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Egyptian Faience Shabti



An ancient Egyptian blue faience shabti, the mummiform figure wears a tripartite wig and holds adze and hoe with seed bag at back, painted inscription naming the owner down the front.

Third Intermediate Period, 21st - 22nd Dynasty,
Ca. 1070 - 712 BC.
Height: 5 1/4 in. (13.4 cm).

Shabtis were first introduced in the Middle Kingdom as substitutes for the the mummy in case it was destroyed. During the Second Intermediate Period inscribed wooden figures called shawabtis (after the Egyptian word for wood, shawab) began to be placed in tombs. During the New Kingdom, shabtis assumed a new role as servant figures for the deceased. They were now depicted with agricultural equipment. By the Third Intermediate Period, the number of shabtis placed in the tomb was set at 401 (365 workers and 36 overseers). During the Late Period the tomb figures became known as ushabtis ('answerers'), these figures represented servants who would magically answer when called upon to perform agricultural duties for the Pharaoh (in the form of Osiris) in the afterlife. Their main function was to ensure the individual's comfort and freedom from daily labor in the next life.

Formerly in a New Jersey private collection.

inventory number: 9220

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