

Model of a Female Servant
The British Museum

From the tomb of Gua, Deir el-Bersha, Egypt
12th Dynasty, 1985-1795 BC

Carrying an offering of bread and meat



The majority of the models that were placed in wealthy tombs of the Middle Kingdom (about 2040-1750 BC) show the production of food offerings for the owner. This was to ensure that the offerings continued for eternity. The models included the preparation of fields for crops, granaries, bread making and butchery. This model, of an offering bearer shows the last stage of this process, the bringing of the offering to the tomb.

The female servant carries a basket on her head, much like women in rural Egypt today. This left one or both hands free to do other things, such as carrying bunches of vegetables or fowl, or holding onto a child. Studies of skeletons from cemeteries of ordinary people has confirmed that women carried heavy loads in this way, causing damage to the neck vertebrae. Such damage does not appear in male skeletons, and men are not depicted carrying things on their heads.

The girl's tight sheath dress of plain linen is typical of the costume worn by most women until the New Kingdom (about 1550-1070 BC). In the New Kingdom both men and women began to wear voluminous finely woven garments with a great deal of pleating. The sheath dress, often highly decorated, is only seen on representations of goddesses.

W. Seipel, *Ägypten: Götter, Gräber und di* (Linz, 1980)

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E. Strouhal, *Life in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 1992)

M. Stead, *Egyptian life* (London, The British Museum Press, 1986)

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