

Museum objects are irreplaceable evidence of our history and heritage and can really bring your lessons to life. Each of these downloadable resources explores one of the objects in our collection.

For even more ideas, discover our loan boxes at <http://schoolloans.readingmuseum.org.uk/> and search our amazing online database at <http://collections.readingmuseum.org.uk/>

## Ancient Egyptian Shabti



Follow this [link to online database](#) to see the object's full record

### DESCRIPTION

**Object:** Ancient Egyptian Shabti  
**Museum object number:** REDMG : 2003.176.1  
**Date:** around 1500 BC  
**Material:** Turquoise Glazed  
**Size:** length 102 mm, width 30 mm

A Shabti was a small figurine in the shape of a mummy. Mummies were people who had been skilfully **embalmed** so that their body would be preserved in the **Afterlife**. Shabtis were made from stone, wood or pottery. The oldest Shabtis were from the Middle Kingdom (2040-1750 BCE). They were placed in tombs inside special boxes or even hidden between the mummy's wrapping's.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Shabtis were buried in the tombs of the dead in Ancient Egypt. Only the **Pharaoh**, the monarch of Ancient Egypt or powerful generals, priests or craftspeople were wealthy enough to have tombs. The grandest tombs were the stone **pyramids**, but many tombs were hidden so that robbers could not find them. The Ancient Egyptians believed that people took whatever they were buried with into the afterlife with them. Shabtis were seen as servants of the person who had been mummified. Everyone in Ancient Egypt was meant to help with farming in the Afterlife, shabtis (which means ‘answerer’) did the work instead of the dead person. Some shabtis hold farming tools - hoes, picks or baskets.

Shabtis were often made to look like the person they were buried with. This shabti is in a long robe and holds a shepherd’s **crook** (staff with a hooked end) and a **flail** (stick with chains on the end) to symbolise the fertility of nature. These were the symbols of the Pharaoh. The headdress (nemes) and beard that the figure has were also signs of the pharaoh. Some shabtis were painted or carved with the name of the dead person, or even a magic spell. Spells were usually from the book of the dead, a collection of incantations to help spirits pass through the underworld. Some commanded the shabti to come to life! These were written in **hieroglyphs**, the Ancient Egyptian language made of pictures. Some mummies in the later period had over 365 shabtis, one for every day of the year and their overseers to give the shabtis orders (1 per 10 workers). **Tutankhamun**, the boy Pharaoh of Ancient Egypt, had 413 Shabtis.

## LINKS TO OTHER OBJECTS

We have collection of Ancient Egyptian artefacts that you may find useful in your lessons. These are a few examples.

- [Egyptian Mummy Mask](#)
- [Ancient Egyptian hawk figurine](#)
- [Baboon Canopic Jar](#)
- [Ancient Egyptian Jar](#)
- [Ancient Egyptian copper alloy cat](#)

See also our [Loan Boxes database](#) for related objects.

## IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES

- **What will your Shabti do for you in the Afterlife**  
Shabtis were meant to ease the life of the dead in the afterlife: children could think about what kind of jobs the shabtis would have to do for the Ancient Egyptians.
- **Design your own shabti**  
What objects will the shabti hold? What material will it be made of? Is it a shabti for a rich person?
- **Download our [Learn and Play board game on Ancient Egyptians](#)**  
During the game children will have to answer questions about the Ancient Egyptian and learn in a fun way about their gods and beliefs.