

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN FUNERARY BELIEFS

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The Ancient Egyptians practiced polytheistic religion, worshipping more than one God. They believed that magic and spiritualism influenced them in both life and death.

Their belief systems encouraged the concept that in order to pass from this realm to the next, you had to have a body. Mummification of a body allowed the soul or the Ka, to have a place to reside. It was imperative that this be done because if a body was destroyed in this world, the deceased would never live on in the next. Clay coffins and sarcophaguses were used to protect against humidity, insect, robbers etc. Often portraits of the occupants were sculpted into the lids.

After death, at your judgement, your heart couldn't weigh more than a feather, otherwise you would be devoured. If the scales balanced or if the feather weighed more, you were deemed to be good and allowed to live on.

This object (*right*) is the mask section from an ancient Egyptian funerary pot. It is approximately 20.5 cm high, 26 cm wide and has a depth of 4.5 cm. The artisan who made it employed tradition manufacturing techniques and materials (clay / Nile silt), and followed a long established design criteria. It is estimated to be from the 3rd Intermediate Period 1070 - 664 BC.

The mask presents rather feminine features with larger lips and a large hair piece area. The pronounced eyes appear to have defined areas around where the eyelashes would be. Its' simplistic ears are exposed by depicting the hair folding behind them. There are clearly visible areas on the front of this artefact that has some minor damage. When it was removed from its original funerary pot, the person responsible was careful not to damage the facial features



Burying the dead in heavy sarcophaguses carved from stone or wood, is now synonymous with Ancient Egypt. However, there were numerous methods and materials used by this culture. Burial pots (*left*), smaller coffins carved from wood or sculpted from clay were also frequently used.

How a body was interned depended on the wealth of the person. The standing of an individual also influenced their burial status. A body that had been close to the Pharaoh in life (human or animal), was ensured to receive a good burial.

The mask (*above right*) once decorated a clay coffin. When it was made, Egypt was in economic distress. Clay was frequently used because stone and wood were expensive. Burial offerings were still placed in the caskets, but the quality of such items depended on your wealth.

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