

Model from the tombe of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II



From Deir el-Bahari, Egypt
11th Dynasty, around 2000 BC

The baking process

This model showing the baking process was placed in the tomb of King Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II (2055-2004 BC) to ensure that he would be provided with bread for eternity. The model is essentially schematic, showing the stages of bread-making rather than a real bakery. It is particularly interesting to learn that kings of this period felt that they needed to be equipped with these objects - not only officials and more ordinary people.

Bread was the staple food of ancient Egypt. It was of such importance in everyday life that several hieroglyphic signs are of different types of loaf, and the symbol for 'offering' is a loaf of bread on a mat. It was included in the offerings made to sustain the deceased in the Afterlife, whether he was a humble farmer or a king.

The first stage of making bread was to grind the grain (barley or emmer) between a grinding stone and a saddle quern. This grinding wore down the millstones, making the flour very gritty. This grit, and other impurities such as sand, were responsible for many dental problems due to excessive wear to the teeth. The flour was sieved to remove the larger impurities, and then made into dough before being shaped into loaves which were baked in circular ovens.

S. Quirke and A.J. Spencer, *The British Museum book of anc* (London, The British Museum Press, 1992)