The shabtis of

King Nepherites I

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VB collection

I Acknowledgements

Publishing parallel catalogues like this for some 15 years now could not have been possible without the support of many shabti scholars, museum curators and private collectors, too many all to mention here. I wish to thank all of you for your contributions.

Especially I would like to thank my dear friend and shabti scholar Glenn Janes (www.shabtis.com) who has produced the most comprehensive and beautiful catalogues on shabtis. He has been a big inspiration and I can only hope that my work can be reminiscent of his fabulous work. Recently he started preparing similar parallel catalogues (”databases”) which must be applauded for their quality and completeness (freely accessible through his website). In the case of this publication of Nepherites I I am indebted to his work done his “Private View” catalogue and the recent “Amasis” publication that contains a great overview as well.

Finally, a thank you must go out to my friend Dik van Bommel (www.ushabtis.come) who has provided the world with a great website on shabtis and the only website in the world that has published ancient Egyptian papyri in a fantastic way. For this publication he provided some great pictures so thanks for that as well.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to this study

This study provides an overview of all published shabtis for Nepherites I. 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 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 Nepherites?

The Egyptian birth name of the founder of the 29th Dynasty was Nayfaaurud (transliteration: nAi.f-aAw-rwD(w), which can be translated as: “The great ones blossom”. His throne name was Baenra, “the Ba/soul of (the God) Ra”. We commonly refer to the King with his Hellenistic name: Nepherites. He was a prince and a general who defeated the only ruler of the 28th dynasty Amyrtaeus, apparently killing him by execution in Memphis and then crowning himself as King in the autumn of 399 BC. He ruled for six year until his death in 393 BC. In Karnak he began the construction of a large warehouse south of the sacred lake and very likely a bark chapel for the first pylon of the temple of Amun, better known as the Chapel of Achoris. A sphinx of the king is preserved in the Louvre, while a naos can still be admired in the White Monastery of Sohag. He is documented by a Serapeum stela from Saqqara where a faience plaque mentioning his Year 2 is known. A mummy bandage label written in demotic preserves his Year 4 (Louvre, inventory number N 5441).

Black basalt statue of Nepherites I in the Tanta museum, Egypt
© Dik van Bommel

He was buried in a black granite sarcophagus within a mudbrick surrounding. The Persians partly destroyed his tomb in 343 AD. His tomb containing some remains of a sarcophagus and funerary equipment was discovered by a team from the University of Toronto and the University of Washington in 1992-1993.

Nepherites tomb in modern times © Jan Koek

Next to his tomb, one of his most famous statues is a large granite sphinx, found in 1513, now in the Louvre museum.

The sphinx of Nepherites I – Louvre museum
© Dik van Bommel

1.3 Description of the shabtis

1.3.1 General

The large faience shabtis of this king were originally in blue faience. Most of the current known examples have lost their glaze partly or completely, turning green or white.

Several molds can be distinguished. Although the elements like the hands, wig, hoes and beard were hand altered after the first baking, prior to the glazing, we can still distinguish at least the following moulds, from the relatively limited shabtis currently known. The number below the shabti indicated either the museum “m” or private collection “p” from the following catalogue.

Mould A: Delecate features, long face

P.10 M.4 P. 7

The cartouches of mould A:

Note that the determinative for “he speaks” is on the shabtis for this owner indicated with a standing figure (instead of kneeling with a hand to the mouth).

Mould B: Round face with chubby cheeks

M.6 P.14

The cartouches of mould B:

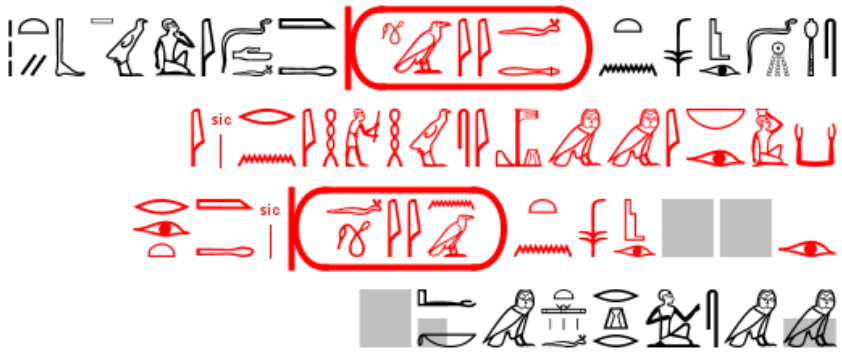
The inscription appears to be by a different writer, which could lead to the question whether the attribution to the same mould is correct, assuming that each writer inscribed his own mould. See also the “he speaks” hieroglyph which is different.

Mould C: Long face with thick chin

P.2 P.3

The cartouches of mould B:

If we look at the inscription, it is remarkable that the writer of P.2 mixed up the rows 2 and 3:



P.2 © Dik van Bommel

Whereas on P.3 it is in the correct order:

P.3 © Dik van Bommel

We see something similar happening on the shabtis of P.12 (see chapter 4 of the catalogue) where the second row is completely missing. Was this writer copying a predetermined text and (in hast), mixed up and forgot lines? Quite slobby for a royal shabti.

Further moulds

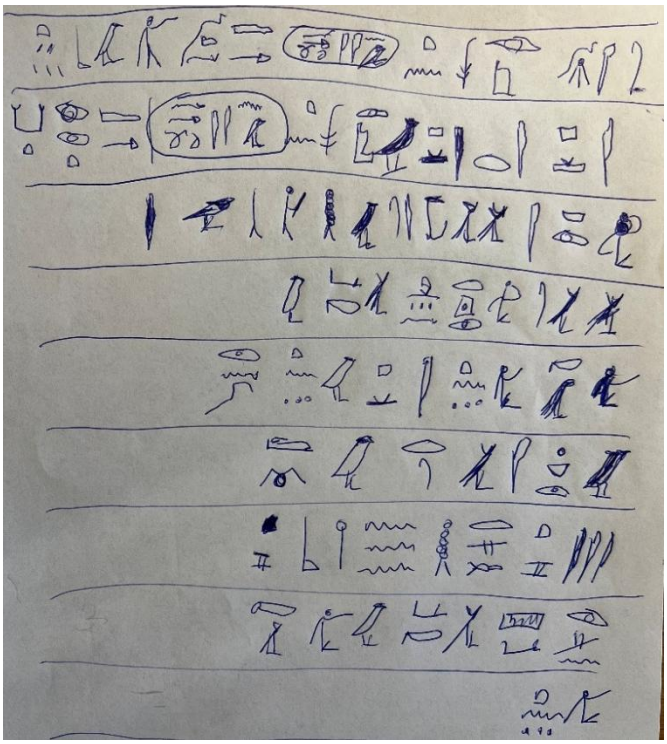
It is clear that at least some more moulds were made. For example, the M.2 model of the British Museum example is of a very poor quality, not seen on the others. Since no other parallels of the same type are in this first catalogue group, I have let it out. Some of the other examples of this catalogue may be attributed to the above list

but without further research on the moulds and a detailed look at the inscriptions (handwriting), it is unclear how many moulds were made in total. Some interesting research perhaps for a later time.

1.3.2. The inscription

The hieroglyphic inscriptions applied in horizontal lines of the shabti reads: "The Illuminated, the Osiris, the King, Nepherites, true of voice, he says: (chapter six follows)".

The inscription, neatly applied, can be visualized as follows, where the text seems to be more or less the same on every example:



1.3.3 Size and numbers

The faience shabtis are of normal size for the Late Period, measuring around 18-21 centimeters.

It is unclear how many shabtis were originally buried in the tomb for Nepherites. The numbers currently known are very low, but the common number for the period is between 365 and 401.

1.3.4 Provenance and fakes

Until the excavation of Redford in the early 1990's, only a couple of shabtis for Nepherites were known. In the following years, a large number of shabtis for this king appeared on the art market, many coming from a dealer in Paris. Some of these were very intensely light blue, with hardly any discoloration. This has raised questions on the authenticity of these examples. Were copies made after the new discovery?
To me the examples in this catalogue appear all to be genuine. It is more likely that some of the shabtis were illegally excavated and "fresh" from the ground after the excavation in 1992-1993. In those circumstances the shabtis could look very good without discoloration that starts fading in the decades after, due to exposure to air, humidity and so on. Whether this is the case for some of the shabtis in this catalogue remains unclear. Another element to consider is that faience from the end of the Late Period till the Ptolemaic Period has a higher percentage of glass (99% in Ptolemaic, versus 95% during the pharaonic times) which could influence this process.

2. Museum examples

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 no. 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.

2.1 Overview of all museum examples

Please find a picture overview of the front of the four museum examples of which a picture is published in this paragraph. There are six examples in total in museums, currently known to the author. All museum examples will be detailed in the next paragraph.

M.2 London, BM

M.4 Marseille

M.5 Paris, Louvre

M.6 Paris, Louvre

2.2 Details of museum examples

M.1: Cairo, Cairo museum, inventory number: CG 48484

Published: Newberry, 1937, number 337
Provenance: This fragment was found with the sarcophagus in 1867.
Size: 11.0 CM
Comments: Fragment, upper part, of which eight lines are still preserved.

M.2: London, British Museum, inventory number: EA76682

Published: Online at https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA76682
Provenance: Acquired from Charles Ede in 2002 (probably 27 July of that year).
Size: 18.3 CM
Comments: Chip to the nose area.

M.3: Mariemont, Musee de Mariemont, inventory number: RW2012-016

Published: No.
Provenance: Unknown
Size: Unknown
Comments: Mentioned by Glenn Janes in “Amasis”. The shabti is not on display.

M.4: Marseille, The Museum of Mediterranean Archaeology, inventory number: 2001-01-02

Published: Online at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepherites_I
Provenance: Unknown
Size: Unknown
Comments: Note the differences in color between the two pictures, caused by the different lighting at the moment of photography.

M.5: Paris, Louvre, inventory number: E 5339

Published: Online at https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010008056
Provenance: Acquired from the collector / dealer Jules Rousset on 15 July 1868.
Size: 19.2 CM
Comments: The oldest registration after the initial find of a fragment upon the first excavation in modern times.

M.6: Paris, Louvre, inventory number: E 17409

Published: Online at https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010005063
Provenance: Acquired from anonymus donation 1 February 1951.
Size: 13.3 CM
Comments: Upper part only. Chip to nose. Blue mostly gone.

3. Private collection examples

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.

3.1 Overview of all private collection examples

P.1: Amasis P.2: Amasis P.3: Amasis P.4: Arqueorama P.6: HC

P.7: Kemehu P.8: Kemehu P.9: Kemehu P.10: Memphis P.11: Memphis

P.12: VB P.13: A P.14: B P.15: C P. 16: D

P. 16: E P. 17: F

3.2 Details of all private collection examples

In the below overview the provenance, publication information, the size and some specific comments are added for each private collection example. If additional pictures are available they are reproduced here, with the exception for the examples published by Glenn Janes in his excellent catalogues as mentioned below.

P.1: Amasis collection, the Netherlands

Provenance: Ex Anubis, said English collection 1970.
Published: Glenn Janes, “the Amasis collection”, number 48 (a), page 191.
Size: 16.8 CM
Comments: Fragment, from the ankles downwards lost. In real life a little more blue.

P.2: Amasis collection, the Netherlands

Provenance: Ex Charles Ede 1992
Published: Glenn Janes, “the Amasis collection”, number 48 (b), page 192.
Size: 12.6 CM
Comments: Fragment, upper part.

P.3: Amasis collection, the Netherlands

Provenance: Ex Anubis, 1994
Published: Glenn Janes, “the Amasis collection”, number 48 (c), page 192.
Size: 13.0 CM
Comments: Fragment, upper part.

P.4: Arqueorama collection, Spain (?)

Provenance: Ex Charles Ede, 2006
Published: Online at https://www.arqueorama.com/galeria-coleccion/
Size: 17.7 CM
Comments: Intact, light blue. It appears that it has lost some of its blue color since the sale at Ede (front picture is from the Ede catalogue), but this could also be the lightning used on the photography.

P.5: Aubert collection, France

Provenance: Unknown
Published: No.
Size: Unknown
Comments: Referenced by Aubert in their 2001 and 2005 publications, but no example was published.

P.6: HC collection, Belgium

Provenance: Drees gallery, acquired 2002
Published: No.
Size: 16.3 CM
Comments: Fragment, lowest part lost.

P.7: Kemehu collection, United Kingdom

Provenance: Ex Cybele
Published: Glenn Janes, “Shabtis – a private view”, number 95 (a), page 182-184
Size: 19.5
Comments:

P.8: Kemehu collection, United Kingdom

Provenance: Ex Cybele
Published: Glenn Janes, “Shabtis – a private view”, number 95 (b), page 185-186
Size: 20 CM
Comments:

P.9: Kemehu collection, United Kingdom

Provenance: Ex Cybele
Published: Glenn Janes, “Shabtis – a private view”, number 95 (c), page 187-188
Size: 21.5 CM
Comments:

P.10: Memphis collection, the Netherlands

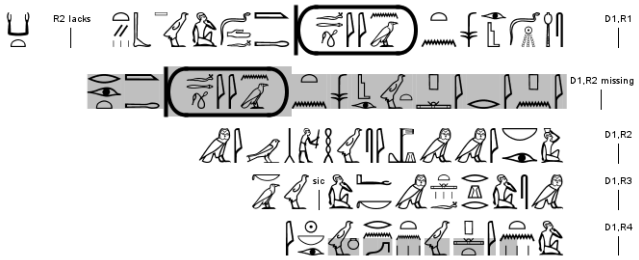
Provenance: Ex French collection, ex Cybele, April 2003, ex French collection, ex Cybele, June 2014, ex Emmacha, sold to current owner 26 September 2022, collection number NH-378
Published: No.
Size: 19.3 CM
Comments: Broken at midsection, chip to nose, both professionally restored, otherwise excellent.

P.11: Memphis collection, the Netherlands

Provenance: Ex Millon auction, Paris, 8 November 2017, lot 91, acquired by coll. B.L. in Paris, sold by Arteas Ltd to current owner on 12 February 2024, collection number NH-463
Published: No.
Size: 17.9 CM
Comments: The faience of this example is a bit crackled making the hieroglyphs difficult to read, A nice bliue side on the back indicates the original blue color of these shabtis.

P.12: VB collection, the Netherlands

Provenance: Ex Antiqua Antiquities and Numismatics (2001/2002), USA, ex Mark Goodstein, sold to current owner.
Published: No.
Size: 11.4 CM
Comments: Fragment, upper part. Probably the best executed example of the series. The face is extraordinary detailed. Interestingly, shabti scholar Dik van Bommel (www.ushabtis.com) noticed that the ancient writer omitted the second row of the glyphs:



© Dik van Bommel

P.13: A, unknown location

Provenance: Ex Swiss private collection, ex Genève Enchères auction, 14 December 2017, lot 918.
Published: Online at: https://www.encheresgeneve.com/lots/oushebti-du-pharaon-nepherites-399-393-av-jc
Size: 19.0 CM
Comments: Feet restored.

P.14: B, unknown location

Provenance: Ex Dutch art market
Published: No
Size: Unknown
Comments: Fragment, upper part.

P.15: C, unknown location

Provenance: Ex Cybele, ex Paris, French collection, ex Delorme & Collin du Bocage auction, 19 December 2012, lot 47.
Published: Online at auction site: https://collindubocage.com/lot/14562/2705530-egypte-rare-oushebti-du-pharaon-nepherites-ier-fondateur-de
Size: 19.0 CM
Comments: Chip to nose. Otherwise intact.

P.16: D, unknown location

Provenance: Private Collection, as coming from a medical professor, sold in 2007 from the Michel Koenig Fund, Brussels, ex Bergé 10 October 2017, lot 101.
Published: Online at: https://www.pba-auctions.com/lot/86497/7883069-oushebti-au-nom-du-roi-nepherites-ier-il-est-momiforme.
Size: 18.1 CM
Comments: Intact. Some encrustations especially affecting the back side.

P.17: E, unknown location

Provenance: Drouot 2003
Published: Unknown.
Size: Unknown
Comments: Fragment, upper part.

P.18: F, unknown location

Provenance: Royal Athena gallery, early 2002 offered briefly online.
Published: No.
Size: 19.1 CM
Comments: Appears to be a very well executed example. The identification is based on the dealers attribution.

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Below is the complete overview of all the currently known location of the shabtis of Nepherites.

Museum pieces

Between brackets is the museum inventory number.

Location	Inventory number	Total
Cairo Museum	CG 48484	1
London, British Museum	EA76682	1
Mariemont, Musee de Mariemont	RW2012-016	1
Marseille, M. de la Vieille Charité	1-2-2001	1
Paris, Louvre	E 5339	1
Paris, Louvre	E 17409	1
Total museums		6

Private collections

Coll Amasis	3
Coll. Arqueorama	1
Coll. Aubert	1
Coll. HC	1
Coll. Kemehu	3
Coll. Memphis	2
Coll. VB	1
Coll Unknown A-F	6
Private collection totals	18
Overall total (museums and private collections)	24

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