Dis-A186-Afr-Egy-Ushabti-Ptolemaic Period- Blue Faïence-300 BCE-350 BCE

**Formal Label:** Ptolemaic Period, Blue Faïence Ushabti, 300 BCE-350 BCE

**Accession Number: A186**

**LC Classification:** DT62

**Date or Time Horizon:** 350 BCE-300 BCE

**Geographical Area:** Lower Egypt

**Cultural Affiliation:** Ptolemaic Period

**Medium:** Faïence

**Dimensions:   
Weight:**

**Provenance: Ex European collection**

**Condition:** Original

**Discussion:**

Ushabtis are anthropomorphic figurines representing servants of the élite deceased in the afterlife and were placed with them in their internments. The Amduat [underworld] included tracts of land that were mythically granted to the deceased by the Sun God Ra from which the dead could plant them for their nourishment in their life hereafter. Hence, many tombs show servants planting fields, and this is why. these same servants are the ones depicted on the Ushabtis. These servants would act as workers in the field or in other daily tasks. Nobles and royalty were interred with many of these figurines so that they would not have to work in the Hereafter. Thus, there were proliferations of many Ushabtis! Early versions of Ushabtis were modelled to represent the task that the servant would perform and the Ushabtis were portrayed with the tools with which to complete their specific tasks. By the Ptolemaic Period Ushabtis were just a token gesture, and therefore they were almost exclusively mummiform as in this current example, without a specific purpose or job to perform--just a show to the underworld as to the riches of the deceased and his tokens of preventing him from any manual labor.

Furthermore, by the Ptolemaic Period (305-44 BCE) there was a wide variation in the quality of Ushabtis: very crude hieroglyphic inscriptions were often faked as on the base of this Ushabti, since the complex ritual and language of the cult of Osiris had begun to lose popularity. For instance, on feet of this Ushabti a magical formula is almost indecipherable but a few garbled initial hieroglyphs suggest that the maker alluded to the opening phrases of Chapter 6 of the *Book of the Dead*: “Greetings Ushabti”. And this is where his expertise in hieroglyphs stopped. He was essentially illiterate! The rest of the *Book of the Dead* went on to say” If Osiris [insert the deceased name] be decreed to do any work in Khert-Neter [hereafter], let any impediment be removed. Here I am [to do the work for him]. Rolled up like a mummy it is hard to imagine how this Ushabti could go to work!

**References:**

Cavillier. Giacomo 2016. *Catalogo degli ushabti del Museo egizio di Firenze. volume 1: il periodo intermedio - nuovo regno (prima parte*). Oxford: BAR Publishing.