



## DIVING INTO THE PAST: ANCIENT EGYPTIAN FEMALE SWIMMER-SHAPED SPOONS AT THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM IN CAIRO

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### ABSTRACT

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The study emphasizes the significance of swimmer figurines in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo collection, highlighting their intricate craftsmanship and use of precious materials. By comparing these artifacts to similar items in international museums, the research aims to fill gaps in provenance and dating. Many of the excavated spoons were inadequately documented before being incorporated into museum collections, resulting in a loss of valuable historical information regarding their original use. The research investigates the difficulties in documenting ancient Egyptian female swimmer spoons and explores the role of glass negatives in preserving these artifacts for archival purposes. The use of glass negatives offers a higher resolution and more detailed representation of these artifacts, preserving their image quality for future research. This paper aims to study the function, history, and features of the female swimmer spoons from the Egyptian Museum.

### KEYWORDS:

Swimmer, Funerary, Lotus, Spoon, Naked.

### INTRODUCTION

From the early dynastic period, long-handled, adorned ivory spoons for applying ointments emerged. There is no evidence of female swimmer spoons from the Old Kingdom to date. Cosmetic spoons, especially prevalent during the Middle and New Kingdom periods, varied in shapes: swimming girls with fish or ducks, servants with receptacles, cartouches on lotus/papyrus plants, and animals like ibexes, antelopes, fish, and ducks (Margaret Dewsbury, 2016, 183). In Middle kingdom the Coffin Texts, 'swimmers' represented souls of the deceased in the waters of Nun (Jean-Loïc Le Quellec, 2008, 31-33). The spoon in the shape of a nude swimming girl is suggested to represent the goddess Nut who paired with Geb in the form of a goose, as the container being held, or the goddess Naunet (Peter Lacovara, 2021, 238). Spoons shaped like female swimmers spanned from the early New Kingdom to the Christian Period (Rania Fadel, 2020, 40), often depicting nude girls swimming and holding ducks or cosmetic containers (Peter Lacovara, 2021, 238). These swimmer girls can be shown wearing only a girdle

and wig with a side lock (Rita Freed, 1982, 206). In ancient Egypt, royal and noble women valued beauty, using tools such as cosmetic spoons (Raymond Bunson, 2002, 88). The significance of swimmer figurines lies in their intricate craftsmanship, which often incorporates exotic and precious materials such as ivory, ebony, cedar, faience, Egyptian alabaster, and steatite. It is worth mentioning that the heads of many female swimmer-shaped spoons have been crafted from various materials. These heads are either glued on or socketed and fitted into the bodies (Lacovara, 2023).

#### **DOCUMENTATION CHALLENGES AND GLASS NEGATIVES AS ARCHIVE**

Many spoons that were excavated were not thoroughly documented before being acquired by museums. Consequently, they underwent a thorough cleaning process and became part of the museums' collections, resulting in limited information about their original use (Lacovara, 2023). The collection in the Egyptian Museum lacks precise dating and provenance information. As a result, I compare it to similar items exhibited in museums abroad. Using archival glass negatives that provide original images of female swimmers' spoons, provides a higher resolution and more detailed representation, capturing finer details often missed by modern photography such as (Figures 2,4,9,10,13). These negatives offer a historical perspective and ensure the preservation of the artifact's image quality, serving as a crucial resource for future research and verification.

Glass plate negatives, also known as "wet plate" negatives, first appeared around 1851 and made use of collodion. They remained in use until approximately 1880. To create a wet plate negative, a photographer would coat a glass piece with the emulsion and expose it before it dried. These negatives can be identified by examining the uneven coating at the emulsion edge. Around 1880, the "dry plate" replaced wet plates, employing a silver gelatin emulsion applied by manufacturers. These pre-sensitized plates could be stored after they were sold. The processed emulsion on dry plate negatives is smooth, uniform, and black (Rina Herskovitz, 1999, 4). The Egyptian Museum in Cairo is home to the largest collection of ancient Egyptian antiquities in the world. It also houses a wide range of archival images, including glass plate negatives (sheets of glass), sheet films, roll films, and printed paper pictures (Asmaa El-Rabbat, 2016, 2). In 2015, the museum's inventory of glass plate negatives began with approximately 5,000 objects. The archivists started their work by enhancing the shelving for the glass plates and cleaning the collection to remove the dust. The Archive department was formally established in 2016. In 2017, the team initiated the digitization and preservation of glass negatives through the Egypt Documentation Project in collaboration with the British Museum. Throughout this initiative, the archivists meticulously documented and digitized approximately 10,000 glass negatives from the museum's collection (Asmaa El-Rabbat, 2016, 2-3,5). Among the collection that was digitized, photographed, and converted into positive images as part of the Egypt Documentation project, four glass negatives capture figurines of female swimmers. Each figurine has been assigned a unique identifier using the format AEMC + Serial number, where AEMC stands for Archive Egyptian Museum, Cairo. The effort to conserve and rehouse the glass plate negatives has provided the conservation team with a valuable opportunity to thoroughly assess and protect the entire collection. The majority of the items only needed minimal cleaning and rehousing, which was primarily a task carried out by supervised interns. Meanwhile, the conservators, performed more intricate procedures such as lifting emulsion, eliminating accretions on emulsion surfaces, and repairing glass plates. By involving interns in the treatment of specific materials, conservators were able to focus their attention on the meticulous treatments required for glass plates (Michael Tay, 2013, 104). Glass negatives are potentially susceptible to damage or loss, which emphasizes the necessity of utilizing

preservation procedures using modern technologies, such as digitization. This transformative approach aims to reshape our perception of photograph collections (Martin Ragaa, Wafika Wahba, Mohamed Marouf, and Yehia Al-Naquarty, 2020, 122). The initial ready-to-use film widely produced for photographers was the glass plate negative. These glass plate negatives are quite robust and resistant to fluctuations in temperature and humidity (Martin Ragaa, Wafika Wahba, Mohamed Marouf, and Yehia Al-Naquarty, 2020, 130). Digitization does not involve replacing or disposing of the original material, nor does it involve destroying these originals. Instead, it involves converting the material into a digital format to preserve the content as faithfully as possible (Martin Ragaa, Wafika Wahba, Mohamed Marouf, and Yehia Al-Naquarty, 2020, 123).

### **THE SYMBOLISM SIGNIFICANCE AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF NUDE SWIMMER SPOONS IN ANCIENT EGYPT: FERTILITY, DIVINE IMAGERY AND PRACTICAL USES**

For the ancient kings and queens of Egypt, the Nile was the life-giving river, providing fertility and wealth. Even today, the Nile still captivates and brings a sense of wonder, joy, and exploration. Throughout history, the Nile served as a social hub for all Egyptians, giving rise to many traditions in their daily lives (Ahmed Gad, 2008, 83-95). Due to Egypt's heavy reliance on the river, swimming held great importance for both recreational and practical purposes. Although ancient Egyptian texts rarely mention swimming directly, related historical accounts, such as stories from battles like Kadesh, provide context for understanding its cultural importance. This broader context helps explain why swimmer motifs, including those on female swimmer spoons, were significant in ancient Egyptian society (Ahmed Hamed, 2015, 15). Moreover, ancient Egyptians had strong tendency to keep clean (William Peck, 2013, 111). Items mentioned in the Ebers Medical Papyrus for maintaining cleanliness included animal fat and plant oils. These substances were helpful for moisturizing the skin and combating various skin ailments. Deodorants were also made and extensively employed, as detailed in the Ebers Medical Papyrus; it suggests putting a scented bread cake under the arms after bathing. Carob beans and porridge were also used as deodorants (Mohammed El-Sayed and Rania Fouad, 2020, 52). However, due to Egypt's heavy reliance on the river, bathing held great importance for both recreational and practical purposes.

The ancient Egyptians had a deep appreciation for the beauty of nature, and as a result, they fashioned some of the spoons handles in the shape of blossoming lotus flowers (James Henry Breasted, 1908, 95). The meaning of the image of a young female, as represented in so many cosmetic tools, representing fertility and possibly re-birth remains a matter of debate. The spoons also depict swimmers holding various forms of containers, including a young gazelle (a creature which is also associated with young women (Asa Strandberg, 2009, 47)), a cartouche, or a lotus flower (Lacovara, 2023). Most of the female swimmers-shaped spoons are made of ivory and wood. The decorated ones gained popularity during the New Kingdom and were possibly used for religious ceremonies although their exact function remains uncertain (Jacobus Raven, 2000, 144, 153-154). The function of the containers of the spoons shaped like female swimmers was supposedly to hold cosmetic pigments such as ochre, galena, malachite, and hematite, which were mixed with various kind of oils (Adam Buszek, 2012, 315). These oils could be applied to the body for cosmetic, medicinal, or magical reasons (Diana Craig Patch, 2005, 215).

Some scholars have suggested that the swimming girls depicted on the spoons represent the sky goddess Nut (Lacovara, 2023; A. P. Kozloff and B. M. Bryan, 1992, 331-334). One scholar has suggested that the intention behind depicting a swimming girl on the

spoon was to give the cosmetic paste a cooling effect, providing a similar relief from the sun as a swim in a river or lake would offer (Margaret Dewsbury, 2016, 184). The sky goddess Nut usually appears naked, stretched out protectively on the ceiling of tombs, temples, and sarcophagus lids (Lacovara, 2023). Often, her mate and cosmological counterpart, the earth god Geb, will be shown naked and falling prostrate beneath her, presumably having just engendered their children (Ogden Goelet, 1993, 25). Ancient artistic depictions of the female form have been construed as amulets, charms, prayers, or representations of fertility. Moreover, these depictions have been associated not only with the idea of fertility but also as a representation of a ubiquitous mother fertility goddess (Silver Morris, 1985, 70). The assumption that the woman is the principal creator of new life is deeply embedded despite an increasingly detailed scientific understanding of the biological process of conception (Ann Macy Roth, 1995, 188). The naked female figurines are probably products of the everyday cult. They are usually associated with personal health and family well-being, particularly reproduction and sexual vitality (Anna Stevens, 2017, 416). Nudity encompasses various meanings, including youthful nudity symbolizing rebirth and the presence of servant girls, dancers, and musicians, which enhances the atmosphere of the elegantly attired banquet guests. Perhaps the most significant aspect of nudity is when it is accompanied by the enticement of ornamentation in which an elaborate hairdo, a dazzling bead collar, or a small, rustling bead girdle is used to accentuate the erotic appeal of a woman in her undress (Ogden Goelet, 1993, 29).

#### **ACCESSORIES OF THE FEMALE SWIMMERS**

Some of the female swimmers in the shape of spoon in the Egyptian Museum, are represented with a lotus collar as in Figures.1 and 8. During the New Kingdom, plant-form collars that have survived often feature a lotus-petal design as their outermost row or border, a characteristic seen in many paintings and reliefs depicting these collars (Andrew Boyce, 1995, 367). Some female figurines symbolize servants assisting a woman in preparing for a festival, attired in a collar, belt, and lotus flower (Charles Wilkinson and Mary Hill, 1983, 111). The Egyptian collars were wide, beautifully shaped, and adorned with lines, symbols, and pharaonic patterns like the Eye of Horus and the lotus flower, featuring rows of geometric shapes, gods, plants, and birds, made of ceramic beads, linen threads, and precious stones, with colors symbolizing important aspects of life (Eman Ramadan, Yu Wu, and Dhaneshwar Shah, 2021, 64). The terminals of surviving collars of this design are typically triangular, representing lotus flowers, or rectangular, adorned with plant designs or spirals. Collar terminals have been discovered in the Central City and the North and South Suburbs of Amarna. Two plant-form collars were found in the North Suburb (Andrew Boyce, 1995, 337). The lotus flower is one of the most iconic plants in ancient Egyptian civilization, closely linked to both the religious and daily life of the people. The lotus flower came to symbolize the sun due to its association with the rising sun. The ancient Egyptians saw it as a symbol of rebirth and regeneration. It was used to represent the deceased's entry into the Netherworld and their rebirth into a new life in the hereafter (Ayman Mohamed Ahmed, 2022, 1-2). The lotus flower was one of the most important symbols in ancient Egypt, associated with the gods due to its emergence from the water. The ancient Egyptians believed that lotuses symbolized creation, rebirth, and strength (Eman Ramadan and Yu Wu, 2021, 360).

One of the female swimmers wear a plain belt, fastened with a robe that is connected to the collar (figure 8). The collar, resembling a bundle worn around the neck, head, or shoulders, is tied around the body and ends at the waist, secured with a girdle. In ancient Egyptian depictions, the hieroglyphic sign "SA", representing A bundle of papyrus plants used by fishermen as a floating device to prevent drowning (similar to a life jacket). For examples, refer to the tomb of Kagemni in Saqqara, often appears around the necks of

certain deities and sacred animals in temple and tomb artwork. Additionally, some illustrations show men wearing this bundle around their chest and waist (Mohamed Zein and Walaa Mohamed Abdelhakim, 2022, 53). It was used as a protective charm in ancient Egyptian depictions and artifacts, the SA amulets date back to the Middle Kingdom, specifically the 11th dynasty (Mohamed Zein and Walaa Mohamed Abdelhakim, 2022, 53), in jewelry, especially in necklaces (Adela Oppenheim, Dorothea Arnold, Dieter Arnold, and Kei Yamamoto, 2015, 241). Sa, often combined with nb and ankh symbols as "sa-ankh-nb," signifies the wish for "all life and protection." As an amulet, it wards off evil and decorates artifacts and coffins, often alongside protective deities like Taweret and Bes (Pat Remler, 2010, 186). This looped sash, resembling a bundle, represents a version of the (Sa) sign, which symbolized protection for female deities. It is worn not only by Anubis but also around the king's waist and by other deities, serving as a symbol of protective power (Mohamed Zein and Walaa Mohamed Abdelhakim, 2022, 59). The female swimmers wear the Sa sign tied around the waist with a belt, like in earlier Old Kingdom scenes, echoing depictions of men hunting hippos with harpoons from small boats. This attire, resembling a narrow belt and textile flap, serves as a loincloth for modesty, covering their genitalia. The Sa bundle also functions as protection in the hostile marsh environment, guarding against dangerous animals like crocodiles and hippos in an environment lacking Ma'at's ordered harmony (Mohamed Zein and Walaa Mohamed Abdelhakim, 2022, 55) (see figure 8).

The collars and girdles of ancient Egypt were not merely decorative but held significant cultural and symbolic meanings. The lotus collar, emblematic of rebirth and regeneration, and the Sa sign, symbolizing protection, illustrate the Egyptians' deep connection to their beliefs and the natural world, reflecting their artistry and spirituality.

#### **BOXES AND BASINS HELD BY THE FEMALE SWIMMERS**

The important elements associated with the female swimmers are the boxes and basins they hold, which vary in shape. An example of a special cosmetic box shape is the cosmetic box in the shape of a duck (see figure 1). The designer cleverly crafted the box's pool so it would be inside the duck's body, and to open the box, the duck's two wings should be moved to the sides in two stages. Additionally, the designer decorated the duck's beak, head, and wings with pretty patterns, especially on the wings (Ahmed Hassan, 2017, 110) (see figure 1). For the basins, they vary in shape, including triangular, diamond, and rectangular forms (see figures 3, 5, 12,14). In the New Kingdom, these basins, often linked to the tree-goddess, were depicted as places where the deceased and spirits could receive offerings of water and food (Ali Radwan, 2008, 280-282). In ancient Egypt, since people used their hands for eating, it was customary to wash their hands both before and after meals. This practice is evident in the depictions of washing tools, such as basins and ewers, shown alongside scenes of offering tables on the walls of private tombs (Mohamed Omran, 2016, 73).

#### **No. 1 WOODEN PAINTED FEMALE SWIMMER-SHAPED COSMETIC SPOON**

ID numbers: JE 28737, CG 45117, SR 3/ 5082.

Dating: New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty (Journal d'enter Register– Egyptian Museum, Cairo Archive).

Provenance: Fayum Region, Kom Medinet Ghurab, Necropolis Area, Tomb 20.

Excavated by W.M.F. Petrie in 1889.

Measurements: Length: 30.5 cm, Width: 6.2 cm.

Description:

A wooden figurine of a female swimmer is depicted holding a duck. The figurine portrays a nude female body, with a short full straight wig. The face is black and has distinct

features. The eyes are white in color, while the nose and lips are small. A green colored collar adorns the neck. The breasts are small and round, and the umbilicus is carved in the center of the flat belly. The pubic triangle is also depicted, and the legs are carved side by side with a separation below the knees leading to the feet. The duck is shown with an open mouth, revealing its red tongue, and is adorned with green decorations on its neck, tail, and body. The entire figurine serves a cosmetic spoon, with the female swimmer's body serving as the spoon handle and the duck serving as the spoon bowl. A peg on the bird's shoulder indicates when wings (now missing) would have been attached (see figures 1,2).



Figure 1. Wooden Painted Female Swimmer-shaped Cosmetic Spoon- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- No. JE 28737, CG 45117, SR 3/ 5082 ©Egyptian Museum, Cairo (EMC)

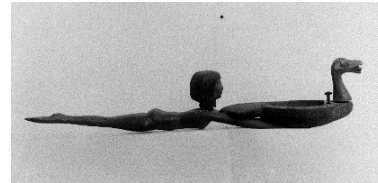


Figure 2. Glass Negative Showing Female Swimmer-shaped Cosmetic Spoon- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- Archival Department – No. AEMC4443 ©EMC

## No. 2 WOODEN HEADLESS FEMALE SWIMMER-SHAPED COSMETIC SPOON

ID numbers: JE 28678, CG 45116, SR 3/ 5081.

Dating: probably New Kingdom.

Provenance: probably Sedment Site II.

Purchased in 1888.

Measurements: Length: 18 cm, Width: 3 cm.

Description:

A wooden headless figurine of a female swimmer is depicted holding a container between the stretched arms. The figurine portrays a nude female body without a head. The breasts are small and round. The flat belly has a carved umbilicus in the center. The pubic triangle is also depicted, and the legs are carved side by side with a separation below the knees leading to the feet (see figures 3,4).

The dating and provenance are missing from the Egyptian Museum's register book, leading the author to propose a New Kingdom dating, compared by comparisons with Penn Museum's artifact No. E14199 and the Sedment Site II, also referenced by Penn Museum's No. E14199.



Figure 3. Wooden Headless Female Swimmer-shaped Cosmetic Spoon- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- No. JE 28678, CG 45116, SR 3/ 5081©EMC



Figure 4. Glass Negative Showing Headless Female Swimmer-shaped Cosmetic Spoon - Egyptian Museum, Cairo- Archival Department – No. AEMC4441©EMC



Figure 5. Wooden Female Swimmer Holding a Lotus Flower-shape Box with a hidden face- From Sediment- 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty- Amenhotep II- Penn Museum - No. E14199

<https://www.penn.museum/collections/object/324272>

### No. 3 WOODEN FEMALE SWIMMER-SHAPED COSMETIC SPOON WITHOUT ARMS

ID numbers: CG 45120, SR 3/ 2149.

Dating: May be New Kingdom.

Provenance: Maybe Deir el-Bahri.

Measurements: Length: 13 cm, Width: 2 cm.

Description:

A wooden figurine of a female swimmer is depicted nude, without arms. The figurine is represented with a short, bobbed wig and there is a missing part at the top of the head. The face has distinct features with wide eyes, and a small nose and lips. The breasts are small and round. The flat belly has a carved umbilicus in the center. The public triangle is also depicted, and the legs are carved side by side with a separation below the knees. The feet are missing (see fig. 6).

The dating and provenance are missing from the Egyptian Museum's register book, leading the author to propose a New Kingdom dating, compared by EMC artifact No. CG 775 and the Deir el-Bahri, also referenced by EMC No. CG 775 (see figure 7).



Figure 6. Wooden Female Swimmer shaped Cosmetic Spoon- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- No. CG 45120, SR 3/ 2149©EMC



Figure 7. Wooden standing naked female figurine- From Deir el-Bahri- New Kingdom Eighteenth Dynasty- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- No. CG 775, SR 3/ 1111©EMC

#### No. 4 WOODEN PAINTED FEMALE SWIMMER-SHAPED UNGUENT SPOON

ID Numbers: JE 5218, CG 45118, SR 3/ 5083.

Dating: New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, Amenhotep III (Journal d'entrée Register- Egyptian Museum, Cairo).

Provenance: Probably Thebes.

Measurements: Height: 7 cm, Width: 4.7 cm, Length: 34.2 cm.

Sold by the Huber Collection (Journal d'entrée Register- Egyptian Museum, Cairo).

Description:

A wooden figurine of a female swimmer is depicted holding a small container between the hands. The figurine portrays a nude female body, with a Partial wig with hairbands, short hair, and a braid hanging down from one side. The hair is adorned with a band around the head and another one in the middle of the braid. The face is brown and has distinct features with wide eyes, long eyebrows, and small nose and lips. Each wrist is adorned with a wide bracelet. The female swimmer is represented wearing a collar tied with a belt that crosses around her chest from the front and the back. There is also a representation of a girdle around her waist. The breasts are small and round. The belly is flat. The public triangle is also depicted, and the legs are carved side by side with a separation below the knees leading to the feet (see figures 8-10).

The provenance is missing from the Egyptian Museum's register book, leading the author to propose Thebes compared by figure 11 which shares a comparable arrangement of long hair on one side.



Figure 8. Wooden Painted Female Swimmer-shaped Unguent Spoon- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- No. JE 5218, CG 45118, SR 3/ 5083©EMC



Figure 9. Glass Negative of the Wooden Painted Female Swimmer-shaped Unguent Spoon- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- Archival Department – No. AEMC4442©EMC



Figure 10. Glass Negative of the Wooden Painted Female Swimmer-shaped Unguent Spoon- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- Archival Department – No. AEMC4444©EMC



Figure 11. Female Figurine on bed nursing child - Medinat Habu – Late New Kingdom- Twentieth Dynasty (Der Sport im Alten Ägypten Emily. Baked Clay Figurines and Votive Beds from Medinet Habu. Chicago, 2010, 16, Fig. 4c)

#### No. 5 GREYWACKE FEMALE SWIMMER-SHAPED COSMETIC SPOON HOLDING A CONTAINER

ID numbers: JE 36186, CG 45113, SR 3/ 5080.

Dating: probably Second Intermediate Period.

Provenance: Perhaps Northern Upper Egypt, Dendera.

Measurements: Length: 13.2 cm, Width: 2 cm.

Description:

A greywacke figurine of a female swimmer. It is portrayed in the nude with her arms outstretched and holding a container. The swimmer is depicted wearing a Nubian short wig and a girdle around her waist. The face has distinct features, with wide eyes, long eyebrows, and a small nose and



lips. The breasts are small and round. The umbilicus is carved in the center of her flat belly. The figurine also depicts the public triangle, and the legs are carved side by side (see figures 12,13).

The dating and provenance are missing from the Egyptian Museum's register book, leading the author to propose Second Intermediate period dating, compared by EMC artifact No. JE 35097 and Dendera, also referenced by EMC No. JE 35097 (see figure 14).



Figure 12. Greywacke Female Swimmer shaped Cosmetic Spoon- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- No. JE 36186, CG 45113, SR 3/ 5080 ©EMC

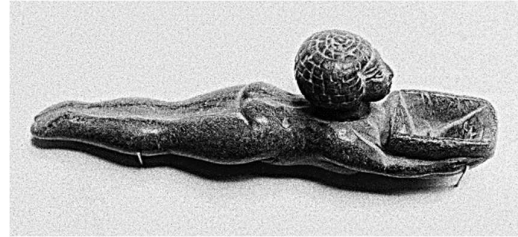


Figure 13. Glass Negative represents Greywacke Female Swimmer shaped Cosmetic Spoon- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- Archival Department – No. AEMC4441©EMC

### No. 6 STEATITE TRUNCATED FEMALE SWIMMER-SHAPED UNGUENT SPOON

ID Numbers: JE 35097, CG 45114, SR 3/ 1604.

Dating: Probably the Second Intermediate Period.

Provenance: Northern Upper Egypt, Dendera (Journal d'entrée Register- Egyptian Museum, Cairo).

Measurements: Length: 10.6 cm, Width: 3.5 cm.

Description:

A steatite figurine of a female swimmer. It is portrayed in the nude, with the arms outstretched holding a container. The figurine is depicted wearing a Nubian short wig. The face is rounded with distinct features with wide eyes, long eyebrows, and a small nose and lips. The breasts are small and round. The legs truncated (see figure 14).

The dating is missing from the Egyptian Museum's register book, leading the author to propose Second Intermediate period dating, compared by artifact Science Museum London - No. A635005 (see figure 15).



Figure 14. Steatite Female Swimmer-shaped Unguent Spoon- Egyptian Museum, Cairo- No. JE 35097, CG 45114, SR 3/ 1604©EMC



Figure 15. Steatite Female Swimmer-shaped Unguent Spoon- Science Museum London - No. A635005 ©The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

### CONCLUSION

The cultural significance of cosmetic tools, particularly spoons, for royal and noble women in Ancient Egypt, emphasizes their meticulous beauty routines as well as deeper, symbolic meanings that these instruments embodied. Throughout the dynastic periods, long-handled ivory spoons adorned with decorative elements were used for the application of ointments. In the New Kingdom, cosmetic spoons evolved, incorporating shallow bowls on intricately designed

handles. Toward the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, a distinct shift occurred as spoons exclusively crafted for the deceased featured lotus buds, bowls, and swivel pins, emphasizing their role in funerary practices. The presence of spoons shaped like female swimmers can be traced from the early New Kingdom and continued to the Christian Period. These artifacts depict naked girls in swimming positions, holding ducks or cosmetic containers. Sometimes the figure wears a girdle and a detachable wig with a distinctive side lock. These representations provide insights into the beauty practices of ancient Egyptian women and reveal the artistry and symbolism behind their cosmetic rituals. By examining these artifacts, we can uncover layers of cultural expression, shedding light on aesthetic ideals and customs that influenced the lives of royal and noble women. The spoons, serving as both practical tools and symbolic elements for fertility and vitality in life as well as rebirth in the afterlife, connect us to the rich tapestry of ancient Egyptian civilization. Frequently, adorned with the lotus flower, which symbolizes the rebirth, these spoons reflect a profound appreciation for aesthetics. The exact meaning behind the image of the female swimmer remains a subject of debate. The enigmatic swimming girl-shaped spoons may represent a divinity, possibly linked to the goddesses Nut or Naunet. Depictions of Nut with limbs resembling swimmers can be seen on temple ceilings, tombs, and coffin lids, weaving a narrative of the connections between the sacred and the earthly worlds. However, young, nude women are also often linked to themes of fertility and rebirth. Containers held by the swimmers are shaped like Nun-basins, young gazelles, cartouches, or lotus flowers, add to the complexity of the embedded symbolism. Materials shifted in the New Kingdom, with a predominant use of ivory and wooden spoons transitioning into decorative forms. This transition hints at their potential roles in religious ceremonies. They symbolize religious beliefs that imbued household objects, like these spoons, with the power to rejuvenate their users. While the unguents may have been applied in a ritualistic manner, it's unclear if a formal ceremony was involved. Containers held by female swimmers were often filled with cosmetic pigments blended with oils. This shed a light on the intersection of beauty, medicine, and magic in ancient Egyptian culture. Examining these artifacts reveals the multifaceted layers ancient Egyptian society with the convergence of artistry, mythology, and pragmatic rituals in both life and death. I addressed the issue of insufficient information about the origin and dating of the swimmers by conducting comparisons with artifacts displayed in museums abroad. The materials of the female swimmers at the Egyptian Museum vary, including wood, greywacke, and steatite. Additionally, their dimensions exhibit a range, with the longest measuring 34 cm and the smallest being 10.6 cm in length. After conducting a comparative analysis of the Cairo Museum, the Penn Museum and Sciences Museum in London, and another collection within the Cairo Museum, I concluded that the items likely originated from various sites, including Thebes, Near Fayum at Sedment Dendera and Lisht at Kom Ghurab.

When it comes to glass negatives which are essential for preserving the visual history of the Egyptian Museum objects, it is important to emphasize the fact that they serve as a key tool for researchers, conservators, and Egyptian museum professionals. These negatives help in understanding, documenting, and sharing the rich narratives of artifacts in collections. They serve as a form of detailed visual documentation, capturing snapshots of objects. They allow for close examination of the objects' features, conditions, and any changes that occur over time. Highly regarded for their accuracy, glass negatives ensure a detailed and authentic representation of objects once they have been entered into the Egyptian Museum. Researchers use them to study material composition, color, texture, and surface features. Therefore, negatives are vital for conservation efforts aimed at preserving historical authenticity. Glass negatives offer a contextual understanding of objects in their original settings, which is crucial for artifacts with cultural or historical significance. They enable comparative analysis, allowing curators to observe changes over time, and conservators to make informed restoration decisions. When used in exhibitions, glass negatives enhance the educational value of the Egyptian museum and its collections by providing a unique perspective on the journey and historical context of objects for visitors. With advancements in digital technology, the Egyptian Museum's glass negatives now digitized enabling in-depth analysis and wider sharing of historical images.

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## استكشاف الماضي: الملاعق المصرية القديمة المشكلة على هيئة سبّاحات نسائية والمحفوظة بالمتحف المصري في القاهرة

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### الملخص

تؤكد هذه الدراسة على أهمية تماثيل السباحين في ضوء المجموعة المحفوظة بالمتحف المصري في القاهرة، وتسلط الضوء على الحرفية المعقدة واستخدام المواد الثمينة. ومن خلال مقارنة هذه القطع الأثرية بقطع مماثلة في المتاحف العالمية، يهدف البحث إلى سد الثغرات فيما يتعلق بالأصول والتاريخ. فالعديد من الملاعق المستخرجة لم توثق بشكل كافٍ قبل إدراجها في مجموعات المتاحف، مما أدى إلى فقدان معلومات تاريخية قيمة بشأن استخدامها الأصلي. يبحث البحث في صعوبات توثيق ملاعق السباحة النسائية المصرية القديمة ويستكشف دور الصور السلبية الزجاجية في حفظ هذه القطع الأثرية لأغراض أرشيفية. إن استخدام الصور السلبية الزجاجية يوفر دقة أعلى وتمثيلاً أكثر تفصيلاً لهذه القطع الأثرية، مما يحافظ على جودة صورها من أجل الأبحاث المستقبلية. تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى دراسة وظيفة وتاريخ وخصائص ملاعق السباحات النسائية من المتحف المصري.

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### الكلمات الدالة:

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