

This is a straight stick covered entirely with thick sheet-gold. At the top of the stick is a knob of blue glass (the colour of lapis lazuli) with a rounded top. At the bottom is a double ferrule of gold, put on separately (Carter: [227e](#)).

From the top is a vertical line of incised inscription 22.3cm long (Carter: [227e](#); Beinlich and Saleh 1989: 67).

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Notes on the object type

The ancient Egyptian word for 'stave' is first given in the late Old Kingdom as *imyt-r*, which could be understood as 'that which is on the edge (of a lake or pool)' (Fischer 1979: 7). This impression of staves representing a waterside reed is confirmed by the inscription found on 227e. There are, however, many types of stave and so a variety of explanations could be suggested.

Most depictions of individuals carrying staves would indicate that they relate to the authority of their owner, although staves can also be carried by their retainers (see below). Other sticks relate to occupations and would therefore designate a career role, such as: sounding rods for sailors, fowling sticks for bird keepers and, cattle prods for pastoralists (Fischer 1979: 8). Where actual staves have been found within the burial they are most often deposited within the wooden coffin of the deceased, a position particularly standardised during the Middle Kingdom (Hassan 1976: 74). The body itself rests on its left side, with the head pointing north and facing east, staves are then placed on either side of the body, occasionally also with bows and arrows (Hassan 1976: 110). Burials are also often accompanied by a head rest and sandals. It can be suggested therefore that these elements were requirements for the ideal Middle Kingdom burial assemblage and may be one reason for the location of group 227a-e in the tomb of Tutankhamun. Hassan points out that while staves should have been placed within the coffin itself, it was also possible to deposit them outside the sarcophagus/coffin and either wrap them in cloth or keep them in a wooden box (Hassan 1976: 110). Group 227a-e was found, along with other objects, wrapped in a length of linen and placed inside the door of the outer burial shrine of Tutankhamun; a typical location within a burial assemblage. Many other staves were found in the Antechamber of Tutankhamun's tomb, but it is unclear why these were kept separate from group 227. There is no clear conclusion as to why staves were a part of the ideal burial assemblage but spell 23 of the Coffin Texts alludes to their potential purpose for use in the journey to the afterlife (see CTI: [23] 71h-72c):

Take your staff, your loincloth, your sandals, [and] your arrows for the road, so that you can cut off the head and sever the neck of your foe that approaches [when] you are dead.

This text also draws together the various elements located within the coffin; the staff, linen dressings, sandals and weapons. The text also indicates that the staves had protective connotations, as well as providing physical support during the deceased's travels to the next world (Hassan 1976: 118). A similar reference can also be found in Coffin Text spell 3 (CTI: [3] 10b-f; Bommas 1999: 57-58), and also in the New Kingdom Tale of Two Brothers (Lichtheim 1976: 208).

Staves first appear in private burials during the First Intermediate Period (Hassan 1976: 119). It is also during this period that staves first appear within the equipment frieze on internal coffin decoration (Hassan 1976: 98). Willems has shown that these depictions represent the funerary rites associated with the interment of the deceased (Willems 1988: 208). The presence of staves within these images descended from similar depictions in Old Kingdom royal contexts showing the object offering

ritual (Willems 1988: 203-204). The first attested private burial of the Middle Kingdom to have staves deposited within the coffin is that of *Hnw* at Saqqara and his burial is illustrated by Hassan as an ideal Middle Kingdom coffin assemblage (Hassan 1976: 75, fig. 19). As the process of including staves within the burial assemblage reappeared during the early New Kingdom, little altered from Middle Kingdom traditions, it is unsurprising to find staves preserved from the royal burials of Amenhotep II, Amenhotep III, Ramesses II and Merenptah (Hassan 1976: 131). Tutankhamun however stands out among New Kingdom examples due to being buried with around 130 staves. According to Hassan's calculations (1976: 131), only about one tenth of these staves have inscriptions; group 227 includes five of these examples. Reeves documents that Carter believed Tutankhamun may have been 'an amateur collector of walking sticks and staves' (Reeves 1990: 178). This statement is however, difficult to confirm due to a lack of complete royal burials from the late Eighteenth Dynasty with which to compare the assemblage of Tutankhamun.

Curved sticks, like those exemplified by 227a-d, first appear in tomb assemblages from the early Middle Kingdom (Fischer 1979: 13). A depiction of three curved staves in a scene from the Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of Kenamun at Thebes (TT93) exhibits them among a selection of military equipment (Davies 1930: pl. XXII, A). They are labelled as having curved tops of 'gold', and straight ends of 'silver' (Fischer 1979: 13). This correlates well with staves 227a-d, as all of these have gold decoration around their handles, while the bottoms are usually decorated with ivory (see 'Object description' above). While the ivory replaces the silver, it remains a white luxury material and likely served the same purpose. Another depiction from the tomb of Kenamun show statues of the pharaoh Amenhotep II holding curved sticks similar to 227a-d. The curved ends face away from the Pharaoh who wears a militaristic uniform and carries various weapons (Davies 1930: pl. XXII, A). Once again the military nature of the curved staves is emphasised and relates to the textual themes preserved on those found in the tomb of Tutankhamun. Of the four statues of Amenhotep II shown holding curved staves three appear more similar to the curve exemplified by 227a and b, while one more closely resembles the more defined curve of 227c. Finally, a group of retainers shown in the lower register of the above two scenes also carry very long curved staves over their shoulders, more reminiscent of the type exemplified by 227a and b (Davies 1930: pl. XXI). 227d appears to be similar to those shown in 227a and b from Carter's descriptive cards (Carter: [227d](#)), however a lack of photographic records makes it difficult to be certain. It is noteworthy that five staves were discovered remaining in the tomb of Amenhotep II, almost all with titles inscribed down their lengths (Daressy 1902: 65-68). While these were all found broken, their remaining decoration gives the impression that they were also similar to group 227a-d.

Around 70 of Tutankhamun's staves were of the *mdw*-type (Hassan 1976: 131). This is the most popular variety, which appears in many tomb scenes and consists of a straight staff with a globular knob at its carrying end. 227e appears to be of the *mdw*-type created in wood and covered in thick sheet gold. However, the text inscribed along the length of the staff links this example more closely with the reed imitating varieties. Often these staves have notches carved along their length to replicate the appearance of reed texture (Fischer 1979: 21). However, 227e is smooth down its entire length and is topped with a large globular knob of blue glass (the colour of lapis lazuli – see above). The inscription (see above) could indicate that the staff had a more religious function than 227a-c and was perhaps used in a ritual linking the pharaoh with the god Amun.

The large number of staves in the tomb of Tutankhamun allow for a

misrepresentative view of sticks in royal burial assemblages of the New Kingdom. It is clear that large numbers of staves should have been expected in other royal tombs, and it is perhaps due to the removal of bodies into caches during the Twenty-first Dynasty that these are no longer preserved in their entirety. It is currently difficult to ascertain exactly why Tutankhamun is buried with such large numbers of the same types of staff (70 in the case of the *mdw*-type), although it is also true that he was buried with at least one of each known example from burial contexts. From this brief overview of staves in Ancient Egypt, and particularly those in the tomb of Tutankhamun, it is clear that the past assumption that these items were 'walking-sticks' (ILN 1925: 524-525) is unfounded and that instead these funerary goods represented the authority of their owners, and related to specific roles and rituals Tutankhamun was involved in. Further work on the inscriptions on other staves found in Tutankhamun's tomb will assist in understanding the purpose of these objects and the reasons for their prevalence in burial contexts from the Old Kingdom to New Kingdom.

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