



Object Life Cycle Project:

W553 – Bronze Sistrum.

Description:



Figure 1: W553.

Accession number W553 in the collection of The Egypt Centre, Swansea, is described as an example of an ancient Egyptian Late Period/Graeco-Roman bronze sistrum¹ (fig. 1).

The 8cm long handle is surmounted by a bi-frontal Hathor-type head with bovine ears and a long wig

which curls outwards at the lappets, on each shoulder is a cobra uraeus rearing up towards the edge of the rattle. The handle is terminated at the bottom with a squat, leonine Bes-type figure rendered almost fully in the round. The top part is an elongated arch of similar length to the handle (table 1; fig. 2) and is pierced with three sets of parallel holes. There is the

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					

Table 1: Measurements of W553 in Centimetres.

¹ Egypt Centre MODES Catalogue #W553. Appendix a.

remains of an embellishment on the outside of the arch at the top. The piece was originally symmetrical on both sides; front and back were identical apart from the Bes figure whose back is shown on the reverse of the handle. It weighs 98g. The diagnostic feature remain

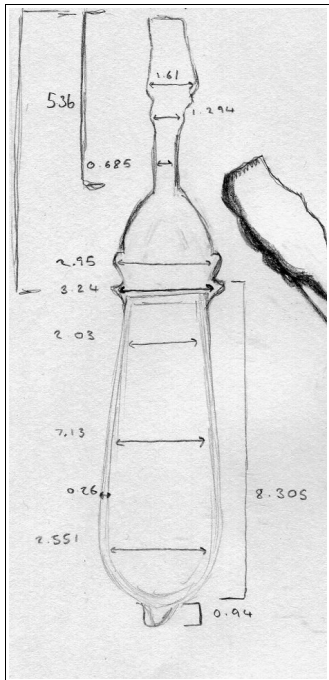


Figure 2: Illustration of W553 with dimensions.

intact, allowing the object to be identified with confidence as a *looped* or *arched* type sistrum or ritualistic rattle. Examples of sistra are known throughout Egyptian history; a descendent of the instrument is still used in the Coptic Church today.² There are three drilled holes in the arched top parallel to one another that would have held the metal cross-pieces and circular or square musical *jangles* as shown in other examples.³ On the pinnacle of the arch is a small, badly worn bulge of metal which is initially elusive.

However, upon comparing W553 with similar models, such as EA6365 from the British Museum, it is probable that the feature

was a cat or kitten figure.⁴

Dating:

As W553 is not inscribed, and advanced dating technologies are not available, it is only possible to attempt to date the object stylistically. The oldest surviving example of a sistrum (fig.3) is a small naos-type faïence instrument of the Old Kingdom which is unlike W553 in material or style, and is described by Davies⁵ as a votive offering. The arched-type sistrum appears to have begun to overtake the naos-type as a functional instrument, in terms of

2 Manniche 1991:63,128.

3 British Museum Online Catalogue #EA36310. fig. 4.

4 British Museum Online Catalogue #EA 6365. fig. 5.

5 Davies 1920:70. It is inscribed with the name of king Teti, first Pharaoh of the Sixth Dynasty and is dedicated to Hathor of Dendera by him.

popularity, during the Middle Kingdom, due to the latter's fragility⁶ and poor acoustic properties. Although the arched sistrum is referred to in Middle Kingdom texts, they are not known from depictions until the beginning of the New Kingdom.⁷ The pair of sistra discovered in the tomb of Tutankhamun (fig.6) resembles W553 in shape, but has a handle of gilded wood, and is entirely free from religious iconography or embellishments.⁸ The plain design is likely to be an anomaly of the Amarna period from which this pair date. A representations in the tomb of Rekhmire, which pre-dates⁹ Tutankhamun by about four generations, shows what looks like a very similar item being offered to the owner, but clearly shows a Hathor-type head at the top of the handle,¹⁰ but is relatively plain in comparison to the lavishly decorated later sistra. A date earlier than the New Kingdom can likely be ruled out for W553 for these reasons. After the New Kingdom elements such as cats, kittens, figures of Bes and Uraeus serpents were added to the design of sistra.¹¹ If the design became typologically more lavish and complex throughout the Third Intermediate Period and into the Graeco-Roman Period as it appears to have done,¹² then W553 seems to suit a tentative date assignment of the late Ptolemaic Period. W553 contains all the embellishments and iconography found in Ptolemaic pieces without having the developments associated with the Roman Period sistra, such as the thicker metal arch top or the wide, heavy, *jangle-less* crosspieces (figs.5, 7 and 8). This is difficult to ascertain, as most surviving sistra are assigned very vague dates with large ranges, so it must remain

6 Most noas sistra are made from Egyptian faience (Teeter & Johnson 2009:31).

7 Manniche 1991:63.

8 Reeves 1990:165.

9 Rekhmire was a Vizier during the Eighteenth Dynasty reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II (Shaw & Nicholson 1995:243).

10 Davies 1944:Plate 63.

11 Manniche 1991:63.

12 The Tutankhamun pair do not fit the typology, but anomalies in religious iconography are a feature of the Amarna Period from which they originate.

speculation.

Materials:

W553 is probably made of bronze, an alloy created from copper and tin, normally with no more than 5% tin content.¹³ Early interest in the mineral wealth of South-west Sinai by the Egyptians is attested by three royal inscriptions from the Third Dynasty¹⁴ at Wadi Maghara,¹⁵ and by the extensive temples of Hathor at Timna and Serabit el-Khadim which date to at least the Middle Kingdom.¹⁶ The Eastern Desert also provided rich deposits of minerals, including copper ore.¹⁷ Further into the Eastern Sinai, copper mining was taking place at Timna, near Eilat in modern Israel¹⁸ from late Eighteenth Dynasty through to the Twentieth Dynasty,¹⁹ but there is evidence to suggest that this ended abruptly during the reign of Ramesses V.²⁰ Also, according to Baines & Málek²¹ there is no evidence that the Egyptians themselves *ever* mined copper in the Sinai; they may have been collaborating with local workers or simply trading for the metal.²² The remoteness of these sites would have demanded major expeditions; well organised and state-sponsored.²³ There are multiple possibilities for the origin of Egyptian copper, tin was not native to Egypt and had to be

13 Ogden 2000:151; Scheel 1989:19.

14 These rock inscriptions date to the reigns of the Third Dynasty kings Sanakht/Nebka, Netjerikhet/Djoser and Sekhemkhet and are close to the ancient turquoise mines (Baines & Malek 1984:188). All depict smiting-scenes, Sekhemkhet dispatches a 'local chieftain' (Baker 2008:368) and Netjerikhet a 'wretched sand-dweller' (Baker 2008:98).

15 Lacovara 2001:295.

16 Baines & Malek 1984:188; Shaw 2001:100.

17 Scheel 1989:14; Shaw 2001:99.

18 Baines & Malek 1984:19.

19 Rothenburg 1972:63.

20 Ogden 2000:150.

21 Baines & Malek 1984:19.

22 Van de Mierop 2007:169.

23 Stevens & Eccleston 2007:147.

sourced elsewhere.²⁴ During the Twelfth Dynasty,²⁵ imports of already alloyed bronze came from Syria,²⁶ yet the source of New Kingdom tin is uncertain.²⁷ It has been suggested that tin was obtained from as far east as India or Malaysia,²⁸ tin from Spain and Britain had certainly reached the Mediterranean in the first millennium BC.²⁹ The late Bronze Age shipwreck discovered near Ulu Burun, Turkey contained ingots of copper and tin amongst the cargo, suggesting that these items were traded widely in the Near East at this time.³⁰

One of the largest buildings at the New Kingdom site of Per-Ramesses was a vast bronze foundry worked by hundred of craftsmen;³¹ these furnaces were for casting imported ingots rather than smelting.³² It is in these foundries that the metals would be mixed to create alloys. The ore would have to be smelted relatively close to the mines in which it was sourced and to a suitable fuel source for ease of transportation; it would be much less efficient to convey heavy raw materials than purified metal ingots.³³ During the New Kingdom, the existence of smelting furnaces at Timna suggests that some mining facilities processed their ore on site,³⁴ fuelled by charcoal from local acacia trees.³⁵

24 Van de Mieroop 2007:168.

25 The metal was known in Egypt much earlier. The oldest bronze objects discovered in Egypt are a pair of ritual vessels, a ewer and basin, from the tomb of the Second Dynasty king, Khasekhemwy at Abydos (Shaw & Nicholson 1995:80; Ogden 2000:153). The origin of the material for these objects is unknown.

26 Scheel 1989:19; Shaw & Nicholson 1995:80.

27 Ogden 2000:153.

28 Van de Mieroop 2007:169-70.

29 Dayton 1971:55-6.

30 Bass 1986:269.

31 Wilkinson 2010:336-7.

32 Markowitz & Lacovara 2001:201.

33 Ogden 2000:148.

34 Rothenburg 1972:69. According to Shaw (2001:99) copper was also smelted on-site at the mining areas of Wadi Dara and Buhen.

35 Van de Mieroop 2007:169. Of course, bronze was also obtained through tribute and spoils-of-war (Van de Mieroop 2007:183), and scrap from earlier periods was undoubtedly melted down and re-used (Hill 2001:203).

Most surviving examples of arched sistra, are of bronze.³⁶ Casting with pure copper is a difficult skill with great potential for gas bubbles and shrinkage,³⁷ which undermines the integrity of the piece. However, alloying tin with the copper makes it much easier to cast, with lower firing temperatures required and increased fluidity in the molten metal which produces a stronger, harder material.³⁸ There was a great increase in the popularity of casting objects in bronze beginning in the Third Intermediate Period and continuing through to the Graeco-Roman Period,³⁹ when W553 was most likely produced. The practicality of the material for this type of object would likely outweigh any symbolic considerations.

It is not clear whether the colour of W553 was intended to be symbolic or not, indeed it is difficult to be sure that the raw bronze was the intended

surface colour. In Young's⁴⁰ analysis of a late period bronze situla⁴¹ he discovered that the remains of a bluish-grey surface layer (50% copper, 50% lead) had a significantly different composition to the bronze core (1-5% tin, 95-99% copper). This led him to infer that the bronze casting was dipped into a molten mass of the lead-copper alloy, before



Figure 9: W553, Remains of a dark coating on inside?

being re-chased and polished; creating a finish intended to simulate silver.⁴² This could explain the remains of a darker outer layer on W553 (fig.9, right).

36 Lesko 1999:100. Sistra have been found in other materials such as travertine/Egyptian alabaster (Davies 1920:69), wood and bronze (Reeves 1990:165) and Egyptian faience (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Accession no. 50.99).

37 Ogden 2000:153.

38 Markowitz & Lacovara 2001:200.

39 Teeter & Johnson 2009:18-19.

40 Young 1959:105-6.

41 Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession No. 58.76.5.

42 A silver/white colour was associated with cleanliness, ritual purity and sacredness (Wilkinson 1994:109). Silver was a more valuable metal in ancient Egypt (Shaw & Nicholson 1995:270), so the coating may have been applied for prestige.

Production:

To make the sistrum handle, it is likely that the technique of lost-wax casting was employed. A model is first made with wax, which is then covered with a casing of clay, which becomes the mould. The assemblage is then heated which melts and burns off the wax; molten metal can then be poured into the resulting void, giving an almost exact copy of the wax model in metal.⁴³ The piece can then be polished after the surface details have been refined and any imperfections removed, such as the *sprue* - the metal filled pouring hole.⁴⁴ The handle of W553 is solid-cast, so this method could apply.

An Eighteenth Dynasty depiction of the production of metal objects is preserved in the decorations of the tomb of Rekhmire⁴⁵ (figs.10 & 13) and in the First Intermediate Period tomb of Pepiankh of Meir where the use of clay or stone moulds is shown.⁴⁶

Some objects were beaten from metal plates rather than casted. The molten metal would be poured and beaten on an anvil made of stone. The craftsmen could then hammer the metal into plates. Using two different types of hammer; one with a round head and the other with a flat head, the plate could be beaten into shape. The flat hammer smoothed the metal while

43 Ogden 2000:157; Van de Mieroop 2007:202.

44 Ogden 2000:157.

45 Davis 1944:Plates 52 & 53. Decoration from the tomb of Rekhmire (TT100) – The Passage, South Wall: East Half, Upper Section, Figures 10 & 13.

46 Blackman & Apted 1953:Plate 17.

the round headed one chased the metal.⁴⁷

We can infer that W553 was formed in this way, while the intricate handle was cast, the top arch was beaten and shaped by hand before the two pieces were soldered together.⁴⁸ The holes for the bars that would have held the *jangles* would have been manually drilled.⁴⁹ There may be visible evidence of soldering on the insides of the arch where it meets the handle, but this remains unclear. It is possible that items such as W553 were mass-produced, the Egyptians certainly used moulds of clay or stone to produce identical metal objects, such as the fired-clay chisel, axe and knife moulds from the Middle Kingdom found at Lahun.⁵⁰ However, sitra whether votive or functional, were ritual objects and thus, were likely to have been made with care; not churned out like utilitarian tools such as axe heads. W553 could be unique. Until an identical example or corresponding mould is discovered, it impossible to say with absolute surety.

Production of bronze objects would likely have been situated close to the royal capital,⁵¹ where highly trained metal-smiths would have worked the metal into the finished pieces. At Per-Ramesses evidence for the presence of Hittite and other foreign tools at this time, would suggest that some of the craftsmen were foreigners working in Egypt.⁵²

The evidence from tomb scenes would suggest that the production of metal objects was an exclusively male occupation; as these types of scene rarely reflect reality but an idealised version, it is unknown whether women or children were involved in the process.

47 Scheel 1989:28.

48 Accession no. 1970.572 from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, clearly shows that the top was made separately and then fixed to the handle (Brovarski 1987:53).

49 This technology was well known to the Ancient Egyptians (Shaw 2012:108).

50 Szpakowska 2008:86-7; Object #UC72571 in the Petrie Museum online catalogue.

51 Wilson 2010:251.

52 Bard 2008:215; Ogden 2000:155.

It can be said with near certainty that W553 was manufactured by professional, skilled craftsmen, but as we cannot be sure at this point *when* W553 was manufactured, it is therefore impossible to say where and by whom it was made.

Use and Function:

Sistra were used from at least the Old Kingdom as musical instruments, ritual tools and even as votive offerings.⁵³ The sound of the sistrum was thought to pacify deities, making them better disposed to the prayers of humankind,⁵⁴ and perhaps repelling demonic forces,⁵⁵ by emulating the gentle swishing sound made by the shaking of bundled papyrus stems⁵⁶ or the rustling of papyrus swaying the breeze; this is connected to a Hathoric ritual called 'Plucking Papyrus for Hathor'.⁵⁷ The Egyptian terms for sistrum are *sš.t*⁵⁸ and *shm*⁵⁹; they are often thought to refer to the naos-type and the later, arched-type, respectively,⁶⁰ but Reynders⁶¹ points out that the designation are ambiguous, demonstrating that the determinatives could be swapped. It has been suggested that the *shm*⁶² was a wand with

53 Davies 1920:70.

54 Pinch 1998:159; Teeter & Johnson 2009:25.

55 In the Coptic Church a sistrum is gestured towards the cardinal points to cleanse the sacred area before the performance of a ritual (Manniche 1991:128).

56 Manniche 1991:63.

57 Teeter & Johnson 2009:30.

58 Faulkner 1962:248.

59 Faulkner 1962:241.

60 Manniche 1991:64.

61 Reynders 1998:1015.

62 Gardiner (1957:591) defines the word as 'Sceptre of Authority', and appears with varying determinatives. The word 'sistrum' may well derive from the Egyptian *shm* (Reynders 1998:1015).

powerful, magical properties which became a sistrum or *sš.t* only when the sound producing elements were added.⁶³ This could point to the origin of the sistrum as a 'magic wand'. Sistra seem to be mainly associated with Hathor and normally feature the bi-frontal cow-eared mask, the iconography of which is strongly influenced by that of the goddess Bat.⁶⁴ The iconography of W553, incorporating the elements of Hathor, Bes and a kitten, could refer to the 'Myth of the Eye of the Sun' in which Hathor assumed the form of a destructive lioness in order to kill a rebellious mankind, until she was pacified with music.⁶⁵ The kitten is a manifestation of a feline goddess at her most benign. The bi-frontal face symbolises power and the ability to see before and behind.⁶⁶ The inclusion of the dwarf god, Bes in the imagery continues the theme of repelling evil.⁶⁷ It seems the instrument could also be used in secular situations; in the story of Sinuhe, the shaking of sistrums by the king's children were part of the character's welcoming home celebrations.⁶⁸

Sistra were predominately associated with female⁶⁹ members of an elite group of priestesses whose role in temple rituals was highly valued; the 'restoration stela' of Tutankhamun records that temple singers and dancers were paid directly from the royal

63 Davies 1920:71.

64 Fischer 1962:7; Pinch 1993:159. Bat's distinctive inwardly curling horns are probably shown of the Namer Palette (Hornung 1996:103).

65 Teeter & Johnson 2009:36.

66 Lesko 1999:23.

67 Hornung 1996:279. Bes is a helpful deity who is usually associated with the protection of children and women in childbirth.

68 Simpson 2003:65. This story is set during the Twelfth Dynasty reign of Senusert I.

69 Although normally associated with women, a depiction from a Middle Kingdom tomb at Kom el-Hisn shows the male owner, Khesuwer, instructing groups of women in the art of sistrum shaking and hand-clapping. His titles included 'overseer of prophets' and 'instructor of singers' (Manniche 1991:123). A male king could also be shown wielding sistra; in the temple of Mut at Karnak, Ptolemy II is shown presenting the objects to Mut and Sakhmet (Manniche 1991:66) and a similar scene at Karnak of the Emperor Augustus (Reynders 1998:1017).

treasury.⁷⁰ Onstine observes that terms for 'sistrum player' are often associated with the role of the *šmꜣyt* or chantress; a role that seemed to involve singing or chanting accompanied by percussion instruments including the sistrum in a mainly religious context.⁷¹ This function was fulfilled by women of high status; there is evidence that the wives of high officials were sistrum players⁷² and even queens and princesses were depicted playing sistra for the gods⁷³. The relatively small scale of W553 leads to a suspicion that it may have been a votive offering or even belonged to a child.

Transformation, Re-use and Deposition:

There is no evidence for any transformation or re-use of W553 before AD 1919 beyond what can be inferred its appearance. The item lost its cross-pieces and sound producing chimes at some point, but has remained largely intact. It is impossible to determine where it was deposited due to lack of providence or close parallels. It may have been added to a temple votive deposit at the end of its useful life or, due to its small size its intended use may have been as a votive⁷⁴ offering like the similar sized king Teti example⁷⁵ and deposited inside a temple's grounds as was the custom.⁷⁶ Funerary context is known from the

70 Teeter & Johnson 2009:25-6.

71 Onstine 2005:9.

72 Ridealgh 2010:124-5.

73 Aldred 1988:226.

74 The deposition of a votive offering was intended to pacify the deity in question in order that the devotee's prayers be answered by a favourably disposed god. The objects were left behind, presumably to ensure the suppliant's continued presence in the temple (Pinch & Waraska 2009:5). There was, perhaps, a religious taboo surrounding the destruction of what had become the god's property.

75 Davies 1920:70. fig.3.

76 Pinch & Waraksa 2009:2.

Tutankhamun pair, which are unlike W553 in style and scale.⁷⁷ It is more likely that a ritual object would be disposed of deliberately rather than accidentally.

Rediscovery:

W553 was purchased by Sir Henry Solomon Wellcome⁷⁸ (1853-1936) at auction on 18th July 1919,⁷⁹ but before that nothing is currently known. The Sotheby's auction catalogue for that date shows that lot number 162 included the sistrum along with with three other objects, but gives no clue as to the previous owner⁸⁰ as it is listed under 'other properties'.⁸¹ At least two Egyptologists have expressed frustrated scepticism regarding the collection. Dodson⁸² has remarked that nothing is known of the mode of acquisition of the vast majority of items from the Wellcome collection, even though much of it was bought on the antiquities market. Aldred⁸³ claimed that an industry had sprung up surrounding the supply of objects to the Wellcome collection which stretched from the West Coast of Africa to the salerooms of Covent Garden, saying "...much of it is false, or specially made up for sale to the Wellcome collection.". The inference is that Wellcome was not particularly interested or knowledgeable about the quality of what was being purchased on his behalf and was happy

77 Reeves 1990:165. fig.6.

78 Dawson & Uphill 1995:436-7.

79 Egypt Centre MODES Catalogue #W553.

80 Although the sourcing of this catalogue was less helpful with W553, it does shed light on the previous owner of another object in the Egypt Centre collection: W229a/GR3, a Cypriot pottery horse, was previously in the collection of a Laurence Cesnola (Anonymous 1919:4).

81 Anonymous 1919:17. See appendix c.

82 Dodson 1998:93.

83 Aldred 1973 [letter]. See appendix d. Cyril Aldred (1914-1991) was a British Egyptologist and Art historian (Dawson & Uphill 1995:9).

to keep signing large cheques while allowing his agents to continue to add to the collection unchecked; much of the Egyptian material from the collection that went to Swansea had not been unpacked since their acquisition.⁸⁴ Aldred also states that he examined a sample of the collection in Birmingham and found, apart from one or two nice items from well known collections, to consist mostly of forgeries. The tone of Cyril Aldred's letter is skeptical in the extreme regarding the Wellcome collection and the current curator of the Egypt Centre disagrees with his opinion, accusing Aldred of being overly negative, and stating that the vast majority of items in the Egyptian collections are genuine.⁸⁵ If indeed there was an unscrupulous supply network coupled with a wealthy and uninterested patron,⁸⁶ it would undoubtedly have been a magnet for objects of dubious provenance – products of illegal excavations and looting. Tomb robbing and looting has been prevalent in Egypt for as long as valuables have been buried alongside the dead; there is archaeological evidence for it during the Predynastic Period,⁸⁷ and textual records of prosecutions for the offence from the Twentieth Dynasty.⁸⁸ There was certainly a lucrative trade in stolen antiquities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as is evidenced by the case of the Royal Cache at Dier el-Bahri. In 1881, the director of the Antiquities Service Gaston Maspero officially opened the cache and found it containing the bodies of many of the Pharaohs of the New Kingdom, hidden there for security during the Twenty-first Dynasty. This tomb was in the process of being carefully plundered by a local family, when Maspero became suspicious about the number and quality of many Twenty-first Dynasty artefacts suddenly appearing on

84 Anonymous 1973:3.

85 Graves-Brown 2012. [private correspondence].

86 Cyril Aldred opines that pre-war there was a Covent Garden saleroom, Stevens, which almost entirely existed on the proceeds from buying and selling for the Wellcome collection, and repeats a rumour that there may have been a lucrative trade in West Africa making objects for it (Aldred 1973:[letter]).

87 Midant-Reynes 2000:51.

88 Known from a series of papyri from the reign of Ramesses IX, Nineteenth Dynasty (Van Dijk 2000:301).

the antiquities market, leading him to have the suspects arrested and forced to confess the existence of the cache.⁸⁹ By this time, stolen Egyptian antiquities were worth more than their scrap value, even with the added risk of discovery; the incentive for looters was great. From the limited data available, W553 appears to be unique, and therefore unlikely to be a fake. For a good fake to appear legitimate, it would likely be a copy of something known, rather than an original design. But given the vigorous antiquities market of the time when it appeared, Wellcome's cavalier approach to collecting, the market's apparent perception of him; all alongside the obscure provenance of the sistrum, it may not be too hasty to suggest that the item was looted either for the antiquities market in general, or the Wellcome collection specifically. Alternatively, it may have been unearthed during a legitimate excavation, such as Mariette's exploration of the temple of Hathor at Dendera during the 1870s, or Petrie's later dig at the same place.⁹⁰ Only conjecture is possible here. Objects such as W553 that have no known provenance for any reason are missing a large part of their story; without context we can only infer their age and use.

Transformation:

The object shows no sign of alteration, conservation or repair. It appears that the only non-original part of the piece is the addition, in white paint, of the accession number W553 on the base which has then been covered in a clear varnish or lacquer. The 'W' number indicates a number given to the sistrum at some point after its arrival in Swansea in 1973. This number supersedes the previous accession and registration numbers assigned to it by the

⁸⁹ Gardiner 1961:319.

⁹⁰ Shaw & Nicholson 1995:84-5.

Wellcome Historical Medical Museum prior to its transfer.⁹¹ The object tag (fig.11, left) was not attached to the sistrum when it was unpacked in Swansea, although it was in the same crate. It has been associated with the object simply due to the word 'sistrum' on the tag,

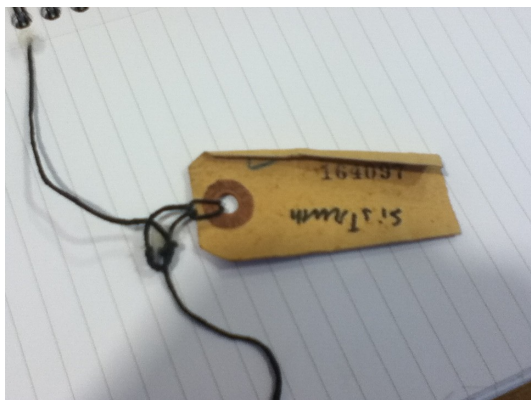


Figure 11: Wellcome object tag belonging to W553.

which is a reasonable inference given that there were no other sistrum-type items in the package.

The tag shows that it had two previous numbers assigned by the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum,⁹² an 'R' number and an 'A' number.⁹³

Everything collected by Wellcome was given an 'R' number upon its purchase however, only items that

were considered important or intended for display were officially accessioned by the museum and assigned an 'A' number.⁹⁴ It is therefore likely that the sistrum was exhibited at some point during its time at the Wellcome Museum in London, or was at least considered for display there.

Possible Future Investigation:

If the funds and facilities were available, some samples of the metal and the coloured coating could be sent for metallographic examination which would determine the composition of the material and ascertain whether the object had a lead-alloy coating.⁹⁵

91 Information about the 'W' number was obtained through conversations with the Egypt Centre staff, Wendy Goodridge and Dr. Carolyn Graves-Brown.

92 Egypt Centre MODES Catalogue #W553.

93 Bywaters 1986:S32. The 'R' number is the registration number and the 'A' number is the accession number. Appendix e.

94 Bywaters 1986:S32.

95 Renfrew & Bahn 2000:341.

On the 7th November 2012 the author contacted the auctioneers, Sotheby's of London in regard to the seller of the object in 1919, they responded quickly but declined to provide the information, citing 'data protection'. Perhaps some gentle persuasion in the future could persuade them to check their archives, assuming that records from that time have been kept.⁹⁶

Reinterpretation and Current Re-use:

W553 has been on permanent loan to the Department of Classics at Swansea from the Wellcome Trustees since 1971,⁹⁷ along with about 3000 other items from the Egyptian collection of Sir Henry Wellcome.⁹⁸ The Egyptian part of the Wellcome collection was considered surplus to requirements due to a shortage of storage space and at the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum and the Petrie Collection at University College London, where much of the collection was housed. There was also a change in policy at the Wellcome Museum, which had become primarily concerned with antiquities of a medical nature.⁹⁹ As a result, the collection was split, under the auspices of the Petrie Museum, between four institutions including University College of Swansea, where ninety-eight crates were received and unpacked by Dr. Kate Bosse-Griffiths who had been appointed Honorary Curator. The collection was originally displayed in a room in the Keir Hardie building

⁹⁶ The author has been advised that a 'freedom of information request' is not appropriate when dealing with a private company as they have no obligation to respond.

⁹⁷ Smith & Dixon 1971 [letter] (appendix b); Gill 2005:48.

⁹⁸ Lloyd 1998:191.

⁹⁹ Anonymous 1973:3.

before being moved to a new, specially built home, The Egypt Centre in 1998.¹⁰⁰

Ethical Implications of Display:

Without knowing the provenance of W553, it is difficult to know what the original owner's intent regarding the object was. If it was gifted as a votive offering or was part of someone's tomb equipment then it could be argued that the item is still the moral property of the owner and furthermore, was intended to perform a function for eternity; removing the object from the temple deposit or owner's tomb for collection or sale would constitute a breach of its original purpose. But, the moral transgression would have been committed at the point that the item was removed from its original context and its provenance forgotten or concealed. It is not the responsibility or fault of the current keeper and, where nothing can be done to restore it to its intended use, and it does not compromise the dignity of a human being, there can be few ethical objections to its public display. It is also possible that the object was simply discarded. There is currently little potential for looted objects to be purchased by public collections in the United Kingdom, due to tight regulations and any argument about the encouragement of looting would be invalid as the Egypt Centre does not purchase antiquities.

The method and context of display have profound affects upon viewer, and especially those without expertise. The prominence given to an object will influence the importance which the non-specialist observer will assign to it and the theme of the display will inevitably bias a visitor's view of the objects purpose. For example, the Ashmolean Museum

¹⁰⁰ The Egypt Centre 2010.

in Oxford used to give such little prominence to what are arguably two of the most important artefacts in their collection,¹⁰¹ that they languished in a darkened corner unnoticed by the majority of visitors.

In an entry in her note book dated 6th March 1972 (fig.12, right), Kate Bosse-Griffiths lists fifteen objects under the heading 'Bronze Exhibition' which included W553; this suggests that the sistrum had previously been displayed, or was considered for display, in the context of its material rather than its supposed use.¹⁰² It is currently on display in the 'house of life'¹⁰³ gallery in a tall, narrow glass case in fairly prominent position at adult head height. The display is entitled 'Music' and consists of around ten items including some

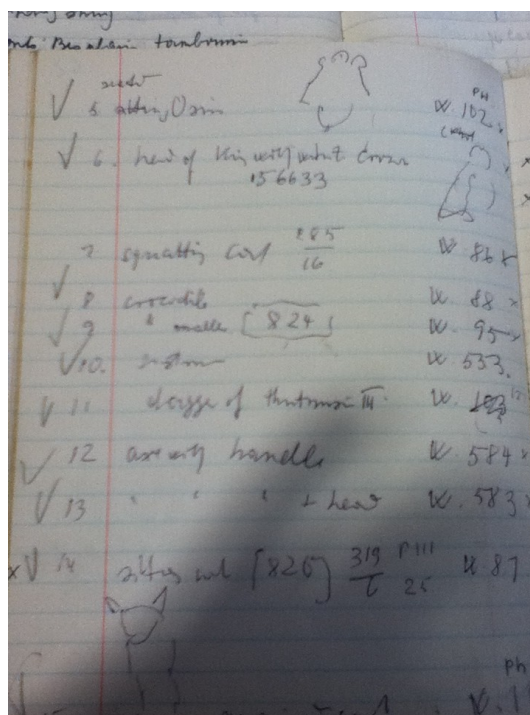


Figure 12: Day-book of Kate Bosse-Griffiths, 1972. Page 63.

Roman Period wooden clappers and a Shabti of a chantress. The bottom two shelves of the case are devoted to a 'Toys and Games' theme. Unless the function of W553 was purely votive, which is a possibility due to its small size, it is entirely appropriate to display it as a musical instrument. Otherwise it could be part of an exhibition of bronze artefacts, votive offerings or ritual objects.

101 The Late Predynastic Scorpion Macehead which may document the original unification of Egypt (Dodson 1995:12), and the limestone statue of Khasekhemwy from the Second Dynasty, which is the oldest identifiable royal statue in stone (Baker 2008:179).

102 Bosse-Griffiths 1972:63 left hand leaf.

103 The Egypt Centre have divided their public collection into two broad categories: 'The House of Life' houses items associated with the living and 'The House Death', those associated with the dead.

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