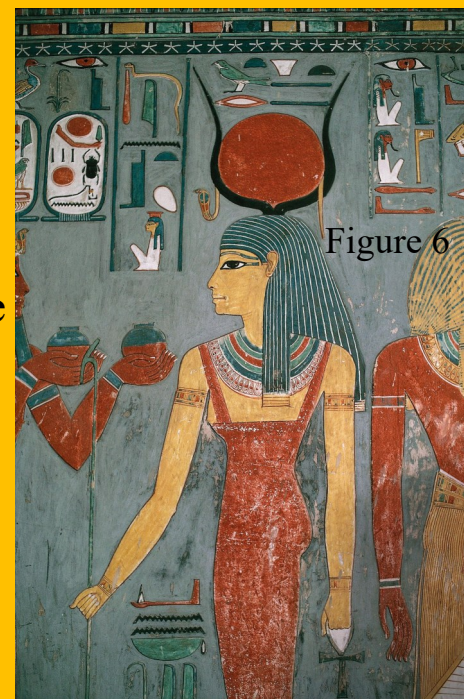


Ancient Egyptian Amulet Mould - An Object Narrative

Place in the funerary sphere

The artifact in figure 1 is an ancient Egyptian mould for producing faience, 'glazed non-clay ceramic' objects (Nicholson, 1998), in this case an amulet of Isis with a suckling Horus.

The mould would have been used as a method of mass production. A similar amulet has been found in Thebes, Asasif within the Ptolemaic vaulted graves of Birabi (Hall, 1922). The amulet has connections in the funerary sphere but is an unusual find within the tomb itself. The amulet found in Thebes was within the wrappings of a mummy, most likely for familial protection within the afterlife.



Protection comes from the invoked images of Isis and Horus. Firstly, the baby Horus, who is the son of Osiris, god of the afterlife. Horus's theological association with new life, rebirth and protection sits at the heart of Egyptian funerary beliefs. Secondly, Isis, wife of Osiris, who, Ancient Egyptian theology associated with the protection of children and mothers both in life and the afterlife. Through the ages, her role as protector, life-giver and sorceress make this an especially powerful amulet.

In addition, Isis is directly connected to the afterlife through her husband Osiris. As Newberry states 'in the funerary realm, Isis was extremely important as she cared for and revived her husband Osiris. She is often described as 'The Great One of Magic,' and this amulet was presumably supposed to invoke her protection and versatile powers for the benefit of its wearer' (Newberry, 1922). The amulets, this mould forms, are most likely from the late period (525 - 332 BCE) to the Ptolemaic period (332 - 30 BCE). Both at this time and during the Ptolemaic period Isis was popular across Egypt and the Mediterranean. She was of particular importance within the funerary sphere at a time when people had lost divine faith in the Pharaoh.

Although an unusual find within tombs, amulets depicting Isis are a common find across what was the empire of Egypt, in the Mediterranean.

Figure 2



Figure 1



Figure 4



Description

Dimensions: Height: 8 cm, Width: top: 3.7 cm, middle: 4.7 cm, bottom: 4.5 cm, Depth: 1.5 cm

Provenance : Currently located in the Cyarthfa Castle Museum. The mould was donated, after the death of the collector Major Harry Hartley Southey, who located it in Cairo, amongst other artefacts he collected with the help of an unnamed curator (Hayward, 2017).

Composition: The mould is made out of Nile silt clay, for the use in faience amulet mass construction. It dates from the late period to the end of known Egyptian history (circa 525 BCE - 359 CE).

Use: This mould produces an object used for religious and magical (heka) protection (Andrews, 1994). A protective ornament for either an individual or indicated for placement in a household shrine, as can be deduced from its size.

The inverse image, taken from the mould is likely of Isis. The object displays characteristics which can be indicative of other divinities such as the sun-disk (Isis or Hathor), horns (Hathor) and a Modus (crown) (Isis or Hathor). Hathor, is the goddess of joy, cows and like Isis, motherhood. Figure 5, with the image of Isis and Horus illustrates this point. The suckling image is strongly associated with Isis, as the mother of Horus. This has been observed in many similar images within amulets and temple carvings with inscriptions of her name in hieroglyphic text.

Figure 5



Place in life

This artefact's main function was as a crafting tool. It would have been used by craftsman. The creation of this form of amulet was achieved by pressing of faience (a combination of crushed quartz and Nile river silt that is fired and becomes a green/blue colour that is seen in figure 2) in to the mould the method is described as follows:

'Damp faience paste was pushed into the moistened mould, and the resulting form, such as a bead or amulet, was removed immediately so it would not stick. The faience was then hardened by baking' (Brooklyn Museum, 2013).

Unlike some tools of ancient civilisations with elaborately decorated tools and implements, this mould does not, even the back (figure 4) holds no inscription, making it an easily replaceable tool.



Figure 3

Importance in funerary archaeology

The presence of amulets within tombs is significant. Their presence is a demonstration of belief in the protection offered through the invocation of an image through heka. This presence of the divine facilitates the journey and the next life as well as provide comfort. The journey is beset by demons and dangers. The application of divine images can provide protection against these 'evils'. This placement of amulets within tombs suggests this may have been a popular aspect of funerary practice as demonstrated by the inundation of amulets within tombs of the era.

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