

ROMANO-EGYPTIAN MUMMY MASK

Egyptian, Roman Period, 1st century A.D.

Plaster, pigments, and gilding

H: 26.7 cm (10.5 in)

Reference: 15880



One of the goals of mummification and its associated rites was to preserve the body for the deceased's ka, or life force. Much care was also taken to create other funerary equipment such as masks, sarcophagi, and statuary with lifelike images of the deceased, which could act as a substitute for the body should harm befall the actual mummy. These masks covered the head (and sometimes shoulders) and served to protect the head of the mummy both functionally and magically. Often created of cartonnage, elite versions could be gilded. A gold color was used because of the ancient Egyptian belief that the skin of the gods was made of gold, an imperishable and brilliant material.

The influence of Roman funerary art and practices is very much apparent in this mask, which displays facial proportions and modeling derived from the Roman tradition of realistic portraiture rather than idealizing Egyptian prototypes. Made of plaster and hollow inside, the mask is carefully molded and painted, with gilded skin, and dark, painted hair further embellishing its striking visage. The man has short, curly hair and wears a floral wreath atop his head. It alludes to Wreaths of Justification, red or gold crowns that identified the deceased with the sun god and indicated that he or she had made a successful transition to the afterlife.

PROVENANCE

Ex- Minneapolis Museum of Art, de-accessioned in the 1950's; Ex- Thomas Howard-Sneyd; Ex- European estate collection; Sotheby's, New York, 13 June 2002, lot 42.

PUBLISHED

Sotheby's, New York, 13 June 2002, lot 42;

Art of the two Lands, Egypt from 4000 B.C. to 1000 A.D., New York, 2006, pp. 137-139, 201, no. 45.

EXHIBITED

TEFAF, New York, October 2017