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Egyptian, Late Dynastic Period, Saite
Period, 26th Dynasty, ca. 570 – 526 B.C.,
Ushabti of Neferibresaneith

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EGYPTIAN LATE DYNASTIC PERIOD, SAITE PERIOD, 26TH DYNASTY,
ca. 570 - 526 B.C.

USHABTI OF NEFERIBRESANEITH

Green faience
19 x 15.3 cm; 7 1/2 x 2 1/8 in.

Provenance

Discovered in Saqqra in 1929;
Acquired in 1931/32 at the Musée du Caire;
Collection of Dr. Hans Eduard Fierz-David (1882-1953), Zurich;
By descent to this grandson Andreas Fierz (1945-2020), Küsnacht;
Acquired from the above.

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This exceptionally finely modelled faience ushabti was made for Neferibresaneith, an important Egyptian official who lived during the reign of Pharaoh Amasis II (Ahmose II), circa 570–526 B.C., in the closing decades of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty. Neferibresaneith belonged to the upper echelon of the Saite administration: inscriptions from his tomb identify him as a *wab*-priest, Royal Chancellor of Lower Egypt and Administrator of the Palace. His funerary monuments therefore provide a rare material record of an individual who occupied a privileged position within the religious and governmental structures of Late Period Egypt.

The present figure takes the characteristic mummiform shape of a Late Period ushabti, standing erect upon a rectangular base with the body enveloped in a close-fitting funerary shroud. The arms are crossed symmetrically across the chest and hold agricultural implements, while a seed bag is represented at the shoulder. These attributes identify the figure not simply as an image of the deceased but as his supernatural substitute: ushabtis were deposited in tombs to answer on behalf of their owner when labour was demanded in the afterlife. The implements refer specifically to the cultivation and irrigation of the fields, transforming the statuette into an eternally available member of the deceased's funerary workforce. The tradition was already ancient by the Saite Period, having developed from the Middle Kingdom onwards.

The quality of the modelling is particularly striking. Neferibresaneith wears a tripartite lappet wig, its carefully delineated strands framing an idealised face, together with the plaited false beard that became a distinctive feature of high-quality Saite ushabtis. Almond-shaped eyes, strongly defined brows, prominent ears and the gently smiling mouth produce the serene expression characteristic of the group. These features find a particularly close comparison in the celebrated ushabti of Neferibresaneith acquired by the J. Paul Getty Museum in 2016 (Fig. 1). The Getty example likewise possesses a tripartite wig, false beard, crossed agricultural implements, seed bag, rectangular base and carefully articulated facial features. The present figure is therefore not merely comparable in subject, but belongs to the same documented funerary ensemble.

Variations between surviving examples are nevertheless important. Examination of Neferibresaneith's known ushabtis has demonstrated that several moulds were employed in their manufacture. The Getty figure, for example, has a relatively square face, whereas the present ushabti displays a more elongated, delicately proportioned physiognomy. Such distinctions are consistent with the surviving corpus rather than indications of different ownership. The known statuettes are predominantly pale blue or sea-green faience and generally measure between approximately eighteen and twenty centimetres in height. Their sophisticated manufacture reflects a period in which Egyptian faience production reached an exceptional level of technical refinement. Figures were moulded in quartz-based frit and subsequently finished by hand, allowing individual facial details and hieroglyphic inscriptions to be rendered with remarkable precision.

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Across the lower body, horizontal registers of finely incised hieroglyphs invoke the ushabti's funerary purpose. Comparable figures from the group bear a version of Chapter 6 of the *Book of the Dead*, summoning the ushabti to respond when Neferibresaneith was called upon to undertake labour in the hereafter: cultivating fields, irrigating riverbanks and transporting sand. The text culminates in the figure's declaration of readiness—effectively, “Here I am”—a formula that transformed the inert statuette ritually into an active servant of the deceased. This form of the spell, together with the back pillar, rectangular base, false beard, green faience and smiling expression, is characteristic of Twenty-Sixth Dynasty ushabti production.

The remarkable importance of this group lies in its secure archaeological origin. Neferibresaneith's tomb was discovered in 1929 by Cecil Mallaby Firth south of the pyramid of King Userkaf at Saqqara. Although the burial had been robbed in antiquity, excavators recorded 336 faience ushabtis associated with the tomb. The group was subsequently dispersed, apparently through mechanisms administered by the Egyptian Antiquities Service; contemporary records confirm that examples circulated from the Cairo Museum, while the Museum's *Salle de vente*, established in 1888, remained an important official channel through which antiquities entered collections. The present ushabti's recorded Egyptian Museum provenance in the 1930s consequently gives it particular historical significance within this story of excavation and dispersal.

Combining secure archaeological association, distinguished ownership in antiquity and exceptional craftsmanship, the ushabtis of Neferibresaneith rank among the finest funerary figures of the Saite Period. The present example, with its refined modelling, carefully articulated inscription and close correspondence to the Getty Museum figure, eloquently embodies the artistic revival that characterised the last great native dynasty of pharaonic Egypt.



Fig. 1 *Ushabti of Neferibresaneith*, ca. 570–526 B.C.,
Green faience, 18.2 x 5.3 x 4 cm.
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2016.

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