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Ancient Egyptian Figurines: An Investigation of Manufacture, Use, and Culture.

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Introduction
Ancient Egyptian society was complex and ever-changing, and it has by far left some of the most extensive and rich material remains of any culture. Figurines served a large part of this material culture, existing since before the first dynasty to long after the last. Political, religious, and ritualistic figurines all serve as major indicators to understanding the cultural climate of the Ancient Egyptians.

My particular investigation began with a figurine donated to the Virtual Curation Lab (VCL) by Professor Jonathan Waybright (Figure 1 and 2). By investigating figurines I hoped to identify and better understand the figurine donated to the lab.

Acknowledgments: Thanks to Jonathan Waybright for donating the figure, and special thanks to Kristen Eagan for painting the 3D figures.

Methods
- I started by investigating the different forms and uses of figurines in Ancient Egypt. I questioned the potential changes in uses between the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms. (Figure 4)
- After this I started focusing on religious figurines as the VCL figure was in mumiform, a trait of religious figurines. It is during this research that the figure was identified to be a Shabti Figure.
- I then continued to research manufacture techniques between the dynasties in order to establish a relative date for the figure through srtation of its artistic aspects as well as its technical manufacture.
- I also used direct research by examining the artifact itself using a digital microscope and physical examination to analyze the decorative and technical features.

Findings
Through my research I did find some answers to the questions I began with, but there is still much to be investigated. Focusing on religious figurines, there is clear changes in the types of figurines, forms of figurines, and uses of them between each of the Kingdoms.

The manufacturing of funerary figurines began as early as before the unification of Egypt when ground buchns and maniacta tombs were used, and continued to be used until after the fall of the empire (David, 2002: 59). Early figurines were usually commonware characters in an anthropomorphic form (Reiske, 2011: 397). During the Old Kingdom figurines were incorporated into religious ceremonies and funerary practices, increasing the number of human and anthropomorphic animal figurines made, many of them now having inscriptions dedicating them to the god or to the person whose tomb they were to reside (David, 2002: 71-73).

Shabti Figures, however, did not appear until the Middle Kingdom (David, 2002: 172). They were made in a variety of mediums, most popularly wood and limestone. They would be presented in a mumiform, hands presented holding objects, with inscriptions of Book Of The Dead spells (Figure 5(Hall, 1931: 11). The figurines started out as spiritual representatives given to insure the outcome of the spell they carried, but later starting in the third Intermediate period, they became representations of agricultural slaves made to serve Osiris in the afterlife (Figure 6 and 7)(David,2002: 21). As with most funerary and religious figurines, the decoration and colour choices held ritualistic significance. Shabti figurines were both painted and unpainted, but painted figurines would have colours in specific regions to signify specific connotations (Figure 1) (Dodd, 2009: 95). Many stone shabtis, including the VCL figure, were made of green stone. This could have been from a convenience standpoint or have religious significance as green is described in the Book of the Dead as the colour that breathes back life (Sagilli, 2011: 241).

Further research I would like to conduct would be to find a way to more accurately date it, either exact or relative. I would also like to continue attempting ways to enhance the hieroglyphics so that they could be translated. Most importantly, I would like to continue studying other funerary figurines and artifacts to better contextualize shabtis in the Egyptian material culture.

FCL Shabti Figure
While not much could be identified about the VCL Shabti, some preliminary conclusions could be drawn. Because the hieroglyphics are too deteriorated to be translated, it is difficult to determine whom the Shabti was dedicated to, which would have given a relative date. However, I was able to narrow down the timeframe by its artistic and technical characteristics. The shabti has a distinct wig and headdress details, which are characteristic of the third Intermediate period (Figure 9, and 10)(Hall, 1931: 12). Furthermore, the form and manufacture correlate with that of other identified shabtis from the third Intermediate period (Figure 11). Based on the relative date and the appearance of the horns, it is most likely the figure was meant to serve as an agricultural slave or farmer in the afterlife.

Further Questions
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Citations available upon request.