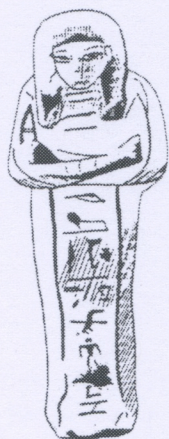
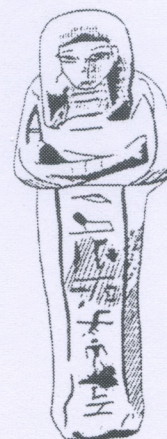


SHABTIS



Oh shabti which has been made for this [your name here],
if this [your name here] is summoned for his duty,
"I shall do it", you shall say.
If this [your name here] is counted off
for that which is to be done there,
when the new fields have to be turned over, or
to transport by boat the sand of the West
so that it will be given to the East and vice versa,
"I shall do it", you shall say for him.



Shabtis (pronounced **shabb**-tees), often called "answerer" figures, are unique to ancient Egyptian culture. Their origins stem from the belief in the necessity of food and labor in the next life and from the magical facility of art and writing to provide both (magical substitution).

Through the millennia, the "answerer" figure was called several different names – shabti, shawabti, shebti, ushabti – all of which may sound similar, but are derived from different Egyptian words.¹ The oldest name, shabti, probably derived from a foreign word meaning "wood" or "stick" and had the literal meaning of "one-made-of-a-stick." Shawabti is a later form of "shabti." During the late New Kingdom, the word "shebti," from a verb meaning to "replace" or to "substitute," was used. In the Third Intermediate Period, the word "ushabti" took precedence. Ushabti derives from a verb meaning "to answer" – hence, the designation of "answerer" figure.

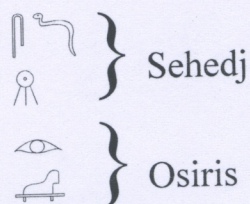
The purpose of shabtis has intrigued Egyptologists for generations. Some early Egyptologists speculated that a shabti represented the deceased himself, while others suggested that it was only a servant. It seems that its purpose, from an Egyptian point of view, included both. The shabti was the master, who needed food for nourishment in the next world and was obliged to provide it for himself. However, he wished to avoid the work associated with the task. Therefore, he used his authority as master to command a shabti to be a *substitute* for him. Thus, the shabti was also a servant who was "on call" to do the work of and for the deceased.

Shabtis made their first appearance during the Middle Kingdom (1990-1630 B.C.E.) and took the form of a crude human figure carved on a wooden stick. The "stick" shabti was rapidly superseded by the mummiform shabti, that is a shabti in the form of a mummy, with legs bound together and hands crossed over the chest. If the hands are shown, they may be empty, or hold religious symbols or tools which would be used by the deceased to do work in the afterlife. During the New Kingdom, shabtis were sometimes depicted wearing the dress of everyday life. Shabtis were made of different materials, including stone, metal and wood, but the most popular material was Egyptian faience. A man-made composite of crushed quartz with an alkali binder and mineral colorant, Egyptian faience in blue and green, the colors of regeneration, were especially appropriate for shabtis.

¹ Hans D. Schneider, *Shabtis: An Introduction to the History of Ancient Egyptian Funerary Statuettes*, Parts 1-111 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, 1977), Part I, p. 136-139.

The shabti was often inscribed with a form of the shabti spell cited above. Some shabtis had long versions of the spell. However, many shabtis were decorated with a very short variant of the shabti spell followed by the titles and name of the deceased, e.g. "Oh Sehedj, the Osiris, the priest of Amon, Djed-Khonsu." Sometimes the initial phrase (sehedj), which is not translatable, was omitted and only the titles and name of the deceased, proceeded by the "Osiris" honorific, were written. The deceased person was called an "Osiris" to indicate his or her status among the blessed dead.

From the Middle Kingdom through the New Kingdom, the number of shabtis in any tomb was small and most probably reflected the number of actual household servants the deceased had during life. However, by the early Third Intermediate Period, the quantity of shabtis increased. Ideally, the tomb owner wanted to have one shabti for each day of the year (365). Then, of course, with that many shabtis, one needed supervisors to maintain order. With one overseer shabti for every ten worker shabtis, (adding 36), the total number of shabtis rose to 401 per person. The overseer shabtis often wore the dress of everyday life and carried a baton or whip as a sign of their authority. Shabtis were sometimes stored in special wood or pottery containers, called shabti boxes. Several shabtis are on display in the *Funerary* case in the Egyptian Gallery.



Shabtis carry symbols related to necessary activities in the afterlife (such as a hoe for tilling the fields) or symbols such as the ankh (☪) sign for "life" or the djed pillar (𓪪) symbolizing endurance/stability.

Design your own shabti –

- Draw useful tools or emblems in its hands
- Write your name vertically down the center of the body
- Use the glyphs above for the shabti text and write your own name in hieroglyphs
- Create your own hairstyle
- Pick your own colors

