

***Faience Shabti of Sety I***  
**The British Museum**

From the tomb of Sety I, Valley of the Kings, Egypt  
19th Dynasty, around 1290 BC

**Upper part of a blue faience funerary figure**



Shabti figures first became part of the Egyptian funerary tradition in the Middle Kingdom (about 2040-1750 BC). A number of royal examples are known from the New Kingdom (about 1550-1070 BC), the earliest of which is that of Ahmose, now also in the British Museum; there were of course several hundred in the tomb of Tutankhamun.

No *shabti* has been found in the tombs of any subsequent kings until Sety I (1294-1279 BC), in whose tomb the remains of hundreds were found. Many of these *shabti* were of wood, and some were crudely shaped; it is said that visitors to the tomb after its discovery by Giovanni Belzoni in 1817 lit them for use as torches. This is one of the finest of the many faience *shabti* found there.

The figure wears the *nemes* head-dress of a king, emphasized by the cobra on his brow. The identity of the object as a *shabti* is made clear by the hoes which the figure holds, and the presence of the '*shabti* spell', the text from the *Book of the Dead*, which indicates that the *shabti* must do the work that its owner is expected to do in the Afterlife. This text and the details of the figure have been painted in black and applied prior to firing.

F.D. Friedman (ed.), *Gifts of the Nile: ancient Egypt* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1998)