

Learning About the Ancient Egyptian Afterlife

The Anthropology Museum at the University of Winnipeg has a collection of hundreds of artefacts from ancient Egypt, Israel, and Palestine (you can learn more about them here: <https://news-centre.uwinnipeg.ca/all-posts/the-adventures-of-the-hetherington-collection/>). Many of our ancient Egyptian items come from the period known as the New Kingdom (1570-1069 BCE) and were excavated from tombs. They were used either as offerings left by the living to honour their deceased family members or for the use of the deceased themselves in the afterlife. We have several shabti figurines in our collection; the following worksheet will help you understand how the ancient Egyptians used these tiny figures.

You can find pictures of more of our objects at @uwluxproject on Instagram. If you'd like, you can share your drawings with Dr. Melissa Funke, the director of the Lux Project at the University of Winnipeg, through email (m.funke@uwinnipeg.ca), Instagram (the handle above), or Twitter (@TheLuxProject1). You can also email Dr. Funke with any questions you have, or for further questions about ancient Egypt.

Background Info: The Function of the Shabti

Shabti dolls (also known as *shawbti* and *ushabti*) were funerary figurines in ancient **Egypt** who accompanied the deceased to the afterlife. Their name is derived from the **Egyptian** *swb* for stick but also corresponds to the word for 'answer' (*wsb*) and so the shabtis were known as 'The Answerers'.

The figures, shaped as adult male or female mummies, appear in tombs early on (when they represented the deceased) and, by the time of the **New Kingdom** (1570-1069 BCE) were made of stone or wood and represented an anonymous 'worker'. Many dolls were inscribed with a 'spell' (known as the shabti formula) which specified the function of that particular figure, while others gave the name and title of their owners. Citizens at the time were obligated to devote part of their time each year to labor for the state on public works projects the **pharaoh** had decreed, like the pyramids. This labor would be assigned according to their particular skill and a shabti would usually reflect that skill (e.g. a stone worker).

Activity:

The Ancient Egyptians had a lot of beliefs concerning the afterlife. Often when someone died they were buried with items that would aid them in the next life, like games or bowls. Some of these items were beautifully made while some were simpler. Now, imagine you are going on a long journey and can only bring 2 or 3 items with you. Describe in 2-4 sentences below what those items will look like and why you have chosen them.

Now draw pictures of those items below. How would they be identified as belonging to you?:

The Afterlife:

The ancient Egyptians' attitude towards death was influenced by their belief in immortality. They regarded death as a temporary interruption, rather than the cessation of life. To ensure the continuity of life after death, people paid homage to the gods, both during and after their life on earth. When they died, they were mummified so the soul would return to the body, giving it breath and life. Household equipment and food and drink were placed on offering tables outside the tomb's burial chamber to provide for the person's needs in the underworld. Written funerary texts consisting of spells or prayers were also included to assist the dead on their way to the underworld.

To prepare the deceased for the journey to the underworld, the "opening of the mouth" ceremony was performed on the mummy and the mummy case by priests. This elaborate ritual involved purification, censuring (burning incense), anointing and incantations, as well as touching the mummy with ritual objects to restore the senses -- the ability to speak, touch, see, smell and hear.

The journey to the underworld was considered full of danger. Travelling on a solar barge (a boat carrying an image of the sun like the one depicted here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_deity#/media/File:Ra_Barque.jpg), the deceased passed through the underworld, which was inhabited by serpents armed with long knives, fire-spitting dragons and reptiles with five ravenous heads. Upon arriving in the realm of the Duat (Land of the Gods), the deceased had to pass through seven gates, reciting accurately a magic spell at each stop. If successful, they arrived at the Hall of Osiris, the place of judgement.

The gods of the dead performed the "weighing of the heart" ceremony to judge whether the person's earthly deeds were virtuous. The weighing of the heart was overseen by the jackal-headed god Anubis, and the judgement was recorded by Thoth, the god of writing. The person's heart was then placed on a scale, counterbalanced by a feather that represented Maat, the goddess of truth and justice. If the heart was equal in weight to the feather, the person was considered worthy and would gain immortality. If they were not deemed worthy, the heart was devoured by the goddess Amemet. This meant that the person would not survive in the afterlife.

The Gods of the Afterlife:

Osiris is the main god of the Afterlife, also known as God of the Dead. He is usually depicted as a mummy with a crown on his head and his hands present holding scepters. He is depicted in this manner, because in Egyptian mythology, he became the God of the Underworld after his brother Seth killed him to gain his throne. (We have several small bronze Osiris figurines in the Hetherington Collection.)

Isis is one of the goddesses of the underworld, but is also important for all aspects of Egyptian life. She is the wife to Osiris and is the one who invented the mummification process after her husband was killed.

Anubis is the jackal or canine-headed god of embalming. During embalming ceremonies, the main priest would wear a jackal mask in honor of the god. Because he was often depicted with a canine head, Egyptians would sometimes have their dogs mummified with them.

Maat is the goddess of truth, justice and balance. She is the one who will judge the dead in the final phase of their trial to cross into the afterlife. The heart is weighed against her in the form of a feather.

Ahemait is the goddess of the Underworld. She is sometimes known as the devourer. She is rumoured to lie in wait for the hearts that fail Maat's test. Scholars don't think she was worshipped formally and that it was considered unlucky to even say her name out loud because she was so frightening.

Nehebkau is the god of protection and magic. He is the protector of the pharaoh in life and the afterlife.

Activity:

1. You must pick two ancient Egyptian Gods that you would like to be painted on the walls of your pyramid/tomb (You can find a list of major gods and goddesses here: <https://www.britannica.com/list/11-egyptian-gods-and-goddesses>). Why are they significant to you? What do they stand for?

2. What types of food will you want to be placed in your pyramid/tomb?

3. In the afterlife, you will need some form of transportation. Will you have a car, boat, plane, or something else?

4. What types of technology will you bring with you to the afterlife? *You may only choose five items.* Technology can include anything from a smart phone, to your toaster.

5. Is there a sport or activity you enjoy? Would you like to include an item from that sport or activity? What would you pick?

6. If you can only bring one thing with you to the afterlife what would it be? Why?

The image below is one of the stone shabtis from the Hetherington Collection. Imagine that it will represent you. What would its face look like? What spell would you write on it? (You can use the clay shabti on the right as an example.)

