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THE TWO UNPUBLISHED SHABTIS FROM KRK (CROATIA)

Mladen Tomorad

In this paper author discussed the two previously unknown and unpublished shabtis from the island of Krk in Croatia. Both findings are very interesting and could start debate among Egyptologists. They were discovered in the late Hellenistic graves which dates to the middle of the 1st century B.C. Along this two shabtis, three Ancient Egyptian scarabs and five amulets of cats were also unearthed. The owner of the first shabti was the Lady *Mehyt-weskhet*, “the Divine Adoratrice of Amun” and the mother of Egyptian pharaoh Osorkon the Elder. The second artefact is pseudoshabti of the female with naked breasts and pseudo-hieroglyphic inscription.

Key words: shabti, pseudoshabti, Krk (ancient *Curicum*), late Hellenistic period, Roman civil war, Queen *Mehyt-weskhet*, 21st dynasty, typology, Siracusa.

1. INTRODUCTION

During my latest research for the Ancient Egyptian artefacts in the various museum institutions in Croatia I suddenly and unexpectedly, find out about the existence of ten Ancient Egyptian artefacts which were discovered at the island of Krk, in the remains of the old Roman settlement *Curicum* (today city of Krk), couple of decades ago. They included two shabtis figures, three scarabs with hieroglyphic inscriptions and five amulets of cats. They are kept today in the Franciscan monastery at the island of Košljun.

According to the information given by the archaeologist Ranko Starac from *Pomorski i povijesni muzej Hrvatskog primorja* in Rijeka, who wrote to me about these artefacts, they were discovered in a late Hellenistic graves which were dated to the middle of the 1st century B.C. These graves were excavated in the backyard of the house Šinigoj in the city of Krk.

According to the other archaeological findings and context they were dated to the early civil war between Pompey and Julius Caesar, probably in 49 B.C. In early

49 B.C. Julius Caesar ordered Publius Cornelius Dolabella to build fleet in Adriatic¹, and the part of this fleet was stationed in *Curicum* under command of Gaius Antonius², probably the brother of Marcus Antonius. At the same time Pompey fleet under the command of Marcus Octavius and Lucius Scribonius Libo was stationed at *Issa*, and sent to the north Adriatic. After the famous battle at Krk, in the middle of 49 B.C., the fleet of Gaius Antonius was defeated, and he had to surrender to Marcus Octavius troops who took charge of *Curicum*.³

It is known that the part of the Pompey fleet and military forces who defeated Gaius Antonius near Krk were recruited Liburnia, Aegean region and Egypt.⁴ It is very likely that few soldiers or sailors who died during the early years of civil war (49–48 B.C.) were buried in these late Hellenistic graves along with the Egyptian artefacts which they could brought directly from Egypt or from some unknown location in the Eastern Mediterranean or maybe even Sicily. We can not confirm or deny if they were worshippers of Egyptian divinities, but that that option is possible. These artefacts can definitely support my thesis that the penetration of Ancient Egyptian artefacts at the east Adriatic coast started before the 1st century A.D. and that it could be element of the early diffusion/dissemination of the Ancient Egyptian cults (Isis, Osiris, Serapis, Harpocrates etc.) in this region.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE OBJECTS

1.1. SHABTI OF LADY MEHYTWESKHET (FIG. 1)

Krk (ancient *Curicum*), date unknown.

Third Intermediate Period; the late 21st-early 22nd Dynasty or the copy of the original shabti crafted during the Ptolemaic period (306–30 B.C.).

Terracotta (well preserved). H. 15.8 cm; W. 5 cm.

Schneider 1977, class VIII C1; Tomorad forthcoming, class N.

FMK: 642, on display.

Unpublished.

¹ App. Civ. II.41.

² App. Civ. II.41.

³ App. Civ. II.47; D. C. XLI.40–41^{1–2}.

⁴ Veith 1924; Šišić 1925, 93–94; Matijašić 2009, 129–131.

Description and typology:

Mummiform. Third Intermediate Period striated lappet wig with one horizontal band on lappets. Without beard. Arms crossed on the chest. Hands crossed right over left, unsleeved. Hoes in both hands. Flat back. Face is oval and well shaped. Eyes with brows. Ears are well shaped. Hieroglyphic inscription is written in one vertical column names the owner *Mehyt-weskhet*. Her name is written in a royal cartouche with the title “Divine Adoratrice of Amun, Lord of the Two Lands”.

Hieroglyphic inscription:

Wsjr dw3t-ntr n Jmn nb

t3wy Mhyt-wsht mry-Mwt dt

The Osiris, the Divine Adoratrice of Amun, Lord of the Two Lands, Mehyt-weskhet, beloved of Mut forever.

Discussion:

The Lady *Mehyt-weskhet* was the important character from the Third Intermediate period. Sometimes scholars call her *Mehyten-weskhet*⁵ or *Mehten-weskhet*⁶. On her shabtis she held the titles “The Divine Adoratrice of Amun” and “God’s Wife of Amun” which means that she was very important person in the region of Thebes, probably the daughter of the High Priest of Amun, maybe *Menkheperre Hemnetjertepyenamun* (1045–992 B.C.), who ruled the Upper Egypt during the Third Intermediate period.⁷ On her shabtis she also held name *Mut-em-hat* what was suggested to be the prenomen or throne name of *Mahyt-weskhet*.⁸ According to the Yoyotte dating of the “Divine Adoratrices of Amun” it seems that she was the third in line and that she lived at the end of 11th or during the early 10th century B.C.⁹ Historians and the Egyptologist has very little knowledge about her life. She is also mentioned on the stele *Pasenhor B* from Serrapeum in Saqqara and on the text formerly on the roof of the Khonsu temple in Karnak.¹⁰ According to the previous historiographical research she married *Shoshenq* with whom she got *Akheperra Setepenra*, later know as king Osorkon the Elder (984–978 B.C.). She was also grandmather of *Hedjkheperra, Shoshenq I* (945–924 B.C.).¹¹ Her shabtis were often broken, probably during the antiquity, which could also mean that her tomb was robbed in antiquity when her grave

⁵ Dodson & Hilton 2004, 200; Tyldesley 2006, 181.

⁶ Kitchen 1996, 437, 506

⁷ Yoyotte 1972, 47.

⁸ Yoyotte 1972, 47.

⁹ Yoyotte 1972, 50.

¹⁰ Dodson and Hilton 2004, 207.

¹¹ Dodson and Hilton 2004, 207.

goods along with shabtis were taken out and probably sold. From one of such robberies during the middle of the 1st century B.C. probably came this shabti which was found in the Hellenistic grave in Krk.

Other shabtis of *Mehyt-weskhet*:

This shabti is one of three known terracotta shabtis which belonged to the owner *Mehyt-weskhet*. The other two specimens are kept in Montserrat and Moscow.

Her faience shabtise were discovered in Thebes. Lepsius brought two of them from Thebes.¹² Petrie mentioned that he acquired her shabti in 1887 in Luxor where it was brought from western Thebes.¹³ One of her shabtis (Cairo CG48527) was discovered in Deir el-Bahri pit in the so-called the Royal Cache.¹⁴

Cf. Ägyptisches Museum-Neues Museum, Berlin: 7418; Egyptian museum, Cairo: CG48455-CG48457, CG48527; Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, London: UC38077, UC39870, UC39871; Museo de Montserrat, Montserrat: 610.105; Hermitage Museum, Moscow: 1615; Brooklyn museum of art, New York: 37.154E; Metropolitan museum of art, New York: 22.3.13, 22.3.14; Musée du Louvre, Paris: N2249, E5334; Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, Swansea: W1315.

2.2. PSEUDOSHABTI (FIG. 2)

Krk (ancient *Curicum*), date unknown.

Ptolemaic period (306–30 B.C.).

Terracotta (well preserved). H. 15.4 cm; W. 5.2 cm.

Tomorad forthcoming, class J.

FMK: 641, on display.

Unpublished.

Description and typology:

Female pseudoshabti figurine with naked breasts. The striated lappet wig with flat back. Without beard. Collar around neck. Naked arms with hands on skirt in attitude of praying. Without implements, bags and baskets. Face is oval and well shaped. Eyes with brows. Ears are well shaped. Pseudo hieroglyphic inscription in one vertical column is carved on skirt above naked feet. Typical features of the life shabtis from the New Kingdom.

¹² Lepsius 1858, no. 574.

¹³ Petrie 1905, III, 251.

¹⁴ Newberry 1930, 428, 434.

Discussion:

The almost identical pseudoshabti is kept today in Siracusa. It supposed to be discovered in Biggemi before 1935 when it was firstly mentioned in the museum inventory books. E. Hauslauer analysed it and wrote that it is modern “fake” probably made at the end of the 19th or at the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁵ Hauslauer also thinks that similar shabtis from New York and Vienna are modern “fakes”¹⁶ because of the pseudo hieroglyphic text. I actually doubt that opinion for two reasons: 1) this identical shabti from Krk was discovered in archaeological context which means that it is original and not modern product; 2) the false hieroglyphic signs do not have to prove that such shabtis are fakes. If such shabtis were crafted outside Egypt in Sicily and North Africa they are probably connected with some workshops related with ancient Egyptian cults and those artists probably do not know ancient Egyptian language and hieroglyphic signs. Such artefacts were probably sold all over Mediterranean world in ancient times and region of Siracuse with good trade connection with Mediterranean east and Egypt could easily be one of the centers for distribution of these kind of goods.

Cf. private collection, New York; Museo Archeologico Regionale “P. Orsi”, Siracusa: 47425; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna: 6708.

3. CONCLUSION

These two interesting shabtis could raise debate among Egyptologists and ancient historians for several reasons: 1) if they were discovered in Krk at the Hellenistic grave from the middle of the 1st century B.C. that can surely prove that such artefacts arrived to the east Adriatic coast before the 1st century A.D. (which is the previous date for the start of the diffusion of the Ancient Egyptian artefacts and cults in this region); 2) it could raise the question: what shabti of the Queen *Mehyt-weskhet* is doing in the east Adriatic coast?, and how it get there?; 3) if this ancient pseudo-shabti is genuine, is it possible that such “Aegyptiaca” artefacts were crafted on various locations around Mediterranean and sold by merchants as exotic artefacts or even as the element of Egyptian cult?

Sadly I can not answer to any of these possible questions but these findings are definitely very interesting and they can maybe be considered as a proof that many of the previous “so-called” Egyptian fakes, which were discovered around Mediterranean world, were actually genuine artefacts made in “Aegyptiaca” style during the Hellenistic or the Roman periods.

¹⁵ Hauslauer 2006, 42.

¹⁶ Hauslauer 2006, 42–43.

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