

Wooden funerary figures make up an integral part of the burial goods from the end of the Old Kingdom, the First Intermediate Period, and the beginning of the Middle Kingdom (Sixth to Twelfth Dynasty, 2350–634 BCE), and were likely intended to magically provide sustenance for the deceased in the afterlife. Models include boats, granaries, scenes of food production and industry, and processions of offering bearers, although other less common scenes do occur. Wooden funerary figures can also refer to representations of the tomb owner.

A wooden figure swathed in a white cloak makes up around 3% of the corpus (63 examples of cloaked figures from UK institutions), often appearing as a 'block' with just the head emerging. This has been interpreted in a number of ways with regards to the identity of the individual within the scene depending on the type of model on which it appears. However, when these figures are dispersed from their original context and present in isolation, their intended symbolism becomes more difficult to unravel. Using examples from the author's ongoing PhD research at over forty institutions, the existing theories on the identities of these mysterious individuals will be discussed and evaluated, with the intention of beginning to uncloak the secrets of these unusual figures.

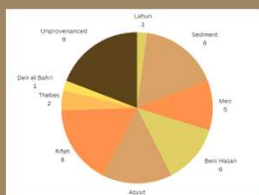


# Cloaked in Mystery: Cloaked figures as part of ancient Egyptian tomb models

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## Geographic origin of the cloaked figures



## Activity

- Fifty are upon model boats
- Two from a granary
- One from a butchery
- Three from a "funerary scene" (AN1922.71, Ashmolean, purported from Deir el Bersha).



## Representation of the deceased

Particularly when shown upon a model boat, a cloaked figure is often interpreted as a depiction of the deceased, or owner of the model, given that owning a cloak differentiates from those working or engaged in a physical activity. Nine cloaked figures identified as the deceased in the corpus.

## Helmsman

This figure is found seated at the rear of a model boat, operating the tiller. In order to carry out this task, the right arm would need to be free from the folds of the cloak **BUT** only one figure required per model boat, and often more occur.

Thirty-four non-cloaked figures in the position of helmsman occur within the corpus, compared to four wearing cloaks.

## Priest

Another interpretation (Harvey 2006; Merriman, 2011) is that the wearing of a cloak denotes a religious significance, as those surrounding the mummy of the deceased upon a boat are often wearing cloaks.

Only one cloaked figure have been identified as a priest, based on its shaven head (W693), but this is not conclusive.

## Interpretations of cloaked figures

### Mourners as Sons of Horus, and other deities

It has been suggested priests or family members enacting the roles of Isis and Nephthys, with the deceased as Osiris, with the groups of four figures in the roles of the Sons of Horus, but this is purely conjecture.



AN1896-1908 E.2296, Ashmolean, Beni Hasan, tomb 500

## Issues of provenance

One of the main issues when working with these figures is the lack of recording relating to them. When isolated from their original models, the provenance is rarely recorded, and so vital information is lost.

In addition, closer examination of models of known provenance indicates that many were 'repaired' shortly after excavation with pieces from incomplete models being used to create 'pastiche' models to meet the demands of the 'excavation committees' responsible for funding the work, and expecting complete models in return.



Garstang working on models at Beni Hasan, courtesy of the Garstang Museum

## Stance

- Eight seated, fifty-five are block figures
- Three of the seated are on chairs, five on blocks or benches typically used by rowers



EA25360, British Museum, purported from Meir, & 1884.81.20, Pitt Rivers Museum, purported from Thebes



## Presence of Linen

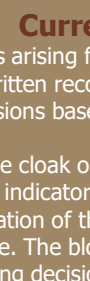
Eight have linen present (13%) **HOWEVER** Linen often doesn't survive (one museum discarded the linen for aesthetic reasons), or is inaccurately reassigned.



UC33622, Petrie Museum, Sedment



W693, The Egypt Centre, unprovenanced



EA45149, British Museum, Asyut, tomb 13

In light of the difficulties arising from the loss of context with many of the figures, and a lack of written records discussing these figures, it is not currently possible to draw conclusions based solely on the absence or presence of a cloak.

In spite of this, when the cloak occurs in conjunction with the right arm exposed, this can be an indicator that the figure is a helmsman from a model boat, and carved delineation of the hem of the cloak helps to hone a likely geographical provenance. The block shape with no limbs may in some instances be purely a manufacturing decision as it would be easier to carve.

