

Made of Many Pieces, Protected by Deities, and Fallen Apart: Studying Wooden Statue Fragments from Ancient Egypt

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Abstract

Most of the wooden statues that are now part of museum collections or were found during archaeological fieldwork in Egypt are incomplete. This paper demonstrates the possibilities that lie within studying wooden statue fragments. Modes of statue reconstructions and the technical aspects of wooden statue production will be shown based on single wooden fragments. It will be shown that the application of incised and hidden deities at the inner sides of the shoulders of the separately made arms and under the feet of a wooden statue were made to protect it at its weakest points. This procedure was most part of a ritual activity that is deeply connected to the materiality of the wooden statues, and consequently to their production and purpose as an everlasting representation of the deceased during the funerary rituals and the subsequent mortuary cult. Thus, the wooden statue fragments are analysed within dynamic entanglements concerning statue production, materiality, and ritual functions.

Introduction¹

The manufacture of statues as representations of deities, kings, queens, and high officials occurs from the early dynastic period (2920–2649 BCE) onwards at the latest.² Even though most ancient Egyptian statues seem to be made of stone, statues made of other materials like wood, metal or clay exist as well, a fact that is often overlooked because of the less favorable conditions for their preservation. Especially wooden statues occur not only since the early dynastic period (2920–2649 BCE) and alongside statues made of stone, but often several wooden statues of the same person were deposited in tombs of high officials from the late Old Kingdom until the early 12th dynasty (2649–1783 BCE).³ Most of the wooden statues now in museum collections as well as those that have been unearthed in recent fieldwork in Egypt are fragmented. The reasons for this are many-faceted and concern not only the preservation by humans and the respective object biography as a cultural item of ancient Egypt but also the materiality and the

1 I am thankful for the remarks and comments by Ulrike Dubiel, Jochem Kahl, and the editors of this volume, Andrea Kilian, Alexander Pruß, and Monika Zöller-Engelhardt.

2 For the chronology of ancient Egypt used here, see Baines/Malek 2000.

3 See the study by Wendy Wood (1977) on early wooden statues from ancient Egypt, and the compilation of wooden statues from the Old Kingdom by Julia Harvey (2001).

affordance of wood as a raw material for statue production. Wooden statues are usually made of more than one piece, wood can be fragile, it is not water-resistant, it is an easy victim of insect infestation,⁴ and it can be reused as firewood. Often it is the arms, feet, or the bases that remain in a disturbed burial proving that a wooden statue was once part of its original equipment. Compared to statues made of stone, wooden statues are rather underrepresented in Egyptological research, and their fragments simply overlooked. For this reason, this paper will mainly focus on wooden statue fragments, discussing the challenges of working with them but will also highlight the possibilities and the merits of studying fragments as opposed to ignoring all but whole wooden statues. To do so, this study is organized in six sections. First, some preliminary remarks concerning fragments in archaeological research as well as a definition for the term itself will be made, followed by an overview of the wooden statue material from Middle Egypt of the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom (2134–1640 BCE). Section three is concerned with the technical aspect of wooden statue production, and the succeeding section will focus on the possibilities of statue reconstructions based on a single wooden fragment. Section five will bring to light the occurrence and function of hidden deities at a statue's weakest spots, namely the separately made arms and bases, and the final section will conclude this paper.

Preliminary remarks on studying fragments

Before presenting the many fragments of wooden statues, the study of fragments in archaeology and the definition of the term itself need to be addressed. The term fragment derives from Latin *fragmentum* and refers to bits and pieces of things, like food or textiles.⁵ Kay Malcher et al., define a fragment as a material entity; emotions and ideas cannot be considered as fragments.⁶ A fragment is part of something 'bigger' that has vanished by now,⁷ yet one can see the 'bigger' thing in the remaining fragment. But to see the 'bigger' in the fragment, the fragment needs to be somehow diagnostic and relatable, at least for the scholar. There is thus a fine line between a wooden fragment of a specific wooden object and a random piece of (worked) wood. Furthermore, as Alexandra Verbovsek pointed out, pottery sherds are fragmented pottery vessels, however, if they contain script, they are classified as ostraca in Egyptological research and gain therefore a new function or quality as historic objects.⁸ During her presentation *What makes a pottery sherd a small find? Processing re-used pottery from settlement contexts* at the Excavating the Extra-Ordinary Workshop 2, Julia Budka also addressed the challenge that comes along with the different classification or attribution of inscribed pottery sherds to etic object

4 See Kühnen/Wagenführ 2014: 104–111.

5 Most 2009: 10–11.

6 Malcher, et al. 2013; see also Philipowski 2011: 98.

7 Philipowski 2011: 98.

8 Verbovsek 2013: 77.

categories by philologists (ostraca) and ceramicists (pottery), when the researchers of each group have their own research methods and interests (see Budka, this volume).

Recently, Gianluca Miniaci stated that “archaeological remains are ‘fragmented by definition’”.⁹ Most objects are not in a completely state of preservation for many reasons, some were fragmented as part of their purpose, others in the cause of history.¹⁰ In 2000, with his study *Fragmentation in Archaeology*, that focuses on the prehistory of Southeastern Europe, John Chapman laid the foundation for studying fragments in the archaeological record.¹¹ Ever since, studies concerned with intentional mutilation during ancient times increased, but are still rare.¹² Also, as stated by Lea Hagedorn, the fragmentary condition in which most museum objects are, has hardly ever been the focal point of their presentation or study in museums.¹³ The reasons why objects are fragmented are manifold. Miniaci indeed differs between accidental, intentional, or semi-intentional fragmentation of objects, he also states that nowadays it is often impossible to reconstruct which form of fragmentation actually took place that led to the incomplete state of an ancient Egyptian object.¹⁴ Katharina Philipowski, on the other hand, differentiates between *überlieferungsbedingte Fragmente*, things that became fragmented over time, *produktionsbedingte Fragmente*, things that have not been fully produced, that are left unfinished and lastly, *konzeptionelle Fragmente*, meaning things that were never intended to be finished.¹⁵ At this point, the questions arise: who decides when something has been completed and what about later modifications?¹⁶ What if an object was mutilated accidentally at one point and intentionally at another? What if an object that was left unfinished was in addition mutilated later? How can these distinct processes and intentions be differentiated with only the objects left?

According to the approach of symmetrical archaeology, humans and things are entangled with one another.¹⁷ These entanglements are dynamic and are not limited to a specific time-frame. Not only do the entanglements change and the people involved within but also the object itself: its function and location might change as well as its condition or state of preservation.¹⁸ In the case of the wooden statues I could not trace any ‘intentional’ mutilations or identify a certain point in time or practice that led to the numerous fragmented wooden statues.

9 Miniaci 2023a: 3.

10 Ibid., 3.

11 Chapman 2000.

12 Miniaci 2023a: 3–4. For Egyptology, see i.e. Miniaci 2023b; Kuch 2018; Kuch 2021; Connor 2019, Connor 2022, Birk 2023.

13 Veldhues 2022: 37–39; see also Hagedorn et al. *ibid.*: 8.

14 Miniaci 2023a: 4.

15 Philipowski 2011: 95.

16 Verbovsek pointed out that only parts of a funerary text were used in the sense of *pars pro toto* (Verbovsek 2013: 84–85). This example illustrates the interplay and biased relationship of an object’s completeness to scholars in relation to ancient practices and their actors.

17 Olsen 2012: 209; Beck 2023. For an introduction to symmetrical archaeology, see Olsen 2012: 209–211. For different approaches influenced by symmetrical archaeology, see e.g. Witmore 2007; Hofmann/Schreiber 2011; Schreiber 2018: esp. 38, 76–77; Beck 2023.

18 Beck 2023.

For that reason, this paper is less concerned with the questions why, by whom and when wooden statues fell apart but will focus on the fragments and point out what information can be drawn from them and which support system was built to prevent the wooden statue from falling apart.

A question of definition: wooden statues and fragments

In the case of wooden statues from ancient Egypt, their identification as a fragment is complicated and depends on the definition of the Egyptological category ‘wooden statue’. I have defined the term wooden statue as an image of a historic person carved in wood, standing or standing-striding on a wooden platform or seated on a wooden seat.¹⁹ This definition excludes other figures made of wood typically labelled as wooden models as well as so-called offering bearers/estate figures²⁰ in Egyptological studies.²¹ This definition does not depend on its materiality and technical aspects. As mentioned above, wooden statues were usually made of various pieces, only their combination results in a wooden statue per definition. Thus, a completely preserved wooden arm or wooden base, the latter even inscribed, can therefore only be treated as a fragment of a wooden statue, even though its state of preservation has not changed since the day of its production.

Different reasons and modes of fragmentation were addressed above, but the degree of fragmentation remains open, and the question arises, how to address the state of preservation of a wooden statue? In Egyptology there is no consensus in how to refer to the state of preservation of an ancient Egyptian object. Designations and estimations like (almost) complete, incomplete, (very, highly) fragmented, fine, (very, slightly, little) damaged, broken, fair, destroyed or (very) good are regularly used. The decision whether an object is damaged or slightly damaged, well-preserved or in fair condition, relies on the subjective evaluation by each scholar combined with his or her expectations of how the object supposedly had looked after its production process was completed. The core problem is situated within a scholar’s expectations which are often not compatible with the possible varieties of ancient object production and its entanglements. For instance, wooden statues can be completely covered in plaster and painted from head to toe, including the base, they can be partially painted (eyes, coiffure, and/or skirt) or not painted at all. Often pigment has faded, or the plaster chipped off and one cannot decide whether or to which extent a wooden statue had been painted. Even though, as mentioned above, materiality and its affordances and consequently technical aspects of wooden

19 Seated wooden statues are rare; only two examples from the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom are known (see Cairo CG 458, Turin S. 14781).

20 For the term ‘offering bearer/estate figure’, see Zöllner-Engelhardt 2022: fn. 8.

21 For more information on wooden models and offering bearers, see i.e. Barker 2022, Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017; Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2021; Tooley 1989; Zöllner-Engelhardt 2016; Zöllner-Engelhardt 2023.

statue production are not included into the definition of the term wooden statue, however they determine its state of preservation: wood is an organic material which attracts insects and fungi and can develop cracks over time caused by humidity or temperature stress,²² and the statues had to be made of more than once piece. Not only is each wooden statue singular, their state of preservation is also unique, making it, in my opinion, impossible to qualify between different grades of fragmentation. For that reason, I decided to only differentiate between complete and incomplete wooden statues, with the remark that the occurrence of coloring has no impact on a wooden statue's assignment to one or the other category, because often the lack of pigment does not indicate that coloring was intended. Also cracks in the wood of the human figure or in the wooden base, were not determining but were, of course, recognized in the object's description.²³

Wooden statues from ancient Egypt

This study is based on my PhD research that focused on wooden statues from Middle Egypt (from Akhmim to Beni Hasan) from the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom (2134–1640 BCE) (Fig. 1).²⁴ The study included 311 wooden statues. Most of the wooden statues come from the necropolis of Asyut (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Overview of the wooden statues from Middle Egypt

Provenance/ Necropolis	Wooden statues
Asyut	215
Meir	49
Deir al-Barsha	15
Beni Hasan	8
Deir Rifeh	7
Qaw el-Kebir	6
Al-Hawawish	5
Asyut or Meir	5
Antinoe	1

In this study the wooden statues were perceived as archaeological objects and funerary images, meaning that the wooden statues were not only studied using art historical methods, like

²² Mergny et al. 2016.

²³ Beck 2023.

²⁴ Ibid.; the study is currently in the process of publishing.

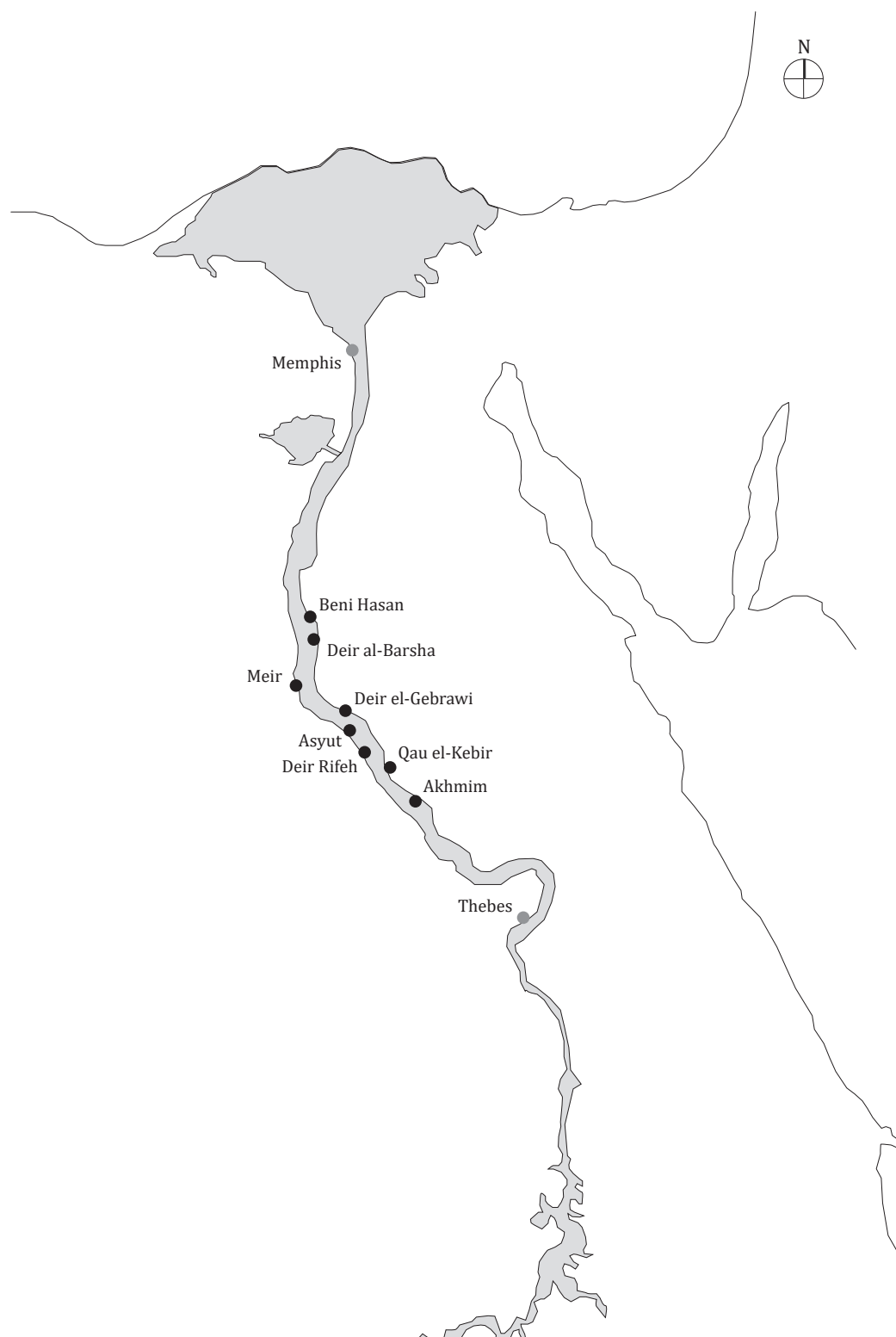


Fig. 1: Map of Egypt. Image: Oliver Hasselbach & Tina Beck

a structural description of each pictorial element, but all available data (excavation reports, archaeological context, socio-historical data of the deceased) was collected, discussed, and evaluated for each wooden statue. Based on the collected information, the relative-chronological dating of each burial and wooden statue was discussed as well as the role(s) and function(s) of the wooden statues during the funerary rituals using the framework of ritual entanglements. Furthermore, differences and similarities between tomb contexts and the different necropoleis were highlighted and discussed. This approach encompassed wooden statues of all kinds of states of preservation. As briefly mentioned above, no pattern of intentional mutilation was detected, rather the grade of destruction was manifold and unique for each wooden statue. However, often only arms, legs and front parts of the feet remain; all those parts were often carved separately and attached to the torso by tenons or nails, as will be demonstrated in the section below.²⁵ All together the study encompassed 205 incomplete wooden statues and 99 complete wooden statues; the state of preservation of seven wooden statues is uncertain or unknown.

The composition of a wooden statue

The size and the technical composition of a wooden statue depends mainly on the available material and its planned size. The height and width of a wooden trunk is decisive for the measurements of a wooden statue and its composition. Most wooden statues were thus made of various parts and plugged together with wooden nails or tenons. In the following, the focus will be set on the separately made arms and the insertion into the separately made bases.²⁶

Arms

In most cases both arms were carved separately and attached to the torso at the shoulders.²⁷ Thereby the following techniques were applied (Fig. 2 a–c):

- a. A wooden tenon was directly carved from the shoulder joint of the arm and inserted into a rectangular or square mortise at the torso's side (Fig. 2a)
- b. A wooden tenon was carved separately and inserted into a rectangular mortise on the shoulder joint of the arm and at the torso's side (Fig. 2b)

25 This observation that more often arms, bases, and toes remain instead of bodies or heads is curious. One can only imagine that these parts would get lost easier in a hasty process of looting, or simply over time. Also, body and torso would serve as better burning material or can be more of use for other secondary purposes that would lead to the destruction of a wooden statue.

26 This study will not focus on ancient modes of repair work (see Louvre E 26915) or rare characteristics like the attachment of the middle flap from a shendjit skirt with wooden nails (see Cairo JE 40372).

27 For exceptions, see i.e. Louvre E 12633, E 11937, WAG 22.11, 22.12, 22.13 (Asyut), Manchester 4735 and 4737 (Deir Rifeh).

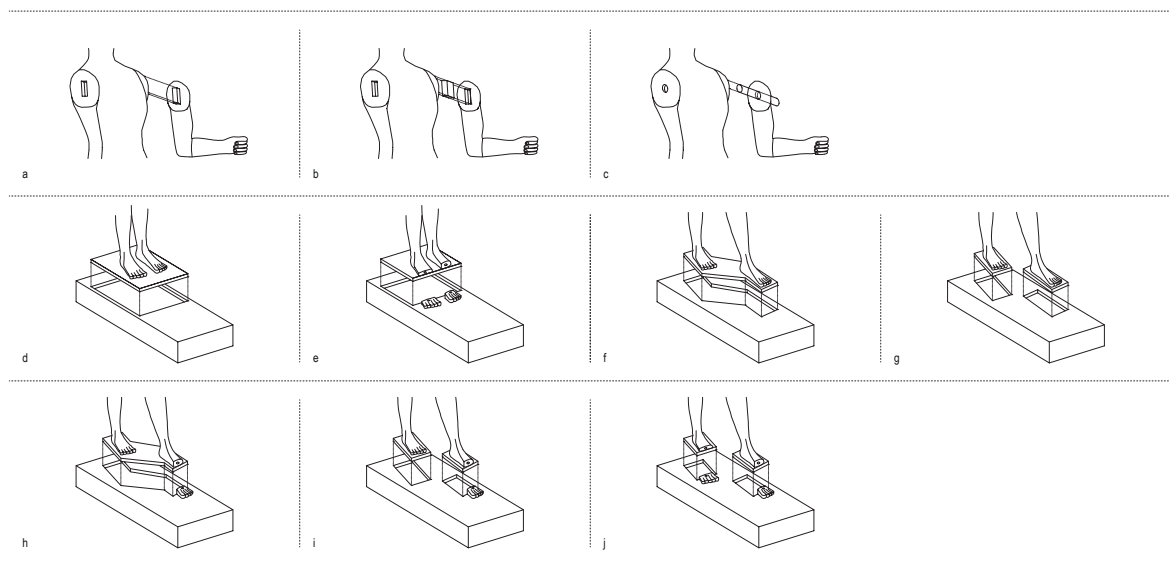


Fig. 2: Model for the construction and composition of a wooden statue to affix arms and the feet into the wooden base. Image: Oliver Hasselbach & Tina Beck

- c. A wooden nail was carved separately and inserted into a drilling hole on the inner side of the shoulder joint and at the torso's side; occasionally the nail was inserted through a drilling hole piercing the whole width of the shoulder and was therefore visible on the shoulder's surface (Fig. 2c)

Whether the arms are connected with nails or tenons to the torso does neither depend on the wooden statue's provenance nor the sex of the depicted but there is a tendency that especially larger wooden statues use tenons in favor of nails. Clearly, rectangular wooden tenons offer more support and stability compared to wooden nails; however, occasionally two wooden nails or wooden tenons were used to affix one arm.²⁸ Furthermore, there is no example that uses a tenon for one arm and a nail for the other arm. Occasionally, a bent left arm for male wooden statues can also be carved of two different pieces that were connected to each other at the elbow or the wrist.²⁹ Wooden tenons were then carved from the hand or the forearm and inserted into the connecting mortise.

Bases

All wooden statues are inserted into their wooden base. The cut-out necessary for the insertion depended not only on the posture of the wooden statue (whether it was standing or

28 See BM EA 45066 (Asyut).

29 See i.e. BM EA 45048, EA 45062, Turin S. 14810 (all Asyut).

standing-striding), but also whether the front parts of the feet (toes and midfoot) were made separately. The following techniques can be found (Fig. 2 d–j):³⁰

1. Standing statues, feet made of one piece:
 - a. Platform-like extension beneath both feet was inserted into the base's cut-out (Fig. 2d)
2. Standing statues, front parts of feet made separately:
 - a. Platform-like extension beneath both heels was inserted into the base's cut-out; front parts of the feet were inserted into hindfoot with a tenon (rectangular or square); front parts of the feet rested on the surface of the wooden base and were occasionally fixed with vertically inserted nails beneath the toes (Fig. 2e)
3. Standing-striding statues, feet made of one piece
 - a. Platform-like extension beneath the striding feet was inserted into the base's cut-out (Fig. 2f)
 - b. Tenon-like extensions beneath each foot were inserted into the base's cut-out (Fig. 2g)
4. Standing-striding statues, front part of left foot made separately:
 - a. Platform-like extensions beneath the right foot and left heel were inserted into the base's cut-out; front part of the left foot was inserted into the hindfoot with a rectangular/square tenon; front part of the left foot rests upon wooden base's surface and was occasionally fixed with a vertically inserted nail beneath the toes (Fig. 2h)
 - b. Tenon-like extensions beneath the right foot and left heel were inserted into the base's cut-out; front part of the left foot was inserted into the hindfoot with a rectangular/square tenon; front part of the left foot rests upon wooden base's surface and was occasionally fixed with a vertically inserted nail beneath the toes (Fig. 2i)
5. Standing-striding statues, front parts of both feet made separately:
 - a. Tenon-like extensions beneath both heels were inserted into the base's cut-out; front parts of the feet were inserted into hindfeet with rectangular/square tenons; front parts of the feet rest upon wooden base's surface and were occasionally fixed with vertically inserted nails beneath the toes (Fig. 2j)

Occasionally, the insertion into the base is further supported by vertically inserted wooden nails into the sides of the wooden base, further affixing the tenon-like extensions or platform-like extensions.³¹

30 There are different techniques to insert a wooden statue into its wooden base: a tenon-like extension beneath the foot or the heel or a platform-like extension beneath both feet or both heels together.

31 See Turin S. 14797/04 bis.

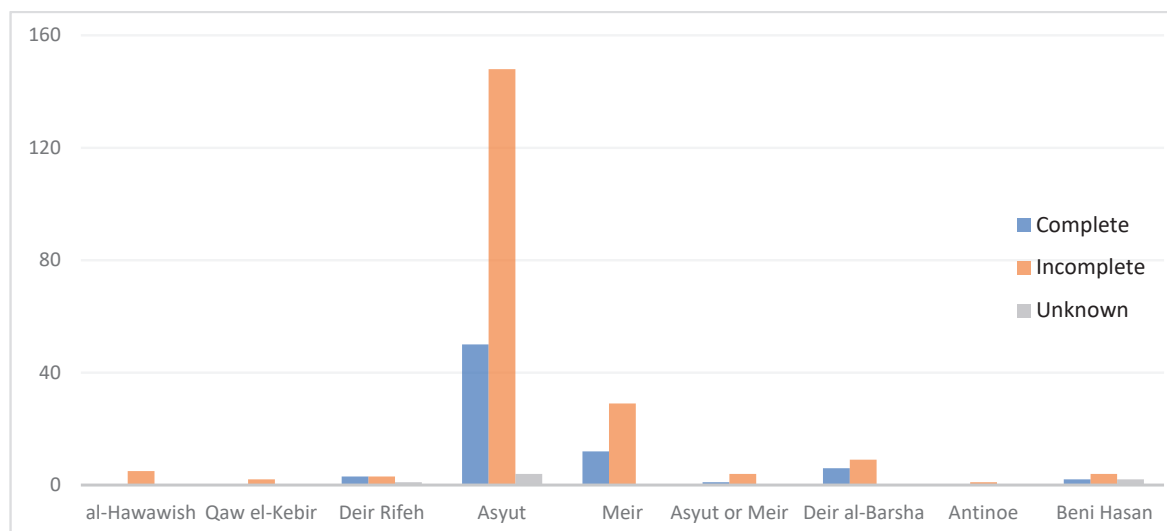


Fig. 3: Overview of the state of preservation of wooden statues from Middle Egypt

Factors determining the technical composition of a wooden statue are the intended size and the materials available, whereas the place of manufacture and the sex of the depicted do not seem to play a role. However, regional preferences concerning wooden statue types, or the composition of different pictorial elements and their stylistic execution were detected. Fig. 3 shows the distribution of complete vs. incomplete wooden statues for each necropolis. Especially for Asyut, where the available data is sufficient, it is possible to reconstruct fragmented wooden statues to a certain extent as will be demonstrated in the following section.

The possible reconstructions of wooden statues

While stylistic details, such as the facial features or the execution of an echelon-curl wig cannot be deduced from a remaining arm; one can reconstruct certain characteristics, pictorial elements or a statue's type based on one single fragment.³² In Asyut all male wooden statues are standing-striding and some hold a scepter in their right hand and a long staff in their left hand. In turn, all the ones with staff and scepter wear an echelon-curl wig and a short white skirt with or without a middle flap (*shendjit*-skirt) (Fig. 4).

Consequently, this type of wooden statue can be reconstructed based on a remaining left arm that is bent at the elbow or a remaining wooden base that not only has a cut-out to insert a

32 The term pictorial element derives from the German *Bildelemente*, see Fitzenreiter 2021: 55.

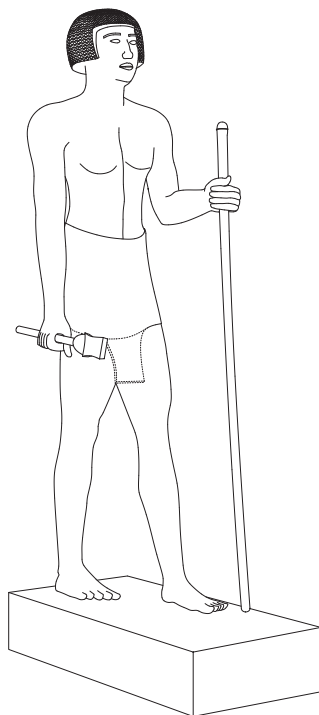


Fig. 4: Reconstruction of a male standing-striding wooden statue with staff and scepter from Asyut. Image: Oliver Hasselbach & Tina Beck



Fig. 5: Wooden statue base (BM EA 45070) of Sedekhiqer with small round depression for the long staff. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

standing-striding wooden statue but also shows a small round depression on the surface of the base in front of the left foot (Fig. 5). This notch once held or supported the end of the long staff to stabilize it.

Apart from the reconstruction of this specific statue type, one can also attribute the sex of a wooden statue, as illustrated in Tab. 2.

Tab. 2: Characteristics of female and male wooden statues from Asyut.

Male	Female
Predominately ochre-red/brown skin color	Predominately yellow skin color
Indicated musculature	Slender arms and legs
Fists	Open hands
Standing-striding posture	Standing posture or standing-striding

Even though a wooden arm can be interpreted as once belonging to a female wooden figure, based on its slenderness, lack of musculature, open hand, and yellow skin color, one cannot reconstruct with certainty its coiffure or choice of dress or whether the female wooden statue was standing or standing-striding. With only a wooden base left, one can at least reconstruct whether the wooden figure was standing or standing-striding depending on the cut-out in the wooden base. While standing statues from Asyut seem to belong all to female wooden statues, the base of a standing-striding wooden statue can belong to both sexes unless it is inscribed and identifies the person represented by the wooden statue. However, one cannot be certain that a single arm, especially when it is female, or a remaining base did not belong to an offering bearer or model figure.³³

Deities under cover

Analyzing fragments as thoroughly as complete wooden statues offers the unique possibility to better understand the production process, to reconstruct the appearance of a wooden statue and even to gain insight into ideas and beliefs that surrounded the creation of a wooden statue. Case in point: there are small incised and occasionally also painted figures of deities or small inscriptions in the shoulder joints next to the mortise of the tenon or the wooden nail. Nine examples are so far known, most come from Asyut. The first scholar who came across these inscriptions was Ludwig Borchardt who published in the *Catalogue Générale* of the Egyptian Museum Cairo a facsimile of a hieratic inscription on the inner side of a wooden statue's shoulder (Cairo CG 781),

³³ Zöllner-Engelhardt 2023: 633. Future research that goes beyond traditional Egyptological (etic) object classifications focusing on the material wood and its affordances concerning the production and usage of anthropomorphic figures in ancient Egypt is desperately needed. Therefore, an article that discusses wooden statues, offering bearers and estate figures together by focusing on their material and form is currently in preparation by M. Zöllner-Engelhardt and T. Beck.



Fig. 6: Left wooden arm (Cairo CG 781) with inscribed deities on the inner side of the shoulder. Image source: Borchardt 1930: 90, revised by Tina Beck

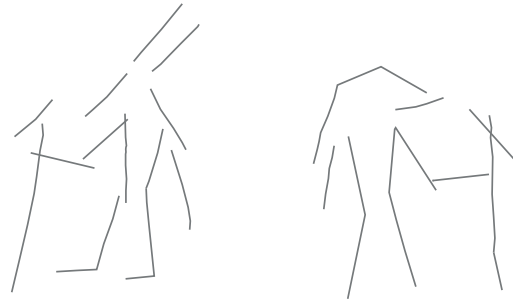


Fig. 7: Incised figures of Horus (right) and Seth (left) on the torso of the wooden statue of Nakht, Miho Museum. Drawing: Tina Beck, based on study images provided by the Miho Museum



Fig. 8: Overview of the incised figures of Horus and Seth (BM EA 45205, 45206, 45207, 45049). Photos: The Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0), drawings: Tina Beck



Fig 9: Overview of the incised figures of Isis and Nephthys (BM EA 45208, EA 45209).
Photos: The Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0), drawings: Tina Beck

referring to numerous deities (Fig. 6).³⁴ In 1998, Lawrence Berman briefly mentioned the depictions of two deities on the torso's side of the shoulder joint on the wooden statue of Nakht, now in the Miho Museum, however without any photos or facsimile (Fig. 7).³⁵ In a recent article, Marie Vandenbeusch published six wooden statue fragments (arms and feet) from the British Museum with incised figures of Horus, Seth, Isis and Nephthys (Fig. 8, Fig. 9).³⁶ Apart from these examples, two more can be added: The left arm of the wooden statue of Khenu, now in the Museo Egizio in Turin,³⁷ has a depiction of presumably Horus, and another wooden foot from the BM shows traces of the inscribed name Nephthys *nb.t ḥw.t* (Fig. 10, Fig. 11).³⁸

Tab. 3 gives a brief overview of the wooden statue fragments, and one can see that Horus and Seth are incised on six wooden arms; Horus occurs once on a left arm and thrice on a right arm. Seth is incised on two left arms, Nephthys on two left feet and Isis once on a right foot. The wooden statue of Nakht has an incised figure of Seth on the left side of the torso and an incised figure of Horus on the right side of the torso.³⁹ Cairo CG 781 bears more than one deity,

³⁴ Borchardt 1930; Chappaz 1993: 90.

³⁵ Berman 1998. Many thanks to Lawrence Berman and Hajime Inagaki who kindly provided me with images of the depictions.

³⁶ Vandenbeusch 2019. See BM EA 45205, 45206, 45207, 45208, 45209, 45049.

³⁷ Turin S. 14757. At this point I want to thank Paolo del Vesco and Valentina Brambilla from the Museo Egizio for their help and support during my research visit in 2019.

³⁸ BM EA 45210.

³⁹ Apparently, no figures were detected on the arms sides and it remains unknown whether there are incised figures of other deities (perhaps Isis and Nephthys) below the feet.

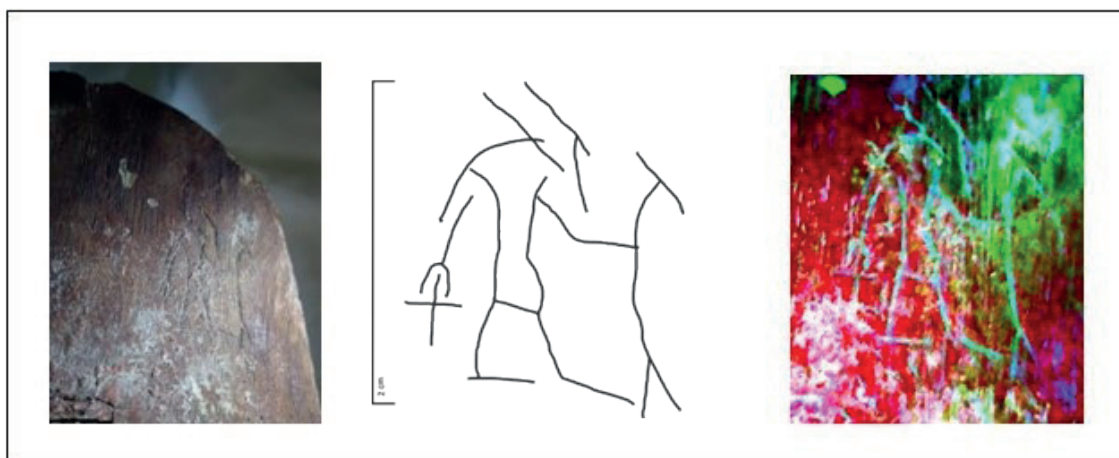


Fig. 10: Figure of a deity, presumably Horus, Turin S. 14757. Photo: Tina Beck, courtesy of the Museo Egizio Turin. Drawing and DStretch: Tina Beck

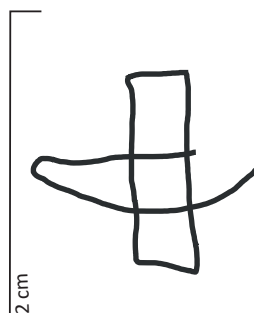


Fig. 11: Underside of left wooden foot BM EA 45210 with the inscription *nb(.t)-ḥw.t*. Photo: The Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0), drawing: Tina Beck

one can read Horus or Horus-Harachte, Isis and Osiris.⁴⁰ This arm that is – according to the information in the *Catalogue Générale* and the *Journal d'Entrée* of the Cairo Museum – either from Meir or Saqqara, clearly follows a different system than the arms from Asyut.

Tab. 3: Wooden statue fragments with incised deities

Wooden Statue	Provenance	Tomb	Short Description	Deity
BM EA 45049	Asyut	?	Left arm, bent at the elbow; depiction on inner side of the shoulder	Seth
BM EA 45205	Asyut	HO Tomb 7	Right arm, pendent; depiction on inner side of the shoulder	Horus with scepter and <i>ꜥnh</i>
BM EA 45206	Asyut	HO Tomb 7	Right arm, pendent; depiction on inner side of the shoulder	Horus with <i>wꜣs</i> -scepter
BM EA 45207	Asyut	HO Tomb 7	Left arm, bent at the elbow; depiction on inner side of the shoulder	Seth with <i>wꜣs</i> -scepter
BM EA 45208	Asyut	HO Tomb 7	Right foot; depiction below the foot on the tenon-like extension	Isis with <i>wꜣs</i> -scepter and <i>ꜥnh</i>
BM EA 45209	Asyut	HO Tomb 7	Left foot; depiction below the foot	Nephthys with <i>wꜣs</i> -scepter
BM EA 45210	Asyut	HO Tomb 7	Left foot; traces of an inscription below the foot on the tenon-like extension	Nephthys
Cairo CG 781, JE 18081, SR 2/263	Meir? Saqqara?	?	Left arm, bent at the elbow; cursive inscription on inner side of shoulder naming various deities	Horus or Horus-Harachte, Osiris, Isis
Nakht, Miho Museum	Asyut	?	Standing-striding statue, left arm bent, right arm pendent, short echelon-curl wig, shend-jit-skirt, staff and scepter; depictions on either side of the torso at the shoulder joints	Horus (right side), Seth (left side) both with <i>wꜣs</i> -scepter
Turin S. 14757	Asyut	?	Left arm, bent at the elbow, wooden base with feet; depiction on inner side of the shoulder	Horus with <i>wꜣs</i> -scepter and <i>ꜥnh</i>

The figures of Horus are falcon headed, Seth is depicted with the head of a donkey, and the female figures of Isis (BM EA 45208) and Nephthys (BM EA 45209) are accompanied with an inscription naming them precisely; BM EA 45209 has no female figure and only an inscription.⁴¹ The depiction on Turin S. 14757 and its identification with Horus needs to be further addressed (Fig. 10). The figure itself is clearly visible, as well as the *ꜥnh*-sign in its right hand and *wꜣs*-scepter in its left hand. However, the outline and shape of the head and thus its identification with a precise god is challenging. In reference to the wooden statue of Nakht (Miho Museum) and the two left wooden arms from the BM (EA 45207 und 45049) a donkey-headed deity – Seth – can be expected on a left wooden arm.⁴² In case of Turin S.14757

40 Many thanks to S. Töpfer (Museo Egizio Turin) for her thought on the reading of the hieratic script.

41 According to Vandenbeusch, BM EA 45049 and EA 45207 are the oldest attestations of Seth depicted with the head of a donkey (Vandenbeusch 2019: 259).

42 See below fn 55.

a (donkey-headed) Seth can hardly be recognized. It seems that the lines between scepter and head and above the head might not belong to the figure, even though they seem intentional. It is noteworthy that the line between head and scepter goes vertically along the grain and if this line was accidentally drawn one would not be able to erase it without damaging the surface of the wood. If one would identify these lines with a donkey's ears, the head of the figure would be dislocated from its shoulders. Based on these considerations the figure will be identified as a falcon headed Horus.

BM EA 45207 can be linked to a tomb excavated by David Hogarth in Asyut in 1906 (HO Tomb 7). Based on their similar sizes (especially for EA 45206, EA 45208 and EA 45209), their comparable manufacture and their registration in the BM with consecutive numbers, one can argue that BM EA 45205–45210 were all found in HO Tomb 27.⁴³ EA 45207 is a bent left arm and in combination with EA 45206, EA 45208, and EA 45209 one can reconstruct a male wooden statue that once held a long staff in its left hand and a scepter in its right hand. Furthermore, one can assume that this posture was combined with a short echelon-curl wig and a short skirt with or without middle flap (see previous section). This reconstructed wooden statue would then have Horus in its right shoulder, Seth in its left shoulder, Nephthys under the left foot, and Isis under the right foot.⁴⁴ All these depictions of deities were not meant to be seen after the production process of the wooden statue was completed. They were hidden and acted under cover. Their presence can be well compared to the mitre inscriptions of coffins. Silke Grallert, who has studied the mitre inscriptions of wooden coffins, argues that they work as a 'virtual' glue that would prevent evil spirits to enter the wooden coffins through the mitres and cause the destruction of the coffins.⁴⁵ By attaching a god or goddess to the most delicate parts of a wooden statue, namely the separately made arms and feet, the wooden statue was further protected from falling apart.⁴⁶ This shows the complicated and dynamic entanglements of materiality, human practices, statues and (ritual) functions. Apparently, the technical mechanism to hold a wooden statue together (tenons and nails) were not perceived as sufficient to stabilize a wooden figure. Thus, another mode of protection was applied that goes beyond the materiality, but is at the same time a direct result of the choice of material. The position of these deities clearly bears witness to their protective function for the wooden statue and therefore also for the deceased, since the wooden statue plays a vital part during the offering rituals performed during the funerary as well as at the succeeding and ongoing mortuary cult.⁴⁷ It seems likely that the placing and carving of the deities was connected to a ritual element. Furthermore, the deities protecting the wooden statues might have been called upon during

43 Ibid.: 256. Vandenbeusch did not include EA 45210 in her study. See also Beck 2023. For more information on the tomb, see Ryan 1988: 47–48; Zitzman 2010a: 25–26.

44 Whether the complete preserved wooden statue of Nakht now in the Miho Museum has incised figures of Nephthys and Isis below his feet is unknown.

45 Grallert 2007: 70. See also Grallert 1996.

46 Vandenbeusch 2019: 259.

47 See Beck 2023.

the funerary rituals as well as in the light of the mortuary cult in order to keep up their protection.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, no ritual texts are known that can be connected with the deities and their involvement as protective gods and goddesses for (wooden) statues.⁴⁹

The choice of deities for the Asyut fragments, namely the pairings Isis – Nephthys and Horus – Seth and their position in the arms and under the feet is not selected at random. Isis and Nephthys co-occur regularly, protecting the deceased.⁵⁰ The same can be postulated for Horus and Seth.⁵¹ The pairing of the deities is also common in texts of the so-called *Gliedervergottung*, meaning the identification of a body part with a deity.⁵² There is no consistency within these texts concerning a fixed or strict attribution of one body part with a specific deity,⁵³ however, the tandem of Isis and Nephthys is often reflected in their identification as twofold body parts like the lower legs or thighs, but also as the ears, the bud cheeks, the upper lip (Isis) and the lower lip (Nephthys).⁵⁴ And several examples identify Horus and Seth with a person's arms.⁵⁵ One can assume that many more arms and feet of wooden statues from Asyut have incised figures of deities, possibly also on wooden models, offering bearers and other objects that are made of more than one piece. It is furthermore noteworthy that Cairo CG 781 follows a different system than the Asyut arms and feet which might indicate regional preferences for the application and choice of deities.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The previous sections have highlighted the possibilities and the merits of studying wooden statue fragments. It was shown that – in the case of the necropolis of Asyut – the appearance of a wooden statue can, to a certain extent, be reconstructed *pars pro toto*. Furthermore, the

48 See Beck 2023.

49 Comparable contemporary figures of deities on statues made of stone are not known. Since these statues are usually made of one piece, there was no need to affix the limbs further by the placing of deities on their surface. However, one cannot know whether the arms or feet were nevertheless addressed or called out in reference to deities in order to protect the statue.

50 Leitz, et al. 2002a: 63; Leitz, et al. 2002b: 97; Hollis 2019: 92–102, Ahmed-Mohamed 2016: 94.

51 Barta 1973: 131.

52 For the so-called *Gliedervergottung*, see Quack 1995: 104; Eschweiler 1994: 81; Stöhr 2009: 175.

53 Ranke 1924: 558–559. See also Altenmüller 1977: 625.

54 Leitz, et al. 2002a: 63–64; Leitz, et al. 2002b: 97.

55 Leitz, et al. 2002c: 233; Leitz, et al. 2002d: 693. Vandenbeusch has suggested to connect the depictions with PT 359, where Horus is identified with the king's right side and Seth with his left side. The example of Turin S. 14757, a bent left arm of a male wooden statue with a falcon-headed Horus however shows that this idea cannot fully be applied (Vandenbeusch 2019: 258; see Beck 2023). Interestingly, in pTurin CGT 54053, a hymn to Thot, 19th dynasty, Nephthys is identified with the left side and Isis with the right side (Rossi/Pleyte 1869: 15, pl. XXIII). Another example can also be highlighted, namely pBerlin 3027 that comprises spells for mother and daughter (Erman 1901; Yamazaki 2003). Spell U identifies Horus and Seth with the arms and Isis and Nephthys with the legs of a child (Erman 1901: 48–49; Yamazaki 2003).

56 For regional characteristics concerning the coiffure and dress of wooden statues, see Beck 2023.

so far little-known depictions of deities in the shoulder joints and under the feet would never have come to the attention of scholars who focus only on complete wooden statues. It was argued above that the deities protected the wooden statue from falling apart at its weakest spot. A measure that had to be applied and depended on the object's materiality and its affordance concerning the production process. However, it goes beyond the technical possibilities of the plug-in system of wooden statue pieces by incorporating deities and therefore a divine level of protection. These relationships between materiality, human practices, including the production processes, ritual practices and deities bear witness of the dynamic entanglements of wooden statues with other humans and things.

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