Two Faience Shabtis from the Egyptian Collection at the Benaki Museum

Among the Benaki Museum’s superb collections of ancient and modern objects can be found three small collections of Egyptian antiquities, namely bone carvings, clay figurines and faience objects. The major part of the faience collection was donated by Lucas Benaki to the Museum between 1959 and 1974; the few inscribed pieces were acquired during the 1930s. The collection comprises about 140 pieces (more than 90% uninscribed), most of which date from the Ptolemaic and Greco–Roman Periods up to AD 300, although several pieces date from the New Kingdom (NK), Third Intermediate Period (TIP) and Late Period (LP). It includes objects of various kinds, among them funerary implements such as several amulets (mainly divinities), two funerary pectorals (one inscribed) and nine small shabtis (seven inscribed). Seven of these are on permanent loan from the private collection of Georgios Leotsakos.

Faience was a material used at various periods of history in the manufacture of many types of object, including beads, pectorals, statuettes, votive objects, steles, tiles, animal figurines, vases, jars, lamps, plates, bowls (Nunschale) and chalices bearing floral and/or zoomorphic decorations, as well as a vast number of amulets and shabtis. Faience was primarily valued for its latent symbolism, because it was regarded as a manifestation of the colour of the sky and of light, as is clear from its ancient Egyptian name, ḫb(n)ti, which derives from the old stem ḫbni, meaning sparkle, be dazzling. Ancient Egyptians connected faience with the sun’s regeneration from the Netherworld and the subsequent dazzling light, which was essential for the well-being of deceased humans in the afterlife. The bright green colour usually associated with this substance (although faience also appears in other colours) was related to the rebirth of everything in nature, alluding to an Osirian connotation.

The use of shabtis by the Egyptians of antiquity is well attested and understood. They were funerary figurines, usually mummiiform in appearance, which developed during the Middle Kingdom out of the funerary statuettes and models placed in the tombs of the Old Kingdom. A plausible etymology of their name (they were known as ‘wībty from the Late Period onwards) derives from the verb wšt, which means answer, respond. The purpose of these statuettes was to magically spare their owners from the menial corvee labour in the afterlife (at the Field of Reeds) by which deceased humans were required to produce their own food. Many shabtis are inscribed with a version of Utterance 6 from the Book of the Dead. The two faience shabtis studied here belong to the Museum’s small but interesting Egyptian collection. The first of them was donated by Lucas Benakis during the late 1960s. The second is a recent acquisition, part of the permanent loan from G. Leotsakos. Both objects come with no information as to their provenance.

B 21.830
Typology: Class VIIIa2 / W21-H4-I5-B15-Tp7b
Date: Mid Dyn. XXI - Early Dyn. XXII
Colour: Sky-Blue Paste (bearing magenta-violet decoration)
Dimensions: 9.5 cm (max height)
This is a faience shabti in a mediocre to bad state
of preservation, bearing an unframed column of short illegible inscription on the front (figs 1-2). Its colour is sky-blue (or blue-turquoise), and its dimensions are as follows: H. 9.5 cm, L. 3.9 cm, B. 2.1(base)-1.5 cm. The paste is damaged and missing in several places (especially head, face, body and thighs). At the bottom of the base and on the back there are places showing patina. The deceased is portrayed wearing the tripartite wig (a TIP striated lappet wig), a considerable part of which is now damaged. The striation is depicted with magenta-violet paint (see below), which has disappeared on the right side part of the wig. The side parts of the wig continue along the forearms, curve slightly and reach down to the palms of the deceased, running almost parallel to the agricultural tools he is holding. The face is almost totally damaged and the left ear is broken. The right ear is extant and protrudes over the right side part of the wig. Few traces of the paste remain on the face. There are no different colour paste inlays on the object. The deceased holds two mr-hoes in his hands (or hbs-hoes, Gardiner’s U6), painted on the sky-blue paste with a magenta-violet colour deriving from manganese oxide (MnO). Only the hands and part of the forearms protrude from the chest and the upper part of the body. The thickness of the body hardly varies from the shoulders to the toes, although it becomes somewhat narrower near the feet. On the back of the figure is an elaborate rectangular bag painted with the same magenta-violet colour, depicted as attached to the wig by straps (which are also painted in the same way).

The shabti originally carried a short hieroglyphic inscription running down from the chest to the feet as an unframed column, which is now illegible and almost completely destroyed. The last and only extant symbol looks like the \( \text{dhd} \)-hieroglyph (Gardiner’s R11) and is situated near the feet. The object has no pillar on its flat back and cannot stand upright. It appears to be of mediocre craftsmanship, and was most probably mass produced in a funerary workshop for use at a burial. On the basis of stylistic similarities this object should be dated to Dynasty XXI (c. 1070-945 BC) or slightly later, but in any case not later than the beginning of Dynasty XXII of the TIP (terminus a quo c. 1000 BC, terminus ad quem c. 900 BC). Indeed, the thick-set body of the object is consistent with shabti models cur-
rent at the end of Dynasty XXI or even the beginning of Dynasty XXII, mainly in the Theban area.

B/L 83
Typology: Class X1a1 / W36-H4-18-B28-Tp0
Date: Dyn. XXX
Colour: Blue
Dimensions: 12.2 cm (max height)
This is an uninscribed faience shabti in an excellent state of preservation (figs 3–4). Its colour is blue, and its dimensions are: H. 12.2 cm, L. 4.2 cm, B(mean) 2.5 cm (the sides of the base, which, unlike that of the previous piece, is well and clearly defined, are 2.8 cm, 2.1 cm and 2.5 cm, while its maximum height is 0.9 cm). The base is separated from the body of the statuette, like a low pedestal. The deceased is depicted wearing the tripartite wig (in this case the Saite common plain lappet wig), which is well preserved. The face is almost perfectly preserved, the eyes have the characteristic Egyptian stare—as if gazing on eternity—and both ears are extant and protrude over the wig. The eyes, lips, and nose are very prominent and well sculpted. However, part of the face and almost the whole of the chest are decolorized and have a white appearance, having lost their blue paste coating; the same applies to the agricultural tools, but not to the hands. The deceased wears the divine beard, an indispensable feature of his sth-status, as is the mummified representation of his body which alludes to its post mortem essence of purity and virtual union with the divine. The beard itself is plaited, runs parallel to the side parts of the wig and ends at the same height as these. The deceased holds a mr-hoe (or hbs-hoe, Gardiner’s U6) and a cord in his right hand, and a pick (without cross bar) in his left hand. The rope holding the agricultural bag (a Saite trapezoid bag with crossed oblique pattern and loop) runs parallel to the hoe on the left side of the body, then over and round the back of the shoulder to keep the bag in place. The tools are incised in high relief, as are the beard and the facial features of the deceased. Only the hands and part of the forearms protrude from the chest and the upper part of the body is more voluminous in shape, reminiscent of the swollen type of coffin characteristic of the second half of the LP. The shabti has a pillar on its back, which starts where the wig ends and stops at the base, but it cannot stand upright. The whole composition and style evoke official undertones. On the basis of stylistic similarities this object can be dated to Dynasty XXX (380–343 BC); indeed, the agricultural tools sculpted in high relief are reminiscent of the style of shabti models during that period. During the reign of this last Egyptian (autochthonous) Dynasty, the Nectanebos presented the temples with rich offerings, tried to reconstruct Egypt and invested the artistic style with a pharaonic nuance which is evident in this shabti.

A large number of shabtis similar to those described above can be found scattered all over the world in various Egyptian collections. Since nothing is known of the context of the objects presented here, it would appear somewhat superfluous to attempt any specific comparisons, since this would reveal neither their actual provenance nor the exact date of their production.

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Notes
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1. D. Fotopoulos, A. Delivorrias, Greece at the Benaki Museum (Athens 1997) 130–33, for a few of the Egyptian objects on display. For an introduction to the Egyptian Collections at the Benaki Museum, see also A.-A. Maravelia, Ὅτι πλεῖστα θωμάσια ἦν ἣν καὶ ἔργα λόγου μέζῳ παρέχεται πρὸς πᾶσαν χώρην... Egyptian Collections in Hellenic Museums: A Brief History and Some Pieces, in: A.-A. Maravelia

2. L. Marangou, Bone Carvings from Egypt, I: Graeco-Roman Period (Tübingen-Athens 1976).


9. See for instance BMD, 266-67, which contains more discussion on shabtis. See also LÄ VI (1986) 896-900 s.v. Ushebti.


11. On the use of wigs, see for instance BMD, 117-18.

12. For this, see Schneider I (n. 8) 65-67. This hybrid entity was considered to partake of both the divine and human hypostases. The sḥ-b-status was achieved through a religiously correct burial, at which the corpse was mumified and provided with a mummy mask and a special coffin in order to attain the bliss of incorruptibility in the hereafter.


Στην παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζονται δύο ουσαπία από φαγετιανή στην Αιγυπτιακή Συλλογή του Μουσείου Μπενάκη. Το πρώτο ταφικό αγαλμάτιο (τύπου VIIIa2/W21-H4-I5-B15-Τρ7b) χρονολογείται από την εποχή της ΤΟΙ Δυναστείας (περ. 1070-945 π.Χ.) και αποτελεί τυπικό παράδειγμα ουσαπίατος της περιόδου αυτής και της αμέσως επόμενης (πρώην ΤΟΙ Δυναστεία, περ. 900 π.Χ.). Έχει χρώμα κυανό, η κατάσταση διατήρησης του είναι καλή και παρουσιάζει έντονες αποκρούσεις. Ορατά είναι έναν ιόδο χρωστικό, για την απεικόνιση των δύο επιζωγραφημένων αροτρών που κρατά η μορφή. Το αντικείμενο αυτό φέρει σχεδόν ολοσχερός κατεστραμμένη επιγραφή, η οποία είχε αποδοθεί με χρήση της ίδιας ιόδους χρωστικής και της οποίας μόνον ένα διάσωζεται πλέον (συγκεκριμένα το σύμβολο τατ).

Το δεύτερο ταφικό αγαλμάτιο (τύπου Χι1α/W36-H4-I8-B22-Τρ6b) χρονολογείται από την εποχή της ΤΟΙ Δυναστείας (380-343 π.Χ.) και αποτελεί επίσης τυπικό παράδειγμα αυτής της περιόδου, και κυρίως της τελευταίας γηγενούς Δυναστείας πριν από τη δεύτερη περιοχή κατάκτησης της Αιγύπτου. Έχει χρώμα σκουρόχρωμο κυανό και η κατάσταση διατήρησης του είναι σχεδόν άψητη. Η κεφαλή, τα χαρακτηριστικά του προσώπου, η φανάρι, το πλεκτό λευκουργικό υπογέιο, και τα γεωργικά εργαλεία (άροτρο, σχοινί και σκαπάνη) που φέρει η εν λόγω μορφή έχουν αποδοθεί άψητα σε έκτυπο ανάλυση, αν και ορισμένα μέρη τους είναι αποχωρισμένα λόγω αποκόλλησης του κυανού πολύ της φαγετιανής.

Τα ουσαπία (αρχ. αιγ.: wsbyt.w) είναι συνήθως μικρού μεγέθους αγαλμάτια, τα οποία παρίσταναν τον νεκρό μουσιμποσμένο, κρατώντας γεωργικά εργαλεία, όπως άροτρα, σκαπάνες κ.λ.π. Πολλά ήταν αναπτυγμένα, ενώ αρκετά έφεραν σύντομη επιγραφή με το όνομα και τον τίτλο του νεκρού, χαρακτηρίζοντας τον ως φαγετιανό άστιγμα (αρχ. αιγ.: shb Wsbyt). Τα μεγαλύτερα από αυτά έφεραν μαγική επωδία και τη στιγμή κατά την οποία θα απολιθώνονται τα αγαλμάτια του Αρχαίου Βασιλείου που απαντάνε σε κυανό χρώμα και κατά την Ήσυχη Περίοδο το μαστίγιο άρχισε να απολιθώνεται στα κοπιώδη αγγαρεία, τη στιγμή κατά την οποία θα απολιθώνονταν τα νεκρά εργαλεία της άστιγμα σφαιρικού περιβάλλοντος και της τελευταίας περιόδου του Φράγματος. Από την Τρίτη Περίοδο, πρώην Τοποθετείται στη στιγμή κατά την οποία θα απολιθώνονταν τα αγαλματίδια και τα εργαλεία του Αρχαίου Βασιλείου, κατά την Ήσυχη Περίοδο, κατά την Ήσυχη Περίοδο, κατά την Ήσυχη Περίοδο.
σης η ποσότητά τους διέφερε από περίοδο σε περίοδο και από ταφή σε ταφή. Στην περίπτωση της ταφής του
φαραώ Σήθου Α’, πατέρα του Ραμεσή Β’ (του Μεγά-
λου), βρέθηκαν περίπου 700 τέτοια μαγικά αγαλμάτια. Η αύξηση της ποσότητας των ουσσαπτίων σε διάφορες
ταφές οδήγησε στην κατασκευή ειδικών κβωτίων, συ-
νήθως ξύλινων, τα λεγόμενα κβώτια ουσσαπτίων. Η
χρήση τους περιορίσθηκε πάρα πολύ κατά την Πτολε-
μαϊκή Περίοδο, προς το τέλος της οποίας εξέλισαν.