

# Objects for Eternity

EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES FROM THE  
W. ARNOLD MEIJER COLLECTION

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### 1.33 Squatting figure from a boat model

Wood.

Middle Kingdom (c. 2040 – 1640 BC).

H. 5.7 cm, W. 2.9 cm, D. 3.3 cm.

This small figure is originally from a wooden model of a boat. The man is squatting and is completely wrapped in a white cloak from just below the neck. His black hair is cut short and there is a patch of damage on top of his head. The head is slightly skewed to the left. The details of the eyes and eyebrows are painted in black and white. There are no further paint traces on the face. The ears are relatively large. The general outline of the arms and feet is visible under the all-encompassing white cloak. There is some slight damage on the left side of the back and at the bottom. Traces of plaster on the bottom confirm that this figure was once attached to a model of a boat.

Boats and shipping played a major role in Ancient Egyptian society.<sup>1</sup> Boat models and tomb scenes in relief or painting involving boats are particularly common during the Middle Kingdom. One of the most famous works of Middle Egyptian literature, the *Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, also has a nautical theme. The boat models included among the burial equipment fall into two main categories: (1) boats to ensure that the deceased could continue his activities in the afterlife, such as fishing, travelling up and down the country and across the Nile, etc., and (2) boats with a ritual purpose, such as the pilgrimage to Abydos<sup>2</sup> or transporting the mummy across the river. As in many other cultures, the symbolic crossing of the river was equated with passing from this life into the next.

Figures like this are often referred to in the literature as pilots, i.e. the person who sat in the bows of the boat and directed the helmsman in the stern. However, similar figures are also found in the stern and in the centre of boat models.<sup>3</sup> When in the bows, they are sometimes next to standing figures holding what seems to be a weight to plumb the depth of the water. These figures are also referred to as pilots. Both types occur separately as well as together. What is more likely, however, is that we are dealing here with a figure of the deceased on the pilgrimage to Abydos, or perhaps with a son or other companion of the mummy on the ritual journey across the river.<sup>4</sup> They are clearly not involved with the actions of sailing or rowing the boat; on the contrary, they never have their arms or legs visible. It has also been



suggested that they may be the forerunners of the later block statues, which also appear for the first time in the Middle Kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

JH

<sup>1</sup> On Egyptian boats in general see B. Landström, *Ships of the Pharaohs. 4000 Years of Egyptian Shipbuilding* (London 1970); S. Vinson, *Egyptian Boats and Ships* (Princes Risborough 1994); D. Jones, *Boats* (London 1995).

<sup>2</sup> For a two-dimensional representation see e.g. P.E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan I* (London 1893), Pl. XXIX (left: boats for travelling, right: funerary boats on the voyage to Abydos).

<sup>3</sup> See for example the two boat models in W.M.F. Petrie, *Gizeh and Rifeh* (London 1907), Pl. X C. In the upper one there are three similar figures gathered around the cabin; in the lower there is one in the bows and one in the stern.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Schulz, *Die Entwicklung und Bedeutung des kuboiden Statuentypus II* (Hildesheim 1992), 755–759.

<sup>5</sup> Schulz, *Entwicklung*, 757.



## Wood and Woodworking

The ancient Egyptians used wood for a wide range of applications from predynastic times, despite a severe paucity of suitable indigenous trees. Native species like acacia, sycamore fig and tamarisk were only able to produce short planks and the wood was often poor in quality. The importation of cedar wood from the Lebanon began as early as the 1st Dynasty and imports of ebony from regions south of Egypt, such as Ethiopia, are known from the Old Kingdom onwards. Wood was used to make furniture, flagpoles, doors, boats and artefacts.<sup>1</sup>

Egyptian carpenters early developed a range of techniques for making the best of the wood they had at their disposal. The valuable imported varieties were mainly confined to objects for temples and the tombs of the pharaohs and highest officials so the indigenous woods were often all that was available. By means of skilful handling, from felling the timber, cutting it and then seasoning it, every part of a tree could be utilized. Many different types of joints were employed to make timbers longer, and to form corners and other joins between two or more pieces of wood. Box-and-frame corner joints, mitre joints, mortise-and-tenon joints and dovetail joints are all known from furniture and statues from as early as the Old Kingdom. The techniques of applying inlay, or a layer of painted plaster, enabled such joins to be hidden from view, giving the impression that the object was made from a single piece. Nowadays we are often able to see the workmanship because much of the painted plaster layers or the inlays have fallen off, revealing the construction below.

Much of our knowledge of woodworking techniques comes from the illustrations of workshops in tomb paintings and reliefs from all periods of Egyptian history, as well as from actual artefacts. One of the most informative sources is the tomb of Rekhmire from the New Kingdom. The entire woodworking process is depicted, ranging from chopping down trees with axes, sawing planks and planing them with a chisel, polishing them and then varnishing them before they move on to the workshops where they are turned into furniture and other objects.<sup>2</sup>

The illustrations on tomb walls and actual surviving artefacts also tell us a lot about the tools used by the

craftsmen. Up to and including the Predynastic Period, wood was worked with knives and saws made of flint, and simple copper tools also began to be manufactured. Even with these simple tools, the quality of the finished products is eloquent evidence of the skill of the craftsmen. The earliest actual tools were found by W.B. Emery at Saqqara in the 1930s. He discovered a cache of copper implements including woodworking tools in a mastaba dating to the reign of King Djer of the First Dynasty.<sup>3</sup> The saw blades were between 25 and 40 cm in length, and look rather like large knives. The edges were beaten to increase their strength. Unlike the teeth of a modern saw, which stick out in both directions, the teeth of these saws were all punched out the same side. This would have made sawing planks a difficult task as the blade would have had a tendency to jam. Emery also found several wooden adze shafts and a large number of copper adze blades. The blades were attached to the shafts by means of leather thongs, strips of linen or cord. By the 3rd Dynasty, great advances in woodworking techniques had been achieved. The tomb of Hesire at Saqqara, discovered during the mid-nineteenth century by Auguste Mariette and dating to the reign of Djoser, proved to contain several wooden panels carved in beautiful raised relief. The tomb was rediscovered by J.E. Quibell in 1911, and proved further to contain several paintings of typical furniture of the time showing the technical details. Perhaps the most significant find dating to the Old Kingdom, however, was the furniture of Queen Hetepheres, the mother of Khufu, the builder of the Great Pyramid at Giza. Her burial was found by the American Egyptologist G.A. Reisner at the bottom of a shaft close to this pyramid. The furniture is currently in the Cairo Museum, with replicas on display in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The tools used at this period are illustrated in the tomb of Ti at Saqqara, which dates to the 5th Dynasty. The reliefs show several carpenters at work: some are smoothing the grain of timbers with sandstone blocks, others are using bow-drills to make handle holes. Above their heads are illustrations of other tools, including an adze and a saw. The shape of the saw has changed – it now has a straight back and a distinct curved cutting edge. The handle has also been modified to better fit the carpenter's hand.

During the Middle Kingdom we first find tools made of bronze in addition to copper ones. Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin and is harder than copper. As a result the quality of carpentry again improved. More and more complicated pieces of furniture appear, and boxes seem to have been particularly popular at this time. They were used to store linen and jewellery, but also toilet articles, perfumes and oils. We also have a wonderful model of a workshop from the tomb of Meketre of the 11th Dynasty, now in the Cairo Museum.<sup>4</sup>

New Kingdom carpenters had a wide range of tools to work wood. In addition to axes and adzes, they also used pull saws and handsaws, bow-drills, mortise and firmer chisels, mallets and awls. The blades were kept sharp by honing. Actual hones have been found with holes bored in them, probably to hang them somewhere handy in the workshop. In the New Kingdom, carpenters began to sit on low stools whereas before they had always worked squatting or cross-legged on the ground. This happened at the same period that stools and even chairs become popular for sitting on. The wooden objects from the tomb of Tutankhamun reveal a wonderful range of chairs, stools, beds, boxes, statues and other artefacts, all displaying magnificent craftsmanship.

There is much less information about woodworking from the periods after the New Kingdom. One exception is an illustration from the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel.<sup>5</sup> It shows two carpenters working with a simple vertical lathe for turning a chair leg. The few surviving examples of furniture from the later periods indeed show that turned elements began to be widely used to make chairs, stools and beds.

JH



<sup>1</sup> For more general information about wood in Ancient Egypt, see R. Gale, P. Gasson, N. Hepper, G. Killen, "Wood", in P.T. Nicholson and I. Shaw (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge 2000), 334–371, and G. Killen, *Egyptian Woodworking and Furniture* (Princes Risborough 1994).

<sup>2</sup> N. de G. Davies, *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-re at Thebes II* (New York 1943), Pl. LV.

<sup>3</sup> Killen, *Egyptian Woodworking*, 19–21.

<sup>4</sup> M. Saleh and H. Sourouzian, *The Egyptian Museum Cairo. Official Catalogue* (Mainz am Rhein 1987), no. 78.

<sup>5</sup> Killen, *Egyptian Woodworking*, 54, fig. 62.

### 1.34 Torso of a man

Wood.

Old Kingdom, end of Dynasty 6, c. 2150 BC.

H. 13.9 cm, W. 7.5 cm, D. 6.2 cm.

This torso of a man is missing its arms and is broken off at the waistline. The man is wearing a black-painted skullcap or his own hair cut very short, as is shown by the traces of black paint. These are particularly visible around the ears, despite a layer of dark varnish which now covers the statue. The right ear is intact and much of the inner detail of the auricle is carved. Although the left ear is damaged, some details of the auricle are still clearly visible.

The facial features are relatively large for the size of the head, but this is not unknown on wooden statues of this period. The brows are carved very prominently over large eyes and heavy eyelids. The lower lids even impose into the cheek area, resulting in rounded “apple” cheeks. The cosmetic lines at the inside and outside corners of the eyes are also clearly indicated. The nose is well shaped with a slight blunting at the tip. Although the nostrils are not hollowed out, the curl around the outside is clearly indicated. The contours of the mouth, like those of the eyes, are rather too large for the face. They impose on the area of the chin, resulting in the chin being rather small with a tendency to recede. The lips are carefully outlined with clear corners; they are slightly pursed. The head is set on a short, stocky neck. The collarbone is carved but there is no trace of nipples, either carved or painted.

There is a thin layer of plaster visible in traces on the back of the statue despite the varnish layer. There are

also traces of red-painted plaster around the socket for the right arm. The nipples were probably originally painted black on this layer of red plaster, something known on many other statues of the period. The break at the waistline is slightly higher in front than behind, which means that it is probably not along the skirt line — skirts and kilts in the Old Kingdom were always lower in front and higher at the back. There is a small patch of superficial damage on the crown of the head.

On the basis of parallels from the corpus of wooden statues of the Old Kingdom,<sup>1</sup> we can postulate that the statue was originally a standing or striding figure, wearing an apron-fronted kilt and probably holding the front flap of the kilt in his right hand. The left arm would also have been pendent but there is no way of knowing whether the hand was clenched or open. The arms were originally attached to the body with pegs that fitted into the holes visible on the shoulders. The original height would have been somewhere around 30 cm.

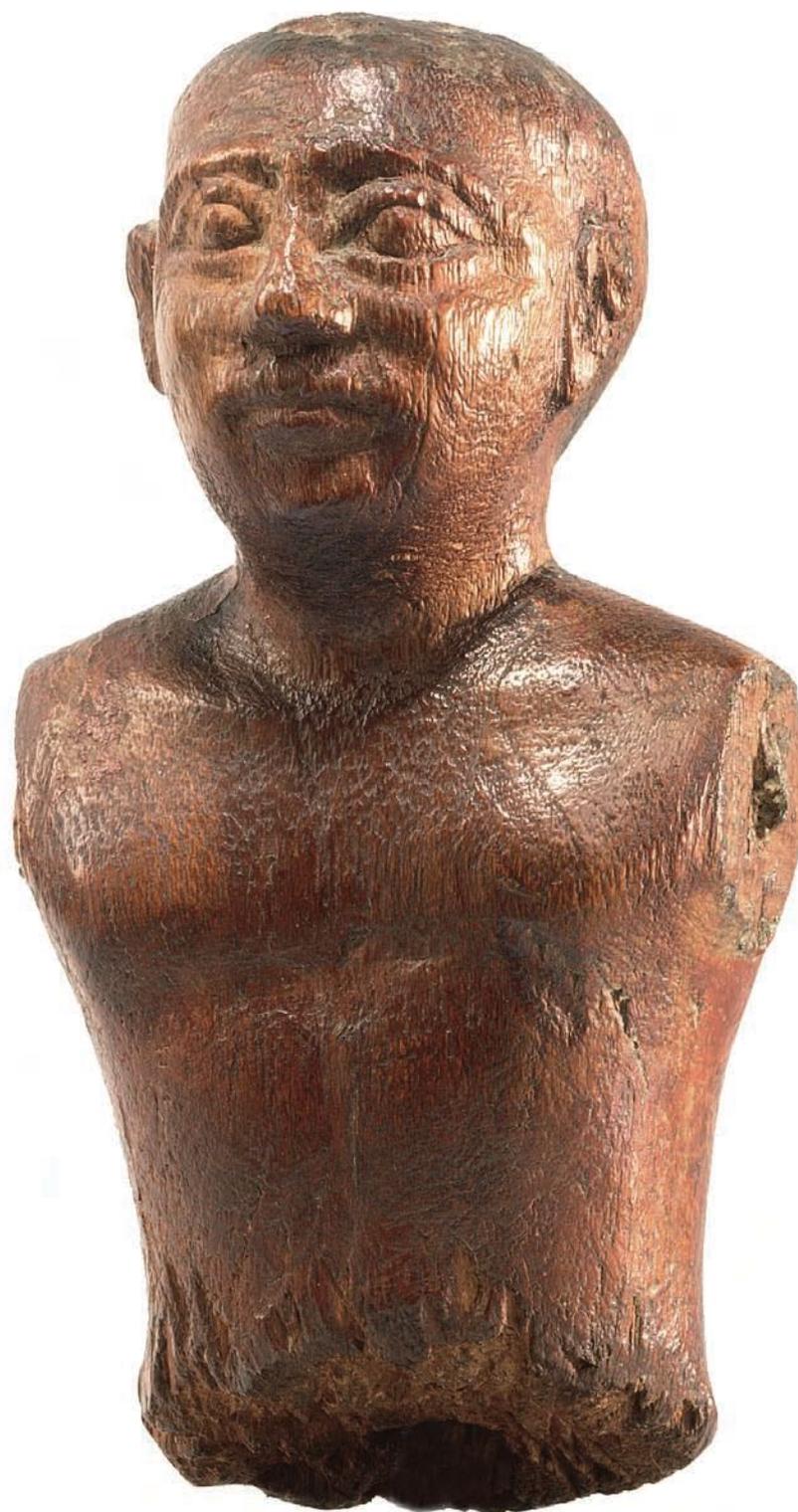
Carbon 14 analysis has dated the wood to the Old Kingdom period.<sup>2</sup> The parallels for the style of the face<sup>3</sup> suggest a date towards the end of the 6th Dynasty, in the period of the reign of Pepi II.

*JH*

<sup>1</sup> J. Harvey, *Wooden Statues of the Old Kingdom* (Leiden 2001), Cat. Nos. A76 (Cairo CG 506), B17 (Hildesheim RPM 67), B39 (Berlin Inv. 1363).

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>3</sup> The best parallels are provided by the statues from a group found in tomb 24 at Dahshur: Harvey, *Wooden Statues*, A70–A76, and the statues from the Tjeteti group: A83–A102. Of this group, A96 is Cat. No. 1.36 in the present catalogue.



### 1.36 Statue of Tjeteti

Wood.

Old Kingdom, Dynasty 6, end of the reign of Pepi II, c. 2150 BC.

H. 38.8 cm, Base: H. 4.1 cm, W. 9.3 cm, D. 20.8 cm.

This wooden statue of a man called Tjeteti is one of a group of wooden statues found in his tomb at Saqqara,<sup>1</sup> the necropolis associated with the city of Memphis, the capital of ancient Egypt, about 25 km south of present-day Cairo. The tomb was found in the excavation season 1921–22 by Cecil Firth in the Teti Pyramid Cemetery, the area next to the pyramid of King Teti, the first king of the 6th Dynasty. The cemetery continued to be used for the interments of officials long after the death of Teti, and the tomb of Tjeteti is one of these later burials. In line with a common practice of the time, which has long since been abandoned, items from the tomb were given to the people or institutions who had sponsored the excavations in return for their assistance. In this way the contents of the tomb, which numbered twenty wooden statues, one of them female, three female offering bearers, several model groups and a seated limestone statue of the tomb owner, became dispersed.

Most of the objects ended up in museum collections, and in 1985 an attempt was made to reconstruct the contents of the tomb by Bengt Peterson of the Medelhavsmuseet in Stockholm, which houses three of the male statues.<sup>2</sup> He was able to publish some of the original excavation photographs and eventually was able to relocate 14 of the original 19 male statues. During research for a catalogue of Old Kingdom wooden statues, a further two statues belonging to the tomb group were identified, one of which is this statue.<sup>3</sup> The three remaining male statues and the female statue are still unlocated.<sup>4</sup>

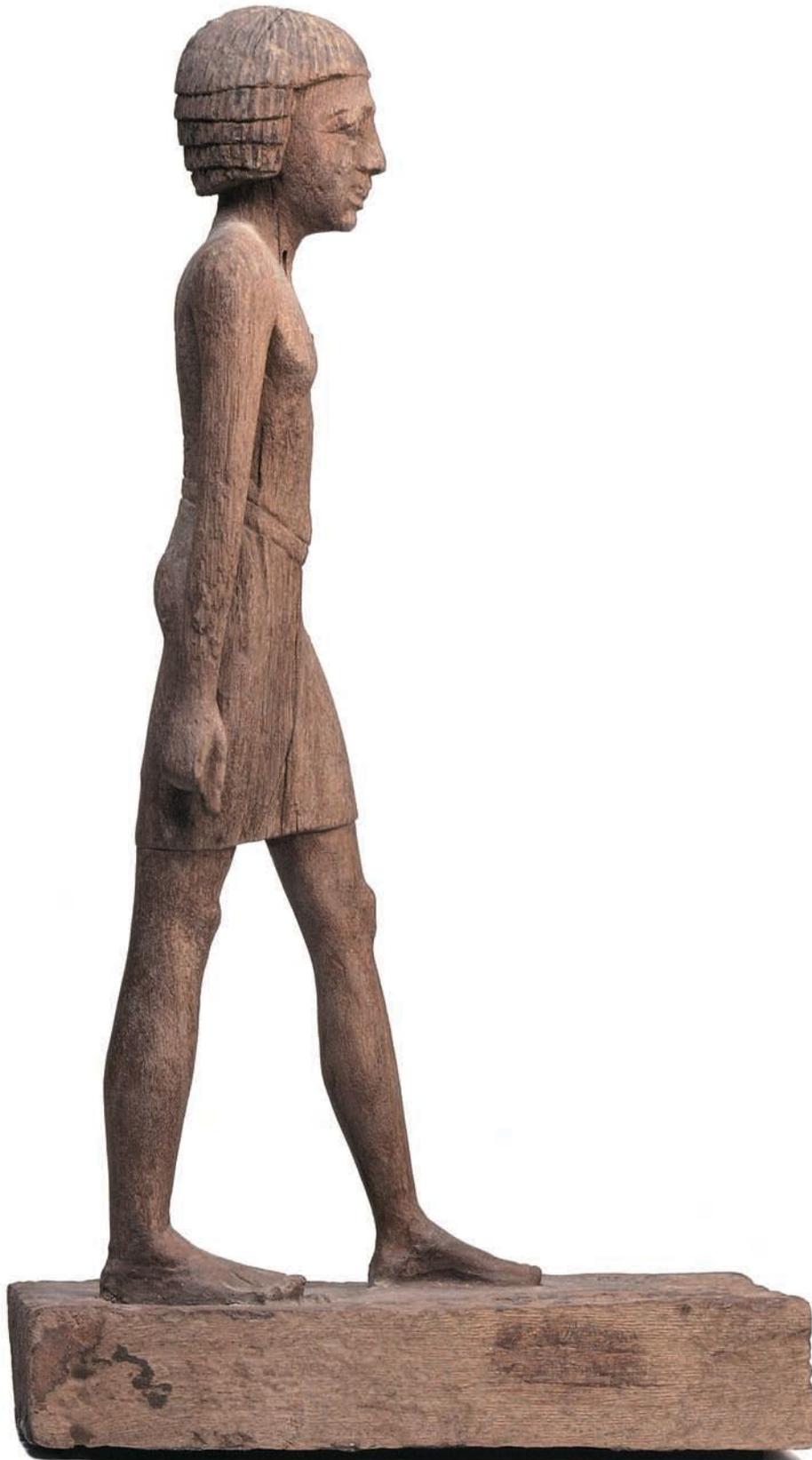
This Tjeteti statue is carved from a single piece of wood, even including the front part of the left foot, which is usually a separate piece. Although the general condition of the statue is good, there are several minor cracks down the front and a wider split on the left side of the face; a large knothole is visible on the chest. Tjeteti is wearing the so-called echelon-curl wig with one long layer to the level of the forehead and then several shorter overlapping layers, covering the ears. The facial features have been well defined. The brow ridge is clearly but unobtrusively carved; the details of the eyebrows were originally painted black. The eyes are rounded with very extended canthi. The eyelids are full both

above and below the eyes, those below giving the impression that Tjeteti has bags under his eyes. The nose is well carved with a straight bridge and the curve of the nostrils is very pronounced. The cheeks are rounded, with sharply defined lower edges. The mouth is very large and wide, with clearly outlined lips. The chin is small but well shaped. The neck is set onto straight shoulders and the collarbone is only indicated on the left shoulder. The chest and waist are narrow; unlike many other statues of the period, the nipples on this statue are not carved but only indicated in black paint, faint traces of which can still be discerned. The kilt is the half-goffered type with a carved tab up onto the belly to the left-hand side of the navel. The goffers are indicated by vertical carved lines on the front right side of the kilt. The arms are pendent, and still attached to the thigh at wrist level. The fists are clasped with long, extended thumbs. The thumbnails are indicated, but the right hand is much more delicately carved than the left. The left leg is extended, giving the impression that the statue is taking a step. The right leg is very slightly to the rear. The knees are clearly and naturalistically carved and the ankles are also pronounced. The feet are large and the toes and toenails are clearly defined. The left leg is slightly slimmer than the right; this is probably due to the difficulties of carving from a single piece of wood.

The original thin painted plaster layer that would have covered the statue is now missing. There are traces of black on the wig and the base and around the right eye; traces of red can be discerned on the face and under the right arm. The skin of males was usually painted red, whereas that of females was usually yellow, perhaps a reference to the difference in the amount of time spent outside in the sun by males and females. The statue has a slight twist to the left, particularly obvious when viewed from behind, which is probably due to the necessity of following the grain of the wood.

The figure is standing on a base which has a short vertical column of inscription in front of the right foot. It was also originally covered in painted plaster, remains of which can be seen around the feet. The inscription reads “The Overseer of the Two Granaries, Tjeteti”. This title is a very high administrative one, with a certain honorific character as well. It is first known from the reign of Nyuserre of the 5th Dynasty.<sup>5</sup> One other statue from the tomb, now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts,<sup>6</sup> has the same title. Some of the titles on the other statues of Tjeteti also seem to have agricultural connotations, ranging from “Overseer of the Fields” and “Overseer of Milkers” to “Overseer of the Labour





Establishment”. There are also some titles which have to do with proximity to the king, such as “Overseer of the Sealed Document”, a scribal title, and the honorific title “Sole Friend”. He is also “Overseer of the House of the Master of Largess”, the department in charge of the provisioning of the King’s table – a very important function.<sup>7</sup>

In the Old Kingdom, the variety of objects placed in tombs began to increase. Whereas previously only the king and his immediate family could provide themselves with a rich tomb and lavish burial goods, by the 6th Dynasty many more levels of society were in a position to do so. Among the many objects placed in the tombs were statues of the tomb owner and of his wife, in both stone and wood. These statues were designed as substitutes for the physical body, should something happen to it.

The earliest surviving nonroyal wooden statues date from the 4th Dynasty,<sup>8</sup> when only one or two statues were provided for a tomb. By the 6th Dynasty, however, tombs were equipped with many more statues, and often these were made of wood. In tomb groups with both wood and stone statues, the stone statues are always seated and the wooden statues are striding or standing. The few seated wooden statues that are known are always part of a larger group of wooden statues. The tomb group of Tjeteti also includes a seated wooden statue, now in Neuchatel.<sup>9</sup>

An interesting characteristic of the Tjeteti group is that all the male statues have their arms carved from the same piece of wood as the torsos, something that is unique to this group. It is more usual for one or both arms to be attached to the shoulders by internal pegs which may or may not be visible on the surface. The statue on display here is the only one of the group to be made entirely from a single piece of wood – the fronts of the feet of the others are separately carved and attached with pegs to their bases. What is particularly interesting about the statues from the tomb of Tjeteti is the wide range of quality in the carving, and the range of groups and sub-groups of styles. At least two sculptors must have been involved in the carving, which in turn implies that there must have been a workshop of some sort in the area.

We know very little about workshops from this period. Did the artisans work to order, or could a prospective

customer just walk in and choose his statues off the shelf? This question becomes particularly interesting when we compare this Tjeteti figure with the next statue in the catalogue. We know almost for certain that the anonymous male does not belong to the original Tjeteti tomb group, despite the obvious visual similarities, because he does not appear in any of the original excavation photographs. What is equally certain, however, is that the figure must come from the same period and workshop, otherwise the similarities cannot be explained. Sadly, too many of the wooden statues placed in burials at the end of the Old Kingdom have not survived the ravages of time, making it virtually impossible for us to gather together a sufficiently large sample from one location to identify individual hands or even workshops. It is easy to posit the same hand at work in a single tomb group; what would be really interesting, however, would be if we could spot that same hand at work in a different group.

The wood used to make the statues was nearly always indigenous, i.e. from trees that grew naturally in the Nile valley. However, very few statues have actually had their wood tested.<sup>10</sup> The most common types of wood were sycamore and acacia, with tamarisk popular for the bases. If a foreign wood was used then it was usually ebony, from further south in the continent of Africa, or cedar, from the Lebanon. This statue may well be made of acacia.

JH

<sup>1</sup> J. Harvey, *Wooden Statues of the Old Kingdom. A Typological Study* (Leiden 2001), Cat. Nos. A83–102.

<sup>2</sup> B. Peterson, “Finds from the Theteti Tomb at Saqqara”, *Medelhavsmuseet Bulletin* 20 (1985), 3–24.

<sup>3</sup> Harvey, *Wooden Statues*, Cat. No. A96.

<sup>4</sup> Harvey, *Wooden Statues*, Cat. Nos. 74–78.

<sup>5</sup> N. Strudwick, *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom* (London 1985), 337.

<sup>6</sup> Boston MFA 24.606; see Harvey, *Wooden Statues*, Cat. No. A85.

<sup>7</sup> A.H. Gardiner, “The House of Life and the Master of the King’s Largess”, *JEA* 24 (1938), 83–91. On Tjeteti’s titles see also Peterson, *Medelhavsmuseet Bulletin* 20, 3–4.

<sup>8</sup> Harvey, *Wooden Statues*, Cat. Nos. A1 and A2.

<sup>9</sup> Neuchatel, Musée d’Ethnographie, Eg. 329; see Harvey, *Wooden Statues*, Cat. No. A101.

<sup>10</sup> For C14 readings see Appendix B.

### 1.37 Statue of an unknown man

Wood.

Old Kingdom, Dynasty 6, end of the reign of Pepi II, c. 2150 BC.

H. as preserved 26.5 cm (base modern).

This figure of a man is strikingly similar to the statue of Tjeteti, no. 1.36, and very probably comes from the same time and place, i.e. Saqqara at the end of the Old Kingdom. It may well have been a product of the same workshop. Despite the similarities, the figure does not seem to have formed part of the Tjeteti tomb group – this statue does not figure in the excavation photographs of that tomb.

The statue is striding with its left leg advanced. Most of the original painted layer covering the surface is now missing, but there are traces of red on the shoulders and back. The echelon-curl wig looks as if it is perched on top of the head. It has one long layer stretching from the crown of the head to the forehead and then four short layers covering the ears. There are traces of black paint on the wig. On the top of the head there is an indentation but it is uncertain whether this is damage or deliberate. The sharp, narrow face appears to be thrusting forwards. The features are blurred due to the loss of the surface layer, but there are traces of black and white paint in the right eye.

The arms are held pendent with clasped fists. They have been carved free of the body above the elbows but still remain attached by the wrists at the level of the hips. The hands are carved free. The left arm is slightly longer than the right. The figure is wearing a short plain kilt with faint traces of white paint or plaster. A hole in the middle of the stomach may indicate where the knot of the kilt would have been inserted. This was often a separately carved knob of wood. The front of the left leg of the statue is missing below mid shin. The foot is also missing although the heel is still extant. The shin and the foot are modern restorations and the foot is turned slightly too far out. There are faint traces of plaster around the inside of the right foot.

The statue appears to be in poor condition due to all the cracks and fissures on the surface. These, however, appear to follow the lines of the grain. The statue was originally made from one single piece of wood, although as the left foot is now missing, we cannot tell whether it was originally a separate piece pegged on. From behind, the head of the statue appears to be tilted slightly to the left. The proportions of the statue appear

to be elongated slightly, a tendency that may indicate a slightly later date than the Tjeteti group.

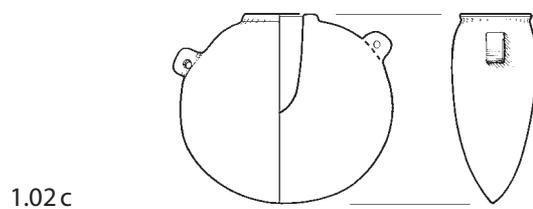
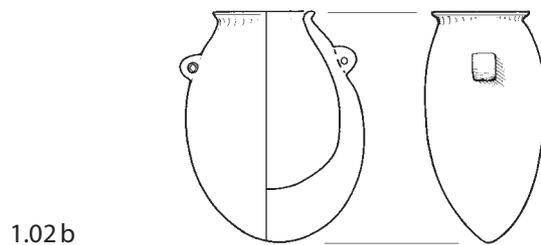
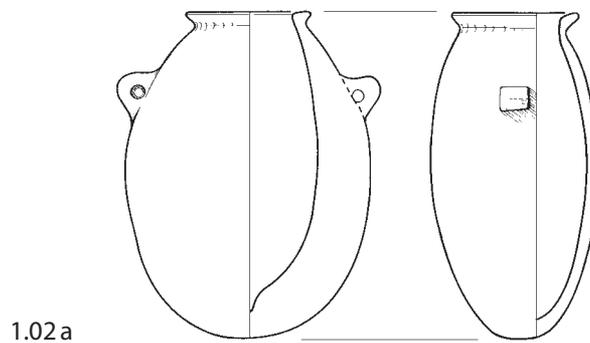
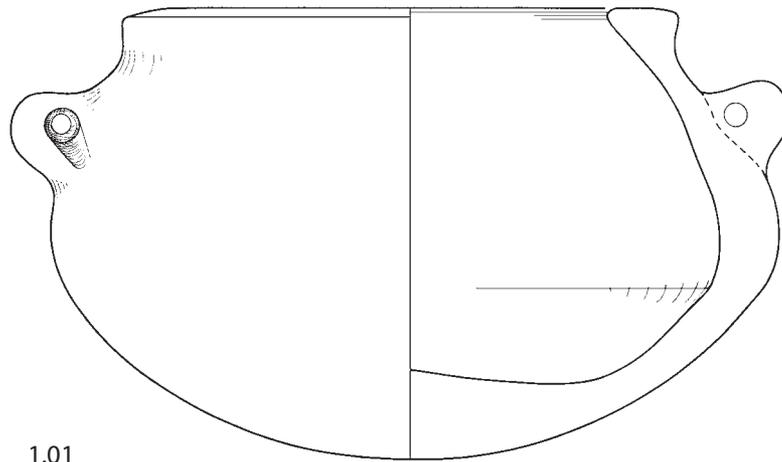
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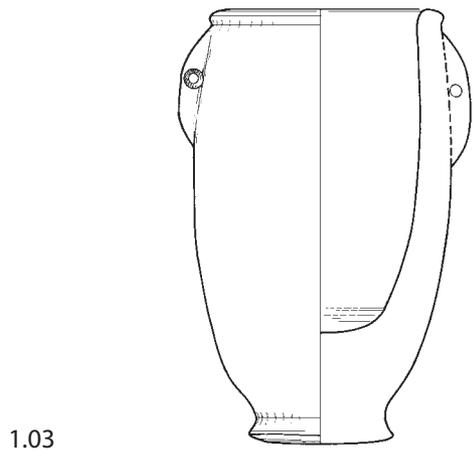




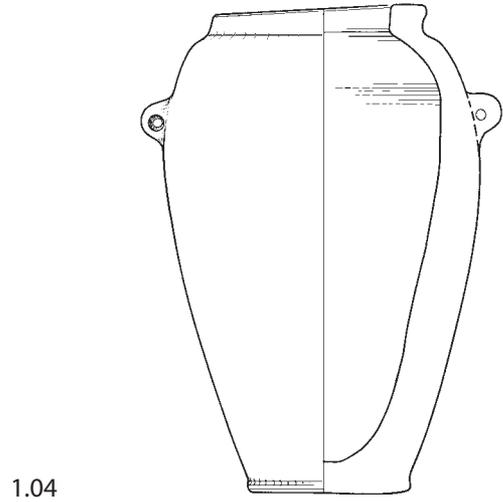
## Appendix D: Drawings of stone vessels

All drawings scale 1:2.

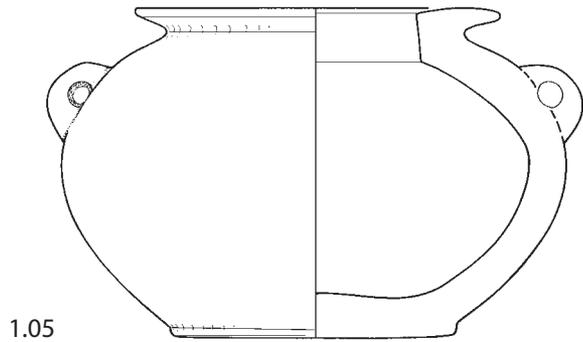




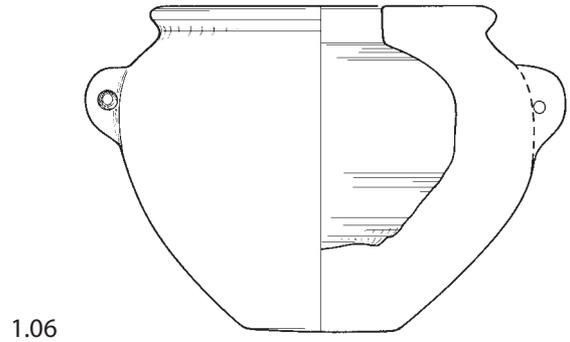
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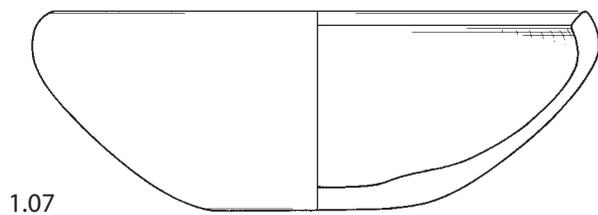
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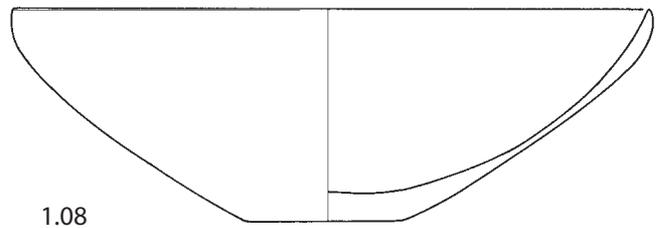
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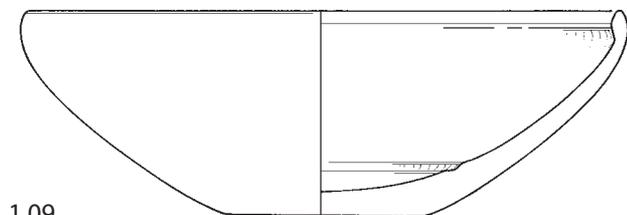
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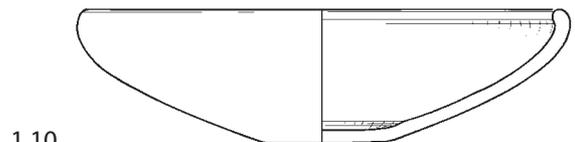
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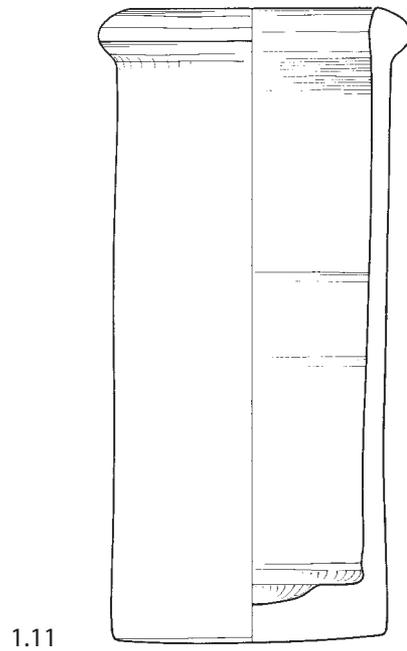
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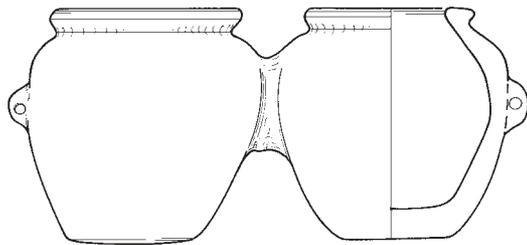
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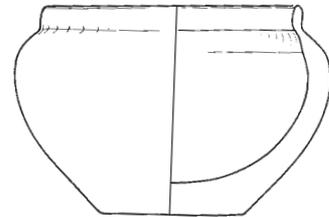
1.10



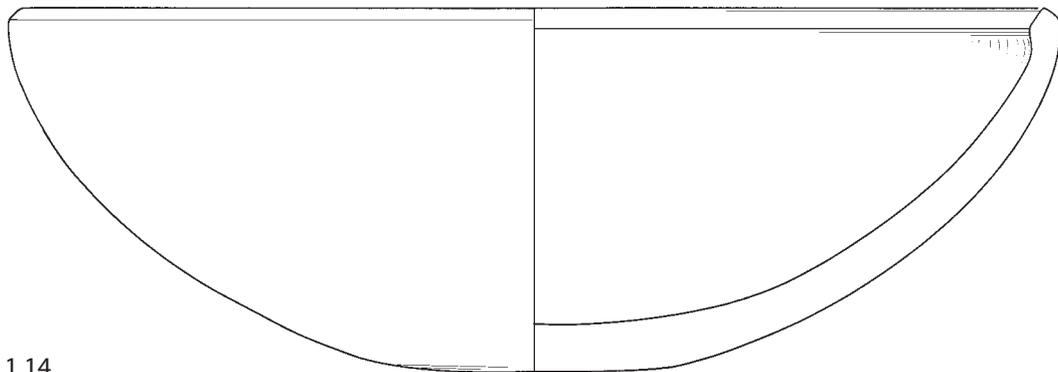
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1.12

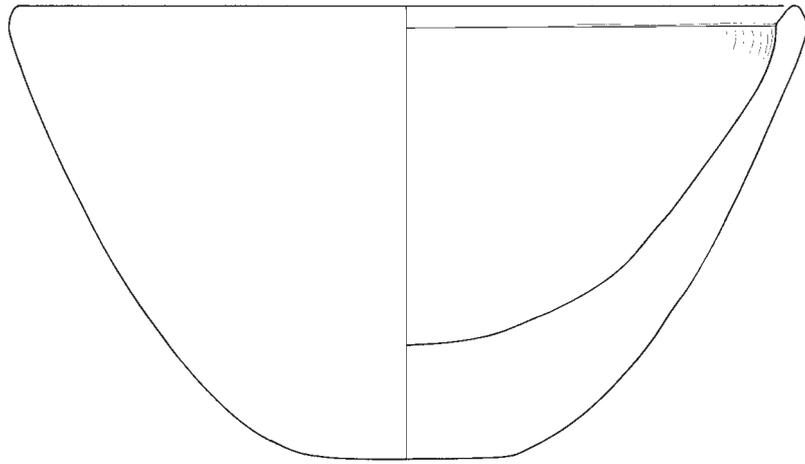


1.13

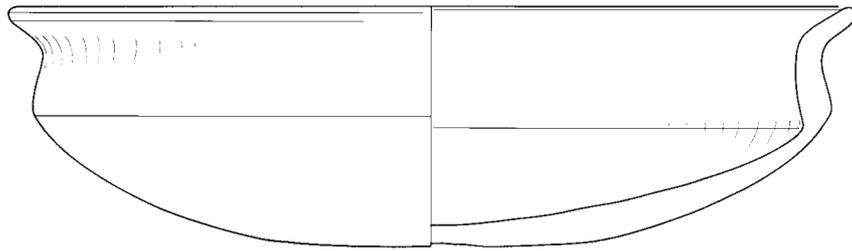


1.14

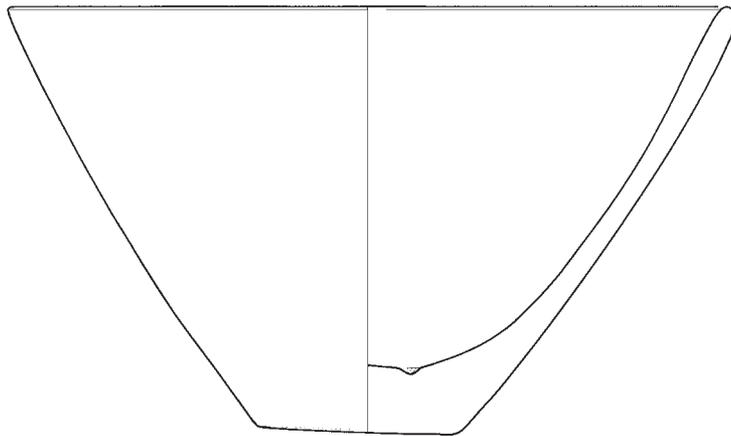
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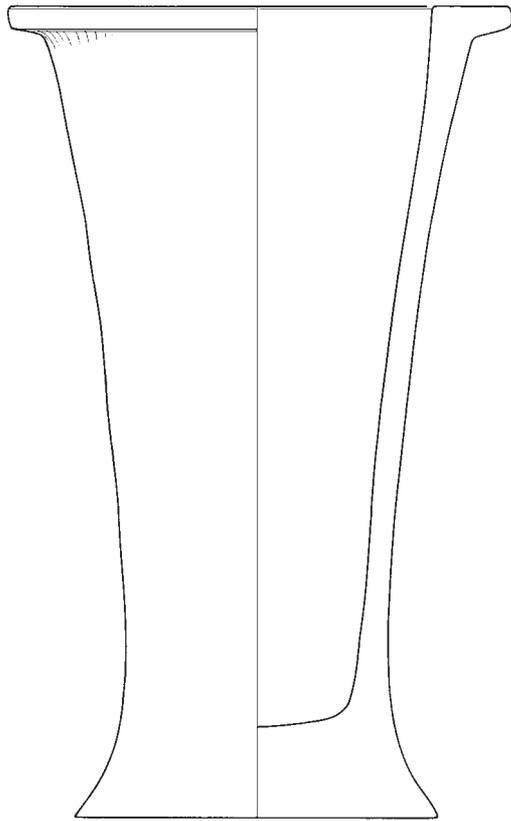


1.16

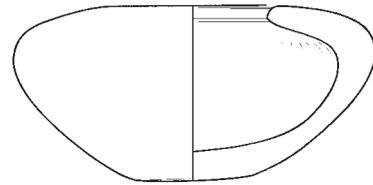


1.17

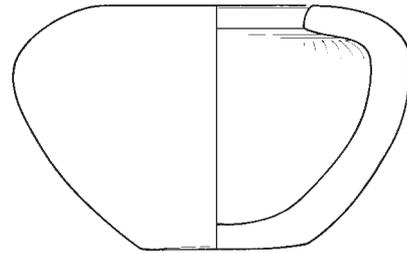




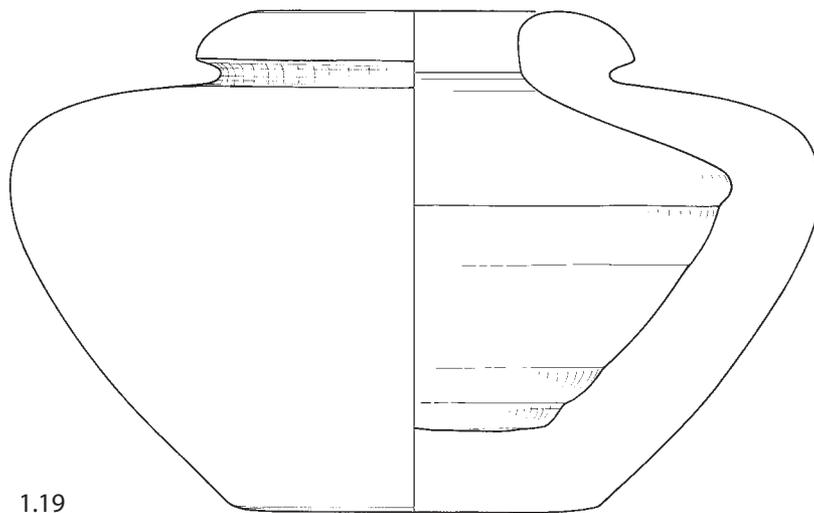
1.18



1.20a



1.20b



1.19