

Inner Coffin of Gua **The British Museum**

From the tomb of Gua, Deir el-Bersha, Egypt
12th Dynasty, 1985-1795 BC

Decorated with excerpts from the Coffin Texts



The decoration of the inner coffin of Gua is similar to that of the outer coffin. The inscriptions on all sides of the exterior are incised and filled with pigment. The same technique has been used for the *wedjat* eyes. These were to allow the mummy, which was placed on its side, to see outside the coffin towards the rising sun.

The interior decoration is painted, with the same subject matter as the interior of the outer coffin. The twisting and turning black lines are maps of the Underworld, designed to aid the deceased reach the Afterlife. Spells from the *Coffin Texts* were also inscribed in the coffin to provide further help. Developments in funerary belief meant that from the Middle Kingdom (about 2040-1750 BC), everyone could aspire to reaching the kind of Afterlife previously restricted to the dead king.

As well as being included in the tombs, furniture, clothing, tools, weapons and jewellery were also depicted on the coffin, as an extra insurance that they would accompany him to the Afterlife. The funerary meal was also represented, as was a false door, allowing the *theka* (spirit) of the deceased to come and go. The offering list guaranteed that the food would be provided eternally.

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

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