Historical Introduction

During the Predynastic period (about 4000-3000 B.C.) the people of the Nile Valley possessed an advanced Neolithic culture that included development of monumental architecture, invention of metalworking, establishment of Egyptian artistic style, and the beginnings of writing. Toward the end of this period, the many independent chiefdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt coalesced into a smaller number of polities, which at about 3000 B.C. were united into one kingdom under a single ruler.

The ensuing Dynastic (Pharaonic) period lasted for almost three thousand years and included three long periods of stability, wealth, and centralized government. The Old Kingdom, or Pyramid Age, (about 2675-2170 B.C.) yielded the first great achievements in Egyptian architecture, science, medicine, and art. The Middle Kingdom (about 1940-1630 B.C.) produced a flowering of Egyptian literature and Egypt’s first imperialistic expansion into Nubia. The New Kingdom, or Empire period, (about 1540-1075 B.C.) saw Egypt’s expansion into both Asia and Nubia, religious revolution under the monotheistic pharaoh Akhenaton, and unprecedented building activities under several pharaohs, including Ramses II. Each kingdom ended in an intermediate period of unrest and disintegration of centralized political authority during which cultural elements nevertheless continued and often flourished.

After the third such intermediate period, a "Late Period" (760-332 B.C.) saw alternating rule of Egypt by native and foreign powers (Kushites from Nubia and Persians from southwestern Asia) that ended when Alexander the Great defeated the King of Persia. Alexander’s successor, Ptolemy I, founded a dynasty of Greek kings, known as the Ptolemies. These kings brought to the Nile Valley a high degree of Hellenic culture and large numbers of European and Asian immigrants; native Egyptian and foreign citizens lived side by side, speaking and writing separate languages. Hellenic culture thrived in Egypt until it was confronted by the power of Rome. The last Ptolemaic ruler, the famous Cleopatra VII, committed suicide in 30 B.C. Henceforth, Egypt was under the control, first, of Rome and then Constantinople, until the invasion of the Arabs in A.D. 641.
### Chronological Table

**Predynastic Period**
- **Badarian** ca. 4000 B.C.
- **Naqada I** ca. 3900-3500 B.C.
- **Naqada II** ca. 3500-3150 B.C.
- **Naqada III** ca. 3150-3000 B.C.

**Early Dynastic or Archaic Period**
- **Dynasty 1** ca. 3000-2800 B.C.
- **Dynasty 2** ca. 2800-2675 B.C.

**Old Kingdom**
- **Dynasty 3** ca. 2675-2625 B.C.
- **Dynasty 4** ca. 2625-2500 B.C.
- **Dynasty 5** ca. 2500-2350 B.C.
- **Dynasty 6** ca. 2350-2170 B.C.

**First Intermediate Period**
- **Dynasties 7-8** ca. 2170-2130 B.C.
- **Dynasties 9-10** ca. 2130-1980 B.C.
- **Dynasty 11** ca. 2080-1940 B.C.

**Middle Kingdom**
- **Dynasty 12** ca. 1940-1760 B.C.
- **Dynasty 13** ca. 1760-1630 B.C.

**Second Intermediate Period**
- **Dynasty 14** ca. 1675-after 1630 B.C.
- **Dynasty 15 (Greater Hyksos)** ca. 1630-1520 B.C.
- **Dynasty 16 (Lesser Hyksos)** ca. 1630-1520 B.C.
- **Dynasty 17** ca. 1630-1540 B.C.

**New Kingdom**
- **Dynasty 18** ca. 1540-1295 B.C.
- **Dynasty 19** ca. 1295-1190 B.C.
- **Dynasty 20** ca. 1190-1075 B.C.
**Chronological Table**

*Third Intermediate Period*
- Dynasty 21 ca. 1075-945 B.C.
- Dynasty 22 ca. 959-712 B.C.
- Dynasty 23 ca. 838-712 B.C.
- Dynasty 24 ca. 727-712 B.C.

*Late Period*
- Dynasty 25 (Kushite/Nubian) ca. 760-656 B.C.
- Dynasty 26 (Saite) ca. 664-525 B.C.
- Dynasty 27 (Persian) ca. 525-404 B.C.
- Dynasty 28 ca. 404-399 B.C.
- Dynasty 29 ca. 399-380 B.C.
- Dynasty 30 ca. 381-343 B.C.

“Dynasty 31” (Persian Reconquest) ca. 343-332 B.C.

*Hellenistic-Coptic Periods*
- Ptolemaic
  - Alexander the Great 332-323 B.C.
  - The Ptolemies 323-30 B.C.
- Roman and Coptic periods 30 B.C.-A.D. 641
- Arab Conquest A.D. 641
Idi, the Count and Overseer of Priests
Egypt, Abydos (?)
Old Kingdom, Dynasty 6, ca. 2350-2170 B.C.
Quartzite (60.46)
Gift of Mr. Leonard Epstein; ex Eid Collection

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This two-thirds life-size figure sits on a simple block seat, wearing a short kilt, pleated at the front. He holds his hands in a position characteristic of sculpture carved in the Old Kingdom: left hand held flat with palm down, and the right one, now mostly broken, clenched with the thumb upward; a small projection in front of the right hand once supported the thumb. Facial features and the shape of the wig are typical of certain later Old Kingdom statues, and in particular of Dynasty 6: broad face, thick lips, horizontal eyebrows, and somewhat almond-shaped eyes. The sides of the wig are quite concave in contrast to the straighter sides of wigs carved before Dynasty 6. His head is low set; the neck is almost non-existent. The figure is carved from quartzite, which was seldom used for statuary during the Old Kingdom. It is an example of subtractive sculpture in which the material was removed by carving or cutting. The shape of the original block is still evident. The rather poor artistic quality of this piece can in part be attributed to the use of quartzite, which is a very hard stone that is difficult to work, and to its origin in the workshop of a provincial artist.

An inscription on the right side of the seat gives his name as Idi (meaning “the deaf one”), and his title as "The Count and Overseer of Priests." On the left side of the seat he is called "The Hereditary Prince." "Overseer of Priests" refers to the administration of a temple outside the capital city of Memphis, the other two titles are honorary, denoting high rank. The name Idi is an unusual one, but is attested in this period at Abydos, Coptos and Aswan. It is possible that the Idi of the statue was a native of Abydos.

The bulk of Egyptian art preserved today functioned for religious purposes and primarily in religious settings. Sculptures like this figure were carved for inclusion in the tomb, to help maintain the deceased in the Afterlife. This statue would have been placed in the offering chapel of Idi’s tomb. The chapel of an Egyptian tomb was where living and dead would interact. The living brought offerings and said prayers to and for the deceased, while the spirits of the dead observed them through the eyes of statues such as this one. The deceased traveled freely between the sealed tomb chamber below and the open chapel above to partake of offerings brought by their descendants and to journey into the world beyond.

MAA 7/99
The thirty squares on the upper surface of this box indicate that it was a board for senet, a game of chance and skill for two players. Numerous wall paintings show individuals playing the game, and many boards have been found in tombs, the earliest from a grave dating to ca. 3000-2900 B.C. The game seems to have been one of the most popular leisure activities in ancient Egypt. The necessary components of the game consisted of a board, four throwsticks or two astragali, and two sets of gaming pieces, usually five or seven in each set. The throwsticks were marked on one side only. A player's move was determined by throwing the sticks and counting the number of marked and clear sides facing up. The pieces were moved in an S-shaped pattern, usually from the top left to bottom right of the board, with the goal of mastering the last five squares. The winner was probably the first of the two players to bring all pieces through the course and off the board.

The squares on this box were once inlaid with plaques, probably made of faience. The last five squares of senet boards bore markings, which were simple in the early period but in Dynasty 18 became more elaborate. Some squares displayed figures of gods, divine symbols, and inscriptions. The plaques of the final five squares of a board now in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto bore inscriptions that translate as follows: "May the good luck endure of him who is at its lead; you ferry across the lake without wading; you climb the staircase of the souls of Heliopolis; the two goddesses unite with you in peace;" and the final square: "Under Horus is your joy." These inscriptions incorporate the symbols usually drawn on the last five squares.

The hollow interior of this box originally held a drawer for the throwsticks and gaming pieces, as was normal for senet boards. One set of the gaming pieces was probably conical, the other spool-shaped. These were the most common shapes in the New Kingdom. The throwsticks would have been marked on one side with geometric patterns and the ends perhaps carved to represent fingernails or the heads of animals.

Although a game of chance played in ordinary life, very early on senet came to symbolize for Egyptians the passage of the deceased through the netherworld. Probably ca. 1200 B.C. a new version of the game was created especially for the dead. The game was similar to the secular game, but the surface of the board symbolized the netherworld with all the squares being marked with special signs, such as figures of gods, names of festivals, etc., that were thought to help the deceased in his or her difficult journey through the underworld.
The scene on this relief from the superstructure of a tomb shows Egyptian divinities enthroned around their offerings. Above the scene is the winged disk of Horus of Edfu. On the far left is the falcon-headed god Horus (not the same as Horus of Edfu) and facing him are his parents Osiris and Isis. The right half of the stone repeats the scheme of the left half, two gods facing one. At the right of center is Hathor. The other gods on the right half are Anhert and his consort Mehyt.

Hieroglyphic inscriptions identify the gods. Horus of Edfu is called “the Behdetite, the great god, the Lord of Heaven, may he give life and dominion.” Horus is called “Horus, son of Osiris, the great god, the Lord of Heaven, who dwells in the Thinite nome.” Osiris is “the great god, Lord of the Necropolis,” while Isis is named “mother of the god.” Hathor is “Mistress of the High House, who dwells in Abydos.” Both Anhert “of the spear” and the lion-headed goddess Mehyt, “Lady of Heaven, Mistress of the gods,” “dwell in Abydos.” The vertical line of text between the two sets of seated figures reads: “All protection and life are behind her like Ra every day!” It is unclear whether this text refers to the figure of Isis or Hathor or both.

Writing in the ancient world began as pictures that represented or symbolized objects (pictographs). Eventually the pictures also came to represent the ideas associated with objects. Thus, a circle might indicate the sun, and also heat and light. These signs are called ideographs. In phonetic writing, the next development, the signs no longer represented objects or ideas but the sound, or group of sounds. The writing of the ancient Mesopotamians (cuneiform) and of the ancient Egyptians (hieroglyphs) made use of both ideographic writing and a phonetic system.

Hieroglyphic writing was in use by ca. 3000 B.C. That name comes from the Greek hieroglyphika grammata (hieros, holy; glyphein, to carve; gramma, letter), i.e. sacred carved letters. When the Greeks first encountered hieroglyphic writing, it was used only by the priests. The direction of writing was normally from right to left, but the opposite was occasionally used as well. Vertical writing, from top to bottom, was frequently employed, as on this relief.
EGYPT

Hieroglyphic writing continued in use for more than 3000 years, but since it was a cumbersome script, a cursive form known as hieratic was soon developed. Hieratic was used for both religious texts and everyday business. In later times, an even more cursive form of writing called demotic developed alongside hieratic writing. Business documents, religious texts and private letters were also written in demotic. The earliest surviving examples of demotic date to the 7th century B.C.
Figures of wood, stone, faience, and clay, usually mumiform, were placed in tombs, often in very large numbers, to act as servants of the deceased and perform for him or her all the labor of plowing, sowing, and reaping that was needed in the afterlife to keep the crops grown and gathered. The ancient Egyptians appear to have used different, but similar-sounding, terms to describe these figures. The earliest written records use the word *shawabti* meaning “stick,” presumably because the earliest ones were made of wood. Later on the most popular term was *ushebti*, meaning “answerer.” Whenever the deceased was called upon to perform tasks in the underworld, the shawabti was supposed to reply, “Here am I.”

The best examples of shawabtis (also written ushabti) were inscribed with the name of the deceased and a version of the chapter from the *Book of the Dead* (spell 6) that deals with shawabtis. This enabled the figure to come alive and perform the required tasks.

In the early New Kingdom, shawabtis were provided with little models of implements needed to perform the tasks, i.e. a hoe, pick and basket. These tools were soon replaced by painted or molded versions on the figure. Thus, shawabtis usually hold a hoe and/or pick in their hands and have a basket on their back. It is thought that wealthy people would have 365 shawabtis placed in their tomb, one for every day of the year. Overseer shawabtis were also provided. The pharaoh was provided with even more shawabtis. At least 414 were placed in the tomb of Tutankhamun.

The museum's shawabti holds a hoe and a pick on his chest and two baskets are slung over his back. Traces of a painted ink inscription, unfortunately now illegible, would have contained the shawabti spell and name of the deceased. The features of the face date the figure to the end of Dynasty 18.

Figures, such as the man sealing jars, are much earlier than the shawabtis and represent servants engaged in tasks that would help sustain the deceased in the afterlife. The preparation and storing of food and drink refers both to life on earth and to the hereafter. If the deceased used up the real food and drink that were placed in the tomb, and his or her descendants were remiss in providing offerings in the tomb chapel, models like this one would provide additional sustenance.
EGYPT

**Head of an Official**

Egypt  
Late Dynasty 18, ca. 1350-1295 B.C.  
Limestone (X-4)  
Gift of Sir Wm. M. Flinders Petrie  

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**Grave Stela**

Saite period, ca. 664-525 B.C.  
Limestone (X-3)  
Gift of Sir Wm. M. Flinders Petrie

The head comes from a statue seated with knees drawn up, a so-called block figure. It is a fine example of New Kingdom private art. The features of the face, although battered, can still be recognized as typical of the sculptural style of late Dynasty 18. The curved line above the upper eyelids, the lips, and the calm expression place it in this period. The hairstyle, however, is most unusual and is known from only one other statue, a Dynasty 19 statue of an official named Yuni, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The back of the piece has the top of two columns of text, which appear to refer to funerary offerings and gods associated with the afterlife.

The fragmentary stela belongs to a much later time than the head and provides an example of good quality carving in low relief. The word stela describes an upright slab bearing inscriptions and figures and serving as a tombstone, or a boundary marker. In this instance, the stela is a round-topped grave marker bearing nine columns of inscriptions and a worshipping scene. The hawk-headed god Re-Harakhte stands on the left, and two men on the right. The inscription mentions "...the lector-priest of the Place of Truth Pakop, son of Pinehas." The "Place of Truth" usually refers to the tomb; the lector-priest recited the ritual over the mummy in front of the tomb.

The head and the stela are two of four Egyptian objects given to the university in 1902 by Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie, the great British archaeologist and founder of modern archaeology. Acquisition of the four sculptures was reported in the Catalogue of the University of Missouri for 1902-1903, but without naming the donor. All four pieces were later placed in storage and forgotten until Professor Weinberg rediscovered them in 1960. The labels, fortunately still with the objects, stated that the
Egypt

sculptures were the gifts of Sir Flinders Petrie, but the reason why he gave them to the University was not stated. Probably it was because Professor John Pickard, the art historian after whom the building is named, was on the faculty at that time. A biography by Margaret Drower, published in 1985, describes how Flinders Petrie traveled in Italy with John Pickard. Until the publication of this biography, the connection between the two men was unknown.
Ostracon with Painted Scene
Dynasty 19 or 20, ca. 1295-1075 B.C.
Limestone (63.6.7)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Donald N. Wilber


Ancient Egyptian scribes and artists often used limestone flakes and potsherds for correspondence, or making sketches, either as practice for large-scale work, or for their own amusement. Such flakes, called ostraca (the singular is ostracon), provided a cheaper medium than papyrus. The drawings on these ostraca are often freer and more imaginative than the formal tomb paintings, and the subjects are frequently humorous or satirical. This figured ostracon presents one such scene.

The piece is decorated on one side only. Drawn in black and red ink, with red and white painted details, is a Judgment scene. A hippopotamus, crocodile, or perhaps a fox, stands upright on one arm of the balance of a weighing scale. Facing it is a large black crow. Two more animals stand below, perhaps serving as judges in this comic scene. On the right appears a cat with front paw upraised, and to the left is an owl. The whole scene is obviously humorous, but Patrick Houlihan suggests that there is a further meaning. The scene is probably intended as a parody of the scene in Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead (below), which shows the final Judgment of the deceased before he or she attains eternal life.

A number of ostraca and painted papyri of Dynasty 19 or 20 (ca. 1295-1075 B.C.) have survived with scenes of animals playing human parts, sometimes with roles reversed. Thus, on one a mouse dressed as a wealthy woman is waited on by a cat; on another, a lion and an antelope play senet together. These may perhaps be illustrations of fables which are now lost to us, or may be satires directed at upper-class Egyptians. Although the subject of the Museum's ostracon is unique, it fits in with these humorous works and has, thus, been dated to the same time period.
The scarab (*scarabaeus sacer*) is a type of beetle that lays its eggs in a mass of dung which it rolls into a ball with its back feet. The ancient Egyptians observed this marvelous phenomenon and associated the actions of the beetle with their god Khephri who, they believed, rolled the sun across the sky in the same manner. They saw the sun as life-giving just like the ball of dung which gave forth new beetles. Thus, the scarab came to symbolize the power of the sun and regeneration. The consonantal stem of the ancient Egyptian word for the beetle (*khpr*) was also the same as their verb “to come into being.”

When scarabs appeared in Dynasty 6 (ca. 2350-2170 B.C.), uninscribed, they functioned solely as a potent amulet. In Dynasty 12 (ca. 1940-1760 B.C.), scarabs began to be inscribed and used as stamp seals as well as being amuletic. The last known scarabs are Ptolemaic (323-30 B.C.), and are purely funerary without an inscribed base. Most scarabs are longitudinally pierced for wearing around the neck or wrist or were mounted in a ring and worn on the forefinger of the hand. Another important type of scarab is the heart scarab. (See the section on Heart Scarabs for further information).

The text on this scarab reads:  (Neb-Maat-Ra) | beloved of Amen-Ra

By Old Kingdom times Egyptian pharaohs were identified with five names. The two most commonly used in inscriptions were the birth name (*nomen*), which the ancient Egyptians called the “son of Ra” name, and the throne name (*prenomen*), identified as “King of Upper and Lower Egypt.” The inscription on this scarab has the throne name (Neb-Maat-Ra) of king Amenhotep III in a cartouche and describes him as one beloved of the important Theban god Amen-Ra.

A cartouche is a rope, in an oval shape, which was used to enclose the two most important names of the pharaoh or his chief wife. It is an elongated form of the *shen* sign, which protected the thing encircled from evil outside the enclosed area, as well as symbolizing all “that the sun encircles.”
The Egyptians made widespread use of faience, at first for beads and amulets, for small sculptures of animals and of humans, and for small vessels. Tiles and inlay for walls and furniture were also made. The term faience is a misnomer, derived from tin-glazed earthenware named after the Italian Renaissance city of Faenza. Ancient Egyptian faience is quite different, being a glazed siliceous material, consisting of silica (either ground quartz or silica sand), with an alkali binder of natron, a naturally occurring combination of sodium salts or potash, and a colorant. These elements were mixed with a small amount of water to form a thick paste which was then modeled by hand or formed in a mold, or molds, and left to dry. As the object dried, salts came to the surface (efflorescence). When fired at a temperature of 800° to 900° C, the salts on the surface and the alkali acted as a flux to lower the melting temperature of the silica so that the viscous surface formed the glaze. Thus, faience is sometimes self-glazing. Alternative methods of glazing were to cover the exterior with a thin paste of the same constituents as the body or to bury the body in a dry mixture of the glazing material.

Colors were achieved by adding certain metallic oxides either to the material from which the object was molded, or to the additional thin layer: copper oxide for different shades of blue, manganese carbonate for brown or purplish black, and compounds of antimony for yellow. The term “blue glazed composition” has been proposed to replace the misapplied term “faience.”

This flask is a typically Egyptian vessel. Normally made of a fine light blue or pale green faience, such flasks are known from their inscriptions as “New Year” gifts. Their form is as here: lentoid-shaped body with neck and rim in shape of a lotus blossom, two tiny monkey or ape figures flanking the neck, and a decorative floral collar on the shoulder. The inscriptions usually invoke the gods of Memphis to grant the owner life, health, and a happy New Year.

The inscription on this piece, which is flanked by sets of four rosettes, has the name of the Memphite god Ptah followed by a wish for a “good new year.” The literal translation for “new year” is “opening of the year.” The “opening of the year” began at the first sighting of the star Sirius above the dawn horizon. This heralded the beginning of the Nile floods and the first of the ancient Egyptian’s three seasons: Inundation (Akhet). In ancient Egypt, New Year’s Day fell between late June and mid-July. The remaining two Egyptian seasons were Growing (Peret: literally “going forth”) beginning sometime between late October and mid-November and Harvest (Shemu), which began in February/March.
In Egyptian religion, animals were sacred because of their association with particular divinities, and they served as representatives of these gods. In some temples a single animal like the Apis bull would be worshipped as the incarnation of the god, but at other cult centers large numbers of living animals such as ibises, hawks, baboons, crocodiles, rams, and cats were revered. At the end of the New Kingdom, ca. 1075 B.C., animal cults had gained preeminence in Egyptian religion, and in the Late period many famous centers associated with animal worship flourished, such as the sanctuary of Thoth at Hermopolis.

The ibis and the baboon were sacred to Thoth, the god who invented writing and was thus protector of scribes. As the protector of Osiris, he became the helper of the dead; he was also lord of the moon.

The oxyrhinchus fish was both reviled and worshipped. On the one hand, it was regarded as a sacred animal that was supposed to have been born from the wounds of the god Osiris. It was also associated with the goddess Hathor at Esna and is sometimes represented with the Hathor crown, as on this example. At the same time, it was reviled because it was thought to have eaten the phallus of the dismembered god Osiris. On certain feast days, therefore, these fish, together with two other species of fish also supposed to have participated in eating the phallus, were burnt and trampled as an offering to the gods.

Geography also played a role in the veneration received by a particular animal. A fish sacred in one town might be considered unclean in another. Or a subspecies of sheep revered in one area might be merely dinner elsewhere.
Sacred Barque
Saite period, Dynasty 26, ca. 664-525 B.C.
Bronze (61.66.2)
Gift of Mr. Leonard Epstein

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A small number of bronze models of boats survive from ancient Egypt. They were made to fit onto the top of a shaft in order to be carried in procession or to decorate a larger model of a boat made of wood. Most take the form of the one in the museum. In the center is the god’s shrine; figures of other gods are generally shown, and the boat is equipped with projections to which the steering oars would have been attached. In this model boat, the gods Horus and Anubis stand in front of the shrine, while behind sits Thoth, the moon-god, in form of a baboon. On top of the shrine is a falcon, again representing Horus. That there are projections at both ends for steering oars is probably a misunderstanding of their function.

Large model boats, a feature of cult practices, were normally carried in procession on the shoulders of priests and contained the cult image. Symbols of the appropriate god (Amun, Sokar, or Osiris) were incorporated into the decoration of the boat. The god to whom this bronze model was dedicated is unknown, since the figure of the god within the shrine is missing, and there are no symbols on the shrine.

For the ancient Egyptians, boats were symbolic of many things. The shrines of gods were often set on boats, even when resting in the sanctuary of their temples on land. The journey from life into death was conceived as a river passage. Models of ships were commonly buried in Middle Kingdom tombs. They enabled a safe and pleasant journey to the afterlife and also allowed the deceased to participate in the great national feasts of the gods by providing a means of transportation up and down the Nile.

The easiest mode of transportation in ancient Egypt was by the river. People, goods, animals, and gods all moved from place to place on boats rather than overland. From earliest times, gods traveled outside their shrines and visited with other deities and their people on boats.
Male Mummy Mask
Egypt, perhaps Luxor
1st or early 2nd c.
Plaster, glass (63.12)
Gift of Mr. H. K. Negbaur

Published: Handbook, no. 6

Female Mummy Mask
Egypt, perhaps Luxor
1st or 2nd c.
Plaster (63.13)

Although the exact origin of these masks is not known, they are believed to come from Luxor. Both are made of plaster, carefully molded and painted. The male mask has inlaid eyes of cast black and white glass and dark blue glass eyeliners. The female mask has painted eyes rather than glass ones. She wears a wreath formed from plaster leaves made separately and added after the face had been removed from the mold. The leaves were painted pink, some of which is preserved. Tendrils of hair escaping from under the headband are painted onto the forehead, and the eyebrows are delicately painted in a feathered pattern.

Such masks were set over the faces of mummies, which were then carefully wrapped in strips of linen. The wrapping of the head provided an oval frame of cloth through which the mask appeared.

Both these masks represent connections between cultures as demonstrated by artistic influence. Although masks made of cartonnage (a composite material of gesso and either linen or papyrus, rather like modern papier mache) placed over the faces of mummies had been in use in Egypt since before 2000 B.C., only after Egypt had become a Roman province did realistic elements make their appearance. It was an Italic custom, dating back to the 2nd c. B.C., to produce masks, or busts, representing family ancestors. From this custom and from the Greeks, the Romans developed an interest in portraiture. The lifelike features of these masks, in particular the male one, suggest that they may have been intended to represent the deceased, although they cannot be considered true portraits.

The fine workmanship and excellent state of preservation of both these masks make them important objects in the museum's Egyptian collection.
Textile
Egypt
Late Roman through Islamic periods, 3rd c. or later
Wool, linen (76.544)
Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday

The textile fragment, in slit tapestry plain weave, depicts bands of dogs facing a floral element with stylized leaves in green. The weave is a weft-faced tabby weave in which the weft threads of a single color do not travel from edge to edge but turn back. Changes in color thus result in gaps and slits in the fabric since the weft threads are structural. Tabby weave or plain weave is a simple weave of over-one-thread, under-one-thread. All ancient Egyptian weaves are variations of this weave.

Coptic textiles exist in large numbers because the arid Egyptian climate and the custom of burying the dead fully clothed have permitted the textiles to survive in excellent condition. After the introduction of a law in the 4th century that prohibited the practice of mumification, the dead were buried in rich clothing such as was worn in real life. The fragments exhibited are all ornaments cut from tunics or shawls.

The museum's collection of Coptic textiles is for the most part only tentatively dated from the 6th to the 13th century, and some are undated. Textiles are difficult to date because many do not come from controlled excavations, or were excavated carelessly by amateur archaeologists looking for pharaonic remains. No attention was paid to evidence that might have provided dates for the time of burial, such as coins and written documents. Thus, dates are often based on stylistic comparisons alone.

The term “Coptic” is frequently used for Egyptian art during the Roman and Byzantine occupations of Egypt. When used as a chronological indicator, the term must be understood as having no religious associations and as referring to all art produced in Egypt after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the 4th century. The word “Coptic” is also used to identify the Christian population of Egypt from the 2nd century A.D. to the present. The term “Coptic" is a garbled form of the Greek Aiguptos and has nothing to do with Christianity.
EGYPT

Tunic Front or Back
Coptic, Islamic period, 10th-11th c.
Wool and linen (79.141)
Gift of Mr. T. E. Bachman

Published: L. Roy Sibley, "A Late Coptic Tunic," Muse 17 (1983) 81-95

In Coptic Egypt, men wore a tunic, named a dalmatic after the country of its origin, Dalmatia (former modern Yugoslavia). It was wider and longer than the Roman tunic and was usually decorated with longitudinal bands from each shoulder, front and back, generally known as clavus bands or clavi; medallions and squares were sometimes placed at the shoulders, sleeves, or hem, or at the ends of the clavi, and other bands adorned the sleeves and the neck between the clavi. Women wore long, wide garments, called colobia. These were often worn over a long-sleeved inner tunic which was decorated with stripes of embroidery or woven designs.

This tunic is decorated with three bands in tapestry weave—two vertical clavi and a band at the neck. Below the neck band is a tubular braid, ending in tassels; there is braided fringe at the lower edge of the tunic, looped fringe decorates the edges near the shoulders, and two rows of braid finish the one preserved side. A tuck at one time shortened the tunic for a wearer.

The two clavi and the neck band, in dark red ground, are adorned with polychrome, schematized figures. Geometric motifs on a dark blue or black ground edge the bands. The figures on the neck band are the worst preserved, but visible are two registers, in the lower of which are sets of three schematized human figures. On both clavi, pairs of figures, some human, some animal, appear to be based on mythological stories. Thus, Europa and the Bull, Nereids (sea Nymphs), and Erotes or Cupids can be recognized. The figures are, however, so schematically rendered that the overall effect is more one of decorative patterns.

The tunic was loom-shaped. That is, it was made all in one piece on the loom with no seams at the shoulders. When stretched out flat, sleeved tunics take the form of a cross. The museum's tunic exhibits jagged edges at the level where sleeves would have been, leading one to surmise that it was once the sleeved type. The finished edge of one side, however, poses problems for that reconstruction, since sleeved tunics were not normally open down the sides. A better preserved sleeved tunic in the Brooklyn Museum offers a possible solution. That tunic has sleeves, but the lower section of each side is open. These two tunics were, thus, perhaps worn over a sleeveless tunic with closed sides. The decorative looped fringe at the shoulders of the Missouri tunic is still, however, unusual, since tapestry-woven bands, squares, or roundels were the common ornamentation of sleeves.
EGYPT

Textiles, Drawer Units

Section of Broad Tape
Egypt
8th c. or later
Linen and wool (72.100)
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Cedric Marks

Slit tapestry plain weave; floral and vegetal motif.

Square Medallion
Egypt
Late Roman through Islamic periods, 3rd c. or later
Wool (76.529)
Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday

Slit tapestry plain weave; animals, trees and urns within roundel.

Medallion
Egypt
Late Roman through Islamic periods, 3rd c. or later
Wool (76.530)
Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday

Slit tapestry and one/two basket weave; Nereids, daughters of the sea-god Nereus.

Section of a Border
Egypt
Late Roman through Islamic periods, 3rd c. or later
Wool and linen (76.532)
Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday

Slit tapestry and one/two basket weave; geometric patterns.
Ornamental Band
Egypt
Coptic, Coptic-Islamic periods
Wool and linen (76.536)
Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday

Slit tapestry plain weave; human and animal figures.

Ornamental Band
Egypt
Late Roman through Islamic periods, 3rd c. or later
Wool and linen (76.545)
Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday

Slit tapestry plain weave; small animals, birds and plants within plain and fringed borders.

Two Bands
Egypt
Coptic, Coptic-Islamic periods
Wool and linen (76.550)
Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday

Slit tapestry plain weave; stylized human figures alternating with braided pattern.

Square Medallion
Egypt
Coptic, Coptic-Islamic periods
Wool and linen (76.552)
Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday

Slit tapestry plain weave; three rows of stylized hounds in central square, border of birds.
The ancient Egyptian practice of mumification of the dead goes back to the Old Kingdom period, ca. 2600 B.C., but wrapping mummies in painted shrouds is a less ancient custom, apparently beginning ca. 900 B.C., the date of the oldest preserved example. The museum's shroud dates to well after the introduction of the practice, belonging to ca. A.D. 150 when Egypt was part of the Roman Empire. Its painted decoration displays an interesting mixture of Egyptian religious beliefs, combined with Graeco-Roman influences.

The shroud has a length of 2.03 m. (6-1/2 feet) and is well preserved. Painted on it is the figure of a woman, shown as if wrapped in a shroud that is covered by an overall pattern simulating a net of faience beads. The woman's face and neck are painted white, and she has large brown eyes. Her long black hair spreads out on her shoulders. The features of her face are not individualistic, but her hairstyle is unusual and suggests that a portrait is intended. The six toes on each foot, revealed by the raised, fringed hem of the shroud, reinforce this suggestion. Polydactilism–more than five fingers or toes on hand or foot–is an inherited genetic abnormality, not unknown in other representations in ancient art. In Syria-Palestine polydactilism was considered the mark of a race of giants. In Mesopotamia, a child born with six fingers on the left hand was thought to bring prosperity to the mother, whereas six fingers on the right hand brought disaster. We do not know the Egyptians' beliefs about polydactilism, but the woman's twelve toes, emphasized by the curved edge of the shroud, indicate that an individual is being represented.

The painted part of the shroud consists of a dark red panel, divided into six horizontal registers and bordered on left and right by two narrow bands. The outer one is yellow with a painted inscription in demotic, the Egyptian "popular" script. This inscription identifies the dead woman. The script reads, in part, as follows:

May the soul of Taathy, daughter of Thatres, live in the presence of Osiris-Sokar, the Great God, Lord of the West. May her soul hasten to Heaven, her body to the Underworld. May she be near the gods, who serve the Lord of the Gods...May offerings be given her in the presence of the Lord Gods forever.
EGYPT

The inner band is a darker yellow than the outer one and contains an hieroglyphic inscription that consists of groups of hieroglyphs continuously repeated. Their meaning has been interpreted as "All life, perpetuity, well-being."

Above the woman's head hovers a vulture, holding a feather in each claw. Its outstretched wings denote protection, a gesture that would have been more effective when the shroud was wrapped around the body. Taathyr wears a pectoral with pendant depicting an ibis, the bird sacred to the funerary god Thoth. To left and right of her head stand a human-headed soul-bird and a goddess making a protective gesture. Between her shoulders and her feet, the six registers contain scenes from Egyptian mythology and beliefs about the afterlife.

In the first register, flanking the ibis pendant of the pectoral, are two mummy-like figures and two kneeling women, perhaps the goddesses Isis and Nephtys. The second register shows the four sons of Horus, the Canopic gods who guarded the viscera removed during mummification. Between them is a mummy with a hawk hovering above. The third band is more unusual. A mummy lies between the gods Horus and Anubis and above it stands a ram, probably the ram of Mendes, "the one that mates with women."

The register below shows a Horus-hawk on a pylon and to right and left a standard crowned by a jackal, the animal sacred to Anubis. In each corner is a winged solar disc. In the fifth band, a soul-bird, symbolizing the soul of the deceased, stands on a pedestal in the form of the hieroglyph meaning "union." The plants twined around it symbolize Upper and Lower Egypt. At left and right, Horus and Anubis are carrying out purification rites. The lowest band shows a hawk above an ankh, the hieroglyph meaning "life." At the left is a soul-bird, and on the far right stands a female figure holding a balance with which to weigh the soul of the deceased, an important part of the journey to the afterlife.

Although the use of painted shrouds began ca. 900 B.C., it was not until the first centuries after Christ, through Roman influence, that portraits of the deceased were included in the mummy wrappings. In most cases the portrait was painted on a separate panel, but in some instances, as here, it was placed directly on a linen shroud. Depictions of women on shrouds are rare.
Textile with Eros in Foliate Medallion

Egypt
Coptic-Islamic periods, ca. 7th to 9th c.
Wool, linen (76.551)
Gift of Doreen Canaday Spitzer in memory of Ward and Mariam Canaday

Published: *Handbook*, no. 9

This fragment is woven from dyed and natural yarns in slit-tapestry plain weave. The colors are red, black, green and yellow, together with natural yellow and ivory. Within a leaf-shaped medallion a small Eros figure flies to the left, holding a bird in his outstretched arms. What is probably intended as his wings can be seen above his legs; some kind of foliage, perhaps water plants, is woven below.

The motif of putti was common in textiles from Egypt. Often they are shown in groups in an aquatic setting, presumably the Nile. Their significance as allegories of prosperity and the goodness of life is well recognized, since they signify the recurrence of the seasons. Indeed, they are often shown with the Seasons. Erotes occur not only on textiles, but also as floor, wall and ceiling decoration.

Stylistically, the figure has lost some of the naturalism of earlier renderings of the motif. Its date in the 7th to 9th centuries is based on the degree of stylization in the rendering of the figure. Although in this time period, Islam was the dominant religion of Egypt, Graeco-Roman artistic influences were still at work.

Foliate medallions adorned the ends of *clavus* bands. This medallion, however, seems to have been a separate ornament, since it is finished all round. Such ornaments were occasionally used as isolated motifs on tunics, and especially on shawls and hangings.
Stone vessels are common in Egypt from Predynastic times to the Roman period. All shapes and sizes were made—plates, jars, bowls, and dishes—and they range from the simple to the elaborate. They demonstrate the skill and virtuosity of the Egyptian sculptor, even from very early times.

The raw materials for these vessels are found in Egypt in the eastern hills or at the edge of the desert. Basalt, Egyptian alabaster (travertine), breccia, granite and porphyritic rock, soft limestone, speckled diorite, schist, serpentine, and steatite, to name just a few, contribute to the variety of colors exhibited by Egyptian stone vessels. The technique of carving is known. After the outside had been roughly fashioned, the interior was hollowed out by drilling with a drill bit that was turned on a weighted shaft or by a bow. The bit might be a tubular one of copper or bronze, or stone—flint, sandstone, diorite or limestone—of different shapes depending on the form of the vessel. An abrasive powder, usually ground quartz, sand or, in the later periods, emery, helped the process. If a tubular bit was used, the cylindrical core left by the drilling was then broken away and the hole enlarged. Finally, the inside and outside were carefully shaped and polished.

The stone vessel on loan from Boston is well made of translucent, banded Egyptian alabaster. The rim of this vessel was formed from a separate piece of stone and attached to the body of the jar with an adhesive. This was a common practice, especially for vessels with a narrow mouth and wide shoulders, such as this piece. If you look closely, you will notice that the banding in the vessel body does not continue into the rim. Like most of the surviving stone vessels, it was probably made for funerary use. It perhaps held cosmetics or perfumed oils, the function of most small vessels. Larger ones held food and drink for the deceased.

The skill of the Egyptian sculptor, manifest as early as Predynastic times in the carving of stone vessels, was later applied to monumental stone sculpture and architecture.
Cosmetic palettes are the most typical artifact from Predynastic Egyptian tombs after pottery. They are first found as early as ca. 4000 B.C. when they were flat, narrow rectangles. Later ones, with which the Boston loan is classed, are frequently in the shape of birds, animals and fish, as here. Palettes also served as ceremonial objects. Some late Predynastic palettes were elaborately carved with scenes in low relief. Such are the well known palettes of Narmer, the so-called Hunters’ palette, and the Battlefield palette.

The simple palettes were used for grinding eye-paint, or kohl (technically the term used only for black eye paint), which in Egypt was made from lead sulphide or malachite, a copper oxide, the former black, the latter green. Both colors were used as early as ca. 4000 B.C., but green was the most popular color from Predynastic times down into the Old Kingdom.

The raw material for the lead was obtained from galena, the chief lead ore found in Egypt, mostly near the Red Sea coast. The lead was extracted from low-grade ore by roasting. Malachite also occurs in Egypt. The finely ground malachite and galena were probably mixed with either water, or a solution of some water-soluble gum, to form a paste, which was then applied around the eye. At first the paint was applied with the fingers, but by ca. 2400 B.C. special sticks began to be used. They are most often made of ivory, wood, or bronze. They take the form of a stick, sometimes with a bulbous end; sometimes they have a small spoon or spatula on one end or a small, carved hand.

The ancient Egyptians used eye-paint as a cosmetic, to enhance the shape of the eye, and to protect their eyes from the glare of the sun. They also believed that it guarded against eye diseases and the flies that transmitted them. It served as the basis for many eye medicines, and prescriptions against eye diseases, written on medical papyri, frequently include galena as an ingredient. Eye-paints also had a magico-religious significance. Eye-paints or the ingredients were offered to the gods; they appear in lists of offerings. The green eye-paint represented the healthy eye of the god Horus, a powerful amulet. Modern studies have shown that both lead- and malachite-based pigments have mild antibacterial properties.

The hole at the top of this palette was used either for a cord “handle” so that the piece could be hung up when not in use or, as some have suggested, so it could be worn.
Osiris is the most well known god of the Egyptian pantheon. In early times he was a chthonic, fertility god, that is a fertility god pertaining to the underworld. He was made king by his father Geb. His jealous brother Seth tricked him into a chest and drowned him in the Nile. Myth reports that his sister-wife Isis retrieved the body, but that Seth stole it and dismembered it. Isis retrieved the parts and, using her magic, reconstituted the body and breathed life into him with her wings long enough to conceive their son Horus. The skill of Anubis, the god of embalming, also played a part. In later times Osiris became the god of the Afterlife, before whom all the dead were judged.

This large bronze statuette depicts Osiris in the form of a mummy, as was usual. On his head is the atef-crown with plumes and the uraeus serpent, his normal headdress. On his chin is a divine beard. He wears a broad collar and holds crook and flail, the symbols of rule. His eyes are inlaid with silver, now mostly missing. Crowns, worn by gods and kings, were symbols of power. The atef-crown, predominantly worn by Osiris, combines the crown signifying the kingship of Upper Egypt with a sun disk on the top and feathers on the side. The sun disk is not portrayed in this example.
The goddess Isis, consort of Osiris and mother of Horus/Harpokrates, is one of the four most important "protector" goddesses of the ancient Egyptians. These goddesses guarded coffins and canopic jars. Isis is the sister of Nephthys with whom she mourned the dead. She is depicted on the sides of coffins. She had special significance for the pharaoh as his symbolic mother.

In myth, she sought Osiris, her dead husband and brother. She breathed life back into him with her wings after his murder by his brother Seth. She bore Horus to him, and just as she protected her own child, so she protected mortal children. In the New Kingdom (ca. 1540-1075 B.C.) she became closely associated with the goddess Hathor. She, and most other goddesses, adopted Hathor's cow's horns and sun-disc. In Greek times she became the protectress of sailors. During the Roman period her cult was regarded as a form of mystery religion outside Egypt and was popular throughout the Mediterranean.

The seated bronze figure of Isis wears a wig and sheath dress, and on her head the crown of disk, horns and uraeus (serpent). She holds her son Horus. There were several different gods named Horus in ancient Egyptian religion. In early times a sky god Horus was imagined as a falcon with outstretched wings. Horus, son of Isis, fought with his wicked uncle Seth and lost an eye in the battle. Eventually, the two deities became reconciled and ruled over Egypt. During some periods, Seth was identified with Upper Egypt, and Horus with Lower Egypt. In other versions of the myth, Horus became the ruler of all Egypt after defeating his uncle. When Osiris gained prominence in Egyptian religious thought, Horus was revered as Osiris' son. Another form of Horus is Harpokrates, i.e. Horus-the-Child. His characteristics are a sidelock of hair and his finger to his mouth. This is the form of Horus most commonly encountered in the Late period to which this group belongs.
EGYPT

Heart Scarab

Egypt
Late Period-Ptolemaic, ca. 760-150 B.C.
Serpentine
Lent by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 67.1125
Gift of Horace L. Mayer

For the ancient Egyptians the heart was a "symbol of life" and the seat of the emotions and intelligence. It revealed a person's true character. It was left in place during embalming, while the brain was considered of no importance and was removed and discarded. Spells from the Book of the Dead were supposed to enable the return of the heart to the deceased in the Afterlife.

The heart scarab was the most important of the many amulets that were wrapped into the bandages of a mummy. Ideally, it was made of a green stone (bnr in ancient Egyptian), mounted on gold and silver fastenings and placed at the throat above the heart. Heart scarabs were inscribed with spells from the Book of the Dead, usually Chapter 30, especially 30B, the spell for not letting the heart create opposition against the deceased in the realm of the dead. Its purpose was to prevent the heart from speaking against the deceased during the Judgment before the great god Osiris when the heart was weighed against the feather of Truth.

Portion of Spell 30B on this scarab:

He says: My heart which I had of my mother. (Twice) My heart of my different ages. Do not stand up against me as a witness! Do not create opposition to me with the magistrates! Do not oppose me in the presence of the Keeper of the Balance! You are my ka which is in my body. Protector who makes my members healthy. Go you forth to the beautiful place we [illegible] thereto. Do not cause [illegible] …
EGYPT

Canopic Jar Inscribed for Pa-di-Hor
Egypt
Dynasty 26, ca. 664-525 B.C.
Egyptian alabaster (travertine)
Lent by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, res.22.233a-b
Gift of the estate of Mrs. Francis Cabot Lowell

Removal of internal organs was necessary for successful mummification, but the organs needed to be preserved for the well-being of the deceased in the Afterlife. Therefore, the embalmed viscera—liver, lungs, stomach and intestine—were placed in four jars, called Canopic jars. Each jar was protected by a minor deity, one of the Four Sons of Horus, and by a goddess. Imsety (man-headed) and Isis protected the liver; Hapi (baboon) and Nephthys, the lungs; Duamutef (jackal) and Neith, the stomach; Qebsennuef (falcon) and Selket, the intestines. The Four Sons of Horus were often represented by jar-lids carved in the characteristic form of their heads.

This finely finished jar is made of Egyptian alabaster with broad banding, while the lid is of more opaque stone. The lid is carved in the form of a human head. On the front of the jar is an inscription written in four vertical columns within a rectangular frame. The inscription faces right. The text reads (Col. 1) What Nephthys says: I conceal the secret and protect (Col 2) Hapi who is in me. The protection of Osiris Pa-di-(Col 3) Hor, born of Iretru, justified, is the protector of Hapi. (Col 4) The Osiris Pa-di-Hor is Hapi.

The man-headed lid represents Imsety. Since normally Imsety guarded the liver, and Hapi the lungs, it seems that the wrong lid has been added to this jar. The lid should be in the form of the head of a baboon, since the inscription indicates that the jar contained the lungs. Whether this happened in antiquity or more recent times is impossible to ascertain. Two other jars with the name of Pa-di-Hor exist. The text inscribed on one mentions Qebsennuef, but the jar is baboon-headed.

The name "Canopic" as applied to these jars is modern, derived from the name of a city on the coast near Alexandria that the Greeks named Canopus. According to the myth, Canopus, the pilot of the Greek prince Menelaus, was buried there. Osiris was worshipped at that city in the form of a jar with a human head of the god. Early Egyptologists gave the name "Canopic" to all Egyptian jars with human-headed stoppers, and the name became attached to the set of four jars that contained the viscera.