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### Research Articles and Updates

#### Teens, manga and replica shabtis

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# Teens, manga and replica shabtis

*Amanda Ford Spora*

## Abstract

The Teens, Manga and Digitally Produced Replicas Project, which brings together archaeologically charged replicas, members of the 'youth generation community' and manga cartoons, forms part of PhD research at the Institute of Archaeology. The research broadly aims to address a need for increased access and investment in understandings of heritage for teens with the use of 3D print replicas through archaeologically driven and active engagement with object-based learning, underpinned by a constructivist learning approach. This research update focuses on one part of the research, which investigates the narratives told through manga cartoons as a demonstration of the access that teen participants developed through engagement with replicas to real ancient objects and the entangled object biographies of both. Manga narratives offer an innovative way for teens to communicate about the Nile Valley funerary figurines from the Kushite kingdom of ancient Sudan which are the subject of the study.

**Keywords:** object-based learning, Kushite shabtis, teen engagement, digitally produced replicas, 3D print replicas, manga, Sudan heritage

## Introduction

In June and July 2021, thanks to a bursary from UCL Engagement (UCL Culture 2020, 3), the Teens, Manga and Digitally Produced Replicas Project was conducted using 3D print replicas of two Kushite shabtis from the royal cemetery at Nuri, Sudan (Napatan period 700–300 BCE). The focus of the project was to explore the development of narratives with these archaeologically charged replica objects using graphic novel style manga representation with teens. The project resulted in the co-creation of a manga\_zine about the shabtis, entitled *Kushite Kingdom Manga* (Ford Spora 2022). The research engages with and investigates digitally produced replica objects through object-based learning (OBL) with a foundation in archaeological methods of enquiry and focuses on the role of replicas as objects ‘in their own right’ (Foster and Jones 2019, 2). When situated centrally, replicas, with the entangled object biographies (Joy 2002; Rainbird 1999) of replica and real object are well placed to increase accessibility and facilitate understanding of ancient objects. This research update is specifically investigating the narratives told through manga cartoons as a demonstration of the accessibility teens developed through active engagement with 3D print replicas of Kushite shabtis.

Manga, a graphic novel form of representation making use of a visual narrative style, was identified in my earlier research involving teens for the potential development of narratives that are rich and compelling. It is the combination of image, text and the use of frames that synergise with cinematic-like devices to communicate and result in a ‘visually compelling medium that engages the reader in a uniquely effective manner’ (Yukinobu 2011, 7) with ‘a network of symbolic representations’ (Constantopoulou 2016). This narrative medium is popular with youth. At the same time it offers a way to tell multi-dimensional stories about objects and their entangled biographies. Accordingly, it was identified as the subject for further research. This project addresses a need to develop innovative and appealing engagement methods with what can be termed the ‘youth generational community’ (Golding and Modest 2013, 199) for accessibility to understandings of the past and as an investment as future heritage custodians.

## East London teen project

The project involved community networking in East London to establish a relationship with the Art and Design department of Harris Academy secondary school. A group of teen participants with an art and design background, aged 13–14 years, was formed. There were three workshop sessions at the school over a period of three weeks (June–July 2021), followed by a fourth plenary session for the launch of the co-created manga\_zine (December 2021). I consciously decided to use the term *manga\_zine*, to combine two separate ideas, manga and zine. It represents a collection of manga, graphic-style narratives presented in the ‘self-published’ manner of a zine or ‘cheaply made printed forms of expression ... they are like mini-magazines or home-made comic books’ (Todd and Watson 2006, 12). I deliberately chose this term for a number of reasons: (a) to ensure the focus on manga was clear; (b) to appeal to the teen’s interest in manga/anime as a narrative form (Constantopoulou 2016, 1); (c) to signpost the self-published, home-made quality of the publication without pressure that it be anything more formal or polished.

Key to this project was the prominent positioning of the replicas as objects in their own right. Investigating replicas entails knowledge of their context of creation, an important facet of the entangled biography of the replica which is combined with that of its real counterpart. It can also be manifested through reference to the network of people who come into contact with both replica and real object throughout their existence, otherwise known as the relationship network (Gosden and Marshall 1999). I consider any object that has accrued archaeological knowledge as part of its object biography as being archaeologically charged; this term is consequently also true of these replicas by virtue of being made to represent an artefact of archaeological context. Accordingly, it is the context of creation that makes replicas stand apart and, when centrally placed in engagement, offer increased access and an immersive connection with objects of the past.

The Kushite shabtis, used in the project, were purposely chosen to bring attention to the Kushite period of Sudanese heritage (700–300 BCE). It is a period relatively unknown to members of the public, as it is overshadowed by the contemporary pharaonic Egyptian history, but

which offered an interesting hook to spark interest. A conscious decision was taken to consider the objects centred from a Nubian framework, as opposed to an Egyptocentric view with which they have been interpreted in the past. Accordingly, interpretations by Howley (2018) and Balanda (2014), which consider the uniqueness of ancient Sudan shabtis with reference to appearance, style, iconography, assemblage number, tomb placement, exclusive royal use and procurement, were employed.

OBL is a pedagogical learning approach that ‘moves the learner and their own engagement with the material world centre stage to the learning process, and thus allows them to take charge of their own learning experience and the meanings they may construct from it’ (Kador et al. 2017, 61). OBL, developed from Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory, asserts that ‘learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience’ (38) and includes a cyclical process of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting in the creation of knowledge. Its introduction and influence on museum learning is via Hein’s (1995) constructivist approach, namely that it is people who construct knowledge through active participation of the mind in their learning (Hein 1998, 22), as opposed to knowledge existing as an external standard of truth (Hein 1998, 34). In practice, for constructivist experiential learning, such as OBL, active engagement for the participants is necessary. In practical terms it is ‘for learners to use both their hands and minds, to interact with the world, to manipulate it, to reach conclusions, experiment and increase their understanding; that is their ability to make generalisations about the phenomena with which they engage’ (Hein 1998, 34).

Pertinent also to the methodological underpinnings of the research design is the co-creation approach that was employed. Co-creation is ‘creating an output together’ (Bunning et al. 2015, 8). I prefer to define my approach more precisely as co-creation with ‘citizens as co-designer’ (Voorberg et al. 2014, 17), which includes participant involvement in content and process with the facilitator initiating the subject. I initiated the idea of a manga\_zine on the basis of my earlier research, which included short manga from teens who chose this genre of expression. To support the co-creation approach there needs to be shared authority, with a renegotiation of roles that supports participants and their willingness to participate, and a generation of value and benefit

for participants that improves their access to social capital (Bunning et al. 2015, 8; Voorberg et al. 2014, 13; Flinn and Sexton 2018, 626).

The research design included workshop sessions for participants with the opportunity to investigate the archaeologically charged replicas with OBL (Kador et al. 2017). The focus was on active engagement, allowing participants to engage with the objects first hand. A shared authority was also key to generate a co-creative atmosphere. Working with the facilitator, who is not an expert in archaeology but has expertise in art and design, enabled the participants to be supported in the artistic work. Initially my role, however, was observational; in later workshops it became more that of a consultant with whom participants could refer for archaeological detail, similar to a consultant on a film set to whom production refer, for example, and as such it was well received by participants. All the above structure was designed to support the participants in their own investigations, enabling them to renegotiate roles as they became confident in their own knowledge and skills about the shabtis. Representations created by teen contemporaries working previously with the replicas were also employed, again seeking to generate the atmosphere of shared authority.

Accordingly, the OBL sessions included active engagement that included handling 3D print physical replicas, as well as engaging with virtual 3D models on Sketchfab (a supplementary method introduced in response to Covid-19 handling restrictions). Sketching the replicas was another element aimed at fostering immersive attention (Roberts 2013, 40), encouraging participants to look closely at the objects and to consider them in detail. Archaeological interpretive resources were available too, including charts (Dunham 1955), maps, photographs, notebooks and illustrations. These representations are drawn from archaeologically driven methods of enquiry that consider context, typology, style and use of the objects. The reason for this focus was to allow participants both to uncover the archaeologically driven biography of the objects and to connect with the modern scholarship interpretation of Balanda (2014) and Howley (2018) referred to above, particularly in reference to the uniqueness of Sudanese shabtis.

Working in four groups, the teen artists developed one manga cartoon per group. This included decisions about storyline, frame layout, the creation of images and text. Each group created a draft and



**Figure 1** Manga\_zine cover page with QR code (Source: Ford Spora 2022, 1, taken from UCL IoA, 2021)

completed design. The participants were supported by Taylor Smith, the art and design facilitator. They had autonomy regarding their choice of narrative from their investigations with the archaeologically charged replica shabti and other resources. However, they did consult with the researcher to discuss matters of archaeological accuracy in representation. After the workshop sessions the designer and researcher consulted on the final design of the manga\_zine. A physical edition of the comic book was printed (Figure 1) and a digital electronic flip book, accessible from the QR code, produced.

The plenary session and launch of the manga\_zine offered a beneficial opportunity to broaden the participants' experience of – and consolidate access to – social and cultural capital that developed throughout the project. It took place in December 2021 for the teen participants and their teachers and was held at the Petrie Museum UCL.

This session included a display in the museum of digitally produced replicas, real shabtis from Sudan and the manga\_zine.

Participants saw their manga on display at the university museum and also received copies of the manga\_zine, postcards of their manga and digital access to the comic book. They completed post-workshop interviews and received congratulatory messages from the curators of the Petrie and Manchester Museums and the project team. Participants reported that they intended to include the manga\_zine in their GCSE design portfolio. They also visited the museum galleries and received an introduction to the UCL campus, experiences which I know from my work with the Brilliant Club assist in making connections for future learning through higher education. Participants stated that they did not know about UCL prior to the project and had never visited the museum or campus before. Many participants also said they did not have family members who had studied at university. The feedback from the staff who attended with the participants was full of praise for their involvement, and for the improved access to social capital afforded to their students.

The plenary additionally offered the opportunity for the participants to engage with both digitally produced replica and original shabtis from Sudan. This is a unique opportunity, valuable for allowing consideration of replica and real together. The participants saw these objects behind glass, side by side; they were, of course, very familiar with the 3D print replicas, having handled them and worked with them intensively during the workshops. Their insights about replica and real objects will be included within the completed research from their plenary interviews.

## **Manga\_zine discussion**

The manga\_zine (Ford Spora 2022) includes four separate manga. In traditional manga style it is read from right to left, with the book opening towards the right. The comic book was produced bilingually in Arabic and English. The manga reading direction, which is the same as Arabic, resulted in a stacked style, allowing Arabic and English languages to appear on the same page. Raising awareness of modern



Sudan as an Arabic-speaking country for the current participants was part of the project. Also, as a bilingual resource, accessibility for Arabic speakers is possible, giving rise to an opportunity of future projects with Sudanese teens.

The titles of the individual manga stories in the manga\_zine are as follows:

1. Madiken, The Story of Her Life (pp. 4–12)
2. Journey Through the Tomb of Senkamanisken (pp. 12–16)
3. The Replica Shabtis Return (pp. 17–20)
4. Madiken Kushite Queen: A documentary special (pp. 21–26)

There are also two short manga within the comic book that were created by teens during the earlier phase of research. It was during this phase that the interest in using manga as a rich narrative form of representation was identified, leading to the development of this current project. These two short manga are in a raw state compared to the main manga, which had the assistance of Taylor as art and design facilitator in workshops and in preparing designs for printing. There was also the addition of Arabic language translation from our colleague Osman Khaleel in Sudan.

The cartoons were analysed by the researcher with Labovian narrative analysis. This includes analysing the individual manga narratives with the following criteria:

- a) abstract: short statement of what the story is about
- b) orientation: who, when and where are involved in the story
- c) complication: plot turning point, complicating action
- d) evaluation: narrator's commentary
- e) resolution: outcome of the story
- f) coda: the conclusion that brings it to the present moment (Denzin 2000, xi; Labov and Waletzky 1997, 3–38; Roulston 2014, 300; Sahlstein Parcell and Baker 2018, 1070).

Additionally, due to the graphic narrative style of manga, a rubric of manga components (Toku 2001), including images, text, frames and cinematic devices, was also used within the analysis to consider the way in which the narrative is produced by the manga style. Finally, replica use and inclusion of archaeological information were also considered because of the use of archeologically charged replicas within

this research. These analyses enabled the extrapolation of narrative themes and subthemes across the individual manga, which in turn can be compared with the participants' interviews and journals about their manga creation.

The summary of narrative themes (Table 1) that were considered as part of these analyses for the four individual manga (indicated by the corresponding number in the above list) are shown below.

Accessibility to the Kushite shabtis object biography for the participants, via the 3D print replicas, is evident from the narratives they created and the narrative themes employed. The cartoons used typological terminology pertaining to shabtis; they also employed the use of hieroglyphic inscriptions from the shabtis in the form of royal cartouches and used the transliterated name of the queen and king. The narratives employed the use of appropriate contextual settings and included characters within the relationship network from all parts of the object biography, among them a variety of people such as researchers, archaeologists, Queen Madiken and King Senkamanisken. The above

**Table 1** Narrative theme breakdown for manga narratives (Source: Author 2022)

<b>Narrative theme</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Corresponding manga_zine number</b>
Replicas seen in their own right	For research	4
	For repatriation	3
	Accuracy to the real object	3
	The making process	3, 4
Sudanese shabtis	Uniqueness of style	4
	Tomb placement	3, 4
	Assemblage number	4
	Pyramids as find sites	1, 2, 3, 4
	Queen shabtis	1, 4
	Hieroglyphic inscription cartouche	1, 2, 3
The purpose of archaeology	Remembering the past	1
Burial site	Concerns with disturbance	2, 3

*Note:* numbers 1 to 4 correspond with manga\_zine.

observations must be backgrounded by the fact that the teen artists did not see the real objects during the creation of the cartoons; they are thus testament to the accessibility of the entangled biographies of replica and real object.

I will now focus on an individual manga, 'Madiken Kushite Queen: A documentary special' (Ford Spora 2022, 21–6), to discuss in more depth the network of symbolic representation that indicates the accessibility of an understanding of these objects. This manga employs several themes as part of its narrative, as can be seen from the corresponding manga number 4 (Table 1). The richness of the narrative is created by framing it as a documentary presented by Queen Madiken in the first person – a familiar format borrowed from cinema that the audience understands. The stylised presentation of Madiken, drawn directly from working with the replica shabti, features the distinctive, vulture headdress of iconographic Egyptian descent, while uniquely adopted by Kushite queen shabtis (Howley 2018, 21); this in turn connects with a Nubian-centred framework of interpretation of these objects. At the same time a range of figural images of Madiken employ stylised cartoon forms, differentiating her in person, on camera, as a replica and as a real shabti. In doing so this reveals the impact of the investigations and familiarity with the objects.

One sequence (Figure 2) illustrates the Sudanese shabtis narrative themes with subthemes, including uniqueness of style, tomb placement, assemblage number and queen shabtis. The sequence outlines the style and paraphernalia of this Kushite Queen shabti, drawn with the replica shabti, harking back to the typological charts of the excavation report publisher, Dows Dunham (1955, Figure 199). It features technical language and explanation of type, which the teen artists contextually understood and were obviously confident to use. Furthermore, they also include their own version of an excerpt from an excavation notebook (Figure 2) that outlines how shabtis were arranged in the tomb. All of this also shows the participants' knowledge of a Nubian-centred framework of interpretation of the shabtis from modern scholarship.

Finally, this narrative presents the replica in its own right. In outlining its creation process as an object of research with teens about Kushite shabtis, this effectively places the teen artists within the relationship network of the object biography. Clearly they identified the

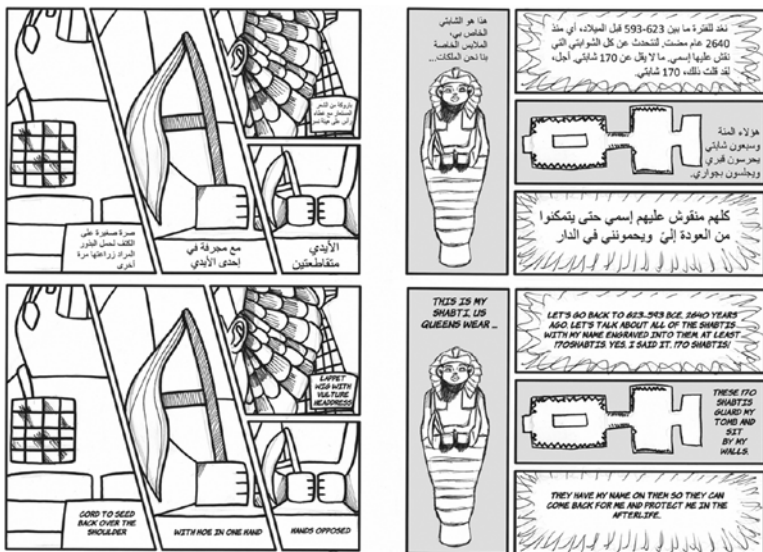


Figure 2 Extract from 'Madiken Kushite Queen: A documentary special' (Source: Ford Spora 2022, 23–4)

way in which the replica was employed to give access to the real object and their entangled biographies. As the teen artists, at the plenary session, explained: 'Our manga communicates what we learnt through the shabtis. It shows what people like us, the younger generation, can see and infer from the shabti itself' (from a recorded interview at the Petrie Museum UCL, 8 December 2021). In this way, the teen artists display both their developed knowledge and an understanding of the intention that their manga communicates with others. Both serve to display the accessibility that participants gained to these objects of Sudanese heritage.

As a visual narrative style, the manga\_zine combines textual and visual detail of the replica shabtis and stories from within the object biography and people within the relationship network. The comic book's approach is not didactic (Hein 1998, 25), in the way that traditional museum labels promote the transmission of an agreed standard of truth with a top-down voice of authority and one-way transmission. Rather, the manga employs a network of symbolic representations to

create a complex narrative that is engaging, encourages enquiry and communicates innovatively from teens. It was a format that the teen artists with no prior knowledge of Sudan or funerary figurines confidently employed to present stories about Kushite shabtis through engagement with archaeologically charged replica shabtis.

As well as the comic book, which is evidence of their knowledge of the ancient objects, participants displayed recall about the subject five months after the workshops during interviews at the plenary session at the Petrie Museum, indicating the experiential learning that took place. It must be emphasised that it was the replicas, centrally placed, which were the objects of engagement and upon which these members of the youth generational community created rich narratives. Furthermore, it was the active engagement of OBL with the 3D print replicas that increased accessibility to this aspect of Sudanese heritage for members of the youth generational community at East London, facilitating co-creation of a resource to communicate, in turn, with their peers.

## Future work

Moving forward, this work will progress in three directions. First, a complete analysis of the manga\_zine project as part of the overall PhD research will be undertaken. This will make recommendations about the use of digitally produced replicas and approaches to innovative methods of addressing the needs of the youth generational community's accessibility to, and investment in, understandings of heritage. Second, there will be further development of the use of digitally produced replicas and manga-style representation with the Manga\_zine, especially as a resource for discussion of heritage with a broader audience of youth. I developed a course with the Brilliant Club entitled Ancient Nile Valley Funerary Figurines: Making Meaning Today, which was delivered in Summer 2022; a second delivery took place in Autumn 2022 and a third is planned for Spring 2023. Third, investigation of the use of manga with the Sudanese youth community will be investigated as a method for accessibility to achieve understanding of the past and communication about heritage.

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

The author declares that research ethics approval for this article was provided by the UCL ethics board (Project id: 12235/001).

### Consent for publication statement

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

### Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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