troupes in Ancient Egypt, they were notably seen used by women specifically (Morris, 2011). They were closely linked to Hathor, goddess of music. However, Morris (2017) has found a large quantity of clappers at sites closely linked with the dead kings. This would suggest they are closely link to funerary processes and the dead. This could mean they are used as ritualistic object to do with death. Which is exactly what she argues in her chapter of Modelling the Imaginary World of Middle Kingdom Egypt.

My Object



Funerary processes in Egypt?

In Egypt there is a very strong connection with the dead and this is seen through various archaeological objects, for example The Book of the Dead, the process of mummification being perfected over thousands of years, the detail and time resurrecting tombs, even the Pyramids of Giza were tombs! There were funerary dancers called the Muu Dancers, they are represented on tombs such as the Tomb of Tetiki. As well as dancers, music was an important part of death, Wiedmann said the music “exhorts the mourners to joy and optimism, and generally behaves as a musical consoler” (Pulver, 1921-22). This is because death was so ingrained in everyday Egyptian life it would not be the same as the modern feeling of death, it was just another step of the journey to Ancient Egyptians.

Ancient instruments in the modern day?

Ancient Egyptian instruments have been reimagined in modern day, an academic example of this would be Heidi Köpp-Junk’s dancer’s lute performance. Which is available from: <http://www.asor.org/anetoday/2018/01/earliest-music-egypt/>. Although we can never get the exact melody right due to there being no melodic sheets of music, we do have lyrics of poems and chants. As clappers were clapped together and are quite simple in shape, it would be simple to remake these musical objects, in large or small form.

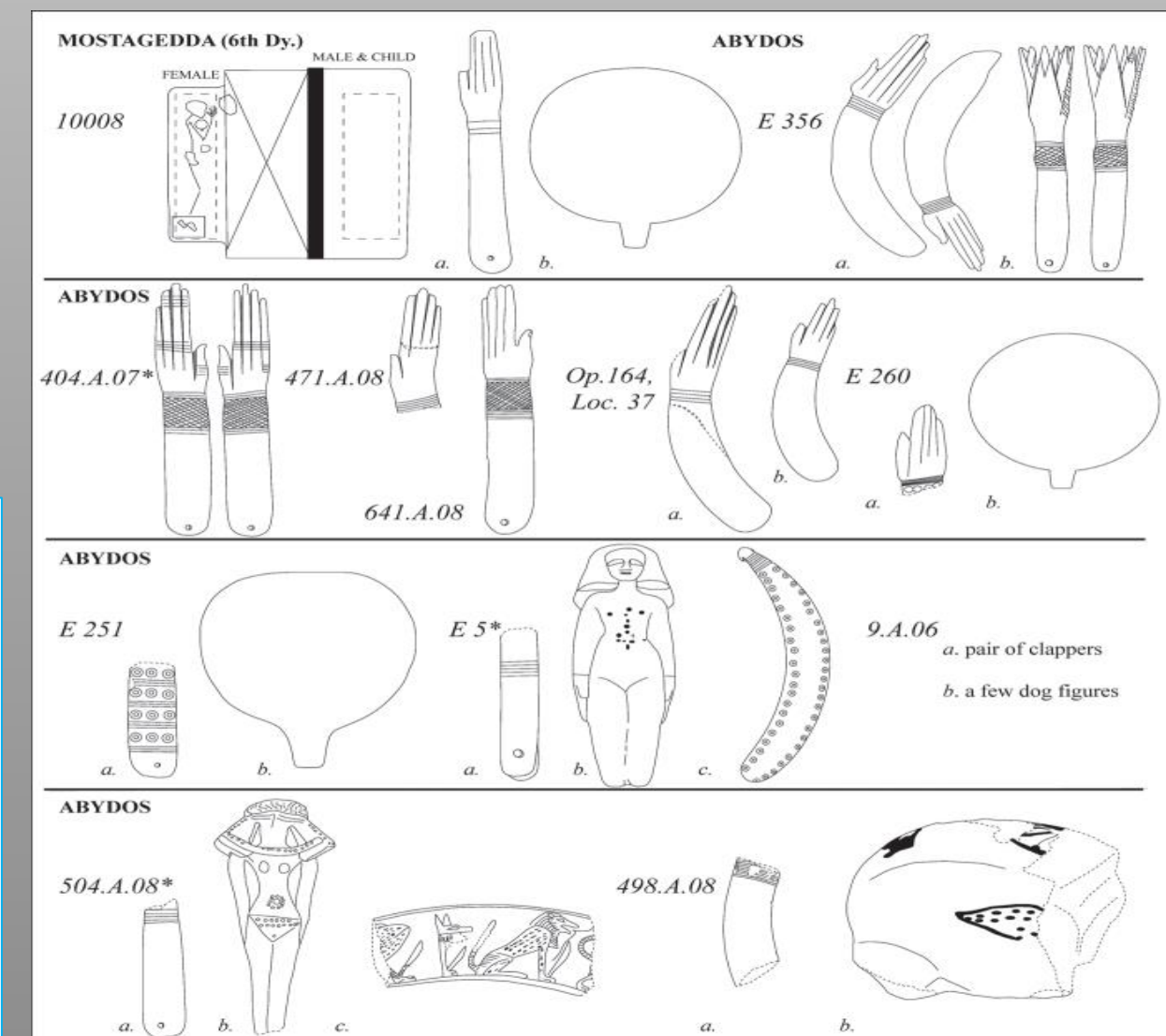


Figure 3 (Morris, 2017)

köpp-Junk, H. 2018. The Earliest Music in Ancient Egypt. Available from: <http://www.asor.org/anetoday/2018/01/earliest-music-egypt> [Accessed 27th January 2021]
Clapper. 1985 BC - 1773 BC. [instrument] At: Liverpool: National Museum Liverpool. 25.11.05.56
Morris, E. 2011. Paddle Dolls and Performance. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, Vol. 47 (2011), pp. 71- 103. [Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24555386>] [Accessed 27th January 2021]
Morris, E. (ed) 2017. *Modelling the Imaginary World of Middle Kingdom Egypt (2000-1500 BC)*. 292. Leuven: Peeters
Pulver, J. 1921-22. The Music of Ancient Egypt. *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 48th Sess, pp. 29-55. [Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/765727>] [Accessed 27th January 2021]