These two mummiform figurines are shabtis, magical servants for the afterlife, made for the burial of Pinudjem II, High Priest of Amun at Thebes. Through much of ancient Egyptian history, burials were equipped with groups of shabtis to undertake agricultural work or other manual labor required of the deceased.

The Kelsey Museum shabtis are made of the bright blue faience typical of the early first millennium BCE. Black ink is used to delineate facial features, attributes (including headdresses, hoes, and seed bags), and inscriptions in cursive hieroglyphs. The text on both shabtis is an abbreviation of chapter 6 of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the so-called shabti spell, which describes the process of “activation” for the figures and what they will do:

\[\text{Illuminating the late High Priest of Amun, Pinudjem, true of voice. May he say: O this shabti! If the late Pinudjem is assigned any work which is to be done in the god’s domain—to make the fields grow, to irrigate the banks, to carry sand from the east to the west—you will say ‘I am here’.}\]

As is common by this period, the text is somewhat corrupted. The scribe of 1971.2.170 has also omitted the second occurrence of Pinudjem’s title and epithet “true-of-voice,” perhaps because space was an issue.

The two figures were mold-made, but not from the same mold, and it is likely that several molds would have been used for a production run. By the time these shabtis were made, it was common (for those who could afford it) to have extensive sets of shabtis: often 365 (one for each day of the year) plus additional figures to act as foremen to manage this extensive postmortem workforce.

1  Variously known as shabtis, shawabtis, ushabtis, etc.

2  For the manufacture of shabti figures, see Bovot 2003, 33–35; Schneider 1:235–236, 240–245.
These figures come from Deir el Bahri in western Thebes, from the burial of Pinudjem II, who served as High Priest of Amun in Thebes from ca. 990 to 969 BCE. He lived during the Twenty-first Dynasty, when power was shared between the Tanite kings in the north and the powerful priesthood of Amun at Thebes in the south. Upon his death around 969 BCE, Pinudjem II was succeeded as High Priest by his son Psusennes, who was responsible for the burial of his father and, however indirectly, for the commissioning of these shabti figures and other funerary equipment.

But Pinudjem II, buried in a remote western Theban tomb with other family members, did not rest in peace. His burial coincided with a long-simmering crisis relating to the robbed tombs of earlier kings and their families. Although valuables were long gone from almost all of the royal tombs in this area, the mummies and less-valuable funerary equipment survived and represented a substantial security problem. The solution was to rebury the royal mummies in mass burials in existing tombs, and the tomb of Pinudjem II was a prime candidate. The mummies and grave goods of nearly forty past kings (including Amenhotep I, Seti I, and Ramesses II) and their relatives were ultimately packed in with Pinudjem II and his family.

This reburial was a success: Pinudjem II’s crowded tomb remained undiscovered for nearly 2,800 years. Around 1870, the tomb was found by local antiquities hunters, who began selling smaller objects from the burial—objects such as the Kelsey Museum shabtis, which were purchased in Egypt around this time. The appearance of material from hitherto unknown royal burials eventually alerted authorities, who tracked down the source of the antiquities and discovered the cache in Pinudjem II’s tomb. The remaining royal mummies and funerary objects were taken to Cairo, where most of them (including Pinudjem II himself) remain to this day.

The acquisition of the Kelsey Museum shabtis was part of an effort by the Bay View Association. Just under three

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3 For Pinudjem II’s career, see Kitchen 1995, 275–278.

4 The so-called Psusennes “III,” now generally thought to have become King Psusennes II, ruling at Tanis (Kitchen 1995, xix–xxii).


6 Many other Pinudjem II shabtis appeared on the market at this time and are now widely dispersed; close parallels to the Kelsey Museum examples are Petrie Museum, University College London UC 8968 (Petrie 1935, no. 264), and Leiden 4.3.04 (Schneider 1977, 2:117–118, 3:47).
hundred Egyptian objects, including the shabtis, were purchased in Egypt by the late 1890s for exhibition in Bay View, Michigan. The objects were eventually loaned to the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, in part to allow a wider audience to see them, and in 1971 the Bay View Collection was ultimately purchased as a whole by the Kelsey Museum. These artifacts form a crucial component of the Kelsey Museum’s Pharaonic Egyptian holdings and have long been a part of Kelsey Museum displays. The opening of the new Upjohn Wing of the Kelsey Museum in fall of 2009 will feature even more of the Bay View Collection, including the two Pinudjem II shabtis, which have had such a long and complex path to Ann Arbor.

T. G. Wilfong  
Associate Curator of Graeco-Roman Egyptian Collections  
Kelsey Museum

Works Cited


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7 Thanks to Margaret Root for her unpublished account of the history of the Bay View Collection.