



VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University
VCU Scholars Compass

Undergraduate Research Posters


Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program

2017

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

Kristina B. Donnally 2455289
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/uresposters>

 Part of the [African History Commons](#), [Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons](#), [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

© The Author(s)

Downloaded from

Donnally, Kristina B. 2455289, "Ancient Egyptian Figurines: An Investigation into Manufacture, Use, and Culture." (2017).
Undergraduate Research Posters. Poster 238.
<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/uresposters/238>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Research Posters by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

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

Kristina Donnally

Virginia Commonwealth University, Anthropology

Created for ANTH 303:Archaeological methods and research design, Dr. Means

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. (Figure 1)

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.



Figure 1-Shabti figures and box from MET museum



Figure 2 and 3 -VCL Shabti figurine, VCL ID 2001

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 mummiform, 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 serration 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 burials and mastaba tombs were used, and continued to be used until after the fall of the empire (David, 2002: 59). Early figurines were usually earthenware characters in an anthropomorphic form (Relke, 2011: 397). During the Old Kingdom figurines were incorporated more 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).



Figure 5-Shabti figures from the British Museum

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 mummiform, 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 un-painted, but painted figures 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 (Sagrillo, 2011: 241).

VCL Shabti Figure

While not much could be identified about the VCL figurine, some preliminary conclusions could be drawn. Because the hieroglyphics are too deteriorated to be translated, it is difficult to determine whom the figurine 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 hoe details, which are characteristic of the third intermediate period (Figure 8,9,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 hoes, it is most likely the figure was meant to serve as an agricultural slave or farmer in the afterlife.



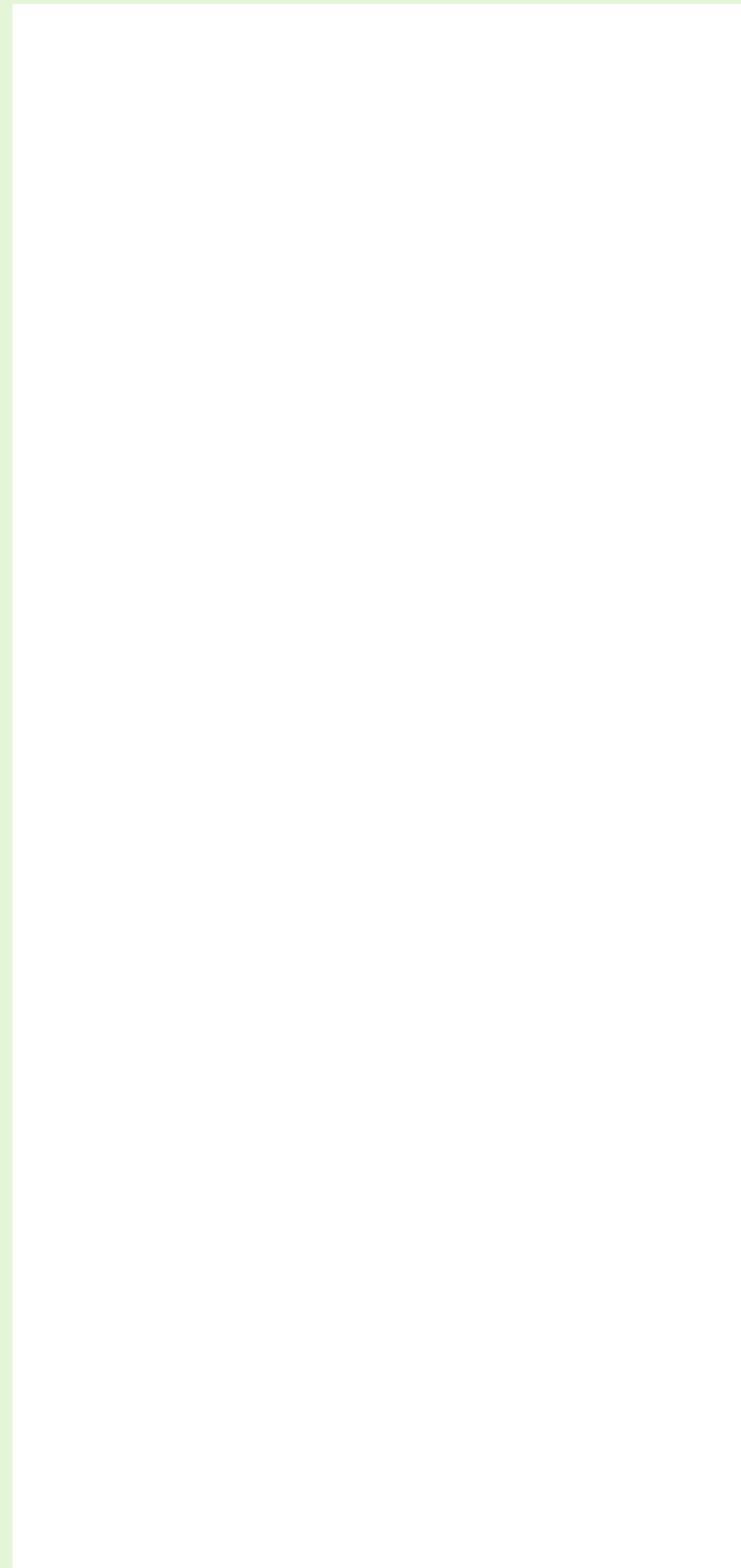
Figure 8-3rd intermediate Shabti, Carnegie Museum Figure 9-VCL figure ID 2001



Figure 10-VCL figure ID 2001



Figure 11-UNID. 3rd intermediate Shabti



3D Print of VCL Shabti figure (VCL ID 2001)



Figure 4- Various Unid. Shabtis,



Figure 6- Med-Ra-Mes Shabti, Ramm Collections.

Figure 7- Shabti figure Liverpool Museum

Further Questions

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.

Citations available upon request.

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