



## Fish Gutters in The Old Kingdom Tombs: A Statistical and Artistic View

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### Abstract

The decorations found on the walls of ancient Egyptian tombs often depict the process of fish gutting. This study focuses on the individuals responsible for gutting fish during the Old Kingdom period. These workers were typically observed seated along riverbanks, seeking shelter under trees or papyrus plants while utilizing knives or flint tools to clean and scale fish. The presence of shells and knives implies that fish scaling may have been a common practice, although specific details such as scaling, salting, and roe pressing are not explicitly shown in the archaeological findings from this era. The primary task of these individuals was to remove the internal organs of fish to produce roe (*batroukh*) and dried fish, a practice frequently illustrated in scenes alongside fishermen. The research also examines the composition of these artistic representations, noting similarities in the depiction of fish gutters, their body postures, and other elements of artistic significance. Additionally, the paper depends on a descriptive and analytical study of the scenes besides, provides statistical data on the occurrence of gutting scenes in tombs from the Old Kingdom period, revealing a higher concentration of these scenes in Fifth Dynasty tombs compared to those from other dynasties. The concentration of these tombs found in Saqqara.

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### 1- The Introduction

The waterway of the Nile Valley provides a habitat suited to a great variety of freshwater fish. Great numbers of fish species are portrayed in Old Kingdom tombs, either swimming peacefully beneath the image of a skiff, or being caught in nets and traps or hooked on a line (Mourad, A. L., and McFarlane, A., 2012: 50). However, not all tombs depict all the fish represented in Egyptian art. It is also likely that not all fish depicted in the tomb scenes were

eaten (Brewer, D., and Friedman, R.F., 1990: 11). The most accurate information regarding the fish eaten in ancient Egypt is based partly on the representations of fish on Egyptian monuments, and partly on the examination of the mummified fish of Egyptian cemeteries (Ruffer, A., 1919: 35). Mullet appears to have been the most popular fish, figuring in more tombs than any other species. Their frequent depiction in Old Kingdom tombs suggests that the fish was easy to catch (Mourad, A. L., and McFarlane, A., 2012: 50; Brewer, D., and Friedman, R.F., 1990 12).

However, many tomb scenes depict fishing as well as different methods of preparing fish, including salting and drying. Others show ancient Egyptians consuming various types of fish, indicating the popularity of fish in pharaonic times. (Mehdawy, M., and Hussein A., 2010: 73). The supply was so abundant that Egyptians are said to have lived principally on fish, fresh, dried, or salted (Ruffer, A., 1919:34). However, the ancient Egyptians gutted fish immediately after catching them, and the fish gutters were represented working by the river bank on the shade of the trees. (Rawlinson, G., 1862:129). However, fish gutters are uncommon in the provincial marsh scene. Some followed Saqqara traditions with an abbreviated shoulder, arms extended, and both legs drawn up thus, provincial artists took over the general Memphite composition of fish gutting, but they probably devised their own figures for the scene. Perhaps this explains why fish gutters in southern tombs lack a detail included in the rendering of some fish gutters in Saqqara reliefs dating from 5- 6 onwards (Yvonne, H., 1987:148).

## 2- Objective of the Study

The paper aims to give a comprehensive account of fish gutters in the Old Kingdom, as part of the fishermen community in ancient Egypt. Besides the motif, the artisans adapted to portray them and highlighted the artistic and statistical aspects of these depictions during this period.

## 3-Fish Gutters

Scenes represented fish gutters did not indulge in the fishing process. They were represented sitting by the river bank near fishermen, their assigned role after catching is to remove the internal organs of fish, making roe (Batroukh), besides dried fish. The surviving marsh compositions, show fish gutters either squatting on the ground or at best sitting on a low bundle of reeds with their opened fish scattered over the ground nearby (Yvonne, H., 1987:148). In general, the portrayal of the gutter using any type of seat is nearly as common as the absence of a seat. Instances of gutters without seats are more frequent in the 4th and 5th Dynasties. They are also more frequent in the 6th Dynasty (Keith, M., 2022: 226). In the shade of the papyrus thicket, They have a small, low table in front of them on which they cut the caught fish open along the sides of their backs so that the head and tail of the animal remain. They took the roe out and collected it in a pot and then placed it between the unfolded fish lying on the ground, or hanging it on a line (Klebs, L., 1915:79). Accordingly, he had equipped with a knife, a wooden board and, a seat or mat.

On the other hand, Harpur and Keith named thirty-three tombs of fish gutting scenes in the Old Kingdom (Harpur, Y., 1987: table 6.21; Keith, M., 2022: table E, 532). As a sample of this study, the classification of these tombs gives an impression about the number of tombs in each dynasty and its location (table 1, 2 and chart 1-2).


**Table 1: The Distribution of Tombs Based on the Respective Dynasties.**

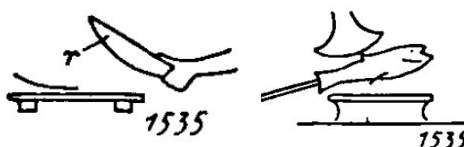
Dynasty	Numbers of Tombs
4th Dynasty	2
5 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty	20
5 <sup>th</sup> or 6 <sup>th</sup> Dynasties?	3
6 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty	8
Total	33



**Table 2: Numbers of Tombs and their Locations and Dates.**

Location	Number of tombs	date
Giza	1	4 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty
	2	5 <sup>th</sup> dynasty
	1	5 <sup>th</sup> or 6 <sup>th</sup> dynasties?
Saqqara	15	5 <sup>th</sup> dynasty
	2	5 <sup>th</sup> or 6 <sup>th</sup> dynasties?
	5	6 <sup>th</sup> dynasty
Maidum	1	4 <sup>th</sup> dynasty
el-Sheikh Said	1	5 <sup>th</sup> dynasty
Zawyet el-Amwat	1	5 <sup>th</sup> dynasty
Dishasha	1	6 <sup>th</sup> dynasty
Deir el Gebrawi	1	6 <sup>th</sup> dynasty
El-Khokha	1	6 <sup>th</sup> dynasty
Unknown Provenance	1	5 <sup>th</sup> dynasty
Total	33	

### 3.1 The Knives

Gutting fish means removing the inside organs from a fish with different types of knives. One triangular has been used to scrape away scales as well as gut the fish (fig. 1) (Ikram, S., 1995: 65, fig. 14; Busman, D., 2000: fig.10.6). Some sort of knives were found in Kahun during the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty made from bronze, in close similarity with that found in the hand of the fish gutters (fig. 2) (Petrie, W.M.F., 1890; Pl. XVII, fig. 19-21). The knife is in flint or copper has often been interpreted as knives used to open the fish. Similar knives, made of copper, are kept in various Museums (Keimer, L., 1939: 219-220). Most of these knives resemble hieroglyphic sign  (T30) in the Gardiner sign list as a determinative of words like; Knife, flint, sharp, cut dawn, and slaughter (Gardiner, A., 2007: 515). Relief in the Egyptian Museum, from a chamber wall, in the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty at Saqqara, shows the rest of two men, crouched, cutting fish on a board lying in front of him with a stone knife (Borchardt, L., 1937: 1535).




Furthermore, the knife appeared as a determinative to the word   wgs 'to cut open' or 'gut' fish. In some tombs, the knife has a broad blade and is of a reasonable length,

approximately half to two-thirds of the body of the fish. Examples of a thinner-bladed knife are pictured in Fifth and Sixth Dynasty tomb chapels. Conversely, some depict the knife to be short, defined as under half of the length of the body of the fish. (Keith, M., 2022: 224; Wb. I, 377).

### 3.2 Scaling Tools











Scaling fish or dressed was done with the aid of a broad splitting knife, the form of which strongly resembles that of some of the predynastic and later flint knives. In some cases, a splitting knife or chopper approaching a quadrant form is represented (Bates, O. 1917: 217). On the other hand, certain fish were sometimes scaled which was found by Petrie at Abydos. The proto-dynastic shell was notched as a scraper, probably for cleaning fish. The same is true with a lesser degree, of the small shell set in a reed (fig. 3). (Petrie, W.M.F., 1902: 24; Bates, O. 1917:2016, figs. 216-217).

Moreover, the depiction of fish being split in tombs described as 'dried'  (šw) has not always been shown in representations (Ikram, S., 1995: 149; Faulkner, R. O., 2002: 263, Wb, IV: 429). The representations make it difficult to determine whether the fish have been scaled or not. It is unknown whether the fish gutter scaled the fish before processing. In any case, fish have been hung on a line for drying after gutting, just like they do with meat (Curtis, R. I., 2001:175). Some fish were likely scaled, but the representations did not show this part of the process (Ikram, S., 1995: 659).

### 3.3 Working Place

Scenes indicate that the fish gutters were depicted in two locations; one was natural where they were surrounded or seated near a papyrus thicket at the river bank, and the second was absence of natural setting. This suggests perhaps a workshop or a specific location set up for such activities. The earliest gutting scenes occur in a natural setting in the tomb of *Nefermaat* with the scene showing low dense foliage and, *Rahotep* depicting a large papyrus thicket which became a typical indication of a natural setting. Following these, the natural setting does not reoccur until the mid-Fifth Dynasty. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, this setting appears less frequently (Keith, M., 2022: 223)


### 4- Fish-Gutters at Work

Texts accompanying these scenes of fish gutters call the process of gutting fishes as *wgs*  'split', with another variant          *wgs mhyt* 'split the fish' (Montet, P., 1925: 41; Wb. I, 377; Hannig, R., 2000: 1112). It also means 'cut open', and 'gut fish' (Faulkner, R., 2002: 71). The subsequent illustrations found in the tombs of Giza, Saqqara, and various other locations portray fish gutter engaged in the activity of gutting fish during the Old Kingdom period (see table 3, and figs. 4-11).

Typical fish processing activities by the fish gutters can be found near marsh scenes. Fish can be transported short distances if they are kept moist (Curtis, R. I., 2001: 174). To illustrate the process of fish processing by the fish gutters while the catch was still fresh, there are depictions of gutting and drying fish in the marshland. The process of gutting and drying prolonged the

period during which the fish could be safely consumed (Mourad, A. L., and McFarlane, A., 2012: 50). Further preparation was sometimes carried out on the boat (Darby, W., et.al., 1977:369). The fish gutter responsible for gutting the fish seized it by the tail and positioned it with its belly facing downwards on a dressing board (table 3). They were then cut in a downward stroke along the vertebral column, after which the viscera were removed. The fish were then laid flat or hung to dry, and the head and vertebral column as shown in the Old Kingdom scenes often left intact (Brewer, D. J., & Friedman, R. F., 1989: 12).

There have been instances where the fish was opened from the belly rather than along the back. Scenes frequently showing the evisceration of fish including the removal and processing of the roe as part of the scene (Brewer, D., and Friedman, R.F., 1990: 12; Ikram, S., 2000: 659; Forbes, R. J. 1993: 194; Wilkinson, J.G., 2010: 189; Bates, O. 1917:264). The reason behind splitting the fish on their backs is that fish are meant to dry in the sun, and their backs are particularly thick, which speeds up the drying process (Keimer, L., 1939: 228). However, scenes in all of these tombs were similar, with little variation from one to another. In addition, scenes indicate that the traditional Egyptian kilt is the only form of clothing identified in this scene. The use of the kilt is appropriate for the type of work the gutter is performing, the person is stationary and not engaged in heavy lifting or performing tasks within the water. The seated position of the gutter also lends to the use of a kilt (Keith, M., (2022: 229).

In the early 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty chapel of *Ra-Hotep* at Maidum (fig. 4), the fish gutter is shown squatting in the traditional male posture  (G1) with a fish held close to his body and the knife ready to administer the first cut (Petrie, W.M.F., 1892: Pl. XII; Yvonne, H., 1987: 148). Here, the gutter sits near a papyrus thicket, gutting five fish, the bodies of which have been strewn haphazardly within the register to dry. This depiction appears to set the standard composition for the Old Kingdom (Keith, M., 2022: 217). In the late 4<sup>th</sup> tomb of *Nebemakhet* (LG 86) at Giza, two fish gutters are sitting on cube-shaped seats, the second man was engaged in cleaning fish and putting them in a large pot, probably to be preserved in salt (fig. 5). Unusually in this scene a second figure who is seated opposite the gutter appears to be placing the gutting fish into a large pot. This may indicate the process of salting (Keith, M., 2022: 217-218). Moreover, the unusual posture of the body where one with his foot slightly outstretched, while the other leg pulled back. The wooden board was replaced by a vase in front of him (Wilkinson, J.G., 2010: fig. 428/2; LD. II, 12; Hassan, S., 1943: 135 fig. 77, pl. XXXVII). Moreover, the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty mastaba of *Hetep-Her-Akhti* at Saqqara, a fish gutter preparing fish with a knife upon a very low table. The free space above this scene is filled by the artist with the representation of fishes (Mohr, H. T., 1943: 60, fig. 30). On the shore, and in the shade of the reeds, a fish gutter was depicted in the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty tomb of *Urarna* at Sheikh Said (no. 25), sitting and cut open the freshly caught fish on a flat wooden board, and he holds a knife by his right hand (fig. 6). (Davies, N. de G., 1901: 24, pl. XII).

Furthermore, in the tomb of *Ptah-Hotep* at Saqqara (D 62) (5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty), the back bent fish gutter was seen sitting on a mat and gutting a fish on a low wooden board (fig.7). In front of him, several fish spread out in the sun to dry (Paget, R.F.E and Pirie, A. A., 1898: 28, pl. XXXII; Keimer, L., 1939: 219).

The fish gutter in the chapel of *Ra-em-kuy* (no 80) at Saqqara (fig. 8), holds a fish like the fish gutter once depicted in the chapel of *Ra-Hotep*. He was depicted with his left leg further outstretched in an unusual posture (Yvonne, H., 1987:148; Hayes, W.C., 1946: fig. 54). Sometimes, fish could have easily been dried on the ground, although in some cases the fish-gutters are shown suspended it on a line. During the suspension method, the air circulates the fish and accelerates the drying process (Ikram, S., 1995:148).

Similarly, in the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty mastaba of *Neb-kaw-her* at Saqqara, he was shown discarding the viscera of a fish and throwing it into the ground. Their roe is removed and placed beside them. The five unopened fish lying before the man on the left belong to different species. The roe, which has been extracted, is laid down beside the fish. (Keimer, L., 1939: p. 221, note 5; PM III/2). Furthermore, two fish gutters in the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty tomb of *Niankhamun and Khunmmhotep* at Saqqara (T 13), are depicted with similar positions and body postures. Each of them wears a short apron (fig. 9) and sits on mat seats at a wooden work table. They are using a knife in their right hand to slice open the back of the fish and extract the internal organs. The fish, gutted by the two men, lies in a rough area between the two gutters. The roe and viscera are neatly separated from the cleaned fish, and insects can be observed settled on the intestines (Moussa, A. M, and Altenmuller, H., 1977:100-101, pl. 12).

However, cleaned fish are always carried out at the river bank, the only unconventional example is in the early 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty chapel of *Mereruka* (T57). This fish gutter differs from the others in position rather more than in posture (fig. 10), for he squats on the stern of a skiff and guts the fish near a fish trapping scene (Yvonne, H., 1987:148; Sakkarah Expedition 1938: pl. 43; Kanawati, N., and Woods, A., et al. 2010: 28; De Morgan, J., 1896: fig. 518). While in the tomb of *Aba* (6<sup>th</sup> dynasty) at Deir el-Gebrawi, a fish gutter was engaged in cutting open the fish on a wooden flat board (fig. 11), and spreading them in the sun to dry (Davies, N. de G., 1902: 13, pl. 20). He was depicted in a traditional male posture similar to the scene in the tomb of *Re-Hotep*.

On the other hand, some fish found in tombs were neither gutted nor split but preserved whole (Curtis, R. I., 2001:175). Examples of fish from Deir el-Medina were not even gutted, possibly because they were salted whole instead of being dried (Ikram, S., 1995: 149). All the consumed fish shown are closed, similar to the fish displayed in the Agriculture Museum in Egypt not spread open as they appear in the scenes depicted in the tomb (Ikram, S., 1995:149, fig. 46; Darby, W., et.al., 1977: fig. 7.37).

The gutted fish were exposed to the air and sun to dry. Nowadays, Egyptians still clean their fish out in this manner (Ikram, S., 1995:148). The drying of fish, either by hanging it on a line (fig. 12) or laying it on the ground, is depicted in representations from nearly all periods of Pharaonic history. This representation dates back to the beginning of the fourth dynasty (Keimer, L., 1939: 228-229). However, Kha's tomb contained fish that were both gutted and split, but they were not opened (Ikram, S., 1995: 149). However, Keith stated in his study that fish that are gutted appear more frequently with a total of 201 confirmed images in comparison to 70 whole fish in the Old Kingdom. The whole fish is depicted either in the hands of a gutter, in piles, or in vessels nearby awaiting processing. (Keith, M., 2022: 221).




In close relation with fish gutter, the removal or tearing off fish fins is a common practice. Especially, the word *wgs* which described this action as ‘split’ or ‘cut out’, *gbt wh<sup>c</sup>*. It therefore seems that *gbt* is an equivalent of *wgs* "to split" where the action *gbt* according to Montet, is reserved for catfish *Synodontis batensoda*, while the *wgs* action can be distributed to all other fish (Montet, P., 1925: 37). In the tomb 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty of *Hetep-Her-Ahkti* at Saqqara, a man shows a peculiar fish to an overseer, who is leaning upon a stick. The boy carefully lifts a fin of the fish. Here as well as in the tomb of *Ti* he wears clothes, that differ from the ordinary fishermen's garb (Mohr, H. T., 1943: 60, fig. 29, pl. 1).

**Table 3: Fish Gutters Illustrated in the Tombs**

fig.	Fish-Gutter	Tomb	Time	place	fig.	Fish-Gutter	Tomb	Time	place
1		Rahotep	4 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Meidum	7		Pehnwik <sup>a</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Saqqara
2		Nebemakhet	4 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Giza	8		Uranma II	5 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Sheikh Said
3		Re <sup>c</sup> em-kuy	5 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Saqqara	9		Aba	6 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Dier el-Gabrawi
4		Prahhotep	5 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Saqqara	10		Mereruka	6 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Saqqara
5		Ti	5 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Saqqara	11		Nianhkhannu m and	6 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Saqqara
6		Pehnwika	5 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Saqqara	-	-	-	-	-

In a scene on the causeway of the pyramid of Sahure, a man holding a fish by its head (fig. 13), and tearing off its fin. This action has been incomprehensible until now. However, it is

accepted that lifting or even tearing off the fin is a verification of the fish's freshness. The inscription above is  gbt wHa to bone the catfish *S. batensoda* (El Awady, T., 2009: 229, pl. 14). Such a scene depicted in the Mastaba of *Ti*, where a man is depicted lifting the fin of a fish in a dynamic motion at the front of the fishing boat (fig. 14). Similarly, in the tomb of *Mereruka*, the man looks like that one in the causeway of the pyramid of Sahure (fig. 14), as well as in the market scenes, where he was seen tearing off the fin before the woman (Sakkarah Expedition, 1938: pl. 43; Silverman, D. P., 1999: 59; Gaillard, M. C., 1923: pl. 1). In the Mastaba of the Musee du Louvre the man with the fish stands alone in the middle of the whole scene (Capart, J. & Werbrouck, M., 1930: fig. 77). In all previous cases, the fisherman certainly tears off the fin, maybe as an indication of the freshness of the fish. This practice can still be observed nowadays in the fish market, and this is likely the correct explanation (Wild. D. De H., 1953: pl. CXXIII; Silverman, D. P., 1999: 60). However, each of these figures holds a catfish *synodontis batensoda*, and indicates its freshness by raising its fin while holding the fish by its hand normally, this action is performed by one of the fishermen either before the major figure or the overseer, although it sometimes occurs outside the context of the dragnet scene. men holding the *Synodontis batensoda* are depicted, with minor variation. Any differences reflect artistic individuality rather than developments in the treatment of the motif. (Yvonne, H., 1987: 147).

### 5-Scene's Composition

Artisans during the Old Kingdom frequently depicted scenes involving a fish gutter as a recurring motif in many tombs. These scenes exhibit notable similarities or even exact replication, with numerous examples dating back to the 5th Dynasty (Kormysheva, E., Malykh, S., & Vetokhov, S., 2010: 84). While the overall composition of these scenes remains consistent, minor variations can be observed, particularly in the positioning of the figure. The typical elements of such scenes include the fish gutter seated under the shade of a tree or papyrus, engaged in the process of removing the internal organs of a fish using a knife, with a wooden flat board placed in front. The area surrounding the fish gutter is often filled with processed fish and occasionally scattered with roe.

However, a small number of scenes depict fish roe. Twelve examples ranging from the mid-Fifth Dynasty to the reign of Teti in the early 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty represent pairs of roe as thin ovals placed beside a gutted fish (Keith, M., 2022: 222). Furthermore, when the fish gutter is shown at work, fishes are shown all around him, so that it looks as if it was flying. It would be a waste of effort according to Schäfer, to wonder whether it lay in the ground, or whether it was hanging on the wall, or to try to establish at all from the picture how the pieces were arranged spatially in nature. The artist did not consider the matter (Schäfer, H., 1974: 162). One must also note that fish seemingly above each other might, in reality, be positioned side by side (Binder, S., 2000: 31) The Egyptian drawings do not give us an impression of the depth of any individual object since there are no lines or surfaces that direct our gaze into depth; they are all spread out on the picture surface. (Schäfer, H., 1974:101).



In contrast, the baseline served as a means to establish connections between figures situated within the same context, often symbolizing the 'ground' of the depicted scene (Anderson, J. B., 2000: 37).

Several examples illustrate instances where individuals engaged in fish gutting were positioned along the same baseline with fish carriers (*Nbemakhet, Aba, Recem-kuy*), and fishing in the river (*Ti, Mererruka*). Notably, in the tomb of *Niankhamun and Khunmhotep*, the fish gutter was portrayed on a distinct baseline, with two registers of fishing scenes positioned above.

Additionally, in bizarre situations, the depictions of fish gutters cutting open fish and boat-building activities were on the same baseline. Furthermore, a layout was observed in the tomb of Urarna II, where the fish gutter was situated on the same baseline as the fish cooking activity.

On the other hand, the arrangement of the scene involving finning the fish was structured as follows; in the Tomb of *Mereruka*, a depiction shows a figure standing in a boat alongside three fishermen utilizing a weir trap, all attired in a similar fashion. The fish gutter is also portrayed in this scene. Similarly, in the Tomb of *Ti*, he is seated amidst a group of fishermen engaged in pulling a seine net, distinguished by his attire from the rest. The act of gutting fish is also illustrated in the same register. Furthermore, in the causeway of Sahure, an illustration features him standing before fishermen operating a seine trap, dressed akin to the other fishermen, although the gutting fish activity is absent. In the Tomb of *Hetep-Her-Akhti*, he is portrayed standing before fishermen actively pulling a seine net, with a fishing overseer in attendance, all adorned in comparable clothing. The Mastaba of the Musée du Louvre exhibits also a scene where a figure stands amidst two sets of fishermen pulling seine nets on either side, each group dressed differently. Lastly, in the Tomb of *Pehnwikay*, he is shown standing before fishermen pulling a seine net, attired similarly to his companions.

**Table 4: Fish Gutter's Body Posture**

Body posture	Figures in Table 3
Armes extended	4, 5, 7, 11
Foot outstretched	3
The foot slightly moved forward	2
Both knees were drawn to his stomach	4, 5, 6, 8, 11
Seated on a mat	1, 3, 4, 8, 11
Seated on a low stool	2, 5, 6, 7
Traditional male posture	1, 9
Rounded backlines	3, 4, 5, 8, 11
Squat in the stem of a skiff	10
Gutting fish while holding by hand	1, 2, 3, 9

## 6-Body Posture

To gut the fish, the man's arms had to be in front of his body, with the knife in the right hand and the fish held steady in the left (table 3). A slightly later fish gutter near the dragnet scene depicted in a seated posture with both of his knees drawn up to his stomach (Yvonne, H., 1987:148). Moreover, all gutters are seated, and the legs may be shown in a variety of positions;

(1) kneeling, (2) semi-kneeling, (3) seated with both legs to chest, (4) seated with one leg extended forwards. However, most of the scenes depicted seated figures with both legs to chest in the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, which indicates that this was the typical leg position employed in this dynasty. This position also prevailed during the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty with a semi-kneeling position as well (Keith, M., 2022: 227-228).

Fish gutters are uncommon in the provincial marsh scene. Some resemble the basic Saqqara type with an abbreviated shoulder, arms extended, and both legs drawn up (table 4). Thus, provincial artists took over the general Memphite composition of fish gutting, but they probably devised their figures for the scene. Perhaps this explains why fish gutters in southern tombs lack a detail included in the rendering of some fish gutters in Saqqara reliefs dating from 5- 6 onwards. The figures are given receding hairlines, and their backlines are rounded as if to suggest a slight hump of old age. It is impossible to determine whether this is a standard motif or indicates that old men (perhaps ex-fishermen) were given the sedentary job of gutting fish (Yvonne, H., 1987:148; McCorquodale, K., 2000: 3).

During the representation of tearing off the fish fins, sometimes, the arm covers the body, and the outline of the whole figure nearly remains the same (Mohr, H. T., 1943: 16). However, unusual postures have occurred, often when the artist attempts to combine conventional representation of certain parts of the body, with what the action in a particular scene requires. In Figures (12-14) the man catches the fish with his left hand and removes the fin with his right hand, but due to the convention of depicting the torso frontally, the right arm needs to be shown fairly high to make the action visible (Binder, S., 2000: 30). However, they are represented standing or seating, wearing in the most cases the traditional Egyptian kilt.

## 7-Conclusion

During the Old Kingdom period, the process of cleaning fish involved manual labor, with fishermen utilizing various types of knives for scaling and cleaning the fish. These knives were crafted from either flint or metal materials. The depiction of scaling, salting, and pressing of roe is absent in the archaeological records from this era. The drying of fish was commonly portrayed as the fish being split open and hung on a line or laid out on the ground. However, it is noted that the fish depicted in these illustrations as split open for drying were consumed in a closed form, contrary to the visual representations.

However, the archaeological site at Giza contains a total of four tombs depicting cleaning fish, with one dating back to the fourth dynasty and three to the fifth dynasty. Moreover, there is a single tomb that has been determined to belong to either the fifth or sixth dynasty. In contrast, Saqqara features a total of 22 tombs, with 15 from the fifth dynasty and five from the sixth dynasty. Furthermore, seven provinces each have a tomb that dates back to the fourth to sixth dynasties, totaling seven tombs. Among these tombs, 33 of them depict scenes of fish cutting, with a significant concentration of such scenes found in Saqqara. The distribution of these scenes shows that the highest number is found in the tombs from the fifth dynasty, with the lowest number in tombs from the fourth dynasty (table 1-2, chart 1-2).

The fish gutters are typically depicted in traditional body postures, with their knees drawn towards their stomach while seated on a mat or low stool, rather than with their feet outstretched

or working on the stem of a skiff (table 3, 4). In most cases, they are wearing the Egyptian kilt. Furthermore, the individual removing the fins from the fish was consistently depicted carrying out his duties aboard a large vessel alongside fellow fishermen engaged in seine net fishing, often attired like his companions.

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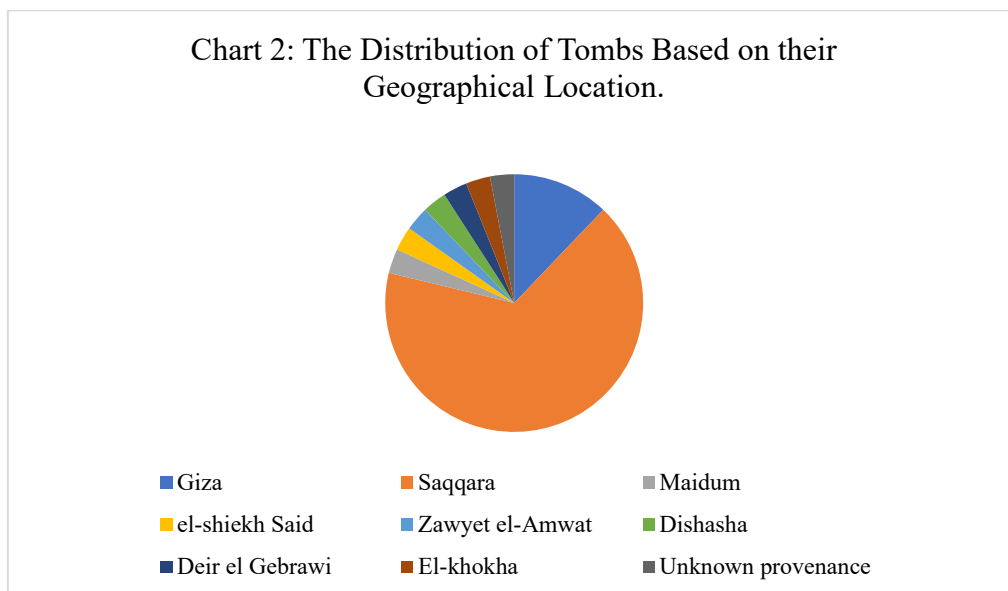
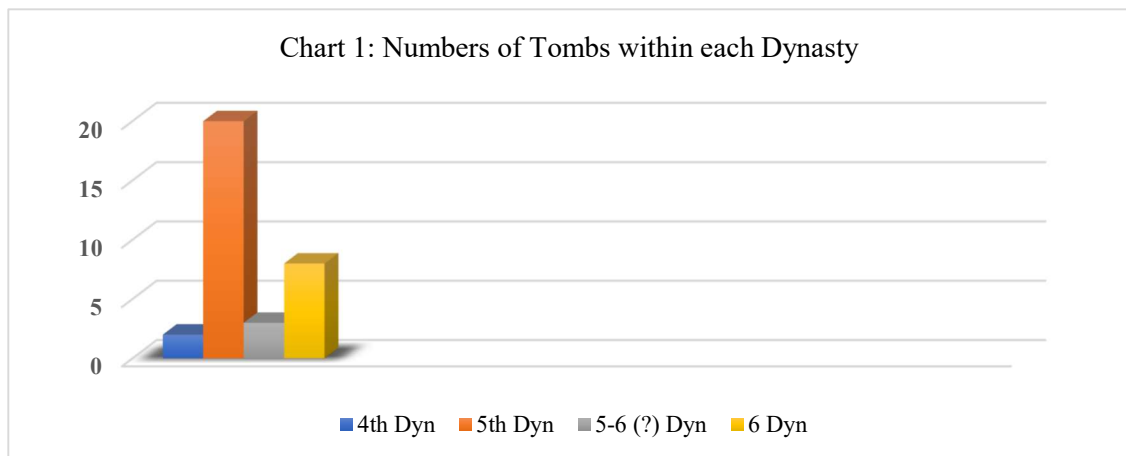
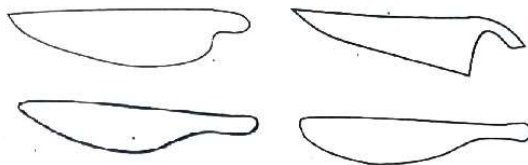
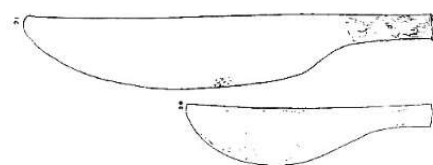


Fig.1: Common flint Knives in the O.K



Ikram, S., 1995: fig. 14

Fig. 2: Metal Knives



Petrie, W.M.F.,1890; Pl. XVII, fig. 19, 21

Fig. 3: Scaling Tools



Bates, O. 1917: figs. 216-217

fig. 4: Tomb of Ra-Hotep



Petrie, W.M.F., 1892: Pl. XII

fig. 5: Tomb of Neb-em-Akhet



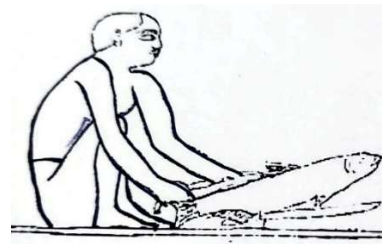
LD. II. 12

Fig. 6: Tomb of Urarna



Davies, N. de G., 1901: 24, pl. XII

fig. 7: Tomb of Ptah-Hotep



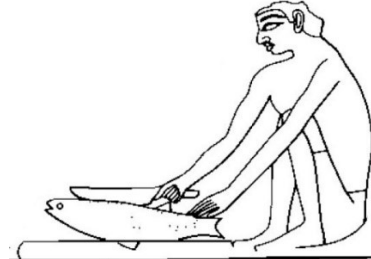
Paget, R.F.E and Pirie, A. A., 1898: 28, pl. XXXII

Fig. 8: Tomb of Ra-em-kuy



Hayes, W.C., 1946: fig. 54

fig. 9: tomb of Niankhamun and Khunmhotep



Moussa, A. M, and Altenmuller, H., 1977: pl. 12

Fig. 10: Tomb of Mereruka



Sakkarah Expedition 1938: pl. 43

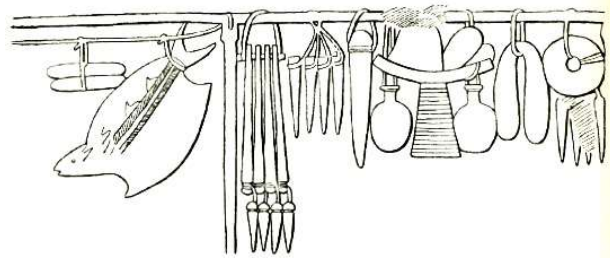
fig. 11: Tomb of Aba



Davies, N. De G., 1902 : pl.20



Fig. 12: Holding fish and roe to on a line to dry



Wild, H., 1953: CXXL

Tearing off a fish fin  
fig. 14

Fig.13

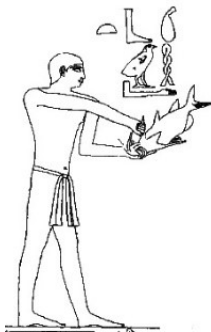


fig. 15



El-Awady, T., 2009: pl. 14 Wild. D. De H., 1953: pl. CXXIII Sakkarah Expedition, 1938: pl. 43

## منظفوا الأسماك في مقابر الدولة القديمة: نظرة إحصائية وفنية

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### الملخص العربي

وجدت الزخارف الموجودة على جدران المقابر المصرية القديمة صورًا توضح عملية تحضير الأسماك. وتركز هذه الدراسة على الأفراد المسؤولين عن تنظيف أحشاء الأسماك خلال عصر الدولة القديمة. وعادةً ما يتم تصوير هؤلاء العمال وهم جالسون على ضفاف النهر ، يلتصقون المأوى تحت الأشجار أو نباتات البردى أثناء استخدام السكاكين أو أدوات الصوان لتنظيف وتقشير الأسماك. يشير وجود القواقع والسكاكين إلى أن تقشير الأسماك ربما كانت ممارسة شائعة ، على الرغم من عدم وجود تفاصيل مثل التقشير والتمليح وضغط البطارخ بشكل صريح في الاكتشافات الأثرية التي تعود إلى هذا العصر. كانت المهمة الأساسية لهؤلاء الأفراد هي إزالة الأحشاء الداخلية للأسماك لإنتاج البطارخ والأسماك المجففة ، وهي ممارسة يتم توضيحها بشكل متكرر في المشاهد إلى جانب الصيادين. كما يتناول البحث أيضًا تكوين هذه المناظر ، مشيرًا إلى أوجه التشابه في تصوير منظفي الأسماك ، ووضعية أجسادهم أثناء العمل، وعناصر أخرى ذات أهمية فنية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، اعتمد البحث على دراسة وصفية تحليلية بجانب بيانات إحصائية حول مناظر التنظيف في المقابر في عصر الدولة القديمة ، ويشير البحث إلى تمركز أغلب المناظر في مقابر الأسرة الخامسة ، مقارنة بتلك الموجودة في اسرات أخرى. كما تتركز معظم هذه المقابر في منطقة سقارة.

الكلمات الدالة : منظفوا الأسماك ، تجفيف ، أسماك ، سقارة.