

# The overseer shabtis of the Supreme Chief of the Harem of Amun

## Nesy-Khonsu

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First edition

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 *Introduction to this study*

This study provides an overview of the shabtis for lady Nesy-Khonsu. In addition to the published examples I added the shabtis I have come across in the world. I will start of with a short introduction of the ancient owner Nesy-Khonsu and describe her shabtis in general. In the following chapters you will find the museum parallels (chapter 2) and the privately owned parallels (chapter 3).

### 1.2 *Who was Nesy-Khonsu?*

Nesy-Khonsu was the principal wife of the High Priest of Amun Pinedjem II. She was born to Pinedjem II's predecessor Smendes II and his wife Ta-hen-Djehouty. Her mother was buried in the Bab el Gasus or Cache 2 cachette. The tomb of Smendes II is yet to be found. My guess is that is likely in the area of the Cache 1 and Cache 2 cachettes in another cachette together with High Priest Menkhepera and other missing family members. Her main title was Viceroy of Kush (one of the last to bear this title), which usually was a title given to men. She had four children with Pinedjem II, two sons Tjanefer and Masaharta, and two daughters, Itawy and Nesitanebisheru (last one also buried in DB320). She died (5 years before Pinedjem II) in year 5 of the reign of Siamun, which is 981 BC. The coffins in which she was buried were originally made for Pinedjem's sister and other wife Isetemkhebi (also buried in DB320). Strangely so, both the inner and outer coffins were found, but one of them was reused for the reburial of Ramesses IX. It is unknown whether her coffin was reused after her death or that she donated it to the reburial of Ramesses. Considering that she died young (around 30, and possibly during child birth) and the fact that they used the coffin originally intended for Isetemkhebi it seems unlikely to me that she would willingly donate this coffin which was not meant for her, during her life. More likely it was hastily used for her burial and apparently also hastily used for the reburial of Ramses IX.

Another great and unique element of her burial equipment were no less than two wooden panels, now in the British Museum and in the Louvre with a spell that reads:

*“Amen-Re, king of the gods, the great god, the first to come into being, says: I shall charge the ushabtis which one has made for Nesi-Khonsu, daughter of Tahenthoth,*

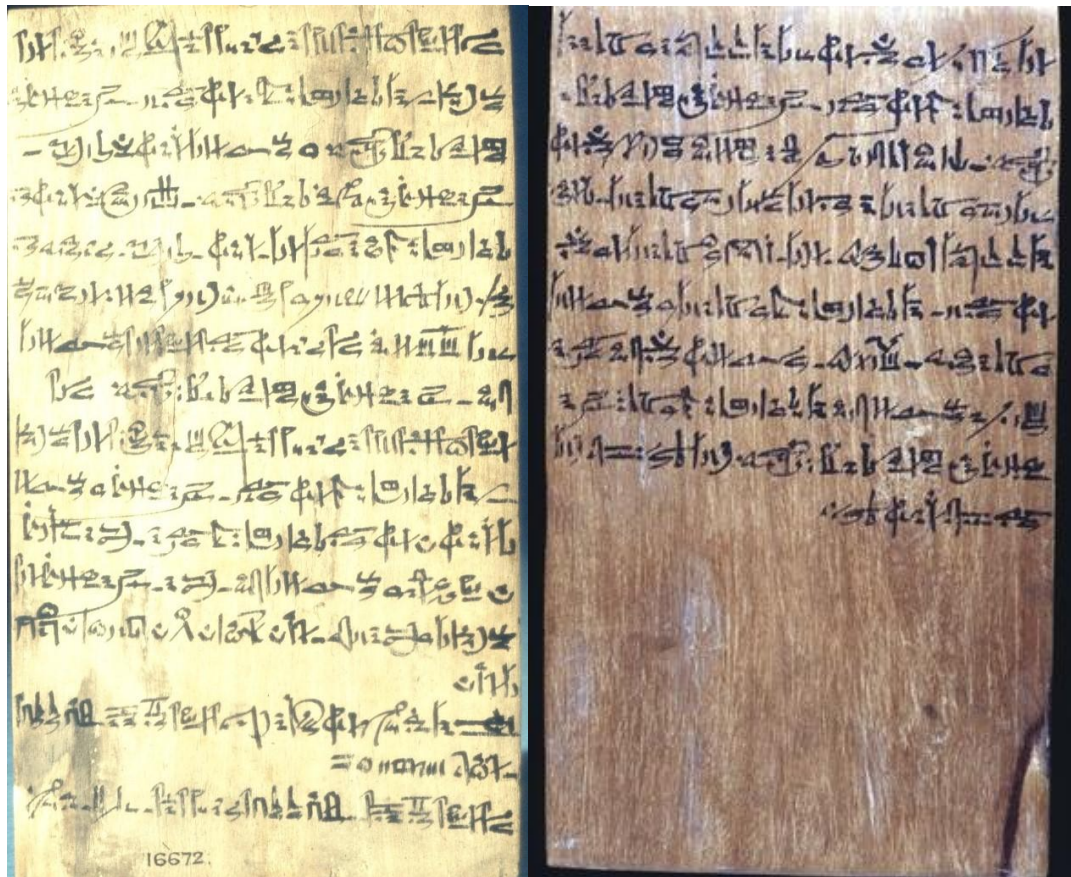
*with performing all the services one has performed for, Nesi-Khonsu daughter of Tahenthoth, in everything which ushabtis can do being in the service of a human who has died, who has been brought to the necropolis and who has become divine, without failing. This is the speech which Amen has spoken: I shall cause them to make them for Nesi-Khonsu, daughter of Tahenthoth. Amen-Re, king of the gods, the great god, the first to come into being, says: I shall charge the ushabtis which one has made for Nesi-Khonsu with doing everything for which ushabtis are being made, for exempting every deceased perfect one, for them to exempt Nesi-Khonsu. I shall charge them with protecting her all year round, every month, every decade, every day and on all epagomenal days.*

*The contents of the writing placed before Amen-nesti-tawi of the temple of the solar obelisk in the year 5, 4th month of summer, day 2: Amen-nesti-tawi of the temple of the solar obelisk, the great god, says in two copies of the writing which attest:*

*Concerning all which they have paid to the makers of faience for the ushabtis made for Nesi-Khonsu, daughter of Tahenthoth, in copper, clothing, loaves of bread, cakes, fish likewise as all that has been paid to them (i.e. the makers) for them (i.e. the ushabtis) and will also be paid to them for them, the makers of faience are paid by this (this) being the payment for their value.*

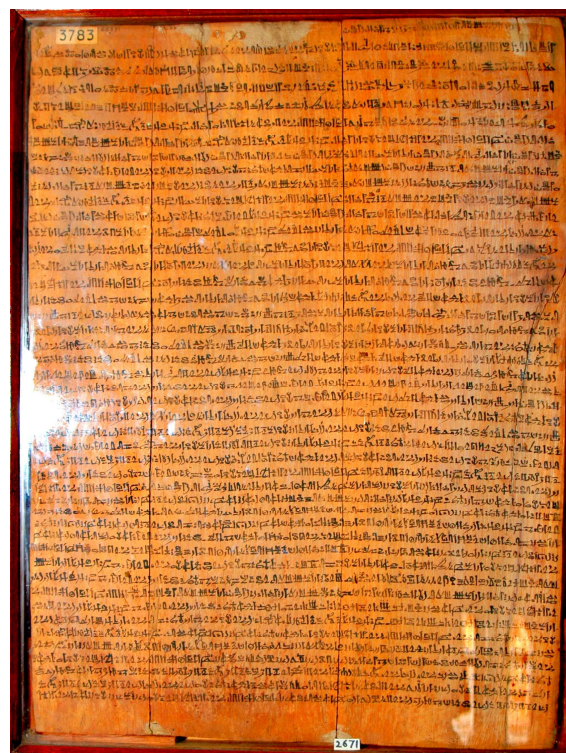
*Concerning all that one has done to the ushabtis in order to pay them for being made, with the intention of replacing somebody at work, saying: "I shall do everything he does," this is the price for the ushabtis to do it, in order to pay back Nesi-Khonsu, daughter of Tahenthoth, and for them to be good to her and for them to do her good."*





Front and back of BM example of the wooden tablet of Nesy-Khonsu

There is also another decree of Nesy-Khonsu, also in wood, now in Cairo museum, that is known as the Decree of Amonrasonthor for Nesykhonsu that should provide Nesy-Khonsu with freedom in the after life.



Other element of her funeral equipment include nice faience offering cups and a great set of canopic jars:



© Manchester Museum



© British Museum (EA17402)



© British Museum





© British Museum (EA25584)

The above heart scarab was stolen by the Abd el-Rassul's brothers but was acquired by the British Museum in 1894 from William Talbot Ready who got it from Edward Stanton (an army colonel who was the Consul General from the United Kingdom as of 15 May 1865).



Nesy-Khonsu's mummy and intact outer coffin (both in Cairo Museum).

### *1.3 Description of the shabtis*

In this document I will only describe the overseers.

The overseers are carrying a whip in the right hand to the front of the left shoulder. The left arm is stretched next to the body with a clinching fist.

The overseer types vary in size around 16.5 cm.

The overseer types of Nesy-Khonsu are all inscribed with just the name and the titles, usually: “The Osiris, the Supreme Chief of the Harem of Amun, Nesy-Khonsu, true of voice”. Note that either the Osiris or the other title is sometimes omitted on this overseer type. Also, the title King’s son of Kush is not mentioned on the overseer shabtis.

It is unclear how many overseer shabtis were originally buried in DB 320 for Nesy-Khonsu, but 36 seems a safe consideration.



## 2. Museum pieces

On the following pages an overview is provided of the museum pieces which are currently part of their respective collections.

The following information is provided for each piece:

Location:	The city in which the museum is located is mentioned as well as the name of the museum.
Published:	If the museum piece is published in a book or on the internet the name of the publication, author and the relevant page number is mentioned.
Inventory nb	The inventory number is mentioned if known.
Provenance:	For as far as available the provenance of the piece is described, detailing the previous owners prior to the entering into the collection of the museum.
Height:	The specific height of the shabti is described in centimetres.
Comments:	Provides the comments of the author to the specific pieces, for example relating to the condition or quality of the object compared to the other parallels.



Cairo Museum (1-2)



Cairo Museum (3-5)





Cairo Museum (6-8)



Cairo (9-12)

Published: Newberry, 1930-57, pp. 364, 412, plate XXXIV

Inventory number: 26239 / 48466

Provenance: From the Maspero excavation

Height: Various

Comments: 11 overseers were on display in a large cabinet in Cairo Museum. The other one was published in Newberry, so should also be in Cairo Museum.



**Chiddingstone, Chiddingstone Castle**



© Glenn Janes

Published: No

Inventory number: EDEC 01.0311

Provenance: Unknown

Height: Various

Comments: Clear glyphs. Thanks to Glenn for the photo's and information.



Lyon, Musee des Confluences



Published: Catalogue Musee Guimet  
Inventory number: Unknown  
Provenance: Unknown  
Height: Unknown  
Comments: Appears to be intact.

**New York, Brooklyn Museum**



Published: No

Inventory number: 16182

Provenance: Gift of Evangeline Wilbour Blashfield, Theodora Wilbour, and Victor Wilbour honoring the wishes of their mother, Charlotte Beebe Wilbour, as a memorial to their father, Charles Edwin Wilbour.

Height: 16.2 CM

Comments: Good. Large hole in right forehead due to defective firing; crude workmanship.

**New York, Brooklyn Museum**



Published: No

Inventory number: 16.187

Provenance: Gift of Evangeline Wilbour Blashfield, Theodora Wilbour, and Victor Wilbour honoring the wishes of their mother, Charlotte Beebe Wilbour, as a memorial to their father, Charles Edwin Wilbour

Height: 16.4 CM

Comments: Clear glyphs and reasonably detailed face and feet.

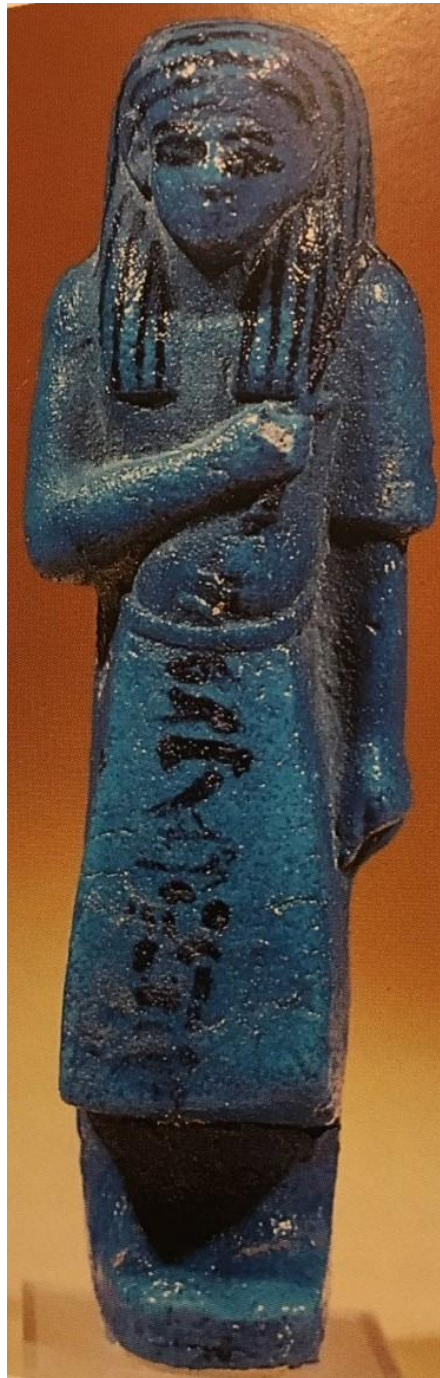


**Oxford, Ashmoleum**



Published: No  
Inventory number: E 1884.41  
Provenance: Unknown  
Height: Unknown  
Comments: Big break at neck level. On display.

Paris, Louvre



Published: Tanis, l'or des Pharaons, Bovot, page 126 and 127

Inventory number: E 20304

Provenance: Unknown

Height: 16.3 CM

Comments: Good example. Not on display.



Published: No

Inventory number: Unknown

Provenance: Unknown

Height: Unknown

Comments: On display. Note that the text does not seem to be centralised on the apron. Well modelled facial details.



### **3. Private collections pieces and unknown current location**

On the following pages an overview is provided of the examples which are currently in private collections around the world.

The following information is provided for each piece:

Owner:	The name of the current collector/collection. In case this is known the identity of the collector is often protected by using initials only.
Published:	If the private collection piece is published in a book or on the internet the name of the publication, author and the relevant page number is mentioned.
Provenance:	For as far as available the provenance of the piece is described, detailing the previous owners prior to the entering into the collection of the collector.
Height:	The specific height of the shabti is described in centimetres.
Comments:	Provides the comments of the author to the specific pieces, for example relating to the condition or quality of the object compared to the other parallels.





Published: Thierry de Maigret, auction catalogue, 24 October 2012, lot 73

Provenance: Pierre Bouche collection

Height: 16,7 CM

Comments: Broken at three levels, head, middle and ankle area. Some further fire cracks.  
Text partly faded. Faience still very shiny.



Coll VB







Published: No

Inventory number: VB-1164

Provenance: Sold at auction, Hotel Drouot 1973, lot 43, photo in Moger collection, then L'ancienne collection Le Vél, Drouot Arts D'Orient Beaussant Lefevre, Lot 23, 17 November 2015

Height: 16.2 CM

Comments: Front of feet broken off and restored. Text faded. Text faded.

**Unknown collection A**



Published: Auction catalogue Drouot, 28th of April 2007

Inventory number: Unknown

Provenance: Sold at auction, 28th of April 2007, lot 502.

Height: 16.7 CM

Comments: Great example.

## Index

Below is the complete overview of all the currently known location of the overseer shabtis of Nesi-Khonsu.

Between brackets is the inventory number.

### Museum pieces

Cairo, Cairo Museum (26239 / 48466)	12
Chiddingstone, Chiddingstone Castle (EDEC 01.0311)	1
Lyon, Musee des Confluences (E 22120)	1
New York, Brooklyn Museum (16182)	2
Oxford, Ashmoleum (E 1884.41)	1
Paris, Louvre (E 20304 and unknown)	2
Museum totals	<u>19</u>

### Private collections

Coll. NH	1
Coll. VB	1
Unknown collection A (ex Drouot 2007)	1
Private collection totals	<u>3</u>
Overall total (museums and private collections)	<u>22</u>

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