

## Hypocephalus of the temple musician Neshorpakhered



From Thebes, Egypt  
Ptolemaic Period, 4th to 3rd century BC

### Inscribed with a spell to give warmth to the head of the deceased

The hypocephalus, literally 'that which is below the head', was placed between the head of the mummy and the funerary headrest. The earliest examples appeared in the Late Period, around 664 BC. They were simply inscribed pieces of papyrus, mounted on cartonnage discs. By the Ptolemaic period (332-30 BC), they were made of linen stiffened with plaster, decorated with vignettes. The hieroglyphic inscription runs around the circumference of the disc.

This example is decorated with scenes relating to the daily creation of the sun. The two boats represent the sun during the night (left) and the day (right). Below, baboons herald the birth of the sun, whose four heads represent the first four generations of creation. Below are figures associated with the Afterlife, including the four sons of Horus, who looked after the internal organs of the deceased.

The spell around the outside of the disc is an abbreviated form of Chapter 162 of the Book of the Dead. It contains an appeal: 'Cause to come into being a flame beneath his head for he is the soul of that corpse which rests in Heliopolis, Atum is his name'.

G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London, The British Museum Press, 1994)

I. Shaw and P. Nicholson (eds.), *British Museum dictionary of A* (London, The British Museum Press, 1995)

S. Quirke and A.J. Spencer, *The British Museum book of ancient Egypt* (London, The British Museum Press, 1992)