

Of gods and (wo)men: Two wooden figurines from Sheikh Abd el-Qurna



Abstract: This article discusses two wooden figurines discovered by an expedition of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, in tomb MMA 1152 in the area of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Theban necropolis. Both objects can be dated to the Dynastic phase of occupation of the site. However, in the first centuries AD, the complex was transformed into a Coptic hermitage, resulting in the decontextualization of the vast majority of Pharaonic artifacts from the tomb and its neighborhood and making the interpretation of the statuettes less straightforward than it could be assumed.

Keywords: Theban necropolis, tomb, figurine, nudity

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INTRODUCTION

Excavations of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, launched in 2003 on a nameless hillock located in the vicinity of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Theban necropolis [Fig. 1], yielded two wooden figurines.¹ Both of them come from what can be generally described as a funerary context: they were found within the Middle-Kingdom tomb complex MMA 1152, one in the courtyard and the other in the burial shaft. However, the long history of the tomb included numerous episodes of reuse (Szapkowska 2007; Kaczanowicz 2018), as well as the transformation of MMA 1152, along with the nearby tomb MMA 1151 of similar date, into a Coptic hermitage (Górecki 2014), resulting in the

disturbance of the stratigraphy. As will be demonstrated below, although found in the tomb complex, at least one of the statuettes need not have originated from a burial, or even from the tomb itself.

The two figurines were discovered during the first decade of the 21st century. The premature demise of the director of the Polish expedition to Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomasz Górecki (1951–2017), sadly complicated the process of the final publication of the project, as information regarding the context and current location of some of the artifacts uncovered during the Polish works was no longer available. Therefore, what follows is based on archival data from earlier seasons of excavations.



Fig. 1. Location of the site within the Theban necropolis (Google Maps | processing M. Kaczanowicz)

¹ For a summary of the works, see Górecki 2004 and subsequent excavation reports published in successive volumes of the *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*.

FEMALE FIGURINE

Inv. No. PH.W.07 [Fig. 2]

Dimensions: 7.4 cm (maximum height) × 1.9 cm (maximum width)

Material: wood

Current location: Carter House store-room

Findspot: The figurine was found in 2003 during exploration of the “kitchen” — a small space in the courtyard of MMA 1152. The statuette was discovered in the entrance area; inside the “kitchen”, a small ostrakon and a wooden hand from an anthropoid coffin were found on the same day (29.03.2003).

Description: The statuette is of excellent workmanship and well preserved,

although its hands and feet are missing. It is a representation of a standing nude female with arms hanging along the slender torso. The ears, lips, breasts, pubic triangle, and buttocks are marked, but the navel is not. The woman sports a kind of “ponytail”, carefully sculpted on the back side of the figurine, with a bulbous ending, its tip slightly raised. The rest of the hair seems cropped (shaven?), which is visible particularly well on the sides, above the ears.² The breasts are flattened in the upper part. The waistline is narrow, contrasting with the full hips. Traces of yellow paint are visible on the surface of the statuette. The object is uninscribed.



Fig. 2. Female figurine, front and back (PCMA UW | Photo Jakub Šliwa)

² Perhaps the hair above the forehead was left unshaven/uncropped.

MALE FIGURINE

Inv. No. PH.W.39 [Fig. 3]

Dimensions: 20 cm (maximum height) × 2.9 cm (maximum width)

Material: wood

Current location: unknown

Findspot: The statuette was discovered at the bottom of the main shaft of tomb MMA 1152 in January 2009. It was found in a thick layer of rubble covering the bottom of the shaft. No exact location of the statuette was provided, but it should be stressed that the shaft's stratigraphy is practically nonexistent due to the prolonged reuse of the tomb, unpublished excavations that evidently took place at the beginning of the 20th century, as well

as the fact that the shaft remained open and unprotected for at least several decades prior to the beginning of the Polish fieldwork at the site. An investigation of the bottom of the shaft in 2009 lasted only one day and did not include any excavation, so the object most probably came from the top layer of rubble.

Description: This headless standing figurine of the naked individual is preserved in a much more fragmentary state than the female one. Only the right half of it remains; besides the head, also the right leg is missing below the knee. However, a diagnostic part of the statuette—a fragment of its carefully sculpted genitals—is



Fig. 3. Male figurine, front and profile (PCMA UW)

preserved, clearly indicating that it was a representation of a male and probably ithyphallic (see below). The right arm ending in a clenched fist hangs loosely along the torso. Traces of black paint in-

dicate that it once covered the legs and the front of the figure. Although less than half of the statuette is preserved, the high quality of workmanship is clearly discernible. The object is uninscribed.

DISCUSSION

At first glance, the two figurines exhibit a number of similarities: material, high quality of manufacture, and the fact that they both represent naked individuals. Nonetheless, as will be argued below, their apparent likeness and occurrence within a single site do not mean that they were akin to one another in function.

Of the two statuettes, the female one appears to be easier to interpret and assign to a known category: a quick examination of the piece seems to suggest that this object belongs to a group of representations of women with emphasized sex characteristics, referred to as “fertility figurines”, or, in older literature, “concubines of the dead” (*concubines du mort*).³ The images of nude elite women in Egyptian art are practically non-existent (Robins 1997), and the identification of the individual as a naked goddess is unlikely due to the absence of any divine attributes or gestures. On the other hand, Egyptian women of lower social strata were often depicted naked, in both two- and three-dimensional arts; clothing was an indicator of one’s status (Russmann 2001: 75). This particular figure bears

a strong resemblance to Type 1 “fertility figurines” distinguished by Geraldine Pinch in her seminal work on votive offerings to the goddess Hathor. Statuettes of Pinch’s Type 1 comprise female representations 10–20 cm in height, well-modeled, and usually nude, “with small breasts, high waists, flat stomachs and buttocks, and plump thighs” (Pinch 1993: 198). Contrary to the other types (2–6), made primarily of clay (occasionally also Egyptian faience and limestone), Type 1 figurines were manufactured from a variety of materials: stone, wood, ivory, and Egyptian faience. When made of wood, these statuettes were usually painted yellow, with details in black. The majority of Type 1 “fertility figurines” come from mortuary contexts and can be dated to the Twelfth Dynasty and the Second Intermediate Period (Pinch 1993: 198–199).

However, there is one characteristic trait of Type 1 figurines that may cast some doubt on the identification of the Qurna specimen. According to Pinch (1993: 198), the majority of Type 1 “fertility figurines” were deliberately made devoid of feet, with the legs rounded off

3 Previously, these objects were believed to represent female companions for deceased men in the afterlife. More recent studies demonstrate that the function of these statuettes—which were deposited both in male and female graves—is much more nuanced and still not adequately understood, though should not be considered simply in the light of the sexual arousal of the male tomb owner. Consequently, the term “concubine” is no longer considered appropriate (Pinch 1993: 211–225; Robins 1993: 75–76; Grajetzki 2014: 115–116; Tooley 2017; 2020).

below the knees. The lack of feet in nude female statuettes was long remarked on also by other scholars (see, for example, Desroches-Noblecourt 1953: 16). This deliberate omission was interpreted as a means of preventing the figurine from leaving the tomb; alternatively, only the body parts essential for the fertility rites could be executed (Pinch 2006: 126). Angela M.J. Tooley, who recently published two papers on this category of objects (2017; 2020), goes even one step further, excluding the figurines with feet entirely from this type, which she now refers to as “truncated figurines”. To this scholar, the lack of lower legs is the most important feature of this group of figures, distinguishing it from all the other types; Pinch (1993: 198) herself had reservations concerning the inclusion of statuettes with feet in this group.

The Qurna female statuette indeed *lacks* feet, which in itself is an argument in favor its inclusion in the category of Type 1, or the “truncated” figurines. However, a closer examination of the object suggests that the lack of feet is not deliberate, but rather a result of later destruction. The breakage line is not directly below the knee, but just above the feet; no rounding off is visible. This can hardly be explained by the fact that the figure was made of wood (perhaps making it easier to break it rather than to round it off, compared to stone or Egyptian faience specimens): for instance, the wooden female statuette found by Howard Carter in the doorway of tomb CC 24 in the area

of Birabi, Asasif (now MMA 26.7.1416), has legs that end at the knees, with the rounding off clearly visible (Carter 1912: 52 and Pl. XLIV.3). It seems possible that the Qurna figurine originally *had* feet, even if it lacks them now.

If not a “truncated” figure, then what kind of artifact was this? Tooley categorically excludes any statuette with feet from her considerations, treating full-height figurines as a different category of objects (Tooley 2020: 262). Can the Qurna statuette at all be defined as a “fertility figurine”? Let us take a look at other details of the statuette in order to attempt to answer this question.

Many known wooden figurines of naked women differ from the Qurna specimen in that their arms were carved separately and then attached to the torso.⁴ The statuette from MMA 1152 is made of a single piece of wood, with no traces of attachment of any separately made elements. This is probably linked to the fact that the figurine is smaller than the majority of known wooden representations of nude females; while it is difficult to identify the type of wood used for its production without examining the object under a microscope, it was most likely made from one of the species native to Egypt, which are generally fibrous and therefore require larger objects to be assembled from smaller pieces (Harvey 2009: 1).

A large number of nude “fertility figurines” known from excavations and museum collections display painted deco-

4 See for example: Boston MFA 04.1777 from Asyut (Breasted 1948: 94, Pl. 87), Boston MFA 20.1120 from el-Bersha (Breasted 1948: 94, Pl. 89a), or the unprovenanced figurine currently at Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Breasted 1948: 95, Pl. 89b–c). All three objects were included in Pinch’s typology as Type 1 “fertility figures” despite the fact that they have feet.

ration: details of jewelry and geometric patterns interpreted as body painting, tattoos, or scarification (Pinch 1993: 198). As Tooley (2017: 426–429; 2020: 262) argues, the decorated specimens, usually made in Egyptian faience, belong to the early chronological phase of the manufacture of the statuettes, stemming from objects known as paddle dolls. The middle phase, on the other hand, is characterized by “experimentation with a variety of styles and materials” – an increase in the use of other materials (including wood), as well as a decrease in size and quality. The end phase once again brought the disappearance of wood from among the materials used for the production of the figurines, with the majority of specimens made of limestone (Tooley 2017: 426–431). In the case of the Qurna statuette, no indication of decoration can be seen, apart from the remains

of yellow paint. It does not necessarily mean that the figurine was undecorated, but that the decoration was not preserved. The more curious feature of the representation is the lack of a navel: statuettes of this kind usually have the navel sculpted rather than painted, which is not the case for the Qurna piece.

The hairstyle of the represented woman is somewhat puzzling, resembling none of the five hairstyles distinguished by Pinch for Type 1 figurines (Pinch 1993: 199). Also Tooley (2020) distinguished as many as 16 hairstyles for the Type 1 “truncated” figurines, but none of them matches the Qurna statuette. A “ponytail”, or a single lock on a cropped scalp, is indeed part of Tooley’s Style 1, though the lock is on the right side like the classical sidelock of youth, while in the Qurna figurine the tress is precisely in the middle of the back. A thick “ponytail” down the back occurs in Style 2 but is accompanied by two braids on each side in a “crop three braid style” (Tooley 2020: 245). A hairstyle like this can be seen, for example, in two unprovenanced Berlin statuettes (12764, 14517) representing nude women carrying infants, dated to the Middle Kingdom (Breasted 1948: 97, Pl. 94b–c). There are wooden female figurines that had locks of hair made separately and attached to the head using dowel pins (e.g. Breasted 1948: 95, Pl. 89b–c). This, however, is not the case of the Qurna statuette, where no remains of such are visible. Therefore, we are dealing with either an incomplete hairstyle (with additional, now lost, locks of hair once attached to the figurine’s head by other means than pins), or an entirely different hairstyle, lacking analogies in Type 1, or “truncated” statuettes.

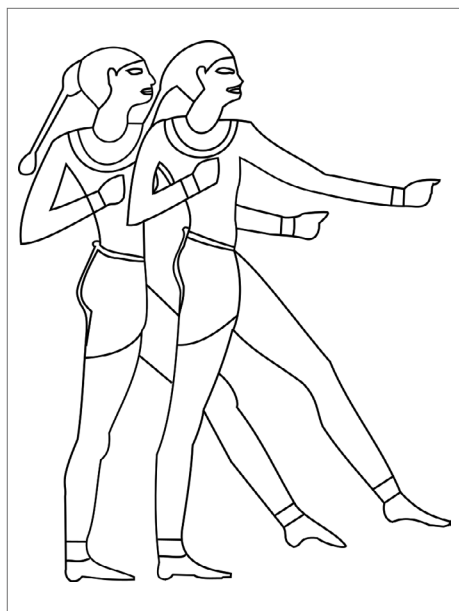


Fig. 4. Dancers from the tomb of Senet (TT 60) (After Davies 1920: Pl. XXIII)

Although the hairstyle of the Qurna statuette does not find exact parallels in Pinch's and Tooley's typologies, some general observations made by the latter scholar are worthy of note here. The braided hairstyles, visible on figurines from the Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period, and early New Kingdom, bear strong links to the cult of Hathor and the notion of daughterhood (Tooley 2020: 271). Tooley (2020: 273) also hypothesizes that the "element of tonsure" on the figurines (executed either by cropping or shaving) evokes an association with the much later ritual baldness of male priests of Hathor, and that the partial baldness of the female figurines (not only the "truncated" ones, as the "crop three braid" style appears also on full-height statuettes) could also be related to the cult of the Golden One.

The Hathoric connection seems to be even more pronounced when one looks beyond "fertility figurines" in the search for analogies to the Qurna statuette's hairstyle, to a tomb scene from the Twelfth Dynasty Theban tomb of Senet (TT 60) representing funerary rites involving dancers. Two female dancers on the left sport a hairstyle similar to the one on the Qurna statuette: a single tress of hair falling down the back precisely in the middle, with a bulbous ending (possibly a metal disc, according to Norman Davies), and the rest of the head either bald or cropped [Fig. 4]. Both dancers are clad only in skirts; additionally, they are wearing bracelets on their wrists and ankles, as well as necklaces. No traces of body decoration are visible. In front of the dancing women, the following text can be read: *m.k Nbwt jj.tj* ("Behold! The

Golden One has come!") (Davies 1920: 22 and Pl. XXIII).

Perhaps, then, the bulge at the end of the "ponytail" of the Qurna figurine is a disc-weight (possibly containing a clay rattle), known primarily from Old Kingdom iconography, but occasionally attested also in the Middle Kingdom (Kinney 2008: 162, note 45; Meyer-Dietrich 2009: 6; Tooley 2020: 255, note 56). It has been argued that the disc-weighted tress usually appears on dancers performing "rigorous dances that required the stamina and flexibility of young performers"; thus, a strong association with youth occurs. Moreover, the hairstyle itself is linked to the cult of Hathor (Kinney 2008: 165). The scene from the tomb of Senet seems to be a close parallel to the iconography of the Qurna statuette not only in the geographical sense, but also stylistically — for example, in Beni Hassan Tomb 15, also dated to the Middle Kingdom, the dancing female acrobats are represented with weights of a slightly different shape (with a flat base, resembling lotus-flower pendants) and fully clothed (Newberry 1894: Pls IV, VIIIa, XIII).

Therefore, that the Qurna piece represents a Hathor dancer is plausible — at least as far as one can assume based on the hairstyle. The hypothesis that at least some of the "fertility figurines", as well as the earlier paddle dolls, represent *hn-rwt* dancers has been a prominent one in the discussion of the function of the representations (Morris 2011; Tooley 2017; 2020). Tooley argues that the early-phase "truncated" statuettes dated to the Twelfth Dynasty indeed bear strong associations with Hathoric ritual performances, while the later figurines (mid-

and late Thirteenth Dynasty to early Seventeenth Dynasty) invoke the notion of daughterhood, but also in the Hathoric context; as she points out, daughters were often members of the *hnr* troupes (Tooley 2020: 271–272). Despite the fact, then, that the statuette does not fulfill what Tooley considers the most important criterion for inclusion in the Group 1 of “fertility figurines” (lack of lower legs), there is a clear affinity between the Qurna figurine and this category of objects.

When it comes to chronological considerations, the dating of the figurine to the period proposed by Pinch for Group 1 “fertility figures” also appears tenable. While wooden figurines of naked women at least partly resembling the statuette from Qurna, such as those from the cemetery of Sedment, were dated to as early as the Sixth (Petrie and Brunton 1924: 3; Breasted 1948: 94; Russmann 2001: 78–79) and Ninth Dynasties (Petrie and Brunton 1924: 7; Breasted 1948: 94), a date in the Twelfth Dynasty or slightly later is more probable based on the lack of Old Kingdom material at the site and its immediate neighborhood and the iconography of the tomb of Senet. Moreover, the Qurna piece shares a number of similarities with wooden “truncated” Type 1 “fertility figurines”. The statuette represents a naked woman with a visible pubic triangle; it is made of material characteristic for Type 1 figures; it is of excellent workmanship; its dimensions are within the range of Type 1 specimens (though closer to the lower end). The Middle Kingdom dating clearly makes sense in the context of this part of the Theban necropolis, all the more so if we assume that the object was not intrusive in MMA 1152 but was deposited

on the occasion of an actual burial in the tomb (see below).

The dating and interpretation of the male figurine are even less straightforward, as representations of nude males in Egyptian art are not as common and well-researched as the female “fertility figurines” (see, for examples, remarks on the history of phallic figurines in the British Museum’s collection in Parkinson 2014). Male nudity is a rare subject in Egyptian art, especially in representations of elite adults, save for a short period in the late Old Kingdom. However, the nakedness of the officials in this period is interpreted not as a reflection of decline in status, but as an allusion to representations of children, who were usually portrayed naked, and the idea of rebirth (Robins 1997: 21). The Old Kingdom is a period unattested on the site and in its closest vicinity. Representations of naked or almost naked non-elite men are more common (Robins 1997: 76), yet they are usually limited to two-dimensional images rather than full statuary. Moreover, according to Egyptian decorum, erection representations are almost exclusively restricted to the divine sphere (Robins 2008).

Here, two inevitable questions arise:

1. Was the statuette ithyphallic or not?
2. Was the mutilation (especially of the phallus) intentional or accidental? The answer to the first question is required to be able to identify the individual represented; to the second, to try to understand the later fate of the object.

Unfortunately, neither of these questions can be answered with certainty. The most obvious interpretation of the piece is that it once represented an ithyphallic male. However, one must acknowledge

that there exists a (less likely) possibility that originally the penis protruded only slightly forwards, and then downwards, resulting in a representation of a non-ithyphallic individual. The state of preservation of the figurine does not allow to completely exclude the latter interpretation, even if it seems unlikely. In a similar vein, it is difficult to say when and how the destruction occurred. The clean, regular break suggests one precise cut — unlike the rest of the figurine, where splinters are still visible in the destroyed areas. Such an explanation seems the more appealing in light of the later history of the site as a Coptic hermitage, making deliberate destruction of such an “erotic” object by the monks an alluring possibility. However, if the statuette had indeed been ithyphallic, the protruding part would be the first one to have been accidentally broken off. It seems that deliberate mutilation is the most likely possibility, yet not the only one.

One is tempted to identify the statuette as a representation of the god Min, one of the oldest Egyptian deities, portrayed with distinctive ithyphallic iconography and with skin often painted black. Yet at least one detail speaks to the contrary: Min is usually represented with his right arm raised, holding a flail (Gundlach 1982: 136), while the discussed figure has the right arm hanging along the body.

The preserved parts of the figure suggest that the legs were probably joined, unlike in typical representations of mortal men, who were usually depicted in a striding pose. As was mentioned above, in ancient Egyptian art the ithyphallic mode of representation — the most prob-

able one in this case — seems to be a prerogative of deities rather than mortals. But if not Min, which god could be represented here? Several Egyptian gods were depicted in an ithyphallic manner; apart from Min, among the most important are Osiris, Amun-Ra (Pinch 1993: 238–241), and even Harpocrates (Abdel-Aziz 1995). The black paint preserved on the figurine suggests an association with fertility and rebirth, which would be in keeping with the identification with Osiris or Amun-Ra. However, these deities were most often depicted in wrappings, with their testicles covered (Robins 2008: 214), while no trace of bandages is discernible in the Qurna example, and the testicles are visibly marked. Moreover, while the ithyphallic mode of representation in art seems to be a solely divine prerogative, it was not limited to male, or even anthropomorphic deities. For example, Chapter 164 of the Book of the Dead characterizes the goddess Mut as a winged, ithyphallic entity with three heads (Faulkner 1985: 160, 163), while a New Kingdom stela from Asyut represents a man kneeling before an ithyphallic goose, Amun's sacred animal (DuQuesne 2008: 56–57, Fig. 11).

Leaving the question of the ithyphallic mode of representation aside and focusing on other stylistic features of the piece, the small size of the statuette is worthy of note: representations of nude mortal males that appear in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties are usually larger and have separate arms. The arms of the Qurna representation are also much shorter than, for example, those of the Sixth Dynasty nude striding figure of Tjeti from Akhmim (BM EA 29594; Robins 1997: 21) or the similarly dated nude statuette of

Meryrahashtef from Sedment (BM EA 55722; Russmann 2001: 76–78), ending on the level of the genitals rather than the middle of the hips, and with no hole for

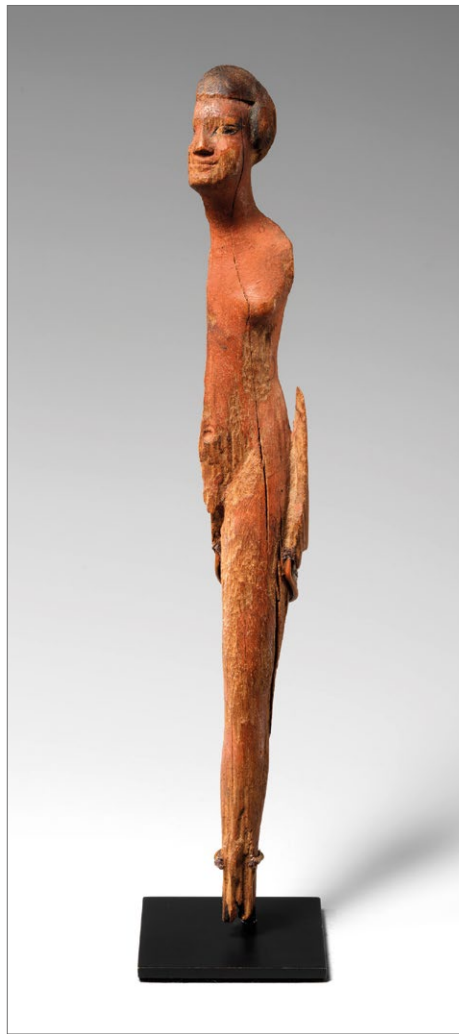


Fig. 5. Left side of a statuette, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number 2021.41.112 (Bequest of Nanette B. Kelekian, 2020. Public Domain, Creative Commons Zero, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/329890>)

a scepter or other item in the clenched fist. The testicles of the Qurna figurine are visibly larger than those of representations of Tjeti or Meryrahashtef, which is probably due to the fact that neither of the two individuals was represented with his member erect. A figurine that could be tentatively considered parallel in style to the object from MMA 1152 is an unprovenanced wooden statuette (also very fragmentary) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, previously in a private collection (MMA 2021.41.112) [Fig. 5]. The figurine, only the left part of which is preserved, represents a naked male and according to the Museum's website can be dated to the Middle Kingdom. The size of the New York specimen (24 cm) is comparable to that from the Polish excavations (i.e. the approximate reconstructed height, with the missing head and feet included) and —like the Qurna statuette— has got hands carved in the same piece of wood as the rest of the body rather than having limbs made separately. It is unknown if the figure was ithyphallic or not: the diagnostic element is missing. It is also unclear whom the statue represents. The website entry mentions the possibility that the object belongs to the category of *ka* figures.⁵ The Middle-Kingdom dating for the Qurna figurine is feasible, although, as will be shown below, some additional arguments could suggest a later date. The Qurna statuette seems to be a strange mixture of characteristics of different kinds of Egyptian representations: ithyphallic deities on the one hand, and “naturalistic” male statues on the other.

5 <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/329890> (accessed: 27.04.2023).

Finally, the two wooden statuettes were found at the same site, but it needs to be considered whether the tomb had been the original place of their deposition. Wooden female figurines sharing a number of similarities to the one from MMA 1152 are known primarily from funerary contexts, also from the Theban necropolis: recently published examples include three wooden statuettes found by Ernesto Schiaparelli at Qurna, currently in Florence (6337, 6338, 6339; Guidotti 2017: 347–348). An ebony figure of a nude female of similar dimensions to the Qurna piece, dated to the Eleventh Dynasty, was excavated in the Theban tomb of Neferhotep (MMA 518; Morris 2017: 299, Fig. 4). Thus, the possibility that the discussed statuette originally came from the tomb is a real one. Alternatively, it might have been brought from the outside: for example, a large number of female figurines were excavated in the nearby workmen's village of Deir el-Medina. However, they are primarily made of clay, their execution is much cruder, and stylistically they differ from the Qurna specimen; and, most importantly, they are dated to the New rather than Middle Kingdom (Backhouse 2013; Arnette 2022). Therefore, it seems more plausible that the figure had been deposited in the tomb itself or in the neighboring mortuary complex, MMA 1151. Of course, that it was brought from some other tomb in the area, for example by a curious later inhabitant of the hill (Górecki 2014), cannot be excluded: its discovery in the aboveground part of the complex rather

than in the shaft could speak in favor of the latter. Nevertheless, the solution could be much simpler. The Polish excavations revealed that undocumented archaeological works took place in MMA 1152 at some point in the first half of the 20th century, and it could be during this clearance that the statuette was recovered from the shaft and later discarded or lost in the courtyard.

Wooden ithyphallic statues, on the other hand, are rarely documented as funerary goods; nude ithyphallic statues are even rarer. Two rough statuettes, originally ithyphallic, probably datable to the New Kingdom and akin in their material and theme to the male figurine from MMA 1152, were discovered by Édouard Naville at Deir el-Bahari. Nevertheless, judging by their description, this is where the similarities end, as their workmanship is very crude (Pinch 1993: 237). The figure BM 60005, possibly from Elephantine, seems to be another example of a rough ithyphallic representation made of wood (Shorter 1930). A further discovery from the Theban necropolis worth recalling here is a group of wooden phalli, found in the debris of the chapel of Hathor in the temple of Mentuhotep II at Deir el-Bahari, allegedly datable to the Eighteenth Dynasty (Hornblower 1926). All of these objects, though they do not constitute exact parallels to the Qurna figurine, originate from non-mortuary rather than mortuary contexts⁶ and are later than the Middle Kingdom. However, an example of a male ithyphallic figurine from a tomb, albeit in a different

6 A possible parallel for the Deir el-Bahari wooden phalli, originating from a Deir el-Medina tomb, was suggested by Pinch (1993: 237).

material, needs to be recalled. In Tomb 36 from Cemetery A at Riqqeh, dated to the Twelfth Dynasty by the excavator, a set of four clay statuettes came to light, three depicting women, and the fourth one a man. The statuettes reproduced in the final publication (one male and one female) are of rough workmanship, with separate heads (Engelbach 1915: 19 and Pl. XXII.6–7). The male figurine (now at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology, LDUCE-UC59338), has a distinct, erect phallus,⁷ demonstrating that depictions of this kind were, in fact, deposited in tombs as well, even if made of a different material than the Qurna specimen.

The high quality of the male statuette from Qurna bears emphasis: it was a small object, but exquisitely crafted. While it cannot be excluded that it belonged to the original burial equipment of the tomb, another possibility to consider is that it was an object deposited in one of the nearby temples (as a votive object or a part of the temple's inven-

tory). Being neither a typical Min figure, nor a typical representation of the tomb owner or his servant, the figurine might have found its way to the tomb not as a burial good, but as an object brought to the site at some later point in history.

If not from the tomb and dated to the New rather than Middle Kingdom, where could the statuette come from? Two locations in the vicinity of the tomb seem the most probable: Deir el-Medina and Deir el-Bahari. In Dynastic times, both sites housed shrines of Hathor, a deity whose cult was strongly linked to human fertility and, by extension, phallicism (Pinch 1993: 238–245). Some other objects originating from Deir el-Medina were retrieved during the Polish excavations on the hill (Górecki 2014). Moreover, phallic objects were found at both locations (see above and note 6). Alternatively, the male figurine could come from an entirely different place, perhaps even from one of the nearby settlements. The unique character of the statuette makes any definitive statements rather precarious.

CONCLUSIONS

The two figurines discussed in this paper may seem similar at first glance: they are made of the same material, their dimensions place them in a group of relatively small representatives of their categories, and —most importantly— they depict individuals whose nakedness usually prompts the “erotic” or “fertility” interpretations of these objects’ functions.

However, appearances can be deceiving, and despite their ostensible likeness, the two objects represent two different groups of artifacts, with seemingly distinct functions, and possibly originating from two unrelated sites. The identification of the better-preserved female statuette as a “fertility figurine” is debatable, but it shares a number of similarities with this category of objects,

7 <https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/Details/petrie/30207> (accessed: 10.08.2023). I am very grateful to the anonymous Reviewer for bringing this piece to my attention.

including what seems to be a strong link to the goddess Hathor. It has been argued above that perhaps the figurine represents a dancer, likely connected with the cult of this deity, and should be dated to the Twelfth Dynasty or the Second Intermediate Period. Nudity in the context of female representations of this kind is not surprising, quite the opposite: numerous specimens known from other sites and museum collections exhibit characteristics visible in the object from MMA 1152. Therefore, even though the object is atypical and possesses several rather unique features, it seems to be embedded in a well-known tradition of imagery.

The interpretation of the fragmentarily preserved male figurine, on the contrary, is somewhat enigmatic. In Egyptian art male nudity was rare, save for a short period in the late Old Kingdom.

The figurine was probably ithyphallic, thus allowing a cautious supposition that it represented a deity rather than a mortal individual. Yet virtually everything else pertaining to the statuette remains uncertain: the dating is problematic, as the stylistic features are not preserved to an extent allowing its comparison with well-dated examples; even the identification of the figure as Min is uncertain due to the arm gesture, atypical for this deity. Nonetheless, known objects of this kind do not belong to the standard burial equipment, either Middle Kingdom or later, even if occasional exceptions from this rule are known. Therefore, it is possible that the tomb was not its original place of deposition. The function of the statuette as a (perhaps New Kingdom) votive offering or part of a temple's inventory rather than a burial good needs to be considered.

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