

SHABTI IN THE NAME OF NEDJEM-IB

EGYPTIAN, MIDDLE KINGDOM,
END OF THE 12TH DYNASTY-BEGINNING OF THE 13TH DYNASTY, CA. 1800-1640 BC
BROWN SERPENTINE

HEIGHT: 28 CM.

WIDTH: 7 CM.

DEPTH: 7 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*FORMERLY IN THE COLLECTION OF
RAPHAËL STORA (1886-1963), NEW YORK.
THEN WITH JAMES E. LE PÈRE, 3 EAST
THIRD STREET, NEW YORK.
SOLD TO NORBERT CHOUCROUN (1925-
1996), HOUSTON, ON 13 SEPTEMBER 1985.
THEN IN THE COLLECTION OF WILL
MCLENDON, HOUSTON.*



This amazing sculpture carved from serpentine stone is a shabti, one of the objects used in Egyptian funerary rites. It represents a deceased person, standing and embalmed like a mummy. The arms are invisible but can be made out beneath the shroud through a play of volumes skillfully crafted by the sculptor. They are crossed on the figure's chest, in the position typical of mummies. The feet are also invisible, wrapped in the fabric. The deceased is wearing a straight, three-piece wig, cascading over their shoulders in two sections and leaving their forehead and ears uncovered. Our shabti is unusual in its features. The large, almond-shaped eyes, enhanced by a make-up line, draw attention to the round face. The nose is wide and surmounts a mouth with rather thick lips. The particularly pronounced smile brings out prominent cheekbones, which make our sculpture very expressive. The last features characterizing our face are the two large, delicately sculpted ears, standing out from the wig. Finally, the statuette is decorated with a vertical, partly legible line of hieroglyphs giving the name of the deceased: "Nedjem-Ib".





Shabtis were funerary statuettes that were renamed ushabtis in the Early Period. They started to be placed in tombs during the Middle Kingdom, when a new concept of life and death emerged. After his life on Earth, Man came to the afterlife, a paradisaical agricultural world governed by Osiris, the main deity of the Egyptian pantheon. In that world, all the deceased had to perform various tasks to satisfy their needs, regardless of status or rank. Rich citizens thus had shabtis created, personal substitutes that could carry out these tasks in their place. The perfect representations of mummies, these statuettes represent the deceased in a shroud, arms invisible with only the head in sight. Nevertheless, over the centuries, the hands were more and more visible, until they were ultimately represented outside the shroud, holding objects useful for the agricultural tasks that

awaited them in the afterlife. Initially devoid of any inscriptions, texts were eventually engraved either to identify the deceased or to make an offering to Osiris. Gorgeous examples resembling our shabti are conserved in private collections and international museums (Ill. 1-4). Finally, over the dynasties, shabtis were more and more frequently placed in tombs. Initially, one shabti was left per deceased person, but later, it was legions. For instance, a group of 209 ushabtis inscribed with the name of a single person are conserved at the Louvre-Lens Museum (Ill. 5).



In terms of their materials, shabtis and then ushabtis could be made of painted wood, faience or hard stone. Our item is sculpted in serpentine stone, with delicate brown glints, giving it a unique aura. This stone, known to have been used in Egyptian

statuary, was nevertheless very seldom used in shabti art, which makes our item a rare example of its type. Our statuette is also exceptional in its dimensions. Shabtis are generally small objects, seldom exceeding 20 cm. The height of our sculpture and the fine facial features make it a beautiful artwork, a perfect example of the tradition of Egyptian funerary statuettes, which persisted until the Ptolemaic period.

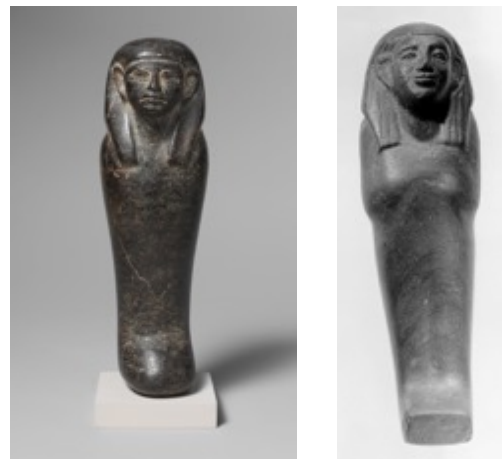


This shabti was initially part of the collection of Raphaël Stora (1886-1963). He and his brother Maurice were art dealers, particularly specialising in antiquities in their Parisian boutique in Boulevard Hausmann, before they opened a new branch in New York. A very fine photograph shows our sculpture among the Stora brothers' stock with the inventory number C-57-6 (Ill. 6). The 'C' in front of the

number seems to imply that our work was placed ("consigné" in French) with Mr Stora by its actual owner so he could sell it for them.

The statuette then joined the collection of the New York galerist James E. Le Père, whose boutique was located at 3 East Third Street. It was acquired by Norbert Choucroun (1925-1996) on 13 September 1985 and conserved with his other artworks at his home in Houston, Texas (Ill. 7). Finally, the shabti was added to the collection of Will McLendon, a friend of Norbert Choucroun's, who had his possessions evaluated upon his death in 1996.

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Shabti, Egyptian, Dynasty XII-XVIII, granodiorite, H.: 18 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 20.2.7.

Ill. 2. Shabti, Egyptian, Dynasty XII-XIII, schist, H.: 12.5 cm. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Holland, inv. no. F1971/7.1.



Ill. 3. Shabti, Egyptian, Dynasty XIII, schist, H.: 23 cm. Formerly in the collection of W. Arnold Meijer.

Ill. 4. Shabti, Egyptian, 12th - 13th Dynasty, granodiorite, H.: 28 cm. Private German collection.



Ill. 5. Ushabtis in the name of Neferibreheb, Egyptian, 500 BC, faience. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. N3459.



Ill. 6. Photography of our shabti in Mr Stora's stock, inv. no. C-57-6.



Ill. 7. Our shabti in Mr Choucroun's home.