

Aims and evidence

1.1. Introduction

The study of the watercraft of Pre and Early Dynastic Egypt is hampered by the absence of a categorisation system for these boats. Several extant competing systems, primarily drawing on watercraft seen as petroglyphs, cover some, but not all, hull types of these eras in Egyptian history. There is no single categorisation system that can be employed. The quality of the petroglyphs ranges from informative to primitive, with the proponents of these systems working more towards categorisations of the petroglyphs, rather than watercraft types. The work of the great Egyptologist Sir Flinders Petrie included depictions of boats seen on ceramics, but he did not use these to offer a watercraft categorisation.

This book examines the complex topic of the watercraft of Pre and Early Dynastic Egypt, bringing together disparate strands of previous research and introducing new material, specifically the remains of excavated hulls. It offers a new categorisation system for the Pre and Early Dynastic watercraft, intended to simplify the numerous, but often contradictory, existing categorisation systems for watercraft depicted primarily as petroglyphs or on pottery. A number of these depictions are revealed in the book to be non-genuine. Models from the time periods under consideration in this work are also considered, with some of these also being exposed as fakes. Surviving hulls, of which several are extant, albeit with severely degraded timbers, are examined in this work. These have not previously been categorised or examined in great detail.

Although the primary purpose of the research was to identify and categorise the watercraft of Pre and Early Dynastic Egypt, a second, but by no means lesser topic has also been approached. The book examines the technical constructional aspects of the decks and associated deck structures of the second Khufu hull, excavated at Giza. This vessel is referred to in this work as Khufu II, to differentiate it from the previous discovery, Khufu I. This earlier watercraft was categorised in a previous work (Stephens, 2012, p. 31) as a Type V (a). The means for the fitting and securement of figureheads and finials to hulls of the Khufu type is also considered. These features and fittings aboard Egyptian watercraft have not previously been examined in depth, and a considerable amount of new material has become available.

The Type V (a) categorisation was resultant of an expansion of the Reisner (1913) categorisation system. This expansion also included watercraft categorised utilising the acronym ETH (for Expedient Type Hull) followed by

a category number and suffix, where applicable. The Pre and Early Dynastic watercraft numerations are preceded by the acronym PED (Pre and Early Dynastic). A chart of these Types and ETH categories is seen at Appendix C.

This differentiation needs to be understood, as an additional category of ETH hull has been proposed in this work. This category was not included in the first work covering the watercraft of the Old and Middle Kingdoms (Stephens, 2012). This was due to a lack of information to form this category.

Finally, the means of positioning the oars aboard Khufu II are considered, and a novel aspect to the research undertaken for this book is the undertaking of a replication experiment on the techniques employed to construct the early dynastic Egyptian hull.

1.2. Aim of the research

The aim of the research in this work is to examine the watercraft utilised during the Pre and Early Dynastic Eras of Egypt. From this research, a tenable categorisation system for these eras will be offered. This, however, is not its single aim. Is it possible to identify, amongst the watercraft of Predynastic Egypt, the precursors of the hull types that would be utilised during the Old and subsequent kingdoms? The watercraft of the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms have been considered in two previous works (Stephens, 2012 & 2022). Although the main aim of this work is to examine the watercraft of the pre and early dynastic eras, referral will at times be made to watercraft after the Fourth Dynasty. As references will be made at points throughout this present work, the categorisations offered in these earlier publications are outlined in the introduction to Chapter 2.

Since the 2012 publication, a considerable amount of new information has become available regarding the techniques utilised to construct the deckhouses, baldachins, and the decks themselves aboard the two Fourth Dynasty watercraft buried alongside the Great Pyramid of Giza. These watercraft are of the hull type categorised as Type V (a) (Stephens, 2012, pp. 29 – 32, fig. 27). This category is an expansion on the Type V hull of Reisner (1913, pp. XVIII – XXI, fig. 76, pl. V).

The research will also consider the deck structures that were carried aboard the pre and early dynastic watercraft. Again, comparisons will be made to the equivalent structures of the later eras to establish if it is possible to establish when these structures had their nascence.

Considerable work regarding the Pre and Early Dynastic watercraft was undertaken by Boreux (1925), who commented on the age of previous publications. His research was an attempt to bring the disparate threads of information from texts, depictions, and research together. In this, he acknowledged the work of previous researchers, including Reisner (1913). Reisner's great work, categorising the models and surviving hulls in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, set the basis for categorising Ancient Egyptian watercraft. This system has been expanded in my research publications of 2012 & 2022. Boreux did not have the benefit of much of the information sources available to modern researchers, such as the remains of Egyptian watercraft, apart from two Middle Kingdom hulls recorded by Reisner. Additionally, he did not use sources such as petroglyphs or depictions on earthenware vessels. These sources form a distinct aspect for research into predynastic Egyptian watercraft.

A final aim of this research is to offer a work of benefit to both students and researchers of the watercraft of Pre and early Dynastic Egypt. This, in conjunction with two previous works, dealing with the ships and boats of the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms, will provide an in-depth understanding of the watercraft of this most vibrant and fascinating civilisation.

1.3. Evidence

A difficulty in researching the watercraft of Pre and Early Dynastic Egypt is the lack of multiple examples of the types employed. Unlike the plentiful corpus of pictorial depictions, from the Fourth Dynasty onwards, or the vast number of model watercraft of the Middle Kingdom, and to some extent, the New Kingdom, examples from the earlier eras are sparse. By contrast, however, researchers into the ships and boats of the earlier dynastic era have the benefit of surviving hulls, although these have all suffered degradation and loss to their constituent timbers.

Apart from the two Khufu vessels, substantial portions of Egyptian watercraft have been excavated. These range from the first to the fourth dynasties. In Chapter 2 of this work, attention is given to the information available by petroglyphs, as well as depictions on ceramics. Some model boats are also known but only one tomb scene, a bountiful resource in the latter eras, has, to this date, been discovered.

Where the remains of the timbers have been lost or almost totally lost, leaving only the outline of the hull, these are only mentioned in passing. For a more extensive consideration of these sources, I must draw the reader's attention to the recent work by D. Inglis (2020).

A technical point that must be made is to clarify the nautical terms "port" and "starboard", terms that appear numerous times in the text. The starboard side is the

right hand side of the vessel, with the port side being the left. Orientation of the port and starboard sides is achieved by facing towards the front, the bows of a watercraft. A map of primary evidence sites is present at Appendix D.