Evelyn Hayes  
Study of a Shabti of Senkamanisken from the Royal Ontario Museum  
Reflective statement

For the final assignment of the course NML340, Intermediate Middle Egyptian, students are tasked with selecting a Middle Egyptian text, translating it and providing historical and cultural comment. I selected the inscription on a replica shabti, or funerary statuette, in the collection of the hands-on Discovery Gallery at the Royal Ontario Museum where I volunteer. My goal was to transcribe the text of the replica, transliterate it into the latin alphabet and translate it into English, and finally research and provide contextual information for the artifact.

My research began with consulting my professor, Dr. Ronald Leprohon. He pointed me towards a study of other shabtis from the same time period (the Napatan period) belonging to the ROM he had conducted for the Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities. He also advised me that the texts found on shabtis are all variations of a prayer from the ancient Egyptian spell collection The Book of Going Forth by Day, also known as The Book of the Dead. He told me that information about this prayer and shabtis in general would be accessible online, using a basic Google search.

My first task was to transcribe the hieroglyphic text from the shabti so I could translate it. The replica I was working with didn’t show the inscription very clearly, which presented a significant roadblock. I hoped that a transcription of the text might have been written by a curator or scholar at the ROM, so I asked a staff member of the Discovery Gallery if one had been done. She looked up the shabti in the Discovery Gallery’s collection files and the ROM’s internal object database, The Museum System, but neither had any details on the text. I thought that perhaps another museum would have a shabti belonging to the same
man, the Nubian king Senkamanisken, which might have a similar text that perhaps they
would have a copy of. I used Google to search for one, and I did find others belonging to
Senkamanisken but none with a text similar in length to this one. I also searched the online
collections of some museums with large collections of Egyptian antiquities, including the
Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Museum and the Brooklyn Museum, but had no
success there either. In the end I transcribed the text directly from the replica myself, and
asked Dr. Leprohon to clarify words and signs that were unclear. Writing the hieroglyphic
text by hand certainly gave me a new respect for ancient scribes!

As my professor had recommended, I used Google to search for information on the shabti
prayer. I found many results, however most were from non-academic websites that didn’t cite
any sources or indicate authorship. I soon decided to conduct a boolean search. By
searching “site:.edu "shabti prayer"” I narrowed my results to University websites. I was thus
able to find a section of University College London’s website dedicated to shabtis, with text
information. I had some difficulties in searching Google and the University of Toronto
Libraries website for information because of the spelling of the word shabti - it can also be
written shawabti or ushebti. I quickly learned to try all of my search queries three times, once
with each spelling.

I also conducted some research on the names of the king written on the shabti. The shabti
has two of Senkamanisken’s names; I wished to find out what these two meant. I searched
the Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt, an online resource I could access through the
University of Toronto Libraries, for his name but found no results. I tried the same on the
University Libraries online catalogue with the same outcome. However, the Oxford
Encyclopedia did have a general article about the Kushite Kingdom, with an extensive
bibliography. I found that one of the books it cites, a handbook of the Napatan kingdom by
László Török, was available at Robarts Library using the University of Toronto Libraries Onsearch platform. It provided Senkamanisken’s full five names, along with some historical information about his dynasty. Seeing that four of them were similar to Egyptian names inspired me to look them up in another book written by my professor about Egyptian royal titulary, *The Great Name*. I found that an earlier Egyptian king had used the same first name as Senkamanisken (Sekheperenre), which I discussed as indication of Napatan use of Egyptian royal customs. Török and Leprohon both provided English translations for the names which allowed me to provide grammatical comment on their constructions.

I started my contextual information research with the description of the shabti in the ROM’s online database of their collections, eMuseum, where I used the search engine to find using its accession number. There I was able to glean basic information about the object, except what material it was made of, which was unclear. I performed a new search for “shabti” and manipulated the search to return objects from the same geographical area and time period and found a record of a similar one made for a different king. The material (serpentine) for this one was listed, which I used to infer that of Senkamanisken’s.

I wished to find the article my professor had written on the ROM’s Napatan shabtis, but I didn’t know which volume of the Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities it was in. On his recommendation, I used the online database *The Oxford Egyptological Bibliography*. Searching for “Leprohon Napatan” returned a citation for the article, which I was then able to find in the Journal at Robarts Library.

I used the University Libraries website to find other sources of historical information relevant to the artifact. Since my paper discussed the Egyptian influence on Kushite royal practices, I wanted to find sources that discussed the Kushite kingdom from both a native and an
Egyptological perspective. I was able to find both kinds of sources by modifying my Onesearch queries to exclude or only display works by topic. Onesearch was able to provide me with sources from the University of Toronto Libraries as well as one from the Near Eastern Library at the ROM.

Researching this paper was a tremendous learning opportunity for me. Through meeting and overcoming multiple challenges and trying a wide variety of research techniques I was able to synthesize historical and linguistic sources and information, which I hope will be transmitted to and enjoyed by ROM visitors in the future.