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A Graeco-Phoenician Funeral Mask

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Graeco-Phoenician
ca. 6th-4th century B.C.

Funerary Mask

Gold
h. 12; 8.1 cm
4 3/4; 3/14 in.

Labelled (top centre, back side of the mouthpiece) *M2991*

Provenance

Private Collection, UK, acquired in the 1980s.



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Gold funerary masks such as this one were produced throughout the ancient Mediterranean by several distinct cultures across both space and time, as early as Mycenaean Greece in the 16th century B.C. and at various times in Ancient Egypt. An important community that crafted such masks and certainly contributed to their wide-ranging origins were the seafaring Phoenicians, originating in the 9th-8th centuries B.C. in modern day Syria and Lebanon, who founded important coastal cities across the Mediterranean as far as Southern Italy and Spain, notably Tyre, Carthage, Utica, Malaga, among others.

The present mask has distinct features reminiscent of Archaic Greek sculpture, wide, almond-shaped eyes, and a schematic mouth upturned in the so-called “Archaic smile,” indicating a date contemporaneous with or later than the manufacture of these sculptures. Phoenicians had significant interactions with Greeks both on the Greek mainland as well as Greek colonies on the important island of Cyprus and the coast of Western Anatolia and Southern Italy.

The two fragments that have survived may have originally been part of a complete gold face mask, such as an example now in the Louvre (Figure 1), or they could have been affixed to a larger mask made of different materials. Due to the ubiquitous value of gold throughout history as well as the material’s rarity, it is difficult to say how frequently or when these items were made, that is to say, this is a very rare object.

For a discussion of Phoenician gold masks, see Moscati, *The Phoenicians*, pp. 124 and 593, no. 55.



Figure 1: Louvre Museum, Paris, AO 3988.

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