Shabti For Seni-Em-lah
Egypt

New Kingdom 1550 - 1077 B.C.

Limestone

H: 32.7 cm x W: 7 cm

From the Second Intermediate Period – New Kingdom, 17th-18th Dynasty, more specifically 1550-1525 B.C. Carved from a high-quality limestone, this shabti represents a figure in mummiform. The style and nemes headdress reflect the association of the owner, Seni-em-lah, with the funerary deity Osiris, and the shabti formula inscribed on the body is an early example of text drawn from Chapter 6 of the Book of the Dead, a magical formula dedicated to the shabti funeral figurines that were an important part of the Egyptian burial inventory. Horizontal bands of hieroglyphic text run down the lower half of the body, and give the name of the owner, 'Seni-em-lah', whilst a vertical line of text reads, "It is his brother who makes his name to live, Pa-kem", giving the name of the donor as the deceased's brother, Pa-Kem. A seated limestone statuette in Dublin (acc. no. 30/002) bearing an inscription naming a priest of Khonsu called Sen-em-lah is more likely to belong to the same man as the present shabti figure, dating as it must stylistically to the transition between the 17th and 18th Dynasty. The unique stylisation and angular treatment reflect the decoration of elite rishi-type coffins of the late 17th Dynasty, including the coffin of King Kamose in Cairo (G. Daressy, "Le cercueil du roi Kames," ASAE 9, pp. 61-3, pl. 9) and the coffin of a noblewoman found by Petrie at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, now in Edinburgh (acc. no. 1909.527.1). In particular, the nearly horizontal treatment of the wings of the nemes headdress and angular, serious nature of the face are reflected in these and other 17th Dynasty wooden coffins. During the 17th Dynasty most shabtis were simple 'stick shabtis' created from simple slim pieces of wood,

therefore this limestone shabti is somewhat unique for its dating. However, the use of the downturned moon symbol in the name of ‘Seni-em-lah’ indicates that the shabti’s inscription dates to the end of the reign of Ahmose, following the reunification of Egypt (i.e., after years 18-22 of the reign), as documented extensively by C. Vandersleyen (Les guerres d'Amosis, fondateur du Nouvel Empire). It is possible the carving of the shabti and the inscription were done at different times.

Literature:

The Property of William Randolph Hearst, Sotheby & Co, London, 11-12 July 1939, Lot 46A.

Fine Antiquities and Pre-Columbian Works of Art, Harmer Rooke / Malter, New York, 3 May 1978, Lot 95A.

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