DIS-Afr-Egy-Shabtis

The history and development of shabtis has been well documented. The first detailed account was written by Louis Speleers (Les Figurines Funéraires Égyptiennes, Brussels, 1923). W. M. Flinders Petrie wrote a catalogue of shabtis in the Egyptian Collection of University College, London, with several short chapters describing the development of the F. and L. Aubert (Statuettes Égyptiennes: Chaouabtis, Ouchebtis figurines (Shabtis, London 1935). Subsequently the books of J. -, Paris, 1974) and Hans D. Schneider (Shabtis - An Introduction to the History of Ancient Egyptian Funerary Statuettes with a Catalogue of the Collection of Shabtis in the National Museum of Leiden 3 vols., Leiden, 1977) are widely referred to. More recent accounts are those by Harry M. Stewart (Egyptian Shabtis, London, 1995) and John H. Taylor (Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt, London, 2001).

A number of museums have published catalogues of their shabtis in which the authors have written a brief outline of the development of the figurines. The most notable of these are by J. -L. Chappaz (Figurines funéraires égyptiennes du Musée d’art et d’histoire et de quelques collections privées, Geneva, 1982), J. -C. Grenier (Les Statuettes Funéraires du Museo Gregoriano Egizio, Vatican, 1996), H. Schlögl and A. Brodbeck (Ägyptische Totenfiguren aus Öffentlichen und Privaten Sammlungen der Schweiz, Göttingen, 1990), H. Schlögl (Corpus der Ägyptischen Totenfiguren der Öffentlichen Sammlungen Krakaus, Crakow, 2000), H. Schlögl (Die ägyptischen Totenfiguren, Poznan, 2006), J. -L. Bovot (Les serviteurs funéraires royaux et princiers de l’Ancienne Égypte, Paris, 2003) and J. -F. Aubert and L. Aubert (Statuettes funéraires égyptiennes du département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, Paris, 2005). The shabtis in Vienna, Oslo, Darmstadt, Frankfurt and Mainz have been catalogued in the loose leaf format produced by Corpus Antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum (Vienna - Elfriede Reiser-Haslauer, 2 vols., 1990; Oslo - Saphinaz-Amal Naguib, 1985; Darmstadt, Frankfurt and Mainz - Birgit Schlick-Nolte and Vera von Droste zu H ülschoff, 1984). H. Schlögl and C. Meves-Schlögl wrote a catalogue of shabtis in Freiburg, Hinterzarten, Karlsruhe and Zurich (Uschebti - Arbeiter im Ägyptischen Totenreich, Wiesbaden, 1993). P. E. Newberry wrote a catalogue of some of the shabtis in Cairo Museum although this has no introduction (Funerary Statuettes and Model Sarcophagi 3 vols., Cairo, 1930-57).

Other books have been written about specific types or periods of shabtis. The earliest of these is by Henri Sottas (Statuettes Funéraires de la XVIII Dynastie, Paris, 1922). Dominique Valbelle wrote a detailed account of figurines from Deir el-Medineh (Ouchebtis de Deir el-Medineh, Cairo, 1972). The shabtis of the Third Intermediate Period have been most thoroughly detailed by Luís Manuel de Araújo (Estatuetas Funerárias Egípcias da XXI Dinastia, Lisbon, 2003). L. Aubert wrote a book about the figures from the Second Cache at Deir el-Bahari (Les statuettes funéraires de la Deuxième Cachette à Deir el-Bahari, Paris, 1998) and most recently there is the work of Paul Whelan (Mere Scraps of Rough Wood? 17th-18th Dynasty Stick shabtis in the Petrie Museum and other Collections, London, 2007) . Numerous short articles have been written for various Egyptology journals including the Journal of Egyptian Archaeology (London), Chronique d’Égypte (Brussels), Annales du Service des Antiquités de l’Egypte (Cairo), Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale (Paris) and Bulletin de la Société d’ Egyptologie (Geneva). The Louvre, Paris mounted a special exhibition about funerary statuettes - Chaouabtis - in 2003, seemingly the only such exhibition of such objects ever to be held. This was accompanied by a book on shabtis by J. -L. Bovot (Chaouabtis - Des travailleurs pharaoniques pour l’éternité, Paris, 2003). Shabtis in private collections have been published by J. Haynes (Privately owned Egyptian Antiquities in Ontario Fasicicle I - Shabtis, Ontario, 1983) , Glenn Janes (Shabtis - A Private View: Ancient Egyptian funerary statuettes in European private collections, Paris, 2002) and most recently by S. Deker (Uschebti - ägyptische Dienerfiguren einer deutschen Privatsammlung, Kempen, 2005).

Sample entry

Egypt, XXVth to XXX Dynasty, 747 to 343 BCE. This is a large ushabti glazed with a beautiful seafoam green faience. The front has ten horizontal bands of hieroglyphic text, and it has been formed to have a handsome face. It has its arms crossed over its chest and is holding hoes (for a clearer photo of an ushabti holding hoes in the similar manner, see the faience ushabti of Sety I on the British Museum website). Ushabti dolls are figures shaped like adult male or female mummies wearing the traditional ancient Egyptian headdresses. The ancient Egyptians believed that after they died, their spirits would have to work in the "Field of Reeds" owned by the god of the underworld, Osiris. This meant doing agricultural labor -- and it was required by all members of society, from workers to pharoahs. The more wealthy and nobility in Egyptian society were able to have shabtis made of faience; blue faience was meant to reflect the color of the river Nile both on earth and in the afterlife. The hieroglyphic inscriptions gave the shabti their power, telling Osiris that they were to do work for him. Comes with a custom stand. Size: 2.1" W x 7.5" H (5.3 cm x 19 cm).