

Mystery Object – Egypt 4 – Shabti



What are they?

Shabti Dolls. They are carved figures who were placed in tombs during funerals to accompany the dead to the afterlife.

What are they made from?

Shabti were made from various materials including; faience, wax, clay, wood, stone and terracotta. These ones are made from faience. Faience is a glassy material that is made from ground up quartz or sand crystals mixed with other elements. This is then moulded into any shape (a bit like you would with clay) before being heated to harden it. Wood was not a common material in Ancient Egypt as they didn't have many trees. It had to be imported so as a more expensive material than we think of it as. Wooden and stone shabti would have to be carved individually but faience shabtis could be made using a mould.

What did the Ancient Egyptians believe they could do?

Egyptians believed that the afterlife was a continuation of your earthly existence (although better as you couldn't get sick or die) and that there would be work to do in the afterlife. Shabtis were believed to come to life in the afterlife to do any work that their owner was called upon to do. Each Shabti was inscribed with a 'spell' (known as the shabti formula) which gave it a particular role or job and they are also carved to show what job they do.

Interesting facts



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We believe that these Shabti belonged to Pinudjem I, whose mummy was found in the Royal Cache in Luxor. They were probably sold to Marianne Brocklehurst and Mary Booth by the famous Abd el-Rassoul brothers in 1874. The brothers found the two caches of mummies in Luxor in the 1870s and removed items from the tomb to sell to tourists.

These Shabti have been carved carrying hoes which shows that they were expected to farm for the deceased in the afterlife.

Shabti dolls were bought from temple workshops. The more money you had the more shabti dolls you could buy and the less work you would have to do in the afterlife. For archaeologists excavating tombs the number of dolls found with a mummy gives them a lot of information as to the status and wealth of the tomb's owner. The poorest of tombs contain no shabtis but even those with a modest amount of money contain one or two. There have been tombs discovered that contain a shabti for every day of the year.