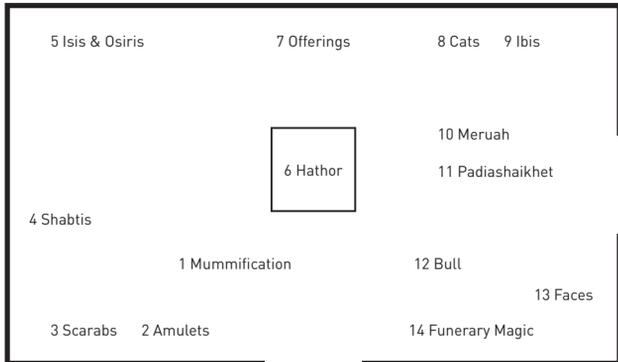


Death in Ancient Egypt was a magical experience. There were gods to judge and guide you, amulets and spells to protect you, mummification to preserve you, even shabtis to do your work for you in an idyllic afterlife.

DEATH MAGIC

Exhibition

The exhibition Death Magic is curated by Michael Turner, designed by Loose And, and made possible through the generous support of the Friends of the Nicholson Museum.



1 Mummification

Mummy of a boy named Horus. AD 100–200. From Thebes. NMR.26.1. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Embalmed head of a bearded man. NMR.32. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Obsidian blade. NM35.17.7. Donated by the British Museum, 1935.

Preserved human brain. On loan from the Pathology Museum, the University of Sydney.

Replica of an Egyptian brain hook.

‘Embalming is performed by specialists. Their first step is to insert an iron hook through the nostrils and pull out the brain. Next, using an Ethiopian knife of sharp obsidian, the embalmers cut a slit along the soft part of the body, and remove all the intestines. After this, they stuff the cavity with sweet-smelling spices. Once the stomach has been filled, they sew it back up and pickle the body by packing it in natron [a salt mixture]. It is then left, for seventy days, after which the embalmers wash the corpse, then wrap it in bandages made from fine linen. This is the most expensive method of preparing a corpse.’

Herodotus, *The Histories*, ii 86. 5th century BC

2 Amulets

Green faience amulet of the god Bes. NM62.606.1. Acquired before 1962.

Green faience amulet of a djed pillar. NM62.606.17. Acquired before 1962.

Inlaid faience amuletic disks depicting daisies. 1184–1153 BC. From Palace of Ramses III, Tell el- Yahudiyeh. NM62.607.1 and NM62.607.3. Donated by the Egyptian Exploration Fund before 1962.

Green and blue faience amulet of a thistle. 1550–1295 BC. From Tell el-Amarna. Donated by the Egyptian Exploration Fund before 1962.

White faience amulet of a bull. NM62.947.3. Acquired before 1962.

Blue faience amulet of a lotus plant. NM64.314. Acquired before 1964.

Green faience amulet of a snake. NM64.472.2. Acquired before 1964.

Red stone amulet of Isis nursing Horus. NM68.23. Donated by Beatrice McPhillamy, 1968.

Ivory amulet of a feather.

NM71.51. Donated through the estate of Ralph Stanley Sennitt, 1971.

Carnelian amulet of a *wedjat* eye. Possibly 30BC – AD 400. NM75.97. Purchased 1975.

Lapis lazuli amulet of a fly. 3100–2700 BC. NM80.54. Donated by Pauline Nohel, 1980.

Lapis lazuli amulet of a frog. 3100–2700 BC. NM80.55. Donated by Pauline Nohel, 1980.

Carnelian amulet of a duck. 3100–2700 BC. NM80.56. Donated by Pauline Nohel, 1980.

White shell amulet of a frog. 3100–2700 BC. NM80.58. Donated by Pauline Nohel, 1980.

Dark blue amuletic finger-ring with bezel in from of a cat or dog. NMR.162.1. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Blue faience amuletic finger-ring with bezel in form of a scarab. NMR.162.2. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Basalt amulet of a heart.

NMR.186.2. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Blue-green faience amulet of the goddess Bastet. NMR.201. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

White and black ceramic amulet of a *wedjat* eye. NMR.231. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Blue-green faience amulet of the god Thoth. NMR.328.1. Donated by Pauline Nohel, 1980.

Blue faience amulet of Horus the younger. NMR.332.1. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Red stone amulet of a trussed ox. NMR.333. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Haematite amulet of a carpenter’s square. NMR.340. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Black stone amulet of a head rest. NMR.414. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

An amulet is any object believed to protect its wearer, living or dead, from harm. They may depict many things: gods, animals, birds, plants, everyday or sacred objects, parts of the body, and hieroglyphs.

They were made usually of faience or semi-precious stones, as well as from rock, glass, shell, bone, ivory, and metal.

The best-known amulets are the scarab and the *wedjat* eye, the restored Eye of Horus, associated with healing and the afterlife. One of the largest amulets was the *djed* pillar, representing the spine of Osiris, a symbol of stability and, in the funerary context, resurrection and eternal life.

3 Scarabs

Scarab amulet. 750–330 BC. Found at the ‘Scarab House’, Naukratis during excavations in 1885. NM00.128.1. Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1900.

Lapis lazuli scarab amulet. 30 BC – AD 400. Found at Hu, Diospolis Parva during Sir Flinders Petrie’s excavations in 1898–99. NM00.209.1. Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1900.

Faience scarab amulet. 30 BC – AD 400. Found at Hu, Diospolis Parva during Sir Flinders Petrie’s excavations in 1898–99. NM00.209.2. Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1900.

Carnelian scarab amulet. 1550–1295 BC. Found in Tomb D114, Abydos during excavations in 1912–13. NM13.9. Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1913.

Steatite scarab amulets. 1550–1295 BC. Found in Tomb D114, Abydos during excavations in 1912–13. NM13.11.2. and NM13.11.3. Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1913.

Faience scarab amulet. 945–715 BC. Found in Tomb 1808, Abydos during excavations in 1925. NM25.4.1. Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1925.

Carnelian scarab amulet. 2000–1400 BC. Found at Tell el-Ajjul, Gaza during Sir Flinders Petrie’s excavations 1930–34. NM50.343. Purchased 1950.

Jasper scarab amulet. 2000–1400 BC. Found at Tell el-Ajjul, Gaza during Sir Flinders Petrie’s excavations 1930–34. NM50.344. Purchased 1950.

White stone scarab amulet. 2000–1400 BC. Found at Tell el-Ajjul, Gaza during Sir Flinders Petrie’s excavations 1930–34. NM50.367. Purchased 1950.

Blue frit scarab amulet. 2000–1400 BC. Found at Tell el-Ajjul, Gaza during Sir Flinders Petrie’s excavations 1930–34. NM50.373. Purchased 1950.

Blue faience scarab amulet. NM62.596. Acquired before 1962.

Black stone scarab amulet. NM64.580.5. Acquired before 1964.

Blue faience scarab amulet. NM64.600. Acquired before 1964.

Blue faience scarab amulet. NM64.605. Acquired before 1964.

Amethyst scarab amulet. NM64.611. Acquired before 1964.

Blue faience scarab amulet. NM68.20. Donated by Beatrice McPhillamy, 1968.

Steatite scarab amulet of Tuthmosis III. 1479–1425 BC. NM68.21. Donated by Beatrice McPhillamy, 1968.

Steatite scarab amulet. 1550–1069 BC. NM84.89. Donated by Mrs Elwyn M Andrews and Miss Elizabeth C Bootle in memory of their great-uncle Sir Grafton Elliot Smith, 1984.

Faience scarab amulet. NMR.140. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Black stone scarab amulet. NMR.141. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Green stone scarab amulet. NMR.142. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Blue glazed steatite scarab amulet of Ramesses III. 1186–1155 BC. NMR.1176. Donated before 1870.

Egyptian scarab beetles, male and female specimen. Collected by George Macleay in Egypt in the early 1800s. NMR.1160.1. and NMR.1160.2. Donated by William Sharp Macleay before 1870.

Other scarab beetle specimens. On loan from the Macleay Museum, the University of Sydney.

Each day, the sun god, Ra, rises in the morning and rolls across the sky, before disappearing down into the earth as night falls, to bring light to the underworld.

Each day, the scarab beetle emerges from its hole in the ground to gather dung, form it into a ball, and roll it across the earth, before disappearing with it back down into the hole. In this ball of dung, it lays its eggs.

The Egyptians saw the movement of the ball of dung across the earth as mirroring the movement of the sun across the sky, and they believed that out of each came new life.

Ra, as the rising sun, bringer of new life, appears in funerary art as the scarab, Khepri. He sits prominently on top of the head of the coffin of the priest Padiashaikhet and on the front of the coffin of Meruah (both on display).

Before the introduction of scarab amulets in about 2300 BC, real scarab beetles were buried in jars with the deceased.

4 Shabtis

Faience shabtis of Ankh-ef-pet. 525–400 BC. Found in the tomb of the Persina Period, Hibeh, 1902–03. NM03.17.1 and NM03.17.3. Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1903.

Faience shabti of an unknown female owner. 1000–30 BC. NMR.309.1. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Faience shabti without inscription. 750–330 BC. NMR312.5. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Shabtis were symbolic figures who undertook the menial tasks expected of the deceased in the afterlife, where existence was supposed to be eternal and leisurely.

‘Oh shabti, who has been given to me, if my name is called or if I am detailed to do any work which has to be done in the realm of the dead ... you shall act for me on every occasion, be it cultivating the fields, irrigating the land, or carrying sand from east to west; ‘Here I am’, you shall say.’

Spell 6 from *The Book of the Dead*, a collection of magical spells intended to help the deceased on their journey to the afterlife.

5 Osiris and Isis

Bronze bust of Isis. 30 BC–AD 300. From Hu (Diospolis Parva). Collected during Sir Flinders Petrie’s excavations 1898–99. NM00.135.1 Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1900.

Bronze bust of Isis. 30 BC–AD 300. From Hu (Diospolis Parva). Collected during Sir Flinders Petrie’s excavations 1898–99. NM00.135.2. Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1900.

Bronze figurine of Isis nursing Horus. 750–330 BC. NMR.307. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Bronze figurine of Isis nursing Horus. 750–330 BC. NM66.703.

Bronze figurine of Osiris. 700–500 BC. From Abydos. NM25.42.1. Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1925.

Bronze figurine of Osiris. 700–500 BC. NM2009.174.

Bronze figurine of Osiris. 700–330 BC. NMR.146. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

Stone figurine of Osiris. NM68.43. Donated by Beatrice McPhillamy, 1968.

‘The Egyptians say that Osiris and Isis are the rulers of the underworld.’

Herodotus, *The Histories* ii 123. 5th century BC

The story of the god Osiris, of his wife (and sister) Isis, and of their son Horus, is one of the most elaborate and fundamental of all Egyptian myths, and of it there are many versions.

Osiris, the ruler of Egypt, was murdered by his jealous brother, Set, the god of violence and chaos. His body was either thrown into the Nile or cut into pieces and scattered across Egypt. It was recovered and preserved by Isis and her sister Nephthys, who restored Osiris to an ‘afterlife’ in the Underworld where he became its ruler. This is the premise for mummification.

Horus, the son of Isis and Osiris, finally defeated Set, bringing peace and stable Dynastic succession to Egypt. In the battle, Horus lost his left eye, torn out by Set. It was found and returned by the goddess Hathor.

Horus gave the eye to Osiris, hoping that it would bring his father back to full life. It didn’t, but this, the so-called *wedjat* eye, became one of the most powerful of all magical amulets, symbolising sacrifice, protection, healing, and most importantly the restoration of the body in the afterlife.

The bronze and stone figurines on display represent Osiris, Isis and Horus as a child.

Isis

Diorite torso fragment of Isis. Circa 1320 BC. From the Karnak temple complex, Thebes. NMR.40. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860.

The head belonging to this broken torso is in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and identifies the statue as the goddess Isis. Broken in antiquity and separated, the torso was acquired in Thebes in or before 1856, while the head was found in 1900 in archaeological excavations at the temple complex of Karnak at Thebes.

The statue was made during the reign of Tutankhamun in about 1320 BC, immediately following the iconoclastic reign of Akhenaten. It has been suggested that it may have come from the mortuary temple of Tutankhamun, which was destroyed by Horemheb.

Osiris

Basalt naophoros statue. Circa 600 BC, NMR.1139. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860.

The kneeling man holds a shrine as an offering. Inside the shrine is the figure of the god Osiris. Osiris appears again, together with his sisters, Isis and Nephthys, scratched on the chest of the kneeling man. By making this offering, the man is expecting to share in the generosity and good fortune of the god.

An inscription on his back identifies the man as Pa-ef-thau-auwy-en-neith, son of Hor-hetep. The statue dates to about 600 BC.

6 Hathor

Red granite column capital. 900 BC. From the Temple of Bastet, Bubastis. Excavated by Henri Naville on behalf of the Egypt Exploration Fund in 1887. NM2004.557. Donated by the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1889.

The face, which appears on both the front and back, is of the cow-eared Hathor, the dangerous yet protective goddess associated with female sexuality, love and motherhood.

Hathor was also the Mistress of the West, the desert land of the setting sun, who welcomed the dead into the afterlife. She can be seen as a cow, at the edge of the desert, on the mummy coffin of Meruah (also on display).

On one side of the capital are two cartouches of the Pharaoh Osorkon II, who ruled Egypt from the Delta between 872 and 837 BC.

In about 450 BC, the Greek traveller Herodotus visited the sanctuary of Bastet, describing it as:

‘... truly remarkable. Other sanctuaries may be larger, or have cost more to build, but none is more beautiful.’

^{Herodotus}, *The Histories*, ii 137–38. 5th century BC

The offering of food and drink, either to the gods or to the deceased, is a common theme on funerary memorials.

On two stone and one wooden memorial, and on a fragment of a mummy coffin, the deceased offer food and drink to the gods. The gods are Osiris, Horus and his sons, and Re-Horakhty, a composite of Horus and Re, recognisable as a hawk-headed man with a red sun disk on his head.

On the relief limestone memorial, the deceased, named as Nebmose, sits holding a lotus, or water lily. The flower, which appears on two other memorials on display, symbolises new life and re-generation.

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This red granite column capital is from the entrance hall to the temple of the cat goddess, Bastet, at Bubastis, a once important town in the Nile Delta. It was carved in the 9th century BC.

The face, which appears on both the front and back, is of the cow-eared Hathor, the dangerous yet protective goddess associated with female sexuality, love and motherhood.

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Hundreds of thousands of mummified ibises, sealed inside distinctive terracotta cones (such as this on display), have been recovered from the catacombs at Tuna el-Gebel, and from tombs at the site of Saqqara.

‘If someone kills an ibis or a hawk there is no alternative but to put the offender to death.’

^{Herodotus}, *The Histories*, ii 65. 5th century BC

The hieroglyphs on this coffin identify the deceased as a woman named Meruah, who lived and died in Thebes (modern Luxor) in about 1000 BC.

She is called Mistress of the House, Chantress of Amun Ra (the father god), and Adorant in the Precinct of Mut (the mother goddess, wife of Amun) at Isheru.

Mistress of the House indicates that Meruah had a degree of social status, and so was worthy to be a Chantress of Amun Ra, a title given to women who sang, chanted and played percussion instruments such as drums and sistra (rattles) associated with the cult of Amun.

Over two hundred women are known to have held the title Chantress of Amun Ra over this period, more that at any other time.

The Precinct of Mut at Isheru was one of the four temple precincts at Thebes that made up the enormous Karnak Temple complex.

11 The mummy coffin of Padiashaikhet

Coffin of Padiashaikhet. 725–700 BC. From Thebes. NMR.28. Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, 1860.

The hieroglyphs on the coffin identify the deceased as a priest named Padiashaikhet, who lived and died in Thebes (modern Luxor) in about 700 BC.

The quality of the coffin and its decoration indicate a man of high status. On the back is the Goddess of the West, identified by the hieroglyphic symbol for ‘West’ on top of her head. Her wings hang down behind her arms ready to envelop and embrace Padiashaikhet.

In the wonderful and complex world of the gods, the role of the Goddess of the West was fulfilled as well by Nut and by Hathor, whose face can be seen on two sides of the large granite column capital (on display).

‘The head of a sacrificed bull is cut off, loaded with curses, and thrown into the river. The curses directed at the head take the form of a prayer:

May we, who have made this sacrifice, and all of Egypt with us, be spared any evil that threatens – and may it fall instead upon this head!’

^{Herodotus}, *The Histories*, ii 39. 5th century BC

Faces, the windows of the soul, from coffins, mummy masks, sculpture and painting.

‘Anubis speaks, the embalmer, lord of the divine hall, when he has placed his hands on the coffin of [the deceased] and equipped him with what [he] needs: ‘Hail, O beautiful of face, lord of vision, whom Ptah-Sokar has gathered together and whom Anubis has upraised, to whom Shu gave support, O beautiful of face among the gods!’

Spell 151 from *The Book of the Dead*, a collection of magical spells intended to help the deceased on their journey to the afterlife.

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The hieroglyphs on the coffin identify the deceased as a priest named Padiashaikhet, who lived and died in Thebes (modern Luxor) in about 700 BC.

The quality of the coffin and its decoration indicate a man of high status. On the back is the Goddess of the West, identified by the hieroglyphic symbol for ‘West’ on top of her head. Her wings hang down behind her arms ready to envelop and embrace Padiashaikhet.

In the wonderful and complex world of the gods, the role of the Goddess of the West was fulfilled as well by Nut and by Hathor, whose face can be seen on two sides of the large granite column capital (on display).

‘The head of a sacrificed bull is cut off, loaded with curses, and thrown into the river. The curses directed at the head take the form of a prayer:

May we, who have made this sacrifice, and all of Egypt with us, be spared any evil that threatens – and may it fall instead upon this head!’

^{Herodotus}, *The Histories*, ii 39. 5th century BC

Faces, the windows of the soul, from coffins, mummy masks, sculpture and painting.

‘Anubis speaks, the embalmer, lord of the divine hall, when he has placed his hands on the coffin of [the deceased] and equipped him with what [he] needs: ‘Hail, O beautiful of face, lord of vision, whom Ptah-Sokar has gathered together and whom Anubis has upraised, to whom Shu gave support, O beautiful of face among the gods!’

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