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The mummiform figure of Senankh from Abydos

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Abstract

The mummiform figure of Senankh dates to the late Twelfth Dynasty and was found in tomb 522 at Abydos. Today the figure is in a private collection in Zurich. There are three other similar figures, one of them dating securely under Amenemhat III. They are all very close in style and material indicating that they were produced in the same workshop or even by the same artist.

In the years 1906 to 1909 John Garstang excavated parts of the cemeteries of Abydos. He found more than one thousand tombs, dating to almost all periods of ancient Egyptian history. The excavations were never fully published, just some small preliminary reports appeared. In 1908 Garstang found the tomb given the number 522 A'08 which contained an inlay of an eye, perhaps coming from a coffin or mummy mask, two mummiform figures, one of them now in Brussels, another small statue holding a bowl and a vessel.¹

In the collection of Rolf Wegmüller² (Zurich), there is one of the mummiform figures from this tomb. The fragment of the figure is 18.5 cm high and made of Egyptian alabaster. The head is lost, as are the left shoulder and parts of the right foot. The body of the figure is well carved without indications of the arms or the hands. It bears on the front one column with an inscription:

A king's offering given to the ka of the overseer of meret-people³ Senankh, begotten of Senankh, true of voice

There are three close stylistic parallel pieces for this statuette:

- The mummiform figure of the overseer of storerooms Iunefer found in Hawara (tomb 57) and now in Cairo.⁴ The figure measures 24 cm high and is made of hard white limestone. It differs from the shabti of Senankh only by the narrow plain collar indicated between the front lappets of the wig. The inscription reads: *A king's offering given to Osiris lord of Rosetau that he may give a coming forth of the overseer of the storerooms Iunefer from the Netherworld, so that he may see the sun rising in the horizon.*
- The mummiform figure of the lady of the house Henetnofret also found at Hawara, now in Manchester (5344).⁵ The figure measures 14.5 cm high and is carved from hard white limestone. The inscription reads: *A king's offering given to Osiris lord of Djedu that he may give a voice offering of bread and beer for the ka of the lady of the house Henetnofret, true of voice.*

¹ Wolfram Grajetzki is grateful to Renate Siegmann for bringing this shabti to his attention. The information of the tomb is taken from the unpublished PhD of Steven Snape who collected all the available data of this excavation: S. Snape, *Mortuary assemblages from Abydos*, University of Liverpool, Liverpool 1986, 179, 269 and 509.

² We are grateful to Rolf Wegmüller for permission to publish this shabti and for sending the photographic pictures.

³ О. Д. Берлев, *Трудовое население Египта в эпоху среднего царства*, Москва 1972, 131–32 (list of title holders).

⁴ W.M. Flinders Petrie / G. A. Wainwright / E. Mackay, *The Labyrinth, Gerzeh and Mazghuneh*, London 1912, 35–36, pl. XXX; H.D. 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 I–III*, Leiden 1977, I, 178–179.

⁵ Flinders Petrie / Wainwright / Mackay, *The Labyrinth, Gerzeh and Mazghuneh*, 36, pl. XXX; H. D. Schneider, *Shabtis*, 1977, I, 179.

- The mummiform figure of Redienptah in Vienna (ÄS 8311), provenance unknown.⁶ The figure measures 20.2 cm high and is made of fine-grained limestone with fossil inclusions. The inscription reads: *The honoured one before Osiris the cupbearer and keeper of the crescent Redienptah true of voice, possessor of veneration.*⁷

All four figures show the same features. The body is just decorated with one line of an inscription and is shown without arms or hands. They all bear a simple tripartite wig. The surface of the body is well smoothed. The example of Iunefer found at Hawara is perhaps closely datable. An *overseer of the storerooms* (*imy-r st*) Senusret Iunefer also appears on a stela now in Rio de Janeiro. The stela is dated by a cartouche under Senusret III.⁸ The Iunefers from the tomb and from the stela in Rio de Janeiro are most likely identical, perhaps dating into the middle of the reign of Amenemhat III, at the end of the long coregency with Senusret III⁹ when Hawara started to become an important cemetery. The similar style and workmanship of the four shabtis make it very likely that they were produced by the same artist or workshop, or are at least very close in time. Very few Middle Kingdom mummiform figures are so well datable, making this group an important chronological fix point for the development of shabtis with which they share many features.

Egyptian alabaster is not a very common material for shabtis in the Middle Kingdom when it appears that darker coloured hardstones such as granite and serpentine were favoured. Unlike the aforementioned limestone group, none of the alabaster shabtis with a single column of inscription which are known to us, and which are listed below, are particularly close to the style of the example from tomb 522.¹⁰

- Seneb (14.9 cm high), dated to the Twelfth/Thirteenth Dynasty. Provenance unknown, now in a private collection.¹¹ The figure has a plain tripartite wig which is quite different in style to that of Senankh's figure. The wig is much wider at the shoulder line and the front lappets angle inwards. A single column of inscription within border lines reads: *A king's offering to Osiris of bread and beer for the ka of Seneb, born of [...], true of voice.*

⁶ E. Reiser-Haslauer, *Uschebti, Corpus antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum*: LBK: Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien. Ägyptisch-orientalische Sammlung, Lieferung 5, Mainz am Rhein 1990, 110–111.

⁷ It is of relevance for the dating of objects in this discussion to note that Redienptah's enigmatic title keeper of the crescent is considered by Oleg Berlev to have appeared in the reign of Amenemhat III (Общественные отношения Египта в эпоху среднего царства, Москва 1978, 275–278 (with list of title holders)).

⁸ D. Franke, *Personendaten aus dem Mittleren Reich* (20.–16. Jahrhundert v. Chr.), Dossiers 1–796, Wiesbaden 1984, 305, Doss. 498; K. A. Kitchen / M. da Conceição de Beltrão, *Catalogue of the Ancient Egyptian monuments in the National Museum, Warminster* 1990, 19.

⁹ J.W. Wegner, *The Nature and Chronology of the Senusret III – Amenemhat III Regnal Succession: Some Considerations Based on New Evidence from the Mortuary Temple of Senusret III at Abydos*, in: JNES 55/4, 1996, 249–279.

¹⁰ Other alabaster shabtis with longer texts include: Kemhu from Abydos, now in a private collection. The figure (13.2 cm high) has a plain tripartite wig and seven horizontal lines of inscription composed of mutilated hieroglyphs (G. Janes, *Shabtis: a private view; ancient Egyptian funerary statuettes in European private collections*, Paris 2002, 3–5); Bener from Lisht, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA 44.4.5). The figure (18.5 cm high) has a plain tripartite wig and four columns of inscription written in mutilated hieroglyphs (D. Arnold, *The South Cemeteries of Lisht I, The pyramid of Senusret I*, New York 1988, 36, pl. 13c–e). The shabtis of Kemhu and Bener are both clearly different in style to our group showing longer texts and have a more robust body shape. They date perhaps to the late Twelfth or early Thirteenth Dynasty (Arnold, *op. cit.* 37). The robust shape of the figures might be caused by the wish to place longer texts on their body.

¹¹ H. Schlögl, *Le Don du Nil: art égyptien dans les collections Suisse*, Zurich 1978, 44–45, pl. 149.

- Renesseneb from Semna, now in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston (24.745), dated to the late Twelfth Dynasty.¹² The figure (14.8 cm high – feet missing) differs to that of Senankh inasmuch as the tripartite wig is striated rather than plain and the single column of inscription is written within border lines which curve outwards in the middle rather than remaining straight as on Senankh's shabti. The inscription reads: *A king's offering for the ka of Renesseneb born of Iku, true of voice.*
- Hekaib, of unknown provenance, is now in the Brooklyn Museum (L.73.2.1), dated to the late Twelfth Dynasty.¹³ The figure is similar to that of Renesseneb described above.

The other finds from tomb 522

A. The other mummiform figure found in the tomb (Brussels inv. no. E.3384) is of some interest as it shows the deceased holding in one hand an *ankh*, in the other a *was* sign. The figure bears an inscription with an imakhu formula invoking Ptah-Sokar and dedicated possibly to the same individual named on the other mummiform figure.¹⁴ The piece is 22 cm high and made of serpentine.

B. A human figure holding a bowl. The statuette is only known from two excavation photographs.¹⁵

C. The eyes of a coffin or mummy mask (Liverpool E 7826).

D. A vessel known only from a rough sketch (measurements not given) made at the excavation. The small drawing indicates a style closer to the late Second Intermediate Period or even early Eighteenth Dynasty. If this dating is correct it might indicate that the tomb was reused.¹⁶

Additional iconographic evidence may be brought to bear on the dating of both shabtis from this tomb group. A statue fragment discovered at the site of Amenemhat III's Labyrinth at Hawara provides a royal example of a mummiform figure in the style of the Senankh's shabti, albeit on a

¹² S. D'Auria / P. Lacovara / C. H. Roehrig, *Mummies & Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt*, Boston 1988, 126–127, no. 57.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ L. Speleers, *Recueil des inscriptions égyptiennes des Musées Royaux du Cinquante à Bruxelles*, Bruxelles 1923, 32 no. 95 (E.3384), 128; idem, *Les figurines funéraires égyptiennes*, Bruxelles 1923, 22–23, pl. 7. The figure is incorrectly assigned to tomb 625. Speleers gives the name of the deceased as Nen, but was clearly uncertain over the reading of the signs in this part of the inscription and provides two slightly different transcriptions in the aforementioned publications. The signs Speleers reads as two rushes with shoots (M23) appear not only to be quite different in size, but the first sign has no visible 'curl' at the top. The name Nen is rare; the Brussels figure is the only example given for it in H. Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*. 2 Bd., Glückstadt/Hamburg 1935–52, I, 205 [14], although Nen also occurs (with a different title) on an unprovenanced seal published in G. T. Martin, *Egyptian Administrative and Private-name Seals Principally of the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period*, Oxford 1971, 62, no. 753. However, the inscription on the alabaster shabti from tomb 522 provides the most compelling reason to doubt Speleers's reading of the name, since Senankh is clearly written twice on this figure and the first occurrence of the name is followed by the title of overseer of *meret*-people, which occurs also on Brussels E.3884.

¹⁵ Published in: B. J. Kemp / R. S. Merrillees, *Minoan pottery in Second Millenium Egypt*, Mainz am Rhein 1980, 149, pl. 22; This type of figure is discussed by A. Verbovsek, in: D. Polz / A. Seiler, *Die Pyramidenanlage des Königs Nub-Cheper-Re Intef in Dra' Abu el-Naga*, Mainz am Rhein 2003, 87.

¹⁶ D. Aston, *Tell el-Dab'a XII. A Corpus of Late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period Pottery*, Vienna 2004: 203–204, "Group 225". Aston notes that the type might have begun earlier. Similar vessels were found at Dahshur and Lisht, but without clear context, compare also A. Seiler, *Tradition & Wandel*, Mainz am Rhein 2006, 86–89, *Falttafel* 6.

larger scale.¹⁷ Only the head and upper torso of this life-size limestone statue are preserved, but the lappet wig and tightly wrapped body without the hands modelled indicate that this plain mummiform style was in vogue during the reign of Amenemhat III and furthermore appears to be unique amongst the relatively modest corpus of Middle Kingdom royal mummiform statuary.¹⁸ One can also mention the group of six life-size mummiform statues carved in half-round relief from the tomb of Sarenputet II at Qubbet el-Hawa, Aswan, which are non-royal examples of this style from a slightly earlier date.¹⁹ Only one of these statues appears to have been completed and bears a single column of painted inscription giving the titles and name of Sarenputet II. Plain mummiform statues such as these were likely to have been influenced by the correspondingly austere style of the earliest anthropoid coffins, which likewise bear a single column of inscription.²⁰

The serpentine figure from tomb 522, Brussels E.3384, may also be dated to the reign of Senusret III or Amenemhat III on account of the *was* and *ankh* symbols it is shown holding. While shabtis with attributes almost certainly appear in the late Twelfth Dynasty, firmly dated examples are lacking and most are assigned to the Thirteenth Dynasty.²¹ However, one piece of evidence, a stela from the reign of Senusret III, confirms that this style formed part of the artistic repertoire at that time. The round-topped limestone stela was discovered by Mariette at Abydos (Cairo 20038) and is dedicated to Iykhernofret, the celebrated official who served under Senusret III. It incorporates a niche containing two female and two mummiform statuettes carved in half round relief and the latter modelled with hands holding ankh signs.²² Although these figures are not strictly mummiform as their feet are exposed, they are clearly to be regarded as such, and therefore represent the earliest securely dated *non-royal* funerary figures shown holding symbolic attributes,²³ to which Brussels E.3384 may now tentatively be added.

Aside from its chronological interest, Abydos tomb 522 provides a rare, possibly unique, example from the Middle Kingdom of an *in situ* deposit of shabtis manufactured in different types of stone and in quite different styles for the same person.²⁴

¹⁷ I. Uytterhoeven / I. Blom-Böer, *New Light on the Egyptian Labyrinth: Evidence from a Survey at Hawara*, in: JEA 88, 2002, 118, pl. XIII; see also I. Blom-Böer, *Die Tempelanlage Amenemhets III. in Hawara. Das Labyrinth. Bestandsaufnahme und Auswertung der Architektur- und Inventarfragmente*, Leiden 2006, 151–152. The statue is believed to represent Amenemhat III as a mummiform deity. It is not possible to establish if the torso bore an inscription.

¹⁸ Senusret I was the first king of the Middle Kingdom to employ mummiform statues in his funerary monument at Lisht (D. Arnold, *The South Cemeteries of Lisht I, The pyramid of Senusret I*, New York 1988, 21–22, pls. 6–7). The eight near complete examples from Lisht are of ‘Osiride’ form representing a tightly wrapped mummy wearing the red or white crown but with arms crossed over the chest and with clenched hands some of which are drilled for the insertion of separately fashioned attributes.

¹⁹ H. W. Müller, *Die Felsengräber der Fürsten von Elephantine*, ÄF 9, 1940, 70–74 and Tfl. XXIX–XXX. The dating of Sarenputet II and his family is discussed in: L. Habachi, *Elephantine IV. The Sanctuary of Heqaib*, Mainz 1985, 46, 159 and D. Franke, *Das Heiligtum des Heqaib auf Elephantine*, SAGA 9, Heidelberg 1994, 39.

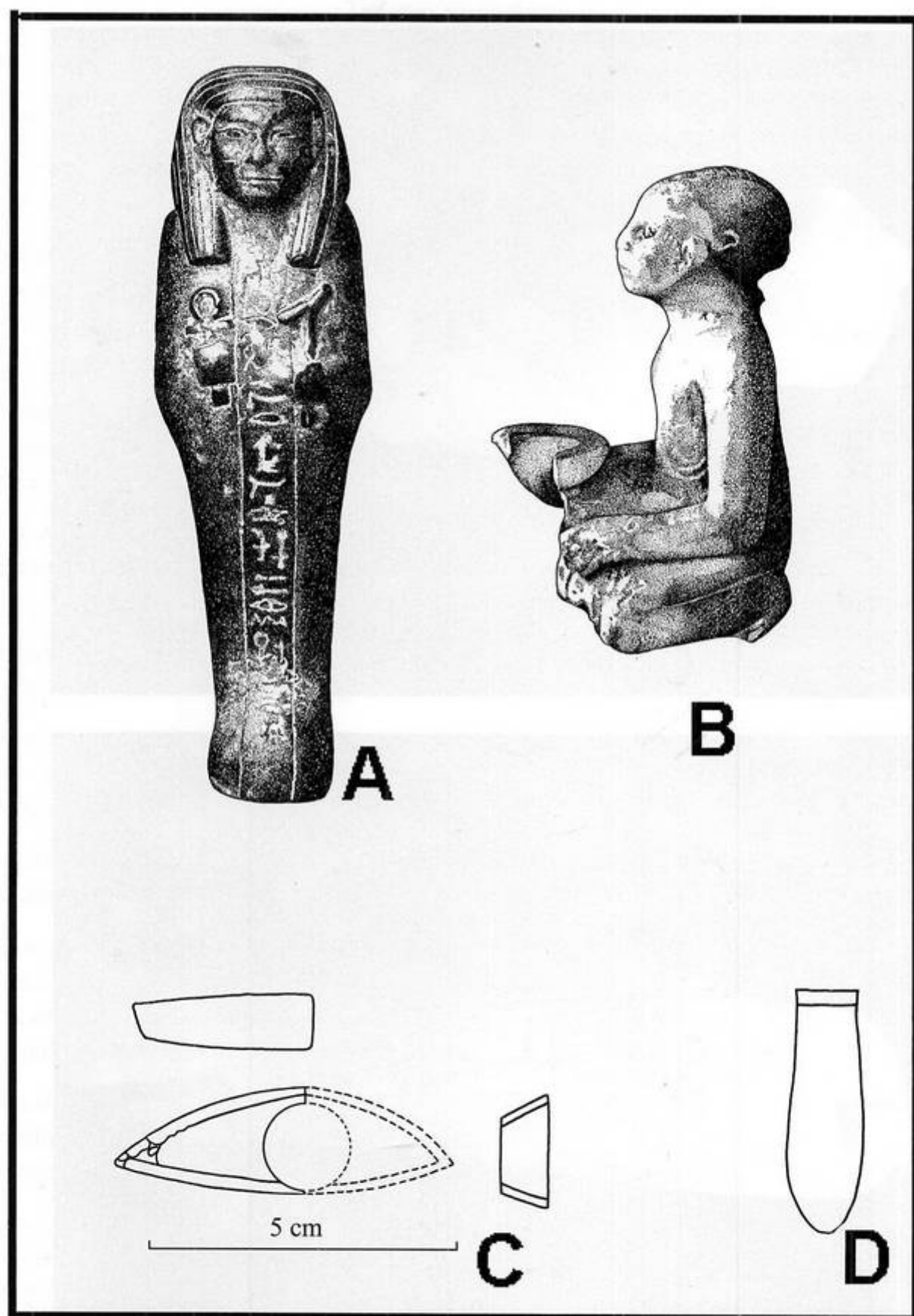
²⁰ A good example of a coffin in this style from Beni Hasan which is dated to the mid Twelfth Dynasty can be found in J. Bourriau, *Pharaohs and mortals: Egyptian art in the Middle Kingdom*, 1988, 91–92, Pl. III, 3.

²¹ For example, all of those listed in H. D. Schneider, *Shabtis*, 1977, I, 180–181. Schneider assigns Brussels E.3384 to the Thirteenth Dynasty.

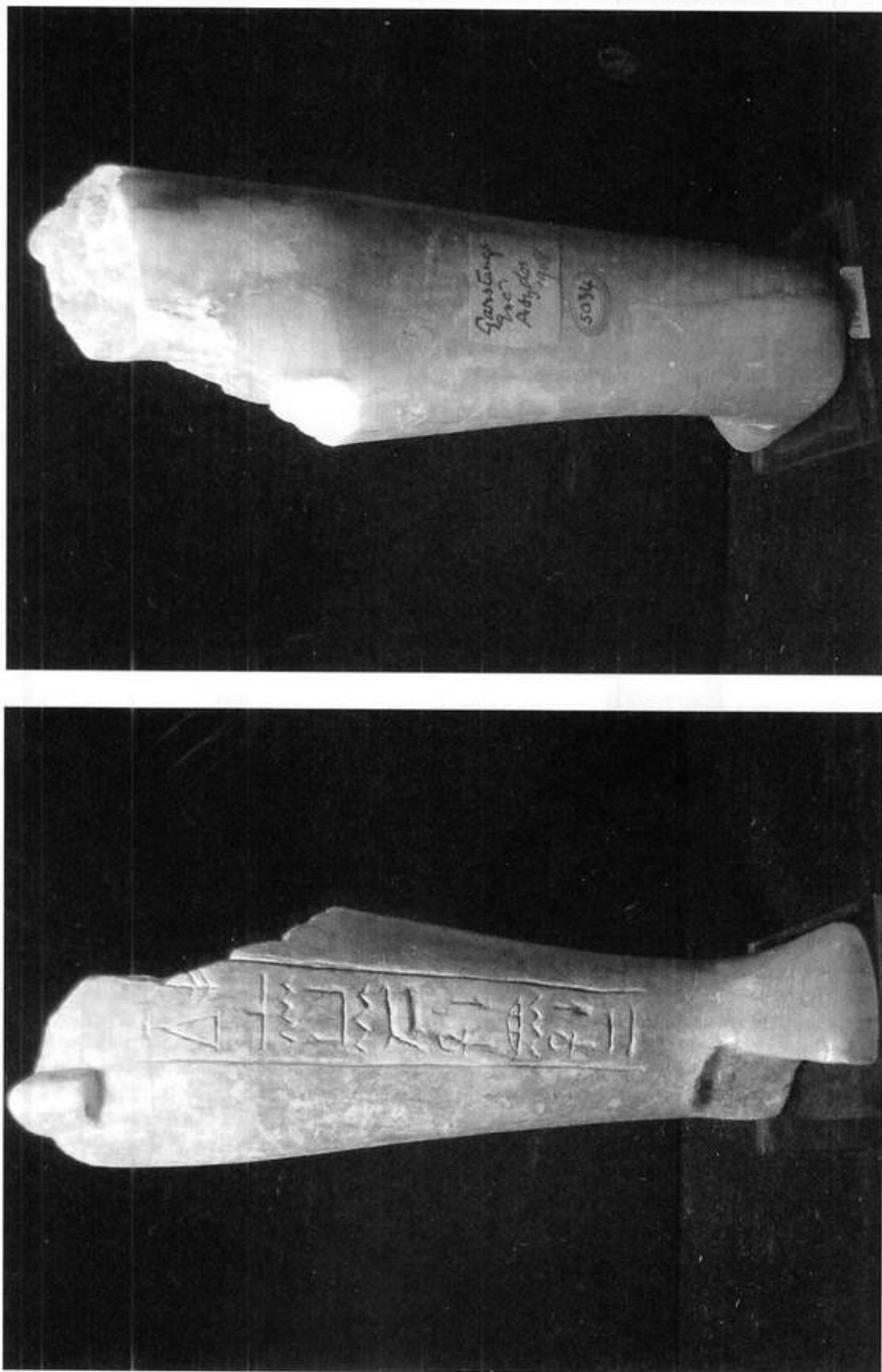
²² H.O. Lange / H. Schäfer, *Grab- und Denksteine des Mittleren Reiches*, Catalogue général des Antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, 4 vols., Cairo 1902–1925, I, 46–48 and IV, pl. IV. The mummiform figures are accompanied by two female figures shown in everyday dress.

²³ For the earliest royal mummiform statuettes with attributes see note 18.

²⁴ Compare a deposit of two shabtis for Renseneb, both however made of limestone, from tomb B13 at Abydos (T.E. Peet, *The Cemeteries of Abydos Part II*, 1911–1912, London 1914, 57, 113, pl. XIII, 30). A third companion limestone figure in Brussels (E.3228) almost certainly came from the same tomb (L. Speleers, *Les figurines funéraires égyptiennes*, Bruxelles 1923, 24 and pl. 8).



The other objects from Abydos tomb 522 A'08 (not to scale)
all drawings © Paul Whelan



Front and back of the mummyform figure of Senankh (© Rolf Wegmüller)