

January-February 1989

EGYPT IN ALBANY:

A fascinating ancient culture explored in an unexpected place

In 1909, Samuel W. Brown, an Albany businessman and museum boardmember, purchased two mummies from the Cairo Museum in Egypt for the Albany Institute of History & Art, then known as the Albany Institute and Historical & Art Society. According to the newspaper account in *The Argus* on June 13, 1909, the two mummies, an Egyptian priest and priestess, left Cairo on March 11 via the Suez Canal on the Steamship Oceana and arrived in New York City on April 22. The mummies then travelled by steamboat up the Hudson River to Albany on the People's Line and were installed on the second floor of the museum.

Since their arrival, the mummies have been a focal point of the Albany Institute's permanent exhibitions. Thousands of visitors—especially area children—have had their first introduction to Egyptian culture with these mummies and the many Egyptian artifacts in the Egyptian Room. These artifacts, ranging from utilitarian and funerary objects to papyrus and jewelry, have been generously donated to the museum by area residents over the years.



Ushabti

c. 1085-945 B.C. Blue faience
Gift of Dr. Gerhard L. Weinberg
Collection: Albany Institute of History & Art. 1988.18
Photo by Joseph Levy

Continued on page 8

Collections

Egypt in Albany

(continued from page 1)

New scholarship inspires an updated exhibition

Given the perennial popularity of the Egyptian exhibition and the significance of the artifacts, the Curatorial Department has been conducting additional research on the collection in preparation for a re-installation of the Egyptian Room. Featured in the new installation will be more detailed information on the history of the mummies, fuller descriptions of the artifacts featured in the exhibition, and more general information on Egyptian culture. The bulk of this new research has been conducted by Bethyl Mayer, an enthusiastic and dedicated student of Mediterranean archaeology from the State University of New York at Albany.

Cutting edge technology aids scholarly research

Through the efforts of Bethyl Mayer, the Curatorial staff, and Clare Weber, Educational Programs Coordinator, the mummies were transported to Albany Medical Center on November 12, 1988 where Dr. William Wagle and staff conducted front and lateral X-rays and CT scans. Three-dimensional CT scan reconstructions were recently completed by William Lorensen and Harvey Cline, senior research scientists at G.E.'s Corporate Research and Development Center in Schenectady. The increased use in recent years of these non-invasive and non-destructive research tools has yielded a wealth of scientific data regarding mummification techniques and the diseases and ills of the ancient Egyptian population.

In the case of the Albany Institute's two mummies, preliminary analysis of the results has determined the sex, approximate ages, and various insights into the mummification process. Perhaps the most interesting find was a well-crafted false toe, possibly made of a type of ceramic, carefully attached to the right foot of the female mummy. It is presumed that the toe was fashioned

for the woman during the mummification process because of the belief that one had to be physically intact to enter the afterlife. Photographs and more details on the scientific findings will also be included in the exhibition.

Gift of *Ushabti* is important addition to the Egyptian collection

A rather serendipitous event occurred recently when Dr. Gerhard L. Weinberg, donated a *ushabti*, funerary figure (shown on the cover) to the Albany Institute's Egyptian collection in memory of his parents, Max B. and Kate S. Weinberg of Albany. Dr. Weinberg, now Professor of History at the State University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, credits his great interest in Egyptology today to his visits to the museum's Egyptian Room as a child growing up in Albany.

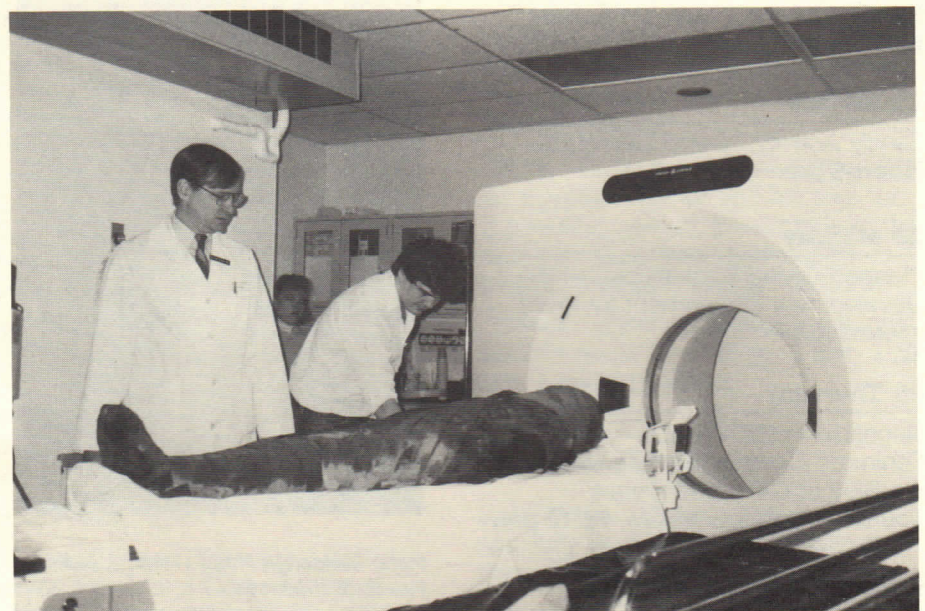
Ushabtis, also called *shawabtis* or *shabtis* depending on their age, inscriptions or a preference in some cases, are funerary figures that were placed in the tombs to perform agricultural tasks that the spirit of the deceased might be required to do in the Underworld. *Ushabti* means "answerer" and when there was work to be done, the figure was supposed to reply, "Here I am, I will do it." The most abundant *ushabti*

forms are worker *ushabtis*, who are depicted holding a hoe or adz in their hands and a seed bag or basket for moving sand on their backs.

Made of brilliant blue faience, the *ushabti* given to the Albany Institute by Dr. Weinberg is of an overseer who was placed in the tomb to supervise workers. For every ten workers there would be one overseer. This overseer carries a whip in his left hand as a symbol of authority, which distinguishes him from a worker *ushabti*.

The facial features, kilt with flaring front (the dress of daily life), and hieroglyphic signs are drawn in black. The hieroglyphs identify this *ushabti* as belonging to Ta Udjat Udjat, who is presumed to have been a priestess of Amun in Thebes during the Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 21, c. 1085-945 B.C. The two mummies in the museum's collection are from the same tomb. *Ushabtis* are an explicit reminder of the agricultural basis of ancient Egyptian culture as well as religious beliefs and funerary practices.

The re-opening of the Egyptian Room will coincide with "Egypt Day," an all-day family celebration to be held on Sunday, January 29, 1989. (see page 6)



Dr. William Wagle, Director of Magnetic Resonance Imaging and Neuroradiology, and Thomas Przybycien, former Head Technician, Magnetic Resonance Imaging, preparing mummy for CT scan.