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Shawabtis

Richard Fazzini: The mostly mummiform figures you're looking at are called either *shabtis*, *shawabtis*, and eventually, as time went on, *ushabtis*. One of their purposes was to do agricultural work in the next world, and some of these figures are shown holding agricultural implements, including a small hoe and a basket to carry things in. They were a sort of eternal insurance policy against work after death. Since most of the objects we have left from ancient Egypt were made for the elite and the prosperous—who certainly didn't dredge canals, plough fields, or cart sand in their lifetimes—it's pretty clear that they wouldn't look forward to doing such after death and for eternity; and, so, they hit upon the idea of these little figures.

Ultimately, by the late New Kingdom and, certainly, in the first millennium B.C., you could have one *shabti* for each day of the year, and they'd be wrapped up like mummies, and that mummiform is also a symbol of the potential for new life. You would also have overseer *ushabtis*, dressed differently, and these would be the ones who would make sure all the other *ushabtis* did the work for you.