



Wooden Doll Figurine

Cyfarthfa Castle Museum, Merthyr Tydfil

Object Type: Doll Figurine

Material: Wood

Period: Unknown, most likely Middle Kingdom

Provenance: Egypt

Dimensions: Height - 17cm / Width - 4.5cm / Depth - 2.5cm (Zinn, 2021)

Description of the Object

This doll figurine can be found in Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and it clearly features characteristics of a person, who is most likely female. The doll features a protruding face towards the upper part of the figurine, with a clear head of hair coming from the face. Traces of black and white paint can also be seen across the doll. The figure also features 2 holes on either side of the doll (the right image above) which would suggest that there would have been arms attached to this doll

when it was created. The purpose for the creation of this doll is unknown, although I have an interpretation regarding this which I will discuss later on. It is also clear that there is a crack across the surface of the figurine. Despite this crack, the object is in a relatively complete condition with some slight shows of wear. I also feel that this doll is most likely from the Middle Kingdom, for reasons I will discuss later on. There are a few reasons that suggest the gender of this figurine is female. One reason that suggests this is the clear depiction of a female pubic triangle that can be seen on the lower part of the figurine (the left image above). It is also clear that the style and length of hair suggests that the gender is female. The hair is 6.5cm at it's longest and- although long hair wasn't such an exclusive gender trait in Ancient Egypt- the style of how the hair is depicted leans more to representing a female as opposed to a male. Although this figurine has 2 dedicated arm holes on each side, I don't feel that these arms would have been doing anything that could suggest the purpose of this object, rather I feel that these arms would have just been perpendicular to the side of the object, and the fingers would likely have been touching each thigh of the doll. This would suggest the figure is idol as opposed to carrying out a particular activity.

What Purpose does this Figurine Have?

As I have previously mentioned, the exact purpose for the creation of this object is unknown. However, whilst carrying out my research I came across many other figurines that are similar to mine both in style and material. After looking at these comparative objects, they all had one word in common as to what they were and



why they were made; Shabti. Shabti figures were common throughout Ancient Egypt, and around the New Kingdom began being made of stone or wood (Mark, 2012), although there is evidence of Shabtis made from these materials in the Middle Kingdom. Shabti figures were created to act as servants for the tomb owner in the afterlife, and were brought in to replace real servants being buried with their owners.

Although it is not confirmed that my figurine is a Shabti figure, I feel that there is a very good possibility of this being the case after looking at various similar objects. For example, catalogue number EA56930 from The British Museum, London (the figure on the left) is a wooden shabti figure dated to the Middle Kingdom. The hair of this shabti figure is of

similar style and length as my doll figurine. However, there are a few features that this figure has that mine doesn't, most notably 2 columns of hieroglyphics on the front surface, as well as the figure being around twice the size of my doll. Hieroglyphics were common on shabti figures, as these were meant to be 'spells' that the shabtis had, that would specify the function of each particular doll (Mark, 2012). When I found this other object and saw the differing characteristics, I began to be unsure as to whether my doll is a shabti figure or not. That was until I



found catalogue number UC40168 from the Petrie Museum, London (the figure on the right). Upon first glance, it is clear that this shabti figure has many more characteristics that are similar to my doll figurine. For example, the wood is lighter than the British Museum figure, and the doll is a lot more linear in style. This doll has a length of 19.7cm and a width of 4.3cm, which is also a lot closer to the size of my given figurine. The arms of this doll are not distinguished from the body, which is similar to how I interpret the arms of my doll would be if they were still attached. Another key similarity between this figurine and my doll is how there are no hieroglyphic inscriptions on the surface of the doll. Despite the lack of inscriptions, it is clear that there is some evidence of black and white paint on the hair and body respectively, which again is a characteristic that my doll also has.

For the reasons given above, I feel that my doll figurine was made to be a shabti figure. The key reason for this is due to the fact it features various similarities with confirmed shabti figures from the Middle Kingdom. This would therefore suggest that my doll figurine has various links to funerary beliefs in Ancient Egypt, as shabti figures were essential for many tomb owners to have a workforce in the afterlife.

Bibliography

British Museum, (2021). *Figure EA56930*. [image] Available at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA56930 [Accessed 7th February, 2021].

Mark, J. J. (2012). *Shabti Dolls: The Workforce in the Afterlife*. *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ancient.eu/article/119/> [Accessed 7th February, 2021].

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