



Shabti Overseer

Date

c. 1070-656 B.C.E.

Medium

Clay

Description

In the Egyptian afterlife, everyone was expected to work in the Field of Reeds (or A'aru) for Osiris, the god of death. Shabtis first began appearing in tombs of the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2040 – 1782 B.C.E.), likely evolving from the wooden models of servants and workers that were included in Old and Middle Kingdom burials. At first, they were only mummiiform and most were placed in their own coffins. Most remained uninscribed, but some included the name of their owners or fractions of the shabti spell from Chapter 6 of the Book of the Dead. By the New Kingdom, shabtis had come to personify the deceased and perform labor on their behalf in the A'aru. They were made of predominantly clay and faience, and painted with agricultural implements such as sickles, hoes, baskets, and brick molds for working in the A'aru. Most tombs contain at least a few shabtis. Over time, it became more common to include 365 worker shabtis (one for each day of the year) and 36 overseers (one for every 10 worker shabtis) in wealthier tombs, totaling 401. This shabti was excavated from Abydos sometime between 1899 – 1902, and donated to the College by William C. Winslow in 1902. Catalogue card from 1960s: "White-washed clay ushabti-overseer. Egyptian, XXI-XXVth Dyns. Gift of: W.C. Winslow '62. Reddish clay; buff wash. Front moulded; back irregular. Short wig and kilt. Right arm at side; left bent, holding whip. Left foot advanced."

Dimensions

Overall: 3 x 1 in. (7.6 x 2.5 cm)