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SMALL YET PERFECTLY FORMED - SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THEBAN STICK SHABTI COFFINS OF THE 17TH AND EARLY 18TH DYNASTY*

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Over the years the shabti statuette\(^1\) has been the subject of several major studies and numerous articles\(^2\), though there has been relatively little discussion about the workshops from whence they came and the craftsmen who made them. This is due to the dearth of explicit evidence relating to the production/producers of shabtis, and is especially acute for the periods prior to the last millennium and a half of pharaonic history. Vaguer still is our knowledge of the craftsmen who made shabti containers, usually miniature coffins or wooden boxes – were they produced by the shabti makers themselves or by other specialised craftsmen in the same or other workshops? This article offers some observations on these unresolved questions as they relate to the late 17th and early 18th Dynasties and in particular to the Theban ‘stick’ shabtis and associated miniature coffins. But firstly a brief survey of the sources for both shabtis and their containers from all periods will serve to highlight the limitations affecting our understanding of these topics.

Depictions of shabtis and/or their containers occur only in a relatively small number of Theban tombs, the earliest of which dates to the reign of Amenhotep III\(^3\). The objects in question usually appear in static scenes of funerary equipment or being held by one or more offering bearers walking in procession towards the deceased’s tomb and as such only provide evidence for the type of wares produced in workshops at that time and nothing to firmly identify the shabti ateliers themselves. Much rarer still are depictions of shabtis or their containers in the actual process of being made; none to my knowledge exist from the New Kingdom and only one or two can be found in tombs of the Late Period\(^4\), which

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\* This article is dedicated to the memory of Professor Jac Janssen (1922-2011).

\(^1\) For a brief summary of this class of object and the variant forms of its name see: H. SCHLÖGL, "Uschebti", in W. HELCK, W. WESTENDORF (eds.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, VI, Wiesbaden 1986, pp. 896-899. For reasons of simplicity ‘shabti’ will be used throughout this article.


\(^3\) The earliest tomb is that of Nebamun and Ipuky (TT181) N. de G. DAVIES, *The Tomb of Two Sculptors*, shabti (?) boxes pl. XXIV-XXV; p. 19 for the tomb’s date.

show craftsmen applying the finishing touches to shabtis, most likely made of stone or faience rather than wood. The most complete workshop scene to include shabtis is found in the tomb of the 26th Dynasty official Ibi, where all manner of craft working and materials are shown in a seemingly continuous scene that fills five horizontal registers. Included amongst them, in between an artisan finishing a vase and a row of four canopic jars, is a seated craftsman applying the finishing touches to a shabti with another, already completed, standing before him. The lengthy tableau is probably not to be ‘read’ literally as representing the activities and products of a single workshop, but rather several specialist production centres. Nevertheless, the grouping of certain objects, for example wooden wheels, statues and chests, may well have been so placed because of their connection to a single artisan or atelier. In this respect, one could infer that 18th Dynasty tombs with depictions of shabtis and/or their containers as well as separate scenes of cabinet-making and joinery are all items made in the same workshops as other predominately wooden funerary objects including coffins. This repertoire is certainly suggested by a text on papyrus from Deir el-Medineh (Pap.DeM 9), written by a certain chief carpenter, Maanakhtef, to the scribe of the vizier asking for materials to finish the decoration on a coffin that almost certainly he had also made. A number of other hieratic documents dating to the 19th and 20th Dynasties from Deir el-Medineh reveal that other craftsmen were involved in making to order wooden shabtis, shabti containers, as well as full-size coffins. Two of these documents refer to the manufacture of shabtis; one, a workshop record (O.IFAO764), includes a group of forty wooden shabtis of seemingly modest value, perhaps indicating that they were of low quality or that the price quoted was for their decoration only. The latter explanation seems more likely because the prices of the other

5 Shabtis of wood are rarely attested for the Late Period; for instance, Montuhotep’s burial was provided with both granite and faience shabtis (J. LECLANT, Montouemhat. Quatrième prophète d’amon, Cairo 1961, pp. 167-170, pl. LIV).

6 This is the view of Schneider (Shabtis - An Introduction to the History of Ancient Egyptian Funerary Statuettes with a Catalogue of the Collection of Shabtis in the National Museum of Antiquities at Leiden, vols. I-III, Leiden 1977, vol. I, pp. 242-243), who cites two Theban tombs. The first is the already mentioned tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky, which has a scene on the South wall that includes bearers carrying two shrine-shaped boxes, presumably each containing a shabti statuette (unseen), though neither this type of container nor shabtis are shown being made in the detailed workshop scenes decorating the western wall (N. de G. DAVIES, The Tomb of Two Sculptors, shabti (?) boxes pl. XXIV-XXV). The second example cited is the tomb of Neferhotep (TT 49), which has a scene of funerary equipment including four shabtis – two for Neferhotep and two for his wife – with their shrine-shaped containers below. And, similar to the tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky, a workshop scene features on another wall, here with detailed scenes of the manufacture and decoration of the deceased’s coffins, but shabtis or their containers are not included (N. de G. DAVIES, The Tomb of Nefer-hotep at Thebes, New York 1933, pl. XXV-XXVI [shabtis and their boxes(?)]; pl. XXVII [workshop scene]).


10 J.J. JANSSEN, Commodity Prices, pp. 242-243.
funerary items listed, which include three coffins and two mummy boards, relate to their
decoration\textsuperscript{11}. The second document (O.Turin 57387) is a record of items ordered from the
scribe Khaemhedjet, which comprise twelve shabtis, two shabti boxes, another type of
box and a coffin\textsuperscript{12}. Here, however, it is not clear if all the items came from the same
source or were obtained from various makers. Besides shabtis, two of these documents
also mention a type of shabti container, an *itr*, understood to be a tall shrine-shaped box,
rather than a miniature coffin\textsuperscript{13}. An *itr* is listed on another workshop record (O. Liverpool
13626) together with four coffins, but again it is not entirely clear if all the objects were
made by the same individual\textsuperscript{14}. Intriguingly, it is only this type of shabti box which ap-
pears in tomb scenes – miniature coffins are never depicted even though these were in
use at the same time\textsuperscript{15}.

The physical remains of workshops involved in the manufacture of stone or faience
shabtis (but not shabti containers) have come to light, but are usually identified by the
contents of associated waste heaps, which included shabtis presumably discarded (unfin-
ished/damaged) by their makers. The best known example was found at el-Amarna,
where fragments of unfinished stone statuettes were recovered from what was probably a
sculptor’s studio perhaps connected to the nearby main temple or the royal palace\textsuperscript{16}. The
fact that, as yet, no evidence has come to light for workshops where wooden shabtis/
shabti boxes were made must be at least partly due to the poorer survival rate of wood
(although Egypt is something of an exception in this respect), being far less durable than
stone or faience. It should also be considered that wooden items were far less likely to be
discarded by workshops because they could be readily re-fashioned into some other prod-
uct or, failing that, simply used as kindling\textsuperscript{17}.

Of the available textual evidence relating to shabti ateliers the most precise information
is found in two hieratic documents dating to the 21\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty\textsuperscript{18}. These reveal that at
Thebes the «Chief Modeller of Amulets of the Temple of Amun» (*hry tsw wd3wt n pr imm*)

\textsuperscript{13} O. Turin 57387; O. Oriental Institute Museum 16987 (K.M. COONEY, *The Cost of Death*, pp. 351-352
and pp. 343-344 respectively); See also comments by J.J. JANSSEN, *Commodity Prices*, pp. 242-243.
Amongst the earliest *itr*-boxes are thirteen from the tomb of Yuya and Thuya (T.M. DAVIES, *The Tomb of
Iouiya and Touïyou*, London 1907, p. 27, pl. XX). For a brief survey of the *itr*-type see: D.A. ASTON, « The

\textsuperscript{15} Perhaps the reason for this is that *itr*-type boxes themselves sometimes contained miniature coffins as
well as shabtis (D.A. ASTON, *The Shabti Box*, p. 22).
\textsuperscript{16} W.M.F. PETRIE, *Tell-el Amarna*, London 1894, pp. 17-18, pl. XXXV. For descriptions of the shabtis
\textsuperscript{17} A relevant example is a stick shabti in the Petrie Museum (UC 40194) which was carved out of an-
other object that used dowels in its construction; two holes and even the remains of one of the dowels are
still present in the object; see P. WHELAN, « Mere Scraps of Rough Wood? 17\textsuperscript{th}-18\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty Stick Shabtis

\textsuperscript{18} For the principal editions of these see: I.E.S. EDWARDS, « A bill of sale for a set of ushabtis», JEA 57
41 (1942), pp. 105-118.

and pp. 343-344 respectively); See also comments by J.J. JANSSEN, *Commodity Prices*, pp. 242-243.
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41 (1942), pp. 105-118.
and «faience workers» (b‘b’){sup 19} were involved in the manufacture of shabtis. At this time faience figures had become the vogue; being mould-made they offered a more efficient and economical method of producing the large quantities of shabtis the deceased was believed to require than the labour intensive processes needed for figures of wood or stone. Many other minor arts must have come from faience workshops – in this instance one attached to the Amun temple. However, what neither document informs us about is the manufacture of the rectangular wooden box(es) in which these shabtis would have been placed{sup 20}. It is unlikely they were produced in the same faience-making workshop not least because the presence of high temperature kilns would pose a potential fire hazard to any wood working activities carried out in the vicinity. Such boxes were probably manufactured in separate workshops specialising in wooden objects including perhaps shabtis{sup 21}.

This brief review of the sources shows that only the documents from Deir el-Medineh positively identify some makers of shabtis in the 19th and 20th Dynasties as also being the makers of shabti boxes and possibly full-size coffins. This kind of evidence is not available for the 18th Dynasty, or indeed for even earlier periods. However, a line of enquiry which offers potential in this respect comes from comparative study of typically crude Second Intermediate Period and early New Kingdom Theban ‘stick’ shabtis and their miniature coffins with contemporary full-size coffins. This has revealed a number of significant stylistic as well as inscriptive similarities, which suggest that both types of funerary object could have been made in the same workshop(s) and probably even by the same craftsmen{sup 22}. Admittedly, lacking any corroborative textual evidence, this view must remain speculative, though the similarity of forms and details, sometimes quite idiosyncratic, between both miniature and full-size coffins is nevertheless compelling. The scope and, ultimately, validity of this analysis is to a large extent reliant upon the size of the data group(s) used. For stick shabtis and model coffins there is already a large data set of published examples available for study, but this is sharply contrasted by the dearth of contemporary full-size coffins with which they can be compared. Often the contexts of known examples cannot be accurately dated either because of the disturbed state of the tomb from which they came, or the absence of associated and datable funeral goods, or simply because of inadequacies in the recording of their discovery. Most come from excavations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when only the finest or most aesthetically pleasing coffins tended to be published, with cruder examples at best only briefly discussed{sup 23}. A notable exception is Howard Carter’s report of the early twentieth century excavations funded by Lord Carnarvon in and around the Assasif and el-Birabi regions of Thebes, which includes descriptions and photographic records of around three dozen.

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{sup 20} The various types available at this time are discussed in D.A. ASTON, *The Shabti Box*, 25 ff.

{sup 21} Despite the vast quantities of faience shabtis evident at this time, wooden shabtis are not entirely absent in the Third Intermediate Period – certainly at Thebes, where many have been discovered including 374 figures for one individual, J-L. CHAPPAZ, «Du bois dont on fait les oushebts», RdÉ 36 (1985), pp. 169-170.


{sup 23} For example, Joseph (Giuseppe) Passalacqua’s discovery of a corridor tomb completely filled with coffins from various periods though none are described in detail in his report (Catalogue raisonné et historique des antiquités découvertes en Égypte, Paris 1826, pp. 200-201).
examples of rectangular and anthropoid coffins of the Second Intermediate Period and early 18th Dynasty. Even so, it is apparent from Carter’s unpublished notes and photographs that the coffins included in the report represent only a fraction of those recovered during the excavations; many others had been eaten through by insects or suffered severe water damage and virtually fell to dust on exposure to air before any recording and analysis could be undertaken, while some appear simply to have been considered uninteresting and subsequently left out of the published report. Therefore, the relatively small range of reliably documented and surviving coffins for the late Second Intermediate Period and early 18th Dynasty represents only part of the repertoire of coffin styles that were in use contemporaneously (or nearly so). Fortunately, the recent monograph on **rishi** coffins by Gianluca Miniaci has made available a much larger corpus of examples from these periods obtained from unpublished descriptions and photographs from nineteenth and early twentieth century excavations as well as actual coffins ‘re-discovered’ in museum collections around the world. Besides the obvious advantage for any study of Second Intermediate Period and New Kingdom coffins, the additional material amassed by Miniaci can also be put to profitable use in comparative analysis of ‘stick’ shabtis and their miniature containers. The following few examples will, I hope, demonstrate the potential of this line of enquiry.

Given that Theban **rishi** coffins appear to be contemporaneous with ‘stick’ shabtis, it is somewhat surprising to find that hardly any of the miniature coffins for the latter are decorated in this style. This contrasts the view of Jean-Luc Bovot that «généralement ces chaouabtis sont enfermés dans de miniscule coffrets qui empruntent leur forme aux sarcophages contemporains, soit rectangulaires, soit anthropomorphes **rischis**». The overwhelming majority of miniature ‘stick’ shabti coffins are of the rectangular type, made of either wood or clay, and often decorated with painted geometric panels and inscription band(s) imitating contemporary full-size coffins. Indeed, an examination of the photographs taken by Carter of a group of miniature coffins discovered in the tomb of Tetiky one finds a quite striking ratio between rectangular and anthropoid types. Out of the fifteen examples included in a plate published in the excavation report as well as another thirteen recorded in two unpublished photographs in the Griffith Institute Oxford, only two miniature coffins are anthropoid with the rest rectangular. This produces a
ratio of at least thirteen rectangular coffins for every one anthropoid coffin. If a cultural imperative lies behind this dramatic statistic then it seems to be one more firmly rooted in the funerary industry of the late Second Intermediate Period than the 18th Dynasty when, gradually, anthropoid coffin sets began to replace rectangular boxes\textsuperscript{31}.

Of the far fewer anthropoid-form model coffins I am aware of only three with clearly defined \textit{rishi} decoration. One was found by Norman de Garis Davies in the tomb of Tetiky in a cache with other less elaborately decorated model coffins. His description confirms the type: «[on] the lid of the coffin is a head and collar with its hair covered by the entire skin of a bird, save that its head is replaced by that of a man (or woman)»\textsuperscript{32}. Davies does not state whether the coffin was made from wood or clay nor did he provide a photograph to compare with his description of the decoration, which is all the more regrettable, since the current location of this object is unknown.

A second example, crudely fashioned in clay, was found by Carter and Carnarvon during excavation of the ‘Valley Temple’ at the eastern end of queen Hatshepsut’s mortuary complex at Deir el-Bahari\textsuperscript{33}. The details of the object in the monochrome photograph published in the excavation report are rather indistinct though the lid appears to have a central band running down its length (no inscription visible) with faint diagonal stripes either side which, according to Carter’s brief written description, were painted alternating green and yellow. The use of two colours for the feathers may be compared to certain full-size \textit{rishi} coffins dating to the end of their development when a simplified palette appears to have been favoured over the earlier use of blue, red and green feathers\textsuperscript{34}. No other painted embellishments on the coffin are visible. The cursorily modelled head also includes a beard – a relatively uncommon feature on full-size non-royal \textit{rishi} coffins – but one that is found on examples dating from the late 17th to the early 18th Dynasty\textsuperscript{35}. In the latter category one ought to mention the coffin of Tetiky buried somewhere in his tomb complex at el-Birabi. Although Tetiky’s actual coffin has not been found, a depiction of it appears in a scene from his tomb chapel and there it is shown sporting a short curled beard\textsuperscript{36}.

The third unprovenanced example, now in Cairo Museum (CCG 48405)\textsuperscript{37}, is arguably

\textsuperscript{32} N. de G. DAVIES, «The Tomb of Tetaky at Thebes (No. 15)», JEA 11 (1925), 13, note 1. It is not clear whether the coffin was of wood or clay.
\textsuperscript{33} EARL OF CARNARVON, H. CARTER, \textit{Five Years’ Explorations at Thebes}, 50 (9, B), pl. XLIII. The current whereabouts of the coffin is unknown.
\textsuperscript{34} G. MINIACI, \textit{Rishi coffins}, p. 31. The earliest \textit{rishi} coffins with beards are those of kings Nubhkheperre Intef (rT01BM) and Kamose (rT03C); non-royal examples: rT11MMA, rT14MMA (late 17th - early 18th Dynasty); rT19MMA appears to be the latest dated on typological grounds to the early 18th Dynasty. It should be noted that in the 13th Dynasty feathered \textit{masks} with beards appear, but this type seems to follow a different chronological path and therefore should not be compared with \textit{rishi} coffins (for a discussion of the masks see: G. MINIACI, \textit{Rishi coffins}, pp. 136-138).
\textsuperscript{35} N. de G. DAVIES, «The Tomb of Tetaky at Thebes (No. 15)», JEA 11 (1925), pl. V. A similarly styled coffin is also depicted in a scene on a coffin fragment (rT10NY). Compare also a similar representation on an enigmatic wood fragment recovered from The Royal Cache (TT320), E. GRAEFE, G. BELOVA, \textit{The Royal Cache TT 320: a re-examination}, Cairo 2010, p. 131, pl. 52; G. MINIACI, \textit{Rishi coffins}, p. 266.
I am deeply indebted to Gianluca Miniaci who, while busy with his own research in the Cairo Museum, managed to locate and take excellent colour photographs of this and other miniature coffins and stick shabtis for me. I am also grateful to the Cairo Museum for permission to publish them here.

Fig. 1 - © reproduction courtesy of the Egyptian Museum Cairo. Photographs by G. Miniaci.

the finest of all model coffins from this period and the only definite example known to me of a miniature rishi coffin in wood and one that has retained much of its bright polychrome decoration (fig. 1)\textsuperscript{38}. Measuring 50cm high x 13 cm wide, the lid is painted with a yellow

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ground replicating that of full-size coffins, over which alternating red and green feathers adorn the upper and middle portion of the third feather layer followed by uniformly green feathers on the lower section, further mimicking an arrangement found on a number of full-size coffins of the late 17th - early 18th Dynasty. Similarly, the single vulture motif on the chest – as opposed to the combined vulture and cobra – also occurs on coffins with the same alternating feather colours. Of rishi coffins on which a chest motif is clearly visible (and many coffins in Miniaci’s corpus are too badly damaged for this to be the case), 59% (21) have a single vulture. The break-down of dates for these coffins is as follows: late 17th Dynasty (5); late 17th - early 18th Dynasty (10); early 18th Dynasty up to Thutmose I (6). The head of the vulture as well as the neck and lesser underwing coverts are coloured white contrasting the green colour of the other wing, body and tail feathers. In addition, the tips of the secondary underwing and tail feathers are coloured red in a similar fashion to a rishi-coffin in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, discovered in a re-used Middle Kingdom tomb at el-Birabi. The exterior of the trough of Cairo 48405 is painted white without any additional decoration, following many equally plain full-size examples, which also are painted a single colour or left bare. The single column of inscription is written in black on a yellow ground bordered by white lines, which extend down from beneath the vulture motif to the very end of the foot board. This arrangement does not occur with any frequency on full-size coffins, but nevertheless features on two royal examples of the late 17th as well as two non-royal ones of the early 18th Dynasties.

The most distinctive feature of Cairo 48405 is its «hathoric wig», a hairstyle found on a few full-size female rishi coffins from around the late 17th and into the early 18th Dynasty, with the latest example dating to the reign of Thutmose I. The earliest is a finely crafted and gilded coffin of queen and also possibly that of princess Satdjehuty, both of whom were connected with the 17th Dynasty king Seqenenre Djehuty-aa. The two circular ends of Cairo 48405's wig have a differently coloured disc in their centre similar to the coffin of queen Ahhotep as well as the non-royal example from el-Birabi already mentioned (rT06NY) which probably belongs to a similar time. With only three or four full-size coffins displaying the «hathoric wig» style one might reasonably conclude that it

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40 G. MINIACI, Rishi coffins, rT02NY (late 17th Dynasty); rT08NY (17th-18th Dynasty).
41 For tables listing the different types of chest motif on rishi coffins, see G. MINIACI, Rishi coffins, pp. 156 and 162.
42 rTo8C, rTo1ED, rTo1NY, rTo2NY, rTo9MMA.
43 rT01ÁS, rT02BM, rT04BM, rT09C, rT11C, rT12C, rX03C, rT07NY, rT11MMA, rT12MMA.
44 rT05BM, rT13C, rT14C, rT15C, rT03MMA, rT20MMA.
45 rT08NY, G. MINIACI, Rishi coffins, 97 and pl. 7a.
47 Late 17th Dynasty: rT01C, rT02C; Early 18th Dynasty rT05BM, rT09NY(?).
48 G. MINIACI, Rishi coffins, p. 30. A slightly earlier Second Intermediate Period dating may be suggested by a coffin discovered by Carter and Carnarvon in a tomb at el-Birabi and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA 12.181.300), for which see ibid. 260-261 (rT06NY).
49 For a discussion of this dating and citations of earlier studies see: G. MINIACI, Rishi coffins, p. 127.
was extremely uncommon, accounting as it does for a little over 5% of the 75 coffins that Miniaci was able to identify by type. This small percentage is also matched by the few miniature versions, although accident of preservation should be taken into account when considering these statistics. One notable difference between the «hathoric wigs» on full-size coffins and Cairo 48405 is that on the latter the wig is painted on rather than modelled in relief and, rather curiously, sits within the yellow ground which itself has the outline of a more common lappet or nemes wig. Perhaps one of the latter wig styles was intended when the object was being carved but was then changed at the last moment to the «hathoric-style» or maybe its maker had left certain elements of the decoration deliberately blank in order to accommodate a variety of options available to potential purchasers50. This we shall never know, but given the overall attention to detail and the fact that several decorative elements mimic precisely the repertoire found on full-size rishi coffins, we can be reasonably sure that the maker of Cairo 48405 possessed an intimate knowledge of their design, and thus was most likely to have been a coffin maker and/or painter. This line of enquiry throws up another interesting puzzle – the several distinctive decorative elements on Cairo 48405, which correspond to Miniaci’s Type D coffins with dates ranging from the reign of Seqenenre Djehuty-aa to possibly as late as that of Ahmose51, do not appear together on any single full-size example. Two reasonable explanations can be proposed to account for this. Firstly, that the overall design of Cairo 48405 incorporates an amalgam of various motifs and colour combinations that its maker used to decorate full-size counterparts, even though these were rarely used altogether on a single rishi coffin. Secondly, it could be that coffins incorporating all these decorative elements were produced, but these have simply not survived to the present day.

Cairo 48405 is such an accurately scaled version of its full-size counterparts that one could almost believe it was a makers’ promotional model, were it not for the fact that it is inscribed for an individual named Teti-nefer who, incidentally, despite the femininity implied by the «hathoric wig», was male52. Nevertheless, its exceptional decoration certainly contrasts all other known miniature coffins of this period which indicates that for the most part they were not decorated by the same accomplished painters who worked on full-size rishi coffins, but by the carpenters who made the coffins. This implies that the production of miniature coffins (and stick shabtis) may have followed a division of labour evident in the 19th and 20th Dynasties, when the carpenters who made coffins rarely painted them as well, but left this task to another specialist artisan53 – the single exception is the chief carpenter Maanakhtef mentioned earlier.

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50 This is not without precedent for funerary objects, since some Middle Kingdom stelae feature deliberately adaptable layouts for their inscriptions; for discussions and examples see: D. FRANKE, «Das Heiligtum des Hequib auf Elephantine. Geschichte eines Provinzheiligtums im Mittleren Reich», SAGA 9, Heidelberg 1994, p. 109; P. WHELAN, «An Unfinished Late Middle Kingdom Stela From Abydos», in S. GRALLERT, W. GRAJETZKI (eds.), «Life and Afterlife in Ancient Egypt during the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period», GHP Egyptology 7, London 2007, pp. 136-139.

51 G. MINIACI, Rishi coffins, p. 148, Table 8 and 9.

52 According to the masculine determinative written after the name (G. MÖLLER, Hieratische Paläographie I, Leipzig 1927, p. 3, I.33).

Like their miniature containers, it has been suggested that ‘stick’ shabtis are similarly modelled on *rishi* coffins\(^5\). It is certainly true that in terms of their overall shape almost every ‘stick’ shabti resembles a *rishi* coffin, inasmuch as they display the same use of wedge-shaped undercuts at either end of the ‘body’ to create the head and feet\(^5\). Yet when it comes to the distinctive *rishi*-style decoration none are known to me. The vast majority of ‘stick’ shabtis are decorated with nothing more than one or two columns of inscription and perhaps indications for the eyes and mouth in black pigment. Only a small proportion bear relatively elaborate decoration consisting of coloured bands over a painted ground that probably represents a style of bandaging at the time\(^5\), but is also found on the «white» style coffins that eventually superseded the *rishi* type\(^5\).

Another unusual coffin re-discovered by Gianluca Miniaci in the Cairo Museum (Cairo TR 9.12.32.1) does not belong to the *rishi* type, but is even more rudimentary in form and almost completely devoid of any painted decoration (fig. 3)\(^5\). It was found by Carter and Carnarvon with other similar examples during their excavations in the Assasif. The lid and trough are carved from a single tree trunk and thus was fittingly coined a ‘dug-out’ coffin by Carter\(^5\). Its overall shape is achieved using the same method of removing wedge-like sections to create the upper chest, head and feet as found on most *rishi* decorated coffins as well as ‘stick’ shabtis. However, the rendering of the face is subtly different to that of any known *rishi* coffin having an even more angular wedge-shape to its outline and a smaller and more pointed chin. The specific styling of the face closely resembles those on a small group of ‘stick’ shabtis, three examples of which are shown in fig. 3. At first glance, the shabtis may appear quite different, but if one takes into account the significant proportional differences between both object types – the coffin is almost ten times the length of each shabti\(^6\) – the specific methods used to create the facial features on each are virtually identical. All have a sharply angular wedge-shaped face with a prominent brow over eyes that are not carved but indicated in ink. The slender and precisely rectangular nose is carved in relief while the mouth is indicated by a single incised line. The only real difference between both object types is that on the coffin the face sits below a prominent ledge which defines the edge of the wig-line. To have included this element on a ‘stick’ shabti would not only have meant reducing the size of the face considerably, but also undermine the object’s representation as a mumified body rather than coffin. The relatively involved process for creating this type of semi-realistic face seems to me to rule out its repetition as mere coincidence, which suggests that all examples

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\(^5\) P. WHelan, *Mere Scraps of Rough Wood?*, p. 26, fig. 17.5 and 27.

\(^5\) P. WHelan, *Mere Scraps of Rough Wood?*, pp. 63-64 with references for other similarly decorated examples.


\(^5\) EARL OF CARNARVON, H. CARTER, *Five Years’ Explorations at Thebes*, pp. 52, 61, 66, 68, pl. LXI.2.

\(^6\) The coffin measures approximately 1.75 m and the shabtis, where known, around 1.85 cm.
Fig. 2 - © reproduction courtesy of the Egyptian Museum Cairo. Photographs by G. Miniaci.
could have originated from the same workshop and possibly were even made by the same hand. In terms of dating, Howard Carter suggested that ‘dug-out’ coffins ‘belong to the beginning of the Second Theban Empire’, on account of a scarab found inside one\(^{61}\). In this instance, one of the ‘stick’ shabtis from the comparison group (fig. 3, far right) may have some bearing on the chronology of this class of coffin. The ‘stick’ shabti in question comes from the tomb of Tetiky where it was discovered \textit{in situ} with dozens of others as well as miniature coffins deposited in four niches in the western wall of the courtyard\(^{62}\). Since Tetiky’s tomb dates to the reign of Ahmose\(^{63}\) we can tentatively propose that ‘dug-out’ coffins were still in use also at this time. The fact that, at present, few examples of this simple anthropoid coffin style are known is almost certainly due to the above mentioned vicissitudes affecting the survival of coffins discovered in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Another commercial-related aspect of ‘stick’ shabtis and their coffins that compares to full-size coffins of the Second Intermediate Period and early 18th Dynasty, is that many were clearly made for stock with a space intentionally left blank in the inscription for the name of the purchaser to be added later\(^{64}\). This contrasts the documentary evidence from Deir el-Medineh which rather suggests that funerary objects – frequently coffins – were only made to order\(^{65}\). Perhaps the difference here is one of commercial organisation and scale. The Deir el-Medineh documents mostly relate to craft production carried out by ‘informal workshops’\(^{66}\), whereby state employees – the royal tomb builders/temple craftsmen – were able to earn extra income by undertaking private work on the side. This contrasts the evidently commercial mass production of \textit{rishi} coffins, ‘stick’ shabtis and their containers, which were likely, therefore, to have come from organised craft centres (premises/employees) with workshops and areas where examples were displayed to potential customers (showrooms). Furthermore, evidence of the pre-preparation of items presumes an expectation of volume sales and/or the ability to cope during periods of high demand. Whether such workshops were attached to temples, palaces or funerary institutions remains to be seen.

Unlike full-size coffins where the addition of a name always appears in the main central text band, some miniature examples are left with insufficient space to accommodate part or even the entire personalised portion of text requiring it to be written to one side of the pre-prepared text. An example of a miniature coffin (Cairo 48400) where this has occurred is shown in fig. 2\(^{67}\), which is yet another accurate copy of a Second Intermediate

\(^{61}\) \textsc{Earl of Carnarvon}, H. Carter, \textit{Five Years’ Explorations at Thebes}, p. 68, pl. LXXII.37 (for scarab).

\(^{62}\) \textsc{Earl of Carnarvon}, H. Carter, \textit{Five Years’ Explorations at Thebes}, pp. 9-21, pls. I-II.


\(^{65}\) K.M. Cooney, \textit{The Cost of Death}, p. 159.


\(^{67}\) P.E. Newberry, \textit{Funerary Statuettes and Model Sarcophagi}, pp. 339-340, XLV.
Period coffin style that may not have survived, but is known from excavation photographs.\textsuperscript{68} The signs in the central column making up the offering formula gradually reduce in height towards the end, presumably as the scribe attempted to fit the text into an ever decreasing space while still leaving room for the personalised portion of text.\textsuperscript{69} Ultimately, this was unsuccessful as the dedication had to be completed on the left side of the main inscription. It does however emphasise the importance to the ancient Egyptian of adding the owner’s name to a shabti and/or its container. This brings to mind a question


\textsuperscript{69} A similar arrangement for the added dedication can be found on UC 14222.
posed by Federico Poole, as to what was done by the shabti makers in order to initiate the shabtis’ magical power. Although Poole’s enquiry is concerned with P.BM EA 10800 and Third Intermediate Period shabtis, a possible answer that may be applicable for all periods, is that rather than (or perhaps in addition to) the performance of a magical ritual, the activation of a shabti occurred when the atelier personalised each figure with the name of its purchaser. It is noteworthy in this respect that very few of the hundreds of ‘stick’ shabtis are anonymous, which is contrasted by the relatively high proportion of full-size rishi coffins – almost one quarter of all published examples – which are unnamed. This is perhaps an example of an ancient Egyptian ideal that in reality was not always adhered to.

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70 F. POOLE, «'All that has been done to the shabtis': Some considerations on the decree for the shabtis of Neskhons and P.BM EA 10800», JEA 91 (2005), pp. 165-170.
71 Some time ago Hans Schneider suggested that an «Opening of the Mouth» ritual performed over small funerary objects such as heart-scarabs was probably carried out on shabtis also (Shabtis, vol. I, p. 242).
72 P. WHELAN, Mere Scrapsov Rough Wood?, p. 41.
73 G. MINIACI, Rishi coffins, p. 35, Table 6.