

Amulets

Amulets are talismans or magical charms that give the wearer (living or dead) promises of good fortune or protection against evil. Ancient Egyptian amulets usually represented familiar forms such as body parts, animals, gods, or ritual objects. The Egyptians believed that much of an amulet's magical powers came from its resemblance to the thing it represented. For example, it was believed that miniature life preservers would protect Egyptians from drowning at sea.

Other factors, such as color or material also were thought to contribute to an amulet's power. Red stones alluded to the life-giving qualities of blood, while amulets made of turquoise, jasper, or other green stones, referred to vegetation and fertility and thus to resurrection. Magical writings could also enhance an amulet's power.

Amulets were used in ancient Egypt from the very beginning. Burials during the Pre-dynastic Period (6100 - 3100 B.C.) occasionally contained a small figurine, carved of bone or ivory, of an animal such as a hippopotamus or a hedgehog. Archaeologists believe that these amulets were worn during life, and put into graves so that their magic would continue from this life to the next.

Different historic periods saw increases in different types of amulets, depending on the concerns of the time. However, there are a few symbols that persisted throughout history, and are most closely associated with ancient Egypt.

One famous symbol is the ankh sign, the hieroglyph for "life" and "to live." It remains unclear what the symbol depicts, but some interpret it as a key. Ironically this well-known Egyptian amulet was rarely worn. Throughout ancient Egyptian history, the ankh was the almost exclusively the property and emblem of the gods. Only gods had the power to give life, so Egyptian mortals almost never wore or carried the ankh.

Another popular amulet is the wadjet-eye, or "Eye of Horus." It represents the eye of sky god Horus in his manifestation as the great celestial falcon. It looks like a human eye with the stylized markings of a falcon's face. The wadjet-eye, as an amulet means "completeness" or "wholeness."

