

PHARAOH MELBOURNE WINTER MASTERPIECES

Artwork labels

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Exhibition Access Guide

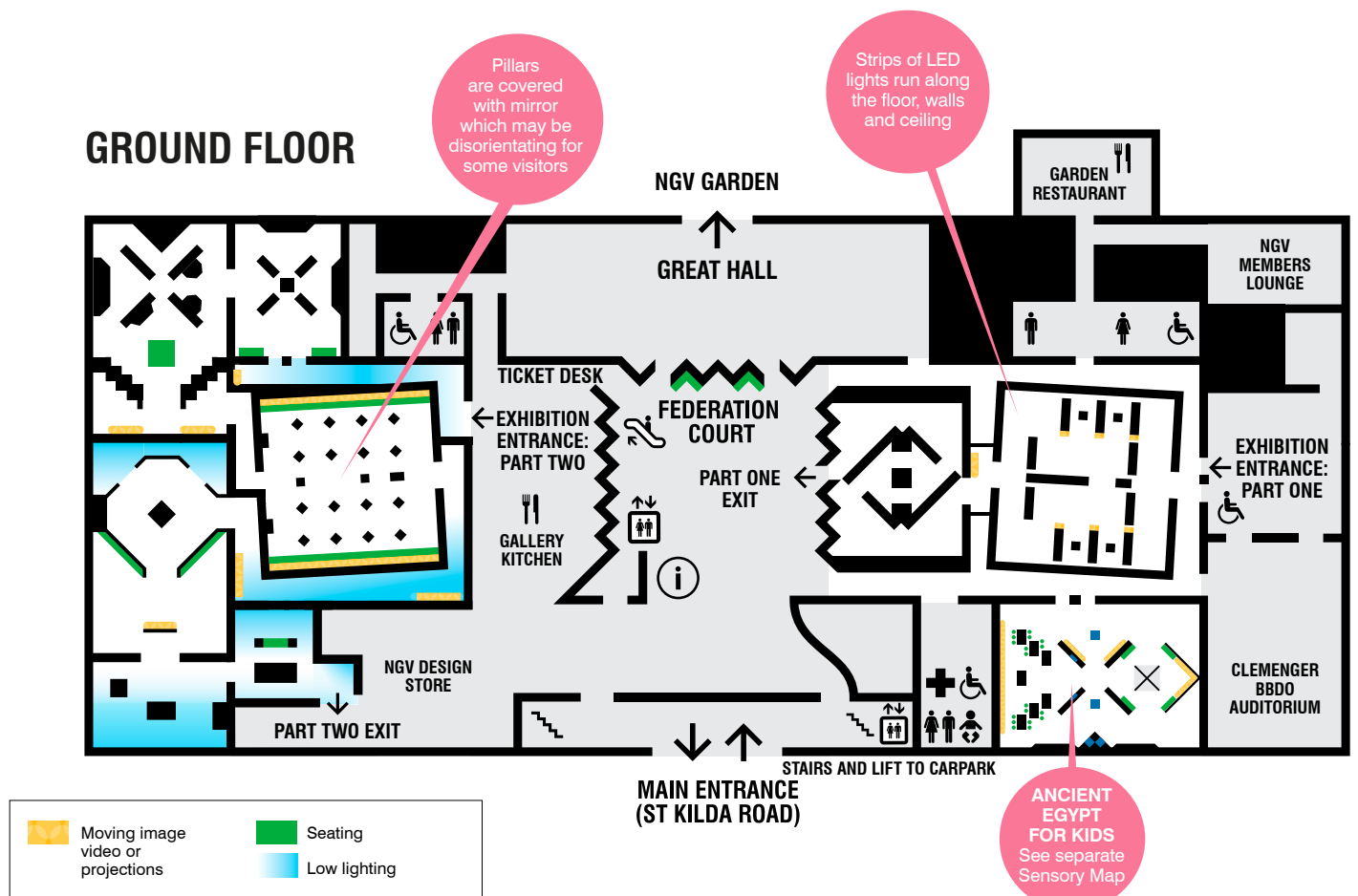
The **Pharaoh Exhibition Access Guide** is a free and accessible PDF document with information including ticketing, access facilities, exhibition layout and navigation.

Exhibition sensory map

The *Pharaoh* exhibition presents an immersive experience using mirrors, sound and lighting effects. The map on the following page shows the locations of audiovisual content, sensory elements and seating.

Visit **[ngv.melbourne/access](https://www.ngv.melbourne/access)** for more resources and information about accessible facilities, events and services at NGV.

Exhibition sensory map



The *Pharaoh* exhibition offers an immersive experience using screens with moving image, projections, mirror and lighting effects including low levels. An ambient soundscape plays throughout the exhibition at a fairly high level. The floor is carpeted. Gallery spaces are air-conditioned and are between 20 and 24 degrees Celsius. Visit [ngv.melbourne/access](https://www.ngv.melbourne/access) for more resources and information about accessible facilities and services for your visit to NGV.

Exhibition Part One of Two

Room: Egypt, land of the pharaohs

Room description: As you enter, there are four large grey walls in front of you with a view to an artwork through the gap between the two central walls. The word 'PHARAOH' is spelled out across the four walls in large grey letters.

Beyond the walls, the room is divided into six bays. Some bays contain objects on plinths inside glass cases. The bays have narrow screens displaying atmospheric colours. The space has mirrors and dark maroon carpet. LED light strips run along the floor, walls and ceiling. Photographs of the gallery space are shown on the following page.



Wall text:

Pharaoh

Pharaoh explores the realities, mythologies and iconographies of kingship in ancient Egypt. Through over 500 objects presented across seven thematic sections, this exhibition introduces the pharaoh's identity and many roles: as high priest, head of the country's administration, leader of the army and head of the royal family.

Pharaohs presented idealised images of themselves as invincible warriors and fervent worshippers of the gods, yet behind these representations the reality of kingship was more complex. Not all pharaohs were male, or even Egyptian. Despite the king's supreme status, Egypt was periodically wracked by civil war,

conquered by foreign powers and governed by competing rulers.

The exhibition also celebrates the exceptional skill of ancient Egyptian artists and craftspeople. Many of their creations present an archetypal image of the pharaohs as they wished to be seen, but there are some objects that reveal a more human perspective. They provide a glimpse into the complexity and challenges of what it must have been like to rule one of the greatest ancient civilisations the world has ever seen.

All objects in *Pharaoh* are from the collection of the British Museum, London. Further details on each object are available through the British Museum's Collection online.

Further details on each object are available through the British Museum's Collection online at [**britishmuseum.org/collection**](https://britishmuseum.org/collection).

Wall text:

Egypt, land of the pharaohs

Kings ruled Egypt in North Africa for more than 3000 years. From the mid sixteenth century BCE, they called themselves *per-aa*: 'pharaoh'. Their kingdom was one of the most prosperous lands of the ancient world. This is largely thanks to the River Nile that flows through Egypt from the south to the north, creating a lush arable landscape surrounded by immense deserts.

Behind an apparent unity, many changes – economic, technological, artistic and political – transformed the country over this vast period. Throughout, the inherent flexibility of the Egyptian monarchy allowed it to persist for millennia. Images of the pharaoh decorated thousands of

temples and monuments, asserting the pharaoh's power for eternity.

Artwork labels:

**Label for a pair of sandals showing
King Den smiting an enemy**

Egypt, Abydos

1st Dynasty, reign of Den,
about 2985 BCE

hippopotamus ivory

EA55586

The longevity of the ancient Egyptian civilisation is remarkable. For over 3000 years, much of the royal imagery – such as the scene on this label, showing a king beating an enemy – remained largely unchanged. Here, King Den holds a mace to strike a kneeling captive. This enduring image was meant to strengthen the king's position as the protector of Egypt.

For kids

Can you believe this little label is 5000 years old? It belonged to a king called Den and was tied to his sandals. If you look closely, you can spot the small hole in the corner where it would have been tied. This label also shows a picture of Den defeating one of his enemies. We know this is Den because his name is written in hieroglyphs in a rectangle in front of his head.

Can you spot the bird in this picture? It is a falcon, a bird that the ancient Egyptians associated with the pharaoh.

Head of King Mentuhotep II

Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri, temple of Mentuhotep II

11th Dynasty, reign of Mentuhotep II, about 2055–2004 BCE

sandstone

EA720

The unification of the Two Lands – Upper and Lower Egypt – was central to the concept of Egyptian kingship.

Mentuhotep II is famous for having reunited the country after a period of civil war and for founding the very prosperous Middle Kingdom (about 2040–1650 BCE). He is shown here with red skin, a colour used to represent men in ancient Egyptian art. Many monuments and sculptures would have originally been vividly coloured like this.

Head of a royal statue, probably Pharaoh Thutmose III

Egypt, Thebes, Karnak

18th Dynasty, reign of Thutmose III,
about 1479–1457 BCE

green siltstone

EA986

Although this head has no inscription, the king can be identified as Thutmose III by the style of his delicate features. His prosperous reign is characterised by high-quality sculptures produced in the royal workshops. After a long coregency with his stepmother, Hatshepsut, Thutmose III organised multiple military expeditions north through the Levant and Syria and south into Nubia. He is famous for enlarging the Egyptian empire to its greatest extent.

Head of a colossal statue, probably King Amenemhat III

Egypt, Bubastis

12th Dynasty, reign of Amenemhat III,
about 1854–1808 BCE

granodiorite

EA1063

Periods of prosperity can be reflected in the building of monuments and artistic production. The quality of workmanship during the reign of Amenemhat III, considered the golden age of the Middle Kingdom (about 2040–1650 BCE), is visible on this head attributed to the king. The head belonged to a colossal seated statue – probably one of a pair – measuring approximately 5 metres in height. The eyes would have been inlaid with coloured stones for a more dramatic look, and the features are exaggerated as

the face was designed to be seen from far below.

Unfinished statue of a pharaoh from the Ptolemaic Period

Egypt, possibly Athribis

Ptolemaic Period, about 305–30 BCE

basalt

EA1209

Symbolism was an important aspect of ancient Egyptian art and was used to confirm the status of the ruler.

When foreign kings assumed the role of pharaoh, they copied the artistic traditions of the past to strengthen their claim to the throne. Although the appearance of the face of this statue allows us to date it to the time when the Greeks ruled Egypt, the figure is depicted in traditional Egyptian style. The pose, with one leg striding forward, as well as the kilt and the *nemes* headcloth, are traditional emblems of Egyptian kingship.

Head of a royal statue, probably Pharaohs Nectanebo I or Nectanebo II

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
probably 30th Dynasty, about 380–343
BCE

greywacke

EA97

This magnificent head belongs to a statue depicting one of the last native kings who ruled Egypt in the fourth century BCE between the Persian invasions and the Greek takeover. This period of unrest was still stable enough for temples to be built and traditional culture to be preserved. The very hard stone of this sculpture was expertly worked to create a smooth and delicate surface. A few features, including the nose, have been later hacked out, perhaps to curse the royal image.

Wall text:

Map of ancient Egypt

The majority of ancient Egypt's population lived along the fertile Nile Valley and Nile Delta, although settlements also extended into the Sinai Peninsula. The selection of places featured on this map were important sites at various times during ancient Egypt's 3000-year history. Some sites were significant religious centres, others functioned as the capital city at different periods, and certain sites flourished for artistic or social reasons. The inset map provides further detail of the area around Thebes (modern-day Luxor), including several key sites that feature in the exhibition, in particular Karnak Temple.

Wall text:

Timeline of pharaonic history

Hundreds of pharaohs ruled in ancient Egypt over three millennia. Egyptologists today divide them into thirty-one dynasties, which are in turn grouped into historical periods reflecting the wider political landscape of Egypt. The pharaohs named in this timeline feature in the exhibition. They include some of the most iconic names associated with ancient Egypt, such as Ramses II and Tutankhamun, while others are less well-known today. Dates before 690 BCE are approximate.

Wall text:

The design of *Pharaoh* takes visitors on a journey from day to night. Exhibition designer Peter King has employed lighting, colour, material textures and architectural forms to suggest different times of day: pre-dawn and early morning, midday, late afternoon, dusk and night. This evokes both the passage of time and the ancient Egyptians' reverence for the sun, associated with Ra, the sun-god. Ra journeyed each day across the sky from east to west in his sacred boat before descending to the underworld, sailing through the twelve hours of night before his rebirth to a new life and a new day each morning.

The room you have just left, which introduced the pharaoh as both concept and through selected representations,

was designed as a pre-dawn space, where change and continuity coexist – just as they did throughout ancient Egypt’s 3000-year history. The story of *Pharaoh* begins in the next room, with metaphorical rays of sunlight marking the dawn and the divine birth of the pharaoh. The exhibition ends in darkness, as night falls and the pharaoh begins the journey to the afterlife and eternal life.

The NGV also commissioned Melbourne-based composer Peter Corrigan to create the exhibition soundscape. Although ancient Egyptian instruments survive, their music does not. Instead, this modern soundscape was inspired by the experience of the exhibition itself, the epic scale of which seeks to convey the vast history of ancient Egypt.

Exhibition design: Studio Peter King,
Melbourne
Exhibition sound: Peter Corrigan

Room: Born of the gods

Room description: Glass cases surround the room and internal walls divide the space. Mirrored surfaces and LED light strips are used. This is the final room of Part One of the exhibition. To access Part Two, cross through Federation Court and the Gallery Kitchen cafe. Photographs of the gallery space are shown on the following page.



Wall text:

Born of the gods

Through the creation of complex myths, thousands of gods populated the lives of the ancient Egyptians. All natural entities could be divine manifestations: the land, the wind and animals all embodied a sacred force. Although human, pharaohs claimed divine ancestry. They acted as the gods' representatives on earth and as intermediaries between gods and humans.

The pharaoh's main role was to maintain the wellbeing of the gods. The gods provided stability and prosperity for Egypt in return for the pharaohs' acts of building temples and performing daily rituals, a relationship that benefitted both. The king's position on the throne

was secured and the gods were made content in the land of the pharaohs.

Wall text:

The king and the divine

Pharaohs were believed to be associated with deities in different ways. Ancient myths recount how Egypt was originally governed by gods before the first human king. The pharaoh was considered an incarnation of Horus, the last divine ruler. At his death, each king transformed into the god Osiris, father of Horus and lord of the underworld. His successor became the new Horus on earth.

Images symbolising the pharaoh's relationship to the gods were omnipresent. The walls of ancient Egyptian temples often depicted scenes of creation mythology. Others showed offerings being made to the gods in return for a fertile Nile flood and a

prosperous reign.

Artwork labels:

Figure of the goddess Isis with her son Horus

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period, about 664–332 BCE

bronze

EA60756

Spacer-bead with Isis nursing Horus

Egypt, possibly Tuna el-Gebel

Third Intermediate Period,

about 1069–664 BCE

faience

EA26233

According to Egyptian mythology, the gods ruled Egypt before the pharaohs. Horus, the last divine ruler on earth, was the son of Osiris and Isis. When Osiris

was murdered by his brother Seth, he became lord of the underworld. Seth then attempted to kill his nephew Horus to take the power over Egypt for himself. Both objects show Horus as an infant, fed and protected by his mother, the goddess Isis.

Figure of the goddess Renenutet suckling Thutmose III

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Thutmose III,
about 1479–1425 BCE

granite

EA802

The divine protection and legitimation of the king took many forms. Identified with Horus, the pharaoh was nursed by various goddesses, such as the snake-headed Renenutet. By drinking her milk, a liquid connected to purification and resurrection, the king was united with her divine powers.

Amulet of a lion-headed goddess suckling a pharaoh

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Third Intermediate Period,
about 1069–656 BCE

faience

EA11314

Figure of the goddess Isis nursing Horus

Egypt, Fayum

Roman Period, 1st to 2nd century CE
terracotta

EA37497

The cult of Isis as the ultimate nursing goddess spread beyond Egypt across the Roman Empire. Even within Egypt, her image was adapted and reinterpreted for the newly arrived Greek and Roman worshippers.

Spacer-bead showing the purification of the pharaoh

Egypt, possibly Tuna el-Gebel

Third Intermediate Period,

about 1069–656 BCE

faience

EA14556

This spacer-bead was used as a piece of jewellery to separate several strands of beads. Its intricate design shows a pharaoh being purified with water by two gods, probably falcon-headed Horus and ibis-headed Thoth. This scene symbolises the coronation of the pharaoh.

The opposite side (see image below) depicts the sun-god with a falcon head holding a bound enemy, symbolising Egypt's control over foreign lands.



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Temple relief showing King

Mentuhotep II protected by the sun

Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri, temple of Mentuhotep II

11th Dynasty, reign of Mentuhotep II,
about 2055–2004 BCE

painted limestone

EA1450

The sun-god provided the king with life, protection and power. On this fragment, Mentuhotep II is protected by a winged sun-disc flanked by two uraei (rearing cobras) and *ankh* (life) signs. Only the top of the king's crown is visible, seen below the sun.

Relief fragment with inscription

‘Son of Ra’

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings,
tomb of Sety I

19th Dynasty, reign of Sety I,
about 1294–1279 BCE

painted limestone

EA5602

Ra was one of the most powerful solar deities worshipped in ancient Egypt, usually representing the sun at midday. One of the main royal titles of the pharaoh was ‘Son of Ra’, seen on this fragment from the tomb of Sety I, stressing his divine ancestry.

Figurines of the goddess Maat squatting

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period, about 664–332 BCE

copper alloy (EA64498), glass (EA12517)

EA64498 and EA12517

Maat was both a goddess and a concept. As a goddess, she is identified by a single feather on her head. She represents notions of truth, justice and universal order. By making ritual offerings of the goddess Maat to the gods, pharaohs acknowledged their obligation to maintain universal order on earth.

Royal figure holding a Maat

Sudan, Kawa

Napatan Period, about 700–500 BCE

copper alloy

EA63594

The iconography of Maat went beyond the borders of Egypt, into Kush (modern Sudan). This object was found in a region where local rulers adopted many traditional Egyptian beliefs, especially during and after the 25th Dynasty (about 747–656 BCE) when Kushite kings took control of Egypt.

Lintel showing Pharaoh Thutmose III making an offering of Maat

Egypt, Deir el-Medina

19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II,
about 1279–1213 BCE

sandstone

EA153

To maintain cosmic stability and balance between the human and divine world, the pharaoh was depicted in most Egyptian temples as offering small figures of the goddess Maat. On the left of this lintel, Thutmose III (about 1479–1425 BCE) presents Maat to four gods – Amun-Ra, Mut, Khonsu and Hathor.

Wall text:

Symbols of power

The king's power to rule was expressed through a wealth of symbols that reinforced royal legitimacy and authority. Magnificent clothing and elaborate jewellery distinguished the pharaoh's unique status from ordinary people. The most universal expression of power, the crown, could take various shapes, each with a specific meaning. For example, the double crown – a combination of the red crown of Lower Egypt and the white crown of Upper Egypt – indicated the king's control over a united country. The uraeus (rearing cobra) was often added to the crown as a protective ornament placed on the forehead. A curved beard, a bull's tail or various sceptres could also be markers of royal power.

Artwork labels:

Uraeus inlay from the brow of a royal or divine statue

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period, about 664–332 BCE

silver, bronze

EA57331

Uraeus with the red crown

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period, about 664–332 BCE

gold

EA16518

The uraeus is a rearing and spitting cobra. It is commonly depicted on the pharaoh's brow, protecting him and investing him with its menacing power.

Crook and flail originally from royal or divine statues

Egypt, Tell el-Yahudiya (crook);
findspot unknown, probably Egypt (flail)
Third Intermediate Period to Late Period,
about 1069–332 BCE
copper alloy

EA11573 and EA11568

Osiris, lord of the underworld, was one of the gods thought to have ruled Egypt before the pharaohs. As such, Egyptian kings often identified with him and adopted some of his characteristic symbols, including sceptres. The crook (*heka*) is a metaphor of the king as a shepherd caring for his flock, and the flail (*nekhakha*) may represent a fly whisk.

Figure of King Mentuhotep II

Egypt, possibly Thebes, Deir el-Bahri
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE
gilded and painted limestone

EA53890

Mentuhotep II, who ruled from about 2055 to 2004 BCE, was famous for reuniting Egypt after a long period of trouble and internal wars. He wears the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, which conveys his control over the Two Lands. The fact that this figure was made centuries after Mentuhotep II lived demonstrates the continued respect felt for this pharaoh's achievements.

Statue of King Senusret III

Egypt, Elephantine

12th Dynasty, reign of Senusret III,
about 1874–1855 BCE

greywacke

EA36298

Exclusively worn by pharaohs, the *nemes* is not a crown as such, but a striped and pleated headcloth pulled into a tail at the back. Although royal sculptures were symbolic rather than realistic, facial features could be meaningful. The large ears of this statue convey the king's listening qualities.

Statuette of King

Mentuhotep VI

Egypt, probably Thebes, Karnak

13th Dynasty, reign of Mentuhotep VI,

about 1675–1650 BCE

greywacke

EA65429

By the time Mentuhotep VI lived, Egypt had been divided into smaller regions, each governed by a local ruler. About fifty kings are known to have ruled over 150 years. Despite the troubled period and a loss of artistic expertise, this statuette was carefully sculpted with most of the traditional stylistic features usually found in royal statuary, including the nemes headcloth.

Statue head of an unnamed pharaoh

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

18th Dynasty, possibly reign of
Amenhotep II, about 1427–1400 BCE
diorite

EA37886

Statue head of a pharaoh

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Ptolemaic Period, about 332–30 BCE
limestone

EA21916

These two heads belonged to statues of unidentified kings. Stylistically, one can be attributed to an Egyptian king of the New Kingdom, and the other to a Greek king of the Ptolemaic Period. Despite the thousand years that separated them, both wear the *nemes* headcloth with the uraeus (rearing cobra) on their brow. Foreign kings largely adopted these traditional Egyptian symbols to appeal to local people.

Statue head of a Kushite pharaoh

Egypt, probably Heliopolis

25th Dynasty, probably reign of Shabaqo,
about 705–690 BCE

granite

EA63833

Pharaohs from Kush (in modern Sudan) ruled Egypt for several decades, after its conquest in about 747 BCE. On top of his *nemes* headcloth, the pharaoh wears a double uraeus, a feature adopted by the Kushite rulers. Egyptian traditions remained an important element of Kushite culture long after they ceased to control Egypt.

Cast of the Narmer palette

original: Egypt, Hierakonpolis

1st Dynasty, reign of Narmer,

about 3000 BCE

plaster cast: late 19th century

EA35714

This is a historic copy of a famous palette that depicts Narmer, the ruler who united Upper and Lower Egypt for the first time around 3000 BCE. The original palette was excavated in 1897–98 and is in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. One side shows Narmer wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt. He strikes his foes and beheads his enemies. The other side shows him wearing the red crown of Lower Egypt. Palettes were used to grind cosmetic powders, although finely decorated ones like this were made for ceremonial use.

Statue of Pharaoh Sety II wearing emblems marking his royal status

Egypt, Thebes, Karnak, temple of Mut
19th Dynasty, reign of Sety II,
about 1200–1194 BCE
sandstone

EA26

Sety II is shown seated on a throne, making an offering to the powerful creator god Amun. The offering consists of a shrine topped with a ram's head, the emblem of Amun. The uraeus (rearing cobra) on Sety's brow protects him, while the bull's tail visible between his legs conveys his strength. The papyrus plant and the lotus decorating each side of the throne symbolise the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Statue fragment of King Senusret III with scene legitimising him as the ruler of a unified Egypt

Egypt, Tell Nabasha

12th Dynasty, reign of Senusret III,
about 1874–1855 BCE

sandstone

EA1069

Despite the poor condition of this statue, the side depicting the king's throne is almost intact. The scene shows two plants, representing Upper and Lower Egypt, being tied together by two deities who personify the fertility of the River Nile. This motif symbolises the unification of the Two Lands of Egypt, which acts as a statement of the king's legitimacy in ruling over the north and the south of the country. The bottom row of *rekhyt* birds (lapwings) represents the people

of Egypt and indicates that the pharaoh reigns over them all.

Statue of the falcon god Ra-Horakhty, protector of Pharaoh Ramses II

Egypt, Tell el-Maskhuta

19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II,
about 1279–1213 BCE

granite

EA1006

Ra-Horakhty represents the union between the sun-god Ra and the sky-god Horus. Both can be represented as a falcon. Ra-Horakhty, as the ‘great god, lord of the sky’, is shown here guarding the name of Ramses II. The statue is one of many created during the sixty-six-year-long reign of Ramses II. Statues such as this convey how the pharaoh sought the protection of the gods. This one was found at Tell el-Maskhuta, east of the Nile Delta, a town apparently uninhabited

during the reign of Ramses II. It was probably moved there to decorate a temple built by a later king.

For kids

In ancient Egypt, the pharaoh was protected by the gods. The large bird in this statue is a falcon, a bird of prey. It represents the god Ra-Horakhty, a combination of the sun-god Ra and the sky-god Horus. In front of the falcon is a big oval shape with hieroglyphs inside, called a cartouche. These hieroglyphs spell the name of the pharaoh, Ramses II. Ra-Horakhty, represented by the falcon, is watching over Ramses II.

Can you see the bird's feathers that have been carved into the wings and the tail?

Ostrakon depicting a pharaoh presenting a libation

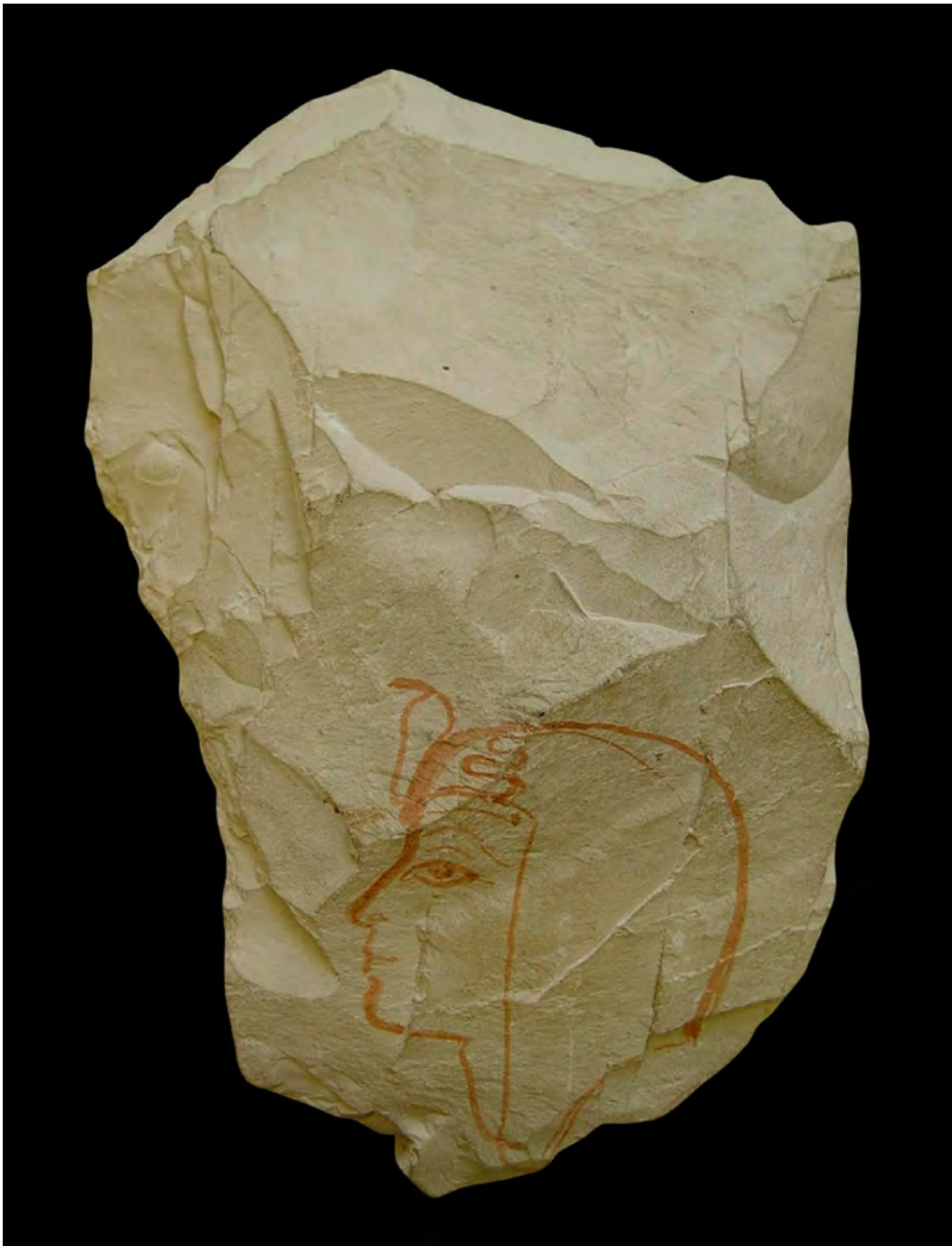
Egypt, Thebes

20th Dynasty, about 1186–1069 BCE

limestone

EA50710

An ostrakon is a broken fragment of stone or pottery used by draughtsmen to sketch details of a larger composition. This ostrakon shows the pharaoh making a libation (a liquid offering) to the gods. The drawing has been made in red ink, which was often used for a first sketch and later amended with black ink. On the reverse (see image below) is a drawing of a king's head.



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Stela with Pharaoh

Amenhotep III and Queen Tiy

Egypt, Amarna, house R 44.2

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep IV/

Akhenaten, about 1352–1336 BCE

painted limestone

EA57399

Amenhotep III (about 1390–1352 BCE) and Queen Tiy are shown in front of food and floral offerings, seated below the rays of the sun-god Aten. Amenhotep III, commemorated after his death during the reign of his son Akhenaten, wears the blue crown and other royal regalia.

Head of Pharaoh

Amenhotep III

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE

quartzite

EA30448

Each royal crown carried specific symbolism. This crown, known as *kheprsh*, is emblematic of Amenhotep III, who is regularly represented wearing it. It was often called the blue crown after the colour found on some examples, and it would have been worn for specific ritual occasions, often appearing in depictions of military victories.

Kneeling figure of Pharaoh Pamy

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

22nd Dynasty, reign of Pamy,

about 778–769 BCE

bronze

EA32747

Pamy, a little-known pharaoh, belonged to a family of Libyan descent. The fact that he mainly reigned over the Delta (Lower Egypt) did not prevent him from wearing the white crown, a symbol of Upper Egypt.

Relief showing King Mentuhotep II embracing the god Montu

Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri, temple of Mentuhotep II

11th Dynasty, reign of Mentuhotep II, about 2055–2004 BCE

painted limestone

EA1397

With its colours vividly preserved, this relief shows Mentuhotep II wearing typical royal regalia. These include the red crown of Lower Egypt and a curved beard, as well as the bull's tail, a symbol of power, strapped around his waist.

Wall text:

The power of names

Each pharaoh was conferred a multitude of names, titles and epithets. These held important symbolic meanings and were carefully chosen to indicate devotion to a certain god or connection to a previous ruler. The king usually had five royal names, some given at birth and others during the coronation. Two of these, the throne name and the birth name, were each framed within an oval cartouche (oval frame enclosing a royal name). Identified by a knotted rope, cartouches symbolised the limits of the cosmos encircled daily by the sun and acted as a form of protection.

Artwork labels:

Relief naming King Khufu

Egypt, Tell Basta

4th Dynasty, reign of Khufu, about 2589–
2566 BCE

granite

EA1097

The first and oldest royal name was the Horus name, which identified the king as an incarnation of Horus, the god of kingship. This name was placed within a *serekh*, a rectangular frame that depicts a palace with Horus, as a falcon, on top. This granite doorjamb is a monumental example of King Khufu's Horus name, although most of the falcon is now lost. His name can be read as Medjedu or 'The one who strikes'.

Top row, left to right

Inlaid tile naming Pharaoh Ramses III

Egypt, Tell el-Yahudiya

20th Dynasty, about 1184–1153 BCE

faience

EA12370

Seal naming Pharaoh Darius I

Egypt, possibly Kharga

27th Dynasty, about 522–486 BCE

bronze

EA48929

These two objects bear very similar motifs: the king's name enclosed in an oval cartouche. The faience tile includes the throne name of Ramses III: 'Lord of the two lands, Usermaatra, beloved of Amun'. The bronze seal surmounted by a double feather and a sun-disc shows

the name of Darius I, a Persian king who ruled over an extensive empire and who, in Egypt, adopted the traditional names of the pharaoh.

Vessel inscribed with four names of King Pepy I

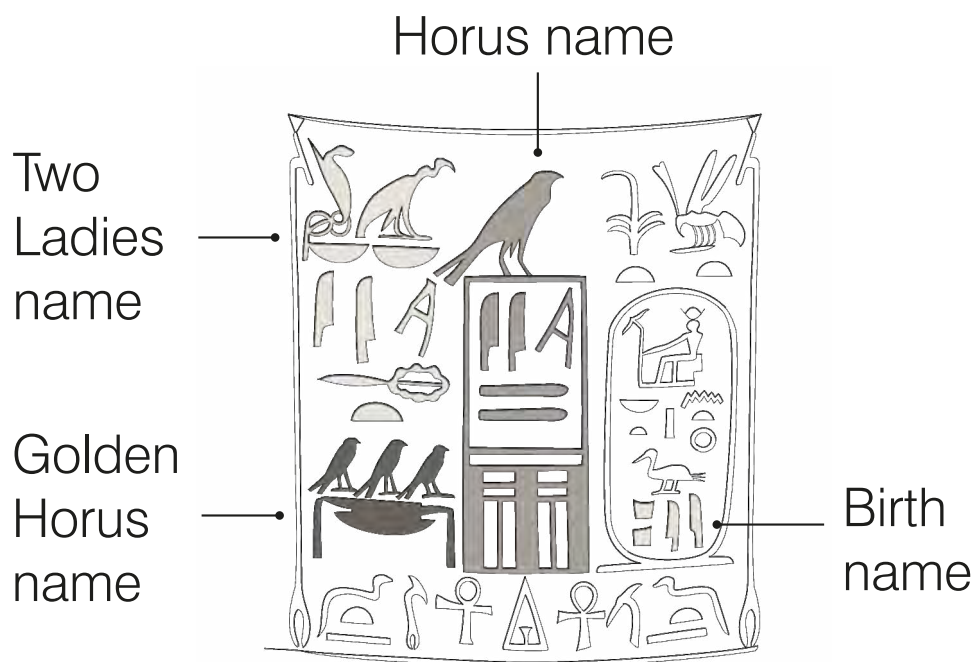
Egypt, possibly Dendera
6th Dynasty, reign of Pepy I,
about 2321–2287 BCE

calcite

EA22559

Each pharaoh was usually given five different royal names. Four of the names of Pepy I are carved on this vessel. His birth name, Pepy, is written in a cartouche (oval frame enclosing a royal name). His Horus name, Merytwy, is in a *serekh* (frame in the shape of a palace). His Two Ladies name, Merykhet,

associates him with both Nekhbet, the vulture goddess of Upper Egypt, and Wadjet, the cobra goddess of Lower Egypt, who appear just above the name itself. Finally, his Golden Horus name depicts the falcon god Horus above the hieroglyphic sign for gold. Below is an illustration of the four names carved onto the vessel.



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Bottom row, left to right

Ornament depicting the throne name of King Senusret II

Egypt, possibly Thebes

12th Dynasty, reign of Senusret II,
about 1880–1874 BCE

electrum, lapis lazuli, cornelian, feldspar

EA54460

This ornament of a winged scarab pushing the sun-disc depicts Khakheperra, the throne name of Senusret II. The word *kha* is represented by the hill framed by the rays of the rising sun (at the bottom), *kheper* is represented by the scarab beetle (in the middle) and *Ra* by the sun (at the top). Khakheperra can be translated as 'The form of Ra is rising'.

Finger ring with the name of Pharaoh Amenhotep II

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep II,
about 1427–1400 BCE

gold

EA54549

Finger ring with the name of Pharaoh Amenhotep III

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE

faience

EA54555

Finger ring with the name of Pharaoh Akhenaten

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep IV/
Akhenaten, about 1352–1336 BCE
gold

EA37644

The names inscribed on these rings belong to three pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty. Amenhotep II's name is flanked by two gods that represent the Nile flood, highlighting Egypt's prosperity. Amenhotep III's name is protected by a cobra wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt. Akhenaten's name is accompanied by the inscription 'all Egypt is in adoration'.

Lintel with the names of Pharaoh Siamun

Egypt, Memphis

21st Dynasty, reign of Siamun, about
975–957 BCE

limestone

EA1470

The fan-bearer Ankhefenmut is depicted kneeling on each side of this lintel, worshipping the names of Siamun, a pharaoh of Libyan origin. Siamun was responsible for the building of several monuments, especially in Lower Egypt, including the construction of a temple in Memphis from where this lintel comes.

Squatting baboon with the names of Pharaoh Amenhotep III

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE
red quartzite

EA38

Royal names often emphasised the presence – or even the omnipresence – of the king. This was particularly the case in temples, where architectural elements and statues were incised with royal names. The inscription on this baboon statue includes the birth and throne names of Amenhotep III.

Stela with erased cartouches of Queen Hatshepsut

Sudan, Wadi Halfa

18th Dynasty, joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III,

about 1472–1458 BCE

sandstone

EA1015

After the death of her husband, Pharaoh Thutmose II, Queen Hatshepsut shared power with her young stepson Thutmose III, before becoming pharaoh in her own right. Later kings, including her stepson, tried to erase the memory of Hatshepsut's reign by destroying her monuments or deleting her name.

This stela preserves what remains of her name, which has been almost completely hammered out (on the left), whereas the name of Thutmose III (on

the right) can still be clearly seen.

Statuette of Pharaoh Tutankhamun, usurped by Horemheb

Egypt, possibly Thebes

18th Dynasty, reign of Tutankhamun,
about 1336–1295 BCE

serpentinite

EA37639

Inscriptions were sometimes erased and monuments re-used. Many statues erected by the young king Tutankhamun were later usurped by one of his successors, Horemheb. The inscription on the back of this statuette's pillar was partly erased and a new cartouche (oval frame enclosing a royal name) was incised. However, the sculptor seems to have stopped before completing it, probably noticing the incorrect orientation of the hieroglyphs. Tutankhamun's name is left untouched on the belt of the kilt.

For kids

This is a statue of one of the most famous kings from ancient Egypt – Tutankhamun. His tomb was discovered over a hundred years ago, filled with treasures. In this statue the king is wearing a huge necklace made from several rows of beads. He is also wearing a type of pleated skirt called a kilt, which wraps around the front. Can you see his name in hieroglyphs in the middle of the belt?

Exhibition Part Two of Two

Room: The king as high priest

Room description: A dark hallway leads to the first room of Part Two of the exhibition. Seating is available on either side as you enter. There are walls in an 'X' shape in the centre of the room which you travel around. Some walls are painted in sandstone-like colours and mirrors are used. Objects are displayed in glass cases. A photograph of the gallery space is shown on the following page.



Wall text:

The king as high priest

With their imposing architecture, Egyptian temples stood out dramatically in the ancient landscape. They represented the cosmos and were a portal to the divine. Hundreds of temples were built along the Nile Valley, each dedicated to one or more of the vast pantheon of deities. Ancient Egyptians believed that temples were the houses of the gods and the divine statues they contained were embodiments of the gods on earth.

Just like living beings, these statues required care and attention. It was the king's responsibility to perform the most important religious ceremonies such as the daily ritual of offering to, clothing and

feeding the gods. In reality, priests across the country performed these rituals on his behalf. If the gods were pleased, they would reward Egypt with stability and the pharaoh with a long and prosperous reign.

Artwork labels:

Statue of Pharaoh Ramses II as a high priest

Egypt, Abydos

19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II, about
1279–1213 BCE

limestone

EA96

This stunning statue of Ramses II originally stood in a temple at Abydos in Middle Egypt. It depicts the king holding an offering table laden with bread, meat and vegetables, and kneeling in front of a libation vase used to pour offering liquids. The statue embodied the king's participation in daily ritual.

Wall text:

Offering to the gods

The gods and their statues required constant attention, and it was the king's responsibility to ensure this was fulfilled. Special rituals were performed three times a day in every temple across Egypt. Theoretically, only the king was authorised to perform them, but since he could not be in hundreds of places at once, he delegated these rites to selected priests. The day began with the priests opening the shrine where the divine statue had rested overnight. They would then recite spells and rituals, while feeding and clothing the god. In return for this considerable undertaking, the king expected the gods to provide him with a long, stable and prosperous reign.

Left to right

Statue of a pharaoh kneeling before the Apis bull

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period, about 664–332 BCE

bronze

EA22920

Most gods were associated with a sacred animal. The Apis bull was a living animal that was considered the earthly incarnation of the creator god Ptah. The bull was also closely linked with the pharaoh, and the coronation of both king and animal was performed by priests based in Memphis. The sacred bull was identified by special markings on its skin, such as a triangle on the forehead, as shown on this figure.

Figurine of Pharaoh Thutmose IV

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Thutmose IV,
about 1400–1390 BCE
bronze, silver, calcite

EA64564

This figurine was probably part of the ritual equipment of a temple. It shows Thutmose IV holding two small round pots usually filled with liquids such as milk or wine as an offering to the gods. He wears the *nemes* headcloth with a uraeus and the traditional royal *shendyt* kilt with a wide belt bearing the king's throne name Menkheperure in the central rectangle. The pharaoh may have originally been depicted kneeling before one or several gods, or accompanying the sacred barque, a boat used to transport the divine statue during

festivals and processions. Relatively few sculptures in bronze survive from this period, perhaps because the high value of metal meant that many were melted down and re-used.

Statue of the royal scribe Meryptah

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II,

about 1279–1213 BCE

steatite

EA2291

Pharaohs, like gods, could also be objects of worship. Meryptah, whose title was Royal Scribe of the Offering Table of all the Gods, is shown here adoring Pharaoh Ramses II. The kneeling scribe holds a cartouche (oval frame enclosing a royal name) that contains the throne name of the king, Usermaatra Setepenra, accompanied by the hieroglyphic sign for year, emphasising the impressive length of Ramses II's reign.

Part of an incense burner depicting a royal figure

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period, about 664–332 BCE

bronze

EA5296

Incense burners were sacred instruments used to spread perfumed smoke and purify statues of the gods. One of the daily rituals required of the pharaoh was to provide delightful fragrances that would reach the divine sphere. Priests performing on his behalf would use censers like this, and the small royal figure acted as a substitute for the king.

Slab with depiction of Pharaoh Nectanebo I

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
30th Dynasty, reign of Nectanebo I,
about 380–362 BCE

black basalt

EA998

Temples were decorated with many scenes, including those depicting the king presenting food, drink and precious items to various gods. Here Nectanebo I, founder of the last Egyptian dynasty, offers incense. Although the scene has been partially erased by hammering, the hieroglyphs describing the offering remain largely intact. The building from which this relief came and the identity of the god being worshipped remain a mystery.

Relief showing Pharaoh Ptolemy I

Egypt, Kom Abu Billo, temple of Hathor
Ptolemaic Period, reign of Ptolemy I,
about 305–282 BCE

limestone

EA649

When Greek kings ruled Egypt, temples continued to be built in the Egyptian style to ensure traditional rituals that had been performed for millennia were still observed. In this temple relief, Ptolemy I presents grass and papyrus to Hathor, goddess of joy and fertility. These plants symbolise Upper and Lower Egypt.

Together they represent the unification of the Two Lands.

Wall text:

Building a temple

Most kings contributed to temple-building by expanding or decorating existing temples or by building anew. Multiple construction projects were usually in progress at any one time, while some were never fully completed. Existing temples were often dismantled and re-used, with the names of a new pharaoh carved over those of his predecessors. Strict rules were followed when building a temple, starting with a foundation ceremony. The first of these rites was the Stretching of the Cord. It was believed that the king, assisted by the goddess Seshat, established the size and orientation of the temple by using a cord to mark the four corners of the building. The ceremony also included

digging a trench, moulding a brick and placing foundation deposits at specific locations.

Relief with cartouches of Kings Senusret III and Ramses II

Egypt, Bubastis

12th Dynasty, reign of Senusret III,
about 1874–1855 BCE

(re-used in 19th Dynasty, reign of
Ramses II,
about 1279–1213 BCE)

red granite

EA1102

Every pharaoh was expected to build new temples and to embellish existing ones. Usurping monuments of earlier kings was common practice. Ramses II, who founded several temples in Egypt and Nubia, proclaimed his dedication to the gods by ensuring his name was seen everywhere, even making sculptors carve it over those of his predecessors. This is precisely what happened to this relief,

which features his cartouche over that of Senusret III, who had lived six centuries earlier. Senusret III's name is still partly visible on the left side of the block.

Case wall, left

Foundation deposits – model axe, saw and adze

Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri

18th Dynasty, reigns of Thutmose III and
Hatshepsut, about 1479–1425 BCE

wood, linen, leather, bronze

EA6058, EA6065 and EA26278

Foundation deposits are often the only physical evidence of a temple's foundation rituals. Marking the start of construction work, these small objects were buried at the corners or other significant spots to protect the building and ensure its longevity. They can take the shape of miniature tools, here an axe, saw and adze. Two of them bear an inscription that records the Stretching of the Cord ceremony.

Case floor, right

Foundation deposits – plaques with the name of Pharaoh Psamtek I

Egypt, Tell Dafana

26th Dynasty, reign of Psamtek I,
about 664–610 BCE

glazed composition (EA23556a),
gold (EA23556b), silver (EA23556c),
jasper (EA23556f), cornelian (EA23556g)

EA23556a, EA23556b, EA23556c, EA23556f and EA23556g

These plaques were buried in the foundations of a temple in the Nile Delta. Foundation deposits are extremely useful to modern researchers because they often provide the name of the pharaoh who founded the temple, making it possible to date the beginning of the work. These plaques bear the name of Pharaoh Psamtek I, the founder of the 26th Dynasty.

Case wall, right; case floor

Foundation deposits – plaques with the name of Pharaoh Ramses II and models of food

Egypt, Matmar, temple of Seth
19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II,
about 1279–1213 BCE

faience

EA63454 to EA63466

Archaeologists found these small faience pieces in a circular pit associated with a temple of Seth in Matmar, Upper Egypt. God of chaos and storms, Seth became one of the state gods during the 19th Dynasty. Excavators found hundreds of these small objects buried during the foundation rites of Seth's temple. The models represent food, such as grain, fish, ducks, and oxen legs and

heads, while plaques record the name of Ramses II, who founded the temple.

For kids

Objects like these tools at top-left were buried in the ground before the ancient Egyptians began building a temple. They were thought to magically protect the temple and help make sure it stood for thousands of years. These magical objects were often smaller versions, or models, of the tools that people really used to build temples.

Can you spot the adze? This was a tool used for woodworking in ancient Egypt.

The Karnak Cachette

These eight statues were buried together in the temple of Karnak, at Thebes. They form part of the Karnak Cachette, a cache of more than 800 stone sculptures, as well as many other artefacts, representing more than twenty-three centuries of Egyptian history. The statues are of priests and government officials who wished to pay their respects to the gods, to benefit from the daily prayers and offerings, and to be rewarded with prosperity and protection. Over the centuries, the statues would have cluttered the temple, so the priests would periodically bury them within the sacred grounds. This pragmatic approach kept the temple tidy while making space available for replacements.

Left to right

Statue of a kneeling man

Egypt, Thebes, temple of Karnak

Middle Kingdom or Late Period,

about 2040–1650 BCE or about 664–332

BCE

granite

EA48036

Block statue of Wahibra

Egypt, Thebes, temple of Karnak

26th Dynasty, about 664–526 BCE

granite

EA48039

Statue of Djedhor

Egypt, Thebes, temple of Karnak
30th Dynasty or Ptolemaic Period,
about 380–30 BCE

granite

EA48037

Statue of a seated scribe

Egypt, Thebes, temple of Karnak
Middle Kingdom or Late Period,
about 2040–1650 BCE or about 664–332
BCE

quartzite

EA48032

Statue of Pakharkhonsu

Egypt, Thebes, temple of Karnak
Late Period or Ptolemaic Period,
about 664–30 BCE

granite

EA48038

Block statue of Padiamunnebnestawy

Egypt, Thebes, temple of Karnak
Ptolemaic Period, about 305–30 BCE
granite

EA48034

Block statue of Padiamunnebnestawy

Egypt, Thebes, temple of Karnak
Ptolemaic Period, about 305–30 BCE
granite

EA48035

Statue of Nebiry

Egypt, Thebes, temple of Karnak
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1069 BCE
limestone

EA48033

Wall text:

Entering a temple

Processional avenues, often lined with sphinxes, led to massive stone gates known as pylons. These marked the entrance of ancient Egyptian temples, with thick mudbrick walls enclosing the sacred space. The temple stood as a metaphor for the world and every element had a symbolic function. The floor was the earth, columns represented lotus or papyrus plants, and the ceiling was the sky, often decorated with stars and zodiacs. Vividly coloured reliefs would have been particularly striking. Images of the king offering to the gods appeared repeatedly on the walls of the courtyards, halls and rooms that led to the most sacred part of the temple. This sacred space contained the statue of the

main god of the temple, where only the king and a handful of priests were allowed to enter.

Sphinx

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Ptolemaic Period to early Roman

Period, 2nd century BCE – 1st century CE

limestone

EA36272

The sphinx was a powerful symbol in ancient Egypt. It combines the body of a lion, representing strength, with a human head. A row of large sphinxes regularly lined processional avenues leading to temples, protecting the pharaoh and proclaiming his power. Smaller versions, like this, could also flank doors in temples or in tombs.

For kids

A sphinx is a mythical creature with the head of a person and the body of a lion. This sculpture of a sphinx has the head of a pharaoh. The sculptor was very clever, and combined the pharaoh's headdress with a huge lion's mane – can you see the fur? Pharaohs liked to be associated with sphinxes and lions because they were such powerful animals. If you look between the lion's front legs, you'll see a cartouche on its chest spelling out the name of the pharaoh Amenemhat IV.

Sphinx of King Amenemhat IV

originally Egypt, Heliopolis; found in Lebanon, Beirut

12th Dynasty, reign of Amenemhat IV, about 1808–1799 BCE

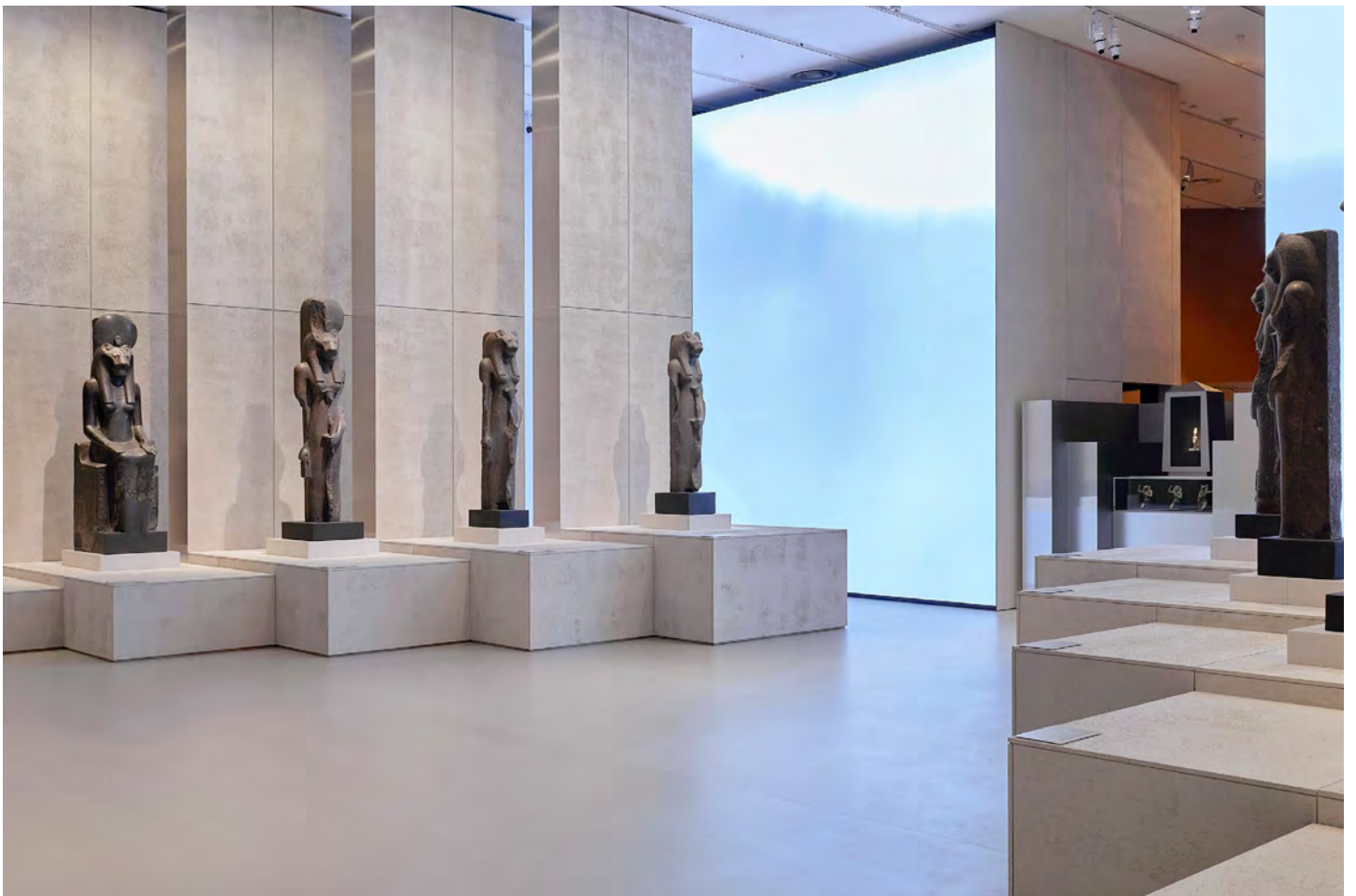
gneiss

EA58892

This sphinx was originally sculpted for Amenemhat IV, according to the cartouche carved on the chest. Judging by the style of the face and the mane transformed into a *nemes* headcloth, it appears to have been re-carved, probably during the Ptolemaic Period (about 332–30 BCE).

Room: Entering a temple + Statues of the goddess Sekhmet

Room description: This is a large room with two sections. The first section has internal walls in an 'X' shape in the centre of the room. The second half of the room has large objects on high plinths and a large seat in the centre. Large screens at the end of the room show atmospheric colours. Photographs of the gallery space are shown on the following page.



Obelisk of Pharaoh Nectanebo II

Egypt, Cairo

30th Dynasty, reign of Nectanebo II,
about 360–343 BCE

siltstone

EA523

Carved from a single block of stone, obelisks were often placed in pairs in front of temple pylons (gates). They were solar symbols that represented the first point reached by the sun's rays in the morning. This pair, erected by Pharaoh Nectanebo II, would originally have been 5 or 6 metres high and possibly capped with precious metal. Although they were of fairly modest scale for obelisks, they would still have been a technical feat to sculpt and erect.

Obelisk of Pharaoh Nectanebo II

Egypt, Cairo

30th Dynasty, reign of Nectanebo II,
about 360–343 BCE

siltstone

EA524

The hieroglyphic inscriptions on these obelisks mention Thoth, a god associated with writing and knowledge often represented as an ibis-headed man. Thoth is described as ‘Lord of Hermopolis, who dwells in Hesret and who dwells in the Mansion of the Net’. Hermopolis, located in middle Egypt, was a cult centre for Thoth. The inscriptions suggest that the obelisks originally stood at the entrance to the god’s temple in Hermopolis. The two monuments were later re-used in the Citadel (a medieval fortification) in Cairo, with one laid on its side as a windowsill.

Fist of a colossal statue of Pharaoh Ramses II

Egypt, Memphis, temple of Ptah

19th Dynasty, about 1279–1213 BCE

red granite

EA9

Colossal statues of the king could flank temple entrances, showcasing his power and protecting the building. This fist belonged to a monumental statue of Ramses II that stood in the temple of the creator god Ptah in Memphis. It was found during the expedition that went to Egypt with Napoleon in 1798 and, just like the obelisks displayed nearby, was gifted to the British Museum by King George III after the French capitulation.

For kids

This enormous fist originally came from a statue of Ramses II, one of the most famous pharaohs of ancient Egypt. It weighs about the same as a small car. Can you imagine how tall – and heavy – the original statue would have been? Do you think it was seated or standing? Consider how the ancient Egyptians might have carved such an enormous statue. They would have needed lots of very skilled craftspeople to create such a large statue.

Lintel of King Amenemhat III

Egypt, Fayum

12th Dynasty, reign of Amenemhat III,
about 1854–1808 BCE

limestone

EA1072

This lintel was originally placed in a temple erected by Amenemhat III. The carving reflects the harmonious symmetry followed inside an Egyptian temple. At the centre is a cartouche enclosing the king's birth name. This is surrounded by inscriptions that radiate from the centre to the sides of the lintel. Names of the king face references to Sobek, the god of the temple, who is depicted as a crocodile seated on a shrine.

Statue of a lion

originally Sudan, Soleb; later Sudan,
Gebel Barkal

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE

red granite

EA2

This statue is one of a pair of lions from a temple erected by Amenhotep III in Nubia, a region now located in southern Egypt and northern Sudan. It displays rare naturalistic features, in contrast to those of the sphinxes. Acting as a guardian to the temple, it was later reinscribed by Tutankhamun who claimed that he had renewed the monument originally built by his grandfather. Much later, around 250 BCE, the Kushite king Amanislo moved both lions south to Gebel Barkal, at the heart of the kingdom

of Kush. That is where the pair was rediscovered at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Relief of Pharaoh Osorkon II from his Sed-festival gateway

Egypt, Bubastis, temple of Bastet
22nd Dynasty, reign of Osorkon II,
about 865–830 BCE
red granite

EA1105

This relief is from the same temple as the Hathor capital, displayed to the right. It depicts one of the most important events held during the reign of a king: the Sed festival. Normally occurring after thirty years of a reign, the festival comprised a series of rituals designed to rejuvenate the pharaoh for the coming years.

Pharaoh Osorkon II, who is celebrated in this relief, is shown inside a kiosk facing the goddess Bastet. In front of him, priests recite spells while others perform rituals or prepare offerings.

Below is an illustration of the hieroglyph details shown in the gateway.

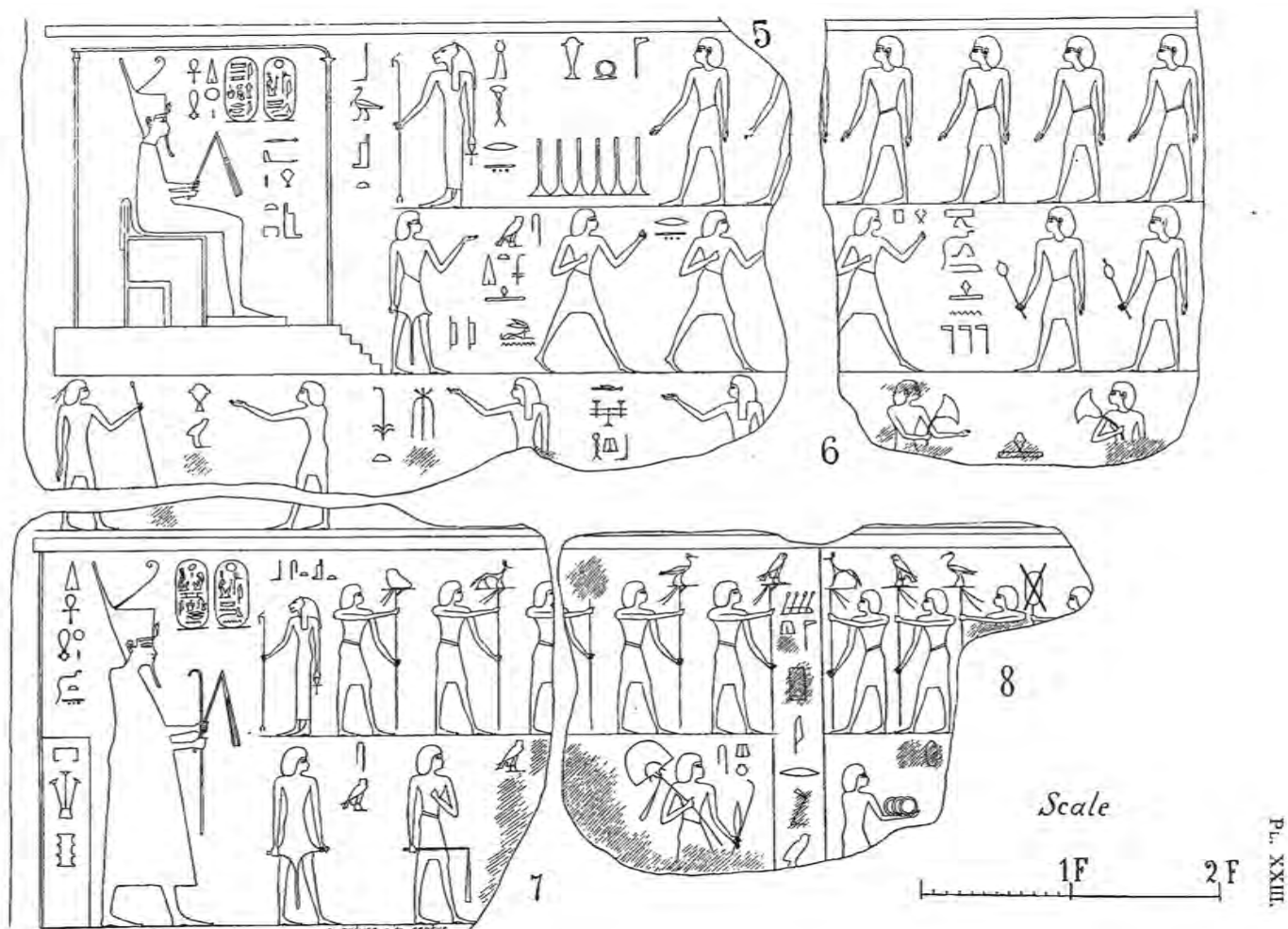


Plate XXIII from Edouard Naville, *The Festival Hall of Osorkon II in the Great temple of Bubastis (1887–1889)*, Keegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., London, 1892.

Below is an artist's impression of the restored gateway to Pharaoh Osorkon II's festival hall at the temple of Bastet, Bubastis, Egypt.



Frontispiece from Edouard Naville, *The Festival Hall of Osorkon II in the Great temple of Bubastis (1887–1889)*, Keegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., London, 1892.

Below is an artist's reconstruction of the inner face of the gateway to Pharaoh Osorkon II's festival hall. The relief depicting Osorkon II's Sed festival, displayed in the exhibition, is shown on the left-hand side of the drawing. The block formed part of a larger scene.



Plate XXXIV from Edouard Naville, *The Festival Hall of Osorkon II in the Great temple of Bubastis (1887–1889)*, Keegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., London, 1892.

Hathor capital

Egypt, Bubastis, temple of Bastet
22nd Dynasty, reign of Osorkon II,
about 865–830 BCE
red granite

EA1107

Temple courtyards and halls were filled with tall columns decorated with symbols of papyrus and other plants. These represented the first plants to grow on the earth, according to ancient Egyptian creation myths. The columns were topped by capitals. This one is from the temple of the goddess Bastet at Bubastis and is carved in the shape of the emblem of the goddess Hathor, recognisable by her cow's ears.

Wall text:

Statues of the goddess Sekhmet

The goddess Sekhmet, or 'the Powerful One', was associated with destruction, war and pestilence. Depicted as a woman with the head of a lioness, she was closely associated with the sun-god Ra, and is usually crowned with a solar disc. In a myth known as *The Destruction of Mankind*, Ra sent the goddess to slaughter humans who were plotting against him. The ensuing carnage troubled Ra, so, to save humanity, he sent beer to soothe Sekhmet. The beer was mixed with red ochre to resemble human blood, and the drunken goddess returned, appeased, to Ra.

This need to soothe Sekhmet explains why Pharaoh Amenhotep III

commissioned hundreds of her statues for his mortuary temple in Thebes. It is generally thought that 730 statues depicting Sekhmet were produced, 365 striding (assertive) and 365 seated (at peace), one of each for every day of the year. The extraction and sculpting of the stone, as well as the transport and placement of all these statues was a huge undertaking. In the ensuing centuries, many were repurposed for other temples. The single largest group, including many shown here, was found in the sacred precinct of Mut in Karnak temple.

For kids

The goddess Sekhmet was ferocious. She was a goddess of war and destruction, with the body of a woman and the head of a lioness. The large circle above her head is a solar disc, representing the sun. Since Sekhmet was so scary, the pharaohs made lots of statues of her to keep her happy. How many do you see here? These statues were hard to make and transport because they are made of stone and extremely heavy.

Statue of the goddess Sekhmet seated

originally Egypt, Thebes, Kom el-Hettan,
mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep
III; later Egypt, Thebes, Karnak,
temple of Mut

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE

granodiorite

EA16 and EA73

Statue of the goddess Sekhmet standing
originally Egypt, Thebes, Kom el-Hettan,
mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, about
1390–1352 BCE
granodiorite

EA41

Statue of the goddess Sekhmet standing
originally Egypt, Thebes, Kom el-Hettan,
mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, about
1390–1352 BCE

granodiorite

EA45

Statue of the goddess Sekhmet standing
originally Egypt, Thebes, Kom el-Hettan,
mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, about
1390–1352 BCE
granodiorite

EA49

Statue of the goddess Sekhmet standing
originally Egypt, Thebes, Kom el-Hettan,
mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, about
1390–1352 BCE
granodiorite

EA53

Statue of the goddess Sekhmet seated

originally Egypt, Thebes, Kom el-Hettan,
mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III;
later Egypt, Thebes, Karnak,
temple of Mut

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, about
1390–1352 BCE

granodiorite

EA63

Statue of the goddess Sekhmet seated

originally Egypt, Thebes, Kom el-Hettan,
mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III;
later Egypt, Thebes, Karnak,
temple of Mut

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, about
1390–1352 BCE

granodiorite

EA88

Statue of the goddess Sekhmet seated

originally Egypt, Thebes, Kom el-Hettan,
mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III;
later Egypt, Thebes, Karnak,
temple of Mut

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, about
1390–1352 BCE

granodiorite

EA518

Statue of the goddess Sekhmet standing

originally Egypt, Thebes, Kom el-Hettan,
mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III;
later Egypt, Thebes, Karnak,
temple of Mut

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, about
1390–1352 BCE

granodiorite

EA519

Statue of the goddess Sekhmet standing
originally Egypt, Thebes, Kom el-Hettan,
mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, about
1390–1352 BCE
granodiorite

EA520

Sacred shrine

The most sacred part of the temple contained the shrine with the statue of the god. The shrine remained dark, except for the dim light that reached the statue every time the priests opened the doors for the daily rites. It represented the point of connection between heaven and earth, where divine energy animated the statue. Shrines were often made of hard stone with wooden doors, while the statue of the god was made of valuable metals and precious gems. The statue was only taken out of the temple for special festivals, allowing more people to connect with the divine.

Figure of the god Amun-Ra

Egypt, Thebes, Karnak

Third Intermediate Period,

about 1069–656 BCE

silver, gold

EA60006

Amun-Ra was the main god of the temple of Karnak at Thebes, one of the largest religious complexes of the ancient world. Made of gilded silver, this figure may have represented the image of god on earth and would have been the focus of the priests' rituals inside the shrine. Few statues in precious metal survive because they were often melted down for re-use. This example had a lucky escape and was discovered in a cache of deliberately buried ritual items.

Figures of a king and two gods in jubilation

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period, about 664–332 BCE

bronze

EA11496, EA11497 and EA11498

These three figures probably decorated the barque (sacred boat) used to carry the divine statue during processions outside the temple. The two gods are Horus of Pe (with a jackal head) and Horus of Nekhen (with a falcon head), who represent the capitals of Lower and Upper Egypt before the country was unified. They were considered the souls of the ancient cities, protecting the king during coronations and jubilees.

Room: Royal life + Ancient Egyptian jewellery

Room description: Walls are painted light blue with a water-like effect projected onto them. Pillars are covered with mirrors, which may be disorientating for some visitors. Bench seats run along both sides of this room. There is a long, dark hallway to the next room.



Wall text:

Royal life

Egyptian royal families could be very large as the pharaoh could take a principal queen, known as the Great Royal Wife, and several other wives. Diplomatic alliances were often formed or strengthened through marriage with daughters of foreign rulers. Numerous children were born from these unions. Ramses II, for example, is believed to have fathered more than forty sons and forty daughters. Many family members, starting with princes, held leading roles in the religious and administrative running of the country. They could influence governmental policies, lead armies or manage estates. Although some members of the extended royal family are known by name, often little else is known about them.

Artwork labels:

Three objects, left

Stela of divine adoratrice

Ankhnesneferibra offering to Amun-Ra

Egypt, Thebes

26th Dynasty, about 575 BCE

sandstone

EA835

The divine adoratrice of Amun was an important religious and political office often held by a daughter of the king.

These princess-priestesses were associated with Amun, the major deity in Thebes, whose temple in Karnak was then one of the most important in Egypt. By fulfilling the role of divine adoratrice, the princess kept the reins of power firmly within the royal family. Here

Ankhnesneferibra, daughter of Psamtek II, is shown playing the sistrum, a type of sacred rattle, to entertain and soothe Amun.

Cylinder seal of the divine adoratrice Amenirdis I

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
25th Dynasty, about 700 BCE
glazed steatite

EA29212

This unusually large and enigmatic seal is inscribed with the names and epithet of Amenirdis I, daughter of the Nubian king Kashta. As a mark of her status, the divine adoratrice recorded her name in cartouches, just as the pharaoh would. The purpose of this object and what it was used to seal remain a mystery.

Figure of Amun-Ra-Kamutef dedicated to a divine adoratrice

Egypt, Thebes

26th Dynasty, about 664–526 BCE

bronze, gold

EA60042

During the seventh century BCE, divine adoratrices became particularly powerful. They practically ruled over the south of Egypt, while the pharaoh ruled in the north. This small figure represents the god Amun-Ra-Kamutef, a complex form of Amun. The text on the plinth explains that it was dedicated to the divine adoratrice Ankhnesneferibra by one of her servants.

Three objects, centre and right

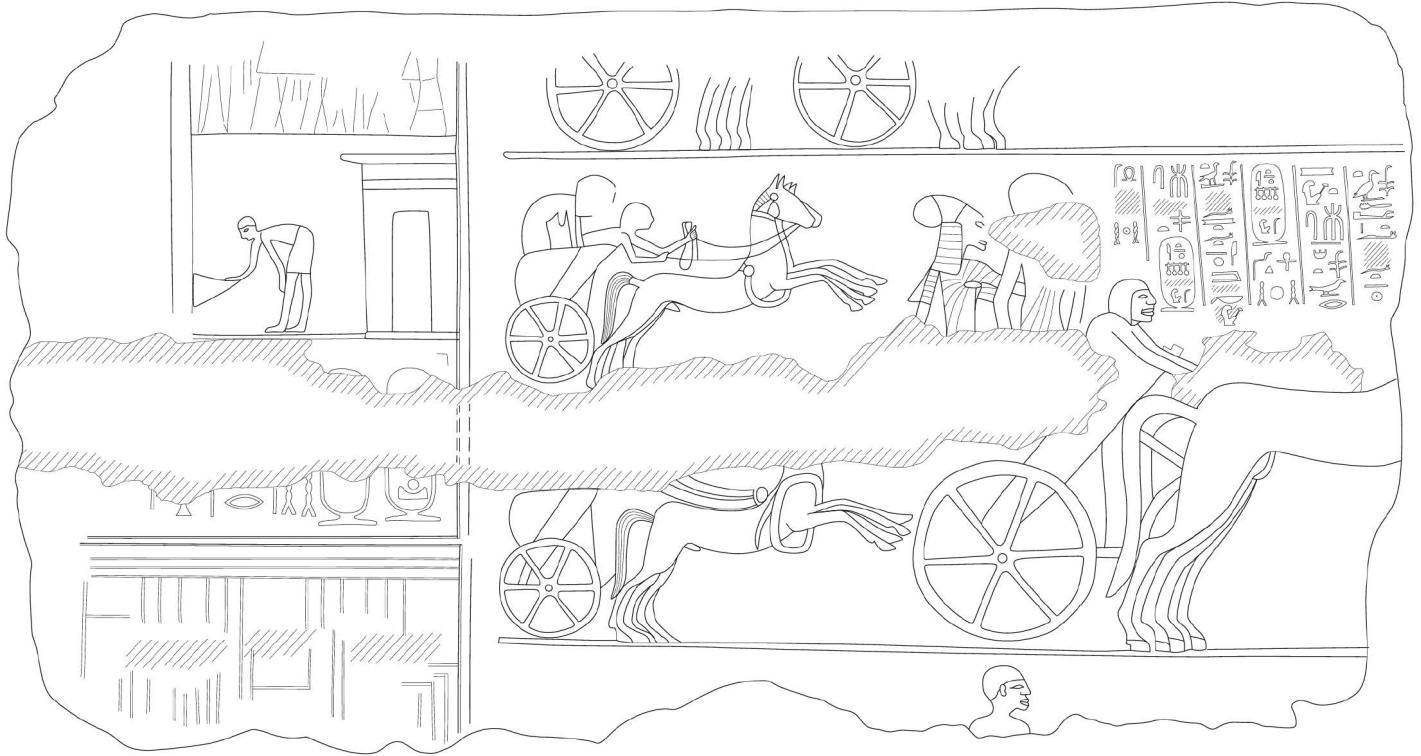
Relief showing two princesses in their chariot

Egypt, Amarna, River Palace, room 25
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep IV/
Akhenaten, about 1352–1336 BCE
red quartzite

EA55616

The royal family of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, with their six daughters, was often the subject of decoration during the Amarna Period. This relief shows a procession of chariots, the one on the right carrying princesses Meritaten and Meketaten, riding across the city of Amarna. Vivid scenes such as this often recorded life in palaces and temples. Here, a man is shown bending forward,

a broom in his hand. The later re-use of this block has partly obscured the scene. Below is an illustrated line drawing.



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Relief depicting a princess

Egypt, Amarna

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep IV/

Akhenaten, about 1352–1336 BCE

sandstone

EA63964

During the Amarna Period, Pharaoh Akhenaten controversially replaced traditional religious beliefs, which recognised a great number of gods, with the worship of a single deity, the sun-disc Aten. The art of this period is distinctive. Representations of the royal family featured elongated heads, as well as private scenes of the pharaoh with his daughters, something highly unusual. Here, one of the king's daughters is shown with a sistrum, a sacred rattle often used in temple rituals, probably worshipping Aten.

Figure of a queen with delicately inlaid dress and wig

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
25th Dynasty, about 716–656 BCE
bronze, silver, gold

EA54388

The vulture headdress shown on this figure symbolises Nekhbet, goddess of Upper Egypt. This style was mainly worn by royal wives, suggesting that she is a queen. She also wears a fitted dress decorated with gold and silver inlays. A gold figure on the chest associates her with the god Osiris, one of the mythical rulers of Egypt. This figure reminds us how bright temple objects could be, as even the face may once have been gilded.

For kids

Look for the statue of a queen on the right-hand side of the case. She is wearing a very unusual head covering – a vulture headdress. Can you see the bird on her head with its wings either side of her face? In ancient Egypt the vulture headdress was only worn by women, in particular queens and goddesses. Her long dress is decorated with silver and gold. It is possible that when this statue was first made her face was also painted gold. She would have looked even more impressive than she does now.

Top to bottom

Figure of a kneeling priest, possibly a prince

Egypt, possibly Thebes

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE

painted limestone

EA21979

The leopard skin covering the back of this figure and the short wig with its braided sidelock were typically worn by priests. Based on the features, which emulate the king, the figure was probably made during the reign of Amenhotep III. It may even represent Amenhotep's eldest son, Thutmose. As a high priest of Ptah at Memphis, the prince would have worn such clothes and adornments. Thutmose died prematurely and Amenhotep III was

succeeded by another son, Amenhotep IV, later known as Akhenaten.

Relief depicting a mother and her son

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Ptolemaic Period, about 305–30 BCE

limestone

EA57348

This relief represents a royal or divine mother and son in a style typical of the Ptolemaic Period. It may depict a Greek queen, possibly Cleopatra I or III. The boy wears the traditional sidelock of hair as a mark of his youth, while the queen wears a vulture headdress, a symbol of royal women. Coregency was common during this period, and this mother and son may have ruled together.

Temple foundation deposit naming Pharaoh Ramses II and his son Khaemwaset

Egypt, Memphis

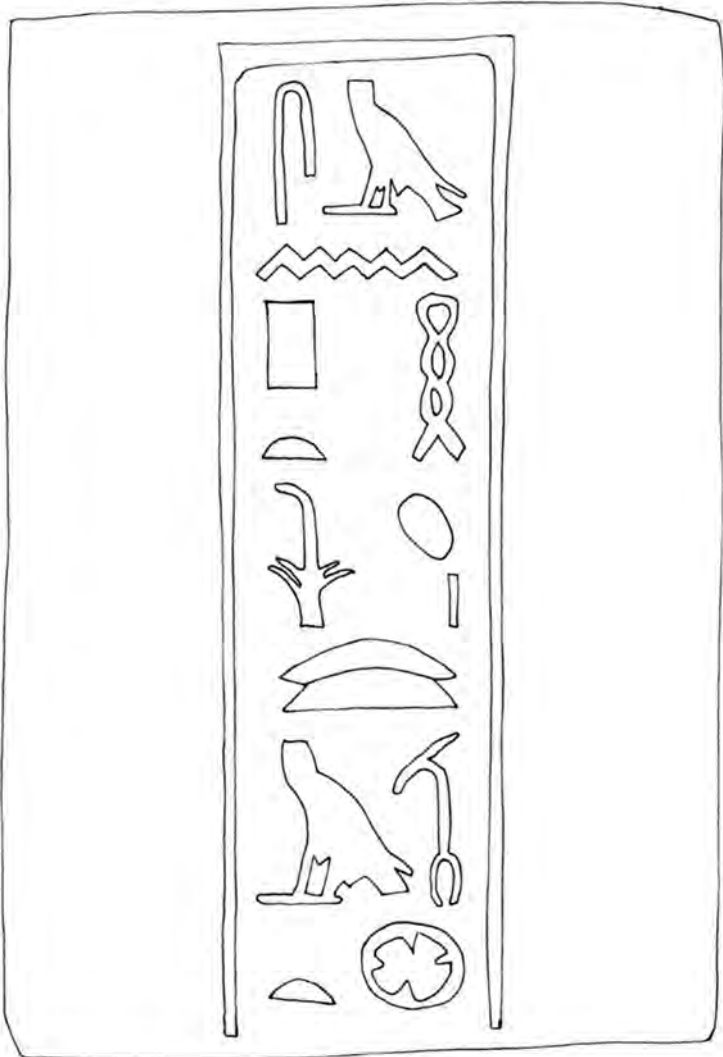
19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II,
about 1279–1213 BCE

sandstone

EA48664

This block was buried as a foundation deposit, probably at a temple in Memphis, near modern-day Cairo. On one side, the inscription refers to Ramses II, the king who ordered the temple to be built. The back (line drawing below) mentions his son, Khaemwaset, who, as a *sem* priest of Ptah, would have taken an active role during religious and funerary rituals in Memphis. Prince Khaemwaset was known for renovating older monuments and may even have

overseen this temple's construction.



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Statue of court official Senenmut with Princess Neferura

Egypt, Thebes, Karnak

18th Dynasty, reign of Thutmose III,
about 1479–1472 BCE

granodiorite

EA174

Princes and princesses were educated by high officials from the royal court. Princess Neferura, daughter of Queen Hatshepsut, is shown as a young girl holding a finger to her mouth, sitting on the knee of Senenmut, the court official responsible for her education. Many statues depict Senenmut with the princess, emphasising his link with the royal family.

Statue of future Pharaoh Horemheb and his wife

Egypt, Saqqara, tomb of Horemheb
18th Dynasty, reigns of Tutankhamun
or Ay,

about 1336–1323 BCE

limestone

EA36

The style of the fashionable garments worn by this couple, originally unidentified, helped to date this statue to the end of the 18th Dynasty. In the 1970s a fragment of the sculpture's hand was found in a tomb built by Horemheb in Saqqara. It was a perfect match that allowed the statue to be attributed to Horemheb and his wife from the time when Horemheb was commander-in-chief of the army. Unlike many other kings, Horemheb was not

of royal birth, but he was a successful army general under Tutankhamun before he rose to become pharaoh.

Bust of Queen Nefertari

Egypt, Thebes

19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II,
about 1279–1213 BCE

black granite

EA1133

Nefertari, Ramses II's first Great Wife, is known for her beautiful tomb in the Valley of the Queens. This fragment of a statue depicts her with a wig and the remains of a crown. Her extended right arm and the hand visible behind her left shoulder suggest that this was part of a group statue with the queen originally in an embrace, possibly with her husband.

Lower part of a standing statue of Pharaoh Ramses II

Egypt, Serabit el-Khadim

19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II, about 1279–1213 BCE

sandstone

EA697

Another Great Wife of Ramses II appears at the side of this statue. Bintanat, who is holding a lotus flower, was not only the pharaoh's wife but also his daughter. She became a principal wife after the death of her mother, another queen called Isetneferet. However, there is no firm evidence of any children from the unions between Ramses II and his daughters, who mainly held a ceremonial role.

Wall text:

Royal palaces

Built across Egypt, royal palaces provided living quarters and protection for the king, the royal family and their entourage. As a location for the king to perform his duties as a political leader, palaces had to convey his power and authority, with rooms dedicated to welcoming official guests. Most kings established their own residences to support their religious and administrative tours around the country. While temples were mainly built in stone, palaces were largely made from sun-dried mudbrick, so very few of them have survived to the modern day. However, the colourful inlays and paintings found inside the surviving examples reveal their original splendour.

Artwork labels:

Case left

Tiles with royal names and plant motifs

Egypt, Tell el-Yahudiya

20th Dynasty, about 1184–1153 BCE

faience

EA12835, EA12369, EA12911 and EA12914

EA16113, EA16115, EA16103, EA16104, EA16108, EA16062,
EA16074, EA16076, EA16097 and EA16110

EA69252, EA69253, EA69258, EA69260, EA69263, EA69278,
EA69286, EA69296, EA69306, EA69319 and EA69322

Palaces were lavishly decorated. Many paintings and tiles featured plant motifs, mirroring the fertile and lively landscape of Egypt. Royal names were also used as ornamental elements to commemorate the king who built the palace. These examples include parts of the names of Ramses III, preserved from a monument

at Tell el-Yahudiya in northern Egypt, which is now largely destroyed.

Case centre

Tile with the name of Pharaoh Amenhotep III

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE

gilded faience

EA58953

This tile was produced for a monument built by Amenhotep III. The gilded inscription depicts the name and titles of the king on a bright blue background in a style that was particularly popular at the time. With its vivid colours, this tile would have marked an architectural feature such as a doorway.

Case right

Tiles showing prisoners and *rekhyt* birds

Egypt, Tell el-Yahudiya

20th Dynasty, reign of Ramses III,
about 1184–1153 BCE

faience

EA12367, EA12368, EA12347 and EA12345
EA12967 and EA12979

Ramses III wanted to convey his power and control over delegations visiting from afar. Scenes depicting foreign prisoners, often with highly decorated garments, evoked the pharaoh's domination over other regions. On two of these tiles, a *rekhyt* bird (lapwing) sits upon a basket forming a hieroglyphic text that can be read as 'all the subjects of Pharaoh', emphasising how the king held ultimate control over all people in Egypt.

Wall text:

Ancient Egyptian jewellery

Ancient Egyptian men, women and children wore rings, necklaces and amulets, often as markers of power and status or as protection from evil spirits. Shape, composition and manufacture varied. Solid gold pieces were fit for kings or the royal entourage, while those with more modest budgets wore jewellery made from faience (a type of glazed ceramic), stone and bone. The pieces of jewellery shown here were deeply personal objects and held complex layers of meaning. Although the most intimate stories relating to these objects often remain concealed from modern understanding, they still provide a glimpse into the lives of the people who wore them.

Artwork labels:

Jewellery in life and in death

Men and women were regularly depicted wearing jewellery for embellishment as well as protection. Many people were buried with favourite pieces that were still believed to be effective even after death.

Painted relief of an unnamed woman from the tomb of nomarch Djehutyhotep

Egypt, Deir el-Bersha, tomb of Djehutyhotep

12th Dynasty, reign of Senusret III, about 1874–1855 BCE

painted limestone

EA1150

Originally shown leading a procession, this woman was a member of nomarch

(provincial governor) Djehutyhotep's family, perhaps his sister. Her tight sheath dress adorned with a full set of jewellery probably mirrors items she wore in life. The diadem placed over a wig and the broad collar with matching bracelets and anklets all reflect trends of the time.

For kids

In ancient Egypt, almost everyone wore jewellery. Women, men and even children wore amulets, rings and necklaces that protected them from bad spirits and helped show how important they were in society. While the wealthy and royal members of society wore gold jewellery, everyday people wore pieces that were made from faience, stone and even animal bone! Jewellery was very special for the ancient Egyptians, just like it is for people today. Do you have a piece of jewellery that means a lot to you?

Jewellery in death

Most examples of jewellery that have survived from ancient Egypt have been discovered in tombs. While some pieces show traces of wear from being used in life, others were specifically produced to adorn the dead.

Necklaces, bracelets and girdles found on the body of an unnamed woman

Egypt, Mostagedda, grave 544

First Intermediate Period,
about 2181–2040 BCE

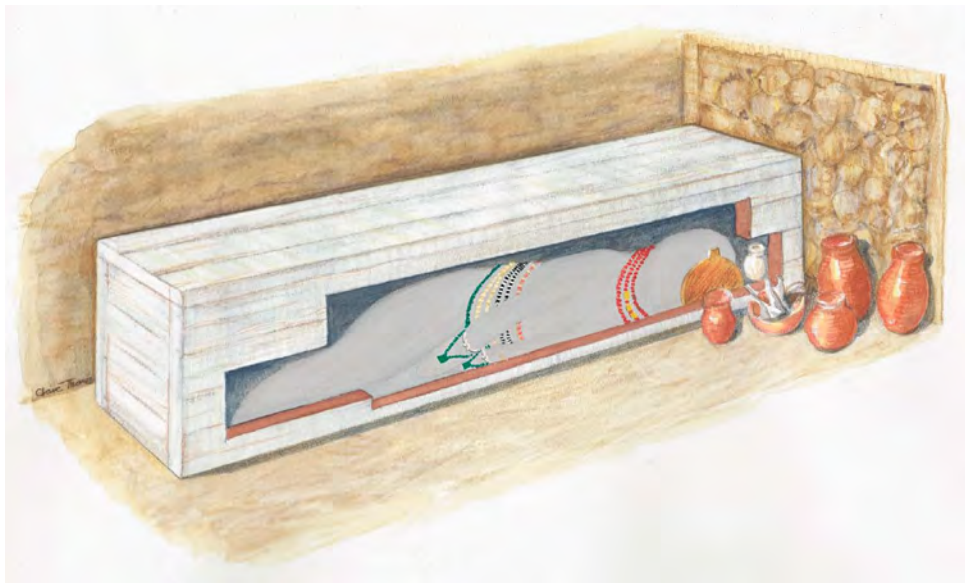
gold, copper, faience, silver, steatite,
electrum, limestone, shell, ostrich
eggshell, cornelian

EA62468 to EA62475

These colourful beads in multiple rows

were arranged around the neck and waist of a woman buried 4000 years ago. The knot on the gold and copper bangle was believed to magically protect her from hostile forces. The bracelet on her left wrist included an amulet in the shape of Heh, the god of infinity – a fitting choice when seeking an eternal afterlife.

Below is an artist's impression of grave 544, with a cutaway view of the coffin showing the placement of jewellery and other grave goods.



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Meaning and power

Most ancient Egyptian jewellery conveyed meaning. The power of the king was expressed not only through crowns and sceptres but also through clothes and adornment.

Tomb painting representing King Amenhotep I

Egypt, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, tomb of Kynebu

20th Dynasty, reign of Ramses VIII, about 1129–1126 BCE

painted plaster

EA37993

This painting, from the tomb of priest Kynebu, depicts Amenhotep I (about 1525–1504 BCE). The many pieces of jewellery he wears mark his royal

status. The diadem was painted in yellow to represent gold, while the collar is similar to some examples found in the tomb of Tutankhamun (about 1336–1327 BCE).

The power of jewellery

Jewellery transcended society and genders as most people living in ancient Egypt would have owned a piece. The design, materials and quality of craftsmanship would have conveyed the owner's level of power and wealth.

Case wall, top to bottom

Wig from a royal statue, with bands and ribbons in gilded plaster inlaid with coloured glass, imitating cornelian and turquoise

Egypt, possibly Thebes

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

faience, gold, plaster, glass

EA2280

Collar

Egypt, Saqqara, burial above tomb 3507

Pan Grave culture; late Middle Kingdom to early New Kingdom, about 1800–1400 BCE

faience

EA67171

Some types of jewellery, such as broad collars and diadems placed over the hair or a wig, were worn by both royal and non-royal individuals. Similar pieces appear in the depictions of the unnamed noblewoman (in the case to your left) and King Amenhotep I (in the case to your right).

Case floor, centre

Collar terminal in the shape of a lotus flower with the names of Pharaoh Amenhotep III

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE

faience

EA65817

This faience terminal is in the shape of a lotus flower, a symbol of rebirth. It would have been used to gather several strands of beads together at one end of a broad collar. Beneath the floral motif is a band of text that reads ‘May the good god live, Lord of the Two Lands, Nebmaatira, son of Ra, Amenhotep’.

**Plaque showing King Amenemhat IV
offering ointment to the god Atum,
Lord of Heliopolis**

Lebanon, Byblos

12th Dynasty, reign of Amenemhat IV,
about 1808–1799 BCE

gold

This delicate ornament was produced by piercing the scene from a thin gold plaque, a metalworking technique today known as *ajouré* or openwork. It was carefully done so that all elements remained attached to one another, while additional features were finely incised. The hieroglyphic inscription between the two figures describes the scene as 'giving unguent', or ointment.

Case floor, left, left to right

**Finger ring with a scarab showing
Pharaoh Thutmose III kneeling and
holding a *wedjat*-eye**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
New Kingdom, about 1479–1069 BCE
gold, steatite

EA64793

**Finger ring with a scarab bearing two
names of Pharaoh Thutmose III in
cartouches**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
New Kingdom, about 1479–1069 BCE
electrum, steatite

EA17894

**Finger ring with the name of
Pharaoh Amenhotep III**

Egypt, Thebes, probably Medinet Habu

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE

faience

EA66427

**Finger ring with a scarab showing a
king in a boat with a cartouche,
perhaps that of Thutmose III**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1479–1069 BCE

gold, steatite

EA17883

**Finger ring with the inscription,
‘The good goddess Maatkara
(Hatshepsut), may she live’**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

18th Dynasty, reign of Hatshepsut,
about 1472–1458 BCE

gold, faience

EA49717

Rings bearing a royal cartouche were common markers of power. Not only could they be used to seal important documents, but their symbolism could also associate their wearer with the king. Some were worn by officials working under royal patronage, while others gave the name of a former king. This was often the case with Thutmose III whose name continued to be used on items long after his death.

Case floor, right

Signet ring with a royal inscription and a child representing the pharaoh's regeneration

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
late 18th Dynasty, about 1350–1295 BCE
gold

EA32723

Jewellery in life

Jewellery found in urban sites is often made from modest materials. Many examples in coloured faience (a type of glazed ceramic) and glass were discovered in Amarna, the city in Middle Egypt founded by Pharaoh Akhenaten (about 1352–1336 BCE).

Case wall, top to bottom

Necklaces with beads depicting plant and floral motifs

Egypt, Amarna

18th Dynasty, about 1352–1323 BCE

faience

EA57884 and EA59335

String with beads of various shapes, including the head of the goddess

Hathor, frogs, crocodiles and grapes

Egypt, Amarna

18th Dynasty, about 1352–1323 BCE

faience, cornelian, feldspar, glass,
lapis lazuli, amethyst

EA63549

Broad collar

Egypt, Amarna, North Suburb

18th Dynasty, about 1352–1323 BCE

faience

EA59334

This broad collar of faience beads was found complete, although its original arrangement is unknown due to the loss of its stringing. The plant motifs of mandrake fruits and lotus flowers were common at the time and conveyed regenerative powers.

Case floor, left to right

Finger rings with bezels showing animal or floral motifs, a *wedjat*-eye and the name of Pharaoh Akhenaten

Egypt, Amarna

18th Dynasty, about 1352–1323 BCE

faience

EA57491, EA57877, EA57880, EA57881 and EA59315

Ear plugs or beads in coloured glass

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE

glass

EA65535 and EA65536

Bead or ear stud

Egypt, Amarna

18th Dynasty, about 1352–1323 BCE

glass

EA68531

Ear stud with rosette

Egypt, Amarna, house U.35.18

18th Dynasty, about 1352–1323 BCE

faience

EA59306

Divine protection

Many people sought protection by wearing amulets of their favourite gods, each evoked for their unique divine qualities. These amulets were often attached to clothing or worn on a string or chain to keep them close.

Case wall, top to bottom

Necklace in the shape of a snake eating its tail, a symbol of eternity, with a heart scarab pendant

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

18th–19th Dynasties,

about 1400–1200 BCE

gold, bronze, basalt

EA29626

Necklace with beads bearing the inscription Psamtek, a royal name

used by non-royal people seeking the king's protection

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
26th Dynasty or later, from 664 BCE
faience

EA24312

Necklace with cat-shaped beads, symbols of the protective goddess Bastet

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE
gold, faience

EA59420

The goddess Bastet was regarded as the daughter of the sun-god Ra. She embodied the protective aspects of a mother-goddess, in contrast to the more aggressive characteristics of the lion-headed goddess Sekhmet. Bastet

was often portrayed as a cat, and it is most likely this goddess that the many small amulets on this necklace represent.

Necklace with amulets in the shape of the hippopotamus goddess Taweret, protector of the household

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE
gold

EA59418

Case floor, back row

Ornament in the form of a flying falcon, with feathers of cloisonné glass

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Late Period to early Ptolemaic Period,
664–200 BCE

gold, glass

EA57323

Case floor, front row, left to right

Finger ring decorated with a figure of the god Bes, protector of the family

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

gold

EA54625

Amulet of Amun, king of the gods

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period to Ptolemaic Period,

about 664–30 BCE

gold

EA65329

Amulet of the creator god Ptah, patron of artisans

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
26th Dynasty, about 664–525 BCE
gold

EA26976

Amulet of Mut, wife of Amun in Thebes

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
New Kingdom to Third Intermediate
Period, about 1550–656 BCE
gold

EA33888

Amulet of the ibis-headed god Thoth holding a *wedjat*-eye

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
late New Kingdom to early Third
Intermediate Period, about 1000–900
BCE

gold

EA23426

Ibis-headed Thoth was the god of knowledge and writing, so his protection was particularly favoured by scribes and priests. Amulets in his shape were also placed in mummy wrappings because Thoth took part in the judgement that granted the deceased access to the afterlife. *Wedjat*-eye amulets represented the eye of Horus, which was lost in battle and restored to him by Thoth. Thus the *wedjat*-eye came to symbolise healing and making whole, as well as protection, strength and perfection.

Amulet of the goddess Sekhmet or Bastet

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Third Intermediate Period,

about 1000–800 BCE

silver

EA3360

**Pendant depicting a lion goddess,
probably Sekhmet, flanked by uraei**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Third Intermediate Period,

about 1069–656 BCE

gold, faience

EA14375

**Amulet with the head of Hathor on a
staff**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom to Ptolemaic Period,

about 1550–30 BCE

gold

EA26977

Amulets in the form of flies, known for

Divine protection

HOME 190

their protective properties

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

gold

EA59416 and EA59417

The fly was considered to have apotropaic (the ability to avert evil) power and these amulets may have been worn for their protective qualities. During the New Kingdom, larger fly pendants were awarded for the military decoration known as the ‘order of the golden fly’ or ‘fly of valour’. The association of the fly is perhaps based on the quality of flies to be persistent in the face of opposition, an attribute associated with the Egyptians’ persistence in attacking the enemy.

Power of symbols

Certain shapes represented plants or animals with qualities or abilities valued by the wearer. Ancient Egyptians also attributed symbolic and magical properties to certain materials and colours, selecting them carefully.

Case wall, top to bottom

String of beads with body part-shaped amulets, believed to protect the integrity of the body

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

First Intermediate Period to Middle Kingdom, about 2181–1650 BCE

faience, cornelian, amethyst, feldspar, ivory, jasper, steatite

EA30347

Girdle with amulets, beads and

pendants

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
12th Dynasty, about 1985–1795 BCE
electrum, silver, lapis lazuli, feldspar,
amethyst, cornelian, glass

EA3077

Most of the delicate amulets forming this girdle have symbolic properties. The central pendant in the shape of a lotus flower symbolises regeneration. The figure of the kneeling man represents Heh, god of infinity, holding palm ribs to symbolise millions of years. The sidelocks of hair evoke youth and the cowrie shells fertility. The fish amulets add a layer of protection, shielding the wearer, who was probably a girl or a young woman, from external harm.

Necklace with lizard amulets, symbols

of regeneration

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE
gold, lapis lazuli, cornelian

EA3081

Lizards, with their fondness for the sun, could be associated with several solar creator gods, such as Atum and Amun-Ra. The small lizard pendants were possibly incorporated into this necklace because of their association with notions of regeneration, probably because they were capable of regrowing their tail, if lost.

Pair of bracelets with snake headed terminals

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
end of Late Period to Ptolemaic Period,
about 400–100 BCE

gold, copper alloy

EA34264

Case floor, back row, left to right

Heart-shaped pendants

findspot unknown, probably Egypt;

Egypt, Tell Nabasha (EA18284)

possibly Ptolemaic Period,

about 305–30 BCE

gold, one with a structural core

EA23427, EA18284 and EA14710

For the ancient Egyptians, the heart rather than the brain was believed to be the seat of intelligence and the centre of the emotions and memory. It was regarded as the most important of all the internal organs and was often left in the body during mummification as it was believed that the heart was necessary for

judgement in the underworld. During some periods heart-shaped amulets, resembling vessels with lug handles, were part of the standard funerary equipment for the deceased.

Finger ring with uraeus flanked by lotus flowers

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
possibly New Kingdom,
about 1550–1069 BCE

gold

EA54583,b

Spacer-bars decorated with cats and inscribed with the names of King Nubkheperra Intef and Queen Sobekemsaf

Egypt, Edfu

17th Dynasty, reign of Nubkheperra Intef,
about 1571–1560 BCE

gold

EA57699 and EA57700

Case floor, front row, left to right

Finger ring with bezel in the shape of a protective *wedjat*-eye, inscribed with an *ankh* sign for life

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

gold, cornelian

EA2925

Finger ring with a frog bezel with a cat incised on the base, two symbols of fecundity and fertility

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

electrum, cornelian

EA2928

Amulets in the shape of fish, probably worn in the hair

Egypt, Thebes

12th Dynasty, about 1985–1795 BCE

gold, quartz

EA30482 and EA30483

Fish carried multiple meanings in ancient Egypt. They could be sacred and therefore taboo in some regions, while part of a normal diet in others. An ancient text describes how a magician parted the waters of a lake to retrieve a fish amulet, perhaps similar to these, which had fallen from a woman's hair. Although the true nature of the amulet's power is not stated, it is often associated with young women. The prolific appearance of fish during the annual Nile flood probably established their association with fertility.

Amulets in the shape of sphinxes, linked to royal powers

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Middle Kingdom, about 2040–1650 BCE
gold

EA30486 and EA30487

Mining in the deserts

The land surrounding the Nile Valley was rich in minerals and materials. Semi-precious stones were mined from the deserts, while various shells were collected from the Red Sea.

Case wall, top to bottom

String with beads in the shape of poppy buds

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE
red jasper, cornelian

EA30417

Shells probably collected from the Red Sea and used as beads

Egypt, el-Badari, grave 4803
Badarian Period, about 4400–4000 BCE

nerita shell, natica shell, ancillaria shell

EA59630

Necklace with an amulet pendant in the shape of a *ba* bird, a person's spirit that could move freely after death

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Middle Kingdom, about 2040–1650 BCE

amethyst, feldspar

EA35116

A large source of amethyst was discovered during the Middle Kingdom (about 2040–1650 BCE) in the Eastern Desert, near Aswan. With its unique purple colour, this semi-precious stone became fashionable among the elite and the mine was soon depleted. It was not until the Roman Period (from 30 BCE) that amethyst was used again, when new

sources were discovered.

String of beads in amethyst and a pendant in cornelian, mined in the Western and Eastern Deserts

Egypt, possibly Thebes

Middle Kingdom, about 2040–1650 BCE

amethyst, cornelian

EA16938

String with beads of hematite, known as *bia* in ancient Egyptian, a word also used for iron

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Middle Kingdom, about 2040–1650 BCE

hematite, garnet

EA36485

Case floor, left to right, top to bottom

Pendant with the cartouche of King

Senusret I

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

12th Dynasty, reign of Senusret I,

about 1965–1920 BCE

mother-of-pearl

EA65268

**Pendant in the shape of a shell,
incised (possibly in modern times)
with a cartouche naming Senusret**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

12th Dynasty, about 1985–1795 BCE

gold

EA65281

Mother-of-pearl is a hard, iridescent material from the inner lining of mollusc shells. Found in the Red Sea, it was often used in jewellery, probably because of the appeal of its shiny surface for decoration. Shell-shaped

amulets were particularly common during the Middle Kingdom, whether made from real shell or reproduced in gold.

Pendant in the form of a *ba* bird

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
26th Dynasty or later, from about 600
BCE

gold, lapis lazuli, turquoise

EA3361

Cylindrical amulet with turquoise beads, a popular semi-precious stone mined in the Sinai Desert

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Middle Kingdom, about 2040–1650 BCE
gold, turquoise

EA68545

Finger ring with a scarab carved from white agate with a brown vein, typical of the Eastern Desert

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
possibly Ptolemaic Period to Roman
Period, 305 BCE – 395 CE

agate, gold

EA54283

Finger ring with the *ankh* (life) sign roughly incised on the stone

Egypt, Thebes

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

cornelian

EA54604

Two finger rings, one with a bezel carved as a scarab

Egypt, Gurob

New Kingdom, about 1390–1069 BCE

chalcedony

EA68914 and EA68916

Two finger rings in jasper, an opaque stone mainly mined in the Eastern Desert

findspot unknown, probably Egypt;

Egypt, Gurob (EA68918)

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

jasper

EA68918 and EA54600

Bracelet from a tomb also containing necklaces in cornelian, steatite, shell and bone

Egypt, Hu, grave X 58

Pan Grave culture; Second Intermediate

Period, about 1750–1550 BCE

mother-of-pearl, gold

EA30849

Materials from beyond Egypt

Riches from across Africa – such as gold, ivory and other exotic items – were imported into Egypt. Several materials were sourced from the east of Egypt, including lapis lazuli, a dark blue stone from Afghanistan.

Case wall, top to bottom, left to right

Bracelet found in the burial of an unnamed woman

Egypt, Matmar, grave 1213

First Intermediate Period,

about 2181–2040 BCE

faience, cornelian, lapis lazuli

EA63446

String with drop-shaped beads made of polished stones decorated with a

strip of thin gold foil

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Middle Kingdom, about 2040–1650 BCE

lapis lazuli, chalcedony, gold

EA24772

String of beads with a scarab in obsidian, a black volcanic glass probably sourced in Ethiopia

Egypt, Abydos, tomb 1818

Middle Kingdom, about 2040–1650 BCE

garnet, obsidian, cornelian

EA58573

Bangle made of twisted gold wires

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

late Ptolemaic Period to early Roman

Period, 1st century BCE – 1st century CE

gold

EA14457

Panel from a bracelet, depicting a kneeling falcon-headed god with coloured glass inlays

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Third Intermediate Period to Late Period,
about 1069–332 BCE
elephant ivory, glass

EA38183

Pair of bangles

Egypt, Deir el-Bahri, pit 3
11th Dynasty, about 2040–1985 BCE
silver, gold

EA40931

Case shelf, left to right

Pendant of a cat

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE

electrum

EA59855

Head of a king wearing the double crown

Egypt, Dahsur

12th Dynasty, about 1985–1795 BCE

electrum

EA29202

Amulet in the form of a goddess, possibly Hathor

Egypt, Dahsur

12th Dynasty, about 1985–1795 BCE

electrum

EA29201

Amulet in the shape of the moon-god Khonsu

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Third Intermediate Period,

about 1069–656 BCE

electrum with gilded surface

EA38006

Electrum is an alloy of gold that, according to modern standards, requires 20–50 per cent silver. Ancient Egyptian gold often contained a small quantity of silver, making it difficult to tell gold and electrum apart. Electrum is harder than gold and less likely to show signs of wear, making it an ideal metal for jewellery. The shades of yellow found on items made from electrum derive from the varied amounts of silver they contain.

Pendant of the god Nefertum, son of Ptah and Sekhmet

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Third Intermediate Period to Late Period,
about 1069–332 BCE

silver

EA66818

Egypt had relatively few silver mines, so this precious metal was largely imported, probably from western Asia and the Mediterranean. Known as *nub hedj* (white gold), silver was at first so rare that, when introduced into the Egyptian economy, its value was higher than gold. According to ancient myths, the gods' bones were thought to be made of silver, a belief that was perhaps reflected in the choice of silver for this amulet of Nefertum.

Openwork uraeus amulet, perhaps part of a diadem

Egypt, probably Thebes

Middle Kingdom, about 2040–1650 BCE
electrum and gold

EA34266

Case floor, top to bottom, left to right

Earring

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

electrum

EA2864

Pair of electrum earrings with bands in gold

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

electrum, gold

EA2755 and EA2756

Pair of large hollow earrings

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

gold

EA54315 and EA54316

Finger ring with a cylindrical bezel

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE

gold, lapis lazuli

EA2922

Ornament with a bull's head on a gold mount decorated with uraei and lotus flowers

Egypt, Dashur

Third Intermediate Period,
about 1069–656 BCE

gold, lapis lazuli

EA14456

Lapis lazuli, a dark blue semi-precious stone particularly valued by the ancient Egyptians, was imported from

Afghanistan. The unusual shape of this lapis lazuli bull's head suggests that it was not carved in Egypt, as it contrasts with the more traditional Egyptian motifs of the gold mount. It was perhaps made in the Middle East.

Finger ring with a scarab naming Queen Hatshepsut

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Hatshepsut,
about 1472–1458 BCE

gold, glass

EA2933

Finger ring with a scarab mounted on a silver-wire shank

Egypt, Abydos, tomb G62
late Middle Kingdom,
about 1800–1700 BCE

silver, lapis lazuli

EA37309

Finger ring with a scarab bezel

Egypt, Abydos, tomb G62

late Middle Kingdom,

about 1850–1650 BCE

gold, obsidian

EA37308

Mixing local and imported materials

Whether sourced locally, from across Africa or Afghanistan, the range of materials identified among these pieces reflects a constant search for alternative sources and innovative techniques in the art of jewellery making.

Case wall, top to bottom

Necklace found on the body of an unnamed woman

Egypt, Mostagedda, tomb 312

4th Dynasty, about 2613–2494 BCE

faience, nassa shell, steatite, cornelian, calcite, quartz, feldspar

EA62443

Two strings of beads from a large tomb that was used for multiple

burials

Egypt, Abydos, tomb G62

late Middle Kingdom,

about 1850–1650 BCE

garnet, cornelian, feldspar, faience,
lapis lazuli

EA37314 and EA37313

String of beads and pendants of various shapes

Egypt, Nile Delta

probably Roman Period,

about 30 BCE – 395 CE

lapis lazuli, agate, amber, diorite,
feldspar, garnet, rock crystal, jasper,
steatite, chalcedony, glass, amethyst,
cornelian

EA23470

The beads in these necklaces
demonstrate the wide variety of materials

Mixing local and imported materials

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used in jewellery manufacture from the time when the pyramids were built (about 2500 BCE) right down to the Roman Period (from 30 BCE). From man-made faience (a type of glazed ceramic) to carefully chiselled semi-precious stones and delicately modelled gold, new mines were exploited, trading partnerships formed and alternative techniques were developed.

Case floor, left to right

Three bangles, probably for a child

Egypt, Saqqara, mastaba D144

3rd Dynasty, about 2686–2613 BCE

bone, possibly from a cow

EA68316, EA68317 and EA68318

Necklace found on the body of an

Mixing local and imported materials

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unnamed woman

Egypt, Mostagedda, tomb 312

4th Dynasty, about 2613–2494 BCE

gold, turquoise

EA62444

Hair ring or earring

Egypt, Gurob

New Kingdom, about 1390–1069 BCE

shell

EA68892

Hair ring

Egypt, Matmar, house 1020

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

jasper

EA63471

Hair ring or earring

Egypt, Gurob

New Kingdom, about 1390–1069 BCE

Mixing local and imported materials

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calcite

EA68895

Hair ring or earring

Egypt, Gurob

New Kingdom, about 1390–1069 BCE

jasper

EA68909

Influence beyond Egypt

Certain motifs, shapes and symbols were shared by people living around the Mediterranean. Many objects produced during the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods (332 BCE – 395 CE) showcase the multicultural identities of the people living in Egypt at the time.

Case wall, top to bottom, left to right

Necklace with a pendant of the god Harpocrates

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Ptolemaic Period, about 332–30 BCE
gold

EA26332

Pair of uraei with highly stylised female figures

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Ptolemaic Period to early Roman Period,
1st century BCE – 1st century CE
silver

EA30469 and EA30470

Pair of earrings

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Roman Period, 30 BCE – 395 CE
gold

EA40661

Finger ring and pendant with busts, including the head of Serapis, a god combining Egyptian and Greek religious beliefs

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Ptolemaic Period to early Roman Period,
2nd century BCE – 1st century CE
gold

EA26320 and EA41533

Pendants of the child god

Harpocrates, who was adapted by the Greeks from the Egyptian god Horus, perhaps used as protective amulets

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Ptolemaic Period to early Roman Period,
2nd century BCE – 1st century CE

gold

EA26319 and EA29499

Cross pendants, symbols of the Christian faith

Egypt, Thebes and Abusir

Byzantine Period,
about 395–639 CE

copper alloy (EA17672),
mother-of-pearl (EA17649)

EA17672 and EA17649

Case floor, back row, left to right

Pair of earrings with lion terminals, a Persian motif commonly used in Greek jewellery

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Ptolemaic Period, about 300–100 BCE

gold

EA26329 and EA26330

Finger ring in the shape of a snake

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Ptolemaic Period, about 300–100 BCE

gold

EA16521

Finger ring with a snake and a hawk

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

late Ptolemaic Period to early Roman

Period, 1st century BCE – 1st century CE

gold

Influence beyond Egypt

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Snakes were particularly popular in ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultures. While fiercely adorning the brow of the pharaohs, snakes were also believed to guard against disease and poison. In Greek mythology, they were associated with health and Asklepios, the god of healing, is often shown grasping a serpent-entwined staff.

Case floor, front row, left to right

**Magical gem showing a scorpion,
possibly for protection against bites or
to enhance sexual power**

produced in the Eastern Mediterranean
Roman Period, 3rd century CE

yellow jasper

EA56180

**Magical gem showing Anubis carrying
a mummified Osiris**

produced in the Eastern Mediterranean
Roman Period, 3rd century CE

hematite

EA56038

**Magical gem showing a man
harvesting crops, believed to help
cure back problems**

produced in the Eastern Mediterranean

Influence beyond Egypt

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Roman Period, 4th century CE

hematite

EA56046

Magical gem depicting the hybrid Graeco-Egyptian lion-headed god Chnoubis on one side and Asklepios, the Greek god of medicine, with his daughter Hygieia, on the other

produced in the Eastern Mediterranean
Roman Period, 3rd century CE

agate

EA56021

Below is an image of the other side of this gem.



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Magical gem showing Pantheos, a god combining various deities, and an inscription in Greek for protection from evil

produced in the Eastern Mediterranean Roman Period, 3rd century CE

green jasper

Influence beyond Egypt

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EA56011

Ring with a gem showing a winged scarab on one side and the Greek word for 'sun' on the other

produced in the Eastern Mediterranean Roman Period, 3rd century CE

hematite, iron

1986,0501.118

Magical gem depicting a womb closed by a key, protecting women during pregnancy and birth

produced in the Eastern Mediterranean Roman Period, 3rd century CE

hematite

EA48024

Magical gem showing two donkeys protecting a womb, inscribed at the back with lao, a form of Yahweh, a

Hebrew name for God

produced in the Eastern Mediterranean
Roman Period, 3rd century CE

hematite

EA56294

Magical gem depicting the Egyptian falcon god Horus

produced in the Eastern Mediterranean
Roman Period, 1st century CE

cornelian

EA56195

Man-made materials: faience and glass

Sand – the raw material used to produce both glass and faience – was abundant and relatively easy to work. Many pieces of jewellery were inlaid with glass and faience instead of precious stones.

Case wall, top to bottom, left to right

String of coloured beads, some with mosaic patterns

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Roman Period, about 30 BCE – 395 CE

glass

EA43113

Three bangles in coloured glass

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Egypt, Akhmim (EA18663 and EA20858)

Roman Period, about 30 BCE – 395 CE

glass

EA18663, EA64158 and EA20858

Mould used to produce cartouches of Pharaoh Akhenaten

Egypt, Amarna

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep IV/
Akhenaten, about 1352–1336 BCE

clay

EA26839

Mould in the shape of an open lotus flower

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

clay

EA26362

Mould-made collar-terminal in the shape of an open lotus flower

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Man-made materials: faience and glass

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New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE
faience

EA7539

**Mould used to produce the bezel of a
finger ring with the name of
Ankhkheperura, who ruled for a short
period alongside or after Akhenaten**
Egypt, Amarna, house in the North
Suburb

18th Dynasty, about 1338–1336 BCE
clay

EA58515

**Finger ring with the name
of Ankhkheperura, probably made
from two moulds,
one for the bezel, another
for the shank**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1338–1336 BCE

Man-made materials: faience and glass

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faience

EA64845

Mould-made *wedjat*-eye amulets found on the body of a child

Egypt, Matmar, tomb 306

First Intermediate Period,
about 2181–2040 BCE

faience

EA63432

Mould used to produce *wedjat*-eye amulets

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period to Ptolemaic Periods,
about 656–30 BCE

limestone

EA59208

Amulet of an *aegis* (head and collar)

Man-made materials: faience and glass

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of Sekhmet above a figure of the god Bes and a *wedjat*-eye

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Third Intermediate Period to Late Period,
about 1069–332 BCE

faience

EA26231

Mould for an amulet in the shape of an *aegis* (head and collar of a deity) of the goddess Sekhmet

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

possibly Late Period, about 664–332
BCE

clay

EA25097

Moulds were commonly used to produce faience and metal objects.

They were incised with various shapes, including ring bezels and shanks and

amulets. Molten metal or faience mixture was poured inside. When it had cooled, the jewellery could be extracted, and the mould re-used.

Case floor, top to bottom, left to right

String of blue beads with black spiral motif

Egypt, Abydos

Middle Kingdom, about 2040–1650 BCE
faience, nassa shell

EA37355

Finger ring with a scarab, its base bearing the name of Pharaoh Thutmose III

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1479–1069 BCE
bronze, steatite

EA65016

Finger ring showing Pharaoh Thutmose III as a sphinx trampling over an enemy

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Thutmose III,
about 1479–1425 BCE

gold, glass

EA14349

The image of the king trampling an enemy is one of the most consistent throughout the 3000 years of ancient Egyptian history. On this ring, Pharaoh Thutmose III, who expanded the borders of the empire to its greatest extent, appears as a sphinx, half human and half lion, crushing a man under his powerful paws. The pharaoh's name appears in the top-left corner in a cartouche. The other side is carved with hieroglyphs presenting another of the

pharaoh's official names. This delicate ring's swivelling bezel is made from glass, in imitation of lapis lazuli, which was only obtainable from Afghanistan.

Below is an image of the reverse side of this ring.



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Finger ring with double-sided plaque, showing an ibex on one side

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

faience, gold

EA54185

Finger ring with a scarab carved from steatite, a soft local stone that hardened when fired, resembling faience

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

26th Dynasty, about 664–526 BCE

gold, steatite

EA65315

Finger ring with seated gods in openwork

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Third Intermediate Period,

about 1069–656 BCE

faience

EA65815

Spacer-bead showing a falcon wearing the double crown on one side, and Horus the Child on the other

findspot unknown, possibly Egypt,

Tuna el-Gebel

Third Intermediate Period,

about 1069–656 BCE

faience

EA36071

Faience (a type of glazed ceramic) is one of the most characteristic materials produced in ancient Egypt. Made of a sand-based mixture, fired and coated with glaze, it could be produced in various colours, although blue and green were the most common. It was probably meant to imitate semi-precious stones,

like turquoise, to evoke fertility and new life. The most experienced artisans could shape faience into technically challenging openwork designs, such as this spacer bead with different motifs on each side.

Beads, pendants or ear studs in coloured glass

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th–19th Dynasties,
about 1550–1186 BCE

glass

EA2895, EA16442, EA29257 and EA29263

Pendant shaped as a flower inlaid with glass

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

glass, gold

EA65325

Coloured glass started being produced in notable quantities in the 18th Dynasty (about 1550–1295 BCE). It was sometimes used in jewellery in place of more expensive imported stones, such as turquoise and lapis lazuli. It became so common during the New Kingdom that even in the tomb of Tutankhamun pieces of jewellery were inlaid with coloured glass.

Jewellery making and metalworking

Ancient Egyptian artisans used their expertise to develop unique techniques and tools to manufacture jewellery.

Metals, such as gold and silver, could be worked in various ways – beaten into sheets, moulded, incised, pierced or bent.

Case wall, top to bottom

Necklace with a plant-motif pendant made from a sheet of electrum

Egypt, Matmar, house 1020

19th Dynasty, about 1295–1186 BCE

faience, glass, cornelian, electrum

EA63467

String with duck-shaped beads and a shrine-shaped pendant, incised with

two gods flanking an offering table

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Third Intermediate Period to Late Period,
about 1069–332 BCE

gold, amethyst, cornelian, onyx

EA15660

Necklace with a pendant of the goddess Maat

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

26th Dynasty, about 664–525 BCE

gold

EA48998

Necklace of alternating biconical and tubular beads

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

possibly Ptolemaic Period,

about 305–30 BCE

gold

EA65282

Gilded glass bead necklace

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Roman Period, about 30 BCE – 395 CE

glass, gold

EA35119

Case floor, back row, left to right

Openwork pendant with Heh, the god of infinity

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

late Old Kingdom to Middle Kingdom,

about 2500–1650 BCE

gold

EA54332

Finger ring with a cartouche-shaped inscription that might have been originally inlaid

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
possibly New Kingdom,
about 1550–1069 BCE
gold

EA65398

**Finger ring possibly made from a
sheet of gold laid over a structural
core and incised with a figure of the
goddess Mut on the bezel**

Egypt, Saqqara

New Kingdom, about 1370–1190 BCE
gold over a structural core

EA16977

**Cylindrical pendant case that may
have contained amulets or a roll of
papyrus**

Egypt, el-Harageh

12th Dynasty, about 1985–1795 BCE
gold

EA24774

A common gold-working technique consisted of decorating surfaces with fine gold granules. It took skill to create the uniformly sized granules used to form elegant patterns. Not seen in Egypt before the Middle Kingdom (about 2040–1650 BCE), the technique was imported from Mesopotamia (roughly modern-day Iraq) where it had already been used for several centuries.

Signet ring with hieroglyphic inscription of names and titles

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Late Period, 664–332 BCE
gold

EA58937

Signet ring bearing the name of the

priest Padipep

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period, 664–332 BCE

gold

EA53893

Signet ring with hieroglyphic inscription of names and titles

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period, 664–332 BCE

gold

EA51088

Case floor, front row, left to right

Pair of earrings formed by bending a sheet of gold

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

New Kingdom, about 1550–1295 BCE

gold

EA66833 and EA66834

Pair of earrings with pyramid-shaped projections

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Ptolemaic Period, about 305–30 BCE

gold

EA65684

Amulet of the god Bes beaten from a sheet of gold, perhaps originally sewn onto a textile

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Late Period to Ptolemaic Period,

about 656–30 BCE

gold

EA54386

String of ancestor bust amulets and a fly, made from sheets of gold probably hammered around a mould to create hollow shapes

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE
gold, cornelian

EA65574

Funerary shroud of Isetweret

Egypt, Thebes

Roman Period, 1st to 2nd century CE

painted linen

EA68950

Isetweret, the woman who was buried in this shroud, lived at a time when Egypt was part of the Roman Empire with its extensive control of – and access to – trade around the Mediterranean. She is shown wearing fashionable rings, bracelets and necklaces, painted in colours that suggest a broad range of materials, including gold and semi-precious stones that were sourced locally and abroad.

Room: Ruling Egypt

Room description: A large room with high ceilings and objects on plinths at varying heights. In two of the corners, smaller rooms are connected to the main room, and to each other by a corridor. These spaces have low lighting.



Wall text:

Ruling Egypt

The pharaoh ruled over a complex administrative system designed to maintain religious, economic and political control over Egypt. One of the main functions of the state was to collect and administer resources to be used for the building of monuments, instigated by the pharaoh. In addition to ensuring a healthy economy, the state dispensed justice and protected the land from internal and external aggressors. The king surrounded himself with family members and a wide range of non-royal officials to help run the country.

Wall text:

High officials

One or two viziers (the highest-ranking government officials) were at the top of an extremely hierarchical structure that oversaw a vast network of scribes and administrators. In tombs and monuments across the land, officials recorded their names, titles, and roles within the community. Since many of these positions were hereditary, it is often possible to build family trees, as well as administration structures, based on these inscriptions. However, they give a very narrow view of ancient Egyptian society and little is known of those who held lower positions, whose names largely remain unknown.

Artwork labels:

Statue of Katep and his wife

Hetepheres

Egypt, probably Giza

4th–5th Dynasties, about 2613–2345 BCE

painted limestone

EA1181

Katep probably lived in the Memphite area where his tomb was built. There, he oversaw low-ranking *wab* priests and administered a territory called *gereget*, which seems to refer to land flooded annually by the Nile and prepared for cultivation. Katep is depicted here with his wife, Hetepheres. The intensely preserved colours marking the couple's skin – yellow for hers, darker for his – were often used to indicate genders.

Statue of government official Sennefer

Egypt, Thebes

18th Dynasty, reign of Thutmose III,

about 1479–1425 BCE

granodiorite

EA48

Sennefer's powerful position as a treasurer enabled him to commission this high-quality statue. This type of sculpture – a seated man wearing a cloak – is referred to as a block statue. The surface of the garment conveniently provides an extensive space for inscriptions. Statues of loyal officials were often placed inside temples as a favour from the king.

This example may have stood in the funerary temple of Thutmose III. Through the intermediary action of his statue, Sennefer hoped to benefit from the daily offerings given to the gods.

Statue of vizier Nespakashuty

Egypt, probably Thebes

26th Dynasty, reign of Psamtek I,

about 664–610 BCE

granite

EA1132 and EA1225

Nespakashuty was a vizier during the reign of Psamtek I. He inherited this high-ranking government position from his father, Nespamedu. At this time, two viziers oversaw the administration: one in the north and one in the south of Egypt. Nespakashuty governed the south, mainly based in the Theban region where he was later buried. He is shown kneeling behind a large stylised sistrum, an Egyptian musical instrument that was a symbol of the goddess Hathor.

Sarcophagus lid of the dignitary Pakap

Egypt, Giza

26th Dynasty, reign of Apries,

about 589–570 BCE

basalt

EA1384

Pakap was an important dignitary and the titles carved on his massive sarcophagus indicate that he oversaw a large team of scribes. His tomb, a gigantic shaft, was located not far from the pyramid of King Khafra, who had reigned several millennia earlier. The pyramid, the second largest of the Giza plateau, remained an important landmark, next to which people continued to seek protection.

For kids

Pakap was a very important person in ancient Egypt. This enormous object is the lid from his sarcophagus, or large stone coffin, that he was buried in. The hieroglyphs carved into the front of it list some of his important titles and tell us that he was in charge of a large team of scribes. Can you see the large, beaded necklace he is wearing? This is called a 'broad collar' and could be worn by royalty and officials.

Top to bottom, left to right

Bust of a high-ranking man

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE
granite

EA66718

Miniature *shebyu* collar

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE
gold

EA14693

***Awaw* bangles**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE
gold

EA66840 and EA66841

The pharaoh gifted precious items of

jewellery as a reward to officials for notable achievements. As markers of prestige, they were mentioned in biographical texts or depicted on statues of the men who received them, as seen on the granite bust here. Pieces such as *shebyu* collars and *awaw* bangles were proudly worn by members of the court who had been honoured by the king. The miniature gold *shebyu* collar here would have likely once decorated a statue.

Ring of Sheshonq, Chief Steward of the divine adoratrice

Egypt, Thebes

26th Dynasty, about 664–526 BCE

gold

EA68868

With this massive solid-gold ring, Sheshonq was certainly proclaiming his status as a powerful man who influenced the life and economy of the Theban area. The ring is moulded with the name of Sheshonq and his title, 'Chief Steward of the divine adoratrice'. The bezel is so thick that the underside had to be cut away to accommodate the wearer's finger. Such rings were used to seal documents, boxes and other objects by pressing the inscribed face into a lump of clay. Seals were an important form of security in the ancient Egyptian administration.

Wall belonging to the funerary chapel of **Urirenptah**

Egypt, Saqqara

5th Dynasty, about 2494–2345 BCE

painted limestone

EA718

In addition to underground burial chambers, tombs often had a superstructure that included a decorated chapel. Urirenptah, an overseer of scribes and a priest in the sun temple of King Neferirkara, had such a chapel. The relief shown here formed its back wall. The decoration consists of two false doors that acted as portals connecting the world of the living to that of the dead. Family members and priests would place offerings in front of the doors for the deceased to enjoy.

The wall is covered in various scenes and hieroglyphic texts. These texts are incised in shallow relief and were originally painted blue. Several other elements have residual paint, the most obvious of which today is the red paint on several figures, including the tomb-owner *Urirenptah*, at the base of the false doorjambs.

View a detailed description of the hieroglyphic texts with translations at [**ngv.vic.gov.au/labels/pharaoh-mastaba**](http://ngv.vic.gov.au/labels/pharaoh-mastaba)

Wall text:

Scribes

Scribes were needed at every level of the Egyptian administration to transfer, record and archive information. An expedition, or even a temple's day-to-day business, would create vast quantities of paperwork. The entire state structure was held together by these people who, although often not part of the elite, could read and write unlike most of the Egyptian population. Scribes not only copied historical, literary and religious texts, but also documented more mundane events, such as the sale of a donkey or the outcome of a legal argument.

Artwork labels:

Case wall, top

Administrative document from a pyramid temple

Egypt, Abusir

5th Dynasty, about 2494–2345 BCE

papyrus

EA10735.9

This fragment of papyrus illustrates the high levels of bureaucracy of the Egyptian state. It comes from a royal funerary temple in Abusir, where some kings of the 5th Dynasty were buried. It reveals administrative and economic procedures, including priestly duties and calendars, lists of offerings and an equipment inventory. The scribes even recorded objects that were damaged or

missing from the temple, with amendments and corrections added in red ink.

Case wall, left

Ostracon recording Pharaoh Ramses VI's accession to the throne

Egypt, Deir el-Medina

20th Dynasty, reign of Ramses VI,
about 1143 BCE

limestone

EA50722

Papyrus was expensive, so people would often use broken fragments of stone or pottery, known as ostraca, to write notes and short texts. This example describes the official announcement, made by the vizier to the inhabitants of the village of

Deir el-Medina, that Pharaoh Ramses VI had recently succeeded to the throne of Egypt.

Case floor, centre

Flask in the form of a scribe

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

18th Dynasty, reigns of Thutmose III to Amenhotep III, about 1479–1352 BCE

painted pottery

EA24653

Scribes were typically shown sitting cross-legged on the floor, ready to write on a papyrus roll spread across their knees. They were an important part of Egyptian society and ancient texts describe how they looked down upon other professions. This scribe's corpulent

shape also conveys his wealth and status.

Case floor, right

Statue of Ptahemsaf Senebtyfy

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
13th Dynasty, about 1795–1650 BCE
red quartzite

EA24385,a and EA24385,b

According to the inscription on this statue, Ptahemsaf Senebtyfy was both a treasurer and a royal scribe. As a scribe, he was in charge of drafting the king's letters and official documents, therefore benefitting from his privileged position of being close to royalty. The statue depicts him with a long kilt tucked in at the chest, a fashion trend for men at the time.

Case floor, left to right

Scribe's palette inscribed with funerary texts

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE
schist

EA12779

Smoother with the name of Benermerut, overseer of all the king's works

Egypt, Thebes
18th Dynasty, reign of Thutmose III,
about 1479–1425 BCE

limestone

EA64191

Inkwell

Egypt, San el-Hagar
late Ptolemaic Period to early Roman

Scribes

HOME 271

Period, 1st century BCE – 1st century CE
faience

EA22015

Scribe's palette with the name of its owner, Banefer

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
6th Dynasty, reign of Pepy II,
about 2278–2184 BCE

wood

EA12782

Ink pot with two wells in the shape of a royal cartouche

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
26th Dynasty, about 664–525 BCE
black steatite

EA59852

Scribes used a variety of tools. The most

common was the palette, a portable writing kit that held ink and reed brushes. Most palettes had two wells for the most common inks (red and black) used for writing. Small pots could also contain ink separately. Smooth pebbles were used to polish surfaces made of papyrus, wood or pottery, as well as to grind pigments. Some of the objects shown here were inscribed with the names of their owner. The wooden palette, for example, gives the names of Banefer, who was 'overseer of the royal scribes of the granaries' and his father, Shemaba.

Wall text:

Priests

Priests enjoyed the rare privilege of acting on behalf of the king in the many temples built along the Nile Valley. Their position was lucrative as priests received part of the divine offerings, made daily. They usually worked in rotation, often combining religious roles with administrative duties. Religious functions were largely hereditary, so families of priests can sometimes be traced over a dozen generations through the names of the men who undertook the same tasks in the same temple, decade after decade. Temples could be complex administrative and economic institutions, not only employing priests, but also farmers who worked the sacred fields, or butchers who prepared the divine offerings.

Artwork labels:

Relief from the tomb of Iry

Egypt, Giza or Saqqara

4th Dynasty, about 2613–2494 BCE

painted limestone

EA1168

This relief was originally part of a door in the tomb of a man named Iry. He is depicted wearing a leopard skin robe, holding a staff and sceptre, and is surrounded by five smaller figures who are probably his children. In ancient Egypt, official functions were often cumulative, and Iry was both a royal priest and a scribe. At the time he lived, the artistic convention to represent the human body in profile was well established. Here, the sculptor focused on arm and leg muscles to emphasise Iry's features. The insteps of his feet are

unnaturally arched, reflecting the artistic convention of showing the inner view of both feet, which lasted until about 1400 BC.

Coffin of the incense bearer

Horaawesheb

Egypt, Thebes

22nd Dynasty, about 900 BCE

painted wood

EA6666

Little is known about Horaawesheb. He worked in the temple of the moon-god, Khonsu, in the sacred complex of Karnak (in modern Luxor), where he carried incense to the god, soothing him with fragrant smells. Horaawesheb's mummy (now lost) would have originally rested between the two rows of protective deities that are painted on the sides of the coffin base. They wave snakes and lizards to repel evil entities and shield his body.

Below is a detail from the coffin. In this detail, the god of the afterlife Osiris

(central figure on the left) is shown with green skin and wearing a tight garment that suggests the bandages wrapped around his mummified body. Osiris is often depicted welcoming the deceased (here, Horaawesheb on the right).



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Left to right

Stela of the high priest Pasherenptah

Egypt, Saqqara

Ptolemaic Period, 41 BCE

limestone

EA886

The autobiography of Pasherenptah inscribed on this stela details many important moments of his life. One highlight was the coronation of Ptolemy XII, which he performed as the high priest of Ptah when only fourteen years old. It also recounts his longing for a son, to whom he could pass on his official duties, and how his prayers were answered by the god Imhotep. Pasherenptah is depicted on the top left, kneeling in front of a row of gods.

Statue of Sematawy

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Ptolemaic Period, about 150–30 BCE
basalt

EA65443

The man depicted here was named Sematawy. He holds a small shrine that encloses a figure of the god Amun wearing a double crown. Shaved heads were characteristic of priests in ancient Egypt and Sematawy's baldness may suggest his occupation. Although, it may also be natural, along with his wrinkles and his aging face. His finely carved head contrasts greatly with the simply sculpted body, suggesting the work of two different artists.

Papyrus showing Nestanebetisheru offering to the god Ra-Horakhty

Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri, Royal Cache

late 21st–early 22nd Dynasties,
about 950–930 BCE

papyrus

EA10554,61

Women worked in temples, often as singers or music players to soothe the ears of both gods and priests.

Nestanebetisheru, daughter of high priest Pinedjem II, held many priestly functions.

The scene shown here is part of her funerary papyrus. At 37 metres, it is the longest example known to date. It

contains such a unique compilation of litanies and hymns that some

Egyptologists believe Nestanebetisheru may have prepared the document herself.

Statuette of a priest offering a libation

findspot unknown, probably Egypt

Ptolemaic Period, about 332–30 BCE

bronze

EA59391

Priests held many responsibilities including the day-to-day management of temples, looking after the statue of the temple deity, preparing offerings to the gods and organising rituals and religious festivals. This statuette shows a kneeling priest depicted with a shaven head as a sign of purity. He offers a figurine of the god Osiris and holds a libation vase, or ceremonial vessel.

Shabti of Pinedjem I

Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri,

Royal Cache

21st Dynasty, about 1054 BCE

faience

EA18588

High priests of Amun at Karnak became so powerful that some started adopting royal prerogatives. Pinedjem I was one of these king-priests. Pinedjem I used the titles and trappings of kingship on some of his monuments and burial equipment, including this shabti figure where his name is placed within a cartouche, a prerogative normally reserved for royal names. The figurine was part of Pinedjem I's funerary equipment, which, surprisingly, also included the coffin of King Thutmose I, who had reigned about 500 years before. The royal coffin had been refurbished for Pinedjem I to legitimise his reign of Upper Egypt.

For kids

Can you see the papyrus on the right-hand side of the case? This is part of a larger piece of papyrus that is 37 metres long. That's about as long as three buses! Papyrus is a kind of ancient paper that was made from the papyrus plant that grew along the banks of the Nile River. The stalk of the plant was cut into thin strips and pressed together to form layers. When it dried it made a good surface for writing on. Papyrus took a lot of skill and time to make.

Wall text:

Craftsmen and village life

Stone statues and large monuments often tell us about the lives of the elite of Egyptian society. However, objects found in Deir el-Medina, a village in the desert near the Valley of the Kings, provide a unique source of information about the workers who built the royal tombs nearby. The villagers – including sculptors, painters, water carriers, stonecutters and their families – left many documents and monuments that offer a unique glimpse into their daily activities, their relationships and their beliefs.

Artwork labels:

Upper and lower shelf, left

Stela of Aapehty adoring the god Seth

Egypt, Deir el-Medina

19th Dynasty, about 1295–1186 BCE

painted limestone

EA35630

Stela of the foreman Paneb worshipping a snake goddess, probably Meretseger

Egypt, Deir el-Medina

19th Dynasty, about 1295–1186 BCE

limestone

EA272

Life in an ancient Egyptian village could sometimes be turbulent. The unruly life of the foreman Paneb is well documented.

He was removed from office as the head of the village for bribery, sexual assault, theft and violence. Some of these charges extended to other members of his family, as his son, Aapehty, who also worked in the village, seems to have become destitute along with his father. These two stelae show that their criminal tendencies did not prevent the men from worshipping the gods and, probably, asking them for favours.

Upper shelf, centre-left; case wall

Shabti of the scribe Qenherkhepeshef

Egypt, Deir el-Medina

19th Dynasty, about 1210 BCE

painted limestone

EA33940

Qenherkhepeshef is one of the most

famous ancient Egyptian scribes. As the 'scribe of the tomb' at Deir el-Medina, he oversaw the administration of the village and its building activity, including recording completed work, keeping an inventory of tools, listing wages paid to the workers and noting any absences. His documents form part of a large family archive that was passed down through several generations.

Document from a family archive

Egypt, Deir el-Medina

19th Dynasty, about 1220 BCE

papyrus

EA10683,3

The scribe Qenherkhepeshef is known for his distinctive (some would say atrocious) handwriting. This fragment of papyrus was used on both sides. On one side,

Qenherkhepeshef copied a famous historical text about the Battle of Qadesh, a clash between Ramses II and the Hittites, originally based in Anatolia. His unique handwriting is relatively easy to recognise, especially when compared to the neatly written text on the reverse (see image below), written by another scribe, who copied an excerpt from a book offering interpretations of dreams.



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Upper shelf, centre-right and right

Figure of the draughtsman Nebra

Egypt, Deir el-Medina

19th Dynasty, about 1295–1186 BCE

painted limestone

EA2292

Stela of the draughtsman Nebra

Egypt, Deir el-Medina

19th Dynasty, about 1295–1186 BCE

limestone

EA276

Draughtsmen, such as Nebra, were among the highly skilled workers living in Deir el-Medina. Nebra worked in various tombs during the reign of Ramses II and came from a well-known family of draughtsmen and sculptors. The figure names Nebra, who is shown holding an

image of the god Osiris, while the stela depicts him worshipping the falcon-headed god, Horus the Great.

Lower shelf, centre-left to right

Ostrakon with a journal of the necropolis

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings
20th Dynasty, reign of Ramses IX,
about 1126–1108 BCE

limestone

EA5672

Ostrakon with measurements of a royal tomb

Egypt, Deir el-Medina
20th Dynasty, about 1186–1069 BCE

limestone

EA8505

Ostraca are something like sticky notes from the ancient world. These stone or pottery fragments were often used to record information, details and events occurring in the lives of the workers at Deir el-Medina. The underside of this ostrakon (see image below) documents the measurements of a royal tomb, probably that of Queen Isis in the Valley of the Queens. Two lines of this text extend onto the side on view, overlapping two figures of Osiris Wennefer, perhaps sketched as practice. The ostrakon to the left is a journal of the necropolis recording daily events of village life including (in this case) deliveries of pigments and failure to receive rations.



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**Ostracon showing the workman
Khnummose worshipping Meretseger**
Egypt, Deir el-Medina
19th–20th Dynasties,
about 1295–1069 BCE
painted limestone

EA8510

Craftsmen and village life

HOME 293

Ostracon showing a baboon eating figs

Egypt, Deir el-Medina

19th–20th Dynasties, about 1295–1069

BCE

Painted limestone

EA8507

Ostracon showing a donkey's head

Findspot unknown, probably Egypt

19th–20th Dynasties, about 1295–1069

BCE

Painted limestone

EA64395

Ostraca captured written inscriptions or instructions to lay out future work on royal monuments. Artists also used them to sketch moments from their personal lives. These small documents are a testimony to the humour of the ancient Egyptians,

as well as their vivid observations of everyday life and of the animals living alongside them.

Room: Egypt and the world beyond

Room description: A medium-sized room with dark walls and low lighting. There is seating on the right side as you enter.



Wall text:

Egypt and the world beyond

With its strategic location between the rest of Africa and Asia, Egypt was part of a complex world of trade and exchange and attracted many foreigners who travelled and settled along the Nile. Defending Egypt was a central duty of the pharaoh. While some kings sought imperialist expansion through military action, others pursued diplomatic alliances with their neighbours through the exchange of gifts. Political marriages were another important aspect of managing foreign relations. Despite these efforts, Egypt frequently suffered periods of civil war and the Nubians, Persians, Libyans, Greeks and Romans all ruled the country at different times.

Wall text:

Foreigners on the throne

Egypt experienced several periods of foreign rule. These kings usually adopted traditional Egyptian iconography to depict themselves as pharaohs, at least in Egypt, and took royal titles and regalia. Most foreign kings also maintained traditional religious beliefs by showing devotion to Egyptian gods, while continuing to worship their own deities in their native countries. Greek kings, and even Roman emperors who did not necessarily set foot in Egypt, were great builders of temples dedicated to Egyptian gods, in which they represented themselves as traditional pharaohs. This approach appears to have helped facilitate a smooth transition of power and pacify the local people.

Artwork labels:

Case wall, left to right

Stela showing Pharaoh Ptolemy II offering to the Buchis bull

Egypt, Armant

Ptolemaic Period, reign of Ptolemy II, about 284–246 BCE

sandstone

EA1694

Stela depicting Alexander the Great and the Buchis bull

Egypt, Armant

Macedonian Period, reign of Alexander the Great, about 332–323 BCE

sandstone

EA1697 and EA1719

Buchis bulls were considered earthly manifestations of Montu, a god of war. Venerating these living manifestations of the gods was an important Egyptian tradition, with the animals being mummified after their death and buried with grand ceremony. These two stelae record the death of a Buchis bull during the reigns of Alexander the Great and Ptolemy II. Both kings were of Greek origin and are depicted wearing traditional Egyptian royal regalia. The one produced during the reign of Alexander records that the bull had been alive during the reign of Alexander's predecessor, the Persian King Darius III.

Case floor, left to right

**Bezel from a finger ring naming Khyan,
a Hyksos king coming from the
Near East**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
15th Dynasty, about 1650–1550 BCE
gold, glazed steatite

EA37664

**Finger ring with a scarab naming
Sheshonq I, a pharaoh of Libyan origin**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
22nd Dynasty, reign of Sheshonq I,
about 945–922 BCE

gold, steatite

EA14345

**Finger ring inscribed for a Greek
pharaoh ‘Son of Ra, Ptolemy, living
forever, beloved of Ptah’**

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
Ptolemaic Period, about 305–30 BCE
gold

EA36468

The three foreign rulers mentioned on these rings reigned over Egypt at different periods of time, each with its own challenges. All three adopted the tradition of inserting their names, transcribed in hieroglyphs, into cartouches. Their names – Khyan, Sheshonq and Ptolemy – reflect their Near Eastern, Libyan and Greek origins.

Coins celebrating Octavian's conquest of Egypt

probably produced in Asia Minor and Italy

Roman Period, 28 BCE

silver

1860,0328.115 and 1866,1201.4189

In 30 BCE, Octavian, the future Roman Emperor Augustus, brought Greek rule in Egypt to an end by defeating Queen Cleopatra VII and incorporating Egypt into the Roman Empire. These coins were minted to celebrate the success of his campaign, with Octavian depicted on one side. On the reverse, the inscription *Aegypto capta*, meaning the 'Conquest of Egypt' in Latin, accompanies the depiction of a crocodile, a symbol of Egypt.

Head of Alexander the Great

Libya, Cyrene, temple of Aphrodite

Macedonian Period, reign of Alexander the Great, about 332–323 BCE

marble

1861,1127.135

Egyptian symbols of kingship were adopted by foreign rulers on Egyptian soil. Alexander's features on this sculpted head found in a temple at Cyrene, a Greek settlement in modern-day Libya, follow Greek styles of portraiture. It contrasts greatly with his representation on the stela displayed nearby that depicts Alexander and the Buchis bull, showing how foreign rulers adapted their iconography to suit Egypt and its people.

Stela depicting the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar

Egypt, Thebes, Karnak

Roman Period, reign of Tiberius,
about 14–37 CE

sandstone

EA398

Although many Roman emperors never visited Egypt, they built or extended temples in Egypt and had their names carved in hieroglyphs on the walls. On this stela, Emperor Tiberius is shown kneeling in front of two Egyptian gods, Montu and Mut, who were closely associated with each other in Thebes. The text records the erection and restoration of monuments at the temple in Karnak.

Wall text:

Royal victory

To promote their success in protecting Egypt, pharaohs regularly portrayed themselves as victorious and mighty warriors. Typically, a large-scale pharaoh is shown fighting battles and slaying enemies. These depictions of royal domination and control are omnipresent on Egyptian monuments, while foreigners are usually shown as subjugated and captive. This symbolism was motivated by a deep-rooted belief in *maat*, the concept of universal order, and the requirement of the pharaoh to maintain universal order, which they believed could be unbalanced by anything foreign.

Artwork labels:

Fragments of a battle scene

Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri, temple of Mentuhotep II

11th Dynasty, reign of Mentuhotep II,
about 2055–2004 BCE

limestone

EA731, EA732 and EA735

These vivid scenes depict rare examples of hand-to-hand combat. They show an Asian city under siege. Egyptian soldiers use a ladder to climb the ramparts (seen on the right of the middle fragment), while men wounded by Egyptian arrows topple from the city walls. Artists typically painted Egyptian men with red skin tones and Asians with yellow skin tones to differentiate them, as seen in the top fragment.

For kids

The pharaoh always wanted to be seen as a powerful and successful warrior. These wall decorations show people fighting in a battle. The pharaoh and the Egyptian army are always shown as winning. It is difficult to make out the bigger picture across these fragments, but if you look closely, you can see images of people who have been pierced by arrows and appear to have been defeated. These fragments come from a much larger battle scene on a temple wall.

Pharaoh Ramses II trampling over the Nine Bows

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II,
about 1279–1213 BCE
sandstone

EA29282

The feet of Ramses II, identified by a series of cartouches carved around this statue base, trample over representations of nine archery bows. In this motif, typically found on royal statuary, each bow represents a traditional enemy of Egypt (usually Nubians, Asians and, most surprisingly, Egyptians) visibly subdued under the pharaoh's power. By crushing the Nine Bows, Ramses II was symbolically eradicating all threats to his country and upholding the universal order, or *maat*.

Temple wall relief with the names of enemies

Egypt, Bubastis

19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II,
about 1279–1213 BCE

red granite

EA1104

Lists of enemies often decorated the walls of temples as a symbol of royal and divine control over foreign lands. This temple relief records the names of Nubian, Libyan and Anatolian peoples. The oval frames represent fortified cities that have been conquered, with their long-haired and bearded foreign inhabitants represented above, their arms tied behind their backs.

Case wall, left to right

Tiles depicting Libyan prisoners

Egypt, Tell el-Yahudiya

20th Dynasty, reign of Ramses III, about
1184–1153 BCE

faience

EA12334 and EA12337

These finely worked tiles were used to decorate a palace of Pharaoh Ramses III in Lower Egypt. They depict Libyan prisoners. Various characteristics distinguish these men from Egyptians, including their hair colour, chest straps, tattoos and beards. Tiles like these would have been placed where they could be seen by foreign delegations visiting the king, both as a mark of the king's power and as a threat.

Stela showing a pharaoh striking an enemy

Egypt, Memphis

18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE

limestone

EA69154

The pharaoh is shown here striking a kneeling enemy, while standing in front of the creator god, Ptah. Held by the hair, the captive faces the pharaoh, arms raised in front of his head to protect himself from the blow of a curved sword. Above them hovers a falcon, probably the god Horus. Scenes like this were often depicted on temple walls to proclaim the pharaoh's domination over foreign lands and people.

Figure of a sphinx holding a captive

Egypt, Abydos, tomb 477

12th Dynasty, about 1985–1795 BCE

hippopotamus ivory

EA54678

This figure depicts the violent image of a prostrated human victim being clutched by the head by a sphinx, which symbolises the king. Only the front of the sphinx, wearing the traditional *nemes* headcloth, is shown. The piece originally decorated a box or an item of furniture, perhaps offered to a favoured official and included in their tomb as a mark of status.

Case floor, left to right

Relief depicting King Sanakht slaying an enemy

Egypt, Sinai, Wadi Maghara

3rd Dynasty, about 2686–2613 BCE

sandstone

EA691

Wealth from neighbouring deserts and foreign lands was constantly sought by the pharaohs. Many expeditions were sent to the Sinai Peninsula, a desert area in north-east Egypt, to mine turquoise, a semi-precious stone. King Sanakht, here shown wearing the red crown of Lower Egypt, marked his journey to the region by having his image carved on the rock. This relief probably celebrates the success of the expedition while also showcasing the king's power over the

desert population.

Very little is known about Sanakht, one of the earliest kings of the Old Kingdom (about 3000–2890 BCE). His smiting posture is a motif showing the king dominating Egypt's enemies, which continued to be used throughout pharaonic history.

Scarab showing Pharaoh Thutmose III as a bull

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1479–1295 BCE
glazed steatite

EA4000

Scarab showing Pharaoh Thutmose III as a horse

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
New Kingdom, about 1479–1069 BCE

Royal victory

HOME 315

glazed steatite

EA13382

Scarab showing Pharaoh Thutmose I in battle

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, reign of Thutmose I,
about 1504–1492 BCE

green jasper

EA17774

Scarab showing a pharaoh slaying an enemy

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
New Kingdom to Late Period,
about 1550–332 BCE

glazed steatite

EA37753

Scarab showing a pharaoh as a sphinx Egypt, San el-Hagar

Royal victory

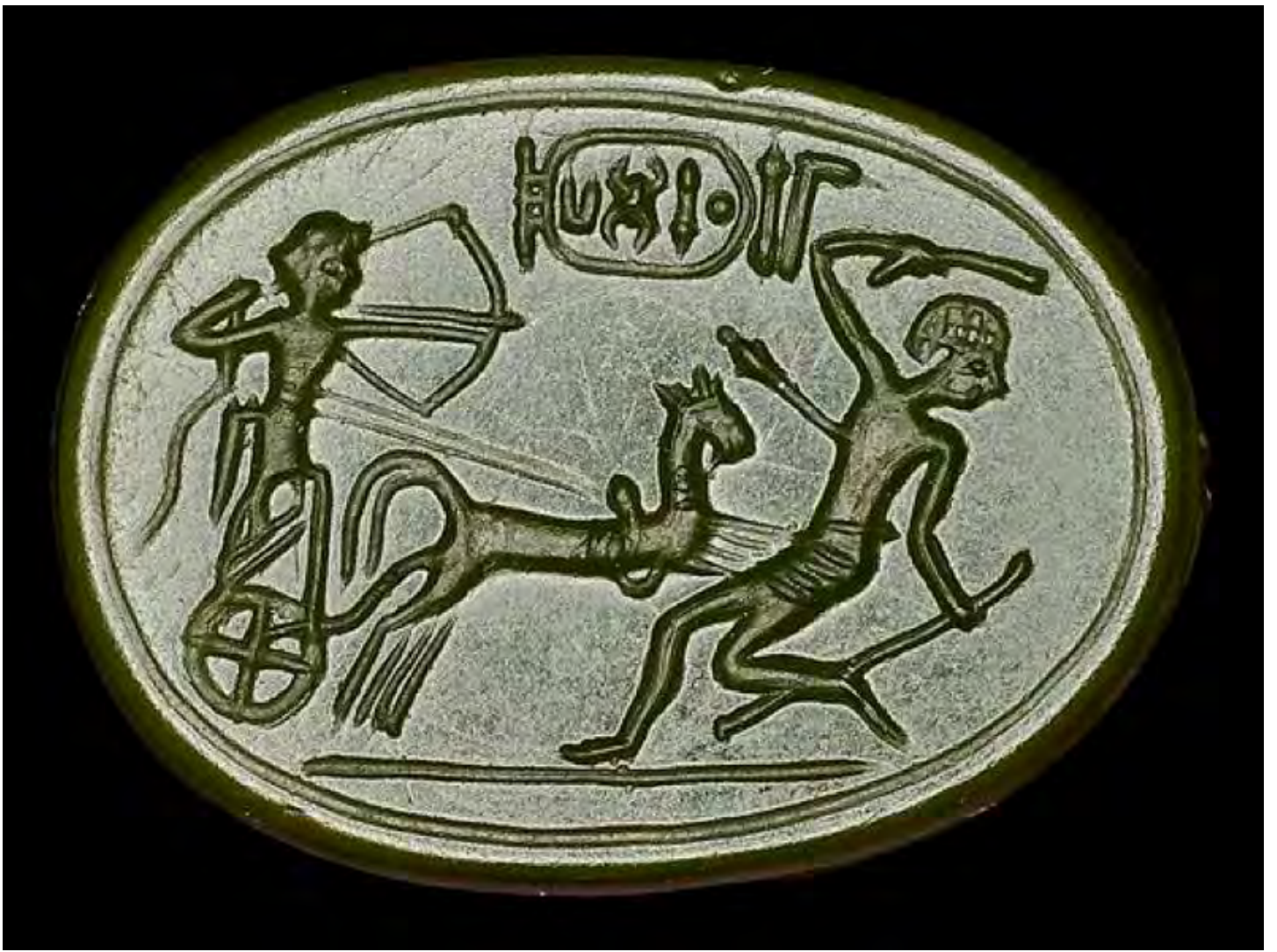
HOME 316

New Kingdom to Late Period,
about 1550–332 BCE
glazed steatite

EA52201

These five scarabs each depict a pharaoh crushing, slaying or trampling an enemy. The pharaoh could take different forms to defeat and control his opponents. As a human, he stands triumphant or rides a chariot pulled by a horse. He can also be represented as a powerful bull or a horse. The sphinx, with a man's head and lion's body, conveys the pharaoh's power over his foes.

Below is an image of the scarab showing Pharaoh Thutmose I in battle in more detail.



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Wall text:

Military lives

As well as sending expeditions abroad, Egypt was also subject to invasion, internal unrest and political coups. At all times, a fighting force was deemed necessary. In the New Kingdom (about 1550–1069 BCE), the army was formed of several divisions consisting of professional soldiers, reservists and mercenaries, including foreigners. The commander-in-chief, often a royal son, oversaw a complex structure of strategists and soldiers supported by a military administration, with infantry, charioteers, naval troops and scribes.

Artwork labels:

Statue of military commander Inebny

Egypt, Thebes

18th Dynasty, joint reign of Hatshepsut
and Thutmose III,

about 1472–1458 BCE

limestone

EA1131

Military expeditions were sometimes described in biographical texts on stelae, tomb walls and statues that summarised the main events of an individual's career. Inebny was a troop commander and overseer of weaponry during the joint reign of Pharaohs Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. He took part in several military campaigns in the north and south, as claimed by the inscription on this statue.

Left to right

Bow

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
18th Dynasty, about 1550–1295 BCE

wood

EA5429

Bows were used for both military and hunting purposes. Archers were an essential part of the army and were often depicted shooting arrows from moving chariots. An ink inscription on this bow reveals that it belonged to a troop commander.

Axe

Egypt, Mostagedda
15th Dynasty, about 1650–1550 BCE

wood and bronze

EA63224

Axes were used in battle as well as in ceremonies and rituals. This axe was found in a private tomb alongside an archer's leather wrist guard. Its blade is inscribed with a royal name, 'the good god, Nebmaatira, given life', a little-known pharaoh who ruled during the Second Intermediate Period.

Shabti of the Master of Horses Sunero

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
19th Dynasty, about 1295–1186 BCE
steatite

EA65206

This funerary figurine, known as a shabti, was produced for a Master of Horses called Sunero. Horses were highly prized in ancient Egypt and usually accompanied pharaohs on their military exploits. Caring for horses was the

preserve of high-ranking officers, like Sunero. Part of the elite, he was perhaps even a prince, as were many of the men who held this prestigious position.

Doorjamb from the tomb of General Horemheb

Egypt, Saqqara

18th Dynasty, reigns of Tutankhamun or Ay, about 1336–1323 BCE

limestone

EA552

Horemheb was not expected to become a king but, after a successful career in the army, he seized the throne by taking advantage of the instability following Tutankhamun's death. General Horemheb had a tomb built in Saqqara but, after assuming the throne, he abandoned it for a royal burial place prepared for him in the Valley of the Kings. This doorjamb comes from his tomb at Saqqara. It remained accessible during his reign, allowing for a uraeus (rearing cobra), acknowledging his new royal status, to be added to his forehead on the wall reliefs.

Limestone relief of the official Tjetji

Egypt, Thebes

11th Dynasty, reigns of Intef II and Intef III, about 2125–2055 BCE

limestone

EA614

Military conflicts not only involved foreign enemies but also families of competing Egyptian rulers. Tjetji was an important official during a chaotic period when Upper and Lower Egypt were governed separately. In this autobiographical text, Tjetji, the ‘overseer of the Seal Bearers’, describes how the border of the kingdom of Thebes, in Upper Egypt, stretched from Elephantine in the south to Abydos, while rivals ruled further north. The rulers of Thebes would soon conquer all of Egypt and reunite the Two Lands.

Wall text:

Foreign diplomacy and cultural exchange

Despite Egypt's claims to military dominance, careful diplomacy was often required to maintain strong relationships with other powerful political states. As well as extracting hefty tributes from conquered lands, ensuring the loyalty of neighbouring rulers was important for obtaining metals, minerals and exotic materials. Astute diplomatic negotiations also led to active trade and the exchange of ideas, artistic techniques, decorative motifs and even religious and cultural practices.

Artwork labels:

Top to bottom, left to right

Royal archives: correspondence about a Babylonian princess

Egypt, Amarna

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III,
about 1390–1352 BCE

clay

E29787

Diplomatic alliances between Egypt and other countries were often strengthened by arranged royal marriages. In this letter, Pharaoh Amenhotep III writes to Kadashman-Enlil, king of Babylon. The pharaoh describes the gifts he is sending and mentions that he is awaiting the Babylonian princess who he will soon marry. The tablet is stamped

on the back (see image below) with the falcon wearing the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, symbolising the pharaoh.



© The Trustees of the British Museum

Oracular tablet of Prince Ashurbanipal

Iraq, Nineveh

Neo-Assyrian, about 673–669 BCE

clay

1882,0522.175

On this tablet, the then-prince Ashurbanipal requests guidance from the Mesopotamian sun-god Šamaš. Ashurbanipal asks the god to approve of his decision to send a *rab-mūgi*, a military commander who sometimes served as an ambassador to foreign rulers, to Egypt. He also asks the god to confirm the commander will follow his orders while in Egypt. This oracular tablet is one of several in Ashurbanipal's library asking for divine guidance on political and military interactions between Assyria and Egypt.

Tablet from the library of King Ashurbanipal

Iraq, Nineveh

Neo-Assyrian, about 663–662 BCE

clay

K.228

The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal led successful military campaigns against Egypt. This tablet belonged to the formidable library that he assembled in his capital city, Nineveh (modern-day Iraq). It records Ashurbanipal's retaliation against the advance of the Nubian kings who challenged the Assyrians for the control of Egypt. The tablet also mentions Ashurbanipal's reception of an embassy, presumably sent with diplomatic intentions. The Assyrian army recaptured Memphis, sacked Thebes and, in 664 BCE, placed Psamtek I on the throne.

Royal archives: letter from Burna-Buriash on the exchange of gifts

Egypt, Amarna

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep IV/
Akhenaten, about 1352–1336 BCE

clay

E29786

Archaeological excavations in the city of Amarna, Akhenaten's capital city, uncovered many clay tablets that record official correspondence between Egyptian and foreign rulers. They were written in cuneiform, the diplomatic script of the time. Maintaining successful relationships between kingdoms often relied on the exchange of gifts. Here, the Babylonian king, Burna-Buriash complains to Pharaoh Akhenaten about the poor quality and quantity of gifts received from him in comparison to those he had sent to Egypt.

Commemorative scarabs produced during the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep III

findspot unknown, probably Egypt; Egypt, Edfu (EA16988)

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, about 1390–1352 BCE

glazed schist, steatite

EA64661, EA65428, EA16988, EA55585 and EA68507

As well as correspondence, Amenhotep III also distributed large scarabs to officials across Egypt and beyond as a diplomatic tool to mark important events. These objects (in the form of scarab beetles) were inscribed on their bases with texts commemorating important royal events. These included the pharaoh's marriage to Queen Tiy, the arrival of the princess Gilukepa and her entourage of 317 women from Mitanni (a

kingdom now covering part of Iraq and Syria), the construction of an artificial lake near his palace, and a bull hunt. The event most frequently inscribed on the preserved scarabs records the pharaoh's claim to have hunted and killed 102 lions during the first ten years of his rule.

Stela of foreman Qaha worshipping gods of Egyptian and foreign origin

Egypt, Deir el-Medina

19th Dynasty, about 1295–1186 BCE

limestone

EA191

Ancient Egyptians often incorporated foreign deities into their religion. This was an easy way to increase access to a range of divine powers. On this stela, Qaha, a foreman at Deir el-Medina, is shown worshipping various gods from the Levant, including the warrior goddess Anat (bottom right), the goddess Qadesh standing on a lion and the war god Reshef (top right). Min, an Egyptian god of fertility, is shown on the top left. These gods were regularly depicted together as symbols of fertility and rebirth.

Stela showing Horus and Isis

Iraq, Babylon

Late Period, about 664–332 BCE

alabaster

1919,1108.2

Worship of the goddess Isis spread far beyond Egypt. This small stela from Babylon depicts her nursing Horus on the right, and Horus the child standing over crocodiles on the left, below the head of the protective deity Bes. These motifs, usually found separately, were grouped together on this intriguing object. Its base, back and sides are covered in magical texts written in small, neat hieroglyphs. Nevertheless, it remains unclear who may have produced and used this work – Babylonians or Egyptians?

Top left

Shell engraved with lotus flowers and a winged sphinx wearing the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt

Iraq, Nineveh

9th to 7th century BCE

tridacna shell

1904,1009.425

Materials, goods, technologies and ideas were shared as people moved constantly between Egypt and its north-eastern neighbours. Decorated giant clamshells have been found in various places, from Italy to Iran. This one was found in Mesopotamia, although the style of its decoration suggests Phoenician workmanship, created in the Levant. The winged sphinx that decorates the surface was certainly inspired by Egyptian motifs.

Clockwise from top centre

Plaque showing a scarab beetle in flight

Iraq, Sippar

Phoenician, about 900–700 BCE

gilded and inlaid ivory

1882,0918.14358

Plaque showing an enthroned figure wearing Egyptian-style wig and dress

Iraq, Nimrud, North West Palace

Phoenician, about 900–700 BCE

gilded ivory

118164

Ornamental horse blinker with three Egyptian-inspired images: a winged sphinx, a cobra wearing the double crown and a falcon

Iraq, Nimrud, Fort Shalmaneser

Phoenician, about 900–600 BCE

ivory

2011,6001.470

**Plaque with a hawk-headed scarab
and two figures facing a fake
hieroglyphic inscription**

Iraq, Nimrud, Fort Shalmaneser

Phoenician, about 900–700 BCE

ivory

1962,0210.9

**Plaque with two figures of the god Bes
flanking a scarab beetle**

Iraq, Nimrud, Fort Shalmaneser

Phoenician, about 900–600 BCE

ivory

1961,0211.4

**Openwork panel showing a lion with
an Egyptian-style sun-disc and collar**

Iraq, Nimrud, Fort Shalmaneser
Phoenician, about 800–700 BCE
ivory

132258

Ancient Syrian and Phoenician artists, well known for their delicate ivory work, were often inspired by motifs of eclectic provenances. Egyptian-inspired designs were regularly incorporated into ivory plaques such as these. They commonly include the scarab beetle, representing the sun-god, or enduring royal symbols such as the sphinx or the uraeus (rearing cobra). These ivory plaques might have originally decorated pieces of furniture and other treasures produced in the Levant, but they were found in Mesopotamia, probably gathered as spoils of war.

Trade with Cyprus

Centuries of trading contact, cultural exchange and political interactions had a significant impact on Egypt and Cyprus. The extent of Egyptian power in the eastern Mediterranean can be traced through the exchange of luxury goods, raw materials, technologies and cult images. Cyprus, like other small regions, was indispensable to Egypt, which relied on their natural resources, particularly copper and timber, and their naval and commercial skills, along with the extensive trade networks they offered. Upper and middle shelf, left

Tell el-Yahudiyeh ware juglet from Cyprus, exported from Egypt

Cyprus, Enkomi, tomb 66

Second Intermediate Period,

about 1650–1550 BCE

pottery

1897,0401.1303

Cypriot pottery jug used as a grave offering

Egypt, Saqqara, intrusive burial in tomb 3507

late Cypriot I Period, about 1600–1550 BCE

pottery

EA67176

Many types of vessels were used for transporting goods between Egypt and Cyprus. Some imports inspired local potters to make new shapes, while other vessels could be repurposed in new contexts. This was probably the case for this Cypriot-made jug found in an Egyptian tomb at Saqqara (middle shelf, left).

Upper shelf, centre and right;
middle shelf, right

Plate probably made in Cyprus with an Egyptian scene of a man on a papyrus boat

Cyprus, Enkomi, tomb 66

18th–19th Dynasties, about 1400–1200
BCE

faience

1897,0401.1042

Small oval flask for precious oils, probably exported from Egypt to Cyprus

Cyprus, Enkomi, tomb 69

18th–19th Dynasties, about 1550–1186
BCE

faience

1897,0401.1111

***Situla*, an Egyptian ritual vessel showing a kneeling goddess, found in Cyprus**

Cyprus, Enkomi, tomb 61

18th–19th Dynasties, about 1400–1200 BCE

faience

1897,0401.999

Some vessels found in ancient Cypriot tombs are made of faience, a type of glazed ceramic commonly used in Egypt. The flask and the situla, decorated with an Egyptian female deity surrounded by lotus flowers, were probably imported from Egypt. During the 18th and 19th Dynasties, Egyptian-inspired motifs became particularly popular in Cyprus. The plate with the boat scene was perhaps produced by local craftsmen imitating Egyptian designs.

Lower shelf, left to right

Votive figure of a worshipper with Egyptian-style costume and a Cypriot pose

Cyprus, Idalion, Sanctuary of Reshef-Apollo

Cypro-Archaic I-II Period, about 650–550 BCE

bronze

1873,0320.343

This bronze figure of a man standing with one fist on his chest depicts a typical posture from Cypriot art. However, the clothing and headdress (probably meant to imitate the white crown of Egypt) were inspired by Egyptian models. Produced in Cyprus, the figure was one of many dedicated to the hybrid Graeco-Phoenician god, Reshef-Apollo, in a

shrine standing in Idalion, in central Cyprus.

Signet ring with the name of Pharaoh Akhenaten, found in Cyprus

Cyprus, Enkomi, tomb 93

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep IV/
Akhenaten, about 1352–1336 BCE

silver

1897,0401.617

Signet ring showing an Egyptian royal couple, found in Cyprus

Cyprus, Enkomi, near tomb 66

18th Dynasty, reigns of Amenhotep III to
Tutankhamun, about 1390–1327 BCE

gold

1897,0401.741

Fly-shaped pendants, perhaps ancient Egyptian symbols of persistence or

protection, found in Cyprus

Cyprus, Enkomi, tomb 19

18th–19th Dynasties, about 1550–1186

BCE

gold

1897,0401.151

Royal exchanges between Cyprus and Egypt are known from official correspondence and archaeological evidence. For example, tombs in Enkomi, eastern Cyprus, contained a rich mix of local and imported products, highlighting its importance as a trading centre. These gold and silver pieces of jewellery were possibly gifts to facilitate trade and diplomatic relations. They reflect the prosperity of Cyprus and its access to precious raw materials.

Room: An eternal life

Room description: A darkened space with black walls. Objects sit on large black plinths and inside glass cases.



Wall text:

An eternal life

Pharaohs prepared for the afterlife by having their bodies preserved through mummification. It was also important to ensure that the correct rituals were performed after their death and that their tombs were filled with protective texts and a range of objects to assist them in the afterlife. When a king died, he was believed to journey to the underworld, where he would be assimilated with the god Osiris, lord of the dead and ruler of the underworld. It was also believed that accompanying the sun-god, Ra – often regarded as the creator of the universe – on his cyclical journey could ensure eternal life for the pharaoh. The deceased king hoped to board the sun-god's barque (sacred boat) to share his journey

across the sky and be rejuvenated with
the sunrise each day.

Artwork labels:

Fragment of the sarcophagus lid of Pharaoh Ramses VI

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings, tomb of Ramses VI

20th Dynasty, reign of Ramses VI, about 1143–1136 BCE

conglomerate

EA140

Pharaohs of the New Kingdom (about 1550–1069 BCE) were buried in a series of stone sarcophagi and wooden coffins placed inside each other. Pieces of Ramses VI's sarcophagus, including this fragment, were found in his tomb in the Valley of the Kings. They were left behind by robbers who had stripped the burial of precious metals and other valuable items. Ancient texts record these robberies. The bodies of Ramses VI and other

kings were later moved to another tomb that had been re-used to gather royal mummies at risk of looters.

Statue from the tomb of Pharaoh Ramses I

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings, tomb
of Ramses I

19th Dynasty, about 1294 BCE

sycomore fig wood (*Ficus sycomorus*
sp.)

EA854

This wooden statue is one of a pair that was found in the burial chamber of Ramses I's tomb. Carved from massive tree trunks, this guardian figure is believed to represent the *ka*, or 'spiritual double', of the king. It was originally coated in a black substance and partially gilded but may have been stripped of its valuable materials by looters.

Wall text:

Royal burials

To ensure eternal life, a tomb would be constructed to hold the royal body. Royal tombs changed throughout history, from massive stone or mudbrick pyramids to underground tombs dug into the hillside of the Valley of the Kings in Thebes.

Although the latter were disguised to hide their location from robbers, most tombs were looted in antiquity.

The royal burials that survived almost intact provide a glimpse into the richness of the objects deposited inside these tombs. Furniture, jewellery, food and numerous magical items demonstrate the wealth and magnificence of the pharaoh and were intended to address his needs for eternity.

To preserve his body, the pharaoh was mummified during a process that took around seventy days. Today, most royal mummies are held at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo.

Artwork labels:

Lower shelf, left to right

Shabti of Pharaoh Sety I

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings, tomb of Sety I

19th Dynasty, reign of Sety I,
about 1294–1279 BCE

wood

EA33919

Shabtis were human figurines placed inside tombs to function as servants for a dead person in the afterlife. The word shabti means ‘one who answers’, referring to the call to work. Pharaohs were sometimes provided with vast numbers of these magical workmen; one for each day of the year. Some are shown with agricultural tools, such as a basket

and hoe, to be used in the fields of the afterlife. These six examples are from the tombs of New Kingdom kings. The one of Ahmose, with the exquisitely carved face, is the earliest royal shabti known to date.

Shabti of Pharaoh Ahmose

Egypt, probably Thebes

18th Dynasty, reign of Ahmose,
about 1550–1530 BCE

limestone

EA32191

Shabti of Pharaoh Sety I

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings, tomb
of Sety I

19th Dynasty, reign of Sety I,
about 1294–1279 BCE

blue faience

EA22818

The two shabtis representing Pharaoh Sety I were produced for his burial. They are inscribed with Chapter 6 from the Book of the Dead, which magically enabled the figure to take the place of the deceased for any work they were called to do in the underworld. Shabtis belonging to the same king could show considerable variation in style and quality. While the shabti in blue faience shows exquisite details worthy of the best craftsmen, the wooden one is much simpler in shape and carving.

Shabti of Pharaoh Amenhotep II

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings, tomb of Amenhotep II

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep II, about 1427–1400 BCE

serpentine

EA35365

Royal burials

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Shabti of Pharaoh Ramses III

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
20th Dynasty, reign of Ramses III,
about 1184–1153 BCE

calcite

EA67816

Shabti of Pharaoh Ramses VI

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings, tomb
of Ramses VI

20th Dynasty, reign of Ramses VI,
about 1143–1136 BCE

calcite

EA8698

Upper shelf, left to right

Shabti of Nubian King Aspelta

Sudan, Nuri, tomb of Aspelta

Napatan Period, reign of Aspelta,
about 593–568 BCE

faience

EA55511

Shabti of Pharaoh Taharqo

Sudan, Nuri, tomb of Taharqo
25th Dynasty, reign of Taharqo,
about 690–664 BCE
serpentine

EA55490

Shabti of Pharaoh Taharqo

Sudan, Nuri, tomb of Taharqo
25th Dynasty, reign of Taharqo,
about 690–664 BCE
calcite

EA55483

Shabti of Nubian King Senkamanisken

Sudan, Nuri, tomb of Senkamanisken
Napatan Period, reign of
Senkamanisken, about 643–623 BCE

Royal burials

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serpentine

EA55499

Shabti of Nubian King Senkamanisken

Sudan, Nuri, tomb of Senkamanisken

Napatan Period, reign of

Senkamanisken, about 643–623 BCE

faience

EA55503

Shabti of Pharaoh Taharqo

Sudan, Nuri, tomb of Taharqo

25th Dynasty, reign of Taharqo,

about 690–664 BCE

serpentine

EA55491

Nubians conquered Egypt in about 747 BCE. Despite ruling for over sixty years, the kings that formed the 25th Dynasty were buried in their ancestral

homeland of Nubia (modern-day Sudan). Greatly inspired by Egyptian funerary traditions, their tombs – and those of later Nubian kings – were often built in the shape of a pyramid and filled with objects like shabtis. Among the kings represented by these figurines, only Taharqo ruled Egypt as a pharaoh. However, Senkamanisken and Aspelta also adopted and reinterpreted Egyptian traditions for their burials, despite only ruling in Nubia.

Pyramidion of King Sekhemra-Wepmaat Intef

Egypt, Thebes

17th Dynasty, reign of Sekhemra-
Wepmaat Intef,
about 1600 BCE

limestone

EA478

Very little is known about Sekhemra-Wepmaat Intef, who reigned in the sixteenth century BCE. The pyramid above his tomb in Thebes was topped by this capstone, known as a pyramidion. Columns of hieroglyphic inscriptions run up its four sides, recording several names of the king. The title of the king's mother 'the royal mother, the great royal wife' was also inscribed, but unfortunately her name has not been preserved.

Figure of a hippopotamus god

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

wood

EA61317

Earlier interpretations of this statue possibly associated the narrow snout with depictions of Sobek, a crocodile god. However, the pendulous breasts and pregnant stomach are characteristic features of ancient Egyptian hippopotamus deities. Their fearsome appearance made them capable protectors of both the living and the dead.

Figure of a ram-headed god

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings,
probably tomb of Horemheb

18th Dynasty, probably reign of
Horemheb, about 1323–1295 BCE

wood, plaster, linen

EA50702

For kids

This statue is made of wood – it is amazing that it has survived for more than 3000 years. In ancient Egypt, lots of gods were part-human and part-animal. This god has a ram's head and a human body, and looks a little scary. It was meant to frighten away bad people and spirits who came to the tomb of the king. What do you think he originally held in his hands?

Figure of a king wearing the red crown

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings

New Kingdom, about 1550–1069 BCE

wood, plaster

EA11490

Wooden figures of various forms were deposited in New Kingdom royal tombs. Some represented the king, seen here wearing the red crown of Lower Egypt, while others depicted divine guardians of the tomb and its occupants. The hippopotamus with its mouth open and tongue out, and the ram-headed god (who originally brandished snakes or lizards in his hands) were both intended to be intimidating and repel threats to the dead king.

Sheet from the Abbott Papyrus

Egypt, Thebes

late 20th Dynasty, reign of Ramses IX,
about 1110 BCE

papyrus

EA10221,2

In antiquity, tombs were targeted by looters seeking precious goods. This papyrus reports a series of inspections made in several burial places in Thebes during the reign of Ramses IX. It describes the robbery of some royal tombs. Despite the scandal that followed, the temptation to seek gold and other luxuries was a powerful incentive for some and robberies did not stop until the royal bodies were relocated to safer places.

Top to bottom, left to right

Fragment of the sarcophagus of Pharaoh Merenptah

Egypt, Thebes

19th Dynasty, reign of Merenptah,
about 1213–1203 BCE

calcite

EA49739

The tomb of Merenptah, son of Ramses II, consisted of a long corridor ending in a burial chamber that originally contained four nested stone sarcophagi. The inner one, in calcite, was carved both internally and externally, and the fragment displayed here is part of its foot end. The external surface reproduces a section of the Book of Gates, a funerary text describing the nocturnal journey of the sun. The interior is decorated with a

kneeling winged goddess.

Throwstick of Pharaoh Akhenaten

Egypt, Amarna, Royal Tomb

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep IV/

Akhenaten, about 1352–1336 BCE

faience

EA34213

Tomb scenes often show the deceased enjoying hunting expeditions in the marshes alongside the river Nile. A throwstick was a type of boomerang used for hunting birds, and examples have been found in royal tombs. This one, made of faience, would have been too fragile for use in a real hunt.

Decorated with *wedjat*-eye amulets (a symbol with healing powers), lotus flowers and the name of the pharaoh, this throwstick was symbolic and intended for

magical use.

Ring with the name of Queen Tawosret

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings, tomb
56

19th Dynasty, reign of Tawosret,
about 1188–1186 BCE

gold

EA54459

Found in a royal tomb in Thebes, this gold ear or hair ring bears the name of Tawosret enclosed within a cartouche. This queen ruled Egypt for a couple of years following the death of her husband's successor, Pharaoh Siptah.

Cosmetic jug inscribed with the name of Pharaoh Thutmose III

Egypt, Thebes

18th Dynasty, reign of Thutmose III,

about 1479–1425 BCE

glass

EA47620

**Bowl, probably from
the tomb of Pharaoh Amenhotep II**

Egypt, Thebes, Valley of the Kings,
probably tomb of Amenhotep II
18th Dynasty, probably reign of
Amenhotep II, about 1427–1400 BCE

glass

EA36342

Objects made from glass do not appear to have been produced in Egypt before the 18th Dynasty when examples, such as these two vessels, were deposited in royal tombs. The turquoise jug was probably part of the funerary equipment of Thutmose III. It is inscribed with the king's name: 'The

good god Menkheperra, given life'. It may have been one of seven vessels filled with sacred oils for use in a funerary ceremony, which allowed the mummified body to breathe, eat and drink in the afterlife.

For kids

Egyptian pharaohs enjoyed a number of outdoor activities, including hunting. They would throw sticks like the curved blue one in the middle here when hunting birds, similar to how a boomerang works. They would have had to be really strong to throw them successfully. This one was too special to be used in everyday life because it is quite fragile. Instead, it was probably used for magic rituals! Can you spot the magical eye symbol?

Wall text:

Divine kings

Pharaohs hoped to survive after their deaths through posthumous cults. The worship of some kings and the survival of their names, particularly those remembered for great deeds or personal qualities, persisted over many centuries. Among those who were honoured for their past achievements were Mentuhotep II and Ahmose, who reimposed centralised rule over Upper and Lower Egypt at the beginning of the Middle and New Kingdoms (about 2040 and 1550 BCE, respectively), and Thutmose III, the builder of Egypt's foreign empire. After their deaths, these rulers were even depicted among the gods.

Artwork labels:

Osiride statue of King Amenhotep I

Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri

18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep I,
about 1525–1504 BCE

painted sandstone

EA683

This statue of Amenhotep I depicts the king shrouded like Osiris to show that he is regenerating, like the god who gained eternal life and became the Lord of the Underworld, while his curled beard marks his divine status. The statue was probably erected in a small temple built near that of Mentuhotep II, who reigned about 500 years earlier. In addition to its impressive height, red, black and white pigments are still preserved on its surface.

Room: Divine kings

Room description: A darkened space with black walls. There is one central artwork in the room, a coffin in a glass case, and a seat. This is the final room of the exhibition and exits into the NGV design store.



Coffin base belonging to temple doorkeeper Ahmose

Egypt, Thebes

early 22nd Dynasty, about 900 BCE

wood, plaster

EA22942

The protection of deified kings could be sought even after a person's death. The temple doorkeeper Ahmose highlighted his close association with an unidentified deified king through the royal image decorating the bottom of his coffin.

Ahmose's mummified body would have been laid directly over the image of the pharaoh, stressing his desire to be linked to the king and to share his success in reaching an eternal life.

For kids

This coffin base belonged to a person named Ahmose, who worked as a doorkeeper at the temple. His coffin was decorated with a picture of a pharaoh in the middle – can you see it? Ahmose decorated his coffin with a picture of the pharaoh because he wanted to be close to him in the afterlife.

There are also lots of animals painted on this coffin, including birds, snakes and dogs, all meant to protect Ahmose. How many animals can you find?

Stela fragment depicting four standing statues

Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri, temple of Mentuhotep II

18th Dynasty, reigns of Thutmose I to Horemheb, about 1504–1295 BCE

limestone

EA690

The upper part of this stela shows four standing statues depicting rulers who reigned centuries apart. Two are identified as Amenhotep I (about 1525–1504 BCE), one as Mentuhotep II (about 2040–2004 BCE), while the fourth remains unidentified. This stela was originally deposited in or near Mentuhotep II's temple, where statues, similar to that of Amenhotep I displayed in the previous room, were erected. These statues acted as guardians of memory and provided a focus for devotion and petitions.

Stela representing King Amenhotep I and Queen Ahmose-Nefertari

findspot unknown, probably Egypt
late 18th or 19th Dynasty,
about 1320–1186 BCE
sandstone

EA989

Many stelae show private individuals worshipping Amenhotep I. Here, the dedicant is a man called Tjaenamun, shown kneeling in front of the deified Amenhotep I and his mother, Queen Ahmose-Nefertari. Amenhotep I is often shown acting as an intermediary between a human and a god, even long after his death. The royal and divine figures are shown seated in front of an offering table, underneath a date palm tree. The profile and name of Queen Ahmose-Nefertari have been squeezed in, apparently as an afterthought.

Stela showing Pharaoh Thutmose IV making an offering

Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Medina or Karnak
19th Dynasty, reign of Ramses II or
Merenptah, about 1279–1203 BCE
painted limestone

EA1515

Even in death, the pharaoh could act as an intermediary between his people and the gods. Here, Thutmose IV (about 1400–1390 BCE) makes an offering of papyrus and lotus flowers to the god Amun-Ra and to Ahmose-Nefertari, queen and wife of King Ahmose (about 1550–1525 BCE). Both Thutmose IV and Ahmose-Nefertari were dead by the time the stela was produced, but deified Thutmose IV intercedes for Kha, the man who had it produced. Kha is shown at the bottom with his arms raised in adoration.

End

Thank you for visiting!