

Oriental Museum
Durham University

Wolfson Gallery

Large Print Guide

What did Ancient Egyptians look like?



Head of a Pharaoh

Basalt

New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty or later, 1295-1069

BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG2150

The Pharaoh depicted here is wearing the blue crown. This was made of cloth with a cobra at the forehead and decorated with gold discs, represented here by the circle pattern. The head of the cobra has broken off this piece.



Head of a Queen

Limestone

Ptolemaic Period, 332-30 BCE

Wellcome Collection

DUROM.1987.1

This bust of a queen is the subject of ongoing research. It was previously identified as representing Queen Tiye who lived around 1398 to 1338 BCE. However, other scholars have suggested that this might be a late Ptolemaic queen, perhaps even the famous Cleopatra VII (reigned 51-30 BCE). The latest research suggests that the head dates from the 20th Dynasty (1186-1069 BCE). The queen wears a heavy wig and elaborate headdress, the top section of which has been lost. This damage is one of the reasons the statue has been so difficult to date. One of the main methods used to date uninscribed statues is to study the style of hair and any headdress.



Figure of Horus as a child
Bronze
Late Period, 747-332 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG1615

This image of the god Horus as a young boy clearly shows the 'sidelock of youth'. Both boys and girls had their hair cut in this way with their heads shaved with only a single plait or ponytail left.



Base of a statue
Quartz sandstone
Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty or later, after
about 1850 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG4012

This section of a statue was created for a priest named Horemhatankhu. It is very finely carved and inscribed on the sides and back of the seat with his priestly titles.

When compared to the stela sitting next to it, this piece shows how styles of clothing varied over time in Ancient Egypt. This statue fragment dates to around 600 years before the stela.

Horemhatankhu wears a much shorter kilt, reaching to just above the knee. The central panel of the kilt between his knees indicates that he is dressed for a formal occasion. More informal kilts from this period do not include the central panel.



Family group statue
Sandstone
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty,
1550-1295 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG6802

Husband and wife statues are found in Egypt from the Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom. Often, as here, smaller figures of children are included.

During the 18th Dynasty, such statues were placed in a niche in the tomb chapel and provided a focus for the giving of offerings for the benefit of the deceased. This statue is dedicated to a man named Amenmes and a lady who is assumed to be his wife though her name and titles are not legible. The daughter standing between the couple is shown at a smaller scale to indicate her lower rank. Several sons are depicted on the carved sides.

The two women wear straight, ankle-length dresses, while Amenmes wears a long kilt and has a bare chest. All three wear long wigs of the type fashionable at this time.



Head of a Queen

Granodiorite

**New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, around
1390 BCE**

Loan from the Dean and Chapter of Durham
Cathedral

EG3976

Just as Pharaoh was identified with the god Horus, his queen was associated with Hathor, goddess of the sky and fertility. The heavy wig worn by this unidentified queen recalls the association the Egyptians made between luxuriant hair growth and good health, potency and therefore rebirth. The flat platform on top of the wig was probably a base for a more elaborate headdress of feathers or perhaps horns and a sun disc - additional symbolism connected with Hathor. The style of carving the features of the face help to date the piece to the early 18th Dynasty.

All dressed up



Mirror disc

Bronze

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG5083

Mirror handle

Ivory

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

EG2785

The shape of Ancient Egyptian mirrors changed very little over thousands of years. This is a typical example, with a flattened, highly polished disc of metal mounted on a handle for holding in the hand.

This handle is decorated with figures of naked women. These may represent erotic dancers who were a symbol of rebirth. Mirrors also seem to have had this symbolism and are often found in tombs, close to the body of the deceased.

Hair

Most men adopted a short hair style but women wore their hair long. This could be braided in elaborate styles or worn loose, decorated with hair pins, flowers and beads. On special occasions, both men and women wore wigs.



Hairpin
Copper
Date unknown

Wellcome Collection
EG1688

Hair pins were used to hold a person's hair in place while it was being styled. They may also have been part of the finished hair style.



Hair rings
Copper covered with gold
New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG1158, EG1150

Rings like these and other metal or faience decorations were woven into wigs or plaited into a person's own hair to achieve some elaborate hair styles.



Toilette implement

Bronze

**New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty,
1550-1295 BCE**

Wellcome Collection

EG4393

This two piece bronze implement combines a razor and a tapering pin. It would have been used for shaving and arranging hair or a wig.

Fashions for hair changed over time. At certain periods Ancient Egyptians shaved their heads and wore wigs: this kept them cool and also prevented head lice. At other times the fashion was to have short, shoulder length or long hair for both men and women. Hair extensions were also sometimes added to real hair to create more elaborate hair styles, cover bald patches or disguise greying hair.



Comb

Wood

**Ptolemaic Period or later,
after 332 BCE**

Northumberland Collection

EG4398

Combs like these were used for brushing a person's own hair and for preparing hair to be used in wigs or hair extensions. The fine teeth helped to remove head lice to ensure that the hair was clean and tangle free before it was styled.



Flower inlays

Faience

EG5388, EG5389

Inlays of this kind were inset into metal head bands, diadems and other head-dresses worn by elite women in Ancient Egypt to complete their hair style.



Head of a male figure

Glass and steatite

New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, about 1370 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG4347

This man is wearing an elaborate wig. Wigs were a status symbol in Ancient Egypt. The most expensive were made with real human hair and were elaborately layered and braided as shown here. These wigs were not meant to look natural. The proud wearer wanted people to know he or she could afford to have such a wig.

This piece is also interesting for its early use of glass. The glass has been ground and polished by a craftsman more used to working with stone.

Cosmetics

People in Ancient Egypt cared very much about their appearance. Both men and women wore make up which they kept in a range of small pots. Scented oils were used to moisturise and protect the skin and perfumes were made by mixing flowers, seeds and fruits with oils and animal fat.



Kohl stick

Wood

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG5083

Sticks like this with a rounded end were used to apply eye make-up from kohl-pots or palettes.



Kohl pot

Travertine

Middle Kingdom or later, after 2055 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG4405



Kohl pot

Faience

New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, 1550-1069 BCE

Rawnsley Collection

EG1789



Kohl pot

Travertine

**New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty,
1550-1069 BCE**

Northumberland Collection

EG4414

Kohl (eye paint) was used by both men and women in Ancient Egypt. It was used both as a cosmetic and to keep the eyes healthy. Eye paint helped to reduce the glare of the sun and to repel flies that caused eye disease.

Two main colours were used: black (galena) and green (malachite). The green colour was most common in early periods, with black being favoured from the Old Kingdom onwards.

Some make up pots have two sections, one for each colour. One of the kohl pots shown here has five compartments. The additional sections may have contained ointments for someone who did have eye disease, as well as kohl to apply over the ointment. This pot originally had a lid, attached via a pin into the small hole in the top. The groove at the front was designed to hold an applicator.



Vessel in the form of a trussed duck
Anhydrite, copper rims for inlaid eyes
Middle Kingdom, 13th Dynasty, about
1700 BCE

Gift of Sir Charles Hardinge
EG610

This vessel, carved in the form of a plucked and trussed duck, has been created from blue anhydrite, a rare stone used for cosmetic vessels and other small items during the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period. Its disappearance thereafter indicates that the source was soon exhausted. The original quarry has not yet been identified.

This vessel was probably used to hold expensive perfumed oil for use on the skin.



Cosmetic palette
Siltstone
Predynastic Period, Naqada II,
3500-3100 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG5284

Palettes like this were used for grinding the minerals used to make kohl. The ground up powder was then mixed with fat before being applied. Once mixed, the make-up could be stored in a kohl pot like the ones shown here. Only small amounts were made so that the mixture did not go off in the Egyptian heat.



Cosmetic spoon

Ivory

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG4367

Spoons were used for measuring and mixing ingredients for cosmetics. The handle of this spoon has been carved in the shape of a hand.



Jar for perfumed oil

Pottery

Late Period onwards, after 747 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG5588

The form of this jar (called a stirrup jar) is based on a Mycenaean design. The original jars were intended to hold olive oil. The Ancient Egyptians borrowed the shape and used their jars to hold perfumed oils for applying to the body. The jar could be held by putting the second and third fingers through the loops while the thumb of the same hand could be held over the spout to control the flow of the expensive oil.

Jewellery

All Egyptians wore jewellery: necklaces, bracelets, amulets, earrings and other ornaments. The most prized examples were made from gold, silver, glass and semi-precious stones but jewellery could be made from faience and copper.



Necklace

Carnelian

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG4014

This necklace is made from alternating round and cornflower- or poppy-shaped beads. Both of these flowers were popular motifs for necklaces during the New Kingdom. It is often difficult to tell which is being represented due to the similarity in shape. Carnelian was a highly sought after stone. It was associated with Sekhmet, the fierce protector goddess often depicted as a lioness.



Necklace

Amethyst, gold

Middle Kingdom, 2055-1650 BCE

EG4013

Amethyst was a popular stone for jewellery and scarabs during the Middle Kingdom. This style of necklace with gold spacers in between the amethyst beads is very typical of that period.



Earrings

Glass

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

EG4378, EG4379, EG4380, EG4387,
EG4389



Earrings were first worn in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period (1650-1550 BCE). It is thought that the fashion may have spread from the Nubians who served as mercenaries to the Theban (southern) rulers at this time.

At first earrings were only worn by women, later they were also worn by men. By the time of Thutmose IV (1400-1390 BCE), even Pharaoh had pierced ears. However, earrings seem to have continued to be regarded as slightly 'foreign', for Pharaoh is never shown in paintings or statues wearing earrings.

All of the earrings shown here would once have had metal wire hooks attached to the top to pass through pierced ears. They are made from glass. Glassmaking was introduced to Egypt during the New Kingdom (1550-1069 BCE), from the Near East. Glass was a high prestige item available only to the elite.



Ear stud

Calcite

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG1141

This ear stud would have been pushed through a pierced ear. This example is plain but the front of the stud was often decorated, usually with a floral design.



Bracelet

Faience, bone

Date unknown

Rawnsley Collection

DUROM.1953.23

Bracelets and armlets were worn by both men and women and at all periods of Ancient Egyptian history. They often appear in pairs or sets, sometimes with matching anklets.



Bracelet

Glass

**Roman Period or later,
possibly 6-8th century CE**

Wellcome Collection

EG1085

Glass bracelets of this kind were made using thin glass rods in different colours which were heated and twisted until they fused together.



Bracelet
Bronze
Date unknown

Wellcome Collection
EG1224

This bronze bracelet was made for a child. The ends do not quite meet, allowing the bracelet to be slightly stretched when it is put on or taken off.



Ring
Faience, metal
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, Thutmose IV,
1400-1390 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG467

The design of this ring includes a cartouche containing one of the names of the Pharaoh Thutmose IV. Next to this the Pharaoh is shown as a human headed lion, trampling on a fallen enemy. The bezel swivels on the metal band so that the ring can be used as a seal. Rings like this showed that the person carrying them was acting with authority from the ruler.



Ring
Faience
Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG3083

This faience ring has been made in the shape of a *wedjat* eye, or eye of Horus. This symbol was associated with health and healing and was popular for amulets and other jewellery. Rings like this were produced in large quantities using moulds. They were therefore relatively inexpensive.



Ring
Faience
New Kingdom, 19th or 20th
Dynasty, 1295-1069 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG2962

The design on this ring includes a falcon-headed sun god. He holds a *was*-sceptre which was a symbol of prosperity and wellbeing.



Ring
Gold
New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG6054

This ring shows the goddess Mut, wearing her vulture headdress. She is the consort of Amun, the god of Thebes, and carries a papyrus sceptre which represents Upper Egypt where Thebes is located. Mut became closely linked to the women of the royal family. A ring like this might have been worn by someone associated with Mut's temple in Thebes or with the royal household.



Necklace
Agate
Predynastic Period, 5500-4000 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG926

Agate was used for some of the earliest jewellery ever found in Egypt. This necklace probably dates back more than 6000 years from the present day. Use of agate declined in the historic period and it is not common in Egyptian jewellery after 3000 BCE.



Beads
Faience
Middle Kingdom, 2055-1650 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG1073

This collection of large faience ball beads is on a modern stringing. The precise origin of the beads is unknown so it is impossible to know if they were originally intended to look this way. Ball beads are characteristic of the Middle Kingdom (2055-1650 BCE).



Earrings
Copper
Roman Period, 30 BCE-395 CE

EG1826, EG1903

These earrings were made by twisting lengths of copper wire and attaching hollow balls of copper to the ends, designed to swing and make a pleasant sound as the wearer moved.

Amulets

God amulets

Amulets were ornaments or charms worn to offer protection to the wearer or give them certain powers. They were worn as jewellery when the person was alive and were wrapped with the mummy for use in the next life. Many amulets took the form of a god as the Egyptians believed this put the wearer under the protection of that god. Popular amulets included the *wedjat* or 'eye of Horus' that warded off evil, Bastet, protector of mothers and children and Bes, who was believed to have the power to ward off snakes.



Taweret

Gold

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG5071

Taweret

Faience

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG4684

Taweret was a household goddess. She was particularly associated with protecting women during childbirth and is a common motif for amulets.

In both of these amulets she is portrayed here in her most common form - as a pregnant hippopotamus, standing upright, with the feet of a lion and the tail of a crocodile running down her back.



Khons
Faience
Date unknown

Wellcome Collection
EG5219

Khons is a moon god. He is shown here in his most common form as a mummified human holding a sceptre and flail. His hair is shaved except for a single braid called the 'sidelock of youth' and he appears to have originally been associated with childbirth. His headdress is formed from a crescent moon with a full moon on the top. In the Theban region he was regarded as the son of the gods Amun and Mut.



Isis, Horus and Nephthys
Faience
Late Period, 26th Dynasty, 664-525 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG5217

The god Horus is shown here as a child, indicated by his shaved head and 'sidelock of youth'. He is flanked by his mother Isis and her sister Nephthys, each indicated by the hieroglyph for her name worn as a headdress. This was a common amulet in the Late Period and was concerned with protection: just as the goddesses are protecting the young child and future king Horus, so the amulet offered protection to its wearer. It was worn by the living and used to protect the dead.



Anubis
Wood
Date unknown

EG5266



Anubis
Faience
Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG4488

Anubis was a god of the dead, particularly associated with embalming and mummification. He is usually represented as a black dog or jackal or a man with a jackal head. Jackals are not actually black. The colour black represented rebirth and new growth as it was the colour of fertile soil. Anubis was the guardian of the necropolis and one of his titles was 'He who is upon the mountain', which conveys the image of the jackal god keeping watch over the cemeteries from the desert mountains.



Bastet aegis amulet

Faience

**Third Intermediate Period,
1069-747 BCE**

Northumberland Collection
EG5239



Bastet aegis amulet

Silver, gold

**Third Intermediate Period,
1069-747 BCE**

DUROM.1995.5

Aegis is the Greek word for 'shield' and it is used by Egyptologists to describe this kind of amulet which shows the head of a god above a broad necklace or collar. This kind of amulet had protective properties and larger versions are depicted on the prow and stern of the ceremonial boats used to transport sacred temple images during festivals.

Bastet, often depicted as a cat or lion, was a protective mother goddess. She is shown in both of these examples as a lion wearing a sun disc headdress.



Sekhmet

Faience

Date unknown

Wellcome Collection

EG4653

Sekhmet's name means 'she who is powerful' reflecting her aggressive nature. She is shown here as a lion-headed woman sitting on a throne and holding serpents in her hand. The serpents are a reference to the royal *uraeus*, the serpent that sat on the brow of the king in order to spit fiery venom at his enemies. As the daughter of the sun-god Ra, Sekhmet was closely linked with the uraeus in her role as the 'Eye of Ra', who punished mankind when they turned against the sun-god.



Bes

Faience

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG4502

The dwarf god Bes was a fierce protector god, strongly associated with the home and particularly guarding children from harm. This amulet shows the full form of the god Bes, with his feathered headdress, grotesque, mask-like face, lion-like beard and ears and squat body with bowed legs. As a protector god, capable of warding off snakes and other harmful creatures, Bes was a very popular amulet.



Khnum or Amun-Ra

Faience

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG5212

Khnum was associated with the annual Nile flood and is regarded as a creator god. Amun was the local god of Thebes who rose to become one of the most important gods in Egypt, regarded by the Greeks as the Egyptian equivalent of Zeus. Both these gods were represented as ram-headed men. In earlier depictions it is possible to differentiate between the two. Khnum is represented with straight, corkscrew shaped horns that extend horizontally. Amun is shown with curved horns that wrap around his face. In later periods, this distinction is not always so clear cut and this amulet could represent either god.



Amuletic necklace

Faience, carnelian

Date unknown

Wellcome Collection

EG5771

This necklace of amulets includes a number of different gods. There are 5 Bes amulets, 2 *wedjat* eyes, 3 Isis and Horus amulets, 1 Sekhmet, 1 Anubis and a carnelian amulet of the goddess Mut. The other amulets include 2 *menyet*-counterpoises and 2 *sistra*, both objects associated with the goddess Hathor. A necklace like this might be placed on a mummy to protect the dead person on their journey to the afterlife.



Wedjat eye

Faience

Third Intermediate Period or later, after 1069 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG4288

In Egyptian mythology the gods Horus and Seth battle for the throne of Egypt. Horus is victorious but in the course of their struggle he loses his left eye. After the battle the eye is healed and the 'eye of Horus', known as a *wedjat*, comes to stand for healing, protection, strength and perfection. For these reasons it became one of the most popular Egyptian amulets. The markings around the eye are thought to mimic the facial markings of a hawk or falcon, a reference to Horus, who often appears in the form of a hawk.



Thoth

Faience

Third Intermediate Period or later, after 1069 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG5179

Thoth was the god of writing and knowledge. He was also closely associated with the judgement of the dead and is often depicted in funerary texts as an ibis-headed man recording the results of the weighing of a dead person's heart. Amulets like this one, showing Thoth as man with an ibis head, seem to have only been used as part of burial rituals. Thoth usually appears in his form as a baboon on amulets worn during life.

Body amulets

Some amulets represented body parts. Heart amulets and ones representing the *ba* (soul or spirit) were often wrapped with a mummy to give protection. Others were worn in the hope of gaining powers. For example, the leg amulet could mean movement.



Leg amulet

Carnelian

Old Kingdom—First Intermediate Period, 2686-2181 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG5403

Amulets of this kind were only used during the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period (2686-2181 BCE). They are often found in pairs - one left and one right foot. Placed on mummies, the function of these amulets was to give a dead person the power of movement in the afterlife or to act as a substitute for a lost limb.



Girdle

Faience

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Royal Scottish Museum

DUROM.1971.178

This girdle, designed to be worn around a woman's hips, includes a number of beads made in the shape of cowrie shells. Cowrie shell amulets were thought to protect pregnant women and women wishing to become pregnant. They are only ever seen on girdles and belts for women. At the centre of the girdle is a *wedjat* eye, another amulet associated with health and wellbeing.



Ba bird
Faience
Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG4431

The *ba* was one of the spiritual elements of a person, often translated as 'personality'. It is usually portrayed as a human-headed falcon. After death the *ba* could leave a person's body to visit the world of the living, travel the sky in the sun-god's boat, or enjoy the afterlife. The *ba* needed to return to the body regularly if the person was to live on in the afterlife. It is thought that *ba* amulets were placed on the chest of a mummy to act as a substitute if the *ba* refused to return.



Heart amulet
Carnelian
New Kingdom or later, after 1550 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG4460

The heart was thought to be the most essential of the organs, as it was considered to be the seat of intelligence, feelings and memory. It was the only organ left in the body during mummification and if it was removed by mistake would be returned and sewn back into place. From the New Kingdom onwards a heart amulet is found on virtually every Egyptian mummy and often many heart amulets are present right across the torso.

Animal amulets

Animal amulets were also popular. Some of these were gods in animal form whilst others were used to represent certain qualities. For example, a lioness represented bravery and fierceness and a hare stood for swiftness of movement. Other animal amulets were there to ward off evil associated with that creature. A scorpion amulet, for example, was worn in the hope of gaining protection from the sting.



Cat amulet

Faience

Third Intermediate Period or later, after 1069 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG5340

Amulets in the shape of a cat represent the goddess Bastet. In this form Bastet represents fertility and protection of young children and the cat often has a kitten sitting between her front paws. These amulets would have been worn by women who were pregnant or hoping to get pregnant.



Crocodile amulet

Faience

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG5364

Crocodile amulets were worn to protect the wearer against the crocodiles who lived along the banks of the Nile in areas where there were marshlands, sandbanks or cliffs.



Scorpion amulet

Glass

Date unknown

Wellcome Collection

EG4854

Scorpion amulets were worn in life as protection against scorpion bites and are known from most periods of Ancient Egyptian history. In burials they can also represent the goddess Serqet who protected the dead.



Hawk amulet

Lapis lazuli

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG5348

Hawk or falcon amulets are usually associated with the god Horus, though the gods Montu and Sokar can also be represented by these birds of prey. Horus was the guardian of the Pharaoh. Wearing a Horus amulet offered the wearer protection from harm both in this life and in the afterlife.



Frog amulet

Pottery

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG5377

When the waters of the inundation receded each year many small frogs were seen in the mud. This led to frogs becoming linked with ideas of regeneration and fertility. In life, women wore frog pendants in the hope of conceiving. In death, frog pendants were placed on mummies because of their link with new life. Most frog amulets are not inscribed so it is difficult to link them to a particular god or goddess but they are often associated with the creator goddess Heqat.



Hare amulet

Faience

Late Period, 747-332 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG5331

Hares are desert animals in Egypt. Their speed and keen senses were admired and they were even thought to sleep with their eyes open. Their fertility was also well known. A hare amulet worn in life was thought to give the wearer fertility or speed of movement. Worn in death the amulet offered the hope of rebirth.



Scarab beetle amulet

Carnelian

Late Period, 747-332 BCE

EG4467

Scarab beetles lay their eggs in animal dung from which the young then appear, apparently spontaneously. This led the Ancient Egyptians to link scarab beetles with regeneration and new life.

These beetles also roll dung balls back to their underground burrows, where they serve as food. This image was transferred to the sun, which the Egyptians imagined being pushed through the sky by a giant beetle each day.

For these reasons the beetle became a very popular image for amulets. They were worn in life and used in funerary contexts.



Fly amulet

Faience

Date unknown

Wellcome Collection

EG5328

Fly amulets have been found in burials dating back to before 3000 BCE and they continue to appear for thousands of years. However, their meaning is far from clear. The amulet may have been intended to keep flies at bay, another theory is that it the fly was a fertility amulet given the fly's ability to produce so many offspring.



Fish amulet

Carnelian

**Old Kingdom - First Intermediate Period,
2686-2055 BCE**

EG5362

Fish amulets served a number of different purposes. Amulets like this one were sometimes placed in burials to act as a magical substitute for food offerings. Other fish amulets were symbols of rebirth and the afterlife or were linked to particular regional gods. The third kind of fish amulet was one that was woven into the hair of children to guard against drowning in the river Nile.



Snake amulet

Faience

**Late Period, 26th Dynasty,
664-525 BCE**

Northumberland Collection

EG5359

From the earliest dynasties, the rearing cobra or *uraeus*, was a symbol of royalty. As a goddess she was the eye of the sun-god Ra, spitting fiery venom at the king's enemies. An amulet like this one was intended for a non-royal wearer. These amulets were placed on a mummy in order to give the person the same protection as the cobra gave to royalty. Because snakes shed their skin, the snake amulet also symbolises rebirth.

Clothing



Linen fragments

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG1974, EG1975

Royal Scottish Museum
DUROM.1971.189



Linen, made from flax, was the most important material used for clothing in Ancient Egypt. Evidence for linen clothing dates back to as early as 5000 BCE.

There were four qualities of linen cloth. The Egyptian terms for these were 'royal linen', 'fine thin cloth', 'thin cloth' and 'smooth (or ordinary) cloth'. The examples here range from ordinary to fine thin cloth.

Most linen varies in colour from light brown to a golden colour, the variation being mainly due to the maturity of the plants when they were prepared. Some linens were deliberately bleached white and dye in a number of different colours was also used.



Spindle whorl

Wood

Nubia, Qasr Ibrim

X-group, 250-550 CE

Egypt Exploration Society

DUROM.1964.563

The first stage in preparing flax to make linen was 'roving'. This involved rolling dried flax fibres to create drawn-out and loosely twisted slivers. These were wound into balls on pottery reels and placed into a lidded bucket. The threads could then be pulled through the hole for spinning on a hand-held spindle. A spindle whorl like this would have been mounted on a slender stick and spun in an anti-clockwise direction to spin the thread as this is the way that flax rotates naturally when it dries.



Seal in the shape of a ram

Steatite

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG5000

As well as linen, the Ancient Egyptians also used wool for warm clothing, particularly cloaks. Sheep and goats were kept for their milk, meat and wool.



Loom weight
Sandstone
Nubia, Buhen
Date unknown

Egypt Exploration Society
DUROM.1964.96



Shuttle
Stone
Nubia, Buhen
Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG2312

The ancient Egyptians used two types of loom. Until the end of the Middle Kingdom (about 1650 BCE), the horizontal ground loom was used. The vertical framed loom came into use by the early New Kingdom (about 1550 BCE) and was probably introduced from the Near East.

Production of the finest linen cloth was state controlled. Wealthy estates and temples also seem to have had their own weaving workshops. Among the poorer classes weaving was done at home and was a chore shared by both men and women in the household.

Bread and Beer

Pots

Preserving and cooking food was not always an easy job in Ancient Egypt. The heat and threats from insects and animals meant that good storage was very important and the Egyptians developed a wide variety of cups, jars, pots and other containers in which to keep and cook different foodstuffs. Early pots were made from stone before being joined by those made from clay and other materials such as faience.



Predynastic pot

Nile mud

Predynastic Period, Naqada II, 3500-3100 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG1447

This pot dates back to before 3000 BCE. Pots of this very early date are remarkable for the quality of their construction and the skill with which they have been fired to achieve this distinctive red and black finish using only an open fire or very basic kiln.



Pot stand

Pottery

**Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty,
1985-1795 BCE**

Wellcome Collection

EG2585

This stand would have been used to support a round-bottomed vessel to prevent it from falling over and spilling its contents.



Large amphora

Pottery

Nubia, Buhen

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Egypt Exploration Society

DUROM.1964.44

This large jar (usually referred to using the Latin word amphora) was probably designed to hold and transport wine. The mouth of the jar would have been sealed with a mud cap to prevent the contents from being lost during transport.

Jars were designed with pointed bases so that they could be stored upright by partly embedding them into the ground. This shape also made transport by boat easier as the jars were packed tightly together with ropes passing through all the handles to prevent them toppling over and breaking in rough waters. In houses they could be stored on wooden or pottery stands.

This amphora was excavated in the 1960s at the fortress site of Buhen in Nubia as part of the UNESCO campaign to save the monuments of that area before the building of the Aswan High Dam. Buhen has now been lost beneath the waters of Lake Nasser behind the dam.



Decorated jar

Pottery

New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, 1550-1295 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG6150

Painted decoration like this was applied using a reed brush before the pot was fired. The light blue colour used here is very characteristic of the New Kingdom. The colour was achieved by using a very small amount of cobalt in the paint.



Bowl

Pottery

**Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty,
1985-1795 BCE**

Wellcome Collection

EG5139

The uneven surface of this bowl was caused by a large amount of chaff in the clay which burnt off during firing. This kind of roughly made bowl would have been used for preparing or serving food in poorer households.



Bowl
Pottery
Date unknown

Wellcome Collection
EG5145

This bowl was made on a potter's wheel, indicated by the lines visible around the sides. It was then covered with a 'slip' - a very liquid layer of clay - to give the bowl a better finish. This is typical of bowls used as tableware.



Wine pitcher
Pottery
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty or later,
1500 BCE onwards

Wellcome Collection
EG5593

The single-handled wine jugs in this shape became fashionable during the second half of the 18th Dynasty. This was a time of great prosperity in Egypt and pottery shapes underwent considerable change, influenced by pottery coming into the country from the Near East and Mediterranean as part of international trade.



Drinking cup

Pottery

Cyprus

**2nd Intermediate Period,
1650 to 1550 BCE**

Wellcome Collection

EG5597

This drinking cup is from Cyprus. The earliest definite evidence for contact between Egypt and Cyprus dates to the 2nd Intermediate Period (1650-1550 BCE). The evidence for contact comes mainly from Cypriot pottery like this which has been found in Egypt. As well as pottery, Cyprus provided Egypt with copper, wood and opium.



Narrow amphora

Pottery

Roman Period, 30 BCE to 395 CE

Wellcome Collection

EG6146

This narrow amphora would originally have had two handles, one has been lost. Tall, narrow necked vessels like this were often used to hold oil. Oil was an important food item and nearly thirty different types of oil are known from Ancient Egyptian sources. These include imported oils, blends and oils flavoured with herbs. Oil was also used for lighting.

International Trade

Traded Goods

Egypt was an exporter and importer of goods. In return for goods such as grain, wine, glass items, papyrus and gold it imported many items. These included woods such as ebony and cedar from Lebanon; wine and oils from the Mediterranean; ivory from the African interior; and even monkeys and baboons which were used as part of religious rituals or kept as pets.



Furniture Leg

Ebony

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG4581

This fragment of a piece of furniture has been made from ebony. Ebony was a highly prestigious material imported into Egypt from tropical Africa. Ebony objects have been found in Egypt dating back to the First Dynasty, suggesting that this international trade was very ancient. Ebony was traded along the River Nile through Nubia or through the Red Sea from the land of Punt (the Egyptian name for a region of East Africa).

Ebony was frequently used as an inlay on furniture, boxes and other objects, often paired with ivory inlays for contrast. It could also be used to make complete pieces of furniture such as a chair from the tomb of Tutankhamun.



Hand-shaped clappers

Ivory

Middle Kingdom, 2055-1650 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG4953, EG4954

Egypt is known to have been a major importer, user and then re-exporter of African elephant ivory. There is also increasing evidence that Egyptians were using and exporting hippopotamus ivory from hippo living along the Nile. For example, Egypt seems the most likely source of hippo ivory used in Minoan Crete during the third and second millennia BCE.

These two pieces are both from sets of clappers, shaped like hands. The clappers would originally have been joined to a matching piece, tied together using the hole at the base. They were used as musical instruments, played alongside harps, pipes and a sistrum (a type of rattle).



The god Thoth as a baboon

Stone

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG2185

Baboons were sacred to the god Thoth. This statuette of the god would originally have worn a moon headdress to identify him. Baboons are native to Sudan and were imported into Egypt from this region in ancient times.



Scarab amulet

Glazed steatite

Second Intermediate Period, 1650-1550 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG1259

The base of this scarab has been decorated with a design of four monkeys climbing a palm tree. In prehistoric times, when the climate was wetter, it is likely that monkeys inhabited the area that became Egypt. However, by early in the historic period, it seems likely that any monkey colonies would have died out in the drying conditions. By the New Kingdom monkeys were being imported from Nubia or Punt (a region of East Africa). They seem to have been kept as elite pets or held in colonies attached to temples.



Alabastron

Glass

Ptolemaic or Roman Period, 332 BCE-395 CE

Northumberland Collection

EG5103

Glass objects and glass making technology were probably first imported into Egypt during the 15th century BCE from the Near East. Glass was highly prestigious and to begin with it may have been subject to a royal monopoly. By the time this vessel was made, during the Greek or Roman Periods, glass was being imported into Egypt from a number of locations around the Mediterranean as well as being manufactured in Egypt itself.



Spindle bottle

Pottery

New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, 1550-1295 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG5432

Tall, narrow necked bottles like this were made in Egypt based on the designs of Mediterranean pots imported into the country. These bottles were used to hold oils. The Egyptians are known to have used a wide selection of oils, including imported oils, for uses ranging from cooking to perfume.



Stirrup jar

Pottery

Egypt, Gurob (tomb 37)

New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, reign of Rameses II, 1279-1213 BCE

DUROM.1996.107

The jar is of Mycenaean origin. It was excavated from a tomb dating to the reign of Rameses II at the site of Gurob, in Middle Egypt. The royal harem and the associated town of Mer-wer, stood on this site during this period. At least one foreign wife of Rameses II is mentioned in fragments of administrative papyri found at the site - Queen Maathorneferura, daughter of the Hittite King. This kind of high status, fine imported ceramic is likely to have belonged to someone connected with the royal household.

Feeding the People

Fishing

The Nile provided the opportunity for Egyptians to supplement their diet with fish. Fishermen used nets, hooks and harpoons to catch the fish. Tilapia fish were the most popularly eaten fish in Egypt, being favoured for their taste.



Bowl with fish decoration

Faience

New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, 1550-1295 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG907

This bowl is decorated with images of the Tilapia fish (*tilapia nilotica*) which lives in the River Nile and was eaten by the Ancient Egyptians.

When Tilapia lay their eggs they then appear to swallow them. In fact, they hold the eggs in their mouths until they hatch. At this point the young fish swim from the parent's mouth. This led to the Tilapia becoming a symbol of rebirth. The lotus flower which decorates this bowl is also associated with rebirth. The square design at the centre is often thought to symbolise a pool or other body of water.

Bowls with this decoration appear to have had a ritual purpose and are particularly associated with the goddess Hathor. Since they are often found in tombs, it has also been suggested that they were used as part of funerary ritual.



Fish shaped palette

Steatite

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG2585

This palette for holding cosmetics is shaped like a Tilapia fish. Tilapia have colourful fins and wealthy Egyptians often kept them in pools in their gardens because of their attractive colours, as well as using them as a source of food. The association of the Tilapia with rejuvenation also made it a good choice for a cosmetic object.

Bread

Barley and wheat was used to make bread. The grain was ground into flour which was then mixed with water and yeast to form a dough. It was baked in a stone oven. Egyptian bread was often contaminated by grit which wore down the teeth.



Barley bread
Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG2076

Bread was one of the most important staple foods in Ancient Egypt. Both wheat and barley were used to make bread. Wheat could be ground into a finer flour and was probably used in richer households as well as for religious and funerary purposes. Barley bread was probably more common in poorer homes.



Saucer
Pottery
Early Dynastic Period,
3100-2686 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG5149

Shallow saucers of this kind were used to hold bread placed in tombs as offerings for the dead. This saucer has been covered with a white slip before firing, giving it a finer finish which is usually found on pottery designed as tableware.



Wheat

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG1800



Barley

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG2080

Grain was a staple food in Ancient Egypt at all periods. Both wheat and barley were used for bread, and barley was also used for beer. Whole grains could also be cooked with meat or vegetables to form stews or soups. Crushed grains were used to make a kind of porridge. Rough cakes like flapjacks or oatcakes were made by mixing the crushed grain with oil or fat.

Fruit

Most people in Ancient Egypt ate fruit and vegetables as part of their diet, many families growing their own. Popular fruits were dates, dom palms and pomegranates. Fruit was often placed in tombs providing sustenance for the afterlife.



Pomegranate

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG2075

Pomegranates were introduced to Egypt from the Near East during the 2nd Intermediate Period (1550-1295 BCE). The shape of the fruit became popular as the form for small jars during the New Kingdom. These jars were probably designed to hold pomegranate juice.

Pomegranate fruit were considered a delicacy. They were used to make a kind of wine, and the juice could be used as a medicine. It was known to reduce swelling in wounds and to treat stomach disorders such as dysentery and diarrhoea.



Sycamore figs

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG2082



Dates

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG2071



Dom palm nut

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG2069

Fruit trees provided an important source of food for the Ancient Egyptians. Sycamore figs were the most important of these trees and true figs were introduced from the Old Kingdom onwards. Figs were eaten as fruit and were also used to make wine.

Dates were eaten fresh and dried. They were also used as puree or jam on bread to accompany festival bread and to enrich the flavour of beer. A kind of wine could also be made from dates.

Dom palm nuts are very woody. It is thought that they were soaked so that the spongy flesh came away from the central stone. This could then be eaten raw or used to make a cake which is said to have a taste similar to gingerbread.

Tools for farming

Land was prepared for sowing crops using hoes or a plough. Seed was scattered from bags carried on the farmer's back. Sickles were used for harvesting. Hoes and picks were also used for digging irrigation channels.



Hooked knife blade

Flint

**Predynastic Period, Naqada III,
3200-3000 BCE**

Wellcome Collection
EG5285

This very early curved blade may have been used as a sickle for harvesting grain. It would originally have had a wooden handle. Sickles were used throughout Egyptian history. The grain was cut just below the ear and the straw was left to be used for brick-making, animal bedding, fodder and fuel.



Shabti

Faience

Late Period, 26th Dynasty, 664-525 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG540

This shabti figure is carrying a pick and a hoe. Hoes were used to prepare the ground for the sowing of grain. Picks and hoes were used to dig the irrigation canals that watered the crops.



Shabti

Faience

**New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of
Hatshepsut, 1473-1458 BCE**

Northumberland Collection

EG533

This shabti has a basket painted onto his back. Grain was sown by hand from baskets or bags carried on the bag. It was then trodden in by animals such as sheep or goats.

Hunting

Pharaohs, courtiers and noblemen hunted animals including hippo, lions and ibex for sport. They used dogs and cats to flush the animals out of hiding. Arrows and special hunting sticks were used to kill the prey.



Arrow heads
Bronze
Date unknown



Northumberland Collection
EG5076, EG5077, EG5078



Bone
Date unknown
EG2835

Bows and arrows were used throughout Ancient Egyptian history for hunting and warfare.

The basic arrow comprised a reed shaft with three feathers at the end, tipped with an arrowhead. The earliest arrow heads were flint, but other types of stone and even wood or bone were also used. By the second millennium BCE bronze arrowheads had been introduced. Different shaped arrowheads were used for warfare, hunting and target practice.



Lower jaw of a hippo

Bone

Modern

On loan from the School of Biological Sciences

The hippopotamus was one of the most feared animals in Ancient Egypt. Hippo were a menace on the river and on land. They could attack swimmers or overturn small boats if frightened in the water. On land, they can run faster than a fully grown man and could trample crops if they stampeded. As this lower jaw bone shows, their bite is also ferocious. As such they were hunted and their meat, bone, hide and ivory were all put to use.

A craftsman's skill



Stamped brick

Mud

New Kingdom, 20th Dynasty, about 1400 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG1054

This mud-brick is stamped with the name and titles of the Scribe and Overseer of House of Amun, Djehuti. He is referred to as 'true of voice' indicating that he is dead. This would suggest that the brick was used in the construction of Djehuti's tomb or some other funerary monument.



Soul house

Pottery

Egypt, Rifeh

Middle Kingdom, 2055 -1650 BCE

Royal Scottish Museum

DUROM.1971.170

'Soul house' is the modern name given to models like this. These models were designed to act as offering tables outside tombs during the Middle Kingdom. The missing section of this model was probably an offering table that came out in front of the portico.

This model was excavated by the famous archaeologist Sir William Flinders Petrie from a cemetery at Rifeh in Middle Egypt in 1906-07. The cemetery belonged to the ancient town of Shashotep.



Lintel of a false door

Limestone

**Old Kingdom, 5th Dynasty or later,
after about 2450 BCE**

Northumberland Collection
EG4010.2

This stone block once formed part of a false door in a tomb. It appears to be a lintel from the top of the door. The carving on the lintel is of very high quality with each hieroglyph carved in great detail. It translates as 'Priest of the king, Nu [and his] wife Imarer'.



Carving of a Pharaoh

Limestone

Ptolemaic Period, 332-30 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG4011

This limestone fragment has been used by a sculptor to practice carving the head of a king. If you look closely you can see the grid lines used by the sculptor to ensure that the face was correctly proportioned.

The use of guidelines to ensure that figures were carved in the correct proportions is a feature of Ancient Egyptian art of all periods.



Axe handle and blade



Set of model tools
Wood, copper, leather
Egypt, Thebes (Deir el Bahri)
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty,
reign of Thutmose III, about
1435 BCE



Chisel

Northumberland Collection
EG3557, EG4565, EG4566,
EG4568, EG4569, EG4570



Chisel



Saw



Drill



Adze

Each part of this set of model tools is inscribed with a column of hieroglyphs which reads 'The good god Mn-hpr-re, beloved of Amun, on the occasion of the stretching of the cord for Amun of Djoser-Akhet'.

'Stretching the cord' was an important part of the foundation ritual carried out at the beginning of a major new building project. The four corners of the new building were marked out and then a cord was stretched between them to mark out the limits of the building. Burying foundation deposits was another part of the ritual and these tools were probably part of such a deposit. Other objects that might have been buried with them include brick or brick moulds, votive plaques, pots, bowls and occasionally jewellery.

Mn-hpr-re is one of the names of the Pharaoh Thutmose III. Djoser-Akhet (Holy of Horizon) is the name of a temple dedicated to the god Amun, built by Thutmose III during the last decade of his reign (1435-1425 BCE). The temple was sited at Deir el-Bahri on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes. It was built next to the famous temple of Hatshepsut that still stands there today and it thought to have been of a similar design. Thutmose's temple was built on a raised terrace, between Hatshepsut's temple and the older Middle Kingdom temple of Mentuhotep. It must have dominated the area when it was built. Unfortunately hardly anything of the temple remains today.

False door stela

Limestone

Egypt, probably Tuna el-Gebel

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG494

cavetto cornice
decorated with
winged sun disc

torus
moulding

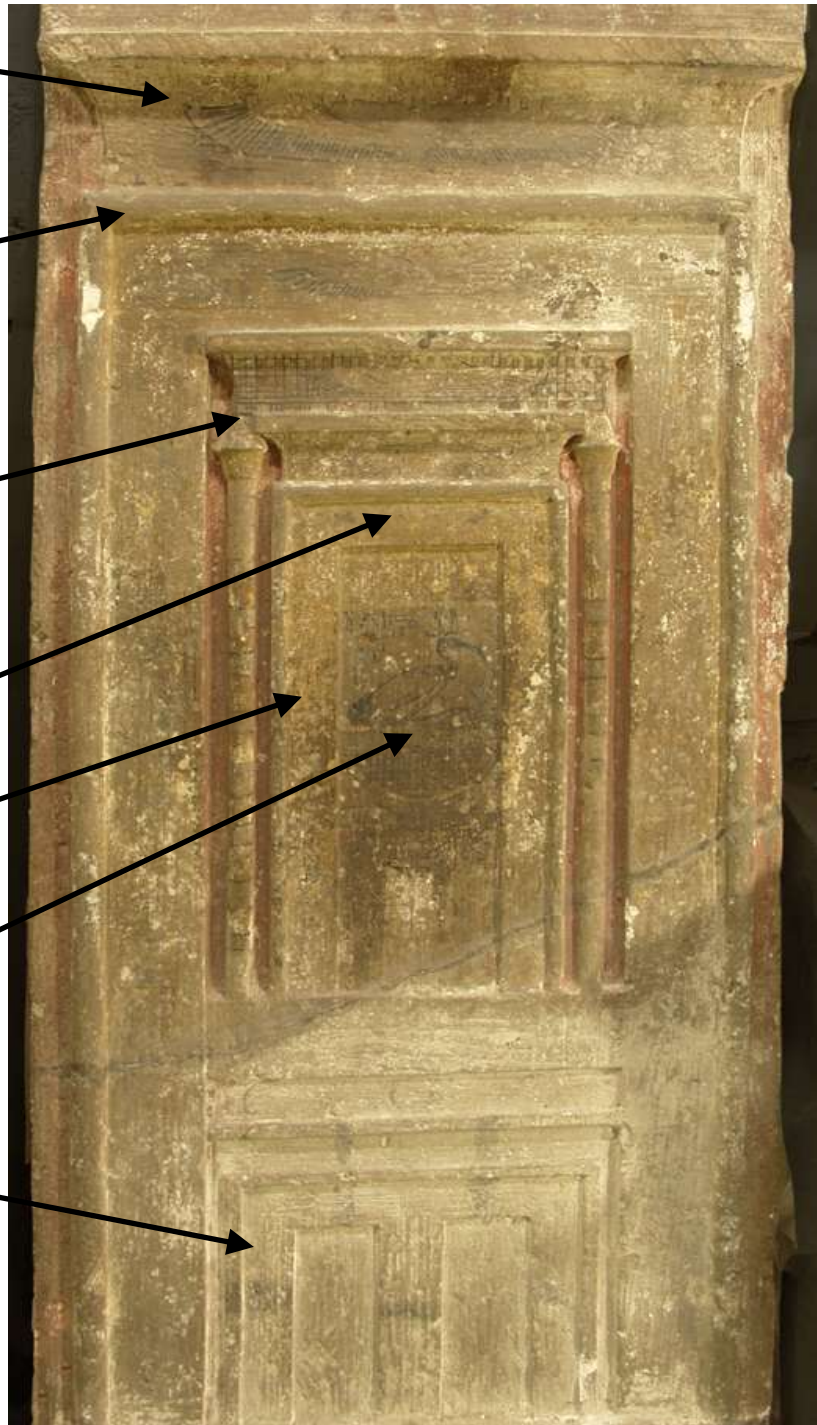
cornice
supported by
two painted
columns

door lintel

door jamb

door way with
image of Thoth

double
doorway in
'palace façade'
style



This elaborately carved false door combines a number of characteristically Ancient Egyptian architectural elements such as curving cavetto cornices on top of semi-circular torus mouldings and the use of the 'palace façade' design, thought to echo the alternating bays and buttresses of mudbrick palaces from the Early Dynastic Period. Traces of the original paint remain. Real architectural elements in prestigious buildings would have been decorated in a similar way.

Throughout Ancient Egyptian history, tombs contained a focal point where the living could make offerings of food and drink and the spirits of the dead could emerge from the afterlife to benefit from this sustenance. Often this focal point took the form of a false door, a solid stone slab carved to represent a door between the world of the living and the dead.

It is usual for false doors to be painted or carved with an image of the deceased person and their names and titles. However, in this doorway we see an image of the god Thoth in the form of an ibis. It is thought that the door comes from the site of Tuna el-Gebel in Middle Egypt. The cemetery at Tuna el-Gebel served the ancient city of Khmun (Greek Hermopolis), the main cult centre for the god Thoth. From the Late Period onwards (after 622 BCE) extensive catacombs of ibis and baboon burials were created here as both animals are sacred to the god Thoth. It seems likely that this false door was intended as a gateway between this world and the next world for Thoth so that he could receive the offerings left for him.

The power of belief



Bes jar

Pottery

Late Period, 747-332 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG3991



Bes jar

Organic material, linen

**Late Period, 26th Dynasty,
664-525 BCE**

EG5428

Bes was one of the most important gods in Ancient Egypt. He was not a major state god though, but a household god. Bes protected the home and particularly children. His image can be found on many household items including jars and jugs like the two displayed here.

If a child was ill, they would be given milk from a Bes jar. It was hoped that Bes would give the milk healing properties and the child would recover. By the Roman Period, Bes jars were not only used for children. Soldiers often drank their beer rations from Bes jars in the hope that Bes would keep them safe from harm.



New Year flask

Faience

**Late Period, 26th Dynasty,
664-525 BCE**

Northumberland Collection
EG881

The Ancient Egyptian New Year coincided with the beginning of the annual Nile flood in late summer. The transition from one year to the next was thought to be a time when chaos could emerge to threaten the correct order of life. A number of rituals developed to help to ensure a smooth transition. It is thought that these vessels were used to collect water from the beginning of the flood to be kept for ritual use. The inscription on the shoulders of the flask asks for New Year wishes to be granted to the owner by the gods Ptah and Sekhmet.



Situla

Bronze

Ptolemaic or Roman Period, 332 BCE-395 CE

Northumberland Collection
EG5075

A situla is a vessel used for storing and offering milk as part of temple or burial rituals. This miniature situla has several bands of decoration. At the top is imagery relating to the sun god, in the centre a man is shown worshipping a number of gods. At the base is a lotus flower.




Hes jar (water jar)

Faience

**New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep II
1427-1400 BCE**

Northumberland Collection
EG882

Water was a symbol of life, regeneration and purification in Ancient Egypt. It was used as part of temple and tomb offering rituals. The vessels used for these ritual offerings were made in a particular shape which mirrored the hieroglyph . Vessels for use in temples were often made in precious metals. Faience versions, such as this one, are more often associated with burials. This one is decorated with the cartouche of Amenhotep II and was presumably a gift from this Pharaoh. Images of water vessels are often found on altars and offering tables. There are two carved into the offering table displayed here.



Offering table

Stone

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection
EG603

Offerings of food and drink were vital to the continued existence of the gods and the dead. They were often presented on special offering tables such as this one. Carved depictions of offerings on the table helped to nourish the god or the deceased if real food and drink was not provided.



Mummified ibis
Linen, animal remains
Roman Period, after 30 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG722

Mummified ibis birds in Egypt seem to date mainly from the Greek and Roman Periods.

The ibis was associated with Thoth, the god of wisdom and the patron of scribes. Ibis birds were mummified and offered at temples in enormous numbers. It is estimated that up to half a million ibis have been found at the cemetery of Saqqara alone and some estimates for the site of Tune el Gebel put the number at around 4 million

X-rays reveal that the bird's breast bone has been removed. This allows the head and neck to be bent forward into the cavity. The legs have been bent underneath so that the whole bird creates a neat package.





Cat coffin

Bronze, glass, lapis lazuli

Late Period onwards, after 664 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG3572

This very finely cast bronze cat was designed as a container for a mummified cat. It would then have been dedicated as an offering at a temple, probably to the goddess Bastet. The cat is protected by an amuletic necklace and a scarab on her forehead.

Gods and Goddesses



Standing Osiris

Bronze

Late Period onwards, after 747 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG1002



Seated Osiris

Bronze

Late Period onwards, after 747 BCE

Bullock Bequest

DUROM 1998.12

Osiris was one of the most important gods in Ancient Egypt. He was associated with death, resurrection and fertility. In both of these objects he is shown in mummy form with his hands projecting through the wrappings to hold the royal insignia of crook and flail. He also wears his distinctive *atef*-crown. As King of the Underworld, Osiris presided over the judgement of the dead. The dead were often referred to as 'the Osiris *name*', expressing the hope that the dead person would be resurrected like Osiris to enjoy the afterlife.



Isis and the child Horus

Faience

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG5215



Isis and the child Horus

Bronze

Late Period, 747–332 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG6135

The goddess Isis was the wife of Osiris and mother of Horus. One of the most important Egyptian goddesses, she stood for all of the virtues of the good wife and mother. As mother of Horus, who was protector of the king, she was regarded as the symbolic mother of the Pharaoh. Her distinctive headdress takes the form of the hieroglyph for seat which is also used to spell her name. She can be seen wearing this headdress in the first of these objects.

From the New Kingdom (1550-1069 BCE) onwards, Isis became closely linked with the goddess Hathor and is sometimes depicted wearing Hathor's crown of sun disc and cow horns. This can be seen on the second image shown here.



Horus
Bronze
Late Period, 747-332 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG1618

This very detailed bronze depicts the god Horus. Horus was the embodiment of divine kingship and protector of the reigning Pharaoh and he is shown here wearing the Pharaoh's 'double crown'. The inner section represents Upper Egypt while the outer section represents the delta region of Lower Egypt. The united crown symbolises the united country ruled over by the Pharaoh.



Wedjat eye amulet
Faience
Third Intermediate Period onwards,
after 1069 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG4121

In Egyptian mythology the gods Horus and Seth battled for the throne of Egypt. Horus is victorious but in the course of their struggle he loses his left eye. The goddess Hathor restores his sight and the eye of Horus, known as a *wedjat*, comes to stand for healing, protection, strength and perfection. For these reasons it became one of the most popular Egyptian amulets.



Hawk figure

Bronze

**Ptolemaic or Roman Period,
after 332 BCE**

Wellcome Collection

EG1237

Hawks and falcons were very closely associated with the god Horus, son of Osiris, and protector of the Pharaoh. The hawk is also associated with the gods Montu and Sokar.



Part of a sistrum showing Hathor

Faience

Late Period, 747-332 BCE

EG2746

The goddess Hathor is often depicted as a cow or woman with cow ears, as on this handle of a sistrum. A sistrum was a musical instrument which made a rattling sound. Hathor had strong connections with music and was particularly associated with the sistrum which was frequently used in ceremonies by priestesses of her cult.



Votive stela showing Harpocrates and Sekhmet

Limestone

Roman Period, 30 BCE-395 CE

Northumberland Collection

EG599

Harpocrates is the Greek version of the ancient Egyptian name 'hr-pa-khrd' meaning Horus the Child. Throughout ancient Egyptian history the god Horus was strongly linked to divine kingship and the sky. He is often shown as a hawk or hawk-headed man. In later periods, he is often portrayed as a child and in this form is strongly linked with protection and healing.

On this stela, dating from the Roman Period, Harpocrates is shown wearing a style of dress associated with the Near East, rather than Egypt. Next to him stands Sekhmet, represented as a woman with the head of a lioness. Sekhmet is a fierce goddess. The sun disc and cobra on her head, identify her as the 'Eye of Ra', the sun-god's daughter and the instrument of his wrath when angered.



Toth as an ibis

Bronze

Late Period, 747-332 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG1506



Toth as an ibis headed man

Faience

Late Period, 747-332 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG2091



Toth as a baboon

Bronze

Late Period, 747-332 BCE

EG5059

Toth was the god of writing and knowledge. He is associated with two very different animals: the ibis and the baboon. Toth was closely linked with the moon and it is possible that the long, curved beak of the ibis was associated with both the crescent moon and the reed pen used for writing. He is shown here depicted as an ibis and as an ibis-headed man. Toth is closely associated with the judgement of the dead and is often depicted in funerary texts as an ibis-headed man recording the results of the weighing of a dead person's heart. The statuette of Toth as a baboon shows the remains of the crescent moon that was part of his headdress, originally surmounted by a full moon. Baboons are known for their enthusiastic greeting of sun at dawn. This is thought to be the reason for their association with the sun god and by extension, Toth as a moon-god.



Head of Bes

Sandstone

New Kingdom or later, after 1550 BCE

EG1560

The dwarf god Bes was a fierce protector god, strongly associated with the home and particularly guarding children from harm. He was also linked with sexuality and childbirth. This stone head appears to have been removed from a monumental carving. The image of Bes was used to decorate birth-houses in temples and birthing rooms in houses and palaces. This image may come from such a setting.



Bes amulet

Faience

Third Intermediate Period, 1069-747 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG4501

This amulet shows the full form of the god Bes, with his feathered headdress, grotesque, mask-like face, beard and ears reminiscent of a lion's ears and mane and squat body with bowed legs. As a protector god, capable of warding off snakes and other harmful creatures, Bes was a very popular amulet.



Imhotep

Bronze

Late Period onwards, after 747 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG75

The engineer and physician Imhotep was the architect of the first pyramid, the step pyramid of Djoser of the 3rd Dynasty. He was revered as a wise man long after his death and was eventually made a god, something very rare for non-royal individuals in Ancient Egypt. He was considered a god of writing, wisdom and medicine. He is shown here in his characteristic pose reading a manuscript unrolled across his knees.



Ra amulet

Faience

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG3336

The sun-god Ra is shown here in his characteristic form as a hawk-headed man with a sun disc headdress. He was enormously important throughout Egyptian history and from about 2500 BCE onwards one of the Pharaoh's main titles was '*sa Ra*' - son of Ra. Over time many other gods were subsumed into his cult. Amun became Amun-Ra, Montu became Montu-Ra and Horus became Ra-Horakhty.



Apis bull

Bronze

**Late Period onwards,
after 747 BCE**

Wellcome Collection
EG1616



Apis bull

Bronze

**Late Period, 26th Dynasty,
664-525 BCE**

Wellcome Collection
EG5232

The Apis bull was regarded as the *ba* or physical manifestation of the god Ptah. Unlike most other sacred animals the Apis was always a single, individual animal chosen for a particular set of markings. When the old bull died it was embalmed and buried with great ceremony. Once a new bull with the correct markings was found it would be crowned and would then live in a special sanctuary close to the temple of Ptah at Memphis. In later periods the Apis is represented on coffins serving as a protector of the dead.



Shu amulet

Faience

**Late Period, 26th Dynasty,
664-525 BCE**

Stanton Collection
EG2493

Shu was the god of air and sunlight. Shu symbolised dry air while his sister-wife Tefnut was the goddess of moisture. They were the first two gods made by the creator god Atum according to the creation myth of Heliopolis. Their children were the earth god Geb and the sky goddess Nut. It was Shu's role to support the outstretched sky goddess and separate her from the earth. This is why he is shown in this pose with his arms raised.



Bastet

Faience

**Third Intermediate Period,
1069-747 BCE**

Northumberland Collection
EG5229

Bastet is often portrayed as a cat, emphasising her protective motherly aspect. Here she is shown as a lion-headed woman, wearing a ureaus on her head and carrying a papyrus sceptre, a symbol of resurrection in the afterlife.



Taweret
Limestone
Date unknown

Wellcome Collection
EG5228

Taweret was a household goddess. Like the god Bes, she had no temples of her own. She was particularly associated with protecting women during childbirth and is a common motif for amulets, as well as being used on decoration for beds and headrests. She is portrayed here in her most common form - as a pregnant hippopotamus, standing upright, with the legs of a lion and the tail of a crocodile.



Min

Bronze

Late Period onwards, after 747 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG950

The god Min is a fertility god and symbol of male potency. He was also a protector of the mining areas in the Eastern Desert. In his raised right hand he would originally have held a flail. Two tall plumes would have completed his headdress.



The four Montus

Bronze

Ptolemaic or Roman Period, after 332 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG5258

Montu was a god of war who originated in the Theban area. He is usually depicted as a falcon headed man, wearing a plumed headdress and carrying a curved sword. Montu's four main cult centres were all in the Theban area and sometimes, as here, amulets were made to represent these 'four Montus'.



Ptah

Bronze

Late Period onwards, after 747 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG5225

Ptah was the creator god of Memphis, the traditional capital of Egypt. He is portrayed as a mummy with his hands protruding from the wrappings to hold a staff which combines the *djed* pillar, *ankh* sign and *was* sceptre (representing stability, life and prosperity). Ptah was strongly associated with craftsmen and the high priest of Ptah held the title 'Great leader of craftsmen'.



Amun or Khnum amulet

Faience

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG5213

Khnum was associated with the annual Nile flood and is regarded as a creator god. Amun was the local god of Thebes who rose to become one of the most important gods in Egypt, regarded by the Greeks as the Egyptian equivalent of Zeus.

Both these gods were represented as ram headed men. In earlier depictions it is possible to differentiate. Khnum is represented with straight, corkscrew shaped horns that extend horizontally. Amun is shown with curved horns that wrap around the face. In later periods, this distinction is not always so clear cut and this amulet could represent either god.



Anubis amulet
Faience
Egypt, Saqqara
Ptolemaic Period, 332-30 BCE

Egypt Exploration Society
DUROM.1975.46

The god Anubis was associated with embalming and mummification. He is usually represented in canine form or as a man with a canine head. There is still some debate as to whether this represents a jackal or a dog. Anubis was the guardian of cemeteries and his image appeared on the seals used to close the tombs in the Valley of the Kings.



Jackal inlay representing Anubis or Wepwawet
Glass
Date unknown

EG5110

This glass jackal may represent Anubis, god of mummification and the necropolis. It may also represent Wepwawet, whose name means 'Opener of the ways' who is also usually represented as a jackal or other wild dog. The roles of Wepwawet reflect his name; he opened the way for a Pharaoh's conquests, he performed the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony on the dead Pharaoh and he led the deceased through the underworld.



Cartouche of Seti I with image of Maat Limestone

**New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, reign of Seti I,
1294-1279 BCE**

EG2946

This cartouche contains one of the names of Seti I - Men-maat-ra. It clearly depicts the goddess Maat as part of the name. Maat personified truth, harmony and justice. She represented the divine order of the universe, regulating the movement of the stars, the changing of the seasons and relationships between people and gods. As such she was central to Egyptians' whole outlook on life. She was closely associated with the Vizier who controlled the law courts of Egypt and it has been suggested that an image of Maat may have served as the badge of office for legal officials. When a person's heart was weighed in judgement after death, it was weighed against her feather of truth.



**Horus on the crocodiles
Stone
Late Period, 30th Dynasty,
about 350 BCE**

Wellcome Collection
EG5256



**Horus on the crocodiles
Steatite
Ptolemaic or Roman Period, 332 BCE-395 CE**

Northumberland Collection
EG2155

These objects are known by the Latin name *cippus* (plural *cippi*). They show the god Horus, depicted as a boy wearing the side lock of youth, standing on crocodiles and grasping snakes in his hands.

The backs of both pieces are covered with protective spells against dangerous animals. One of the two pieces displayed here is shown back to front to allow you to see these inscriptions.

Touching a cippus, or drinking water which had been poured over it, was thought to cure problems such as scorpion stings or snake bites.

The journey to the afterlife



Obelisk

Limestone, paint

Egypt, Abydos

Middle Kingdom, Late 13th Dynasty, around 1700 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG608

The use of obelisks dates back to the Old Kingdom, when they were often placed in pairs outside tomb entrances and acted as stela-like markers, providing protection and symbolising fertility and eternal life. This Middle Kingdom obelisk, however, is different. It is thought to be a votive monument due to its small size, decoration and inscriptions.

The obelisk sits in a base, which would have originally been set within the stone or mudbrick pavement of a sacred building. It is thought to have been housed in the temple of Osiris in Abydos.

From the inscriptions we learn that an official named Amenemhat ('Overseer of the Storeroom of the Chamber of Fruits') commissioned this monument on behalf of his deceased relatives, Beni and Henenu. Each face of the obelisk shows a different scene. The front names Amenemhat and his titles, and displays an offering scene with Amenemhat seated with a lotus flower and censured by a priest. The two sides show figures of the owner, and the back depicts the fertility god Min, thought to protect the obelisk from negative influences. A prayer and offering formula is inscribed on each face in honour of Henenu, invoking Osiris and other gods.



Funerary stela of Ibya

Limestone

Middle Kingdom, 2055-1650 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG580

A stela is one of the most characteristic Ancient Egyptian funerary monuments. They are known from all periods, forming the focal point for the giving of offerings by the living to the dead. This small stela from the Middle Kingdom was commissioned by a man called Senebef, the Controller of the Ruler's Table, for his brother Ibya, a military commander. Ibya is shown seated at a table covered in food while his brother, Senebef stands making offerings to him.



Funerary stela

Limestone

Middle Kingdom, 2055-1650 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG581

The writing on this stela is difficult to read. This has led to different interpretations. The lady seated at the top is identified as Tutemhotep but experts disagree about the names of the men shown with her, perhaps called Iry and Amenemhat. Underneath is an offering formula for a man called Mentuhotep. This has led to the suggestion that this stela was reused and recarved after its original creation.



Part of mummy mask

Plaster, glass

Roman Period, 30 BCE-395 CE

Royal Scottish Museum

DUROM.1971.183

During the Roman Period, plaster masks were sometimes made to cover the face of a mummy. These often extended to cover much of the upper body as well as the head and could be elaborately painted. Only this section of the face remains of this mask.



Face

Clay

Date Unknown

Wellcome Collection

EG3978

The wealthy had mummy masks and coffins made of prestigious materials such as wood or painted cartonnage. Poorer people might model a mask from clay. Clay coffins with moulded faces are also known. Research into this object is ongoing.



Mummy mask

Painted and gilded cartonnage

New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, about 1500 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG733

The ultimate aims of the physical and ritual processes of mummification and burial were to transform the deceased person into an *akh*, or effective spirit, and to unite them with the gods in the afterlife. This mask shows the deceased successfully transformed into a semi-divine being, with radiant gold skin and lapis-lazuli blue hair.



Mummy mask

Cartonnage, paint, gilding

Ptolemaic Period, 332-30 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG732

This mask was manufactured more than a thousand years after the mask next to it. However, it uses the same technique and has the same purpose. Both masks are made using cartonnage. This is formed by layering linen with glue and plaster. It can be shaped when wet and will then hold its shape once it has dried. The final shape can then be painted or gilded.

Both masks show the dead person successfully transformed into a semi-divine being with golden skin.



Cranial hook

Bronze

Date unknown

Wellcome Collection

EG6136

This kind of hook was used to remove the brain during mummification. This was a delicate operation involving inserting the hook through the nose and pulling the brain out through the nasal cavity.



Heart scarab

Jasper

Date Unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG5270



Heart scarab (underside shown)

Steatite

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG3516

The Ancient Egyptians believed that after death their deeds in this life would be judged. Their heart would be weighed against Maat, the personification of truth, and if they were found wanting they would be devoured by the monster Ammit and cease to exist. They would be denied their afterlife. The heart scarab was designed to

prevent this terrible fate. It was placed within the mummy wrappings, preferably inscribed with a spell to 'prevent the heart of the deceased creating opposition to him in the realm of the dead'. In this way the owner hoped that his heart would not betray any wrongdoings and he would pass safely into the afterlife.

The first of these scarabs (shown right side up) is inscribed for the Officer Amunmehsu. The second one (displayed so that the inscription on the underside is visible) is for a washerwoman named Ankhau.



Canopic jar

Pottery

**New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of Hatshepsut,
1473-1458 BCE**

McGregor Collection
EG193

During mummification, the internal organs were removed. The lungs, liver, stomach and intestines were then preserved and stored in four jars to be buried in the tomb alongside the mummy.

This jar belongs to man called Itet, who was as 'scribe of the treasury'. There is a matching jar in the collections of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. They are thought to come from unpublished excavations carried out by archaeologist John Garstang at Abydos between 1906 and 1910.



Tomb model of a woman

Wood

Middle Kingdom, 2055-1650 BCE

Royal Scottish Museum
DUROM.1971.181

Models were used in Ancient Egyptian tombs to represent things that the owner hoped to benefit from in the afterlife: servants carrying food, people making bread or beer, ploughing, brick-making, and even washing. By having servant models to undertake these tasks, the wealthy Egyptian hoped to enjoy all the luxuries of this life in the next world. This female figure (indicated by her skin colour) is thought to come from a model boat and seems to be a mourner, lamenting the passing of the tomb owner.



Miniature coffin

Wood, bitumen, linen, straw

Late Period onwards, after 747 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG1276

This miniature coffin is thought to have been made to hold an animal mummy which has now been lost. Pieces of linen and straw remain embedded in the bitumen that is left. The decoration on the top of the coffin includes an image of a lion footed bed with a mummy lying on it. On one end is an image of a coffin lying on a bier.



Fish-tail knife

Flint

Predynastic Period, Naqada I, 4000-3500 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG3646 and EG71

One of the most important objects used in the opening of the mouth ritual was the *pesesh-kef* knife. This is thought to have its origins in flint knives with fish tail blades like the one shown here which date back to 4000 BCE. This suggests that the ceremony may have very ancient origins dating back to well before the first evidence of other aspects of Egyptian funerary ritual.



Statue of the Vizier Idi with 'opening of the mouth' equipment

Statue: alabaster

Base: limestone and gypsum

Vessels: alabaster, limestone and quartz crystal

**Early First Intermediate Period,
2160-2025 BCE**

Northumberland Collection

EG4009

This interesting statue was previously dated to 6th Dynasty, the end of the Old Kingdom in Egypt (2345-2181 BCE), and was thought to be from a tomb. However recent research by Dr Janet Richards and her team at the University of Michigan has shown it to be later in date and not made for a burial.

The man depicted has been identified as Idi, who was an Overseer of Priests, Vizier and Governor of Upper Egypt during the 6th Dynasty. Idi was buried at the site of Abydos. Archaeological evidence suggests that shortly after his death a cult grew up around Idi's tomb, with devotees venerating him as a local saint or hero. This cult continued on into the First Intermediate Period (after 2160 BCE). This statue seems to date from this period.

The statue shows Idi with all of the equipment needed for the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony, which was performed as part of the rites for the dead. However, it would appear that it does not come from inside the tomb, but was rather left as an offering somewhere nearby in the hope that this saint could act as an intermediary between local people and the gods.

The 'opening of the mouth' ceremony was an elaborate ritual performed on the mummy and images of the dead person. The ceremony involved ritual purification, incense burning, anointing and incantation. In addition various parts of the mummy were touched with magical objects in order to ensure that the dead person could not only open their mouth but use all of their senses to fully enjoy the afterlife.

Performing the ritual on a statue of the dead person transformed the statue into a vessel for the dead person's *ka*, or life force. This allowed it to be used to receive offering intended to sustain the deceased. Although this statue was made long after Idi's death, it would have performed the same function, receiving offerings made in the hope that Idi would take action on behalf of the local people.

Idi's tomb and the shrine were desecrated at some point during the turmoil of the First Intermediate Period and fell into disuse. However, the tomb was rediscovered during the late 11th Dynasty (2063-2055 BCE) by an official named Nekty. He reused it for his own burial and revived Idi's cult, probably constructing the limestone building that now stands on the site as a focus for worshipers. The cult of Idi then continued during the Middle Kingdom (2055-1650 BCE) with numerous other small mud brick chapels being constructed in the area. Idi is one of the world's earliest documented local saints.

Shabti figures

Shabtis were funerary figures that developed from Middle Kingdom (2055-1650 BCE) tomb models and statuettes. The purpose of shabtis was to spare the owner from manual work in the afterlife. Many shabti are inscribed with chapter 6 of the *Book of the Dead*. One version of this reads:

‘O shabti, if [name of deceased] be summoned to do any work which has to be done in the realm of the dead—to make arable fields, to irrigate the land or to convey sand from east to west; “Here I am”, you shall say, “I shall do it”.’

Shabtis were made from a wide range of materials, ranging from wood to faience and stone. They also vary greatly in size and quality of workmanship. Many carry agricultural implements such as hoes and baskets. Most shabtis are mummiform but during the New Kingdom (1550-1069 BCE) there was a fashion to make shabtis in daily dress. Initially the deceased would have just had one shabti but over time the number of shabti put in each tomb grew so that they might be 365 shabti, one for each day of the year, together with 36 ‘Overseers’, often carrying whips, giving a total of 401. The large number of shabti led to the development of shabti boxes to store them in.

The Oriental Museum has more than 300 different shabti. We are currently undertaking research into the collection and will be updating these labels as we learn more.



Shabti
Faience
Late Period, 716-332 BCE

Wellcome
Collection



Shabti
Faience
**New Kingdom, 19th
Dynasty, 1295-1186
BCE**

Northumberland
Collection EG393



Shabti
Steatite
**New Kingdom, 20th
Dynasty, 1186-1069
BCE**

Northumberland
Collection
EG536



Shabti
Faience
**Third Intermediate
Period or later, from
1069 BCE onwards**

EG526



Shabti
Faience
Date unknown

Wellcome Collection
EG529



Miniature shabti
Stone
Date unknown

Wellcome Collection
EG520



Shabti
Faience
Third Intermediate
Period or later, from
1069 BCE onwards

Northumberland
Collection
EG381



Shabti
Faience
Third Intermediate
Period or later, from
1069 BCE onwards

Wellcome Collection
EG204



Overseer shabti in
daily dress
Faience
New Kingdom, 1550-
1069 BCE

EG433



Shabti
Faience
Third Intermediate
Period,
1069-747 BCE

U11127



Shabti
Faience
Date unknown

Wellcome Collection
EG175



Shabti
Faience
Third Intermediate
Period or later, from
1069 BCE onwards

Wellcome Collection
EG186



Shabti
Faience
Third Intermediate
Period,
1069-747 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG151



Shabti
Faience
Third Intermediate
Period,
1069-747 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG156



Shabti
Faience
Third Intermediate
Period,
1069-747 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG165



Shabti
Faience
Third Intermediate
Period,
1069-747 BCE

Rawnsley Collection
DUROM.1953.10

An everlasting body



Mummy of a child

Roman Period, 1st century CE

DUROM.1985.61

This is the mummy of a boy of around 14 or 15 years of age. X-ray examination tells us that he was just over four foot tall when he died but cannot tell us how he died.

The boy has been elaborately wrapped in linen bandages arranged in a layered diamond pattern with gilded plaster inserts. This type of wrapping is a feature of Roman Period mummification. A portrait of the boy's face would have been painted onto a board and placed over his face. This has since been removed. Unfortunately we do not know the boy's name or anything else about him.

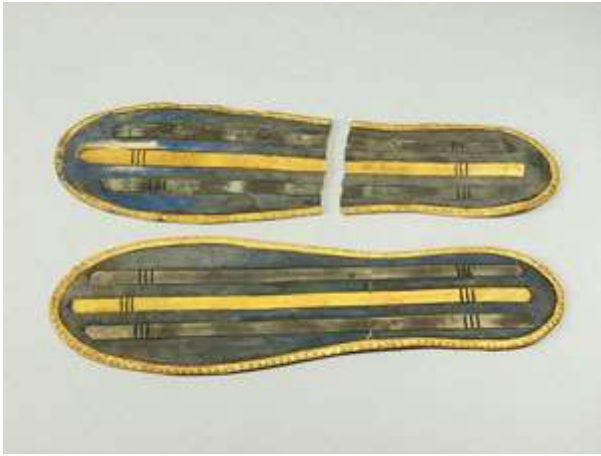


Bead net

**Faience, modern stringing
Third Intermediate Period or later,
from 1069 BCE onwards**

Wellcome Collection
EG2424

From the beginning of the First Millennium onwards, bead nets were placed as a final layer over the wrappings of a mummy. Elaborate nets were made from beads of different shapes and colours and they often incorporated a scarab or other protective amulets. For this reason, the nets are thought have had both a decorative and symbolic purpose, acting as a protective layer over the mummy. Some nets covered only the chest area while others covered the whole body. This net has been restrung in modern times and may originally have been part of a larger piece.



Mummy sandals

Cartonnage, gold

Ptolemaic Period, 332-30 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG735

These are the soles of a pair of decorative sandals. These sandals are not made from materials that would have withstood any wear and tear in life; they were made specifically for burial. Sandals were regarded as important symbolic items for the dead. They were placed on or near the mummy and aided the dead person's spirit in leaving the tomb to enjoy the afterlife.

Mummy Amulets 1

Throat



Shoulder

Line of
wedjat
eyes



Mummy Amulets 2

Heart

Line of Scarabs



Mummy Amulets 3

**Belly
button**

Nephthys,
Horus and
Isis



djed
pillar



Nephthys,
Horus and
Isis



2 x Khnum



2 x Thoth



3 x scarabs



2 x Isis

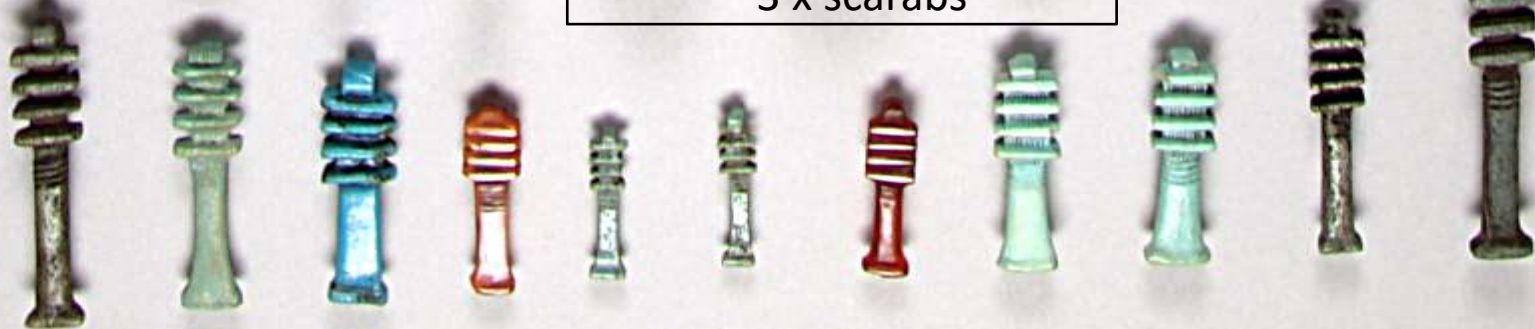


Horus



Hips

Line of
djed pillars



The power of writing

A scribe's tools

Most scribes used a wooden palette that could be carried out with them wherever they had to work. It contained the reeds used to write with and had holes at one end which housed the red and black ink. The ink was produced by grinding down pigments and minerals and mixing them with water. Scribes working with papyrus used a burnisher to seal the surface and provide a smooth writing surface.



Imhotep figure

Bronze

Late Period, 747-332 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG5227

The engineer and physician Imhotep was the architect of the first pyramid, the step pyramid of Djoser of the 3rd Dynasty. He was revered as a wise man long after his death and was eventually made a god, something very rare for non-royal individuals in Ancient Egypt. He was considered a god of writing, wisdom and medicine. He is shown here in his characteristic pose reading a manuscript unrolled across his knees.



Figure of a priest

Bronze

Late Period, 747-332 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG1508

This figure of a priest, in his robes and skull cap, is carrying a scroll under his arm. He may represent Imhotep in his form as a god of writing, wisdom and medicine.



Scribal palette

Wood

Date unknown

Northumberland Collection

EG1039

This is a typical scribal writing palette from Ancient Egypt. Made of wood, it has a hollow in the centre for reed pens and two round depressions to hold red and black ink. Black ink consisted of a solution of soot and water mixed with a binding agent and dried to form blocks. Red ink was used to emphasize important passages in documents and was made from ground ochre. The inscription along the sides begins with the formula, 'Words spoken by Thoth' and mentions the scribe Iratju and the royal scribe Meryptah. The hollow for holding pens has not been fully carved, suggesting this piece made have been made for inclusion in a tomb rather than everyday use.



Grinding palette

Granite

New Kingdom, 1550-1069 BCE

Wellcome Collection

EG2301

This palette would have been used with a grinding stone to crush small amounts of pigment. These could then be mixed with water or a binding agent to form ink for writing or painting.



Cylinder seal of Senebi

Greywacke

**Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty, reign of Senusret I,
about 1935 BCE**

Northumberland Collection
EG460

From the very beginnings of writing, seals have been used to indicate possession and to prevent theft and fraud. Cylinders like this one were worn by their owner as a mark of power and authority, hanging on a cord which passed round the neck or wrist. The owner of this seal was a man named Senebi, 'Overseer of the House of Life' – the place where future officials were taught to read, write and administer.



Burnisher with the name of Tiye

Faience

**New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of
Amenhotep III, about 1370 BCE**

Wellcome Collection
EG6793

This oval object is a technically complicated imitation in faience of a simple stone pebble, glazed in two colours. It was used as a burnisher to seal the surface of a sheet of papyrus and provide a smooth surface for writing.



**False door with Carian
inscription**

Limestone

Egypt, Saqqara

Late Period, 26th dynasty, around 600 BCE

Gift of Egypt Exploration Society

DUROM.1971.140

This stela takes the form of a 'false door' through which the spirit of the dead person could pass to receive offerings from the living. Although it is a very typical Ancient Egyptian object, it is inscribed in Carian - a language spoken in what is now South-West Turkey.

The stela dates from the 26th Dynasty. These rulers relied heavily on foreign mercenaries recruited from across the Greek world and it is likely that this stela belonged to one of these men who settled in Egypt. The inscription can only be partially read but it seems to have been for a man named Pedeto, son of Pedrem.

Styles of writing

Most people associate writing in Egypt with hieroglyphics. This was a complicated system that used over 700 different signs and remained remarkably consistent over the whole of Ancient Egyptian history.

Hieroglyphs were used on important monuments, temples, tombs and for some religious documents. However, for business documents, letters and other everyday material, scribes used a form of writing called hieratic which was much faster to write. Other faster scripts such as demotic and Coptic developed over time. After Alexander the Great conquered Egypt, Greek became the official language. Coptic was an alphabetic script using elements of Greek and demotic. It is still in use today in the Coptic Christian Church in Egypt.

Writing materials

Most writing was not done on papyrus, which was expensive and was originally reserved for royal use. Instead scribes wrote on a variety of materials including shards of pottery or 'ostraca'. This had the advantage of being cheap and could be painted over and re-used. In the later periods, wooden writing boards were also used.



***Book of the Dead* of Padiuf son of
Shepenese
Papyrus
Late Period, 26th Dynasty,
about 600 BCE**

Gift of Sir Alan Gardiner
DUROM.1952.7

The text on this papyrus is written in hieratic, a cursive form of the hieroglyphic script. It reads from right to left. Red ink was used by the scribe to emphasize the opening words of the different sections of the text. The passage to the Afterworld was fraught with difficulties and dangers and texts like this one were designed to guide and protect the dead person on this journey.



**Mummy label
Wood
Ptolemaic or Roman Period, after
332 BCE**

Wellcome Collection
EG1271

This label has been written in Greek which became the official language of Egypt in the Ptolemaic Period. While Greek was used for some purposes the existing Egyptian writing systems continued to be used at the same time. Different scripts were used for different purposes. It identifies Kastor Pulonomos of Hermopolis.



Christian oil lamp
Terracotta
Christian Period, 5th century CE

Northumberland Collection
EG6785

The writing on this lamp is also in Greek. The inscription on this lamp tells us that it belonged to 'Father Timotheos, the Archbishop'. We think that Father Timetheos is Timothy II, Coptic Pope of Alexandria.



Coptic ostrakon
Pottery
1st century CE or later

Transfer from Dundee Museum
DUROM.1951.32

The word 'ostrakon' comes from the Greek *ostrakon* which means potsherd. It is the term used by archaeologists to refer to sherds of pottery or flakes of stone that were used to write or draw on. Writing on sherds was obviously much cheaper than using papyrus and ostraca were used for scribal practice, letters, sketches and personal writing. This ostrakon is inscribed with a text written in Coptic. Coptic is the final stage in the development of the Ancient Egyptian language. Coptic is an alphabetic script, using Greek letters and six additional signs taken from demotic, a cursive script which had itself replaced hieratic for everyday use from the Late Period onwards. Coptic is still used in the Coptic Christian Church to the present day.

Royal writing

Hieroglyph means 'sacred writing' so it is not surprising that most texts associated with royalty took that form. From the Fourth Dynasty onwards the names of Pharaohs were surrounded by a cartouche. This elliptical shape with a horizontal line at one end was believed to offer protection from evil spirits. The name encircled by the cartouche was usually the 'throne name' or the name given to the Pharaoh at birth.



Shell pendant with name of Senusret I
Silver
Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty, reign of Senusret I,
1965-1920 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG459



Ring with name of Akhenaten
Bronze
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of Akhenaten,
1352-1336 BCE

Wellcome Collection
EG2547



Relief fragment with name of Nefertiti
Red granite
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of Akhenaten,
1352-1336 BCE

Northumberland Collection
EG3971

These three objects all have royal names on them. Names were very important in Ancient Egypt. The name was regarded as one of the essential elements of a person, just as important as their physical body, *ka* or *ba* (the person's life force and personality).

Personal names in Ancient Egypt often incorporate the names of gods who were important at that period, or in the location where the person was born. Akhenaten's name means 'glory of the aten (sun disc)'. Some names were more abstract, for example Nefertiti famously translates as 'the beautiful one has come'.

In one Egyptian creation myth the god Ptah creates everything in the universe by pronouncing its name. This emphasises that names were not just abstract symbols but acted as physical manifestations of the thing named. Thus, the destruction of a name from a carving or removing a name from a papyrus was considered to amount to the destruction of the very existence of the person to whom the name belonged. Funerary monuments ask visitors to speak the name of the dead, so that they might live forever.



Writing board

Wood, wax, (modern string)

Roman Period, after 30 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG2200

In Ancient Egypt wooden writing boards were mainly used for writing practice. These boards have been covered with a thin layer of wax to provide a writing surface which could then be easily renewed.



Funerary stela

Limestone

**Middle Kingdom, 13th Dynasty,
1795-1649 BCE**

Northumberland Collection

EG586

The inscriptions on this stela help us to identify the owner and his wife who are both seated on lion-footed chairs in the upper part of the stela. They are Chief of the God's Wife of [Amun] Sennefer and his wife the Lady of the House Baket. Sitting opposite them on the other side of the offering table is their daughter, who is called Iretefnofret. She is identified as the person to had this stela made for her parents. The lower part of the stela depicts Nebseny, a wab-priest, Foremost of Hathor, seated with his wife the Lady of the House, Tery. Facing them is Amenemopet. The relationship of these people to the stela's owners is not made clear.



Funerary stela

Wood, plaster, paint

Late Period, 26th Dynasty, reign of Psammetichus I (Wahibra) 664-610 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG496

Stelae are a feature of Ancient Egyptian burials at all periods. However, painted and plastered wooden stelae are only found from the 25th Dynasty onwards, earlier examples are always carved from stone. Despite the change in medium the traditional offering formula (a request to the gods for everything the dead person will need in the afterlife) remains very similar to that found in earlier periods and continues to be written in hieroglyphs. Hieroglyphs continued to be considered the appropriate script for such an important ritual object, even though they had long since ceased to be used in everyday life.

This stela belonged to a lady named Tasameni. The ibis-headed god Thoth can be seen leading her by the hand to meet the god Osiris who is followed by Isis, Imsety and Hapy.



***Sed* festival jar**

Alabaster

Old Kingdom, 6th Dynasty, reign of Pepi I, 2321-2287 BCE

Northumberland Collection

EG1449

The inscription on this jar contains the names and titles of Pepi I. His 'Horus-name', Merytawy, is shown inside a protective *serekh* frame. The hieroglyphs denote the *nesw-bit* title, often translated as 'Dual King' or 'King of Upper and Lower Egypt'. This name is written inside a protective cartouche and is Meryra.

The jar was made in celebration of Pepi's *sed* festival. This ritual appears to date back to the very early stages of Egyptian history. It was a ritual of renewal and regeneration, reaffirming the king's right to rule.



Panel from a senet game box

Ivory

**New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, about
1375 BCE**

Northumberland Collection
EG4958

This panel was an inlay originally glued onto the side of a rectangular game-box. Thirty squares would have been laid out on the upper face of the box for a game called 'senet'. The lower side would have been the board for the 'game of twenty squares'. The inscription written on the panel in hieroglyphs reads as follows: 'An offering which the king gives (to) Re-Harakhte and Mehen ("The Coiled One", name of a serpent spirit) who is in the senet game, that they may give life, prosperity, health, the following of one's desire, in a life of peace, for the *ka* (spirit) of the one who comes into the thirty and goes out the twenty (a reference

to the two games), mayor of the Southern City, Ahmose, justified.'