

**The shabtis of the Gods' Wife of Amun and Divine Adoratrice  
Mehyt-Weskhet**



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction to this study

This study provides an overview of the shabtis for Mehyt-Weskhet. In addition to the published examples I added the shabtis I have come across in the world<sup>1</sup>. I will start off with a short introduction of the ancient owner Mehyt-Weskhet 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 Mehyt-Weskhet?

#### 1.2.1 Title and heritage

Mehyt-Weskhet was one of the most powerful women of her time as she was “Divine Adoratrice of Amen” and “God’s Wife of Amen” in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty. During the Third Intermediate Period, these two titles seemed to be interchangeable and coupled the lady with the god of Thebes, Amen. Consequently, she could not get married nor bear any children. Her office gave her power over the income of the temples of Amen, leading to her considerable wealth and power. It seems that the ideal scenario was that for the office of Divine Adoratrice of Amen she would have to be a daughter of the ruling High Priest of Amen with his wife being a daughter of the ruling pharaoh in Tanis.

As only her shabtis seem to have survived, we have little knowledge of her exact timeframe and parentage as there were other ladies with the same name during this period as well<sup>2</sup>. Jose Ma Ortuondo Rocandio published an extensive article<sup>3</sup>, suggesting to attribute her as Mehyt-Weskhet (D) concluding that most likely she was a daughter of Seshonq I (who reigned c. 943–922 BC), who founded the 22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty. Mehyt-Weskhet (D) most likely came to office following Henut-Tawy (D)<sup>4</sup> and preceding Karo-Mama (buried at the Ramesseum, and presumed daughter of Seshonq II). It is

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<sup>1</sup> The first author to prepare such a list was shabti scholar Glenn Janes in *Shabtis - a private view*. Paris 2002, pages 88-91.

<sup>2</sup> Mehyt-Weskhet (A) was the wife of Sheshonq (A), mother of Nimlot (A), grandmother of Sheshonq I (who was a son of Nimlot (A) and Tentsepeh (A). Mehyt-Weskhet (B) was the sister of Sheshonq I and was married with Shed-shu-nefertem (A) from Memphis.

<sup>3</sup> Jose M. Ortuondo Rocandio, *Fragmento anonimo de un ushebti de una divina adoratriz de amon de la dinastia XXII* in Boletín de la Asociación Española de Egiptología, nr. 18, p. 205-229.

<sup>4</sup> Yoyotte, Jean 1972. "Les adoratrices de la Troisième Période Intermédiaire: à propos d'un chef-d'oeuvre rapporté d'Égypte par Champollion." In Bulletin de la Société Française d'Égyptologie, 64, page 46–47, although there is little evidence for this proposed order. Henut-tawy (D)'s tomb is still undiscovered.

unclear when Mehyt-Weskhet (D) died, but it was probably during the reign of her brother Osorkon I (who reigned c. 922–887).

### 1.2.2 Location of her burial

The location of Mehyt-Weskhet's (D) tomb is officially unknown. Many authors believe it to be the Ramesseum as most likely candidate, considering that her brother Osorkon I started burials there and her successors in office, Karo-Mama and Ked-Merut, are certainly buried there.

However, till now the various scholars (Bovot, Janes and others) have missed an important piece of the puzzle. Winlock excavated in the area of the Deir el Bahri caches and found various pits that contained burials, most notably from the Middle Kingdom, but actually from various times, including a couple of ladies of the 22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty. Following contact with the Metropolitan Museum of Art<sup>5</sup> it was confirmed that several shabtis of Mehyt-Weskhet were indeed excavated in Pit 1103, MMA excavations, 1920–1921<sup>6</sup> in a tomb that the excavators believe was originally cut in Dynasty 11. The official report reads: *"The tomb itself yielded us the name of its XI dynasty owner-The Steward of the Inner Palace Sianhur-and some shawabti figures of a queen of a much later period, but that was all"*. It contained only a few random finds ranging from Middle Kingdom to Ptolemaic Period. According to the very brief (unpublished) notes made by the excavators, the shabtis were found in the lower chamber of the tomb, "most of them from the lowest sarcophagus place."

So we know for certain that a number (but not how many<sup>7</sup>) of shabtis were excavated from Pit 1103, but is uncertain whether this was the place of her actual burial. Considering the very disturbed context of Pit 1103, it is difficult to give any certainty. Could it be that she was buried there but that her coffin and other valuables were removed to the Ramesseum? Or is her tomb still undiscovered in another corridor from Pit 1103 yet to be discovered? Hopefully, new research will provide clarity on this in the future.

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<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Janice Kamrin and the MMA for her help and research in the excavation reports from the museum.

<sup>6</sup> *The Egyptian Expedition 1920-1921: III. Excavations at Thebes*, E. Winlock, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, Vol. 16, No. 11, Part 2: Egyptian Expedition for MCMXX-MCMXXI (Nov., 1921), pp. 29-53

<sup>7</sup> The description "most of them" would indicate more than the 3 examples the MMA have noted, two in their collection and one in Cairo museum.

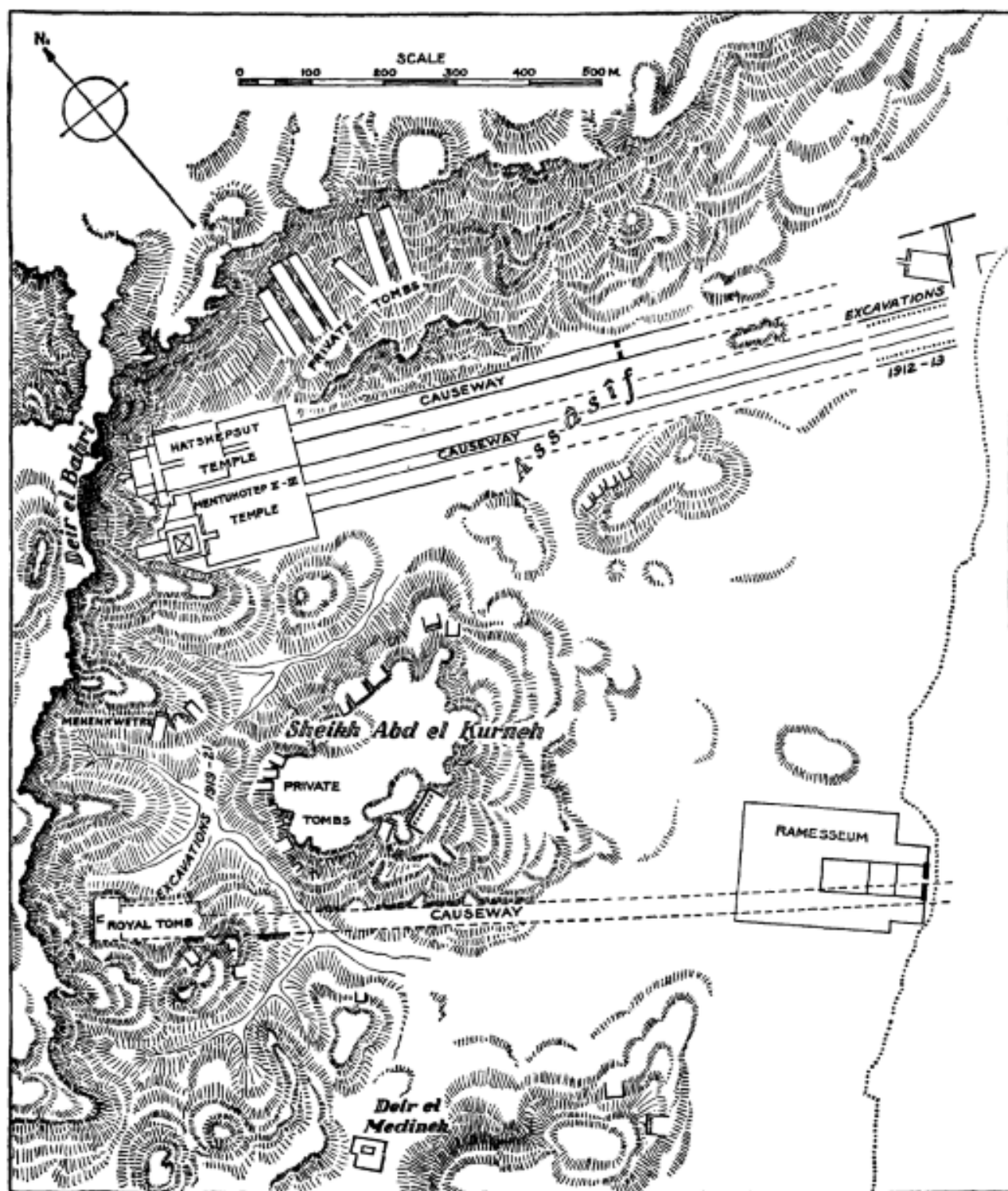
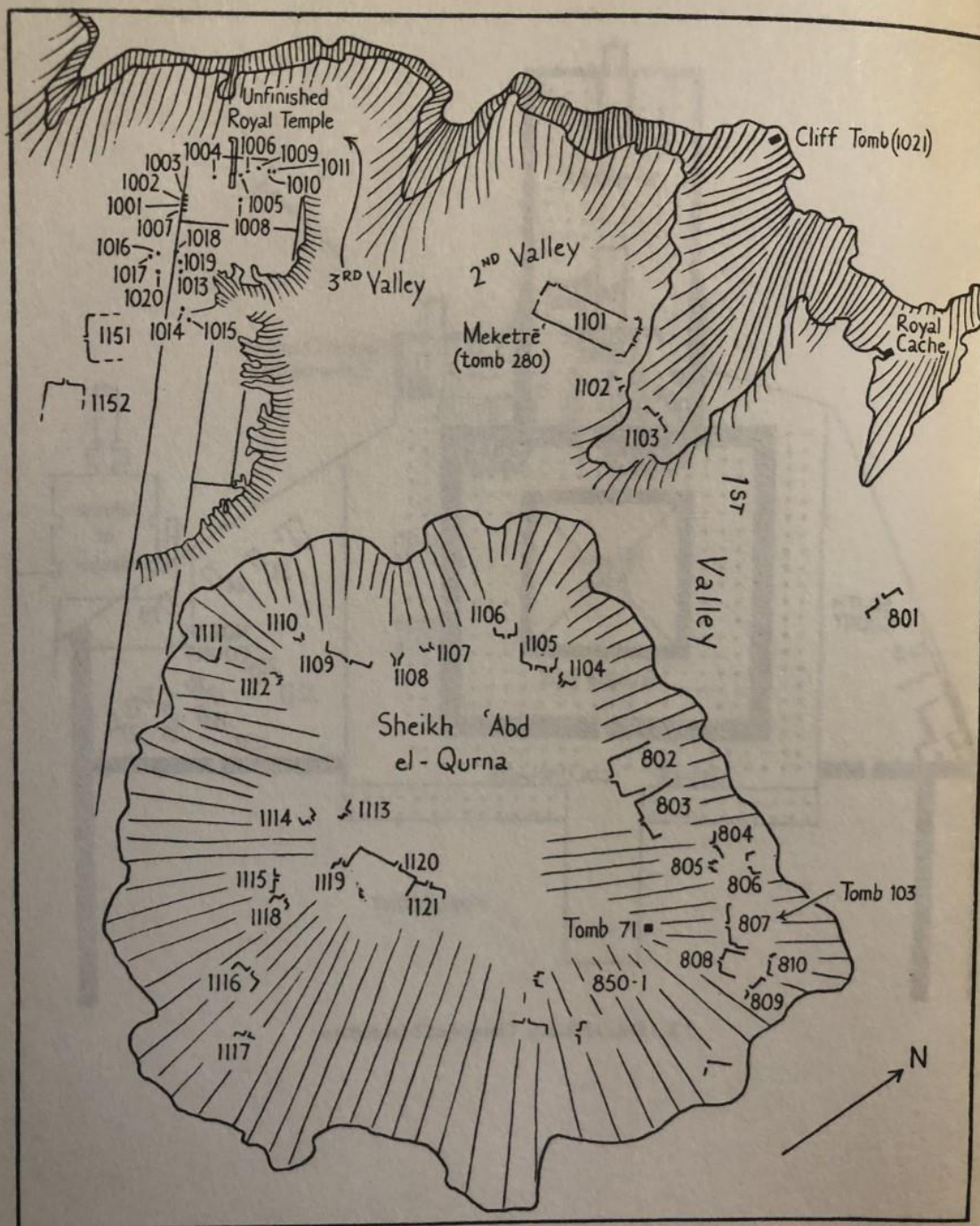


FIG. 1. SKETCH MAP OF THE THEBAN NECROPOLIS

As published in: *The Egyptian Expedition 1920-1921: III. Excavations at Thebes*, H. E. Winlock, page 30



X. Valleys south of Deir el-Bahri Temples, and Sheikh 'Abd el-Qurna

From *The Theban Necropolis, Part II, Royal Tombs and Smaller cemeteries*, Porter & Moss, table X



### 1.3 Description of the shabtis

#### 1.3.1 General

Shabti scholar Glenn Janes considers these shabtis to be probably the best shabtis produced in this period. The shabti worker type are mummiform. The faience has a brilliant blue glaze and the details are in purple/black. The shabtis are wearing a striated tripartite wig with a fillet head-band. The known variations are:



Type A

Type B

Type C

Type A has a black thick horizontal line marking the end of both of the lappets as well as at the end of the wig on the back, whilst Type B does not have these end markings. Usually Type A has thicker and more vertical lines than the ones of Type B. Type A is the most common type. Type C is a variant of Type A but has no lines on the top of the head, emanating from the black dot on the top:



Type A

Type B

Type C

The hands are holding agricultural implements in each hand. Both hands hold a hoe. In general the hoes are relatively short on Type A, whilst on the Type B they are generally longer:



Type A



Type B

There is a seed sack hanging from the shoulders:



Type X



Type Y

As can be seen from the pictures above, there are two types of seed sacks found, either with diagonal crossed lines (X) and vertical/horizontal ones. This can be found on both Type A and Type B shabtis mentioned above. Apparently, the drawing of the seed sack was up what the ancient scribe felt like. This is not uncommon as I have seen other TIP shabtis with up to 4 different types of seed sacks.

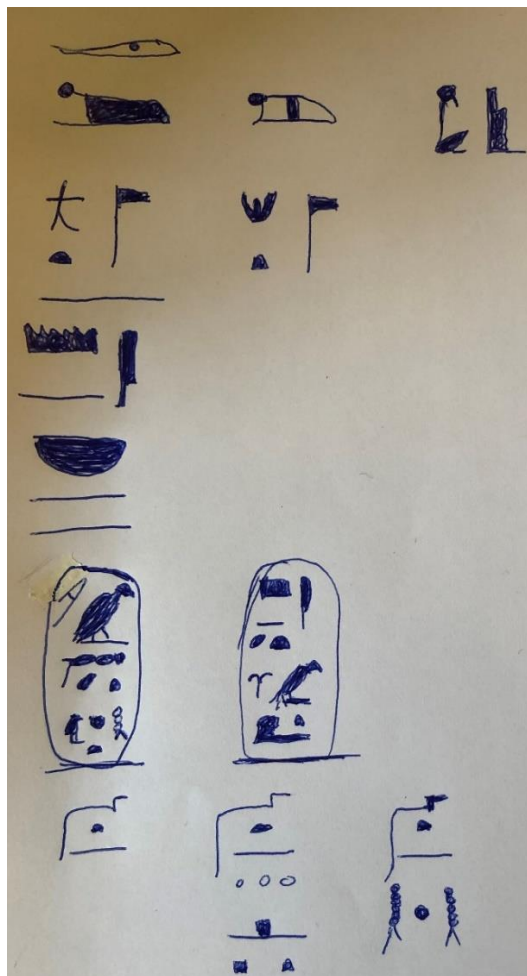


### 1.3.2. The inscription

The hieroglyphic inscriptions on front reads:

“The Osiris, the Divine Adoratrice of Amen, Lord of the Two Lands, Meryt-Mut Mehyt-Weskhet, forever”. On some “Divine Adoratrice of Amen” is replaced with “God’s Wife of Amen”. Most examples end only with (r) D.t (forever). However, on some this is supplemented with (n)HH (ever) or Htp (happy).

The variations in inscription can be visualised as follows, where the left column is the most common inscription and the following columns demonstrate the alternate inscriptions:



The published overseers<sup>8</sup> (now at the Louvre and Berlin museums) show the name in the cartouche as Mehyt-Weskhet Meryt-Mut and as Sit-Amen Mut-em-Hat. We find this alternative cartouche on two worker shabtis as well (in Cairo<sup>9</sup> and in the Petrie Museum<sup>10</sup>).

<sup>8</sup> See paragraph 2 number 17 below.

<sup>9</sup> See CG 48457 also described in the next chapter as number 11.

<sup>10</sup> UC38077 see also described in the next chapter as number 18.

### *1.3.3 Size and numbers*

The faience shabtis are very large for the period (22th dynasty), measuring between 16.8 and 17.3 centimetres for the worker types. The overseer has a rectangular pillar at the back. This is a very uncommon feature for shabtis, although it appears irregularly throughout the various periods. Well known for example are the shabtis of Khaemwaset that contain a series of shabtis with a huge rectangular slab pillar inscribed with the “Khaemwaset-formula”. It measures 16.5 centimetres.

As described in paragraph 1.2.2. it is unclear how many shabtis were originally buried in the tomb for Mehyt-Weskhet as the tomb had been plundered in antiquity. When comparing the fragments as published in this article, it appears that none of them can be combined and thus restored to a complete example as almost all examples have an inscription that contains “Amen” with the exception of one upper half fragment (P5). Consequently, there are 28 shabtis known. That cannot be the entire set. Normally, one would expect around 401 shabtis. So, there are a couple of options: a) the rest remain still in the tomb location, b) they are in musea and private collections waiting to be “discovered”, c) the ones currently known are part of “donations” to the temple (Ramesseum?) and her tomb and possibly a full set of shabtis remain unknown. Of course, it could also be a combination of the options. I am sure some more will come to light the coming years, but I do not expect huge numbers.

### *1.3.4. The pottery examples of Montserrat and Krk*

There are two pottery examples attributed to the Mehyt-Weskhet of this article. One is in the Museu de Montserrat, Barcelona and the other one in Krk, Croatia. However, I have not included them in the parallel overview as they do not seem to be ancient, at least not belonging to the original burial assemblage.



Barcelona, Montserrat<sup>11</sup>

Krk, Croatia<sup>12</sup>

The Barcelona example has been published first in 1969 and then again in 2008 (see pictures below) by Javier Uriach Torello<sup>13</sup>. Unfortunately the object has been severely damaged in the meantime and part of the inscription has been lost. With the publication of Mladen Tomorad<sup>14</sup> of the Croatia example a second one from the same series has been unearthed<sup>15</sup>. The theory of Tomorad is that there are “pseudo-shabtis” that are not 19<sup>th</sup> century fakes, but actually Hellenistic and / or Roman period shabtis. They apparently have been found in graves in Eastern Europe. For the specific pottery shabti he now seems to believe it to be an actual shabti from the burial assemblage of Mehyt-Weskhet and somehow ended up in a tomb in Croatia. The evidence for his theory is not convincing for me.

Looking at the facts, there are no recorded finds of these pseudo-shabtis ever in Ancient Egypt, despite numerous tomb finds from the Hellenistic and or roman-period. For decades the faience shabtis of Mehyt-Weskhet have been sold in Luxor, without anyone (Lepsius, Petrie, Winlock) referencing to pottery examples. Although one could argue that a mix of faience and pottery

<sup>11</sup> Thanks to Javier Uriach Torello for his help. The museum inventory number is 610.105. Published in *La Colleccio Egipcia del museu de montserrat*, Barcelona, 2008, page 195 and in J. Uriach Torello, *Aquí estamós! Estatuillas funerarias egipcias de algunas colecciones de Barcelona*, page 82-83.

<sup>12</sup> Published by Mladen Tomorad in *The century of the brave stoljeće hrahrih*, 2014, page 397-400 and then again in *The two unpublished shabtis from krk (Croatia)*, in the journal of Egyptological Studies (2015), page 141-146.

<sup>13</sup> See note 11.

<sup>14</sup> See note 12.

<sup>15</sup> He refers to a third pottery example, being the Puskhin Museum one, which is incorrect. That is a regular faience one as illustrated in chapter 2 of this article.

examples for a single owner existed in the TIP, it is extremely rare outside the royal shabtis. Most important, however, are the style characteristics of the pottery examples. To my knowledge, no striated pottery wigs are recorded for the shabtis of an ancient owner in the 22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty (or the entire TIP for that matter). So, the pottery examples were either made in hellenistic / roman times or they are modern forgeries. As I am not aware of any other lady of whom shabtis were made as sort of tribute in these ancient times it seems highly unlikely that specifically she was chosen as we know so little from Mehyt-Weskhet (D) from monuments or other information. To me it is much more likely that after her shabtis appeared on the market in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that some artist decided to copy the inscription and enhance the appearance by adding a striated wig (and the faience prototype had a painted striated wig of course).

Therefore, I have not added the Montserrat and Krk shabtis to the parallel list.



## 2. Museum pieces

On the following pages an overview is provided of the museum pieces which are currently part of their respective collections. First I publish all the pictures of the museum pieces that I have, followed by a detailed account of the museum pieces with and without a picture.

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, based on the museums information unless otherwise stated.
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.



Lepsius, Denkmäler, plate III, page 256:d-f

6-7 Brooklyn, New York, Brooklyn Museum



6: 37.154E



7: 37.155E

8-12 Cairo, Cairo Museum



8: JE 47748 /SR 4: 2347



9: CG 48455 / J 96867



10: CG 48456 / JE 32761



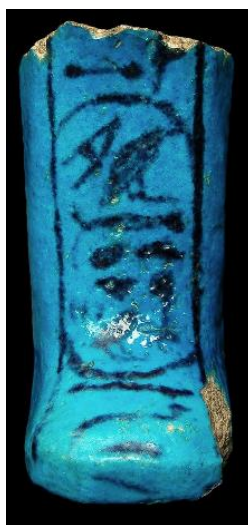
11: CG 48457 / JE 32762



13-15, London, British Museum



13: EA41538



14: EA66665



15: EA90161

16-18, London, Petrie Museum



16: UC39870



17: UC39871



18: UC38077

19-20, New York, Metropolitan Museum



19



20







22-23, Paris, Louvre Museum



22: E 1976



23: E 5334

### **1-5 Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung SMB**

Published: Two examples: Lepsius, Denkmäler, plate III, page 256:d–f

Inventory nb: 4521, 4522, 4523, 7418/01, 7418/02

Provenance: Bey family

Height: Unknown

Comments: 4521 Overseer missing since 1945, but the lower part could recently be re-identified by Dr. Jan Moje. The upper part seems to be destroyed, presumably during the bombing of the museum island. 4522 Overseer existing. 4523 Worker missing since 1945. 7418/01 Worker existing. 7418/02 existing, different shabti compared to 7418/01. All these shabtis will be published by Dr. Jan Moje in: J. Moje, Schabtis und verwandte Figurinen. Mit den Beständen der Antikensammlung, des Museums für Vor- und Frühgeschichte und des Vorderasiatischen Museums. Band 2: Dritte Zwischenzeit (CAA Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin SMB-SPK), Working title<sup>16</sup>.

### **6-7: Brooklyn museum, New York**

Published: No

Inventory nb: 6: 37.154E (top) and 7: 37.155E (bottom)

Provenance: Unknown

Height: Unknown

Comments: Although the break line seems a perfect match, the top and lower half are for different owners, which can be seen by the width of the panel lines as well as the repeating of the Amen glyphs<sup>17</sup>.

### **8-12: Cairo, Cairo museum**

Published: Number 9-12 are published by Newberry in Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire: Funerary Statuettes and Model Sarcophagi, of which number 9 is included with a picture (part III, plate XXXII) .

Inventory nb: In the display cases there are different inventory numbers than the ones used in the publications, for completeness the various numbers per items are mentioned: 8: JE 47748 / SR 4: 2347, 9: CG 48455 / J 96867, 10: CG 48456 / JE 32761, 11: CG 48457 / JE 32762, 12: CG 48527 / Maspero Slip. Cat. 3019.

Provenance: 8: Excavated by H. Winlock for the MMA (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) in 1921, Thebes (Diospolis Magna; Luxor) , Thebes: West, Deir el-Bahri. 9-11: unknown. 12: Deir el Bahri pit, Maspero, Mission Francaise du Cairo.

Height: 8: JE 47748: 17 cm, 9: CG 48455: 16.5 cm, 10: CG 48456: 6 cm, 11: CG 48457: 7 cm, 12: CG 48527: 16 cm;

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<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Dr. Jan Moje for all the information on the Berlin examples.

<sup>17</sup> Thanks to Kathy Zurek-Doule of Brooklyn Museum for the information and the pictures.

Comments: Three complete workers (all fractured and repaired), two are fragments. Numbers 8-11 were on display prior to the opening of the new Grand Egyptian Museum. Only 12 (CG 48527) was not on display<sup>18</sup>.

### **13-15: London, British museum**

Published: Published online at the museum website

Inventory nb: 13: EA41538; 14: EA66665; 15: EA90161

Provenance: 13: EA41538: acquired from Luxor dealer Mohammed Mohassib in 1905; 14: EA66665: donated by VES James on 1964; 15: EA90161: unknown provenance

Height: 13: EA41538: 17.3 CM; 14: EA66665: 6 cm; 15: EA90161: 7,36 cm

Comments: 13: EA41538: Nearly complete (fractures unrestored). 15: EA90161: Ends with “di Ankh” which can be translated as “Given Life”. They are not on display.

### **16-18: London, Petrie museum**

Published: Petrie, *Shabtis*, No 267, 268, 269, p.14, pls. 15,18,37

Inventory nb: 16: UC39870, 17: UC39871, 18: UC38077

Provenance: Acquired by Petrie in Luxor in 1887 where the provenance was given as Western Thebes, Petrie, 1905, III, page 251.

Height: 16: UC39870: 16.8 cm, 17: UC39871: 5.7 cm, 18: UC38077: 5,5 cm.

Comments: One complete example and two lower halves. UC38077 has Mut-em-Hat as name in the cartouche.

### **19-20: New York, Metropolitan Museum**

Published: No

Inventory nb: 22.3.13 – 22.3.14

Provenance: Deir el-Bahri, Seankhare Cemetery, Pit 1103, MMA excavations, 1920–22, Rogers Fund and Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1922, Museum excavations, 1920–22. Acquired by the Museum in the division of finds, 1922<sup>19</sup>.

Height: 19 (22.3.13): 16.8 cm; 20 (22.3.14): 16.5 cm

Comments: Despite the chips, very good quality examples.

### **21: Moscow, Pushkin Museum**

Published: The way to immortality, Puskhin exhibition catalogue, page 127-128

Inventory nb: 1,1a 1615

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<sup>18</sup> Thanks to Marwa Abdel Razek from Cairo Museum for the confirmation of the inventory numbers.

<sup>19</sup> Thanks to Janice Kamrin from the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the information and research on the excavation notes.

Provenance: Unknown

Height: 13.5 cm

Comments: Two fragments. It is unclear to me whether they are from the same example.

**22-23: Paris, Louvre Museum**

Published: BOVOT, Jean-Luc; *Les serviteurs funéraires royaux et princiers de l'Ancienne Egypte* nr. 162 and 163

Inventory nb: 22: E 1976 (N 2249) and 23 E 5334

Provenance: E 1976: Acquired from Dr. Clot-Bey in 1852, E 5334: Acquired from Rousset-Bey in 1868.

Height: 22: E 1976: 17 cm; 23: E 5334: 16.5 cm.

Comments: Early acquisitions whereby the Bey family apparently had both the only known overseers (this one and the in Berlin inv. 4522, see above).

### 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.





*Private collections pieces and unknown current location*



P1



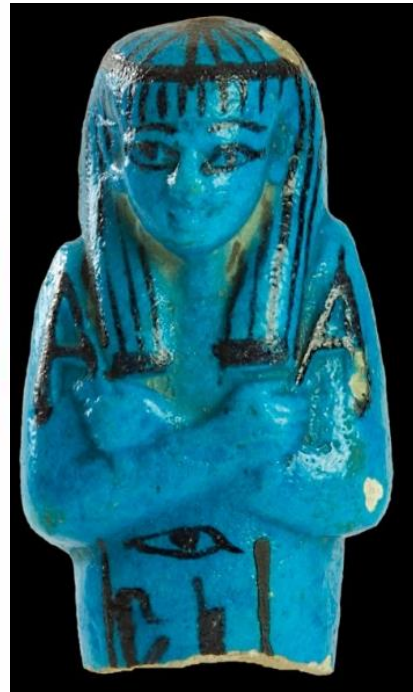
P2



P3



P4



P5

**P1 and P5: Coll J, United Kingdom**

Published: Janes, Glenn; *Shabtis - a private view*. Paris 2002, P1: page 88-90; P5: 91

Provenance: P1: Audrey Jean Smith collection; P5: Unknown

Height: P1: 16.5 cm; P5: 9.3 cm

Comments: P1: considerable repairs, including restoration of the feet section; P5: Very attractive fragment with exceptional glaze. © Glenn Janes, with kind permission<sup>20</sup>.

**P2: Coll NH, the Netherlands**

Published: No

Provenance: Ex European private collection, France, circa 1970, sold by Phoenix Ancient Art, New York, to USA collector JL, then to current owner.

Height: 17.2 cm

Comments: Repaired at waist; the first “eye” hieroglyph of [Ws]ir (Osiris) originally missing (added in repair), otherwise intact. Note the exclusive inscription (r) D.t (n) HH (forever and always).

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<sup>20</sup> Special thanks must be given for Glenn Janes’ continuous support and scholarship as well as the use of his photographs.

**P3: Coll Emmacha, France**

Published: H. Loffet, *La Collection Emmacha Antiquites Egyptiennes*, Livre I (Paris 2013); page 200 – 201, no. 61 and Bonhams catalogue 1 May 2018, page 33.

Provenance: Ex UK collection from the 1960's, sold Bonhams, 1 May 2018, lot 63.

Height: 11.6 cm

Comments: The striated wig has lots of vertical lines.

**P4: Coll VB, the Netherlands**

Published: Jose Ma Ortuondo Rocandio, *fragmento anonimo de un ushebtj de una divina adoratriz de amon de la dinastia XXII*, page 205-228

Provenance: Ex Chicago USA collection, acquired by Harlan J. Berk from a local auction, said to be from an old Chicago collection, sold to Spanish collection, to current owner.

Height: 10.5 cm

Comments: Piece has undergone some restorations to the front of the head/wig.

## Index

Below is the complete overview of all the currently known location of the shabtis of Mehyt-Weskhet.

Between brackets is the inventory number.

### Museum pieces

Berlin (4521, 4522, 4523, 7418/01, 7418/02)	5
Brooklyn (37.154E - 37.155E)	2
Cairo, Cairo Museum (CG 48455-48457, 48527, JE 47748)	5
London, British Museum (EA41538, EA66665, EA90161)	3
London, Petrie (UC 38077, 39870, 39871)	3
Moscow (1615)	1
New York (MMA 22.3.13 – 22.3.14)	2
Paris, Louvre (N 2249 – E53340)	2
Museum totals	<u>23</u>

### Private collections

Coll Emmacha (P3)	1
Coll. J (P1 and P5)	2
Coll. NH (P2)	1
Coll VB (P4)	1
Private collection totals	<u>5</u>
Overall total (museums and private collections)	<u>28</u>

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