

EGYPTIAN FAIENCE USHABTI OF IMHOTEP

Egyptian, ca. 664-525 B.C.)

Faience

H : 23.5 cm

Reference: 19700



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The long inscription comprised of nine horizontal lines contains excerpts from chapter 6b of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and provides general information along with the titles of the deceased: a certain Imhotep, Chancellor of Lower Egypt born from Iset Weret [Isis the Great Goddess].

The figure comes from a well-known series of funerary statuettes; the Egyptian Museum in Cairo alone houses thirty-two ushabtis that once belonged to the same royal official. According to J.-F. Aubert and L. Aubert, this group would have been discovered at Saqqara around 1860. The iconography of this statuette is similar to that of many contemporary ushabtis. The variations between one type of figurine and another are small, and mostly concern proportions, facial shape, text arrangement, and hairstyle (whether striated or smooth). The body of this ushabti resembles a mummy entirely wrapped in a shroud, with rather slender proportions; the arms, the outline of which is barely indicated, are crossed on the chest. In his hands, the man holds a hoe, a pick, and the rope of a seed sack suspended behind his left shoulder. A tripartite striped wig frames his broad, rounded face; a false beard, long and finely braided, adorns his chin.

This type of funerary statuette, called an ushabti, was most often made of blue faience. Stone, wood, or bronze specimens are rare and were reserved for high-ranking individuals. Ushabtis accompanied the deceased in the tomb and served as substitutes for him (or her) in performing required chores in the afterlife.

CONDITION

This ushabti is complete and perfectly preserved. Like many others made at the time, it possesses very fine technical and artistic qualities.

PROVENANCE

Ex-M. H. Hoffmann collection, France; M. Delestre auction sales, Paris, May 14, 1895; ex-Charles Gillot (1853-1903) collection, France, acquired in 1895 Paris (listed in the account book of Charles Gillot, May 14, 1895).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AUBERT, J.-F., and AUBERT L., *Statuettes égyptiennes: Chaouabtis, ouchebtis* (Paris, 1974), p. 235.

NEWBERRY, P. E., *Funerary Statuettes and Model Sarcophagi*, *Catalogue General du Musée du Caire*, vol. 53, no. 2 (Cairo, 1930), pp. 133-36, 138-41, 364-65 (CGC 47334-46, 47360, 47368-79)

(ushabtis bearing the same name).

PAGE-GASSER, M. – WIESE A.B., *Égypte, moments d'éternité: Art égyptien dans les collections privées, Suisse*, (Mainz am Rhine, 1997), pp. 247-48, no. 162a.

Other contemporary ushabtis:

WIESE, A.B., et al., *Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, Die Ägyptische Abteilung* (Mainz am Rhine, 2001), pp. 172-73.