

# The Life Cycle of an Object Project

## W553 Bronze Sistrum

### Introduction:

W553 is an example of a Late to Graeco-Roman period arched sistrum within the Wellcome collection, now at the Egypt Centre in Swansea<sup>1</sup> (fig. 1). It was purchased by Sir Henry Wellcome at a Sotheby's auction in 1919<sup>2</sup> and is now on permanent loan to the Egypt Centre from the Wellcome Trustees.

### Formal Properties

Fortunately W553 is in relatively good condition, besides a few noticeable damages to later be discussed; the diagnostic features remain clear to identify the object as an arched sistrum rattle. The top of the handle has the head of the goddess Hathor<sup>3</sup> in her iconographic frontal face and curled wig, terminating down into a standing, rather worn away, Bes figure. Both images appear on either side of the handle, however, Bes is shown having both a front and back figure. The front of the sistrum shows considerably more wear than the back, revealing a more detailed image of the decoration (fig. 2 and 3). Above the Bes figure on the back side are two raised lines of which on a similar sistrum from the Berlin Museum, is identified as Bes' feathered headdress<sup>4</sup>. The sistrum is of the arched style known to the Egyptians as *sekhem*<sup>5</sup>, and is missing its cross bars or metal disks seen in other examples of sistra to create its sound<sup>6</sup> (fig. 4). It stands at 17cm tall and weighs 98g (fig. 5 for measurement table) and is made of bronze. At the top of the arch is a protruding lump of metal which is fairly worn in its detail; similar lumps are described as kittens on a similar

<sup>1</sup> Egypt Centre MODES Catalogue entry for #W553.

<sup>2</sup> Gill, D. (2005), 48; Appendix A. W553 Object File.

<sup>3</sup> An Egyptian goddess of love, joy and music. Tyldesley, J. (1995), 129.

<sup>4</sup> Teeter, E. (2009), 36.

<sup>5</sup> Transcribed from the transliteration *shm*, written with an arched sistrum determinative. Sometimes this term, along with *sš.t* can be interchangeable as discussed by Reynders, M. in her article 'Sš.t and *shm*: names and types of the Egyptian sistrum'.

<sup>6</sup> British Museum Online Catalogue entry for #EA36310.

sistrum from the British Museum, EA6365<sup>7</sup> (fig. 4), and so it is very likely that this is what is depicted on W553 also.

### **Dating:**

In attempting to date W553, relative dating needs to be used, by comparing its stylistic features to multiple other sistra from different periods of Egyptian history. The Egypt Centre have dated W553 to be from between the Late Period and the Graeco-Roman Period and there is existing evidence to support this. The oldest surviving example of a sistrum is one belonging to King Teta of the Sixth Dynasty<sup>8</sup> and is of the naos-sistrum style, in Egyptian *sesheshet*<sup>9</sup> (fig. 6). It does not bear the head of Hathor like later examples and instead the Horus falcon is on the top, emphasising the cult iconography at the time; despite this omission, Hathor's clear association with the rattle remains, as shown in the engraved inscription dedicated to her<sup>10</sup>. In de Garris Davies' article on the King Teta sistrum, he observes that the arched style of sistra have not been found dating to before the Seventeenth Dynasty<sup>11</sup> (fig. 7). The arched style increased in popularity during the New Kingdom, developing stylistically through the Eighteenth Dynasty and Amarna Period (figs. 8 and 9). During the Ramesside Dynasties the naos-sistrum reappears in common use; however, the naos-sistrum never replaced the popularity of the arched sistrum, of which was widely used during the Late Period<sup>12</sup>.

The arched sistrum is known to have experienced wide use during the Late Period and Roman Empire<sup>13</sup> leading to the possibility that W553 could belong to this time period, which the Egypt Centre itself dates it to. This broad period of time has unsurprisingly left behind

<sup>7</sup> British Museum Online Catalogue entry for #EA6565.

<sup>8</sup> Manniche, L. (1991), 63; de Garris Davies, N. (1920), 70.

<sup>9</sup> Transcribed from the transliteration *ss̄.t*, written with a naos-sistrum determinative, Reydner, M. (1998), 1014.

<sup>10</sup> de Garris Davies, N. (1920), 70.

<sup>11</sup> de Garris Davies, N. (1920), 71; Wilkinson, J. (1978), 318.

<sup>12</sup> de Garris Davies, N. (1920), 71.

<sup>13</sup> Antelme, R. and Rossini, S. (2001), 40-41.

sistra of varying styles, often mirroring earlier New Kingdom designs (compare fig. 8 from New Kingdom and fig. 10 from the Late Period); however, a number survive of which bear great similarity to W553 and are labelled from the same time period. A Roman Period sistrum from the British Museum, EA6565<sup>14</sup>, bares great similarity to W553 with the frontal face on Hathor, kitten motif, and the Bes figure on the handle, only contrasting by the addition of a small podium on which Bes stands (fig. 4). Also from the British Museum, EA30735 is an earlier sistrum from 600 BCE<sup>15</sup> and it too shares the latter mentioned features although its handle is different, being a straight lightly decorated column (fig. 11). Other examples from the Late to Graeco-Roman Period share the same core features as W553, from the Berlin Museum<sup>16</sup> (fig. 12). The kittens that appear on each of these examples were an element that was commonly added to sistra during the Late Period, as well as figures of Bes<sup>17</sup>; furthermore, Quirke has suggested that the figures of cats on sistra could relate to the popular Late Period cult of Bast that also used sistra in their practices<sup>18</sup>. Due to the broad time scale of the Late Period to the Graeco-Roman Period it is likely numerous designs would be created; W553 is stylistically similar to a particular design found on sistra of these time periods and so it is reasonable to infer that it can indeed be dated between the Late to the Graeco-Roman Periods. A final consideration to note is in regards to the material that the object is made as it can further insights. Tin bronze was increasingly used from the Third Intermediate Period onwards and was in full use by the Late Period<sup>19</sup>; each of the Late Period and Graeco-Roman Period sistra mentioned, including W553 are unsurprisingly, therefore, made from bronze. This material shall be discussed next.

### **Substantial properties**

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<sup>14</sup> British Museum Online Catalogue entry for #EA6565.

<sup>15</sup> British Museum Online Catalogue entry for #EA30735.

<sup>16</sup> Kaiser, Werner, et al. (1967), 63.

<sup>17</sup> Manniche, L. (1991), 63.

<sup>18</sup> Quirke, S. (2000), 130.

<sup>19</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 21.

W553 is crafted from the copper and tin alloy of Bronze. Bronze is a metal that was imported already alloyed from Syria from the Twelfth Dynasty<sup>20</sup> and created in Egypt itself from the early New Kingdom onwards<sup>21</sup>. It could also be obtained through tribute and spoils-of-war<sup>22</sup>, and throughout Egypt's history scrap metal was melted down and re-used<sup>23</sup>. W553's bronze could have either been alloyed by the Egyptians themselves, or obtained through trade at this time. The source of tin on its own from this period is still uncertain<sup>24</sup>. Although there are Egyptian tin deposits in the Eastern desert and the fifth cataract in Nubia, there is no evidence of tin being mined in Dynastic Egypt<sup>25</sup>; it has been suggested that tin was obtained through trade with Crete and Cyprus<sup>26</sup>, and tin from Spain and Britain had reached the Mediterranean by the first millennium BCE<sup>27</sup>. Copper ores were mined and smelted in both the eastern desert and in the Sinai from as early as the Third Dynasty<sup>28</sup> and Timna was a primary source of copper from at least the Eighteenth Dynasty<sup>29</sup>, reaching its peak of activity during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties<sup>30</sup>. Mining in these areas would have entailed major state-sponsored expeditions<sup>31</sup> and relied on positive relations with the Sinai; however, evidence suggests that this activity abruptly ended during the reign of Rameses V and there is no sign that any further exploitation of the mine occurred during the Late Period. Egyptian influence in the Levant dramatically decreased in the Late Period<sup>32</sup>, despite being a time when Egyptian use of copper had reached its high point<sup>33</sup> and so it is likely that the copper for

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<sup>20</sup> Egyptian Metalworking and Tools, page 19.

<sup>21</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 19.

<sup>22</sup> Van de Mieroop, M. (2007), 183.

<sup>23</sup> Hill, M. (2001), 203.

<sup>24</sup> Ogden, J. (2009), 153.

<sup>25</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 18.

<sup>26</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 18.

<sup>27</sup> Dayton, J. (1971), 55-56.

<sup>28</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 14; from the Third Dynasty inscriptions dating to the reigns of Nebka, Djoser and Sekhemkhet, Baines, J. and Málek, J. (1984), 188.

<sup>29</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 14.

<sup>30</sup> Ogden, J. (2009), 150.

<sup>31</sup> Stevens, A and Eccleston, M. (2007), 147.

<sup>32</sup> Shaw, I. (2003), 321.

<sup>33</sup> Ogden, J. (2009), 150; Ramses VI was the last king whose name is attested in Sinai, Van Dijk, J. (2003), 301.

W553 was mined elsewhere. The use of copper and bronze was widespread by the Late Period and was available for creating a variety of items<sup>34</sup>, such as sistra, although pure copper would not have been easy to cast unless alloyed. Ogden writes,

“When copper is alloyed with tin there is a noticeable increase in the hardness and potential sharpness of copper alloy tools and weapons. The melting temperature drops from 1,083 °C (pure copper) to 1,005 °C for copper with 10 per cent tin. Tin also greatly increases the fluidity of the molten metal, thus facilitating casting.”<sup>35</sup>

It is clear that alloyed bronze would be an easier and more readily accessible metal to work with, especially when crafting detailed objects such as W553.

Another aspect to consider with regards to W553’s material is its colour. In his study, Riederer analysed 1,200 Egyptian copper alloyed objects; three figures of Harpocrates used over 16% tin, creating a pale alloy reflecting the child-god’s skin, leading him to theorise a link between the alloy chosen and the potential symbolic colour of the final piece<sup>36</sup>. Unfortunately many artefacts have undergone conservation and cleaning treatments by collectors and museums and so the original colour or texture has been damaged<sup>37</sup>; this may have happened to W553 and so the original shade of bronze may now be altered making any inferences about its colour significance difficult.

Most surviving examples of sistra are in bronze, although it is possible that other metals were used as well<sup>38</sup>. Sistra have also been found made of alabaster, wood and faience (figs. 6, 9 and 13).

### **Production:**

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<sup>34</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 14; Erman, A. (1971), 460-461.

<sup>35</sup> Ogden, J. (2009), 153.

<sup>36</sup> Ogden, J. (2009), 154.

<sup>37</sup> Ogden, J. (2009), 154.

<sup>38</sup> Lesko, B. (1999), 100.

W553's bronze was created using a transformative technology, alloying tin and copper ores. The crude ore, once mined, would have been transported to a factory; such factories were often located in a temple precinct or palace workshops<sup>39</sup> such as at Per-Ramesses, a vast bronze foundry<sup>40</sup>. The metal would then have been crushed into small pieces before being smelted in a furnace<sup>41</sup>; from the Ramesside period onwards shaft furnaces which could reach temperatures of 1200°C were predominantly used<sup>42</sup> and equipment such as blow pipes, fans and bellows were used to increase the air-flow and raise the temperature<sup>43</sup>. The New Kingdom tomb of Rekhmire (TT100) contains scenes depicting the production of copper alloy objects<sup>44</sup>, giving a clear picture of the process of smelting and casting<sup>45</sup> (fig. 14). Casting moulds made of clay or stone would be used to form the metal into the desired shape as examples from the Middle Kingdom town of Lahun show<sup>46</sup>. Moulds also remain from the Theban Necropolis close to an excavated hearth<sup>47</sup>, and such moulds are further depicted as early as the Old Kingdom, in the tomb of Pepiankh<sup>48</sup> (fig. 15). It is possible that complex objects such as sistra, would have then been cast in a mould and split into smaller sections to be further treated by smiths<sup>49</sup>. The attention to detail required for forming the decoration of W553 makes it most unlikely that hammering the metal on an anvil took place<sup>50</sup>, and so casting would be the most effective option. The Egyptians mastered the skill of annealing metal from as early as the Pre-dynastic period<sup>51</sup> and this method would also have been used for detailed objects, such as sistra. Annealing required the craftsman to reheat the metal and

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<sup>39</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 21.

<sup>40</sup> Wilkinson, T. (2010), 336-7.

<sup>41</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 14-15.

<sup>42</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 15.

<sup>43</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 24.

<sup>44</sup> Ogden, J. (2009), 156.

<sup>45</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 25.

<sup>46</sup> Szpakowska, K. (2008), 86-7.

<sup>47</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 27.

<sup>48</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 30.

<sup>49</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 27-28; Ogden, J. (2009), 155.

<sup>50</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 28; Ogden, J. (2009), 158.

<sup>51</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 30.

whilst holding it with tongs, the metal could then be precisely shaped<sup>52</sup>. To complete the sistrum, its surfaces would be polished and imperfections such as the *sprue* would be removed<sup>53</sup>.

Further considerations towards W553's manufacture refer back to the alloy choice and the possibility of colour significance. A study by Young on a bronze situla from the Late Period highlighted the remains of a grey alloyed metal surface layer, contrasting to the base alloy of the main sistrum; it appears that the bronze casting was then dipped into a separate molten alloy to simulate a silver finish<sup>54</sup>. W553 appears to have traces of an external surface layer, suggesting that this process was also undergone for this Late Period sistrum (fig. 16).

The metal-working factories were often within close proximity to the mines due to the difficulties of transporting the heavy ore and ingots<sup>55</sup>. Evidence of this can be seen at the copper mines of Timna of which during the New Kingdom had local smelting furnaces<sup>56</sup> that were fuelled by the charcoal of acacia trees<sup>57</sup>. It can be certain that W553 was created by a skilled craftsman although we cannot tell exactly where and when it was crafted. All that can be determined is that due to the use of bronze and its stylistic features, W553 could have been created between the Late and Graeco-Roman periods. The production location of W553 is inconclusive; however, it can be inferred that the miners would have gathered the raw materials needed for W553's bronze from mines outside of Egypt<sup>58</sup>, pre-alloyed or alloyed upon obtaining the metal, before trained metal-smiths would smelt and cast the metal in a mould. Egyptian craftsmen may have been responsible for this, but as the evidence of Hittite tools at Qantir suggest, foreign craftsmen were also employed for this job<sup>59</sup>. During the Late

<sup>52</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 30.

<sup>53</sup> Ogden, J. (2000), 157.

<sup>54</sup> Young, E. (1959), 105-6.

<sup>55</sup> Ogden, J. (2000), 148.

<sup>56</sup> Rothenburg, B. (1972), 69.

<sup>57</sup> Van de Mieroop, M. (2007), 169.

<sup>58</sup> Scheel, B. (1989), 14-18.

<sup>59</sup> Ogden, J. (2009), 155.

Period the metal industry was expanding considerably and the mass production of temple offerings has been commented upon as being of a ‘poor-quality’<sup>60</sup>. If W553 was intended as a votive offering then it may be considered amongst these ‘poor-quality’ offerings.

### **Function:**

The manifest function of the sistrum is its use as a rattle to make sound and music; the sound that it created has been said to resemble the rustling papyrus thickets in which the goddess Isis mythologically raised her son Horus<sup>61</sup>. The arched sistrum would have produced a more powerful sound to the naos-sistrum<sup>62</sup> and so the former, such as W553, are likely to have been more popular in practical use; however, musical scenes appear to show the two types of sistra being used alternately, giving no clear preference<sup>63</sup>. Music was a popular aspect of Dynastic life and so musical instruments would have been used on many occasions for celebration<sup>64</sup>. A sistrum’s latent function would be as a sacred and magical object used to create a sound to drive away evil influences during times of vulnerability, such as childbirth<sup>65</sup>. This could be why on W553 we see the image of Bes, an apotropaic deity whose ugliness was effective in scaring away evil and protecting the home, mothers and children<sup>66</sup>, who could also be seen using a drum for the same effect as a sistrum<sup>67</sup>. Due to the presence of Bes on its handle, W553 could have been used for the purpose of driving away evil and invoking protection. Sistra were commonly played during religious ceremonies to appease and pacify deities, who were believed to be

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<sup>60</sup> Ogden, J. (2009), 160.

<sup>61</sup> Manniche, L. (1991), 63; other versions name Isis as the actor in this myth, Antelme, R. and Rossini, S. (2001), 40-41.

<sup>62</sup> Manniche, L. (1991), 63.

<sup>63</sup> Teeter, E. (2009), 31.

<sup>64</sup> Tyldesley, J. (1995), 126.

<sup>65</sup> Pinch, G. (2002), 231; Szpakowska, K. (2008), 114.

<sup>66</sup> Pinch, G. (2002), 119.

<sup>67</sup> Pinch, G. (2002), 118.

entertained by music<sup>68</sup>, especially the goddess Hathor who features on W553 and is the most frequently depicted deity on sistra (see list of figures for examples).

Whether sistra such as W553, were being used for musical, protective or cultic purposes it was almost exclusively played by females as shown in all ancient depictions of it in use<sup>69</sup>, except from in two circumstances. In later periods it was the king's role to maintain Egypt's relationship to the gods and in texts he would offer the sistrum to Hathor, 'to calm her anger', although no images remain showing a king playing the sistrum himself<sup>70</sup>. The other reference to a male in relation sistrum is by the god Ihy, the divine son of Hathor, and he is shown using both types of sistrum (fig. 17), appealing to his mother<sup>71</sup>. These are the only instances where males were shown using sistra and so it is very reasonable to conclude that W553 would have been used by a female; despite this, it is known that during the Middle Kingdom a male Priest was the one who instructed Priestesses in the shaking of sistra and must have held it briefly for this teaching<sup>72</sup>.

Due to its cultic imagery it is most likely that it was involved in religious practices, particularly in the cult of Hathor, being used by a Priestess<sup>73</sup> (fig. 18). Musicians who participated in the cult of a deity were held in high esteem and could rise to a high social status<sup>74</sup> as shown in many paintings and reliefs from both temples and tombs<sup>75</sup>. There existed three types of sistrum players known as *shmyt*, *sšywt* and *ihywt*, yet it is unclear how these sistrum players had distinct duties from the temple singers who also used sistra<sup>76</sup>. W553 therefore, could have been used either by a temple singer or a specific sistrum player within a cult.

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<sup>68</sup> Teeter, E. (2009), 25.

<sup>69</sup> de Garris Davies, N. (1920), 70.

<sup>70</sup> Gillam, R. (2005), 54.

<sup>71</sup> Antelme, R. and Rossini, S. (2001), 40-41.

<sup>72</sup> Manniche, L. (1991), 86.

<sup>73</sup> Teeter, E. (2011), Plate III.

<sup>74</sup> Manniche, L. (1991), 120-124.

<sup>75</sup> Teeter, E. (2009), 25.

<sup>76</sup> Teeter, E. (2009), 26.

Aside from being used in the cult of Hathor, it is also possible that W553 was used within the cult of Bast due to the presence of kittens on the rattle and the popularity of her cult during the Late Period<sup>77</sup>. Other goddesses associated with the sistrum were Isis at the end of the Dynastic Period<sup>78</sup>, and Mut<sup>79</sup>. Sistra were also used with the cult of the Amarna Period cult of the Aten and were shaken by Queen Nefertiti<sup>80</sup> and the young princesses<sup>81</sup> (fig. 19); however, such rattles would have not included any cultic images due to the nature of Atenism, especially later on in the cult, as shown on a rattle belonging to Tutankhamun (fig. 9). This evidence of female children using the sistrum does raise a further possibility for W553: W553 stands at 17cm in length, with its handle only reaching 5.36cm, as primary evidence shows that the head of Hathor would have sat above the hand of the user (figs. 7 and 8); this is significantly too small for the average modern adult female to comfortably hold<sup>82</sup>. To support this, another image from the New Kingdom tomb of Rekhmire shows adult women and young girls offering sistra that vary in size according to the size (and age) of the user (fig. 20); this promisingly leads to the idea that W553 may have been intended for the use of a young girl.

In the Late and Graeco-Roman periods numerous objects were dedicated to Hathor in particular<sup>83</sup> and many votive offerings dedicated to her have been found in 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty temple complexes such as Deir el-Bahri<sup>84</sup>. Commonly found are cult objects offered and left at temples so that the objects function would be in continuous use there<sup>85</sup>. A sistrum would certainly be a relevant cult object to offer to Hathor. Many votive offerings were miniature representations of the cultic objects and evidence exists of sistra being used in

<sup>77</sup> Quirke, S. (2000), 130.

<sup>78</sup> Tyldesley, J (1995), 129.

<sup>79</sup> Lesko, B. (1999), 154.

<sup>80</sup> Manniche, L. (1991), 86.

<sup>81</sup> Gillam, R. (2005), 77.

<sup>82</sup> The author stands at 5ft tall, with small hands and held the sistrum to demonstrate this.

<sup>83</sup> Pinch, G. and Waraksa, A. (2009), 1.

<sup>84</sup> Pinch, G. and Waraksa, A. (2009), 4.

<sup>85</sup> Pinch, G. and Waraksa, A. (2009), 5.

this way<sup>86</sup>; due to W553's small size it is more possible that this could be an example of that. Other votive examples, however, are larger than W553, being sizable enough to comfortably use (fig. 13) and so size may not necessarily be indicative, especially with the possibility of it being used by a child. Votive objects that were big enough to use, were indeed used by the Priests, or in the case of sistra, Priestesses, before being stored in votive deposits<sup>87</sup>. Wear on the handle, to be discussed later, suggests possible damage caused by handling the object numerous times and so it is most likely that it was indeed in full use. W553 could therefore be a votive offering belonging to a temple and used by a young Priestess before being deposited in a votive cache.

In its use within cultic practices, sistra like W553 were often used within the cult of the goddess Hathor, being associated with her from the Old Kingdom onwards through to the Roman Period, as shown with remaining examples, such as the sistrum of King Teta of the Sixth Dynasty<sup>88</sup> and EA6565 at the British Museum<sup>89</sup>. W553 clearly bares the image of Hathor upon its handle, marking it as a likely item belonging to her cult. Depictions of Priestesses using sistra give suggestions as to how they were used. Sistra appear to have been carried in pairs of Priestesses<sup>90</sup>, shaken 'to divide the phrases of recitation'<sup>91</sup> and in the case of the cult of Hathor, and possibly other goddesses, the *menat* necklace would be shaken in conjunction<sup>92</sup>. This use with the *menat* necklace leads into sistra being used by hired mourning women during funerary rites, again shaking sistra to ward away negative influences<sup>93</sup>.

### **Transformation and Deposition:**

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<sup>86</sup> Pinch, G. and Waraksa, A. (2009), 6.

<sup>87</sup> Pinch, G. and Waraksa, A. (2009), 5-6.

<sup>88</sup> de Garris Davies, N. (1920), 70.

<sup>89</sup> British Museum Online Catalogue entry for #EA36310.

<sup>90</sup> de Garris Davies, N. (1920), 70.

<sup>91</sup> Manniche, L. (1991), 63.

<sup>92</sup> Antelme, R. and Rossini, S. (2001), 44.

<sup>93</sup> Teeter, E. (2011), 71; Manniche, L. (1991), 24.

The Egypt Centre's Object File on W553 gives no indication of W553's provenance<sup>94</sup>, and so due to the nature of early Egyptology, its archaeological context appears to have been lost. The exact systemic context of W553 is also unknown; however, it can be safe to infer that it is possible to have been used within a temple to Hathor in the predicted Period. Potential examples of Late period and Graeco-Roman period temples and chapels dedicated to Hathor are the temple of Dendera, Kom Abu Billo and el-Kab<sup>95</sup>. Without knowing the context of the provenance, it is also difficult to determine the nature of how W553 came to the end of its ancient life. No records have been found to suggest that W553 had its metal-disks or cross-bars in tact when found and so it can only be assumed that these wore away in its find-spot or were broken in antiquity and thus disposed of. Regardless of whether or not it was broken in antiquity or wore away in its find-spot, W553 was a sacred object and because of this, it is most likely to have been buried in a cache within the temple after its use had been fulfilled<sup>96</sup>.

As for W553's condition, it retains its diagnostic features of the arched rattle, Hathor's head and Bes handle, which are in relatively good condition. In all other examples of sistra crossbars or metal disks would have been attached to the rattle arch in order to create the sound (figs. 4 and 10) and so we know that W553 is now missing this feature. In comparing W553 with contemporary and stylistically similar sistra, it is likely that W553 had crossbars instead of metal disks to make its sound (fig. 4). Another aspect of W553's current condition is its aforementioned worn away front face, in comparison to the clearly preserved back. The face of Hathor and the Bes figure are considerably worn away, yet are still recognisable (fig. 2). The handle of W553 is slightly bent at the Bes figure (fig. 21) and this wear can suggest a possible indication of its use: When held, the position of the handle in

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<sup>94</sup> Appendix A. W553 Object File.

<sup>95</sup> Wilkinson, R. (2000), 111,149, 203.

<sup>96</sup> Pinch, G. and Waraksa, A. (2009), 5-6.

ones hand is such that the frequent contact would result in the expected wearing away of the image by the fingers, and the bend in the handle could be caused by pressure from the thumb when shaking the rattle<sup>97</sup>. Again, due to the size of the W553 this may have been held and worn away by a small female child<sup>98</sup>.

### **Rediscovery and Display:**

W553 was purchased by Sir Henry Wellcome at Sotheby's auction in London in 1919<sup>99</sup>, yet little more information on its origin can be determined. From the Egypt Centre's Object File<sup>100</sup> W553's lot number is listed as 162 and tracing this back to the Sotheby's 1919 catalogue it explains that W553 was grouped with the following objects:

“A bronze forepart of a horse, late period; a sistrum with a handle bearing an aegis on each side and terminated by a figure of Bes; a pair of bronze bracelets; and two pairs of small castanets.”<sup>101</sup>

This grouping could possibly be the collection of objects that W553 was discovered with originally providing a context of provenience; this is possible due to other items listed as Late Period objects as well, although this cannot be certain without further confirmation. In 1971 part of the collection was granted on permanent loan to the University College of Swansea by the Wellcome Trustees, on the condition that it would be available to any who wish to use it for research and that it would be open to the public<sup>102</sup>. It was thus kept in a small museum within the Department of Classics<sup>103</sup>. With the transition from the University College of Swansea, to the University of Wales Swansea in the mid-1990's, the plans to build the Egypt

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<sup>97</sup> The author stands at 5ft tall, with small hands and held the sistrum to demonstrate this.

<sup>98</sup> Gillam, R. (2005), 77.

<sup>99</sup> Gill, D. (2005), 48.

<sup>100</sup> Appendix A. W553 Object File.

<sup>101</sup> Anonymous (1919), 17.

<sup>102</sup> Gill, D. (2005), 48.

<sup>103</sup> Gill, D. (2005), 48.

Centre were in motion and by 1998 it was formally opened, creating a new home for the collection<sup>104</sup>. W553 is now on display in the ‘House of Life’ Gallery of the Egypt Centre in the entertainment cabinet, emphasising to visitors its musical function. Although it has a justified place in the entertainment cabinet, its religious design may give alternative clues to its original function in cultic practices; by placing it in this cabinet it may lose its deeply religious meaning to the public from this view. It therefore may be preferable to place it in a religious items cabinet or a cabinet specifically designed for women in ancient Egypt. Since handling W553 for this study it is now being displayed faced down in favour of viewing the less worn away side of the handle; Hathor’s face is now more clearly seen and the Bes figure is facing down.

**Word Count: 3955**

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<sup>104</sup> Gill, D. (2005), 48-49.

# Figures



**Figure 1.**  
W553. Photo by author.



**Figure 2.**  
W553, front side of the handle. Photo by author.



**Figure 3.**  
W553, back side of the handle. Photo by author.



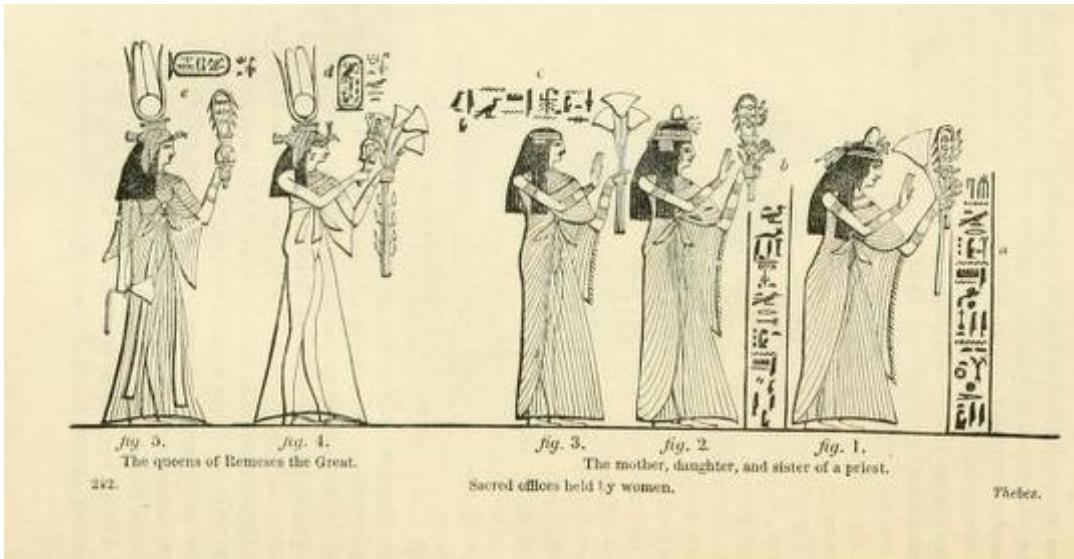
**Figure 4.**  
British Museum online catalogue, EA6365

MEASUREMENT TABLE						
Handle length	8.065					
Handle width	3.24	2.95	0.685	1.299	1.61	1.21
Rattle length	8.305					
Rattle width	2.865	2.55	2.13	2.03		
Bes length	2.74					
Overall length	17					

**Figure 5.**  
Measurement table in millimetres, for W553. Table by Maite Balado, 2012.



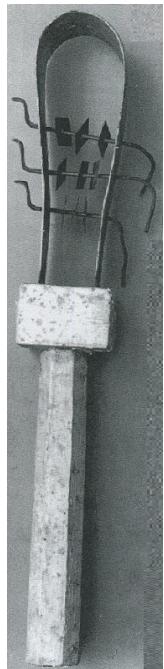
**Figure 6.**  
de Garis Davies, N. (1920), 70.



**Figure 7.**  
Wilkinson, J. (1978), 318.



**Figure 8.**  
Roberts, A. (1995), 57.



**Figure 9.**

Roberts, A. (1995), 60.



**Figure 10.**

British Museum online catalogue EA36310



**Figure 11.**  
British Museum online catalogue, EA30735.

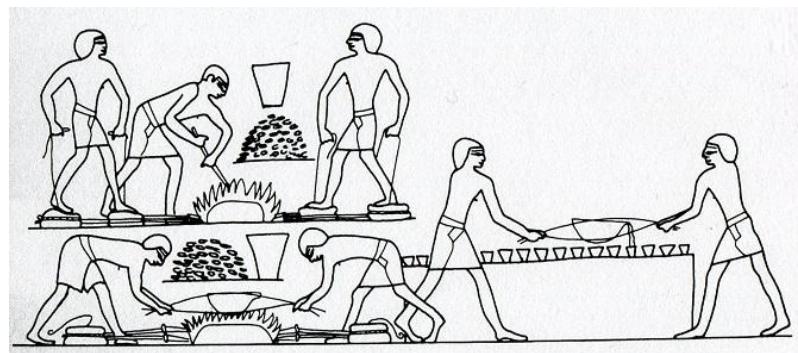


**Figure 12.**  
Kaiser, Werner, et al. (1967), No. 717.



**Figure 13**

Metropolitan Museum of Art searchable database, #50.99



**Figure 14**

Scheel, B. (1989), 25.



**Figure 15**

Scheel, L. (1989), 30.



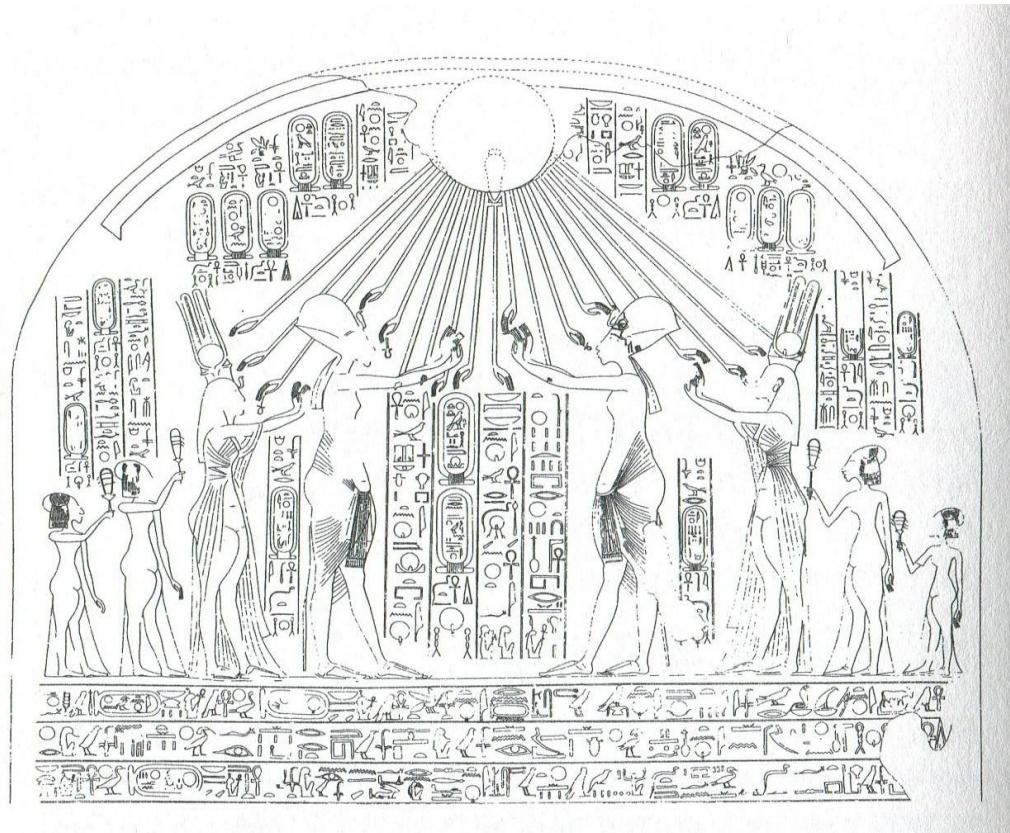
**Figure 16**  
W553, remains of a surface layer on the arch. Photo by author.



**Figure 17**  
Roberts, A. (1995), 31.



**Figure 18**  
Teeter, E. (2011), Plate III.



**Figure 19**  
Hornung, E. (2001), 62.



**Figure 20**  
Teeter, E. (2009), 31.



**Figure 21**  
W553, showing the bend in the handle. Photo by author.

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# Appendix

## A. Egypt Centre Object File

*PnA OS  
17/11/11  
W*

Record number	W553
Number of items	1
Previous number	26410 (W)
Previous number	162 (lot)
Previous number	164097 (label found separate from object)
Identification	
Simple name	sistrum
Title	Sistrum. This rattle was played mainly by women during religious ceremonies. It was also used to provide music at parties.
Brief description	Bronze sistrum with Hathor head and handle terminating in a Bes figure. 17cm long. Late Dynastic-Graeco-Roman. Purchased by Wellcome at auction in 1919. Sistra were associated with Hathor. Hathor was a goddess of fertility whose festivals included music, dance and drunkenness. The sound of the sistrum was said to be like the sound of Hathor as she walks through the papyrus plants. Bes seems to have been a household god connected with fertility and the protection of women in childbirth. He is often shown as a dwarf god, with a sticking out tongue and a leonine mane. See A. Barahona 2002 'Ancient Objects Relating to Music And Ancient Egypt In The National Archaeological Museum Of Madrid' In Eldamaty, M. and M. Trad eds. 'Egyptian Museum Collections Around The World' for further information on sistra. Also, Reynders, M. 1998 'Names and Types of Egyptian Sistra' In Willy Clarysse, Antoon Schoors and Harco Willems 'Egyptian Religion the last thousand years. Studies dedicated to the memory of Jan Quaegebeur' Part II, Leuven: Peters, p1014-1026.
Caption	Sistrwm. Roedd y rhuglen hon yn cael ei channu'n bennaf gan fenywod yn ystod seremoniau crefyddol.
Temporary location	
Location	display, first floor, music
Description	
Height	17cm
Material	metal, copper alloy
Association	
Concept	music
Person	god : Bes
Person	god : Hathor
Period	Late Period - Graeco-Roman
Period	Graeco Roman
Photography	
Date	1997
Person	photographer : Donohue, V.A.
Photograph number	27/ neg 12
Photograph number	slide
Photograph number	object file
Photography	
Photograph number	65/ neg 17-18
Date	2001
Person	photographer : Graves-Brown
Acquisition	
Corporate body	loan : Wellcome Trustees
Address	from : Wellcome Trustees
Note3	Gibbs Building, 215 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BE
Date	See file on Wellcome loan for conditions of loan
	15.2.1971

**Previous transfer**  
Date                   **18.7.1919**  
Corporate body       **auctioneer : Sotheby**

**Notes**  
**Wellcome flimsy slip in Wellcome Institute reads '26410. One model of a sistrum with handle terminating in aegis of Bes. 6 3/4 " high. Soth 18/7/19 Lot 162. Case 1015'**

**Related record**      **W553.jpg**

**Condition check**  
Date                   **4.9.2009**  
Person                 **: Graves-Brown**  
Reason                 **moved location**

**Condition check**  
Date                   **7.3.2011**  
Person                 **: Graves-Brown**  
Reason                 **handling session for international Woman's Day**

**Condition check**  
Date                   **14.11.2011**  
Reason                 **student handling session**  
Person                 **: Graves-Brown**