

## Mummy mask of Hornedjitef



From the burial of Hornedjitef, Asasif, Thebes, Egypt  
Early Ptolemaic Period, around 220 BC

Hornedjitef was a priest in the Temple of Amun at Karnak during the reign of Ptolemy III (246-222 BC). His high status is reflected in his elaborate funerary equipment, which is typical of a high-ranking dignitary of Thebes in the third century BC. CT scans of the mummy show that Hornedjitef was a mature man at his death. There were signs of osteoarthritis and osteoporosis, diseases of the bones, indicating that he might have reached an advanced age.

The form and decoration of Hornedjitef's coffins follow the pharaonic funerary tradition. The mummy was covered from shoulder to foot with a cartonnage cover. The cover and the mask placed on his head were both decorated with traditional funerary scenes.

Hornedjitef's idealized youthful face is golden, showing that he has become divine. Around his brow is a version of a spell in which the parts of his head are identified with the bodily members of various gods. Both the spell and the mask were intended to protect the head from being separated from the body, something that was greatly feared by ancient Egyptians, as it would prevent the deceased reaching the Afterlife, and also elevate the deceased to divine status.

Soon after the time when Hornedjitef died, Hellenistic influences brought great changes to the appearance of Egyptian burials. See, for example, the coffin of Tamiris, and one of an unknown woman, also in the British Museum.

J. Mack (ed.), *Masks: the art of expression* (London, The British Museum Press, 1994)

S. Walker and M. Bierbrier, *Ancient faces: mummy portrai-1* (London, The British Museum Press, 1997)