

# Ushabti: servants for the dead

Small Egyptian figurines in the form of humans are called **ushabti** [[Egypt 11](#); [Death 8, 9, 11](#)]. In ancient Egypt, hundreds of ushabti figures were buried with each mummy, to whom they were servants in the afterlife. The name *ushabti*, which means 'answerer' in Egyptian, can be found in Spell 6 in the *Book of the Dead*:

O ushabti, if the deceased is called upon to do any of the work required there in the necropolis at any time ... you shall say 'Here I am, I will do it.'

The earliest figures, dated to about 1975 bc, were made of wax. They were wrapped in linen and put into coffins, just like miniature mummies. It is thought that the figures represented the dead person, which is why they were wrapped like a mummy.



From about 1504 bc, craftsmen began to make ushabti to resemble actual servants, equipped with baskets, water pots, and agricultural tools that would help them perform tasks for their owner in the **Field of Reeds** (the afterlife). The ushabti were created from many different materials: terracotta, wood, limestone and faience. They were inscribed with either the name of their owner, or with a version of Spell 6.

Later ushabti (1075 bc – 30 bc) were often made of faience with black details.

They were also **mummiform** (in the shape of miniature mummies) just like the earliest figures. Everyone wanted to have ushabti in their tombs so they were mass-produced in moulds, but wealthier people had them made of higher quality materials.

Many wealthy people had a set of 401 ushabti buried with each mummy: one for each day of the year (365), with an overseer to manage each gang of ten workers. The wealthiest people, however, often had several sets of ushabti.

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