



SHABTI IN THE DRESS OF THE LIVING

Egypt
New Kingdom, XIX Dynasty
Alabaster with original polychrome
Hauteur: 23,4 cm

The male figure is shown in daily dress, wearing an elaborate long sleeved and partially pleated garment with overfold in front, projecting over the feet. The arms are crossed right over left above the chest, the hands hold painted crook and flail. These agricultural implements indicate the shabti's function to perform labour on behalf of the deceased in the afterlife. His face with broad nose and prominent eyes is framed by a double wig. A now faded column of hieroglyphic text down the front of the kilt and five horizontal lines around the kilt recite Chapter VI of the Book of the Dead, mention the name, titles and filiation of the deceased.

Shabtis were first introduced in the Middle Kingdom as substitutes for the mummy in case it was destroyed. During the Second Intermediate Period inscribed wooden figures called shawabtis (after the Egyptian word for wood, shawab) began to be placed in tombs. During the New Kingdom, shabtis assumed a new role as servant figures for the deceased. They were now depicted with agricultural equipment. By the Third Intermediate Period, the number of shabtis placed in the tomb could be up to 401 (365 workers and 36 overseers). During the Late Period the tomb figures became known as ushabtis ('answerers'), these figures represented servants who would magically answer when called upon to perform agricultural duties for the Pharaoh (in the form of Osiris) in the afterlife. Their main function was to ensure the individual's comfort and freedom from daily labour in the next life.

PROVENANCE

Private collection Forest Hill, New York, acquired prior to 1950, by descent; private collection Sotheby's New York 6 December 2006, lot 145

LITERATURE

G. James: *Shabtis, A Private View*, Paris 2002
J & L Aubert: *Statuettes Egyptienne Chaouabtis et Oushebtis*, Paris 1974