Ancient Egyptian wooden statuettes from the Tomb of Minhotep in the Museo Egizio

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The study we would like to present is a preliminary research, whose results have led to a PhD research, that will focus on insights on artistic and constructing techniques of wooden funerary sculpture in Ancient Egypt. In particular, the central point of this work is the funerary assemblage from Minhotep's tomb, presently housed in the Museo Egizio, due to its rather clear provenance and historical period, and the high number of wooden sculptures it includes. The Egyptian workforce hired by Ernesto Schiaparelli found Minothep's funerary assemblage in 1908 in the Asyut necropolis and, among other objects, it counted three "offering bearer" statuettes, two statues of Minhotep, a bakery model and four boat models, which most likely came from specialized workshops operating in the area during the early XII Dynasty.

Given the lack of technical literature about this topic, we would like to contribute with a multidisciplinary study based on the technical comparison between wooden sculptures belonging to the same context, in order to collocate them in a possible production field, underlining similarities and differences both for the construction techniques and for the materials of the painted decoration. The study has started from artefacts of the same type, and will be extended to all the objects of the *corpus*.

The focus of the preliminary study was on the comparison between two of the three painted wooden sculptures of female offering bearers (n◦ inv. S. 08795; S. 8796) [1-2]. X-ray Computed Tomography (CT) has a significant role as investigation tool in our research, due to its non-destructive capability to investigate the whole inner structure of precious and unique artefacts. This permitted to obtain useful information about the characteristics of the wooden structure, besides the thickness of the decoration materials, and previous interventions made on the structure. Despite the same provenance and iconography of the artefacts, we found some important differences in terms of manufacturing techniques, use of materials and state of preservation.

The importance of underlining similar and different features in terms of assembly, modelling technique and materials could suggest possible different hands in the realization of the objects. As starting point for future systematic studies, these specific characteristics could contribute in the correct understanding of finds coming from the same context, but not necessarily produced by the same artisans. In the future, the possibility to apply similar investigation strategy to other wooden artefacts and statuettes belonging to the same area will be explored. Analogies and differences will also support the Egyptological study aiming at the possible identification of different workshops active in Asyut in the early Second Millennium BCE.

References

[1] Vigorelli, L., Re, A., Guidorzi, L., Cavaleri, T., Buscaglia, P., Nervo, M., Del Vesco, P., Borla, M., Grassini, S., Lo Giudice, A., Multi-analytical approach for the study of an ancient Egyptian wooden statuette from the collection of Museo Egizio of Torino. ACTA IMEKO 11, 1 (2022).

[2] Vigorelli, L., Re, A.,Buscaglia P., Manfredda N., Nervo M., Cavaleri T., Del Vesco P., Borla M., Grassini S., Guidorzi L., Lo Giudice A., Comparison of two ancient Egyptian Middle Kingdom statuettes from the Museo Egizio of Torino through computed tomographic measurements, Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports, 44, 103518 (2022).