

The British
Museum

ETERNAL PROVISION FOR THE SOUL CELEBRATING LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT



15 AUGUST 2019
CLORE CENTRE

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SANTO DOMINGO FAMILY
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In Ancient Egypt, the dead had the possibility of **returning to the world of the living**. Their soul had two main parts: the *Ka* resided in the tomb of the deceased surviving on the spiritual essence of the daily food offerings while the *Ba* would leave the body and travel from the underworld with the sun god Re to visit the earth during the day and return back to the tomb at night. During the Middle Kingdom (ca 2055-1650 BC), ceramic offering plates with food offerings evolved into houses, commonly known as **Soul Houses**. These were left outside some tombs so the deceased would find a place to **rest and eat during the visit**.

The dead could then **feast on fresh figs and dates**, baked bread, pieces of fine meat, vegetables and refreshing water or barley beer. Even though family and priests would regularly bring food offerings to the tombs, Soul Houses were conceived as an emergency supply. By leaving these objects, the living were making sure their relatives could **sustain their souls throughout eternity**.

Funerary offerings such as Soul Houses account for the importance of death for ancient Egyptians, but they also reveal **their fondness of life**. As part of their spiritual journey, the dead could come back from the afterlife to **enjoy the simple pleasures of life**.



Soul House

Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055 to 1650 BC),
Egypt

Soul Houses are pottery models of houses often showing food offerings. They were placed in ancient Egyptian tombs to supply provisions and housing for the soul of the deceased in the afterlife.

Food offerings, such as bread, fruits, vegetables and meat are represented in the courtyard of this model. These objects are a good source of information about the diet of ancient Egyptian people and their beliefs about life and death.

EA32610, purchased from James Burton



Soul House

British Museum Collection Online:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA22783







Fragment of a funerary offering scene
Tomb-chapel of Nebamun
New Kingdom (ca 1550-1069 BC)