

Egyptian Funerary Boat Model in the Australian Museum: Dating and Analysis

STAN FLOREK¹ , HEATHER BLEECHMORE² , JANA JONES³,
COLIN MCGREGOR², ROSS POGSON² , AND JIM SPECHT² 

¹ Engagement, Exhibitions & Cultural Connection,
Australian Museum, 1 William Street, Sydney NSW 2010, Australia

² Australian Museum Research Institute,
Australian Museum, 1 William Street, Sydney NSW 2010, Australia

³ Department of Ancient History, Macquarie University,
Balaclava Road, Macquarie Park NSW 2109, Australia

ABSTRACT. The unprovenanced and stylistically unusual wooden boat model (AM E60381) from the Australian Museum collection is examined to assess its identity and age. The analyses of construction method, wood, pigments, and gesso demonstrate the boat's compatibility with ancient Egyptian craftwork. Three species of wood are identified: cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*), sycamore fig (*Ficus sycomorus*), and sidr (*Ziziphus spina-christi*). Funerary boat models are distinctly associated with the 11th and 12th dynasties (mid-20th to 19th century BC). Yet eight radiocarbon dates obtained from six separate pieces of wood are between 24th and 16th century BC; six cluster at the late 3rd millennium BC. Conspicuous disparity between these dates and expected chronological context is discussed. Stylistically, resembling a divine (sun) barque, the model has no parallels among comparable representations. With combination of iconographic motifs, construction methods and radiocarbon dates, the model is attributed to the period spanning the late Old Kingdom and the early Middle Kingdom.

Introduction

Over the past two centuries, a widespread fascination with Egyptian civilization has resulted in a staggering dispersal of its ancient relics and artefacts around the world (Eldamaty & Trad, 2002; Stevenson 2019). Many artefacts acquired as souvenirs, “trophies” and collectible curios have only vague, if any, provenance and some are modern replicas or fakes (Fiechter, 2009; Boange, 2012). In some cases, it is difficult to prove their authenticity (Lilyquist, 2003:270). These artefacts constitute a significant body of material evidence, but are often of limited value for historical and cultural studies. In this paper we examine one such

unprovenanced artefact, the wooden model of a funerary boat, the authenticity of which has been questioned.

Our aim is to explore and assess the feasibility of meaningful research on artefacts deprived of context and specific provenance. We are mindful that not all individual relics can be usefully studied, but new and some well-established analytical techniques increasingly make such research possible. This boat model offers the opportunity for a range of analyses relating to materials (wood, and various organic and non-organic substances), structural complexity and stylistic intricacy in form, colours and symbolic connotations, which are likely to reveal some clues about the boat's origin and its history.

Keywords: archaeology; Egypt, funerary boat model; iconography; Middle Kingdom; Old Kingdom; pigments; radiocarbon dating; wood species

Corresponding author: Stan Florek Stan.Florek@Australian.Museum

Received: 20 October 2020 **Accepted:** 13 July 2021 **Published:** 22 September 2021 (in print and online simultaneously)

Publisher: The Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia (a statutory authority of, and principally funded by, the NSW State Government)

Citation: Florek, Stan, Heather Bleechmore, Jana Jones, Colin McGregor, Ross Pogson, and Jim Specht. 2021. Egyptian funerary boat model in the Australian Museum: dating and analysis. *Records of the Australian Museum* 73(2): 67–85. <https://doi.org/10.3853/j.2201-4349.73.2021.1738>

Copyright: © 2021 Florek, Bleechmore, Jones, McGregor, Pogson, Specht. This is an open access article licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited.

