

Boats, models and the afterlife in Ancient Egypt

The Ure Museum's model boat [[Egypt 12](#)] is unusual because it is in a good state of preservation for a wooden artifact. It is from the Tomb of the Officials at Beni Hassan, on the east bank of the Nile. On the basis of its occupants the tomb dates to the Twelfth Dynasty in the Middle Kingdom of Egypt (1938–1759 BC).

Boats, and representations of them, are a relatively common find at Egyptian burial sites. Although they were especially frequent during the Middle Kingdom, many have been found from all periods of ancient Egyptian history. Two pits containing full-sized, but disassembled, barges were uncovered next to the Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza and thirty five elaborate models of various types of boat were discovered in Tutankhamun's tomb.

While full scale boats and many models were found in royal graves, most burial complexes included the image of some kind of boat. This comes from the Egyptian belief that an object or a representation of an object buried with you would follow you to the afterlife. An Egyptian tomb was packed with as much as that individual could afford in life; apparently there was no way of acquiring these items after death.

Boats are common grave goods because they were important in ancient Egyptian daily life. The river Nile ran all the way up the country, so boats were needed to cross the river and move up and down the country. As boats were so common in life, it was natural for the Egyptians to assume they would need them in the afterlife. Before interment (burial in the ground) each body was taken across the Nile on a boat. This mirrored the journey of the soul, from the land of the living to the afterlife.

William Davis

