



Review

A. MERRIMAN

EGYPTIAN WATERCRAFT MODELS

FROM THE PREDYNASTIC TO THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIODS

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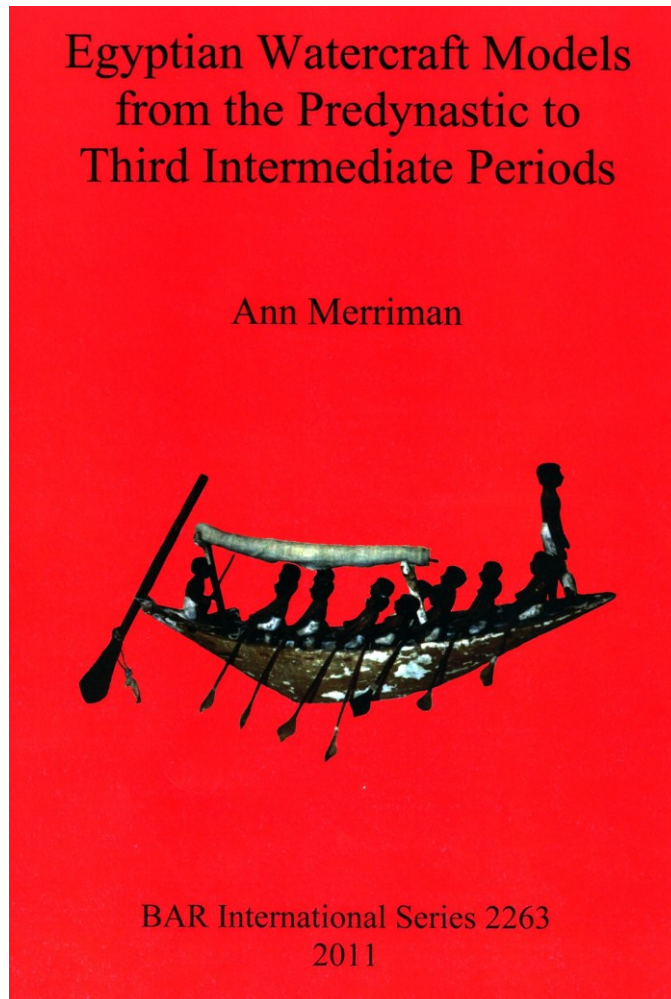
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Reviewed by Pearce Paul Creasman

Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, University of Arizona

In this publication, Ann Merriman undertakes an ambitious but vital task to increase our collective understanding of the maritime world and Egyptians' interactions with it in antiquity. The author recognizes that the boat was the epitome of transportation in ancient Egypt and that the ubiquitous miniature versions of watercraft so often found in tombs had yet to be academically harvested. Merriman's recording and synthetic evaluation of hundreds of models (586, to be exact) spanning approximately 3,000 years yields information in a great quantity and quality. While *Egyptian Watercraft Models from the Predynastic to Third Intermediate Periods* is a significant step in the direction of a better understanding of the models, numerous opportunities remain in the analysis of these often overlooked representations of watercraft. For example, unfortunately for



readers of this journal, the author misses clear opportunities to venture into discussion of interconnections (e.g., the Gurob ship model and the silver and gold boat models of Ahhotep¹).

The title suggests a comprehensive account and discussion, but the introduction confirms that this is instead more an academic catalog, intended for scholarly consumption by ship and boat specialists, in a manner similar to the topical volumes of the Egyptian Museum's *Catalogue Général*. While the author's statement that this work comprises "a full accounting of the known Ancient Egyptian watercraft models in existence"² is surely an exaggeration (e.g., fewer than ten private collections are referenced), the fact that more than 150 museum and public collections are sourced is nonetheless impressive.

The textual contributions

are well written, exceptionally well organized, and the arguments presented are well supported. However, despite a thorough review of early site reports and literature, sources and discoveries since ca. 2000 are largely overlooked,³ a surprise given the 2011 publication date.

The volume is organized in six sections: I–V and the appendices. Section I includes an introduction detailing the need for this work, previous iterations, and an explanation of how the information was collected. Section II elaborates on the theory and methodology employed in the development of the eponymous “Merriman Classification System.”⁴ Section III details the geographic (by nome) and chronologic (kingdom and period) origins, when known, of boat models and provides basic context by summarizing major boat-related finds of other forms, especially boat burials and two-dimensional representations. Section IV discusses “secondary” model attributes, such as modes of propulsion, fenders, gangplanks, a brief sub-section on decoration, and categorization of people, their tasks, and items found on deck. This section (IV), certain to garner interest from researchers who are not maritime centric, is a valuable contribution. Section V details the Merriman Classification System, which is discussed chronologically.

The five appendices (A–E) comprise 354 of the book’s 484 pages. Appendix A is a catalog of watercraft models that can be mined for data in several different formats. Here, some form of digital access would have been extremely useful for searching and analyzing the trove of data collected. Appendix B notes examples of “questionable artifacts, probable forgeries, and tourist

souvenirs.” Appendix C describes a Ptolemaic Period wooden boat model from Tebtunis, which lies outside the scope of the remainder of this work. Appendices D (McGrail’s water transport classification system) and E (a chronology) are referenced throughout the primary text. A thorough index is a welcome inclusion.

This volume would be vastly improved by the addition of a CD or online access to its images and data. Most of the images, especially those in the primary text, are too small to be useful, lack scales, and vary widely in quality and resolution, although those in the appendices are of generally better quality and dimensions are indicated when known. The practicalities of securing some of the images understandably impaired the results (*i.e.*, photographs taken through glass on display or reproduced from historic reports). As all images are in black and white, an accompanying disc of photographs would facilitate greater use of these materials, especially discussions of color and pigment, critical components in the interpretation of watercraft models.

This publication is clearly the culmination of years of arduous research that proved extremely rewarding. Unfortunately, missed opportunities in scope, presentation, and content limit the utility of the results. Regardless, Merriman’s work is invaluable as a catalog, providing numerous leads for future research, and should be found on the shelves of all those studying ancient Egyptian ships or maritime life.

NOTES

- ¹ Shelley Wachsmann, “Ahotep’s Silver Ship Model: The Minoan Context,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 2.3 (2010): 31–41.
- ² Merriman 2010, xi.
- ³ *E.g.*, Shelley Wachsmann, *Seagoing Ships and Seamanship in the Bronze Age Levant* (College Station: Texas A&M, 1998), for comparisons of watercraft models with contemporary cultures; Frederick Hocker and Cheryl Ward (eds), *The Philosophy of Shipbuilding* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004); Pearce Paul Creasman, “The Cairo Dahshur Boats,” (thesis, Texas A&M University, December, 2005): 1–8, for a discussion of ancient Egyptian boat models; David Fabre, *Seafaring in*

Ancient Egypt (London: Periplus, 2005); “Mahmoud Abd el-Raziq, Georges Castel and Pierre Tallet, “Ayn Soukhna et la mer Rouge,” *Égypte, Afrique et Orient* 41 (2006): 3–6, for recent finds at Ayn Soukhna.

- ⁴ Merriman’s theoretical foundation is built largely on “Sean McGrail 1985,” but no such reference is included in the bibliography. Complicating matters further, on page 129 the reference is noted as “McGrail 1984.” This likely refers to a 1985 manuscript “Towards a Classification of Water Transport.” A stronger theoretical base could have been constructed with the inclusion of more recent works, for example: Hocker and Ward 2004.