



Shabti

ISOBEL ALLEN 1601189

Death in Ancient Egypt

- ▶ Death occurred when the body was separated from the Ka and the Ba.
- ▶ Fortunately, that was not permanent. As when the body was reanimated by the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, where the Ka and Ba returned and helped create the Akh.
- ▶ Being reanimated means that eternal life has been achieved, meaning that now you assume the role of helping the Gods in the next life.
 - ▶ But in order to have a relaxed eternity, the deceased were buried with Shabti figures, whom would do your agricultural work.

Being Prepared for the Afterlife

- ▶ Shabti's would not be the only objects buried with the deceased.
- ▶ Funerary goods buried within tombs are the necessary items needed for life in the next world to be exactly how it was in this world.
 - ▶ Food offerings
 - ▶ Jewellery
 - ▶ Clothing
 - ▶ Furniture

What is a Shabti?

- ▶ A shabti is a mummiform figure whose original purpose was as a funerary figurine that could represent you.
- ▶ As time passed Shabti's became mass produced and lost their individuality.
- ▶ Generally made from wood, pottery and stone.
- ▶ They are inscribed with Chapter 6 of the Book of the Dead.
- ▶ Shabti → Shawabti → Ushabti [3]



Image 1



Image 2

Comparison

- ▶ First appeared in the 11th Dynasty, during the reign of Mentuhotep II[1]. Used seemingly more by higher society.
- ▶ As time goes on and religion is “democratised” use of shabti’s becomes widespread by society.
- ▶ Used well into the Late Period.
- ▶ With time the number of Shabti’s grew so that by the Third Intermediate Period (c.1069 BC) a deceased had 365 workers and 36 overseers. [4]

Shabti Formulae - Papyrus of Nu, mid Eighteenth Dynasty (BM 10477)

- ▶ i.Swbty ipn
 - ▶ ir ip.tw N r irt kAt nbt irrt im m Xrt-ntr
 - ▶ ist Hw n.f sdbw im
 - ▶ r s r Xrt.f
 - ▶ ip.tw r.k r nw nb ir.tw im.f
 - ▶ r srwd sxt r smHt wdbw
 - ▶ r Xnt sa r imnt iAbt
 - ▶ iry.i mk wi kA.k
- ▶ O shabti figure(s)
 - ▶ If N is called up to do any work that is done there in the underworld
 - ▶ Then the checkmarks (on the work list) are struck for him there
 - ▶ As for a man for his (work service) duty
 - ▶ Be counted yourself at any time that might be done
 - ▶ To cultivate the marsh, to irrigate the riverbank fields
 - ▶ To ferry sand to west or east
 - ▶ 'I am doing it – see, I am here', you are to say [2]

Conclusions

- ▶ Shabti's are an essential funerary good, if you wanted a relaxed eternity.
- ▶ The fact they are mass produced, indicates their importance, but unfortunately they lose their individuality.
- ▶ Is it possible they were made as an alternative to human sacrifice we see from early dynasties?

Image List

- ▶ Image 1:
 - ▶ Lampeter Roderic Bowen Library, Ceredigion, Wales
 - ▶ Monday, 18 March 2019 15:20
- ▶ Image 2: Image of a collection of Shabti figures.
 - ▶ Xpo Center Bruges, Mariastraat 38, 8000 Brugge, Belgium
 - ▶ Tuesday, 14 August 2018 11:50

Reference list

- ▶ [1] Ian Shaw, The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt, Oxford University Press 2003, p.170
- ▶ [2] <http://www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk/literature/religious/bd6.html>
- ▶ [3] Gahlin, L. (2011). Gods, Rites, Rituals and Religion of Ancient Egypt. Leicestershire: Anness Publishing.
- ▶ [4] Strudwick, H. (2006). The encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt. London: Amber Books Ltd.

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