

Model Of A Boat

Circa: Middle Kingdom 2040 - 1782 B.C.

Egypt

Middle Kingdom 2040 - 1782 B.C.

Wood, Polychrome

L: 79.5

The sailing boat manned by six crew seated in the prow, four sailors standing by the mast raising or lowering the linen sail, a seated bald-headed figure behind, and three standing sailors including the helmsman in the curved stern with rudder, four of the standing sailors wearing white painted chest bands, the deck painted with a red and white chequerboard design. Boats were an essential part of life in ancient Egypt, whether for carrying supplies, or transporting troops, pilgrims or mourners up and down the Nile. They varied in design according to function; reed boats being used for light use such as hunting in the marshes and lakes, papyrus boats being connected with the gods and royalty and used for entertainment or religious events (such as carrying statues of gods in religious ceremonies and pilgrimages), and sturdier wooden boats for heavier use such as trading voyages across the Mediterranean, Red Sea and beyond. Essential and exotic commodities and livestock were all imported by river and sea traffic. From Predynastic times, ships are depicted on rocks and pottery vessels, and continue to be represented in abundance throughout later periods on paintings, reliefs and models. The story of the Shipwrecked Sailor is one of the best-known tales in Egyptian literature; written during the Middle Kingdom around 2000 B.C., it is the original castaway story, telling of a fantastic journey into the Indian Ocean to the mythical land of Punt, a shipwreck on an island of enchantment, and encounters with a giant serpent, rounded off by rescue and salvation. Egyptian tombs often contained representations of activities and daily life, the images and models fulfilling a magic and religious function and assuring the continuation of such activities for the benefit of the deceased in the afterlife. The Pilgrimage to Abydos, the resting place and cult centre of Osiris, which every Egyptian hoped to perform during his life or in the afterlife, was made by boat; to arrive in Abydos was to share in the death and resurrection of the god, a belief particularly important in the Middle Kingdom. Just as the life of an ancient Egyptian was spent mainly on the Nile ("a man without a boat" being listed as one of the ills of life), so in death his spirit might travel in a boat upon the waters of the 'Godly West' or make the voyage to Abydos. To this end, model boats were placed in tombs during the Middle Kingdom (circa 2041-1750 B.C.), usually in pairs - one rigged with a sail as well as oars for sailing upriver (southward) with the prevailing wind from the Mediterranean, the other with oars alone for the journey downstream

against the prevailing north wind. The ancient Egyptians saw the blue sky as a celestial river and believed the gods, particulary the Sun god Re, travelled by special barques across the river of the sky by day (me'andjet-barque), and the waterways of the Underworld by night (mesektet barque). The model boats placed in tombs provided the souls of the deceased with a magical means of accompanying the Sun on its cyclical journey around the world.

Exhibitions

Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, 1984–87

Literature:

The Herald, Australia, Tuesday 26 July 1949, p7.

Leonard Joel Pty Ltd., Melbourne, 29 July 1949, lot 26.

'Life and Death in Ancient Egypt – Tjeby an Egyptian Mummy in the Museum of Victoria', 1984, p10–11.

Antiquities, Christie's, London, 13 October 2008, lot 69.

David Aaron Ltd, 2021, No. 17.