Basic Detail Report

Shabti

Date
c. 1295-656 B.C.E.

Medium
Faience with pigment

Description
As conceived by Ancient Egyptians, the afterlife was not much different from life on earth, although one never had to worry about illness or death. A highly valued facet of Egyptian life–and therefore afterlife–was labor. In the afterlife, this meant that everyone was expected to toil in fields of reeds called Aaru for Osiris, the god of death. Although in the predynastic and early dynastic eras, lasting from around 5500 to 2700 BCE, the pharaoh's slaves and servants were sacrificed following his death so that they could take the pharaoh's place in the Aaru, this cruel practice seems to have been relatively unpopular and consequently faded away. In its place, the Book of the Dead provided a spell for calling forth shabtis–mummiform figurines with painted or carved symbols and features–to take one's place in the Aaru. The earliest shabtis were unclothed and made of wax or wood; later, they were made of clay and faience and were clothed in garments tailored to specific agricultural tasks (for example, some had satchels to collect the harvest, while others had sickles and hoes). While the poorest of Ancient Egyptians could not afford to be buried with any shabti figures, most tombs contain at least a few shabtis, although usually of poorer quality than those that might be found in a pharaoh's tomb; for those who could afford it, a single tomb could hold over 400 shabti (written Spring 2018 by Christina Naston, Class of 2020). Catalogue card from 1960s: "Faience ushabti. Egyptian, XIX-XXVth Dyns. Gift of: W.C. Winslow '62. Mended; foot smashed. Granular white fabric; turquoise glaze; purplish black paint. Front moulded; back flat but for raised wig. Moulded crossed arms holding painted hoe & mattock. Painted eyes, eye brows, fillet, satchel, columnar inscription." Greenish figure broken in two. Bottom painted with black symbols, feet broken but repaired. Toes still missing.

Dimensions
Overall: 4 1/2 × 1 3/8 in. (11.4 × 3.5 cm)