





ETERNAL LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT

To ancient Egyptians, the afterlife was simply the next stage of life, with death as a transition. The sage Hardedef advises ancient readers to establish a household, and then 'equip your house in the necropolis'. In this way, a person could be sure that their afterlife would be full of the comforts and symbols of status that they enjoyed in daily life. Artworks can tell us as much about the rituals of death and the requirements of the afterlife, as they can about the preoccupations of everyday people in ancient Egypt: their jewellery, cosmetics, education, status, professions, worship, fears, and hopes.

COFFINS

Death and the afterlife held great meaning for the ancient Egyptians and complex funeral preparations and rites were observed to ensure the transition of the deceased from earthly existence to immortality. Wealthy individuals sought to ensure their survival for eternity by having their body preserved through the process of mummification and their likeness and name preserved. Funerary beliefs and practices changed over thousands of years of Egyptian history but the underlying desire to guarantee a good afterlife was consistent.

Those who could afford it would be buried in multiple coffins which fit within each other, and at various times in Egypt's pharaonic history, with a cartonnage inner case in which the mummy was wrapped. The quality varied depending on wealth and status.

1 | AN EGYPTIAN GILDED WOOD ANTHROPOID
COFFIN FOR THE LADY IRTWRW

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD TO LATE PERIOD
25TH–26TH DYNASTY, CIRCA 747–525 BC
Height: 173 cm

PROVENANCE

With Jacques Schulman N.V., Amsterdam, 1965
Bodo Bleß (1940–2022) Collection, Berlin, acquired from the above, thence by descent





The gilded face of the coffin links the deceased with the sun god and regeneration. Below there is a large elaborate collar with a sun disc beneath.

The front of the coffin: The upper register is painted with a central seated Osiris, with text reading: 'Words spoken by Osiris, great god, lord of Rostjau'. To the right the Four Sons of Horus are depicted on a lotus, with the falcon-headed soul of Pe behind. Behind Osiris over an offering table there is another winged disc protecting the god and also protecting him is his wife, Isis, with text reading: 'Words spoken by Isis'. Behind her is Nephthys, with a red cloth over her arm, with text reading: 'Words spoken by Nephthys, given life'. Behind is the jackal-headed soul of Nekhen. Both Pe and Nekhen are named in the register below.



Bleß at Leiden in the 1950s

Bodo Bruno Bernhard Bleß (1940–2022) was born in Berlin during World War II. On finishing school in 1955 he was apprenticed to the goldsmith Dietrich Schenk in Berlin, and eventually took over the running of the business and moved to Neukölln. Marrying his wife Margot in 1962, the couple were enthusiastic travellers in Europe, collecting ancient Egyptian works on the art market in the Netherlands and in London, where they were well-known as collectors of Egyptian funerary works, particularly shabtis.



The second register shows a seated falcon-headed deity wearing a sun disc, named as Osiris. He is flanked by winged goddesses and udjats on a basket: both the goddesses are named as Isis. On the right she is 'given life', on the left called 'the great'. To the right a standing falcon-headed god with arms in gesture of jubilation with text reading: 'Words spoken by the Soul of Pe, given life, stability, all dominion, health for ever'. On the left a standing jackal-headed god in a mirror posture, named as 'Soul of Nekhen, given life, stability, dominion, health'. They are the protective deities of Lower and Upper Egypt respectively.

In the third register Anubis 'tends to the mummy' on a lion-headed funerary bed with the deceased woman's name below, 'Irtwrw'. To the right stands winged Isis, named as 'the great land divine mother', and to the left there is another winged Isis with an udjat on a basket, named 'the great [...]']

The lowest panel shows a winged Wadjet and winged Nekhbet flanking a central column of text. The cobra-headed Wadjet is named as 'Wadjet of Dep and Pe (the double capital of Lower Egypt), mistress of per-nw (a Lower Egyptian sanctuary), given all life, stability, dominion, dominion forever'. Nekhbet is represented with a cobra head, with text naming, 'The White One'; the other epithets are missing. The central text reads: 'An offering which the king gives to Osiris foremost of the West, invocation offering of bread and beer for the Osiris'.

The back of the coffin is decorated with the standing winged figure of the goddess Nut, with the three hieroglyphs naming her in front of her face. The goddess wears a long close-fitting sheath dress and bracelets, and holds Maat feathers in her hands. The field is filled by palm fronds.

This impressive piece, intricately painted and inscribed, depicts scenes of the lady Irtwrw's journey into the afterlife. In the rituals for burial ceremonies, spells were cast, and gods invoked, to guarantee her eternal life. The deities depicted are primarily protective: Osiris, the god of the underworld is depicted, along with his wife Isis and the four sons of Horus. The back of the coffin is decorated with the standing winged figure of the goddess Nut, with the three hieroglyphs naming her. Nut was the goddess of the sky and heavens, and the deceased would be reborn from her, like the sun.

The deceased is named only once on the coffin in a scene showing her lying on a funeral bed, while being tended by the jackal headed god of mummification, Anubis. Her identity remains somewhat enigmatic as there are no titles or family to give us further insight to who Irtwrw was. Her splendid gilt face however indicates that she was of high social status. A closely-related coffin for Tarutu, Singer in the Temple of Amun in Tekhneh, modern-day Akoris in Upper Egypt, is now in the Norton Simon Museum.

[MORE INFORMATION ↗](#)





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2 | AN EGYPTIAN WOOD COFFIN FRAGMENT

LATE FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD TO EARLY MIDDLE KINGDOM
CIRCA 2000–1900 BC
Length: 77.1 cm; height: 10.6 cm

PROVENANCE
Collection of Richard Stuart Teitz (1942–2017), Director of Worcester Art
Museum, Hood Museum of Art, and Denver Art Museum

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3 | AN EGYPTIAN WOOD MASK

THIRD INTERMEDIATE TO LATE PERIOD, CIRCA 1000–600 BC

PROVENANCE

Reputedly with Spink and Son, Ltd., London, 19 July 1957

Benjamin and Hilda Sonnenberg Collection, acquired from the above, thence
by descent in 1978 to their daughter Helen Sonnenberg Tucker (1926-2022)

MORE INFORMATION ↗



4 | AN EGYPTIAN POLYCHROME WOOD MUMMY MASK

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD, CIRCA 945–715 BC

PROVENANCE

Sybil Frank (1929–2021) Collection, New York, acquired before 1972

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5 | AN EGYPTIAN WOOD MUMMY MASK

LATE NEW KINGDOM, 19TH–20TH DYNASTY, CIRCA 1295–1070 BC

PROVENANCE

Dr. Bruce L. Ralston (1925–1998) Collection, Tuxedo Park, New York, acquired before 1979.

Dr. Ralston, a neurologist, assembled a large collection during the 1960s–1970s

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6 | AN EGYPTIAN POLYCHROME PAINTED
CARTONNAGE SARCOPHAGUS FRAGMENT

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD, CIRCA 1070–702 BC

PROVENANCE

Reputedly from Thebes

French private collection, Paris, acquired in the 1970s: A label inside reads:
“Fragment de sarcophage, Thebes, Basse Egypt, 1580 a 1086 Avant J.C.”

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FUNERARY EQUIPMENT

Irtwrw would have been buried with important funerary equipment for her afterlife, including shabti figures to act as labourers for the deceased: in beautiful faience, finely moulded. She would have been wrapped with protective scarabs and amulets, her organs placed in four canopic jars with stoppers in the form of the Sons of Horus. She would perhaps have had cosmetic supplies including ointment jars for scented oils to use in the funerary rites.



7 | AN EGYPTIAN GREEN STONE HEART SCARAB

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD
CIRCA 1069– 656 BC

PROVENANCE

Private collection, Europe

Hotel Drouot, Paris, 2 April 2014, lot 114

With Dominique Thirion, Brussels

Acquired by the present owner from the above

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8 | AN EGYPTIAN CARNELIAN SCARAB OF TAWERET
SET IN A MODERN GOLD RING

CIRCA 4TH - 3RD CENTURY BC

PROVENANCE

Mr. P.H., Collection, New York before 1983

With Antiquarium Ltd, New York, acquired from the above in 1984

Dr. G.F. Collection, New York, 1990s

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9 | A GROUP OF TEN EGYPTIAN SHEET GOLD AMULETS

LATE PERIOD, CIRCA 664-332 BC

PROVENANCE

Hans Blaser Collection, Kloten, Zurich, acquired in the 1970s

With Galerie Nefer, Zurich, 1991

Private collection, Switzerland

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10 | A NECKLACE OF EGYPTIAN
TILAPIA FISH AMULETS

NEW KINGDOM, CIRCA 1200 BC

PROVENANCE

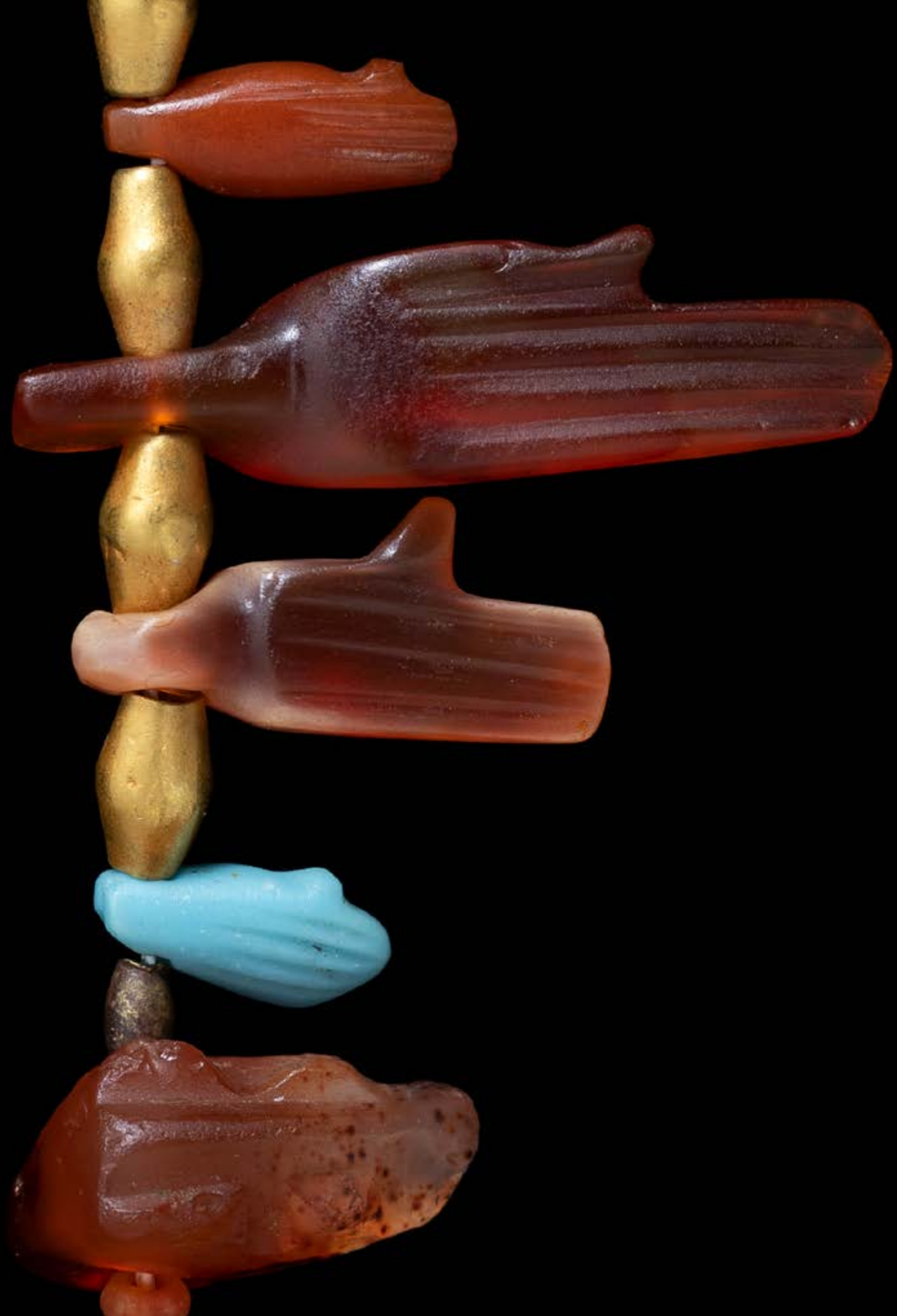
With Byron Zoumboulakis, Geneva, 1970s

With Galerie Nefer, Zurich, 1978

Private Collection, Aarau, thence by descent

Private Collection, Switzerland

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11 | A NECKLACE OF EGYPTIAN HANDS AND FEET AMULETS

OLD KINGDOM TO NEW KINGDOM, CIRCA 2500–1000 BC

PROVENANCE

With Merton Simpson, New York, before 1988

With Galerie Nefer, Zurich, 1988

Private Collection, Aarau, thence by descent

Private Collection, Switzerland

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12 | AN EGYPTIAN JASPER, CARNELIAN AND GOLD NECKLACE

NEW KINGDOM, CIRCA 1550–1196 BC

PROVENANCE

Maurice Nahman Collection, Egypt

With Jean Charpentier (1891–1976), Galerie Charpentier, Paris, circa 1956,
Stafford Collection, prior to 1992

Christie's, New York, 15 December 1992, lot 34A

Jackie Fay Collection, 1992

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13 | AN EGYPTIAN FELDSPAR AMULET OF A PALETTE

LATE DYNASTIC PERIOD, CIRCA 730–332 BC

PROVENANCE

Private collection, Bayeux, France, collected before 1940

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14 | KOHL JARS

NEW KINGDOM, CIRCA 1550–1196 BC

Used by both men and women of all social classes, the Egyptians believed kohl held vital medicinal, magical and religious qualities. Kohl was not just used to ward off physical ailments, but also ailments of the spiritual kind. Kohl was made primarily from galena or lead sulphide, which was ground on a palette and mixed with oils or animal fats. The kohl was then stored in beautiful, variously shaped small vessels and applied using a thin kohl stick





15 | AN EGYPTIAN GREYWACKE OFFERING SPOON

LATE PERIOD, 26TH–27TH DYNASTY, CIRCA 664–400 BC
Length: 8.9 cm

PROVENANCE

de Menil Collection, New York, acquired in the first half of the 20th century,
thence by descent

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16 | AN EGYPTIAN WOOD FIGURE OF DUAMUTEF

PTOLEMAIC PERIOD, CIRCA 400–30 BC

PROVENANCE

Ralph Huntingdon Blanchard (1875–1936) Collection, Cairo

Geoffrey Lyster McDermott (1912–1978) Collection, UK, acquired from the estate of the above in 1946, thence by descent

Bonhams, London, 27 April 2006, lot 8

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17 | AN EGYPTIAN WOOD PTAH SOKAR OSIRIS
FOR THE OSIRIS MUSICIAN PRIESTESS OF MIN,
THE DAUGHTER OF TA-SHERIT-MIN

AKHMIM, PTOLEMAIC PERIOD, CIRCA 200 BC

PROVENANCE

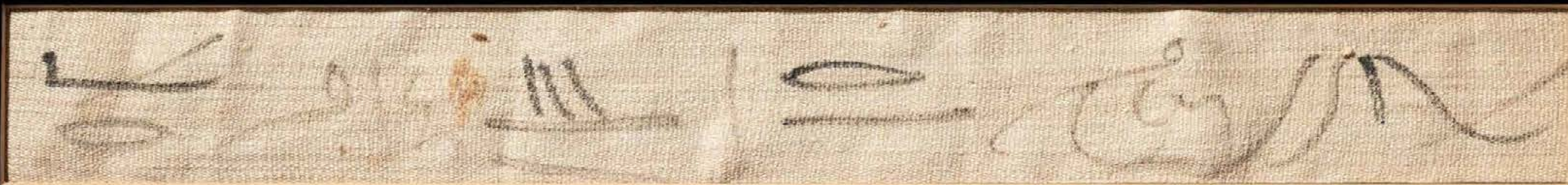
Probably from Akhmim, Egypt, circa 1890

Hannen Collection, UK. Accompanied by a collection card stating it was
shown to the British Museum in July 1959

Bonhams, London, 6 December 1994, lot 278
with Galerie Rhea, Zurich, December 1994

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18 | AN EGYPTIAN HIERATIC INSCRIBED LINEN
FRAGMENT FROM THE BOOK OF THE DEAD

PTOLEMAIC, CIRCA 3RD-2ND CENTURY BC

PROVENANCE

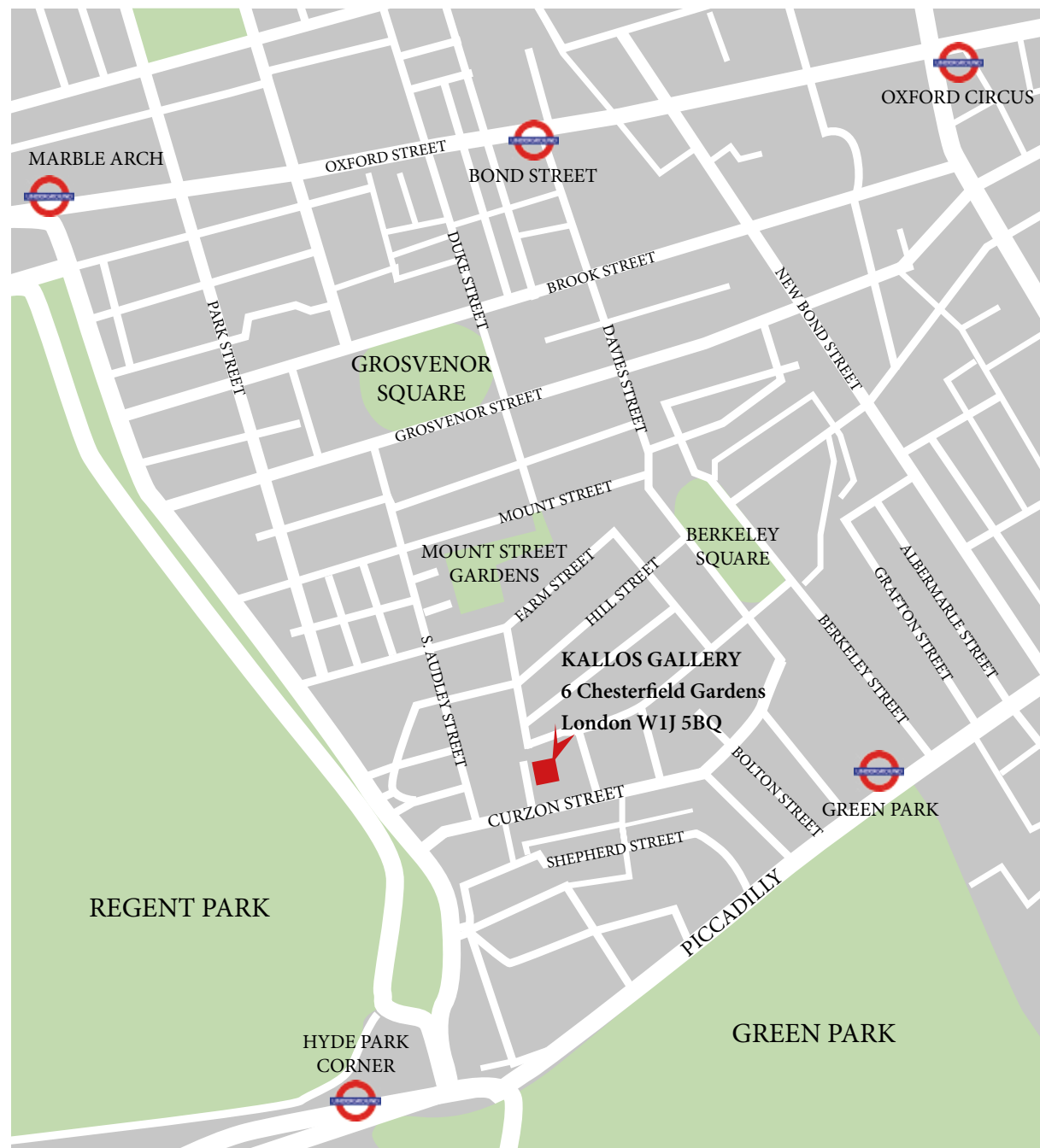
Paul Lutz Collection, USA, 1970s

With Charles Ede Limited, London, circa 2003

UK private collection, acquired from the above

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Egyptian men and women were both buried with their Book of the Dead; these were a series of highly protective ritual spells and incantations to guide the deceased to the realm of the dead. The texts were the same for both men and women showing the funerary parity between the sexes in ancient Egypt, a parity that is notable elsewhere in ancient Egyptian life and customs.



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