

Painted Wooden Model Boat **The British Museum**

From Egypt
12th Dynasty, about 1985-1795 BC



Boats were the commonest type of funerary models placed in tombs during the Middle Kingdom (about 2040-1750 BC). They provided the dead person with the magical means of travelling along the waterways of the Underworld. This was clearly imagined as resembling the Nile, as the models were often supplied in pairs: one with the sail erected, as if for travelling southward with the prevailing wind from the Mediterranean, and the other propelled by oars for northward journeys, in which the current of the river aided navigation.

This model represents a Nile boat manned by oarsmen. It was probably intended that a mast would have been slotted into the deck, but this was never supplied. The pilot, standing at the prow, was probably represented testing the depth of water with a sounding-pole (now lost). The steering equipment (also lost) would have been operated by the helmsman who stands at the stern. The owner of the craft is represented by a squatting figure wrapped in an enveloping cloak. Other figures include servants of the owner, one of whom holds a writing-tablet and carries a pack on his back.

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