

# OLD KINGDOM COPPER TOOLS AND MODEL TOOLS

**Martin Odler**

with contributions by

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Cover: Abusir, Context A39, Tomb of Qar Jr., copper model tools (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology)

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To my parents  
and grandparents



# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	xv
<b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....	xvi
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>1. Limits of subject, chronology and chorology</b> .....	4
<b>2. Tools and model tools in archaeological theory</b> .....	7
<b>3. Tools and toilet implements in Ancient Egypt – history of research</b> .....	10
<b>4. Definitions of artefacts</b> .....	13
4.1. Classification, morphology and chronology of artefacts.....	13
4.1.1. Ancient Egyptian models.....	14
4.1.2. Model and miniature tools.....	15
4.2. Semiotic triangle of meaning.....	19
4.3. Old Kingdom weights and measures applicable to tools .....	20
<b>5. Research tools</b> .....	23
5.1. Available research tools.....	23
5.2. Catalogue of contexts with Social status, titles (text by Veronika Dulíková).....	23
5.3. Catalogues of artefacts .....	27
<b>6. Copper tools in Old Kingdom textual and iconographic sources</b> .....	29
6.1. <i>Pr-ḥd</i> – Treasury and metals.....	30
6.2. Written sources.....	31
6.2.1. Offering lists .....	31
6.2.2. Copper tools in market scenes .....	33
6.2.3. Inscribed Old Kingdom tools .....	34
6.3. Iconographic sources – reliefs and palaeography .....	36
6.3.1. Sites with iconographic and written sources.....	38
6.3.1.1. Sites in Lower Egypt.....	38
6.3.1.2. Sites in Upper Egypt.....	51
<b>7. Archaeological sources – material culture</b> .....	54
7.1. Archaeological context of copper artefacts .....	54
7.1.1. Sites with findings of copper artefacts.....	54
7.1.1.1. Sites in Lower Egypt.....	54
7.1.1.2. Memphite region.....	54
7.1.1.3. Sites in Upper Egypt.....	83
7.1.1.4. Sites in Nubia.....	97
7.1.1.5. Sites in the Levant.....	97
<b>8. Tools and toilet implements</b> .....	98
8.1. Stonework, timberwork, carpentry and sculpture tools.....	98
8.1.1. Chisels .....	103
8.1.1.1. Chisels before the Old Kingdom .....	108
8.1.1.2. Semiotic definition of the tool(s).....	109
8.1.1.3. Database entry and general descriptive statistics .....	114
8.1.1.4. Flat chisels .....	116
8.1.1.5. Cross-cut chisels .....	121
8.1.1.6. Picks.....	123
8.1.1.7. Outlines of chronology .....	123
8.1.1.8. Analyses.....	127
8.1.1.9. Near Eastern and Aegean analogies .....	127
8.1.2. Adzes .....	128
8.1.2.1. Adzes before the Old Kingdom .....	129
8.1.2.2. Semiotic definition of the tool.....	129
8.1.2.3. Database entry and general descriptive statistics .....	140

8.1.2.4. Type A: plain adzes with flat butt .....	140
8.1.2.5. Type B: plain adzes with rounded butt .....	140
8.1.2.6. Type C: necked adzes with flat butt .....	140
8.1.2.7. Type D: necked adzes with butt .....	140
8.1.2.8. Outlines of chronology .....	142
8.1.2.9. Adzes in archaeological contexts .....	144
8.1.2.10. Tool traces .....	144
8.1.2.11. Analyses .....	145
8.1.2.12. Near Eastern analogies .....	145
8.1.3. Axes .....	146
8.1.3.1. Semiotic definition of the artefact .....	146
8.1.3.2. Database entry and general descriptive statistics .....	148
8.1.3.3. Type A: plain forms .....	150
8.1.3.4. Type B: single-perforation forms .....	154
8.1.3.5. Type C: lugged forms .....	154
8.1.3.6. Battle axes .....	156
8.1.3.7. Outlines of chronology .....	156
8.1.3.8. Axes in archaeological contexts .....	158
8.1.3.9. Analyses .....	160
8.1.3.10. Near Eastern analogies .....	160
8.1.4. Saws .....	160
8.1.4.1. Saws before the Old Kingdom .....	162
8.1.4.2. Semiotic definition of the tool .....	162
8.1.4.3. Database entry and general descriptive statistics .....	163
8.1.4.4. Type A: Symmetrical saw blades .....	167
8.1.4.5. Type B: Asymmetrical saw blades with tang .....	168
8.1.4.6. Type C: Asymmetrical saw blades with handles and without tang .....	168
8.1.4.7. Outlines of chronology .....	168
8.1.4.8. Saws in archaeological contexts .....	169
8.1.4.9. Analyses .....	169
8.1.4.10. Near Eastern analogies .....	170
8.1.5. Drills .....	170
8.1.6. Wedges .....	173
8.2. Cosmetic tool kit .....	173
8.2.1. Razors .....	175
8.2.1.1. Razors before the Old Kingdom .....	175
8.2.1.2. Semiotic definition of the tool .....	176
8.2.1.3. Database entry and general descriptive statistics .....	176
8.2.1.4. Type A: symmetrical razor blades without a tang .....	178
8.2.1.5. Type B: symmetrical razor blades with a tang made together with blade .....	179
8.2.1.6. Type C: symmetrical razor blades with an attached tang .....	179
8.2.1.7. Outlines of chronology .....	180
8.2.1.8. Razors in archaeological contexts .....	181
8.2.1.9. Analyses .....	181
8.2.1.10. Near Eastern analogies .....	181
8.2.2. Mirrors .....	181
8.2.2.1. Semiotic definition of the artefact .....	181
8.2.2.2. Database entry and general descriptive statistics .....	185
8.2.2.3. Variants .....	186
8.2.2.4. Outlines of chronology .....	190
8.2.2.5. Mirrors in archaeological contexts .....	190
8.2.2.6. Analyses .....	192
8.2.2.7. Near Eastern analogies .....	192
8.2.3. Tweezers .....	193
8.2.4. Hair curlers .....	194
8.2.5. Kohl-sticks .....	194
8.2.6. Cosmetic tool kit from Mahasna .....	194
8.3. Textile and leatherwork tool kit .....	194

8.3.1. Needles .....	195
8.3.1.1. Semiotic definition of the artefact .....	195
8.3.1.2. Database entry and general descriptive statistics .....	195
8.3.1.3. Variants.....	195
8.3.1.4. Outlines of chronology .....	196
8.3.1.5. Needles in archaeological contexts .....	196
8.3.1.6. Near Eastern analogies .....	196
8.3.2. Awls.....	196
8.3.3. Pins.....	197
8.4. Hunting and food processing tool kit.....	198
8.4.1. Fish-hooks .....	198
8.4.1.1. Semiotic definition of the artefact.....	198
8.4.1.2. Database entry and general descriptive statistics .....	198
8.4.1.3. Variants.....	198
8.4.1.4. Chronology and archaeology.....	198
8.4.1.5. Near Eastern analogies .....	199
8.4.2. Harpoons.....	200
8.4.2.1. Semiotic definition of the artefact.....	200
8.4.2.2. Variants, chronology and archaeological contexts .....	201
8.4.3. Knives .....	201
8.4.3.1. Semiotic definition of the artefact.....	203
8.4.3.2. Outlines of morphology and chronology.....	204
8.4.3.3. Type A – knives with a blunt back, one-sided edge and a tang .....	205
8.4.3.4. Type B – knives with a straight back and an incorporated handle.....	205
8.4.3.5. Type C – leather-cutting knives.....	205
8.5. Agricultural tools: sickles, hoes.....	206
8.6. ‘Cosmetic spatulas’ – Old Kingdom ingots? .....	207
8.7. Weapons .....	207
8.7.1. Arrowheads.....	208
8.7.1.1. Results of previous research.....	208
8.7.1.2. Semiotic definition of the artefact.....	208
8.7.1.3. Outlines of morphology and chronology.....	208
8.7.1.4. Near Eastern analogies .....	208
8.7.2. Spearheads.....	208
8.7.2.1. Results of previous research.....	208
8.7.2.2. Semiotic definition of the artefact.....	209
8.7.2.3. Outlines of typology and chronology .....	209
8.7.2.4. Near Eastern analogies .....	209
8.7.3. Daggers .....	209
8.7.3.1. Results of previous research.....	209
8.7.3.2. Semiotic definition of the artefact.....	210
8.7.3.3. Outlines of morphology and chronology.....	210
8.8. Tools of unknown use .....	210
8.8.1.1. Forked object from the pyramid of Khufu .....	210
8.8.1.2. Unfinished chisel from Balat.....	211
8.8.1.3. Fan-shaped object from Dendera .....	211
8.9. Other objects .....	211
<b>9. Towards a semiosis of tools in the Old Kingdom culture.....</b>	<b>212</b>
9.1. Contexts with full-size tools .....	217
9.1.1. Settlement and temple contexts.....	217
9.1.2. Finds out of context .....	218
9.1.3. Full-size tools vs. models and their technological changes .....	218
9.2. Contexts with model tools .....	219
9.2.1. Funerary archaeological contexts.....	220
9.2.1.1. Tools and model tools in royal tombs.....	220
9.2.1.2. Tools and model tools in non-royal tombs .....	221
9.2.1.3. Contents of tool assemblages from in situ burials.....	225

9.2.1.4. Tools in shaft graves and grave pits .....	227
9.2.1.5. Tertiary contexts .....	229
9.2.2. Morphology of artefacts – secondary changes .....	229
9.2.3. Model tools: interpretations .....	231
9.2.3.1. Tools and the patron – craftsman relationship and its religious meaning .....	231
9.2.3.2. Model tools in female burials .....	232
9.2.3.3. Social status and comparison of tool kits (text by Martin Odler and Veronika Dulíková) .....	233
9.2.3.4. Copper and the production of burial equipment .....	234
9.2.3.5. Tool variables and their interpretation .....	235
<b>10. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>236</b>
10.1. Tasks for future research .....	237
<b>11. Case studies .....</b>	<b>238</b>
11.1. Archaeometallurgical study of copper alloy tools and model tools from the Old Kingdom necropolis at Giza .....	238
<i>Jiří Kmošek – Martin Odler – Tereza Jamborová – Šárka Msallamová –</i>	
<i>Kateřina Šálková – Martina Kmoníčková</i>	
Introduction .....	238
Arsenic copper alloys .....	238
Corrosion deterioration of artefacts .....	240
Methodology .....	240
X-Ray diffraction analysis .....	241
Optical microscopy .....	241
Energy dispersive X-Ray fluorescence spectrometry .....	241
Scanning electron microscopy with X-Ray energy dispersive analyser .....	241
Vickers micro hardness testing .....	241
Results and discussion .....	242
Corrosion deterioration .....	242
Alloy composition .....	245
Microstructural characterization .....	246
Conclusion .....	248
11.2. Morphometrical and statistical case study of Old Kingdom adze blades .....	248
<i>Martin Odler and Ján Dupej</i>	
Introduction .....	248
Related work .....	252
Material and methods .....	252
Results and discussion .....	253
Form .....	253
Shape .....	256
Social status .....	257
Conclusion .....	257
11.3. Dating of archaeological contexts from the Memphite necropolis with copper tools and model tools based on assemblages of model stone vessels .....	261
<i>Lucie Jirásková</i>	
11.4. Dating of select Old Kingdom archaeological contexts in the Memphite region based on ceramic finds .....	264
<i>Katarína Arias Kytnarová</i>	
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>271</b>
Web sources .....	290
<b>Catalogue .....</b>	<b>291</b>
The catalogue is available at <a href="http://bit.ly/2cT1NFz">http://bit.ly/2cT1NFz</a> .....	291



## List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of sites with Old Kingdom copper tools and model tools (Martin Odler in software qGIS, map: Natural Earth).....	5
Figure 2: Shortcuts of the sites in the text and in the catalogue .....	6
Figure 3: Classification of the artefacts and their relation to emic and etic categories (drawing Martin Odler, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	14
Figure 4: Analyses of the chemical composition of Old Kingdom copper alloy tools and model tools.....	16-17
Figure 5: Semiotic triangle of meaning (drawing Martin Odler, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology)	19
Figure 6: Semiotic triangle of meaning applied to Old Kingdom copper tools and models tools (drawing Martin Odler, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	19
Figure 7: Ancient Egyptian measures of length (based on Rossi 2004, Table 2).....	21
Figure 8: Scale used for drawings of the Old Kingdom copper tools. Ancient Egyptian measures are measured from right to left, centimetres are displayed from left to right (drawing Martin Odler, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	21
Figure 9: Structure of the database of Old Kingdom copper tools and model tools in File Maker .....	24
Figure 10: The updated basic model of the structure of administration in the capital during the Old Kingdom (after Dulíková 2016, 58, Fig. 4.1, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	25
Figure 11: Saqqara, weighing of adze blades in the tomb of Kaemrehu (icon76; after Mogensen 1921, Fig. 42, corrected drawing of the adze blades based on the original exhibited in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, CG 1534, drawing Markéta Kobierská).....	30
Figure 12: Offering lists and tool names (composed after Köhler and Jones 2009, 148–149, with kind permission of C. E. Köhler; AEIN 896b, © Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. Photo: Ole Haupt; drawing Markéta Kobierská after Smith 1933, Pl. XXIV; Junker 1940, Taf. IX) .....	31
Figure 13: Helwan, offering list of Wabkhenemu (after Köhler and Jones 2009, 148–149, with kind permission of C. E. Köhler) .....	32
Figure 14: Giza, Saqqara or Abusir, Offering list of Isi (AEIN 896b, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. Photo: Ole Haupt.).....	33
Figure 15: Giza, Offering list on the sarcophagus of Prince Minkhhaf (redrawing Markéta Kobierská after Smith 1933, Pl. XXIV) .....	34
Figure 16: Giza, Tomb of Kaemankh, offering list of Kaemankh (after Junker 1940, Taf. IX) .....	34
Figure 17: Inscribed Old Kingdom tools (except of mirrors) .....	35
Figure 18: Selection of Old Kingdom full-size adze blades. Contexts and sources: X1 - UC16330, Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL, X5 - EA66207, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, G23 - MFA 11.785, Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová; G119 - after Hassan (1953, pl. LXII: B, drawing Markéta Kobierská); M2 - after Petrie (1892, Pl. XXIX: 11); EK1 - after Hendrickx and Eyckerman (2009, Fig. 27, with kind permission of S. Hendrickx). .....	36
Figure 19: Selection of Old Kingdom full-size axe blades. Contexts and sources: AR1 – after Valloggia (2011, Fig. 164, © IFAO), G23 – MFA 11.784; NI1 – after Rowe (1936, 283–289) , drawings by Markéta Kobierská, Martin Odler; G12 – after Kromer (1978, Taf. 32: 14, 15); Ad1 – after Williams (1989, Fig. 70c, Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago). .....	37
Figure 20: Selection of Old Kingdom full-size chisel blades. Contexts and sources: G2 and G3 - after Reisner and Smith (1955, Figs. 36-37); X2 -after Rowe (1938, Pl. LIX, drawing Markéta Kobierská); G26 - MFA 11.841, X3 - EA66208, X4 - EA66209, both artefacts courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum - Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová; Ay5 - after Petrie (1903, Pl. XV: 1); Ay6 - after Petrie (1903, Pl. XV: 8); Ay7 - after Petrie (1903, Pl. XV: 10); Ay9 - Petrie (1903, Pl. XV: 11). .....	38
Figure 21: Old Kingdom sites with iconographic sources concerning copper tools (Martin Odler in software qGIS, map: Natural Earth). .....	39
Figure 22: Saqqara, craft scenes in the tomb of Ty, sculptors and carpenters (icon12, 56; after Steindorff 1913, Taf. 133).....	39
Figure 23: Old Kingdom iconographic sources with tools .....	40-50
Figure 24: Giza, Tomb of Iymery (G 6020), first chamber, south wall, craft scenes (icon15; after Weeks 1994, Fig. 30, © MFA, with kind permission of Rita A. Freed).....	50
Figure 25: Deir el-Gebrawi, wooden haft of a model adze blade (after Kanawati 2013, Pl. 81: DGS06: 5, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	52
Figure 26: Deir el-Gebrawi, Tomb of Djau-Shemai and Djau, chapel, north wall, east section (icon25, 50, 63; after Kanawati 2013, Pl. 75, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati).....	53
Figure 27: Old Kingdom archaeological contexts with copper tools, according to the sites .....	56-60
Figure 28: Bubastis, Context Ba4 – Tomb 161 (after el-Sawi 1979, Figs . 148–149, redrawn by Markéta Kobierská, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	61

Figure 29: Abu Rawash, selected Old Kingdom contexts. Sources: AR1 - after Valloggia (2011, Fig. 163–164); AR5 - after Bisson de la Roque (1925, Pl. XXVI: 446a–b); ; AR6 - after Bisson de la Roque (1925, pl. XXVI: 453ab, 455, 454ab); AR7 - after Bisson de la Roque (1924, Pl. XIII: 160); AR8 - after Bisson de la Roque (1925, pl. XXVI: 357ab); AR9 - after Bisson de la Roque (1925, Pl. XXVI: 335abc, 282, 283); AR10 - after Bisson de la Roque (1925, Pl. XXVI: 330:1–2, 4–5); AR12 - after Bisson de la Roque (1925, 77, pl. XXVI: 443a–d). Redrawn in scale by Markéta Kobierská, © IFAO.....	62
Figure 30: Abusir, selection of Dynasty 5 copper tools and model tools. Contexts and sources: A2 - after Callender (2008, Fig. 4.81d, 4.82a, 4.83b); A3 - unpublished, drawing Valéria Uramová; A4 - after Callender (2008, Fig. 4.84); A5 - after Callender (2008, Fig. 4.85a); A6 - unpublished, drawing Valéria Uramová; A7 - after Callender (2008, Fig. 4.87); A8 - unpublished, drawing Valéria Uramová; A9 - after Callender (2008, Fig. 4.86); A17 - after Krejčí (2008c, Figs. 3.45, redrawn by Markéta Kobierská); A19 - after Krejčí (2008a, Fig. 5.73b); A20- Krejčí (2008b, Figs. 5.117); A21 - after Krejčí (2008b, Fig. 5.120); A22 - after Krejčí and Arias Kytarová <i>et al.</i> (2014, Figs. 3.5a, 3.7a); A23 - after Krejčí and Arias Kytarová <i>et al.</i> (2014, Fig. 3.4a); A24 - after Krejčí and Arias Kytarová <i>et al.</i> (2014, Fig. 3.6a); A25 - unpublished, drawing Martin Odler; A26 - after Krejčí, Arias Kytarová and Odler (2015, Fig. 12); A28, A33, A34, A35 - unpublished, drawing Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová, with kind permission of the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, National Museum, Prague, acc. no. P5605 (A28), P7093 (A33), P7096 (A34), P7104 (A35); A30, A31 - Odler (2015b, Fig. 2) A32 - unpublished, drawing Martin Odler. © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology. Layout Markéta Kobierská. ....	63
Figure 31: Abusir, Context A50, Tomb AS 65 of Neferherptah, Shaft 1, perhaps of his relative (wife?), mirror (drawing Martin Odler, Lucie Vařeková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	64
Figure 32: Abusir, Context A37, Tomb AS 27: Tomb Lake of Abusir 5, Shaft 2, model tool kit deposited on a travertine offering table (photo Květa Smoláriková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	64
Figure 33: Abusir, Context A49, Tomb AS 22, burial chamber of Inti Pepyankh; copper model tools (find No. 140/JJ/2000) together with a ceramic vessel and limestone model vessels (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	65
Figure 34: Giza, Old Kingdom contexts in the database.....	66-69
Figure 35: Giza, selected Dynasty 4 contexts with model tool kits. Contexts and sources: G5 - after Reisner (1942, Fig. 218); G9 - after Reisner (1942, Fig. 321); G10 - after Reisner (1942, Fig. 323); G20 - MFA 27.2037, G34 - MFA 36-12-31, 36-12-32, 36-12-33, drawings by Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová; after G35 - Reisner (1942, Fig. 279, Pl. 58f), © MFA, G39 - after Hassan (1953, 5, Pl. VI: B). Layout by Markéta Kobierská. ....	70
Figure 36: Giza, Context G33, model tool types from the tomb of Babaf (G 8260) (after Hassan 1953, 9, no scale).....	71
Figure 37: Giza, Contexts G11–G19, tools and tool fragments from the settlement debris, datable to the reigns of Khufu and Khafra (after Kromer 1978, Taf. 32).....	71
Figure 38: Giza, finds from the Menkaura valley temple, MFA Boston. Contexts and accession numbers: G23 - 11.784, 11.785; G25 - 11.842; G26 - 11.841; G27 - 11.845; G30 - 11.843. © MFA. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová .....	72
Figure 39: Giza, Dynasty 5 model tools deposited in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Contexts and numbers: G42 - 24.2989, 24.2990; G47 - 15-12-52; G48 - 27-2-462; G49 - 33-1-41, 33.1046 - 33.1048, 33.1055; G50 - 15-11-42; G52 - 25-12-120, 25.2915; G55 - 25.2831, 25.2832, 25.2834, 25.2903; G58 - 33.1085, 33.1098; G59 - 25.2765; G60 - 25-12-106, 25.2799; G62 - 12-11-30b; G64 - 25.1866; G65 - 30-12-118; G73 - 25.2630; G86 - 14-1244, © MFA. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová, Layout Markéta Kobierská .....	73
Figure 40: Giza - Dynasty 5 full-size and model tools, contexts in other museums. Contexts and sources: G46 - after Reisner (1942, Fig. 304a); G53 - after Hassan (1941, Fig. 217); G68 - after Reisner (1942, Fig. 310); G69 - after Hassan (1941, Fig. 208). Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová: G61 - PM - RPM Hildesheim; ÄMUL - ÄMU Leipzig; G66 - PM - RPM Hildesheim; ÄMUL - ÄMU Leipzig; G70 - PM - RPM Hildesheim; ÄMUL - ÄMU Leipzig; G81 - ÄMUL 2130; G85 - PM - RPM Hildesheim; ÄMUL - ÄMU Leipzig; G90 - PM - RPM Hildesheim; ÄMUL - ÄMU Leipzig; G91 - ÄMU Leipzig. Layout Markéta Kobierská .....	74
Figure 41: Giza - Dynasty 5 and 6 provenanced contexts from the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien. G51 - Context II; G67 - Context XVI; G107 - inventory numbers on drawing; G112 - Context I. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová, Layout Markéta Kobierská .....	75
Figure 42: Giza - late Dynasty 5 and early Dynasty 6 contexts. Contexts and sources: G63 - after Hassan (1941, Fig. 82); G92 - after Hassan (1941, Fig. 118). .....	76
Figure 43: Giza - Dynasty 6 contexts in the MFA Boston. Contexts and numbers: G76 - 25.2688; G77 - 25.2610; G93 - 25.1783; G94 - 25.1634; G100 - 12-11-52; G120 - 30-12-5, © MFA. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová, Layout Markéta Kobierská .....	77
Figure 44: Giza, Context G97. Tools and model tools from the tomb of Ptahshepses Impy, G 2381, Shaft A. © MFA. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová, Layout Markéta Kobierská .....	78
Figure 45: Giza, Context G98. Model tools from Tomb G 2381, Shaft Z, © MFA. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová, Layout Markéta Kobierská.....	78
Figure 46: Giza - selected Old Kingdom mirrors and model mirrors. Contexts and sources: G99 - after Simpson (1980, 14, Pl. XXXIIc, redrawn by Markéta Kobierská); G115 - MFA, 37.1235; G126 - KHM Wien, Context V. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová, Markéta Kobierská, Layout Markéta Kobierská.....	79

Figure 47: Giza, unprovenanced Old Kingdom material from the excavations by Hermann Junker, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien. Contexts G123 - G131. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová, Markéta Kobierská, Layout Markéta Kobierská .....	80
Figure 48: Kafr Ammar, Old Kingdom mirrors. Sources: KA1 – after Petrie and Mackay (1915, Pl. XIV), KA2 – after Petrie and Mackay (1915, Pl. XIV) .....	81
Figure 49: Saqqara, Context S4, model tool kit from the tomb of Kaemsenu (after Firth and Gunn 1926, Fig. 38, no scale, © IFAO) .....	81
Figure 50: Saqqara - model tool kits from the Tombs of Kagemni (S6) and Neferseshemra- Shesi (S9). Source: S6 – after Firth and Gunn (1926, Fig. 17); S9 – after Firth and Gunn (1926, Fig. 14), © IFAO. ....	82
Figure 51: Saqqara - model tool blades from Context S24 (after Jéquier 1925, Fig. 24, no scale, © IFAO) .....	82
Figure 52: Saqqara - mirror from Context S26 (after Jéquier 1925, Fig. 63, no scale, © IFAO) .....	82
Figure 53: Saqqara - Context S31, most probably from the First Intermediate period or Middle Kingdom (after Jéquier 1940, Fig. 47, © IFAO).....	83
Figure 54: Abydos - selected contexts with copper model tool kits. Ay1 – the British Museum, axe blades after Davies (1987, Pl. 2: 12); Ay10 – the British Museum; Ay11 – the British Museum, © Trustees of the British Museum. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová, Layout Markéta Kobierská .....	84
Figure 55: Matmar, Old Kingdom copper alloy finds. Contexts and sources: Mt1 – after Brunton (1948, Pl. XXXV: 5); Mt2 – after Brunton (1948, Pl. XXXVII: 3208-10); Mt3 – after Brunton (1948, Pl. XXXV: 6); Mt4 – after Brunton (1948, Pl. XXXV: 8); Mt5 – after Brunton (1948, Pl. XXXV: 7); Mt6 – after Brunton (1948, Pl. XXXVII: 3234-14).....	85
Figure 56: Mostagedda, Old Kingdom copper alloy finds. Contexts and sources, new Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová: Ms1 – British Museum, EA63113; Ms2 – British Museum, EA62529, both courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum; Ms3 – Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AN1930.514; Ms4 – after Brunton (1937, Pl. LXI: 19); Ms5 – after Brunton (1937, Pl. LXIV: 10 012-6); Ms6 – after Brunton (1937, Pl. LXI: 17); Ms7 – after Brunton (1937, Pl. LXI: 18); Ms8 – after Brunton (1937, Pl. LXI: 16).....	86
Figure 57: Kau, Badari and Hammamiya, Old Kingdom copper alloy finds. Contexts and sources: Bd1 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 23); Bd2 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 22); Bd3 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 18); Bd4 – British Museum, EA57570; Bd5 – UC17734, Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL; Bd6 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXVIII: 7); Hm1 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 1); Hm2 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 2, 3); Hm3 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 20); K1 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 2); K2 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 21); K3 – UC17669, Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL; K4 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 12); K5 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 18); K6 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 22); K7 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 23); K8 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 20); K9 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 22); K10 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 4); K11 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 18); K12 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 22); K13 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXIX: 4).....	87
Figure 58: Dara, Context D1, late Old Kingdom copper alloy finds: model axe blade with haft and model chisel (after Weill 1958, Pl. XL, f, g, © IFAO).....	88
Figure 59: Dendera, selected Old Kingdom copper alloy finds. Context and sources: Dd2 – after Petrie (1898, 7, Pl. XX); Dd3 – after Petrie (1898, Pl. XX); Dd4 – after Petrie (1898, Pl. XX); Dd5 – Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AN1896-1908 E.1742, drawing Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová. ....	88
Figure 60: Diospolis Parva (Hu), selected Old Kingdom copper alloy finds. Contexts and numbers: DP2 – after Petrie (1901, Pl. XXXI: D14); DP3 – after Petrie (1901, Pl. XXXI: N 19).....	89
Figure 61: Edfu, selected Old Kingdom copper alloy finds. Contexts and sources: Louvre - Ed1 – E 25975; Ed4 – E 25973, E 25978. National Museum, Warsaw: Ed2 – MN 141673; Ed8 – MN 140331; Ed10 – MN 141590. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová .....	90
Figure 62: El-Kab, Old Kingdom copper alloy finds. EK1 – after Hendrickx and Eyckerman (2009, Fig. 27, with kind permission of S. Hendrickx); EK2 – after Quibell (1898, Pl. XVIII: 56–65); EK3 – after Lilyquist (1979, Fig. 10, with kind permission of C. Lilyquist).....	91
Figure 63: El-Kab, mirror from Context EK4 (no scale, after Limme 2008, Fig. 23, with kind permission of D. Huyge).....	92
Figure 64: Mahasna, Old Kingdom copper alloy finds. Contexts and sources: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: Mh1 – AN.1896-1908 E.1860; Mh6 – AN.1896-1908 E.1783; Petrie Museum, UCL: Mh3 – UC 40535, Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL; Mh2 – after Garstang (1902, Pl. XL: 100); Mh4 – after Garstang (1902, Pl. XL: 401); Mh5 – after Garstang (1902, Pl. XL: 424); Mh7 – after Garstang (1902, Pl. XXXIII, XL: 349). Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová .....	92
Figure 65: Zawiyet el-Mayitin, Old Kingdom copper alloy finds. Drawings Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová. Louvre: ZM1 - E11457; ZM2 - E11470; ZM3 - E11464.....	93
Figure 66: Balat, selected Old Kingdom copper alloy finds, Layout Markéta Kobierská. Contexts and sources: B1 – after Valloggia (1998, Pl. CVII-CVIII); B2 – after Valloggia (1998, Pl. CVII, CVIII); B3 – after Valloggia (1998, Pl. CVII, CVIII); B8 – after Valloggia (1998, Pl. CVIII); B10 – after Castel, Pantalacci and Cherpion (2001, Fig. 123–124); B12 – after Castel, Pantalacci and Cherpion (2001, Fig. 124); B14 – after Castel, Pantalacci and Cherpion (2001, Fig. 124); B15 – after Castel, Pantalacci and Cherpion (2001, Fig. 123–124); B17 – after Valloggia (1986, Pl. LXXIII, LXXXVI); B18 – after Valloggia (1986, Pl. XXV, A, LXXIII, LXXXVI); B19 – after Valloggia (1986, Pl. LXXIII, LXXXVI); B22 – after Valloggia (1986, Pl. LXXXVI); B24 – after Minault-Gout and Deleuze (1992, 116); B25 – after Minault-Gout and Deleuze (1992, Pl. 41); B26 – after Minault-Gout and Deleuze (1992, Pl. 41); B27	

– after Soukiassian, Wuttmann and Pantalacci (2002, Fig. 109); B28 – after Soukiassian, Wuttmann and Pantalacci (2002, fig. 98); B29 – after Soukiassian, Wuttmann and Pantalacci (2002, Fig. 98); B30 – after Soukiassian, Wuttmann and Pantalacci (2002, Fig. 98); B33 – after Castel and Pantalacci (2005, Figs. 103-104, no. 17, 21), © IFAO. Layout Markéta Kobierská .....	94
Figure 67: Balat, selected Old Kingdom copper alloy mirrors. Contexts and sources: B4 – after Valloggia (1998, Pl. LXXVI, B); B10 – after Castel, Pantalacci and Cherpion (2001, Figs. 123–124); B11 – after Castel, Pantalacci and Cherpion (2001, Fig. 123); B15 – after Castel, Pantalacci and Cherpion (2001, Figs. 123–124); B26 – after Minault-Gout and Deleuze (1992, Pl. 41); B32 – after Castel and Pantalacci (2005, Fig. 66, no 1), © IFAO. Layout Markéta Kobierská .....	95
Figure 68: Selected Old Kingdom copper alloy finds from Nubia. Contexts and sources: Ad1 – after Williams (1989, Fig. 70c); Ad2 – after Williams (1989, Fig. 71: b, j), both figures published with kind permission of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago; An1 – after Steindorff (1935, Taf. 70: 7-9, redrawn by Markéta Kobierská); Bh1 – after O'Connor (2014, Pl. 54); Bh2 – after O'Connor (2014, Pl. 54); Bh3 – after O'Connor (2014, Pl. 54); To1 – after Emery and Kirwan (1935, Fig. 356) .....	96
Figure 69: Tool counts in the iconographic sources .....	99-102
Figure 70: Saqqara, Tomb of Mereruka, north wall, Room A3, east wall, craft scenes (icon22, 80, after Kanawati <i>et al.</i> 2010, Pl. 74, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	103
Figure 71: Abusir, Tomb of Ptahshepses, Room 4, east wall, register 1, sculptors (icon54; after Verner 1977, Pls. 27–28, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	103
Figure 72: Sheikh Said, Tomb of Serefkai, metalworking scene with products of the workshop (icon7, 77, after Davies 1901, Pl. 4) .....	104
Figure 73: Deshasha, Tomb of Inti, chapel, east wall, south of entrance, craft scenes (icon32, 67, 79; after Kanawati and McFarlane 1993, Pl. 29, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	104
Figure 74: Finds of chisels according to the sites and periods .....	104
Figure 75: Types and variants of chisels used in Shaft 113 at Saqqara (after Welc 2010, Fig. 27, with kind permission of F. Welc) .....	105
Figure 76: Abusir, Tomb AS 60, chisel marks in the burial chamber (photo Lucie Jirásková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	106
Figure 77: Abusir, Tomb AS 60, chisel marks in the burial chamber (photo Lucie Jirásková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	106
Figure 78: Abusir, Tomb AC 15: burial chamber of Khekeretnebtj, chisel cut marks on a sarcophagus (photo Milan Zemina, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	107
Figure 79: Abusir, interior of the canopic jar 15_3/AS67/2012 with chisel traces. The tool might have been used either to cut out the drilling core remaining after the use of a copper tube drill or to gouge out the stone to shape the interior of the jar (photo L. Jirásková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	107
Figure 80: Abusir, a detail of a side of a canopic jar (find No. 24/AS37/2007), which was once deposited in the burial chamber of Neferinpu's wife or mother situated at Abusir South. In this case, a chisel was used instead of the figure-of-eight borer to shape the interior of the jar (photo L. Jirásková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	108
Figure 81: Abusir, another canopic jar from the set of Neferinpu's wife or mother (find No. 25/AS37/2007) showing that bases of all the jars belonging to this set were dressed using a copper chisel (photo L. Jirásková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	108
Figure 82: A bowl (find No. 19_25/AS37/2007) belonging to the assemblage of model stone vessels collected in the burial chamber of Neferinpu (AS 37) at Abusir. All of the bowls of this set bear traces of the use of copper chisels to shape the depressions. It is a rare example, since most of the limestone model bowls were drilled using crescent-shaped flint borers (photo L. Jirásková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	109
Figure 83: Abusir, Tomb of Ptahshepses, fine traces of chisels and polishing agents on a relief fragment (photo Milan Zemina, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	109
Figure 84: Reconstruction of the semiotic triangle for <i>mnḥ</i> chisel. Relief and tool name after Wild (1953, Pl. CXXVIII © IFAO). Drawing Martin Odler. ....	110
Figure 85: Meidum, Tomb of Rahotep. Shipbuilding scene (icon40; after Petrie 1892, Pl. XI, register 1) .....	111
Figure 86: Chisels in Old Kingdom iconographic sources .....	112-114
Figure 87: Saqqara, Tomb of Ankhmahor-Sesi, Room II, south wall, craft scenes (icon60, 69, 150; after Kanawati and Hassan 1997, Pl. 40, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	115
Figure 88: Hawawish, Tomb of Kaihep/Tjetiiker, chapel, south wall, west of entrance, craft scenes (icon26, 64; after Kanawati 1980, Fig. 9, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	115
Figure 89: Giza, Tomb of Senedjemib Inti (G 2370), Room II, north wall, craft scenes (icon14, 58, 149; after Brovarski 2001, Fig. 45, © MFA, with kind permission of Rita A. Freed) .....	116
Figure 90: Old Kingdom chisels, Types A–C, no scale. Drawing Martin Odler, sources: A1 – after Castel, Pantalacci and Cherpion (2001, Fig. 123–124); A2 – after Jéquier (1929, Fig. 24); A4 – after Reisner (1942, Fig. 304a); A3, A5, A6, A7 – after Firth – Gunn (1926, Figs. 17, 22, 38); B1 – after Kromer (1978, Taf. 32: 8); C1 – after Reisner and Smith (1955, Fig. 36); C2 – after Reisner (1942, Fig. 323); C3 – after Rowe (1938, redrawn by Markéta Kobierská) .....	117



Figure 91: Old Kingdom chisels, Types D–G, no scale. Drawing Martin Odler, sources: D1 – after Castel, Pantalacci and Cherpion (2001, Fig. 123–124); D2 – ĀMUL 2116; E2 – after Kaplony (1965, Taf. VII); D3 – after Hassan (1941, Fig. 118); D4 – after Firth – Gunn (1926, Fig. 17); D5, E1, F1 – after Junker (1929, Abb. 17); G1, G3 – after Reisner and Smith (1955, Figs. 36–37); G2 – after Brunton (1927, Pl. XXXVIII: 14); G4 – MFA, 33.1046.....	117
Figure 92: Terminology used for the description of tools, selected terms. Drawing Martin Odler, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology.....	118
Figure 93: Terminology used for the description of chisels. Drawing Martin Odler, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology.....	118
Figure 94: Histogram of the length of complete Old Kingdom model chisels .....	119
Figure 95: Histogram of the length of complete Old Kingdom model chisels of A1 variant (produced in Systat software).....	119
Figure 96: Saqqara, Context S8, model tool kit from the tomb of Mereruka (numbers under the tools denote the preserved specimens of the types, after Firth - Gunn 1926, Fig. 22, © IFAO).....	120
Figure 97: Histogram of the length of complete Old Kingdom model chisels of A5 variant (produced in Systat software).....	120
Figure 98: Context A40, model chisel blade with traces of a wooden handle and a textile wrapping (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	121
Figure 99: Histogram of the length of complete Old Kingdom model chisels of D1 variant (produced in Systat software).....	122
Figure 100: Saqqara, chisels of Variant D1 from Context S11 and a fragment of an adze blade (after Kanawati <i>et al.</i> 2006, Pl. 75: cdef, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati).....	123
Figure 101: Context A45 – two chisels, an adze and a needle (drawing Martin Odler, Lucie Vařeková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	123
Figure 102: Dynasty 4 chisels found at Giza (no scale; after Junker 1929, Abb. 17).....	124
Figure 103: Variants of chisels according to the sites.....	125
Figure 104: Variants of chisels according to the periods.....	126
Figure 105: Abusir, Context A49, set of five cross-cut chisels of Variant D1 bound by a thread (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	126
Figure 106: Abusir, Context A49, copper model tools corroded together (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	126
Figure 107: Abusir, Context A40, model chisel blades with traces of wooden handles (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	127
Figure 108: Abusir, Context A37, remains of wooden handles on model chisels (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	127
Figure 109: Abusir, Context A40, detail of the remains of a wooden handle on a chisel blade (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	127
Figure 110: Finds of adzes according to the sites and periods.....	128
Figure 111: Reconstruction of the semiotic triangle for <i>ʿn.t</i> adze. Full-size blade after Petrie (1892, Pl. XXIX: 11), relief after Wild (1966, Pl. CLXXIII, © IFAO), drawing Martin Odler.....	130
Figure 112: Reconstruction of the semiotic triangle for <i>msḥ.tyw</i> adze. Relief and tool name after Hassan (1938, Pl. XCVI), drawing Martin Odler.....	130
Figure 113: Old Kingdom terms for adzes (after Odler 2015, Fig. 4).....	131
Figure 114: Abusir, Tomb of Ptahshepses, hieroglyph of an adze with a lashing, butcher knife (most probably stone) (photo Milan Zemina, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	132
Figure 115: Adzes in the Old Kingdom iconographic sources .....	134–137
Figure 116: Abusir, Tomb of Ptahshepses, sculptor with an adze at work (icon54; photo Milan Zemina, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	137
Figure 117: Meidum, Tomb of Atet, south wall of the niche, shipbuilding (icon41; after Petrie 1892, Pl. XXV).....	137
Figure 118: Giza, Tomb of Wepemnefret (G 8882), chapel, eastern wall (icon13, 57; after Hassan 1936, Fig. 219).....	138
Figure 119: Saqqara, a loose block found at the causeway of the pyramid of Wenis (icon78; after Hassan 1938, Pl. XCVI) .....	138
Figure 120: Saqqara, Tomb of Mereruka, north wall, west of statue niche, shipbuilding (icon47; after Kanawati <i>et al.</i> 2011, Pl. 74, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati).....	138
Figure 121: Giza, Tomb of Kaemankh, burial chamber, west wall, lumberjacks and metalworker (icon33; after Junker 1940, Taf. X) ....	139
Figure 122: Abusir, Causeway of Sahura, block SC/south/2003/07 (icon83; after el-Awady 2009, Pl. 5, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	139

Figure 123: Saqqara, Tomb of Ihy (Idut), Room VIII, west wall, a carpenter with an adze (icon21; after Kanawati - Abder-Raziq 2003, Pl. 61, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati).....	139
Figure 124: Abusir, Tomb of Ptahshepses, loose block, an adze at rest (icon30; after Vachala 2004, Fragment F 138, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	140
Figure 125: Histogram of the length of complete Old Kingdom adze blades .....	141
Figure 126: Types and variants of Old Kingdom adze blades, no scale. Sources: C3 – after Hassan (1941, Fig. 217); C4 – MFA, 27-2-462i; D1 – after Bárta <i>et al.</i> (2009, Fig. 6.3.120: 12); D2, D6, D7, D8 – after Firth and Gunn (1926, Figs. 6, 14, 17); D4 – after Valloggia (1986, Pl. LXXIII, LXXXVI); D5 – drawing Martin Odler, Find no. 19a/AS67/2012; D9 – after Quibell (1898, Pl. XVIII: 61); D10 – after Hassan (1953, 9). Drawing Martin Odler .....	141
Figure 127: Abusir, model adze blades of Variant D1 from Context A47 (drawing Lucie Vařeková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	142
Figure 128: Variants of adzes according to the sites .....	143
Figure 129: Variants of adzes according to the periods .....	143
Figure 130: Abusir, Context A40, thread on a neck of a model adze blade (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	144
Figure 131: Abusir, Context A40, model chisel blades with traces of wooden handles and textile wrapping on a model adze blade (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	144
Figure 132: Abusir, Context A41, negative traces of a thread on a model adze blade (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	145
Figure 133: Abusir, Context A40, model adze blades with traces of a thread on the neck (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	145
Figure 134: Abusir, Context A49, set of adze blades of Variant D2 bound by a thread (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	145
Figure 135: Semiotic triangle for Old Kingdom axe. Relief and tool name after Wild (1953, Pl. CXXIX), full-size axe blade after Valloggia (2011, Fig. 164, redrawn by Markéta Kobierská). Drawing Martin Odler. ....	147
Figure 136: Axes in the Old Kingdom iconographic sources .....	148-149
Figure 137: Saqqara, Tomb of Nyankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, Door Room, north wall, shipbuilding scene and lumberjacks (icon35, 43; after Moussa - Altenmüller 1977, Abb. 8, with kind permission of H. Altenmüller) .....	150
Figure 138: Zawiyet el-Mayitin, Tomb of Nyankhpepy-Khnumhotep, fragment of relief, lumberjacks at work (icon38; after Varille 1938, Pl. XVI, © IFAO).....	150
Figure 139: Meir, Tomb of Pepyankh the Black, Room 1, north wall, craft scenes (icon24, 62; after Kanawati and Evans 2014, Pl. 73; © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	151
Figure 140: Hammamiya, Tomb of Kakhenet and Khentkaus, chapel, east wall, section C, shipbuilding and carpentry (icon18, after El-Khouli and Kanawati 1991, Pl. 69, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	152
Figure 141: Histograms of the height of complete Old Kingdom model axe blades .....	152
Figure 142: Finds of axes according to the sites and periods.....	153
Figure 143: Types and variants of Old Kingdom axe blades, no scale. Sources: A1, A2, A3, A7 – after Firth and Gunn (1926, Fig. 14); A4 – after Hassan (1953, 9); A5 - after Bárta <i>et al.</i> (2009, Fig. 6.3.120: 7); A6 – after Edel, Seyfried and Vieler (2008, Abb. 24, redrawn by Martin Odler); B1 – after Hassan (1941, Fig. 118; B2 – Context A31, Find no. 193a/AS68d/2012; B3 - Bárta <i>et al.</i> (2009, Fig. 6.3.154); B4 – KHM Wien, Context G128, axe no. 3. Drawing Martin Odler .....	154
Figure 144: Saqqara, model tool kit from Context S10, after Firth and Gunn (1926, Fig. 6, © IFAO) .....	154
Figure 145: Abusir, model tool kit from Context A46 (drawing Martin Odler, Lucie Vařeková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	155
Figure 146: Abusir, Context A44, model tool kit with a model bowl (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	156
Figure 147: Abusir, model tool kit from Context A44 (drawing Martin Tomášek, Martin Odler, Lucie Vařeková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	157
Figure 148: Dasha, Tomb of Inti, chapel, east wall, north of the entrance, siege of a town (icon147; after Kanawati and McFarlane 1993, Pl. 26, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	158
Figure 149: Saqqara, mortuary temple of Pepy II, a halberd-shaped blade (icon89; after Jéquier 1938, Pl. 45, © IFAO).....	158
Figure 150: Variants of axes according to the sites .....	159
Figure 151: Variants of axes according to the periods .....	159
Figure 152: Abusir, Context A37, model axe blades with traces of wooden hafts (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	160

Figure 153: Abusir, model tool kit from Context A37 (drawing Květa Smoláriková, Lucie Vařeková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	161
Figure 154: Abusir, Context A40, textile wrapping on a model axe blade (photo Martin Frouz © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	162
Figure 155: Finds of saws according to the sites and periods.....	163
Figure 156: Giza, Tomb of Meresankh III (G 7530-7540) (icon1, 156; after Dunham and Simpson 1974, Fig. 5, © MFA, with kind permission of Rita A. Freed).....	164
Figure 157: Semiotic triangle for Old Kingdom saw. Relief after Wild (1966, Pl. CLXXIV); Full-size saw blade after Petrie (1892, Pl. XXIX: 12); model saw blade after Firth and Gunn (1926, Fig. 11); tool name after Junker (1940, Taf. X). Drawing Martin Odler.	164
Figure 158: Saws in Old Kingdom iconographic sources .....	165-166
Figure 159: Saqqara, Tomb of Nefer and Kahai, east wall, alcove, craft scenes (icon9, 34; after Lashien 2013, Pl. 83, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	166
Figure 160: Histograms of the length of Old Kingdom saw blades. ....	166
Figure 161: Types and variants of Old Kingdom saw blades, no scale. Sources: A1 – after James (1953, Fig. 4); A2 – after Hassan (1941, Fig. 217); A3 - MFA, 14.1723; B1 – after Quibell (1898, Pl. XVIII: 59); B2 – after Reisner (1942, Fig. 310); B3 - ĀMUL 2110; B4 – after Bárta <i>et al.</i> (2009, Fig. 6.3.111); B5, C1 – after Reisner and Smith (1955, Figs. 36-37); B6 – after Castel, Pantalacci and Cherpion (2001, Fig. 123–124); B7, C2 – after Hassan (1953, Pl. VI: B, redrawn by Markéta Kobierská); B8 – MFA, 15-12-38_a. Drawing Martin Odler. ....	167
Figure 162: Variants of saws according to the sites .....	168
Figure 163: Variants of saws according to the periods.....	169
Figure 164: Old Kingdom full-size saws. Contexts and sources: M3 – Petrie (1892, Pl. XXIX: 12); G2, G3 – after Reisner and Smith (1955, Figs. 36-37).....	170
Figure 165: Saqqara, Context S7, model tool kit (after Firth and Gunn 1926, Fig. 11, © IFAO).....	170
Figure 166: Abusir, Context A40, model saw blades with traces of wooden handles (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	170
Figure 167: Drills in Old Kingdom iconographic sources .....	171
Figure 168: Deir el-Gebrawi, Tomb of Ibi, north wall, east of offering recess, craft scenes (icon23, 48, 61, 151, 157; after Kanawati 2007, Pl. 72, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati).....	171
Figure 169: Meir, Tomb of Pepyankh the Black, Room 1, west wall, drilling of stone vessels (icon169; after Kanawati and Evans 2014, Pl. 72, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati).....	172
Figure 170: Saqqara, Tomb of Ty, bow-drill in use (icon146, after Wild 1966, Pl. CLXXIV, detail, © IFAO).....	173
Figure 171: Finds of razors according to the sites and periods.....	174
Figure 172: Semiotic triangle for Old Kingdom razor. full-size razor after Reisner and Smith (1955, Fig. 45); model razor blade ĀMUL 2132; razors in an etui after Khouli and Kanawati (1991, Pl. 64, © ACE); tool name after Moussa and Altenmüller (1977, Abb. 10, with kind permission of H. Altenmüller). Drawing Martin Odler. ....	175
Figure 173: Razors in Old Kingdom iconographic sources.....	176
Figure 174: Saqqara, Tomb of Nyankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, Door Room, north wall, lower relief field, circumcision scene and market scene (icon71, 82; after Moussa - Altenmüller 1977, Abb. 10, with kind permission of H. Altenmüller).....	177
Figure 175: Hammamiya, Tomb of Kakhenet and Khentkaus, chapel, west wall, section E, razor case as offering (after El-Khouli and Kanawati 1991, Pl. 64, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati).....	177
Figure 176: Types and variants of Old Kingdom razor blades, no scale. Sources: A1 - MFA, 13.3082; A2 – after Minault–Gout and Deleuze (1992, 116); B1 - Context G127, KHM Wien; i (1979, Fig. 147); B2 – PM 2730, RPM Hildesheim; B3 - after Hassan (1953, 9); B4 - Context A3; B5 – after el–Sawi (1979, Fig. 147); B6 – after Soukiassian, Wuttmann and Pantalacci (2002, Fig. 109); B7 – after Valloggia (1998, Pl. CVIII); B8 - British Museum, EA6075, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum; B9 – after Brunton (1948, Pl. XXXVII: 3234-14); C1 – after Reisner and Smith (1955, Fig. 45); C2 – after Firth and Gunn (1926, Fig. 17). Drawing Martin Odler .....	178
Figure 177: Variants of razors according to the sites.....	180
Figure 178: Variants of razors according to the periods.....	180
Figure 179: Finds of mirrors according to the sites and periods.....	182
Figure 180: Semiotic triangle for Old Kingdom mirror. Sources: full-size mirror: MFA, 37.1325, relief after Thompson 2014, Pl. 65, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati), model mirror Context G126, tool name after Jéquier (1929, Fig. 30). Drawing Martin Odler....	183
Figure 181: Mirrors in Old Kingdom iconographic sources .....	184-185
Figure 182: Tehna, Tomb of Kaihep, false door, west wall, mirror with papyriform handle as offering (after Thompson 2014, Pl. 65, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati).....	185

Figure 183: Saqqara, Tomb of Mereruka, mirror dancing (icon 125; after Kanawati et al. 2011, Pl. 76, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati).....	186
Figure 184: Abusir, Tomb of Ptahshepses, metalworkers at work, a mirror among the products of the workshop (icon74, photo Milan Zemina © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	186
Figure 185: Histogram of complete Old Kingdom mirror disc heights.....	186
Figure 186: Histogram of complete Old Kingdom mirror widths.....	187
Figure 187: Types and variants of Old Kingdom mirrors, no scale. Sources: A1 – after Saleh (1983, Taf. 47, redrawn by Martin Odler); B1 – after Williams (1989, Fig. 71: b, with kind permission of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago); C1 - MFA, 37.1325; C2 – after Limme (2008, 23, with kind permission of D. Huyge); C3 - Louvre, E 11457; D1 – after Brunton (1948, Pl. XXXV: 8); D2 – after Petrie (1898, Pl. XX), Lilyquist (1979, 13); E1 - after Verner (1986, Pl. 28, detail). Drawing Martin Odler.....	187
Figure 188: Old Kingdom mirrors and clamps found at Qubbet el-Hawa. Sources: QH5 – after Edel, Seyfried and Vieler (2008, Fig. 12); QH6 – after Edel, Seyfried and Vieler (2008, Fig. 58); QH7 – after Edel, Seyfried and Vieler (2008, Fig. 141); QH8 – after Edel, Seyfried and Vieler (2008, 102, Fig. 117); QH9 – after Edel, Seyfried and Vieler (2008, Fig. 63); QH10 – after Edel, Seyfried and Vieler (2008, Fig. 71); QH11 – after Edel, Seyfried and Vieler (2008, Fig. 38). With kind permission of F. Schöningh Verlag.....	188
Figure 189: Variants of mirrors according to the sites .....	189
Figure 190: Variants of mirrors according to the periods.....	189
Figure 191: Abusir, Context A50, a mirror with traces of textile wrapping (photo Martin Frouz © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	190
Figure 192: Abusir, Context A50, a rear side of the mirror on figures 31, 191 (photo Martin Frouz © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	190
Figure 193: Inscribed Old Kingdom mirrors. Contexts and sources: With kind permission of C. Lilyquist: X8 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 8); X10 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 9); X14 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 7); X15 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 13); X16 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 14); X17 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 15); X18 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 16); X19 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 17); X20 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 18); X21 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 19); G133 – after Lilyquist (1979, 14, Fig. 12); Mth1 – after Lilyquist (1979, Fig. 11); EK3 – after Lilyquist (1979, 13, Fig. 10); DP3 – after Petrie (1901, 38, Pl. XXXI: N 19) Layout Markéta Kobierská.....	191
Figure 194: Inscribed Old Kingdom mirrors.....	192
Figure 195: Deir el-Gebrawi, Tomb of Ibi, west wall, north section, three mirrors with papyriform handles and tweezers(?) under the chair (icon139; after Kanawati 2007, Pl. 56, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	193
Figure 196: Types and variants of Old Kingdom tweezers, no scale. Sources: A1 – after Garstang (1902, Pl. XXXIII, XL: 349); B1 – after Valloggia (1998, Pl. -CVIII); © IFAO.....	194
Figure 197: Finds of needles according to the sites and periods.....	195
Figure 198: Types and variants of Old Kingdom needles, no scale. Sources: A1 - after Hassan (1941, Fig. 217); B1, B2 -after Junker (1944, Abb. 93).....	196
Figure 199: Variants of needles according to the sites.....	196
Figure 200: Variants of needles according to the periods.....	196
Figure 201: Finds of needles according to the feature types.....	197
Figure 202: Abusir, Tomb of Fetekty, market scene with a cluster of fish-hooks (icon72, after Bárta 2001, fig. 317, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	198
Figure 203: Fish-hooks in Old Kingdom iconographic sources.....	199
Figure 204: Types and variants of Old Kingdom fish-hooks, no scale. Sources: A1 – after Callender (2008, Fig. 4.88); B1 – after Dreyer (1986, Abb. 48); A2 – after Kromer (1978, Taf. 32: 7).....	200
Figure 205: Harpoons in Old Kingdom iconographic sources (1).....	202-203
Figure 206: Deir el-Gebrawi, Tomb of Henqu II, chapel, north wall, east of serdab, double-barbed harpoon (icon116; after Kanawati 2005, Pl. 54, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati).....	203
Figure 207: Types and variants of Old Kingdom knives, no scale. Sources: A1 – after Soukiassian, Wuttmann and Pantalacci (2002, Fig. 98); B1 – after Labrousse and Lauer (2000, Fig. 35); C1 – after Garstang (1902, Pl. XXXIII, XL: 349); © IFAO .....	204
Figure 208: Giza - Dynasty 5 and 6 contexts. Contexts and sources: G76 – 25.2688; G77 – 25.2610; G82 – ÄMUL 2170; G109 – RPM Hildesheim, drawing Martin Odler, Valéria Uramová; G118 – after Hassan (1943, Pl. XXII: C, redrawn by Markéta Kobierská); G119 – after Hassan (1953, Pl. LXII: B, redrawn by Markéta Kobierská). Layout Markéta Kobierská .....	205
Figure 209: Deshasha, Tomb of Iteti/Shedu, south wall, west of the engaged pillar, craft scenes (icon29, 70; after Kanawati and McFarlane 1993, Pl. 49, © ACE, with kind permission of N. Kanawati) .....	206
Figure 210: Leather-cutting knives in Old Kingdom iconographic sources .....	207



Figure 211: Daggers in Old Kingdom iconographic sources .....	210
Figure 212: Giza, artefact from Context G8 (the British Museum, EA 67819) © Trustees of the British Museum .....	211
Figure 213: Saqqara, artefacts from Context S1 (after Labrousse and Lauer 2000, Fig. 35 © IFAO).....	211
Figure 214: Types of structures with tool finds in the Old Kingdom, according to the periods .....	213-216
Figure 215: Abusir, context A49, copper model tools in situ (photo Miroslav Bárta, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	222
Figure 216: Abusir, context A37, bundle of model chisels bound by a thread (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	223
Figure 217: Abusir, context A49, copper model tool kit (drawing Martin Odler, Lucie Vařeková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	224
Figure 218: Abusir, context A37, complete model tool kit (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	225
Figure 219: Abusir, context A41, model tool kit (drawing Martin Tomášek, Lucie Vařeková, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	226
Figure 220: Abusir, context A41, model tool kit (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	227
Figure 221: Abusir, context A40, model tool blades corroded together (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	228
Figure 222: Abusir, context A40, model tool blades corroded together (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	228
Figure 223: Abusir, context A40, model tool blades corroded together. Complete tool blades were preserved together with fragments of smaller chisel blades (photo Kamil Voděra, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	229
Figure 224: Contents of the Old Kingdom complete model tool assemblages .....	230-231
Figure 225: Set of analyzed artefacts. Dashed lines and arrows indicate the sampled locations (photo J. Kmošek, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	239
Figure 226: Summary of parameters of the analyzed set of artefacts .....	239
Figure 227: Techniques used to characterize composition and mechanical properties of the examined artefacts. ....	241
Figure 228: Results of X-Ray diffraction analysis of corrosion products presented on surface of the selected artefacts (weight %). .....	242
Figure 229: Razor ĀMUL 2130 with detail of preserved fragments of mineralised textile on the surface (Photo J. Kmošek) .....	243
Figure 230: Results of Energy Dispersive X-Ray Fluorescence analysis of metallic material of the artefacts (weight %). ....	243
Figure 231: Results of the SEM/EDS analysis of the main chemical phases occurring in the analyzed artefacts (weight %).....	243
Figure 232: SEM images of cross sections of analyzed samples. A - corroded structure of sample ĀMUL 2120 (SE image, photo T. Jamborová), B - partly corroded structure of sample ĀMUL 2129 (SE image, photo T. Jamborová), C - metallic structure of sample ĀMUL 5513 (SE image, photo T. Jamborová), D - corroded structure of sample ĀMUL 2130 and map of elemental distribution (SE image, photo T. Jamborová), E - metallic structure of sample ĀMUL 2131 and map of elemental distribution (BSE image, photo T. Jamborová).....	244
Figure 233: Results of the SEM/EDS analysis of the main chemical phases present in the analyzed artefacts.....	246
Figure 234: Optical microscopy images of the metallic structures after etching. A - recrystallized grains of $\alpha$ -Cu phase and slip lines (ĀMUL 2129, photo M. Kmoníčková), B - partly corroded, fully recrystallized grains of $\alpha$ -Cu phase with As-rich $\gamma$ phases at the grain boundaries (ĀMUL 2131, photo K. Šálková), C - partly corroded, recrystallized grains of $\alpha$ -Cu phase with As-rich $\gamma$ phases at the grain boundaries and slip lines (outer surface of sample ĀMUL 2131, photo K. Šálková), D - extensively worked grains of $\alpha$ -Cu phase with large amount of slip lines (ĀMUL 5513, photo M. Kmoníčková). ....	247
Figure 235: Old Kingdom contexts with complete adze blades. The category of social status was determined by Veronika Dulíková .....	249-251
Figure 236: Formula of centroid size .....	252
Figure 237: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, results of the PCA analysis for periods (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	253
Figure 238: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, results of the PCA analysis for sites (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	253
Figure 239: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, effect of the principal component 1 (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	254
Figure 240: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, effect of the principal component 2 (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	254

Figure 241: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean forms of the periods (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	254
Figure 242: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean forms of variants (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	254
Figure 243: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean forms of the sites (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	255
Figure 244: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean forms of the parts of sites (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	255
Figure 245: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean forms of full-size blades and model blades (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	256
Figure 246: Shape of Old Kingdom adze blades, results of the PCA analysis for periods (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	256
Figure 247: Shape of Old Kingdom adze blades, results of the PCA analysis for sites (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	257
Figure 248: Shape of Old Kingdom adze blades, effect of the principal component 1 (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	257
Figure 249: Shape of Old Kingdom adze blades, effect of the principal component 2 (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	258
Figure 250: Shape of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean shapes of the periods (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	258
Figure 251: Shape of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean shapes of variants (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	258
Figure 252: Shape of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean shapes of the sites (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology) .....	258
Figure 253: Shape of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean shapes of the parts of sites (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	259
Figure 254: Shape of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean shapes of full-size blades and model blades (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	259
Figure 255: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean forms of the social status categories, as defined by Veronika Dulíková (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	260
Figure 256: Form of Old Kingdom adze blades, mean shapes of the social status categories, as defined by Veronika Dulíková (Ján Dupej, © Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology).....	260
Figure 257: Dating of problematic Old Kingdom contexts with both copper implements and stone vessels .....	263-264

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## List of Abbreviations

ACE – The Australian Centre for Egyptology, Macquarie University, Sydney

AERA – Ancient Egypt Research Associates

ÄMUL – Ägyptisches Museum – Georg Steindorff – der Universität Leipzig

BM – The British Museum, London

CIE – Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University

DAIK – Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Kairo

EBA – Early Bronze Age

FA CU – Faculty of Arts, Charles University

GA CU – Grant Agency of the Charles University

IFAO - L'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Le Caire

KHM – Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien

MBA – Middle Bronze Age

MFA – The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

MSA – Ministry of Antiquities, Egypt

PCMA – Polish Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw

pers. comm. – personal communication

PM – Porter – Moss (1974), Porter – Moss (1981)

RPM – Roemer- und Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim

SCA – Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egypt

TLA – Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae

# Introduction

It is generally accepted that the number of preserved ancient Egyptian full-size tools is too low to allow complex conclusions to be drawn.<sup>1</sup> Most ancient tools would have been recycled over time, losing their original shape as they were recast into other objects. There are some exceptions; Dynasty 1 has large numbers of tools that have been found in the secure archaeological contexts at Abydos and Saqqara, but regrettably, not many have been analysed. This lack of information about the finds from known contexts (their physical and chemical properties) limits the capacity to date unprovenanced full-size tools. Most full-size tools have been published merely because they were inscribed, and this caught the attention of scholars. Full-size tools are not the only evidence, however. Significant collections of model tools have been found from Dynasty 2 at Helwan and Abydos. They disappeared on a massive scale from the burial assemblages at the end of the Middle Kingdom, but from Dynasty 11, they were used in the foundation deposits, a practice that continued until after the end of the New Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> This custom even reached the Napatan sites in Nubia. This work will show that the number of at least partially preserved Old Kingdom tools with metal blades greatly exceeds not only the textual sources but also the evidence of the iconographic sources. This material culture should not be ignored in the reconstruction of the past of ancient Egypt and this monograph is an attempt to fill this gap.

In his monograph on the theory of archaeology, the Czech archaeologist Evžen Neustupný defines an artefact as 'every object, formed by man intentionally to serve a purpose'.<sup>3</sup> An artefact could have a practical purpose, a social meaning or a symbolical meaning. A tool is defined as 'an object used to change the properties of other objects'.<sup>4</sup> His definition enables to categorise objects of daily use, such as jewellery and toilet implements, as tools: pins used to join parts of clothing or mirrors used indirectly to change the human appearance. In this work, the definition of a tool is narrowed down to tools with practical purpose with a condition that their functional part was made in the Old Kingdom and of metal (usually a copper alloy, either pure copper or arsenical copper; the existence of bronze is supposed, but not proved for the Old Kingdom). This will leave out three other important categories of artefacts made of metal in the Old Kingdom: vessels, statues and statuettes, and jewellery.

There was no single term for this definition of tools in Old Kingdom Egyptian, as we will see; tools were split

into several practical and cognitive categories for ancient Egyptians. Their common characteristic was that they were made of metal in the metallurgical workshops.<sup>5</sup>

Accurate dating of the decoration of private tombs is possible in the Old Kingdom Memphite necropolis. Elsewhere, there have been numerous attempts to date and redate specific tombs and tomb clusters.<sup>6</sup> Much less attention has been paid to other datable items of art and material culture, although the situation has changed recently for pottery.<sup>7</sup> It can be argued that other items of material culture were created closer to the moment of the burial than the tomb decoration, which was planned and executed well in advance of the burial itself. However, the provision of the Old Kingdom burial equipment has not been the subject of a significant study.

The iconographic and textual evidence cannot be ignored because it can help explain the meaning(s) and role(s) of tools as they were perceived by Egyptians during the Old Kingdom. This evidence also provides information about the cognitive categories of Old Kingdom Egyptians. Ancient Egyptian evidence can be aptly used to demonstrate that artefacts occurred in meaningful assemblages. The tool classes were not perceived as singular, but were organized into tool kits.<sup>8</sup> Elena Maragoudaki and Panayotis Kavvouras have recently reconstructed Late Bronze Age Mycenaean tool kits, containing chisels, adzes, axes, saws, drills, awls, hammers and mallets.<sup>9</sup> They used a shipbuilding scene from the Old Kingdom, late Dynasty 5 tomb of Ty at Saqqara by way of comparison, but the Late Bronze Age is too late to investigate the origins of the tool kits. In Egypt, kits of tools with metal blades appear in the Chalcolithic period, in the second phase of Naqada culture in the latter half of the 4th millennium BC. The first complete collection of tools with copper blades was found in the First Dynasty Tomb 3471 at Saqqara dated to the reign of King Djer.<sup>10</sup> Such tool kits continued into the Old Kingdom and throughout the whole Early Bronze Age of Egypt. Old Kingdom tool kits consisted of several emic artefact classes, the most frequent of which are axes, adzes, chisels and saws. They had distinct shapes, which can be discerned from the Early Dynastic tool types and variants by means of the tool morphology. Iconographic evidence and preserved tool marks reveal that tool kits, consisting of chisels, adzes, axes and saws, were used to

<sup>1</sup> Eichler (1993, 15).

<sup>2</sup> Weinstein (1974).

<sup>3</sup> Neustupný (2010, 45).

<sup>4</sup> Neustupný (2010, 61).

<sup>5</sup> Scheel (1985); Davey (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Linacre College (2006); McFarlane and Mourad (2012).

<sup>7</sup> Rzeuska (2006); Arias Kytarová (2010, 2014); Krejčí and Arias Kytarová *et al.* (2014).

<sup>8</sup> In the case of woodworking, copper blade tools and other tools were studied as a meaningful unit, a tool kit, by J. Šliwa (1975, 21–43).

<sup>9</sup> Maragoudaki and Kavvouras (2012).

<sup>10</sup> Emery (1949, 18–57).



work wood and stone in the building of ships, shaping of wooden and stone statues and for other tasks. The preserved evidence can be arranged in a semiotic triangle of meaning, combining full-size artefacts, their models and their ancient Egyptian names, together with their connotations.

In the Old Kingdom, tool kits were represented mostly by assemblages of so-called copper model tools. They were included in the burial equipment at all major burial sites in the Memphite area: Meidum, Giza, Abu Rawash, Abusir, Saqqara, Heliopolis; they are only lacking in Dahshur. They appear also in the provincial cemeteries, with assemblages *e.g.* in Elephantine, Edfu, el-Kab, el-Khokha (Western Thebes), Abydos, Gebelein, Balat and Bubastis. They represented miniaturized versions of full-size tools used in Old Kingdom society. The interpretation of Old Kingdom copper tools and models tools has been discussed in the paper ‘Social Context of the Old Kingdom Copper Model Tools’ by Martin Odler and Veronika Dulíková and by Martin Odler in an article on model tools in Old Kingdom female burials.<sup>11</sup> This book is a continuation of the discussion on Old Kingdom model tool kits.

Other tool kits were also present in the iconographic and archaeological record – toilet implements (mirrors, razors, tweezers, hair curlers), weaving tools (needles, awls), leatherworking tools (leather-cutting knives, awls), tools for the retrieval and processing of food (fish-hooks, harpoons, knives) and weapons (axes, arrowheads, spearheads, daggers). Iconographic sources, texts and the archaeological record complement each other in the study of the past: it will be shown that some artefactual classes were preserved only in the iconographic evidence and, *vice versa*, many items of material culture were not reflected in the iconography.

It needs to be borne in mind that tools with copper alloy blades were not the only material category of tools utilised in the Old Kingdom. Tool kits traversed the borders of materials, although these borders were not often crossed by the contemporary specialists on specific materials. Stone, bone and wooden tools were also widely used in the Old Kingdom. The *Encyclopedia of Egyptian Archaeology* dates the use of stone tools from the earliest times up to Dynasty 25.<sup>12</sup> The case is similar in Mesopotamia, Moorey considers higher effectivity and cheapness of stone and ceramic tools.<sup>13</sup> Mutual influence of materials can be observed – butcher’s knives were made of flint in the Old Kingdom, and a few preserved examples of metal knives have the lithic form. Tools made of other materials are beyond the scope of this work, but the use of different materials for tools will be noted.

The present work is intended as a corpus publication of the preserved tools and model tools with copper alloy blades from the ancient Egyptian Old Kingdom. The corpus includes all existing tool categories: tools of craftsmen, cosmetic tools, textile and leatherworking tools, hunting and food processing tools. The artefacts have been described by morphological and metric variables in a database. The corpus comprises tools and model tools found in documented archaeological contexts. Only a limited selection of unprovenanced artefacts is included, falling into two categories. Artefacts with inscriptions, which could be dated using either the information in the inscription or the palaeography of the signs, are included. The assemblages of unprovenanced Old Kingdom artefacts from the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien and Ägyptisches Museum der Universität Leipzig have been included in the corpus because they contain the most completely preserved model tool blades, can be dated by their morphology to the Old Kingdom and provide the dimensions of the complete tools (necessary for statistical evaluation). It was impossible to include every unprovenanced artefact found in museum collections all over the world, even though online collection databases provide easy access to some of them.

The corpus is used as a basis for a typological and morphological re-evaluation of Old Kingdom tools and model tools. Metals were controlled by weighing in ancient Egypt. The weight of metal artefacts changed during use and during the post-depositional history due to corrosion processes. Other measures of the tools, including their general size and other dimensions, are better preserved. The regularization and standardization of the tools will be examined using these measures. A reviewed and refined chronology of the evolution of tools and model tools is proposed. Their morphological evolution during the Old Kingdom is clarified. Material culture will be compared to a proposed model: copper artefacts were produced within attached craft specialization<sup>14</sup> and a centralised control is assumed for the Early Dynastic period and the Old Kingdom. The centres of attached craft specialization were regionalised during the First Intermediate period and regional differences might be expected thereafter.

After defining the subject of the work in Chapter 1, tools in the archaeological theory and Egyptian archaeology are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The focus then moves on to the correct definitions of artefacts that will enable correct ‘reading’ and interpretation of the tool kits (Chapter 4). The main research tool, a database of archaeological contexts and tools, is described in Chapter 5. The evidence of texts, iconography and palaeography on the Old Kingdom tools with copper blades is discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 comprises a general evaluation of the archaeological record of contexts with preserved tools. Chapter 8, the core of the volume, discusses Old Kingdom tool categories and tool

<sup>11</sup> Odler and Dulíková (2015); Odler (2015a; 2015b).

<sup>12</sup> Tillmann (1999).

<sup>13</sup> Moorey (1994, 256).

<sup>14</sup> Brumfiel and Earle (1987, 5–9).

kits. New hypotheses about the meaning(s) of copper tools and model tools are proposed in Chapter 9.

Case studies of selected problems are appended after the conclusion. The first paper is an archaeometallurgical study of Old Kingdom copper tools and model tools in the collection of the Egyptian Museum of Leipzig University (Jiří Kmošek and Martin Odler *et al.*). The second paper deals with the promising application of morphometry on the statistical evaluation of the tool morphology focused on Old Kingdom adze blades

(Martin Odler and Ján Dupej). The third and fourth papers discuss the dating of the stone and ceramic vessels found in the Old Kingdom archaeological contexts with copper model tools (Lucie Jirásková, Katarína Arias Kytarová).

A catalogue of the Old Kingdom archaeological contexts containing tools and model tools with copper alloy blades, together with data sheets for complete tools, is presented in an online appendix to this work <http://bit.ly/2cT1NFz>.