

DATABASES FOR SHABTIS OF THE THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD (c. 1069-656 BC)

Iset-em-Khebit H

3s.t-m-3h-bi.t



Third Intermediate Period, 25th Dynasty

From Abydos, North Cemeteries, Cemetery D, Tomb 3



[Iset-em-Khebit H]

Faience, blue glaze, details added in black

Third Intermediate Period, 25th Dynasty

From Abydos, North Cemeteries, Cemetery D, Tomb 3

- a. H. 8.0 cm. W. 2.3 cm. D. 1.3 cm.

ex deceased estate, Shropshire, UK. Formerly sold by the Egypt Exploration Society in the early 20th Century

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- b. H. 8.0 cm. W. 2.3 cm. D. 1.3 cm.

ex English private collection (Chippenham, Wiltshire)



A pair of mummiform *shabtis* wearing a plain tripartite wig and a divine beard. The wig, except for the rear lappet, is painted black. The beard is also painted black. The arms are crossed on the chest and the hands, which are small, hold a pair of hoes that are faintly indicated in raised relief. The *shabti* is very slender in profile. There is no inscription. Parallel *shabtis* that are identical to this example have a vertical column of an incised inscription giving the name of the owner as Iset-em-Khebit (Isis is in Khemmis).¹

Iset-em-Khebit was the daughter of the 25th Dynasty Kushite king, Shabaka.² Her tomb, described as being a 'fine mastaba,' was excavated by Arthur Mace during excavations at Abydos in the 1899–1900 season.³ Mace led work at Cemetery D, an area that is part of the larger North cemetery near the wadi leading from the Osiris Temple to the Umm el-Qa'ab. It was in use between the late Second Intermediate Period through to the beginning of the Late Period. There are two sections of the North Cemetery referred to as Cemetery D. One was excavated by Mace during the 1899–1900 season and a second cemetery also designated D was excavated by Peet during his work between 1911 and 1914. The two cemeteries lie at opposite ends of the overall North Cemetery.

Iset-em-Khebit's tomb is described as having a stone-lined burial chamber with an arched roof, and with a similar dummy chamber above it (see Fig. 1).

Regarding the *shabtis*, Mace comments that they are 'small and poor in workmanship, though covered with a fine dark blue glaze.'⁴ A total of 337 *shabtis* were found. 37 were inscribed and 300 were uninscribed.⁵ The inscribed examples could perhaps be regarded as 'overseer' *shabtis* although not wearing the usual dress

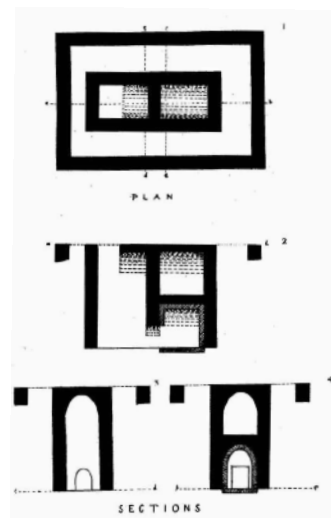


Fig. 1. A plan of Abydos, North Cemeteries, Cemetery D, tomb 3.
(Randall-MacIver & Mace 1902, pl. XXVII [nos. 1–4].)

of daily life with the triangular projecting apron and short-sleeved tunic and with a whip in one hand associated with such figures in the Third Intermediate Period. Certainly in the Late Period these types of figures are never found, so the *shabtis* for Iset-em-Khebit perhaps represent part of this transition. With a ratio close to the prerequisite number of 1 'overseer' to 10 worker *shabtis* this seems highly plausible. 23 of the inscribed examples have been allocated (see the following database).

It is worth commenting on the *shabtis* that are known for king Shebitku, the third ruler of the 25th Dynasty whose tomb was

excavated by George Reisner at El-Kurru (Ku. 18), one of three cemeteries that were used by the Kushite royalty. The worker *shabtis*, of which there were ‘at least 182,’ are very similar in size and appearance to those of Iset-em-Khebit H although they have a barely discernable painted inscription and some examples have a parted wig. Shebitku also had ‘at least 14’ ‘overseer’ *shabtis* that stand upon a thin trapezoidal base with the left leg advanced. These are obvious ‘overseers’ as each wears a *shendyt*-kilt, has a divine beard and carry a clearly defined whip in the clenched right



Fig. 2. *Shabtis* (workers and ‘overseers’) for king Shebitku from El-Kurru.
Dunham, D., *El Kurru* (Boston, 1950) pl. XLVa/b [nos. 19–4–141a/b].

hand that is folded above the waist (see Fig. 2).⁶ Worker *shabtis* for other owners buried at El-Kurru are often very similar to those of Iset-en-Khebit H and Shebitku in terms of their small size and relatively simple form. Could it be that the *shabtis* were made in the same workshop, perhaps in Thebes where it is generally considered that other *shabtis*, notably stone ones for Taharqa, Senk-Amen-isken and others were likely carved? A Theban workshop produced stone *shabtis* for local nobility such as Pa-di-Amen-em-ope and others of the 25th Dynasty. Presumably this workshop would have also manufactured faience *shabtis*. Senk-Amen-isken for example, had *shabtis* made in both serpentinite and faience.⁷ They must surely have been products of the same workshop. Whoever they were made for, the *shabtis* would have been distributed south to Nubia for the Kushite royalty and north to Abydos where the *shabtis* for Iset-em-Khebit H were found as well as locally in Thebes.

A final comment is about a curious figure that is to be found in London (UC 40062) that was considered to be a *shabti* by Petrie and, although not mentioning a name, could potentially be considered to be an ‘overseer’ for Iset-em-Khebit H. Indeed it is of a similar size to her *shabtis* (7.5 cm in height), has a bright blue glaze and wears a tripartite wig that is painted black.⁸ The figure wears a short knee-length kilt and has the left arm held across the waist, the

clenched hand holding what appears to be a whip or flail. The right arm hangs down by the side of the body. The left leg is slightly advanced upon a shallow rectangular base (see Fig. 3). It is currently described on the museum’s website as being either a *shabti* or a figurine of Sekhmet, the latter on account of its somewhat leonine face.⁹ In the opinion of the author, especially noting the probability that the *shabtis* which are inscribed with the name of Iset-em-Khebit are the more likely contenders for ‘overseers’ it seems that UC 40062 is an amulet although it does not have a suspension loop or piercing that is usually associated with amulets.



Fig. 3. A potential ‘overseer’ *shabti* for Iset-em-Khebit H [UC 40062].
Photo: courtesy of The Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology, UCL.

The tomb of Iset-em-Khebit H also contained four broken alabaster canopic jars as well as the upper part of a female mummy that was presumed by Mace to Iset-em-Khebit herself, skulls and bones from several animals, and coffin fragments Cairo (JE 34431 = TN 9/2/15/11). The latter gives the titles of Iset-em-Khebit. Although not published by Mace in his excavation report, Anthony Leahy studied the coffin fragments in the early 1980s (see Fig. 4).¹⁰ The title of King’s Sister suggests that one of Shabaka’s sons must have ruled, possibly Tanut-Amen who, according to Assyrian records, was a son of Shabaka.¹¹ Thus Iset-em-Khebit H would have been sister and wife of king Tanut-Amen, the last ruler of the 25th Dynasty.



hmt nsw.t wrt snt nsw.t s3t nsw.t
S3-b3-k3 3s.t-m-3h-bi.t

The King’s Great Wife, the
King’s Sister, the Daughter of
Shabaka, Iset-em-Khebit.

Fig. 4. An inscription on one of the coffin fragments for Iset-em-Khebit to be found in the Cairo Museum.
(After Leahy, A., ‘Tanutammon, son of Shabako ?,’ GM 83, p. 43 (Göttingen, 1984).

Typology and database of *shabtis* for Iset-em-Khebit H

Shabti types and subtypes from a study of parallel examples to be found in museum collections, private collections and those offered for sale at auctions and by dealers (images are not to scale).

OVERSEERS – mummiform; mid-bright blue glazed faience; details are added in black; fully painted tripartite wig; face is quite small and simply modelled; the chin wears a divine beard that is painted black; ears are barely discernable and protrude in the front of the lappets of the wig; faintly modelled arms are crossed above the waist; pair of hoes are modelled in raised relief; none carry a basket; standing upon a rectangular base that vary in height; vertical column of inscription incised – probably applied using a stamp) on the front.

7.9–10.5 cm in height.

Amsterdam (AMP 9483).¹² ①

Aylesbury (AYBCM 1961.80.2).¹³ ②

Batley (KLMUS 966.29).¹⁴ ③

Bolton (BOLMG 1900.54.105, 1966.40.A & 1966.41.A).¹⁵ ④–⑥

Boston (MFA 00.696).¹⁶ ⑦

Cairo (JE 34432 – assumed to be inscribed).¹⁷

Chicago (OIM E 6851).¹⁸

Detroit (DIA 1990.306).¹⁹ ⑧

Glasgow (KEL 1900.126.ak).²⁰ ⑨

Greenock (MMAG 1987.301).²¹ ⑩

Liverpool (WM 24.9.00.114).²² ⑪

London (BM EA 32720 & 54848;²³ ⑫ ⑬ UC 40081).²⁴ ⑭

Manchester (MM 3622).²⁵ ⑮

Oxford (ASH E.3615).²⁶

Philadelphia (PUM E.14650).²⁷ ⑯

Southport (AT 204).²⁸ ⑰

St. Helens (SAHMG 1900.010.0012).²⁹ ⑱

Warrington (WAGMG 1900.395).³⁰ ⑲

Bonhams 2005, part of lot 13. ⑳





WORKERS – mummiform; bright blue glazed faience; details are added in black; fully painted tripartite wig although some rear lappets are not fully painted; horizontal groove denotes end of rear lappet (rare); face is quite small and simply modelled; a beard is modelled and painted black; ears are barely discernable and protrude in the front of the lappets of the wig; faintly modelled arms are crossed above the waist; pair of hoes are modelled in faint relief; none carry a basket; without inscription.
7.5–8.2 cm in height.

Amsterdam (AMP 9047 ⑬ & 9048).³¹

Cambridge (FWM SU/36 & SU/48).³² ② ③

Cambridge (HPM 20–13–50/B2221.1).³³ ④

Dublin (NMI 1900:345 – possibly faintly inscribed?).³⁴ ⑤

Liverpool (WM 24.9.00.116, 56.21.49 & 56.5.74).³⁵ ⑥–⑧

Manchester (MM 5598).³⁶ ⑨

Philadelphia (PUM 86–35–169 & 86–35–170 – both unidentified).³⁷

Rochdale (RHAS 1114).³⁸ ⑩

Tatton Hall (THC – 2 examples). ⑪ ⑫

Toronto (ROM 994x2.912 – upper part only).⁴⁰

Kemehu Collection – 2 examples. ⑬ ⑭

Memphis Collection – NH–303 – ex New York MMA 46.40.14, acquired from Millea Brothers 2020, part of lot 1331; ⑮ NH–502 & NH–503 – ex Bodo Bleß (1940–2022) Collection (Berlin) – acquired from Bonhams 2024, part of lot 81.⁴¹ ⑯ ⑰
Bonhams 2010, part of lot 382 – ex Ackworth Collection and Pamela Drinkall Collection (an Egyptologist who collected in the 1950s–1960s). ⑱
Digard 2011, lot 29. ⑲





Photo credits:

GJ with the exceptions of **OVERSEERS**: Aylesbury = Courtesy of Aylesbury Buckinghamshire County Museum; Boston = © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Detroit = Courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Arts; London = Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum and Courtesy of The Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology, UCL; Philadelphia = Courtesy of The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania; © Bonhams, London. **WORKERS**: Dublin = Courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland; Tatton Hall = © Tatton Park / Cheshire East Council / Peter Spooner & George Littler; Memphis Collection = courtesy of NH; Bonhams = © Bonhams, London; Digard = © Digard (auctioneers, Paris).

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Abbreviations

AMP	Allard Pierson Museum (Amsterdam).
AYBCM	Aylesbury Buckinghamshire County Museum.
ASH	Ashmolean Museum (Oxford).
AT	The Atkinson (Southport).
BM	The British Museum, London.
BOLMG	Bolton Museum & Art Gallery (Bolton).
CAA	Corpus Antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum.
DIA	Detroit Institute of Arts.
FWM	Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge).
GM	Göttinger Miszellen (Göttingen)
HPM	Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts).
JE	Journal d'entrée du musée du Caire.
KEL	Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum (Glasgow).
KLMUS	Kirklees Museums and Galleries.
MFA	Museum of Fine Arts (Boston).
MM	The Manchester Museum (England).
MMAG	McLean Museum & Art Gallery (Greenock, Scotland).
NMI	National Museum of Ireland (Dublin).
OIM	Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago.
PUM	The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Philadelphia).
ROM	Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto).
SAHMG	St Helens Museum of Glass (World of Glass)
THC	Tatton Hall (Cheshire, England).
TN	Temporary number (Cairo Museum).
UC	University College, London (Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology).
WAGMG	Warrington Museum & Art Gallery.
WM	World Museum (Liverpool).

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