MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION NATIONALE, DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE

BULLETIN
DE L'INSTITUT FRANÇAIS
D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE

en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne

BIFAO 126 (2026), p. 85-99

Anna Giulia De Marco

Rare Specimens of ḫw-fans and the Rediscovery of Fans at Deir el-Medina

Conditions d'utilisation

L'utilisation du contenu de ce site est limitée à un usage personnel et non commercial. Toute autre utilisation du site et de son contenu est soumise à une autorisation préalable de l'éditeur (contact AT ifao.egnet.net). Le copyright est conservé par l'éditeur (Ifao).

Conditions of Use

You may use content in this website only for your personal, noncommercial use. Any further use of this website and its content is forbidden, unless you have obtained prior permission from the publisher (contact AT ifao.egnet.net). The copyright is retained by the publisher (Ifao).

Dernières publications

9782724711219	*Gateway to Africa. Cultural Exchanges Across the Cataracts*	Valentina Gasperini (éd.), Gihane Zaki (éd.), Giuseppe Cecere (éd.)
9782724711264	*La chapelle d'Osiris Ounnefer Neb-djefaou*	Laurent Coulon
9782724711752	*Guide du Caire Islamique*	Hadrien Collet
9782724711660	*Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales 41*	Adrien Candiard (éd.)
9782724711745	*Bulletin archéologique des Écoles françaises à l'étranger (BAEFE)*	
9782724711271	*Du côté de chez Zeus*	Emmanuel Botte (éd.), Hélène Cuvigny (éd.), Michel Reddé (éd.)
9782724711677	*La Description de l'Égypte*	Paul-Marie Grinevald
9782724711714	*La pensée et la pratique pharmacologiques d'Avicenne*	Sylvie Ayari

© Institut français d'archéologie orientale - Le Caire

Rare Specimens of *ḫw*-fans and the Rediscovery of Fans at Deir el-Medina

ANNA GIULIA DE MARCO

ABSTRACT

This study presents the identification and analysis of an atypical wooden fan handle, which was rediscovered during the examination of wooden artefacts stored at the site of Deir el-Medina, as part of the ÉBÉNES programme (IFAO)/Medjehu Project. Initially mistaken for a mirror handle due to decorative and morphological similarities, further analysis has confirmed it to be the handle of a specific type of fan, known in ancient Egyptian as *ḫw*. Despite the frequent depiction of such fans in New Kingdom iconography, they have not previously been identified in the material culture.

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of the object and, to further investigate the function and significance of fans at Deir el-Medina, provides a brief review of other fan artefacts from the site.

Keywords: Deir el-Medina, Thebes, New Kingdom, woodworking, wooden artefacts, fans, cultic object.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude présente l'identification d'un manche d'éventail en bois atypique, qui a été redécouvert lors de l'examen des artefacts en bois conservés sur le site de Deir el-Médina (programme ÉBÉNES [Ifao]/projet Medjehu). Initialement confondu avec un manche de miroir en raison de similitudes décoratives et dimensionnelles, une analyse approfondie a révélé qu'il s'agissait du manche d'un éventail spécifique, le *ḫw*, fréquemment représenté dans l'iconographie du Nouvel Empire, mais jusqu'ici non identifié dans la culture matérielle.

BIFAO 126 (2026), p. 85-99
Rare Specimens of ḫw-fans and the Rediscovery of Fans at Deir el-Medina
© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

Cet article fournit une analyse détaillée de l'objet découvert et offre un examen contextuel des autres artefacts d'éventail trouvés à Deir el-Médina, contribuant ainsi à une meilleure compréhension de la fonction et de la signification des éventails dans ce contexte archéologique.

Mots clés : Deir el-Médina, Thèbes, Nouvel Empire, artisanat du bois, artefacts en bois, éventails, objet cultuel.

THE REDISCOVERY OF A DEIR EL-MEDINA *ḤW*-FAN[1]

Since its discovery, the site of Deir el-Medina has proved to be a significant source of information for the New Kingdom, primarily due to the exceptional state of preservation of its archaeological, textual, iconographic and material sources. Although extensive research has been conducted on these sources, wooden artifacts have long been overlooked by scholars, despite their potential to shed light on various aspects of the site. It was not until 2018 that focused and systematic research on this corpus of wooden artefacts was undertaken, when the Medjehu Project[2] team (led by Gersande Eschebrenner Diemer) began work at IFAO's archaeological mission at Deir el-Medina (directed by Cédric Larcher), as part of the IFAO ÉBÉNES programme.[3]

In recent years, our research has focused on the study, analysis, conservation, and full publication of the wooden cosmetic objects.[4] These previously unpublished items were uncovered during several IFAO excavation campaigns directed by Bernard Bruyère in the first half of the 20th century and were subsequently stored in the mid-1950s in *Magasin* 23 (P. 1049), also known as "Magasin ethnographique".[5] This storeroom was specially chosen and equipped with shelving to house small artefacts of different materials, which were then organised into different categories. However, the sorting process did not involve an analytical study of the items, often resulting in categorization inaccuracies. In fact, several wooden fragments belonging to mirror handles were found in 2022 among a group of diverse decorative elements.

The wooden artefact DeM_2022_M25_109, which gave rise to this study, was identified among this group of mixed material and initially classified as a mirror handle due to its morphological and decorative similarities. However, following a detailed analysis of its manufacture,

1 The results presented here are part of the work of the Deir el-Medina Mission – opération Ifao 17148. I would like to express my gratitude to Cédric Larcher, director of the mission, for granting permission to publish this work.

2 *The Medjehu Project – Investigating woodcraft along the Nile* (www.medjehuproject.it) consists of a team of wood specialists using a multidisciplinary approach to study and conserve ancient Egyptian wooden artefacts. See also De Marco, Eschenbrenner Diemer, Marini 2022; Eschenbrenner Diemer 2023.

3 ÉBÉNES – "Étude des Bois Égyptiens : Nature, Emplois, Sauvegarde" (IFAO no. 20211) focussed on the IFAO collection of wooden objects.

4 De Marco, Eschenbrenner Diemer forthcoming. For an overview, see De Marco, Marini 2023, pp. 247–248.

5 Larcher et al. 2020, pp. 25–27.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

it became evident that the object was, in fact, the handle of a specific type of fan, called *ḥw* by the ancient Egyptians.[6]

While representations of this fan type are frequent in New Kingdom iconography, it has not previously been identified in material culture. Consequently, the present study offers a detailed analysis of the object, with comparative examination of similar artefacts and relevant iconographic sources, to explore the function of the relatively unknown *ḥw*-fans within Deir el-Medina. In addition, a brief overview of other fan specimens from the site is provided to offer a deeper understanding of the various uses and significance of the fan within this community.

ANALYSIS OF THE *ḤW*-FANS

The object inventoried as DeM_2022_M25_109 is the mounting element for a handle, decorated in relief with a distinctive composite iconographic motif that incorporates a papyrus umbel with rosettes in the volutes (Fig. 1). The fragment is crafted from a common local timber, sycomore fig (*Ficus sycomorus L.*),[7] and is of relatively small dimensions, measuring 1.3 cm in thickness, 4.0 cm in height. Only 3.0cm of its original length have been preserved; however, considering that its right side is symmetrical, it can be estimated that it originally measured approximately 4.0cm. A drilled dowel hole is present at the bottom of the base, intended for the insertion of the staff that would have served as a handle.



© Ihab Mohamed Ibrahim, IFAO, DeM_2022_M25_109

Fig. 1. Front and back views of the wooden fragment.

6 *Wb* III, 246.9-10.

7 The xylological analysis was conducted by Gersande Eschenbrenner Diemer, whom I thank for generously sharing her results with me.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

The object in question does bear a resemblance to certain mounting pieces for New Kingdom mirror handles from the site (Fig. 2);[8] however, it is the upper joint part that distinguishes its function. On mirror handles, this joint consists of a rectangular hole for the insertion of the metal disc. In the case of DeM_2022_M25_109, there are three cylindrical elements protruding from the top, two of which are hollow and partially intact. The absence of mirror handles constructed in this particular manner, coupled with the small dimensions of the holes (Diam. 0.3cm; D. 1.4cm), would necessitate a metal disc with two extremely thin projecting tangs, a feature not identified thus far.[9] Consequently, this leads to the exclusion of its function as a mirror handle, suggesting instead the possibility that the object represents a specific type of fan handle not previously recognised in the material culture.



© Museo Egizio, Torino

Fig. 2. Fragment of mirror handle from Deir el-Medina S. 7593/1 (Museo Egizio, Torino).

A second specimen worth mentioning, also originating from Deir el-Medina, is wooden object S.07593/03 (Fig. 3) currently preserved in the Museo Egizio in Turin and discovered by Ernesto Schiaparelli during his early 20th-century excavation of the site.[10] Although fragmentary on one side, the morphology and decoration of this element are similar to the previous example. Due to its symmetrical design, it likely originally featured two raised rosettes within the volutes of the papyrus umbel. Additionally, traces of stucco are visible over the entire surface, with faint remains of red lines visible in the surviving rosette, suggesting a polychrome decoration similar to that of the previous mirror handle, illustrated in Figure 2. A minor difference is evident in its dimensions, as it is slightly larger than the previous specimen (H. 7.8cm; W. 6.5cm; T. 1.3cm), as well as in the upper joining system. In this example, the three holes are not cylindrical standing elements but are instead hollowed within a rectangular protruding element. On the opposite side, however, as in the previous example, a simple hole is present at the base for the insertion of a handle.

A closer comparison to the first specimen can be made with the wooden mounting element E 14513 (Fig. 4), currently housed in the Louvre Museum,[11] which was also discovered at Deir el-Medina by B. Bruyère.[12] This decorative piece is distinguished by its better preservation, craftsmanship, and larger dimensions (H. 11cm; W. 6.5cm; T. 2.1cm). Notably, it features the same decorative motif as the previous pieces, but is complete in form. This composite

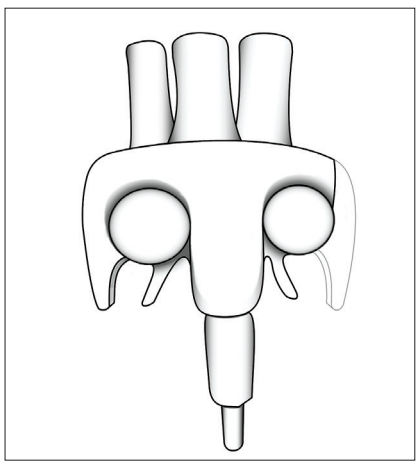
8 De Marco, Marini 2023, p. 247; De Marco forthcoming; De Marco, Eschenbrenner diemer forthcoming.
9 For an overview of mirrors, see Lilyquist 1982 and Lilyquist 1979; Vandier D'Abbadie 1972, pp. 167–182; Derriks 2001.
10 De Marco forthcoming.
11 Louvre online catalogue, E 14513: https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010079536.
12 Bruyère 1929–1930, p. 3, see: https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0151_005; https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0151_006.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

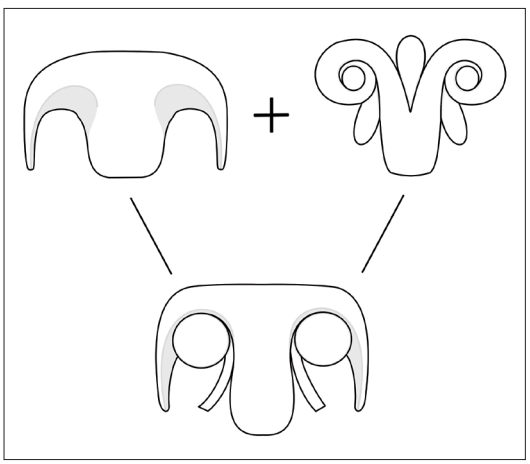


© Museo Egizio, Torino

Fig. 3. Front and top views of the mounting element of fan handle S.07593/03 (Museo Egizio, Torino).


© Lisa Sartini

4.


© Lisa Sartini

5.

Fig. 4. Drawing after the fan handle E 14513 (Musée du Louvre).
Fig. 5. The two different motifs that influenced the composite iconography.

iconography represents the fusion of two decorative elements commonly found in handles: the papyrus umbel and the open blue lotus flower.[13] The result is a papyrus umbel in which the volutes of the blue lotus flower are instead replaced by rosettes (Fig. 5).

In addition to the decoration, the upper joint system closely resembles that of DeM_2022_M25_109, consisting of three drilled cylindrical elements protruding from the upper side. In contrast, the lower part has a protrusion to secure the handle in place once inserted.

13 See, for example, the fan handles 49.1918 (Museum of Fine Arts di Boston) and AH 139 (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden), from which the drawing in Figure 5 is derived.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

This Louvre specimen was found in 1930 within the Ramesside rubbish dump of the so-called "southern kom" and was recorded by B. Bruyère in his excavation diaries as a fan handle,[14] however it is currently identified as a fly whisk in the Louvre's online database. Whilst the possibility of this function cannot be completely dismissed, no comparable examples have been identified in iconographic records.[15] Instead, the Louvre fragment and DeM_2022_M25_109 exhibit a close correspondence with depictions of the so-called *ḫw*-fan, which was particularly popular during the New Kingdom (Fig. 6).

Henry George Fischer classified this particular fan according to its iconography as a "ceremonial fan." It is described as having a mounting similar to the palmiform fan with a single ostrich feather attached.[16] Furthermore, it is important to note a key distinguishing feature that differentiates it from other palmiform fans, as is clearly visible in the iconography: the specific type of joint used in the mounting piece that consists of three cylindrical elements, atop which the feather is positioned.



© Museo Egizio, Torino

Fig. 6. *ḫw*-fan standing behind Osiris from the stela of Djehutynefer (Cat. 1639, Museo Egizio, Torino).

However, due to the scarcity of examples in the material culture, the precise function of these three cylindrical elements remains uncertain, as does the method by which feathers might have been inserted into them. Based on the few examples examined and the iconographic sources, it is plausible to hypothesize that an additional semi-circular component was inserted within these cylindrical elements to enhance the stability of an individual feather, similar to the construction of classical fans.[17] Alternatively, single feathers may have been inserted into each cylinder,[18] and their proximity could create the visual impression of a single feather, which was subsequently emphasized in the iconography.

A significant piece of evidence further supporting the function of this piece as a fan handle is provided by a carved Assyrian ivory of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (54.117.3),[19] found in the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, and dated to the late 8th and

14 Bruyère 1929–1930, p. 3, see: https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0151_005; https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0151_006.

15 For a comprehensive overview of the various types of fly whisks see Jéquier 1921, pp. 255–258; Fischer 1977, col. 83.

16 Fischer 1977, cols. 82–83.

17 See, for example, the unusual depiction of fans in the fragmentary stela Provv. 874 (Museo Egizio, Torino).

18 This appears to have been the case also for palmiform fans, which featured holes for the insertion of feathers (Freed 1982). See, for example, 49.1918 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and MMA 26.7.841 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). The author is grateful to the anonymous reviewer for this observation.

19 MET online catalogue, 54.117.3: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/324324.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

7th centuries BC (Fig. 7). This object, which served as the decorative element of a fan handle, exhibits a structure strikingly similar to that of DeM_2022_M25_109 and E 14513. The piece features a hole at the bottom designed to accommodate the staff used as the handle, while the upper portion is surmounted by three hollow cylinders intended to hold feathers. This specific function has been discussed by Paul Collins through close iconographic comparisons, hypothesizing a particular use within the context of the royal court.[20]

Despite the temporal and geographical distance between the Assyrian object and its ancient Egyptian counterparts, the presence of shared ideologies and craftsmanship is not surprising. This can be attributed to the enduring intermingling of cultures and the spread of "internationalism" during the Late Bronze Age, which is evidenced by numerous Egyptianizing elements in Assyrian material culture.[21] Furthermore, it is plausible to hypothesise that craftsmen continued to preserve and adapt earlier Egyptian and Egyptianizing models and traditions over centuries, thereby contributing to the continuity of craftsmanship and stylistic elements across regions and periods.[22]



© Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Fig. 7. Assyrian fan handle MMA 54.117.3 (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

THE FUNCTION OF *ḤW*-FANS AT DEIR EL-MEDINA

The archaeological contexts in which the *ḥw*-fans have been discovered unfortunately do not provide sufficient information to determine their function within the specific site of Deir el-Medina. To fully understand their role and significance in this context, a more comprehensive analysis is required.

In ancient Egyptian culture, the *ḥw*-fan was primarily associated with the presence of deities and pharaohs. In addition to the typical attributes shared with other fans, such as serving as both a divine manifestation and a provider of shade, the *ḥw*-fan also symbolised protection—an aspect closely tied to the meaning of the term *ḥwy*.[23]

During the New Kingdom, the importance of the *ḥw*-fan's function is reflected in the adoption of the title "Fanbearer" (*ꜣ.y-ḥw*)[24] by numerous high-ranking officials. This role eventually acquired such prestige that it led to the creation of an even more exclusive title "Fanbearer on the right of the king" (*ꜣ.y-ḥw ḥr wmn n(y)-sw.t*)[25]. The function of the holders of this title is further emphasized in the iconography, where these individuals are frequently depicted holding

20 Collins 2009.
21 Feldman 2008; Lilyquist 2013.
22 Ciafaloni 2009. For the fan-bearers see Bonatz 2000, pp. 103–105.
23 Bell 1985, pp. 33–35, 37.
24 *Wb* III, 246.10; *Wb* V, 348.4; https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/5/title/2490.
25 *Wb* V, 348.4; https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/5/title/2495.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

the *ḫw*-fan in the presence of the pharaoh.[26] The title was granted to prominent members of the royal court, such as the Viceroy of Kush, royal sons, and the vizier. However, over time, the exclusivity of the title diminished, and by the Ramesside period, it came to be associated with both higher and lower-ranking officials.[27]

It is particularly noteworthy that, among the titles under examination, the designation "Fanbearer on the right of the king" is the only one attested in Ramesside sources from Deirel-Medina.[28] In this context, however, it was applied exclusively to high-ranking officials who, while not members of the local community, maintained a close relationship with it. These individuals did not reside in Deir el-Medina, thereby suggesting that they were not the owners of the *ḫw*-fan specimens found at the site. This assertion is further corroborated by the craftsmanship, the type of raw material used,[29] and the decoration of the artefacts, which do not seem to match the quality that would have been expected for such a significant object. Indeed, the only recorded price for a *ḫw*-fan in Deir el-Medina textual sources is a modest 2 *oipe* (O. Cairo 25242).[30] Furthermore, the iconographic motif chosen for the mounting element of the Deir el-Medina specimens differs from the standard decoration employed in the depictions of the high officials (Fig. 8).



© Museo Egizio, Torino

Fig. 8. Depiction of a *ḫw*-fan held by the vizier Neferrenepet on a door frame from Deir el-Medina (Cat. 1464, Museo Egizio, Torino).

26 Helck 1958, pp. 281–284; Pomorska 1987, pp. 25–35.

27 Pomorska 1987, pp. 155–158.

28 For the widespread presence of the title "Fanbearer on the right of the king" within the Deir el-Medina hieratic sources see Albert, Gasse (eds.) 2019, p. 8, as well as the contributions by Renaud Pietri (p. 112) and Nathalie Sojic (pp. 115–141) in the same volume.

29 Macroscopic examination indicates that the wood grain does not exhibit the typical characteristics of softwood (coniferous) species, nor those of dark wood species such as the so-called "pharaoh's ebony." It appears to be a local hardwood, most likely sycomore fig, as demonstrated by the xylological analysis of the specimen DeM_2022_M25_109 from Deir el-Medina.

30 Janssen 1975, p. 303.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

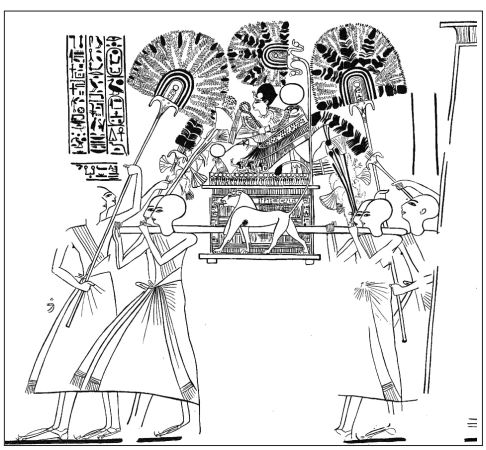
An example that closely resembles the fan handles under investigation can be found on a terracotta tile in the Amarna style, discovered in Tomb 474 at Gurob (Fig. 9).[31] This illustration depicts female royal attendants holding *ḫw*-fans characterized by a handle embellished with a composite motif of a papyrus umbel and rosettes in the recesses of the volutes, similar to those found at Deir el-Medina. Although the fan continued to be predominantly depicted in court or religious scenes, by the Amarna period it was no longer exclusively associated with the "Fanbearer on the right of the king" and its appearance in other contexts suggests a broader use.



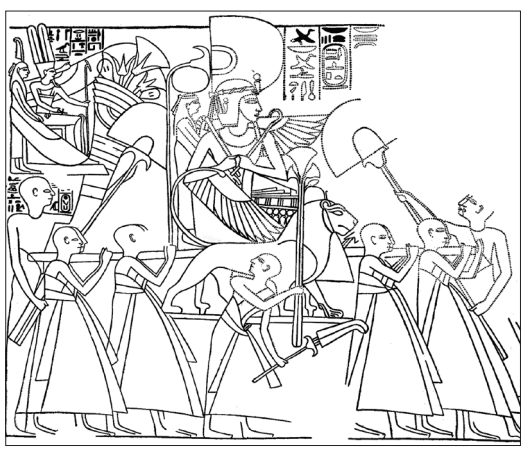
Fig. 9. Terracotta tile with royal attendants holding *ḫw*-fans (after Brunton, Engelbach 1927, pl. 28).

Indeed, fans were frequently depicted in religious ceremonies, as evidenced by the scene in the tomb of Amenmose at Thebes (TT19), which illustrates a religious procession for the deified king Amenhotep I.[32] In this depiction, the four priests carrying the litter bearing the king's statue are accompanied by four other priests each holding a fan: two of the classical type, defined by H.G. Fischer as "palmiform" type,[33] and two *ḫw*-fans (Fig. 10). In such ceremonies, in addition to their intrinsic religious significance, as previously discussed, fans also served a pragmatic function, acting as physical sign of the cult image.[34]

A similar scene appears in the funerary chapel of Khabekhenet (TT2) at Deir el-Medina, where bearers of palmiform fans and a *ḫw*-fan accompany the procession of the deified king Amenhotep I (Fig. 11). Although Jaroslav Černý identified the *ḫw*-fan bearer as a "Fanbearer



10.



11.

Fig. 10. Procession of the deified pharaoh Amenhotep I from the tomb of Amenmose (TT 19) with priests holding palmiform and *ḫw*-fans (after Foucart 1935, pl. 28).
Fig. 11. Procession of the deified pharaoh Amenhotep I from the chapel of Khabekhenet (TT 2) at Deir el-Medina where some of the attendants are holding palmiform and *ḫw*-fans (after Černý 1927, fig. 14).

31 National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh online catalogue, A.1921.1482, https://www.nms.ac.uk/search-our-collections/collection-search-results?entry=300395; Brunton, Engelbach 1927, pp. 15–16, pl. 28.
32 Foucart 1935, pl. 28.
33 Fischer 1977, col. 82.
34 Bell 1985, pp. 33–34; Teeter 2011, p. 70.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

on the right of the king,"[35] in light of the evidence presented in this study, it is more plausible that the figure, depicted in a manner consistent with the other participants, represents a community member assigned the role of carrying the fan, rather than a high official.

Indeed, excluding representations of fans associated with high officials at Deir el-Medina,[36] which, as previously discussed, do not reflect their actual use at the site, it is notable that the *ḫw*-fans are predominantly depicted in representations of religious rites, processions and acts of personal devotion. In these contexts, fans were often carried by members of the community or placed behind deities.[37] This practice is not unexpected within the context of Deir el-Medina, as members of the community were actively involved in cult practices, assuming roles such as priests or other subordinate functions, including the carrying of divine statues, barks, and fans.[38] Also noteworthy is the case of the stela MV.22788.0.0 (Museo Gregoriano Egizio),[39] where the dual significance of the *ḫw*-fan, both religious and representative, is likely exploited by the foreman Nekhemmut who is depicted presenting this fan to Ptah.

In conclusion, iconographic evidence further confirms the importance of fans at Deir el-Medina as ceremonial objects widely used within the community, rather than merely honorific, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the function of the wooden *ḫw*-fans discovered at the site.

OTHER FAN SPECIMENS FROM DEIR EL-MEDINA

Despite the limited scholarly attention fans have received, at least two distinct types of wooden fans are attested at Deir el-Medina: the palmiform fan and the *ḫw*-fan. Indeed, in addition to the *ḫw*-fans examined above, other wooden fan handles are also attested at the site.

The specimen S. 07593/2,[40] discovered at the Deir el-Medina by E. Schiaparelli and currently housed in the Museo Egizio in Turin, exemplifies the standard palmiform fan typology mentioned above (Fig. 12). Although fragmentary, the specimen preserves a palmiform mounting component from which the semicircular element, once containing the feathers, protrudes. The object is small and features simple decoration, consisting of a stucco layer with a yellow pigment applied over it. Unfortunately, there is no available data regarding its original archaeological context at the site. However, the lack of any distinctly prestigious features suggests that it should not be regarded as a honorific object. Rather, it is more plausible that it was used within the religious contexts previously discussed.

35 Černy 1927, p. 188.

36 E.g., Museo Egizio Torino, back of Stela Cat.1452, Door jamb Cat. 1464, Stela Cat. 1466; Musée du Louvre, Door jamb E 16271; British Museum Stela Ostracon EA5620, Ostracon DM 2405 (Vandier D'Abbadie 1937, pl. 58); Stela DM 151 (Bruyère 1952, p. 103) and stela fragments in Bruyère 1933, fig. 23.

37 Procession scene from Khabekhenet chapel (TT2); Museo Egizio Torino, Stela Cat.1454; Museo Gregoriano Egizio, Stela MV.22788.0.0; British Museum, Stela EA278; Fitzwilliam Museum, Stela E.GA.3002.1943; Egyptian Museum Cairo, Slab JE 43591. See also two stelae (EA588 [British Museum] and Bruyère 1952, pl. 17) where the royal scribe Hori is represented venerating the pharaoh by holding the *ḫw*-fan.

38 Černy 1927, p. 197; Bruyère 1929, p.72; Bierbrier 1982, p. 96.

39 Capriotti Vitozzi 2007, pp. 59–61.

40 De Marco forthcoming.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net



© Museo Egizio, Torino

12.



© IFAO

13.

Fig. 12. Fragment of fan handle S. 07593/2 (Museo Egizio, Torino).
Fig. 13. Fan of Sennefer JE 54859 (Cairo Egyptian Museum) (after Bruyère 1929, p. 8).

Fan handle JE 54859, now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo but originally discovered in the tomb of Sennefer (DM 1159A) at Deir el-Medina, represents a different case (Fig. 13). This specimen is the most complete fan from the site, belonging to the palmiform type with a long staff, of which, unfortunately the feathers or palm leaves have not been preserved. It consists of two parts, the handle and the mounting element, and the decoration is particularly significant, featuring an entirely red-painted surface with ivory inlaid in geometric patterns at both ends of the shaft and lotus petals at the base, and an inscription engraved on the body that reads: *sḏm-ʿš m s.t mɜʿ.t Sn-nfr wḥm ʿnḫ* – "Servant in the Place of Truth, Sennefer, the one who relives (repeats life)".[41]

Although the title does not provide clarity regarding Sennefer's specific role within the community, a comprehensive study of the funerary assemblage in which the fan was found—including other objects crafted with precious materials, such as the "ebony"[42] cubit rod and a shabti with gold foil—suggests that Sennefer held a prominent position.[43] It can therefore be hypothesized that the fan in question may have functioned both as a honorific and religious symbol, particularly given the religious ideologies associated with fans in the funerary context. In this sphere, fans not only served practical purposes, such as providing breeze and shade, but their presence was also symbolically connected to the spiritual notion of the deceased's shadow.[44]

A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding another fan handle from Deir el-Medina held at Museo Egizio in Turin, catalogued as Cat. 6923 (Fig. 14).[45] Although the loss of its upper

41 Corteggiani 1981, p. 57; Bruyère 1929, pp. 71–72.
42 Please note that the anatomical analysis of the wood has not yet been conducted, making it currently impossible to definitively identify the type of wood used. However, the Medjehu Project plans to undertake microscopic analysis of this specimen in the near future.
43 Bruyère 1929, p. 56; Meskell 1999, pp. 186–189; Smith 1992, p. 219.
44 Roth 2002.
45 De Marco forthcoming.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

portion precludes a precise typological classification, the object features an inscription that clearly identifies it as a funerary item, similar to the one belonging to Sennefer. The carved text, which contains traces of black pigment, is concise and reads*: sš Wn-nfr m s.t mɜʿ.t ḥr swɜḥ* – "the scribe, Wennefer, in the Place of Truth, to endure."[46]

Furthermore, two additional and previously unknown pieces found in Magasin 23 at Deir el-Medina along with DeM_2022_M25_109 deserve consideration. Although their fragmentary condition does not allow a definitive identification, their characteristics suggest they may be fan handles. The first specimen, DeM_2022_M25_120 (Fig. 15), measuring 10cm in width, exhibits a classic palmiform shape and displays slight traces of a painted polychrome decoration, consisting of three red dots which appear to be covered by a layer of blue pigment applied over the entire surface. The only element that may link it to the previously mentioned *ḫw*-fan is the presence of three dowel holes drilled in the upper part. The second fragment, DeM_2022_M25_121 (Fig. 16), measures 11cm in height and also displays a palmiform shape, with an elongated semicircular element that can be compared to the mounting piece of Sennefer's fan. Both, however, are made from local timbers: the first from sycomore fig (*Ficus sycomorus* L.), the second from acacia (*Vachellia nilotica* L.).[47]



© Museo Egizio, Torino

Fig. 14. Fan handle of Wennefer Cat. 6923 (Museo Egizio, Torino).



© Ihab Mohamed Ibrahim, IFAO, DeM_2022_M25_120

Fig. 15. Wooden fragment.



© Ihab Mohamed Ibrahim, IFAO, DeM_2022_M25_121

Fig. 16. Wooden fragment.

46 Three scribes bearing this name are attested at Deir el-Medina during the Ramesside period (Davies 1999, pp. 283–284); however, the lack of further information prevents a precise identification.

47 The xylological analyses were conducted by Gersande Eschenbrenner Diemer, whom I thank for generously sharing her results with me.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

CONCLUSION

A century after their discovery, the wooden artefacts from Deir el-Medina continue to provide significant data on New Kingdom Egyptian material culture. Although these objects have remained largely unknown, the analytical research conducted through the Medjehu Project has already yielded significant results, including the identification of rare artifact types, as illustrated in the present case study. Specifically, the fans from Deir el-Medina have not previously been subjected to systematic analysis; thus, this study serves as a preliminary effort to contextualize and understand their function.

Despite the paucity of archaeological data, the overall analysis of the fans from Deir el-Medina has shed light on their varied uses and meanings during the New Kingdom, particularly from the end of the 18th Dynasty through the Ramesside period. The specimens known to date and examined in this study do not appear to have belonged to individuals bearing the title of "Fanbearer" nor do they seem to fulfill the associated honorific function. Rather, they seem to have been owned by ordinary members of the Deir el-Medina community and served a range of purposes, including ceremonial, representational, and funerary activities.

In particular, the *ḫw*-fans from Deir el-Medina appear to have been primarily employed in cultic contexts, suggesting a more precise dating to the Ramesside period, when their use became more common beyond the elite circles. Furthermore, this evidence offers valuable insight into the religious practices and social dynamics of the settlement, further illustrating the diverse roles assumed by members of the craftsmen community in maintaining its ritual functions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albert, Gasse (eds.) 2019

F. Albert, A. Gasse (eds.), *Études de documents hiératiques inédits : les ostraca de Deir al-Medina en regard des productions de la Vallée des Rois et du Ramesseum. Travaux de la première Académie hiératique, Ifao (27 septembre-1er octobre 2015)*, BiGen 56/CENiM 22, 2019, https://hal.science/hal-02509476v1.

Bell 1985

L.D. Bell, "Aspects of the Cult of the Deified Tutankhamun," in P. Posener-Kriéger (ed.), *Mélanges Gamal Eddin Mokhtar*, BiEtud 97, Cairo, 1985, pp. 31–59.

Bierbrier 1982

M. Bierbrier, *The Tomb-Builders of the Pharaohs*, London, 1982.

Bonatz 2000

D. Bonatz, *Das syro-hethitische Grabdenkmal: Untersuchung zur Entstehung einer neuen Bildgattung in der Eisenzeit im nordsyrisch-südostanatolischen Raum*, Mainz, 2000.

Brunton, Engelbach 1927

G. Brunton, R. Engelbach, *Gurob*, BSAE 41, London, 1927.

Bruyère 1929

B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1928)*, FIFAO 6.2, Cairo, 1929, https://www.ifao.egnet.net/uploads/publications/enligne/FIFAO006_vol_2_3.pdf.

Bruyère 1929–1930

B. Bruyère, *Journal de fouille 1929–1930*, field notebook, 1929–1930, IFAO Archives, notebook DEM 2.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

Bruyère 1933
B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh* (1930), FIFAO 8.3, Cairo, 1933, https://www.ifao.egnet.net/publications/catalogue/9782724711004/.
Bruyère 1952
B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh* (1935–1940), FIFAO 20.2, Cairo, 1952, https://www.ifao.egnet.net/publications/catalogue/9782724711196/.
Capriotti Vittozzi 2007
G. Capriotti Vittozzi, "Sculture Iscritte da Deir El-Medina ai Musei Vaticani," *Aegyptus* 87, 2007, pp. 55–71.
Černy 1927
J. Černy, "Le culte d'Amenophis Ier chez les ouvriers de la Nécropole thébaine," *BIFAO* 27, 1927, pp. 159–203.
Ciafaloni 2009
D. Ciafaloni, "A Taste for Egypt: Egyptianizing Ivories and Other Artifacts at the Neoassyrian Court," in S.M. Cecchini et al. (eds.), *Syrian and Phoenician Ivories of the Early First Millennium BCE: Chronology, Regional Styles and Iconographic Repertories, Patterns of Inter-regional Distribution: Acts of the International Workshop Pisa, December 9th–11th 2004,* Ricerche di Archeologia del Vicino Oriente 3, Pisa, 2009, pp. 307–319.
Collins 2009
P. Collins, "An Ivory Fan Handle from Nimrud," *MMJ* 44, 2009, pp. 9–20.
Corteggiani 1981
J.-P. Corteggiani, *Centenaire de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale*, Exhibition Catalogue, Egyptian Museum Cairo, 8 jan.-8 feb. 1981, Cairo, 1981.
Davies 1999
B. Davies, *Who's Who at Deir el-Medina: A Prosopographic Study of the Royal Workmen's Community*, Leiden, 1999.
De Marco forthcoming
A.G. De Marco, *Lavorare il legno: botteghe e artigiani da Deir el-Medina. Studio dei materiali conservati presso il Museo Egizio di Torino*, Studi del Museo Egizio, Modena, forthcoming.
De Marco, Eschenbrenner diemer forthcoming
A.G. De Marco, G. Eschenbrenner Diemer, *Cosmetic Objects from Deir el-Medina: A Comprehensive Study*, DFIFAO, Cairo, forthcoming.
De Marco, Eschenbrenner diemer, Marini 2022
A.G. De Marco, G. Eschenbrenner Diemer, P. Marini, "Woodcraft in Deir el-Medina: From the Manufactured Object to the Workshop," in S. Töpfer, P. Del Vesco, F. Poole (eds.), *Deir El-Medina Through the Kaleidoscope: Proceedings of the International Workshop Turin 8th-10th October 2018*, Modena, 2022, pp. 462–492.
De Marco, Marini 2023
A.G. De Marco, P. Marini, "Manufatti lignei dimenticati: l'artigianato del legno a Deir el-Medina: alcuni casi di studio," in A. Di Natale, C. Basile (eds.), *Atti del XX Convegno di Egittologia e Papirologia: Siracusa, 30 settembre-3 ottobre 2021*, Siracusa, 2023, pp. 239–256.
Derriks 2001
C. Derriks, *Les miroirs cariatides égyptiens en bronze. Typologie, chronologie et symbolique*, MÄS 51, Mainz am Rhein, 2001.
Eschenbrenner diemer 2023
G. Eschenbrenner-Diemer, "Le projet Medjehu : redessiner l'histoire économique et sociale de l'artisanat du bois au fil du Nil," *BSFE* 208, 2023, pp. 45–60.
Feldman 2008
M.H. Feldman, "The Legacy of Ivory-working Traditions in the Early First Millennium B.C.," in J. Aruz et al. (eds.), *Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.*, Exhibition Catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Nov. 18, 2008-Mar. 15, 2009, New York, 2008, pp. 445–449.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

FISCHER 1977
H.G. Fischer, *LÄ* II, cols. 81–85, s.v. "Fächer und Wedel."

Foucart 1935
G. Foucart, *Tombeau thébaines : nécropole de Dirâ Abû'n-Nâga. Le tombeau d'Amonmos*, MIFAO 57/3, Part 4, Cairo, 1935.

FREED 1982
R.E. Freed, "Fan Handle," in *Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom, 1558-1085 B.C.*, Exhibition Catalogue, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, February 3 – May 2 1982, Boston, 1982, p. 179.

HELCK 1958
W. Helck, *Zur Verwaltung des Mittleren und Neuen Reichs*, ProblÄg 3, Leiden, 1958.

JANSSEN 1975
J. Janssen, *Commodity Prices from the Ramessid Period: An Economic Study of the Village of Necropolis Workmen at Thebes*, Leiden, 1975.

JÉQUIER 1921
G. Jéquier, *Les frises d'objets des sarcophages du Moyen Empire*, MIFAO 47, Cairo, 1921.

LARCHER et al. 2020
C. Larcher, A.-C. Salmas, A. Winkels, W. Keeding et al., "Deir el-Medina (2019)," *BAEFE* 1, https://journals.openedition.org/baefe/996.

LILYQUIST 1979
C. Lilyquist, *Ancient Egyptian Mirrors from the Earliest Times Through the Middle Kingdom*, MÄS 27, München, Berlin, 1979.

LILYQUIST 1982
C. Lilyquist, "Mirrors," in *Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom, 1558-1085 B.C.*, Exhibition Catalogue, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, February 3–May 2 1982, Boston, 1982, pp. 184–188.

LILYQUIST 2013
C. Lyliquist, "Remarks on Internationalism: The Non-Textual Data," in J. Aruz, S.B. Graff, Y. Rakic (eds.), *Cultures in Contact: From Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean in the Second Millennium B.C.*, New York, 2013, pp. 268–273.

MESKELL 1999
L. Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life: Age, Sex, Class et cetera in Ancient Egypt*, Oxford, 1999.

POMORSKA 1987
I. Pomorska, *Les flabellifères à la droite du roi en Égypte ancienne*, Warsaw, 1987.

ROTH 2002
A.M. Roth, "Gold-covered Handle and Base of a Fan of Queen Ahhotep," in E. Hornung, B. Bryan, *The Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt*, Exhibition Catalogue, National Gallery of Art, Washington, May 12–Sept. 2, 2002, Washington, 2002, p. 106.

SMITH 1992
S.T. Smith, "Intact Tombs of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Dynasties from Thebes and the New Kingdom Burial System," *MDAIK* 48, 1992, pp. 193–231.

TEETER 2011
E. Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge, 2011.

VANDIER D'ABBADIE 1937
J. Vandier D'Abbadie, *Catalogue des ostraca figurés de Deir el Médineh, nos 2256-2722*, DFIFAO 2/2, Cairo, 1937.

VANDIER D'ABBADIE 1972
J. Vandier D'Abbadie, *Catalogue des objets de toilette égyptiens, Musée du Louvre*, Paris, 1972.

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

© IFAO 2026 BIFAO en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net