

# A PSEUDO-SHABTI STATUETTE DISCOVERED IN *TIBISCUM* (DACIA SUPERIOR)

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**REZUMAT:** Studiul de față dorește să aducă la cunoștință interpretarea corectă a unei statuete reprezentându-l pe Osiris, descoperită cândva înainte de 1983 în timpul lucrărilor agricole de un locuitor din satul Iaz. Ulterior a fost publicată de preotul I. Câmpănu în anul 1983 ca o redare a Isidei Patrona. Douăzeci de ani mai târziu, în 2003, S. Petrescu a republicat artefactul menționând că este vorba de o reprezentare a lui Osiris. În realitate avem de a face cu o „pseudo-ușabti”, cu redarea lui Osiris. Statuetele de tip ușabti apar în timpul Regatului Mijlociu fiind depuse în morminte în cutii de lemn, sarcofage sau sicrie. În timpul Regatului Nou ușabtiurile încep să fie puse în număr din ce în ce mai ridicat. În mod regulat numărul ușabtiurilor depuse era de 401, câte una pentru fiecare zi a anului (365) și 36 de supraveghetori (câte unul la fiecare zece muncitori). Scopul acestor servitori era să servească defunctul în cazul în

care acesta trebuia să îndeplinească unele cerințe în Lumea de Apoi. Pe ele erau de obicei gravate incantații din Cartea Morților.

În perioada greco-romană acestea de regulă nu mai sunt inscripționate și sunt produse în număr mult mai redus, mai ales în zona centrelor cultice dedicate Isidei sau lui Osiris. Această statueta reprezintă prima descoperire de acest fel făcută cu certitudine într-o așezare de pe teritoriul Daciei romane însă nu se poate afirma cu certitudine dacă a fost adusă dintr-un centru isiac puternic (ca suvenir) sau a fost produsă pe plan local, fiind o dovadă a unui cult al paredrei Isis-Osiris/ Sarapis în așezarea de la Tibiscum.

**KEYWORDS:** shabti; terracota; Osiris; Tibiscum; Egypt.

**CUVINTE-CHEIE:** shabti; terracotă; Osiris; Tibiscum; Egypt.

## ANCIENT EGYPTIAN SHABTIS (HISTORY AND USAGE)

The shabti (eg. w<sup>ab</sup>ty)<sup>1</sup> is a figure found in Egyptian tombs from the Middle Kingdom onward, very often in large numbers in wooden boxes, sarcophagi and coffins, or laid on the floor. The shabti assumes the form of a mummified person bearing various agricultural implements. During the New Kingdom, shabtis were placed in tombs in high numbers. A perfectly equipped tomb might hold 401 shabtis: 365 workers (one for each day of the year), and 36 overseers (one for every ten workers). There are three different variations of the Egyptian words for shabti. The first is shabti with unknown etymology, the second is shawabti, and by the time of the Late Period the common term was ushabti. All of these terms have their root in the Egyptian word wSb – meaning “answerer”. The shabti was intended to serve as a magical replacement should the deceased be called upon to perform tasks in the underworld.

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<sup>1</sup> About general remarks on shabties see: Steward 1995; Jones 2002.

The Egyptians believed that when they died they had to perform manual labour for Osiris, the king of the dead, the same as they did during their lives for the pharaoh, the king of the living. Common Egyptians had to do various jobs (e.g. build and clean irrigation systems, carry out agricultural tasks in the fields, etc.) for the pharaoh during floods. Members of high society always had someone else to do their work. But in the underworld every Egyptian had to work. Therefore, the main role of the shabti was to stand in for the deceased and perform labour in the land of the dead. The most common shabti tasks were filling canals with water, ploughing the fields and carrying the sand. Shabties bore a variety of inscriptions. Usually they bore name of the owner, offering incantations, dedications and spells. The most common shabti spell with agricultural references came from the Coffin Texts<sup>2</sup> which later became “*The chapter of not doing work in Khert-Neter*” from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. Shabties from the New Kingdom onward mainly bear incantations from the Book of the Dead, either in whole or in part: “*Illumine the Osiris Ani, whose word is truth. Hail, Shabti figure! If the Osiris Ani be decreed to do any of the work which is to be done in Khert-Neter, let everything which standeth in the way be removed from him – whether it be to plough the fields, or to fill the channels with water, or to carry sand from (the East to the West). The Shabti figure replieth: I will do it, verily I am here (when) thou callest.*”<sup>3</sup> The incantation sHD Wsir Hm-nTr from the New Kingdom were commonly written on them. Shabtis appeared for the first time during the late Old Kingdom or early First Intermediate Period. According to G. Mariette<sup>4</sup>, the first form of shabtis and its inscriptions appeared during the Sixth Dynasty. During that time wooden models of servants – e.g. agricultural labourers, bakers, brewers, butchers – were placed in tombs). Their purpose was to answer in the name of *ba* when the gods called the deceased to their court. During the Middle Kingdom, the *ka* was shown as the mummy. In the time of the New Kingdom, the *ka* was united with shabti which bore the name of the deceased. Shabtis were made of various materials, including alabaster, wood, clay, metal and coloured (green, blue, brown or red) faience. During the Thirteenth Dynasty, shabtis were made of calcareous stone, granite or wood. The figure’s hands crossed the breast, but without any agricultural implements, with the name and titles of the deceased inscribed. Glazed faience shabtis appeared at the beginning of the New Kingdom, and they were used until the end of Saite period. The iconography of shabtis changed during the Eighteenth Dynasty, when they began to carry various agricultural implements (e.g. hoes, mattocks and baskets). At the time of the Nineteenth Dynasty, the attire of shabtis changed, and since then shabtis usually featured the garments which the deceased wore during their lifetimes. During the reign of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, the shabti stood on a square pedestal and had a rectangular upright plinth on the back. They were usually made in moulds and painted in light blue and green pigments or they were glazed. As of the end of the Saite period, they were made with less care and had brief inscriptions. By the end of Ptolemaic period, shabtis became small and usually had no inscriptions. During the Roman Empire shabtis lost their previous usage, and they were became the symbols of the Osiris-Isis cult circle and they were commonly found all around the great Roman Empire in: *Britannia, Tangier, Belgica, Lungudensis, Aquitania, Narbonensis*, the territory around river Rhone and Seine, around *Forum Claudii* in Alps region, few pieces in the *Germania Superior, Noricum* and *Dacia*. Shabtis in numerous numbers were found in *Italia, Istria, Dalmatia, Pannonia*, the Aegean Sea and the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire.

During Pharaonic Egypt shabties along with other funerary equipment were manufactured by specialist craftsmen (sculptor, painter, scribes etc.) in various temples or palace workshops. With the decline of Ancient Egyptian religion and its funerary customs and beliefs during Graeco-Roman period shabties started to be crafted in smaller serial workshops related with cultic centres in Egypt and outside Egypt.

<sup>2</sup> De Buck 1935, Spell 472.

<sup>3</sup> Budge 1895: Chapter CLIIa.XIII.

<sup>4</sup> Mariette 1880.

With diffusion of Egyptian cults through Mediterranean and Europe such workshops often existed in Isiac cultic centres all over Roman Empire<sup>5</sup>.

**The pseudoshabti from Tibiscum** (Fig. 1 a-b, Fig. 2 a-c for details and the drawing Fig. 3).

**Discovery:** A local priest, named I. Câmpeanu first published it as a statue of Isis Patrona in 1983 adding the fact that it was discovered on the banks of the river Timiș, near to the Roman fort of *Tibiscum* and it was given to him by a local farmer from the village of Iaz who informed him that he discovered it while ploughing<sup>6</sup>. Twenty years later S. Petrescu republishes it, identifying the statuette as being a depiction of Osiris<sup>7</sup>. Also, I. Nemeti, while conducting a repertoire of the Osiris statuettes from Dacia mentions the currently researched statuette<sup>8</sup>. We are dealing here with the first shabti statuette ever found with certainty on the territory of the province Dacia. Regarding the direct connections of Tibiscum with Egypt we can state only the fact that in this settlement an anonymous female (the name is lacking due to the broken upper part of the funerary monument) was born on the banks of the river Nile and then was eventually buried in Tibiscum<sup>9</sup>.

**Provenance:** fort Tibiscum, Dacia Superior, modern Jupa, Caraș-Severin County, Romania.

**Collection:** Caransebeș Ethnography and Border Regiments County Museum, inv. no. 11791 (for the location see fig. 4).

**Height:** 21 cm

**Material:** terracotta.

**Preserved condition:**

Damaged, broken in three pieces: head with *Atef* crown, body with hieroglyphic inscription under its arms, and feet. Part of *Atef* crown is missing.

**Description:**

Mummiform. The mummified figure wears typical *Atef* crown on its head which is commonly linked with the Ancient Egyptian god Osiris. It has oval face with big ears, eyes without brows, nose, small thick lips and plain artificial beard. Unsleeved arms are crossed left over right. Implements are common for the representation of Osiris, in the left hand it holds *heqa* (eg. Hq A) scepter and in the right *flabellum*, another symbol of the royal authority.

Hieroglyphic inscription framed in ten horizontal lines underneath arms does not have any real meaning. Flat back.

**Typology:**

Shabtis usually dates from the First Intermediate period till the end of Ptolemaic dynasty. They changed their shapes, forms, texts and position of agricultural implements a lot throughout history. These changes were classified in various typologies during 20<sup>th</sup> c. (L. Speleers (1923)<sup>10</sup>, W. M. F. Petrie (1935)<sup>11</sup>, J. Monnet Saleh (1970)<sup>12</sup>, J. F. Aubert (1974)<sup>13</sup>, and H. Schneider (1977)<sup>14</sup> but chronologically only until

<sup>5</sup> About a more detailed image of the diffusion of the shabties see Bricault 2001, *passim* (for the entire empire) and for most of the Balkans and Pannonia: Monnet Saleh 1970; Selem 1971, 113–117, tab. XXVII–XXXI; Selem 1972, 5–104; Selem 1979, 79–92, tab. I–II; Tomorad 2000, 1–14; Tomorad 2004, 89–116; Tomorad 2006, 279–309, pl. 69–78; Tomorad 2011, 109–134; Tomorad 2012, 275–282.

<sup>6</sup> Câmpeanu 1983 ms. (*non vidi*).

<sup>7</sup> Petrescu 2003, 301–304.

<sup>8</sup> Nemeti 2010, 280, no. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Inscription in verses CIL III 8002= IDR III/1 174; Stănescu 2006, p. 619: [---/ quem nilotica ripa suu]m patraque notavit / [ingenioque et Ale]xandria coniuge iunxit / [quacum nil questus trigint]a pertulit annos / [iamque levis pereat van]arum fabula rerum / [permaneant modo re]c[on]gesta fama laborum.

<sup>10</sup> Speleers 1923.

<sup>11</sup> Petrie 1935.

<sup>12</sup> Saleh 1970.

<sup>13</sup> Aubert 1974.

<sup>14</sup> Schneider 1977.

the end of Late period (30<sup>th</sup> dynasty). The only typology which classify shabtis from the Ptolemaic and Roman period is made by M. Tomorad (forthcoming)<sup>15</sup>. According to this new typology shabtis from the Late period to the end of the Roman Empire are so far classified into fourteen main groups. This “Tibiscum Osiris shabti” can be classified as type N (Tomorad, forthcoming)<sup>16</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

The shabti statuette depicting Osiris, discovered in Tibiscum, Dacia Superior (modern day Jupa, Romania) is, as mentioned above, the first one of this kind ever discovered on the territory of Dacia. Unfortunately we cannot determinate with certainty was its use is, if it was related to the Isiac cults or if it was brought here as a simple souvenir from Egypt, although current research posses a fairly good image of its use in Ancient Egypt. We can only state that at least for now, no important traces (excepting an unnamed Alexandrian woman born in Egypt) can link Egypt and Tibiscum.

## ABBREVIATIONS

*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin 1863–.

*Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae*, București.

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<sup>16</sup> To be consulted Tomorad forthcoming.

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Fig. 1. a–b. Osiris shape pseudo-shabti frontal view  
(photo courtesy of the Caransebeș Ethnography and Border Regiments County Museum).





Fig. 2. a. Osiris shape pseudo-shabti side view; b. Detail of the upper part of the inscribed strip with hieroglyphic imitations; c. Detail of the lower part of the inscribed strip with hieroglyphic imitations (photo courtesy of the Caransebeș Ethnography and Border Regiments County Museum).



Fig. 3. The Shabti statuette (drawing S. Petrescu).



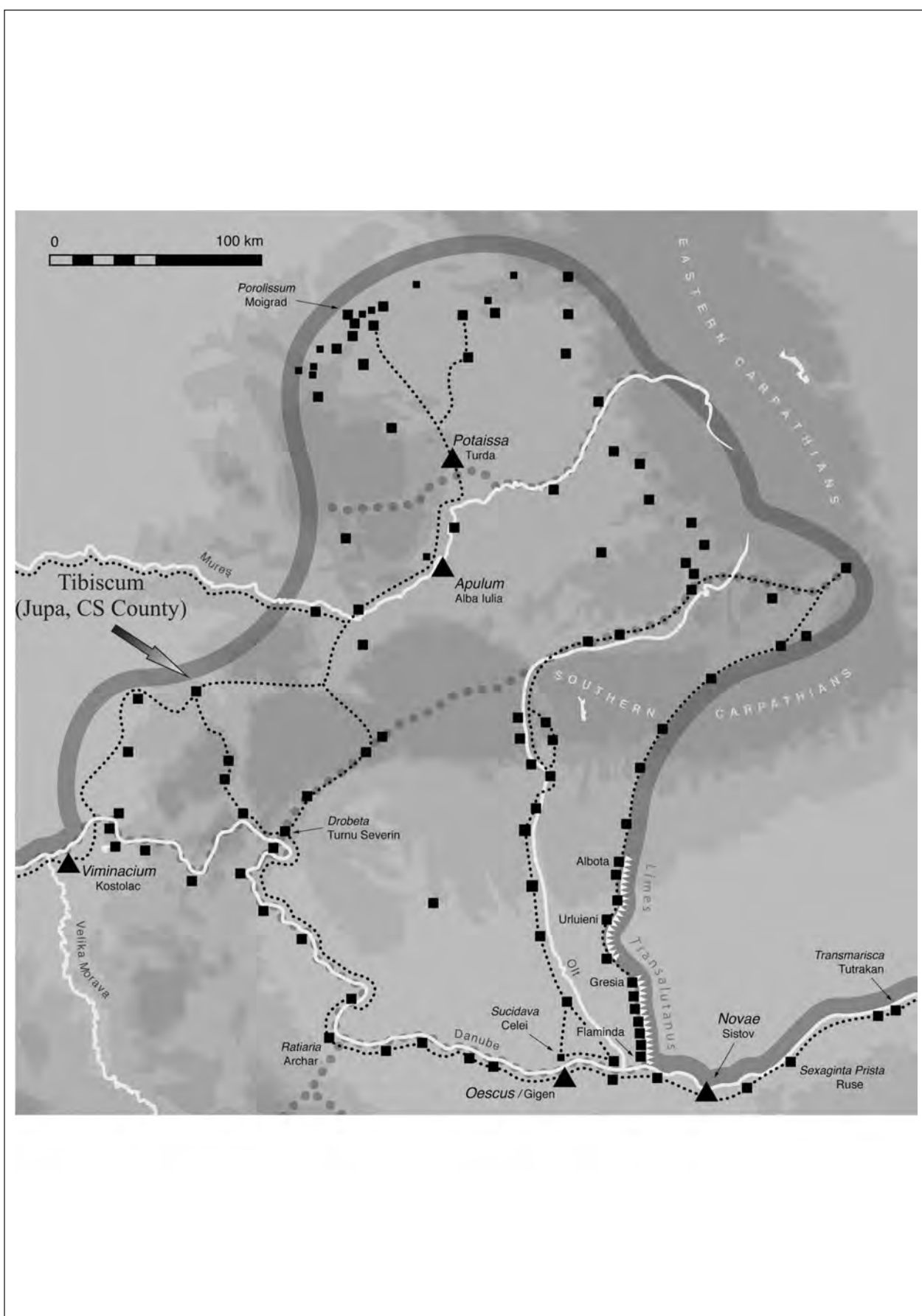


Fig. 4. The placement of Tibiscum.

(Danube Limes-UNESCO World Heritage/Pen&Sword CHC, University of Salzburg, authors: David Breeze and Kurt Schaller).