

Death, Funerals, and Female Figurines



Figure 1 – Front View of female Figurine, 1695.004 (Smith, 2020)

The object featured is Middle Kingdom wooden female figurine (1695.004), and is a part of the collection of Ancient Egyptian Artefacts originally owned and collected by Major Harry Hartley Southey.

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Height: 170mm
Head Width: 25mm
Waist Width: 27mm
Hip Width: 45mm
Base Width: 30mm
Head Depth: 30mm
Waist Depth: 8mm
Hip Depth: 25mm
Base Depth: 20mm

The figure has a carved face, in which eyes, nose, and mouth are all visible. A long black wig covers the head and shoulders, and an incised line denotes the breasts. The hips are exaggerated, and the pubic triangle is highlighted by more incised lines. Whilst she currently has no arms, two peg holes in each of her shoulders suggest that she once would have had removable arms. There is quite a lot of damage to the figure, some of which is most likely contemporary with its creation, as three filled peg holes in the back of the head appear to be holding the figure together, since there is a large crack across the width of the top half of the body. There is another, smaller, crack which runs down the right side of her head and across her front. The legs appear to be broken off, but it is unclear whether this was intentional or not.

Such artefacts, including figurines and paddle dolls, have often been identified as concubines, dancers, or other sexual figures, and were thought to stimulate sexuality, serve as sexual partners in the afterlife, or other generic sexual and fertility roles (Morris, 2011, pp.72). This rather simplistic and shallow view of their use most likely comes from the common feature of an exaggerated pubic triangle (Morris, 2011, pp. 72). Morris argues that, like paddle dolls, such figurines – in particular middle kingdom truncated female figurines – depict dancers from khener-woman dancing troupe (Morris, 2011, pp. 102). In comparison, Waraksa argues that female figurines were ritual objects, to be used as an essential focus for magic and spell, and owned by priests and magicians (Waraksa, 2008, pp. 3). However, a common feature of such figurines, is deliberate breakage across the waist (Waraksa, 2008, pp. 3), which this figurine notable lacks, as it is complete. Further evidence for this theory, such as the context in which it was found, is impossible, as this is unknown. It is most likely that this figurine would have been included within a burial assembly, as part of a representation of dancers, such as the khener-women.

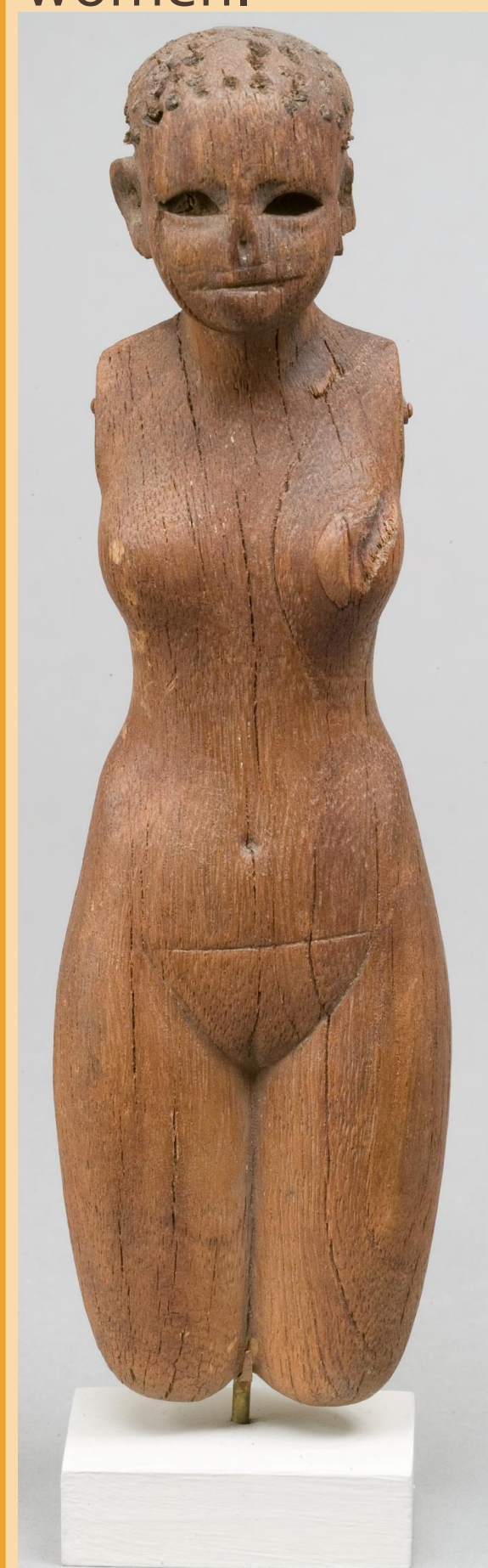


Figure 3 – Wooden Middle Kingdom Female Figurine (MET, 08.200.22)

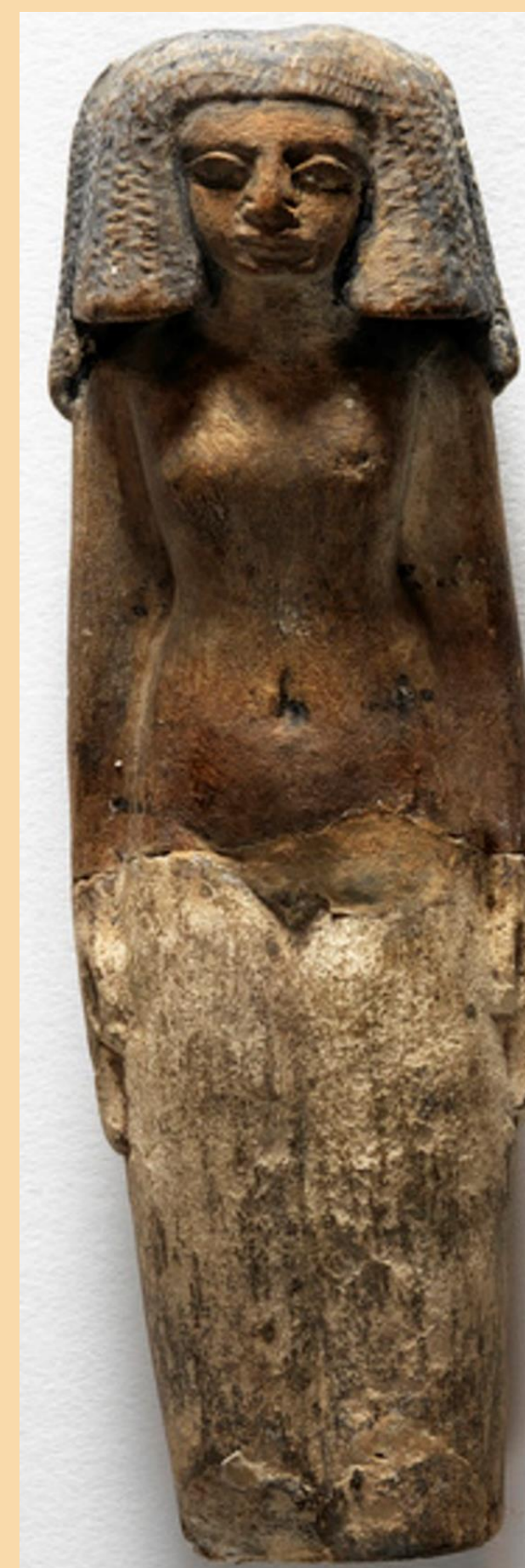


Figure 4 – Wooden Middle Kingdom Female Figurine (PENN, E482)

These two figurines show other, similar examples to 1695.004. Fig. 3 shows a figurine that has the same style of detached arms, which are also missing from this model. She also has exaggerated hips and pubic triangle. Fig. 4, whilst having carved, rather than detached arms, wears a similar style of wig, although hers is shorter and more detailed. These figurines serve to highlight the variety and detail found across examples of female figurines. Like many female figurines, their role within the funerary sphere would most likely be to act as a stand-in for dancers, like the khener-women, or to signify the grave owner's role as one of the dancers, as in the case of the grave of Hepy, at Lisht (Morris, 2011, pp. 92)



Figure 2 – Back View of female Figurine, 1695.004 (Smith, 2020)

The missing lower legs would identify this figure as a Type 1 Truncated Figurine (Tooley, 2017, pp. 422)

Image Bibliography

Figure 1 – Smith, R., (2020) *Cyfarthfa Museum*

1695.004

Figure 2 – Smith, R., (2020) *Cyfarthfa Museum* 1695.004

Figure 3 – Metropolitan Museum, *Statuette 08.200.22*.

Available at:

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/556790?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=Female+figurine+Egypt&offset=0&rpp=80&pos=30> (Accessed: 22nd January 2021)

Figure 4 – Penn Museum, *Statuette E482*. Available at:

<https://www.penn.museum/collections/object/300521> (Accessed: 22nd January 2020)

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Morris, E., (2011) 'Paddle Dolls and Performance', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 47, pp. 71-103

Tooley, A., (2017) 'Notes on Type 1 Truncated Figurines: The Ramesseum Ladies', in Miniaci et al (ed), *Company of Images: Modelling the Imaginary World of Middle Kingdom Egypt (2000-1500 BC)*, *Proceedings of the International Conference of the EPOCHS Project held 18th 20th September 2014 at UCL, London, Leuven-Paris-Bristol*: PEETERS

Waraksa, E., (2008) 'Female Figurines (Pharaonic Period)', in Wendrich et al (ed), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles: UCLA