

• UNIVERSIDAD DE ALCALÁ •

# SHAPED

10-11/12/2024



Materials, people and written  
words in ancient cultures

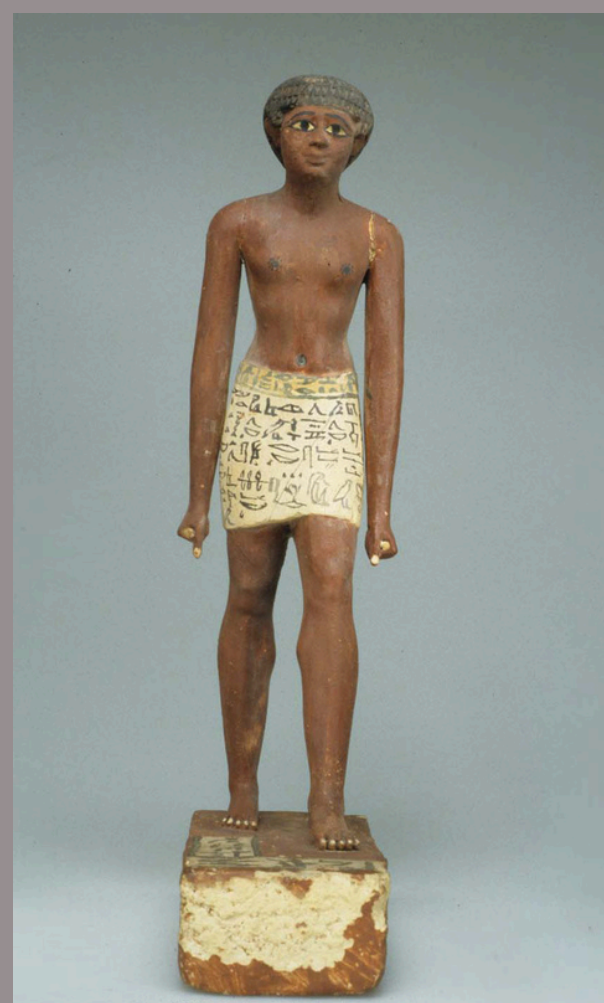


Universidad  
de Alcalá

The relationships between matter, society and texts are highly complex. And to a certain extent, they are one of the main characteristics of a culture. This is the approach of SHAPED, an international conference on the relationships between the material, the written and the social in ancient cultures with figurative scripts in search of common points and differences to better understand the relationship between these three elements by bringing together different approaches such as history of ideas, archaeology, material and digital philology, linguistics and anthropology.

The primary interest of SHAPED lies in echoing those approaches that highlight both the material dimension of the manifestations of a culture and its ideological aspects to go beyond the hylomorphism that has sustained (and sustains) the distinction between matter and form (or archaeology and philology *mutatis mutandis*), and which, furthermore, has left out of the equation the capacity for action of individuals as creators and consumers of such manifestations (agency).

To limit this research, SHAPED proposes the following transversal lines of research articulated in the three conference panels.





## 1. Taking shape

Beyond the seemingly simple fact of putting a text into a medium, medium-text relations are by no means simple, and their complexity requires broader and deeper conceptual approaches (compare the general concept of 'scripturology' recently coined by Klinkenberg & Polis 2018 for the comprehensive study of writing systems). The complexity of the medium-text relationship is especially true in the case of figurative writings (Eyre 2013; Vernus 2016), which maintain a more or less immediate link with the material world. This line of research is extremely topical, as shown by the specialised series *Materiale Textkulturen* or the recent volume *The Ancient World Revisited: Material Dimensions of Written Artefacts* (2024), edited by Betrò, Friedrich and Michel 2024, both published by De Gruyter. Figurative writings are the oldest in human history and the only ones until c. 1200 BC C. These writings are the scope of study of this panel on the relationships between the medium and the text written in figurative writing. It is about investigating the immediate (more physical) relationship between text and medium, including the following topics:

- When the text takes material form. The figurativeness of these writings allows them to acquire "corporeality" so that we find signs in 3D or interacting with representations and objects, among other hybrid phenomena.

- Colour and shape. Specific ideas are inextricably linked to a material and its appearance, which is reflected in how the inscriptions materialise.

- The material as a medium. Due to this phenomenon, the material part of the written object provides information by itself. An illustrative case is that of cuneiform tablets written around the support, not only the "recto" and "verso" but also the sides.

- Digital philology and AI. A field that has seen an astonishing expansion in recent years and that has implemented OCR, text mining, restoration and other possibilities (Gracia Zamacona and Ortiz-García 2021) that allow reconstructing texts and their contexts (historical, socioeconomic, and ideological) with the contribution of a quantity of data unattainable until now.

- References from the text to the medium. A frequent case of this is the user's representations of the text in possession of the document or making use of it (Tarasenko 2017).

- The imitation or mention of a material. It is about examining the question of figurative and literary realism in materials (architecture, artefacts and texts). On many occasions, it is pretended to have used a material (prestigious or effective), which is replaced by another, more affordable one.

## 2. In motion

To track the motion of elements that are involved in the documents' ('written objects') production and reuse:

- Production chain: craftsmen, objects, texts and materials in motion through regions (e.g. Memphis/Thebes; Thebes/Middle Egypt) and abroad. Most frequent materials such as wood (e.g. conifers), resins (e.g. pistachio), varnish, pigments (e.g. orpiment), and stone (white limestone, pink granite) can be traced through new technologies in archaeometry. In addition, lexicographical studies on these materials should shed new light on their commercial mobility and the ideas they convey.
- Reuse and how to identify it (e.g. wood from ships reused for coffins).

## 3. Networks and transmission

To picture geographical, social and professional networks relevant to the text-medium relations through the identification of:

- Regional and abroad networks for production, distribution and use of documents
- Social networks (e.g., the same texts in coffins belonging to family members or within a social group; investigate similarities in the techniques or materials used).
- Artisans networks
- Scribal networks by tracking individual and 'school' handwritings through the production of copies to reflect on the material aspects of 'text transmission' and the very concept of it.

## References

Betrò, Marilina, Friedrich, Michael and Michel, Cécile (eds.). 2024. *The Ancient World Revisited: Material Dimensions of Written Artefacts* (Studies in Manuscript Cultures Edited 37). Berlin: De Gruyter.

Eyre, Christopher. 2013. *The use of documents in ancient Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gracia Zamacona, Carlos and Ortiz-García, Jónatan (eds.). 2021. *Handbook of digital Egyptology: Texts* (Monografías de Oriente Antiguo 1). Alcalá de Henares: Editorial Universidad de Alcalá.

Klinkenberg, Jean-Marie & Polis, Stéphane. 2018. On Scripturology. *Signata* 9: 57-102. <https://doi.org/10.4000/signata.1885>.

Tarasenko, Mykola. 2017. Images of papyrus rolls in vignettes of the Book of the Dead. In Katalin Anna Kóthay (ed.), *Burial and mortuary practices in Late Period and Graeco-Roman Egypt: Proceedings of the international conference held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 17-19 July 2014*. Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts, 71-82.

Vernus, Pascal. 2016. De l'image au signe d'écriture, du signe d'écriture à l'image, de l'image au signe d'écriture : la ronde sémiotique de la civilisation pharaonique. *Actes sémiotiques* 119: 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.25965/as.5633>.



## 1. Taking shape - 10/12/2024

(R) indicates "remote talk"

Chair: Leah Mascia (Universität Hamburg)

**9:30 – 9:45 h.** Presentation

**9:45 – 10:05 h.** Lisa Sartini (Medjehu Project): *The funerary formulae on black coffins with yellow decoration of the New Kingdom: The materiality of the texts and their chronological, regional and social peculiarities.*

**10:05 – 10:25 h.** Pinar Durgun (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York): *Materiality of copies and materials of copying in ancient western Asia.*

**10:25 – 10:45 h.** Gael Papola (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris): *From End to Beginning: Decoding the Reversed Narrative of Papyrus BNF Égyptien 156.*

**10:45 – 11:05 h. (R)** Zsombor Földi (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München): *The Electronic Babylonian Literature Project: Results and prospects.*

**11:05 – 11:25 h. (R)** Marina Sartori (University of Oxford): *Of papyrus and stone: Graphic registers and intermediality in ancient Egyptian funerary production.*

**11:25 – 12:05 h. Break**

**12:05 – 12:25 h.** Niv Allon (Metropolitan Museum, New York): *Text and matter in seal impressions from the Festival Palace.*

**12:25 – 12:45 h.** Angela McDonald (University of Glasgow): *Shaping Intentions? The Materiality and Dynamics of Udjahorresne's Biography.*

**12:45 – 13:05 h.** Beatriz Noria Serrano (Università di Pisa): *"Out of the margins": side and edge inscriptions in Middle Kingdom stelae.*

**13:05 – 13:25 h.** Roxana Flammini (CONICET, Buenos Aires): *Reassessing King Kamose's Titulary Preserved on a Block at the Open-Air Museum (Karnak).*

**13:25 – 15:00 h. Lunch**

**15:00 – 15:20 h. (R)** Pedro Canto (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Natal, Brasil): *Between retrograde writing and paths of the afterlife: Textual spatiality and material engagement in Seti I's tomb (KV17).*

**15:20 – 16:50 h.** Discussion

**16:50 – 17:40 h.** Keynote speaker: Gordon Whittaker (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen): *Modulating shape, colour and setting in the Aztec writing system.*

**17:40 – 19:00 h. Visit to the exhibition *Beyond the Tree: A Journey into the Traditions of Egyptian Woodcraft***



**11/12/2024**

## **2. In motion**

Chair: Margaret Serpico (University College London)

**9:30 – 9:50 h.** Andrea Fanciulli (Museo Egizio, Turin): *Re-examining Ramesside royal hymns: the materiality beyond texts; the case of the Turin papyrus Doc ID 28.*

**9:50 – 10:10 h.** Christina Karlshausen (Université Catholique de Louvain): *Truths and lies about stones in ancient Egyptian texts.*

**10:10– 10:30 h.** Gersande Eschenbrenner Diemer (Universidad de Alcalá): *“Seeing through its house of eternity, embodying its own eternity”: Some remarks on the perception of the coffin between the Ancient and New Kingdom.*

**10:30 – 10:50 h.** Aude Semat (Metropolitan Museum, New York): *The Beam and the Mat: Trompe-l’œil and Meta-Architecture in Ancient Egypt.*

**10:50 – 11:10 h.** Julie Desjardins (Université du Québec à Montréal): *Between Imitation and Authenticity: a Closer Look of Inscribed Wood Imitations from the Theban Region.*

**11:10 – 11:50 h.** Break

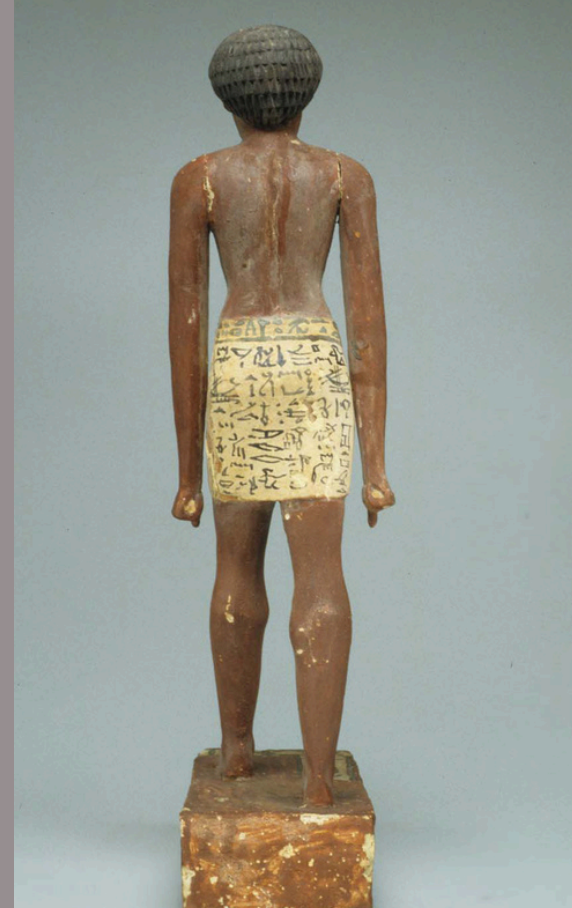
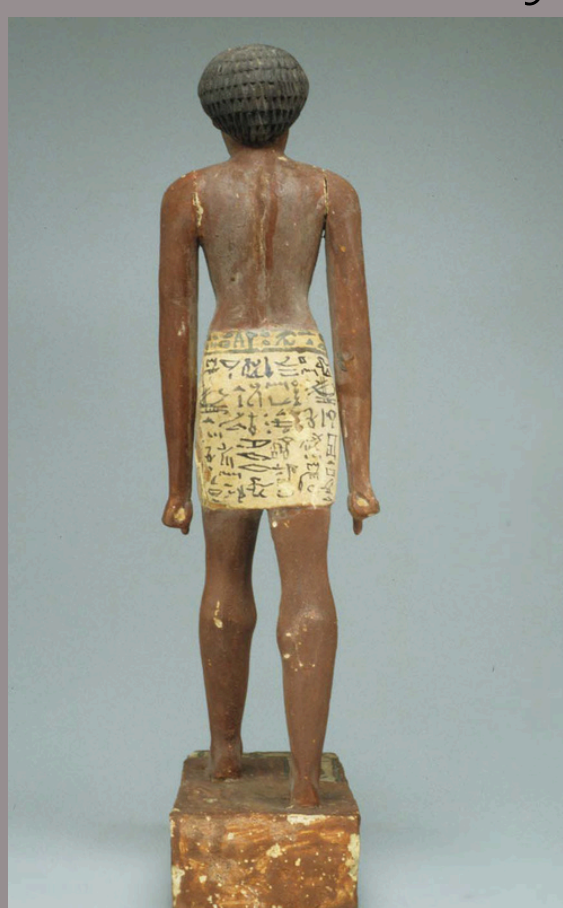
**11:50 – 12:10 h.** Margaret Serpico (University College London): *Up in smoke: *sntr* and *’ntyw* as resins and incense.*

**12:10 – 12:30 h.** Rogério Sousa (Universidade de Lisboa): *Yellow coffins and visual culture: what painting reveals about the craftsmen’s communities from Thebes.*

**12:30 – 13:30 h.** Discussion

**13:30 – 15:00 h. Lunch**

**15:00-15:50 h.** Keynote speaker: Geoffrey Killen: *Wood, tools and non-textual methods used by ancient Egyptian carpenters.*





### 3. Networks and transmission

Chair: Danijela Stefanović (Univerzitet u Beogradu)

**15:50 – 16:10 h. (R)** Luisa M. García González (Northeast Normal University - NENU, Changchun): *A Social Perspective of the Mortuary Texts: Preliminary Tests and Results of Applying Social Network Analysis to Southern Egyptian Archaeological Sources.*

**16:10 – 16:30 h.** David Fuentes & Carlos Gracia Zamacona (Universidad de Alcalá): *Understanding word and phrase relations in ancient Egyptian using Neural Networks.*

**16:30 – 16:50 h.** Anna Giulia de Marco (Medjehu project): *The reality of Deir el-Medina's wooden objects: from texts to material culture.*

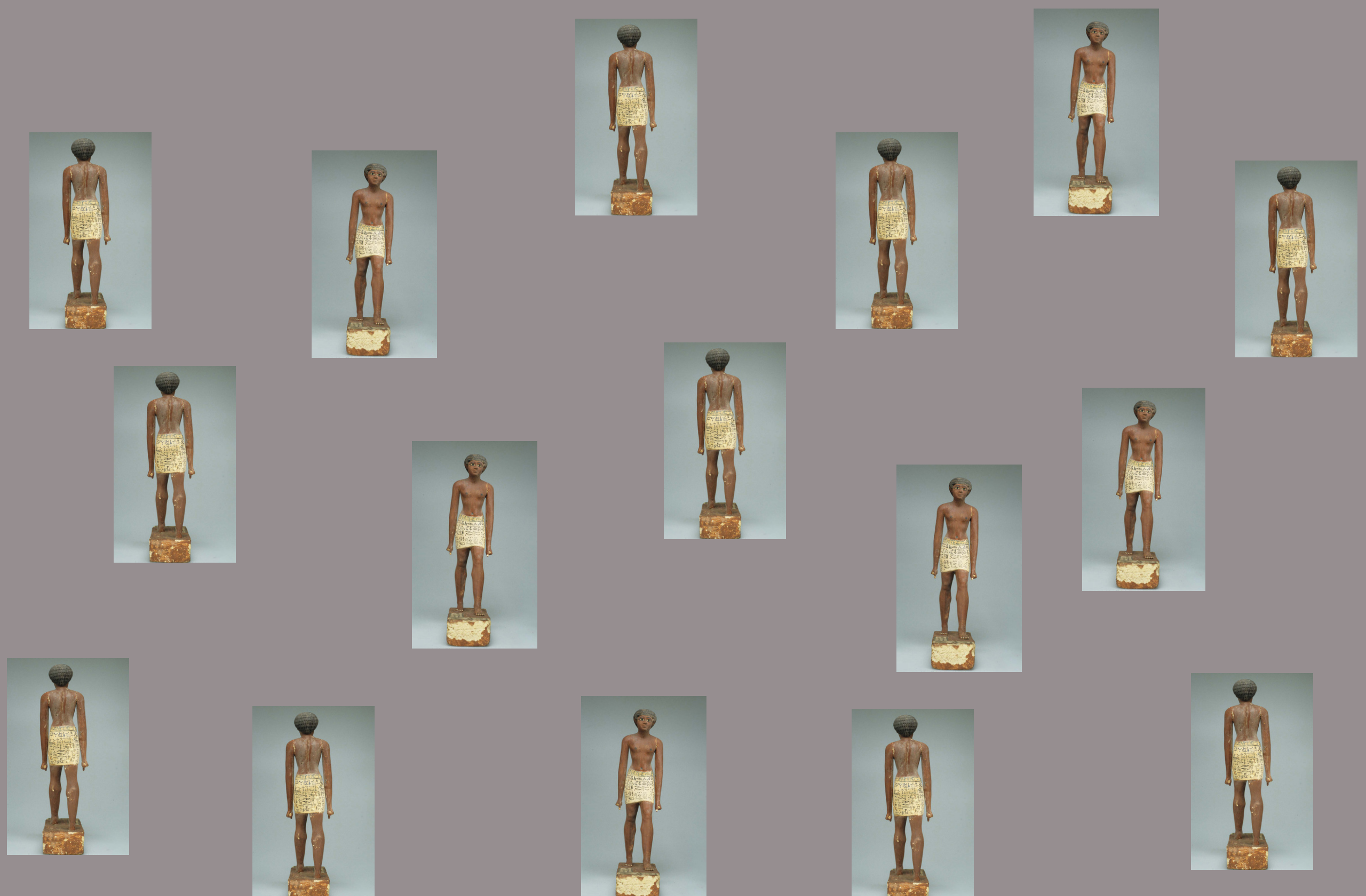
**16:50 – 17:00 h.** Veronika Dulíková & Marek Bukáček (Univerzita Karlova, Prague): *The importance of title importance.*

**17:00 – 17:20 h. (R)** Elizabeth Bettles (Universiteit Leiden): *Text transmission of the Negative Confession (BD 125) at Deir el-Medina: Human agency in the tombs of TT3 and TT 265.*

**17:20 – 17:40 h. (R)** Joaquín Jiménez Puerto (Universidad de Valencia): *Unravelling the networks of the past: Applications and potential of Social Network Analysis for archaeological research.*

**17:40 – 19:10 h.** Discussion

**19:10 - 20:10 h.** Demonstration of woodworking tools' use by Geoffrey Killen.



## **In-person attendance**

Sala María Isidra de Guzmán  
Edificio del Rectorado  
Plaza de San Diego, s/n  
28801 - Alcalá de Henares (Madrid) - Spain

Places are limited. Please contact Carlos Gracia Zamacona (**[carlos.gracia@uah.es](mailto:carlos.gracia@uah.es)**) regarding availability.

## **Zoom links**

All Madrid time.

URL ZOOM Tuesday 10 December, 9:30 to 13:30 h.

<https://uah-es.zoom.us/j/92308058027?pwd=wPzaaalWF9IriysNJqSeENkO8bVA4E.1>

Código acceso: 868290

URL ZOOM Tuesday 10 December, 15:00 to 17:45 h.

<https://uah-es.zoom.us/j/91698610110?pwd=F4ePU6P28MkWlqjgEYlpiiwfAgtj94.1>

Código acceso: 084794

URL ZOOM Wednesday 11 December, 9:30 to 13:30 h.

<https://uah-es.zoom.us/j/95163183002?pwd=Dfl9wibgXkgS4Fcaqo6DqW1qbxqWe.1>

Código acceso: 389240

URL ZOOM Wednesday 11 December, 15:00 to 20:15 h.

<https://uah-es.zoom.us/j/93666941859?pwd=UpAOwRP9abir3faQwuOZOEasZK3fCV.1>

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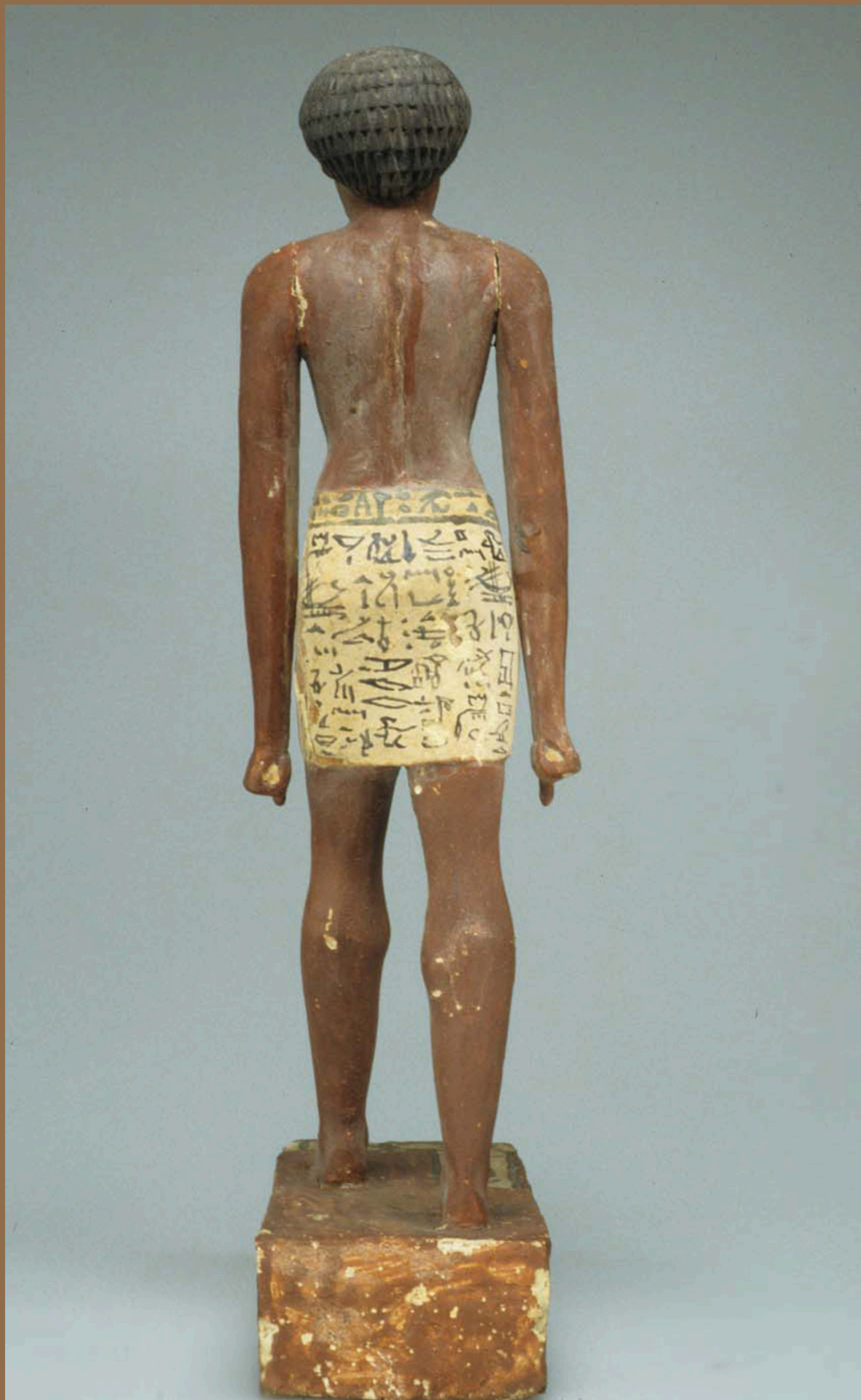


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Organised by

Gersande Eschenbrenner Diemer, director of the MEDJEHU project

Carlos Gracia Zamacona, director of the MORTEXVAR project

<https://www.mortexvar.com/the-shaped-conference>