Egyptian Art

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Egyptian art reflects one of the most enduring artistic traditions of the ancient world. Although there were modifications in the style of Egyptian art during the 3,000 years when pharaohs ruled the Nile Valley, objects from any period of this time are instantly recognizable as being of Egyptian origin.

The permanence of Egypt's artistic tradition can be traced to the function of its art. Virtually all examples of two-dimensional work—whether wall painting or carved relief—and all examples of statuary and architecture are related in some way to religious beliefs pertaining to Egyptian mortuary cults or to the veneration of the gods and kings. Indeed, the kinds of objects that are encountered in museum galleries and that fill art reference books were thought to be able to transcend the barriers of temporal existence and go beyond the restraints of life and death. The belief in the potency of art dictated that the mere representation of foodstuffs within the tomb was capable of sustaining the soul of the deceased in the afterlife. The image of an individual, carved in imperishable stone and incised with names and titles, served to perpetuate that person among the living for eternity. Very few examples of Egyptian art existed for purely aesthetic reasons.

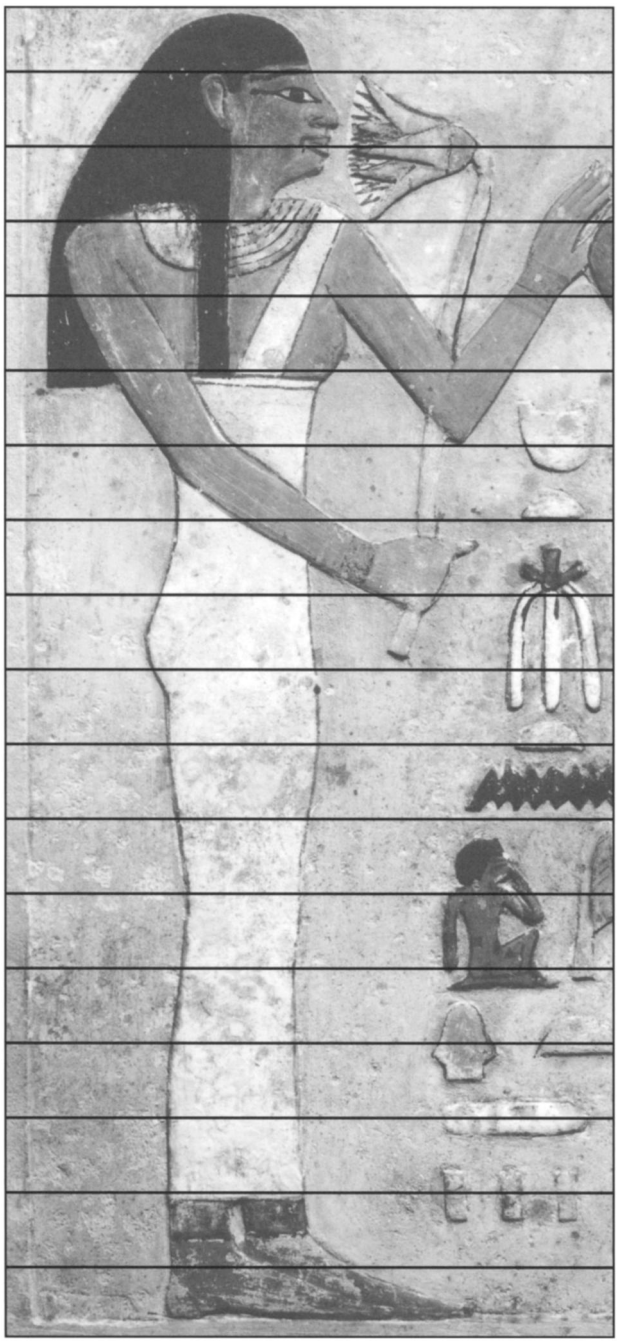
The Western conception of equating change with positive progress was unknown in ancient Egypt. On the contrary, the Egyptians believed that the condition of the world was perfect at the time of creation and that earlier styles were to be carefully preserved and emulated. This innate conservatism ran deep in the Egyptian psyche. Rituals and beliefs that the art served, such as the belief that rebirth was dependent upon the preservation of a representation of the deceased, were firmly established at an early date. Since art served the needs of stable religious beliefs, the themes and forms of Egyptian art were particularly resistant to change.

In practical terms, the uniformity of Egyptian art was the result of a common proportional system that employed guide lines and grids. For example, from the time of the Old Kingdom (c. 2700 B.C.), the standing human figure was proportioned from the hairline to the soles of the feet by an eighteen-square grid (see illustration on p. 16). Likewise, the length of the foot was allotted three squares, while the torso from neck to waist spanned four squares. This system was maintained until the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty (c. 700 B.C.), after which time the grid was modified to twenty-one squares, a change that resulted in the elongation of the figures prominent in Ptolemaic and Roman era art (c. 332 B.C.–A.D. 395).

Continuity in artistic styles was also ensured by the existence of workshops in which the official representations of the king and deities were produced under the supervision of temple or palace officials. Each work was the product of many artisans. Not only were they specialized by specific task, such as painting or carving, but master craftsmen did the most complicated section of compositions, leaving routine work to apprentices. As a result of this teamwork, few pieces of Egyptian art can be attributed to an individual artist, and fewer yet are signed.

The conventions of ancient Egyptian art distinguish it from the products of other ancient and modern cul-

FACING PAGE: *Wall Fragment from the Tomb of Amenemhet and His Wife Hemet*, Middle Kingdom, Dynasty 12 (c. 1991-1784 B.C.) (detail of cat. no. 3).



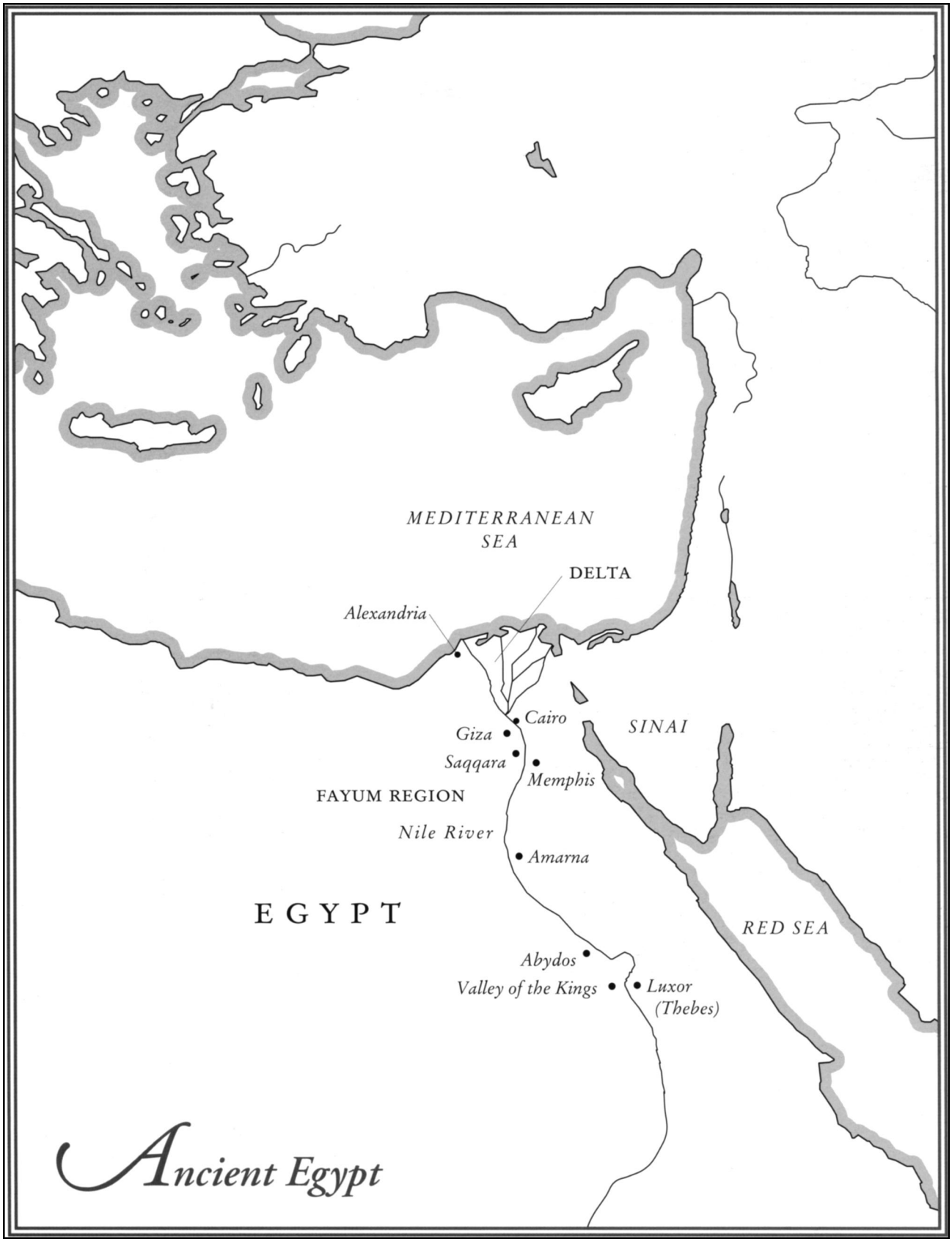
ABOVE: The human form was drawn using a strict system of measurement that divided the body, from the hairline to the soles of the feet, into eighteen equal parts. In this system, the length from the waist to the baseline was always eleven units, while the torso and head was seven, resulting in the uniform long-legged, high-waisted appearance of Egyptian figures. In the eighth century B.C., the system was expanded to twenty-one units, resulting in even more elongated figures.

tures. Its apparent ambiguities may even seem childlike to those who are the inheritors and perpetuators of Western artistic traditions, for Egyptian art is emphatically non-Western. The distinctive conventions of Egyptian art have been referred to as "conceptual" rather than "perceptual," thereby stressing that each subject was portrayed as if in isolation. Each of the essential and identifying characteristics of the subject was portrayed, and each object was represented not from the frame of reference of the viewer, but from the object itself. Hence, foreshortening, inherent in the Western tradition of perspective, was never adopted by Egyptian artists because it was thought to distort the essential form of the subject. Overlapping was avoided to prevent masking essential characteristics of individual objects in complex compositions. An object that was acknowledged to be behind another did not diminish in size as in Western art, but was rather placed above the nearer object to show both forms.

The representation of the human form likewise served to stress essential data about the subject. The shoulders are nearly in frontal view to show the width of the body and not obscure the far arm, while the chest was represented in profile to show its contour. The legs are shown laterally to portray the form of the feet and to indicate rest or movement. With few exceptions, forehead, nose, and chin are in profile to emphasize contour, while the eye is portrayed frontally, to clearly show the pupil in a non-abstracted manner. Most examples of Egyptian representations of humans are heavily idealized and cannot be said to be portraiture. The portrayals strive to depict the individual as eternally slim, youthful, and healthy, for this was the image that he or she wished to maintain for eternity.

The legacy of Egyptian art is difficult to assess. The Sahara Desert prevented significant contact between the Nile Valley and central African civilizations. Certainly, much Egyptian influence can be seen in the arts of Nubia (modern Sudan and southern Egypt), just as Nubian influence can be seen in Egyptian art. The question of interchange between Egyptian and Greek artistic cultures has been impacted by recent linguistic studies that suggest that in the Ptolemaic era (332–30 B.C.) the two cultures did not mix substantially. Artisans created Greek-style representations for Greek clients, and Egyptian-style statuary for native Egyptians. Much of the perceived fusion is merely the result of adding Egyptian costumes and trappings to Greek or Roman works of art.

The exotic conventions, the reminder of the existence of a powerful and sophisticated kingdom of great antiquity, and the religious potency of the art and what it tells us about the complex beliefs of these ancient peoples continue to evoke a special and strong attraction to the arts of ancient Egypt in the modern mind.



1. Wall Fragment from the Tomb of Thenti

This relief fragment from the tomb of the judge and scribe Thenti shows the deceased and his wife sitting on either side of an offering table piled with reed-shaped loaves of bread. Thenti wears the classic knee-length kilt, the belt looped at his waist. His hair or wig is closely cropped and he is clean-shaven. His wife, whose name is now illegible, wears a tight sheath dress that stops just below her breasts. She is ornamented with a beaded necklace, a choker, and bracelets, and a heavy wig composed of a series of braids. Their son, also named Thenti, stands behind his mother. A small girl, whom the hieroglyphic text identifies as Thenti's granddaughter, stands anchored on her own small baseline. She sucks her finger in a gesture traditionally associated with small children in Egyptian art.

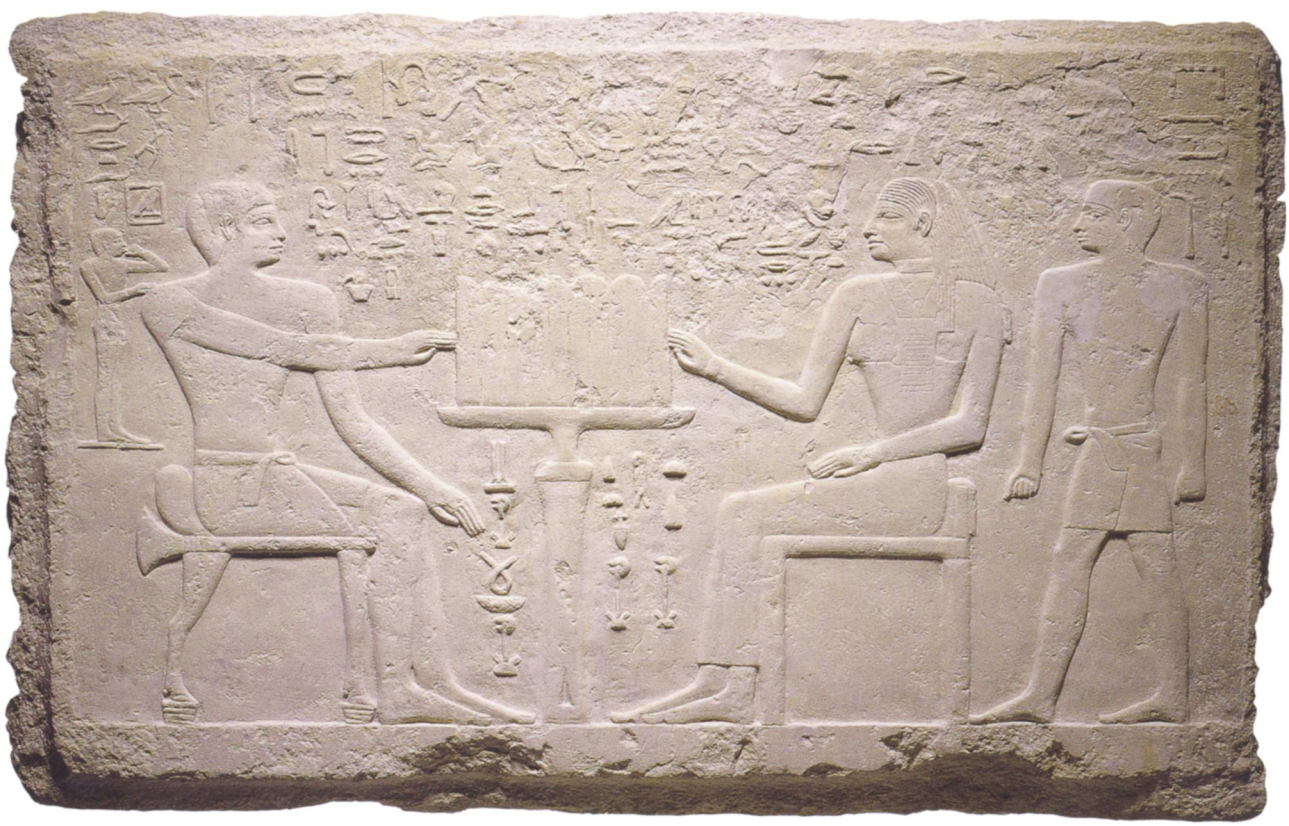
This scene displays many features of the classic Egyptian artistic conventions for human representation. The small toes of the near foot, for example, are invisible, the feet being rendered identically. When both feet are visible, as with the younger Thenti, the arch of each foot is visible, as if both were viewed from the inside. Only one of the woman's breasts is portrayed, for her torso is shown in combined profile and frontal views to express simultaneously its width and contour.

The hieroglyphic texts enumerate the offerings that were desired to sustain Thenti and his family in the afterlife. In addition to food, he requests clothing, linen, incense, green and black eye paint, and material used in the embalming process. (ET)

2. Alabaster Vessels

Egyptian alabaster (calcium carbonate or properly calcite or travertine) is a soft stone that was favored throughout Egyptian history for its color and for the fact that it

1. **Wall Fragment from the Tomb of Thenti**
Egyptian
Old Kingdom, Dynasty 5 (c. 2524–2400 B.C.)
Limestone; h. 53.3 cm (21 in.)
Museum Purchase Fund, 1920.265
References: Thomas George Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection* (Chicago, 1923), pp. 23 and 26 (ill.).



2. Alabaster Vessels
Egyptian
Old Kingdom to end of the New Kingdom (c. 3050–1293 B.C.)
Egyptian alabaster (calcite); max. h. 18.6 cm (7 1/16)
Gifts of Henry H. Getty, Norman W. Harris, and Charles L. Hutchinson, 1892.11 and 1892.7; Gifts of Henry H. Getty and Charles L. Hutchinson, 1894.617a,b and 1894.991; Gift of Charles L. Hutchinson, 1912.1844 (previously 1912.1219); Gifts of Henry H. Getty, Charles L. Hutchinson, Robert H. Fleming, and Norman W. Harris, 1894.429a,b, 1894.664a,b, and 1894.385

3. Wall Fragment from the Tomb of Amenemhet and His Wife Hemet
Egyptian
Middle Kingdom, Dynasty 12 (c. 1991–1784 B.C.)
Limestone and pigment; h. 30.6 cm (12 in.)
Museum Purchase Fund, 1920.262
References: Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection,* p. 40 (ill.).

could be polished to a high gloss. Alabaster was available in a wide variety of colors, from bright white to yellow and even nearly to green, usually with contrasting bands of white. Found mainly in Egypt's Eastern Desert, alabaster was used for large-scale architectural features (floors, columns, walls, shrines), statues and stelae, and small objects. The material was worked with copper chisels, saws, and drills, and it was smoothed with pebbles and possibly scraps of leather. The workmanship of alabaster vessels shows great variation. While the walls of some vessels are so thin as to be translucent, some of the smaller squat vessels have only a tiny interior cavity whose shape has little relationship to its exterior profile. Unfinished examples indicate that the outside of a vessel was generally completed before the interior was hallowed out.

Alabaster was most commonly employed for small-scale luxury vessels such as those shown here. The tall flaring beaker, for example, which was used for food and liquid offerings, is characteristic of the early Old Kingdom Period. Shorter covered pots of the same general shape were intended for cosmetic or funerary oils.

Squat jars with a narrow neck and a flat wide rim, usually equipped with a disk lid, were designed to hold kohl, a copper-based eye paint used by both men and women. Egyptian artisans also employed alabaster to make open bowls and vases. (ET)

3. Wall Fragment from the Tomb of Amenemhet and His Wife Hemet

This fragment from a tomb chapel portrays the official Amenemhet and his wife Hemet standing before funerary offerings. He wears a pleated white kilt with an inverted pleat that is depicted as a triangular projection. The low table before him is heaped with reed-shaped loaves of bread, a haunch of beef, and vegetables. To the right of the table stands a nested basin and ewer, and three tall vessels for liquid offerings. According to the conventions of Egyptian art, the vegetables and calf's head shown above the jars are considered to be behind them. The small figure to the upper right, also named Amenemhet, presents a haunch of beef to the deceased.

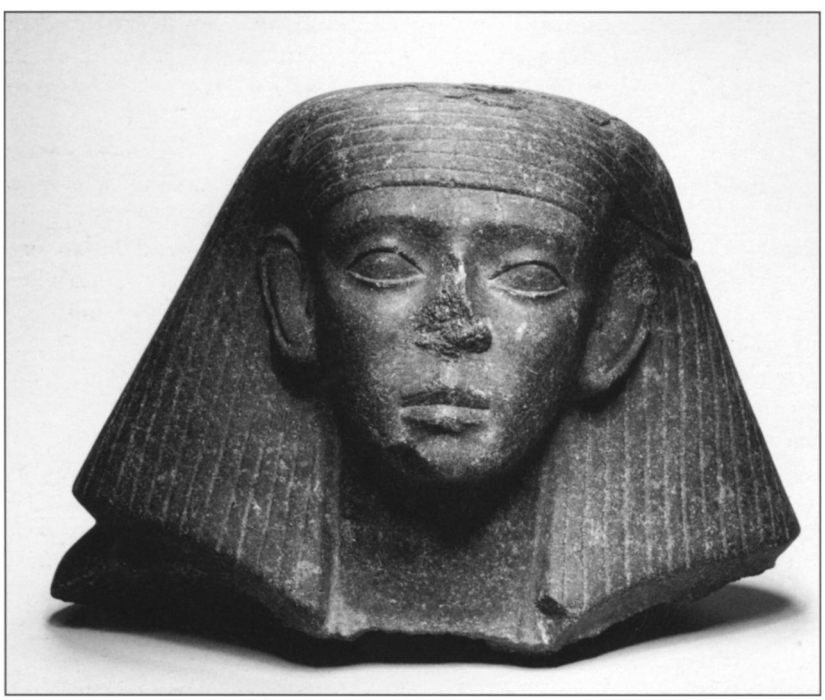
Amenemhet's wife Hemet stands behind her husband, her hand affectionately on his shoulder. She holds a flower to her nose, an allusion to rebirth in the afterlife. In typical Old Kingdom style, the skin of Hemet is colored yellow, while the skin of her husband is a ruddy red. The well preserved pigment is a good reminder that most Egyptian monuments were originally brightly colored.

This relief from Amenemhet's tomb chapel served to immortalize him and his family for eternity through the preservation of their images, names, and food offerings. The hieroglyphic text calls upon the god Osiris to grant them sustenance in the afterlife. This scene was originally located above the tomb's "false door," a representation of a portal that allowed the spirit of the deceased access from the subterranean burial chamber into the decorated tomb chapel. (ET)

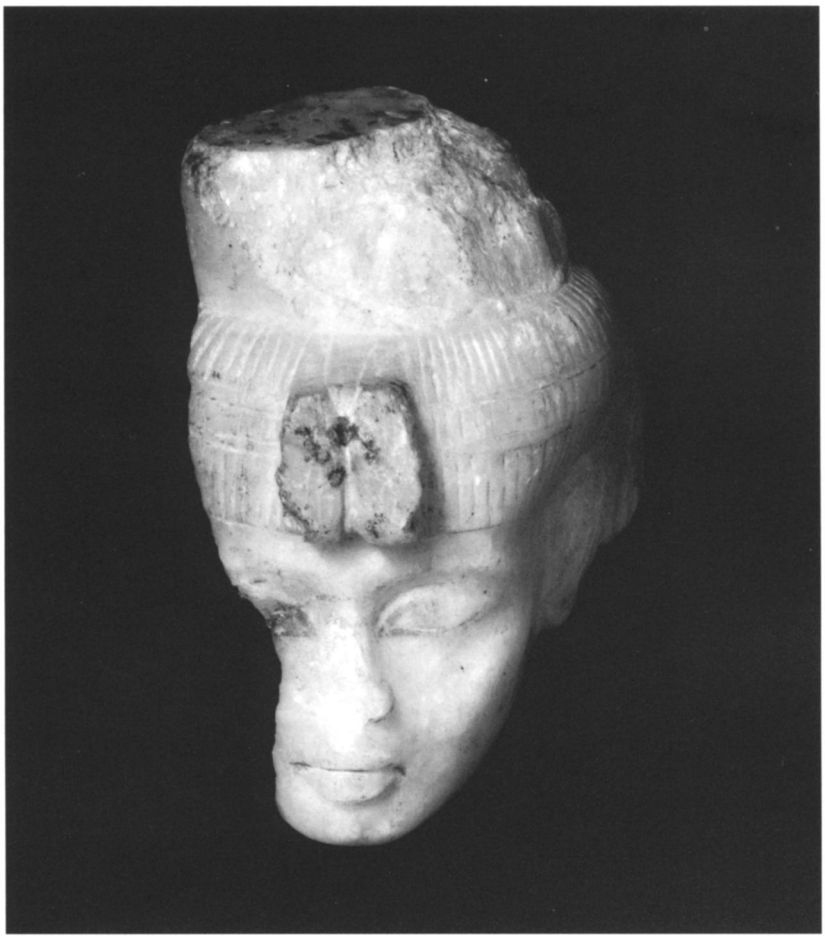
4. Head of an Official

This nearly life-sized head of a man—a fragment of a once complete statue—exemplifies the art of the late Middle Kingdom. The face shows careful modeling in the expressive mouth, well-defined upper lip, and eye sockets. The large ears, which are characteristic of much Middle Kingdom sculpture, are slanted slightly backwards and are schematic, with no detailing of the outer ear. The cheekbones are high, while the sides of the face are nearly unmodeled flat planes. The eyebrows are indicated by pecking rather than with the more common carved or relief line. The conventional style of the wig features the thick locks tucked behind the ears, falling to blunt-cut triangular points upon the shoulders.

The financial resources needed to commission a statue of this size and quality suggests that the man whom it portrays was an official of some circumstance. It may have been produced for his tomb where it would have symbolically partaken of the offerings left for the main-



4. Head of an Official
Egyptian
Middle Kingdom, Dynasty 13
(c. 1783 B.C.)
Black granite; h. 33.8 cm (13¾ in.)
Museum Purchase Fund, 1920.261
References: Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection,* p. 51 (ill.).



5. **Head of Queen Tiye**
Egyptian
New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amunhotep III (c. 1386–1349 B.C.)
Egyptian alabaster (calcite) and traces of pigment; h. 7.3 cm (2⅞ in.)
Gift of Henry H. Getty, Norman W. Harris, and Charles L. Hutchinson, 1892.232
References: Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection,* p. 54 (ill.); Arielle P. Kozloff and Betsy M. Bryan, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and His World,* exh. cat. (Cleveland, 1992), p. 210 n. 7.

tenance of the soul of the deceased.

Like other relatively hard stone statues, this black granite head was produced with stone tools. Pounders and stone picks would have been used to rough out the basic form, and smoothing and polishing stones were used to finish it. Most stone statues were originally painted in lifelike tones. (ET)

5. Head of Queen Tiye

This fragment of a small statue depicts the head of a woman with pierced ears, and a heavy striated wig. A pair of protective uraeui—the sacred cobras that were emblems of Egyptian royalty—hang from the fillet encircling her head. The head has a full and sensuous lower lip, with down-turned edges to the mouth. The broad nose is now badly damaged. The slender almond-shaped eyes and the eyebrows are delineated with pigment.

The date of this masterfully carved fragment can be deduced from its iconography and style. The use of the double uraeus on the forehead of a queen is rare. It is known from representations of a few New Kingdom Queens including Ahmose Nofertari, Tiye, and Nefertiti of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and Nofertari, wife of Ramesses the Great of the Nineteenth Dynasty. The full lips and down-turned edges of the mouth, as well as the slender almond eyes argue for a late New Kingdom date, during the Amarna Period (c. 1349–1335 B.C.). Although the headdress is badly damaged, the flat top and outline suggest that it was a platform crown, which is most frequently seen on representations of Queen Tiye, the mother of King Akhenaton. (ET)

6. Shawabty of Nebseni

A shawabty (also called a *ushebti*) is a mummiform statuette that was thought to be able to serve the deceased in the afterlife. Here, the simplified rendering of the human figure represents the body of Nebseni in his mummy wrappings. This representation, as well as the presence of the false beard, stresses Nebseni's association with the god Osiris, the principal deity of the afterlife.

The finely incised and pigment-filled inscription is

6. **Shawabty of Nebseni**
Egyptian
New Kingdom, early Dynasty 18,
c. 1570 B.C.
Wood (tamarisk) and pigment; h. 28.2 cm
(10¾ in.)
Gift of Henry H. Getty and Charles L.
Hutchinson, 1892.28
References: Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection,* pp. 64 (ill.) and 66n;
G. T. Allen, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead Documents in the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago* (Chicago,
1960), p. 72, pl. CVI.

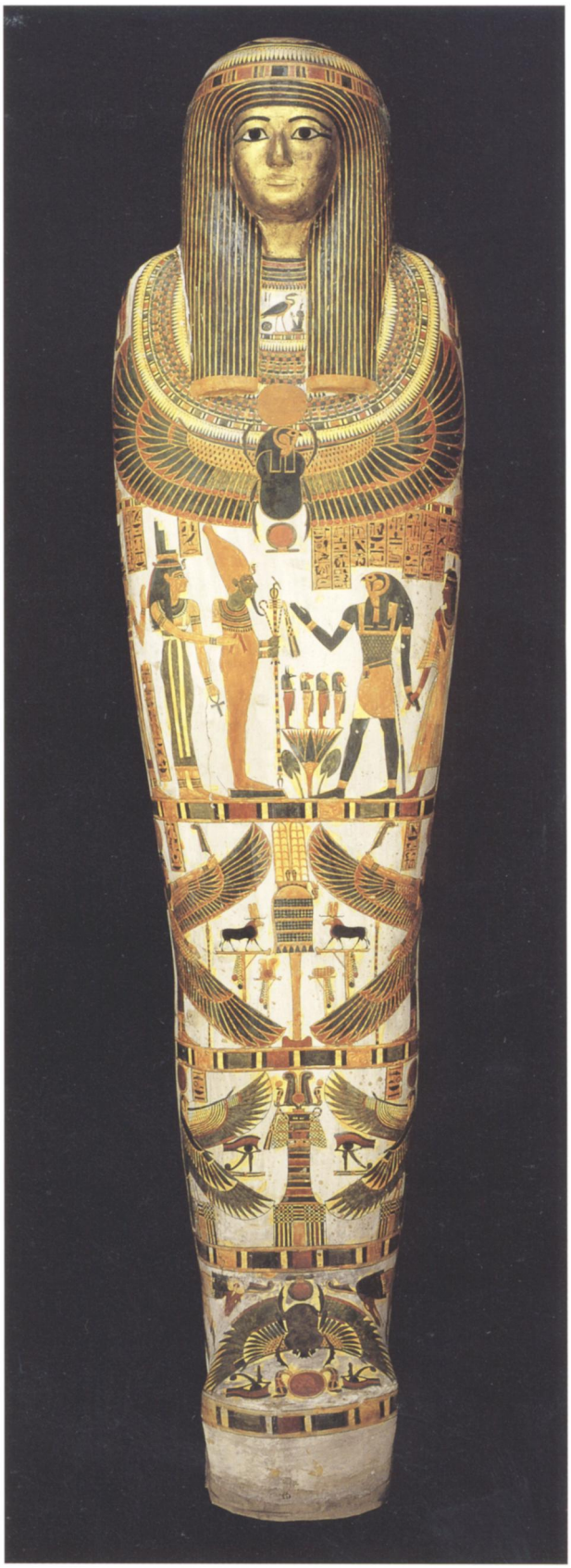
a version of chapter 6 of the *Book of the Dead,* excerpts from which appear on most other shawabtys as well. The text affirms, in part, that "if [the deceased] be called upon to do any work which needs to be done in the realm of the dead. . .'Here I am' you shall say." Supplies of these funerary figures were placed in tombs, often as many as one for each day of the year, along with a group of thirty-six overseers. Many shawabty statuettes are supplied with representations of seed baskets, picks, and hoes with which to accomplish their duties. Shawabtys appeared in Dynasty 13 (c. 1784 B.C.), and they continued to be a feature of mortuary furnishings through the Ptolemaic era.

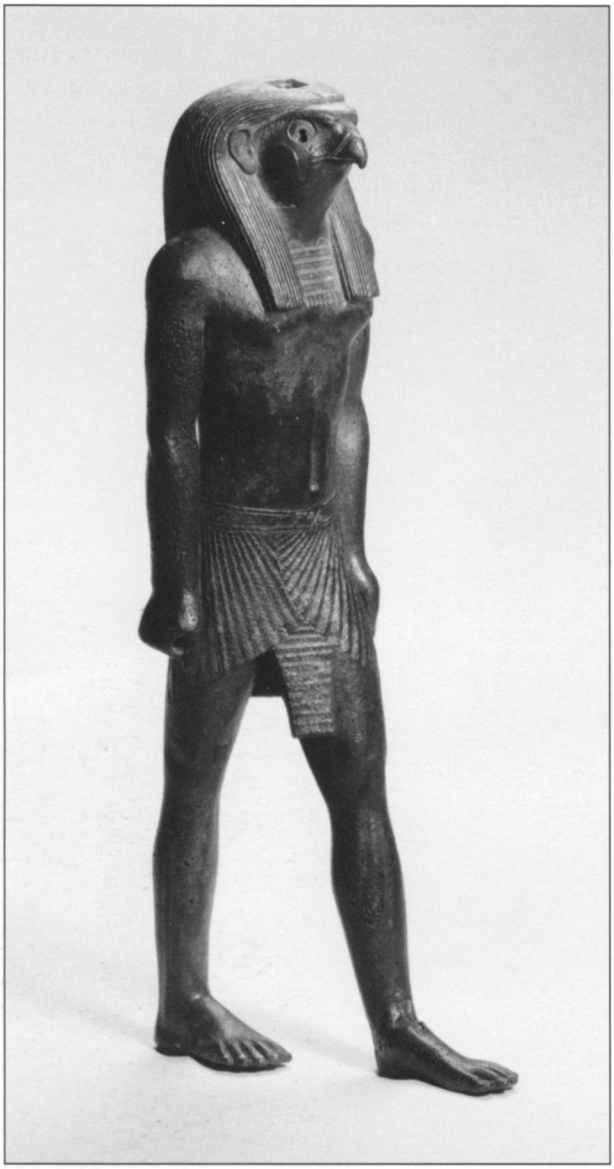
The inscription indicates that Nebseni served as a scribe for a woman who held the title "God's Wife," the rank of a priestess who was considered to be married to the god she served. (ET)

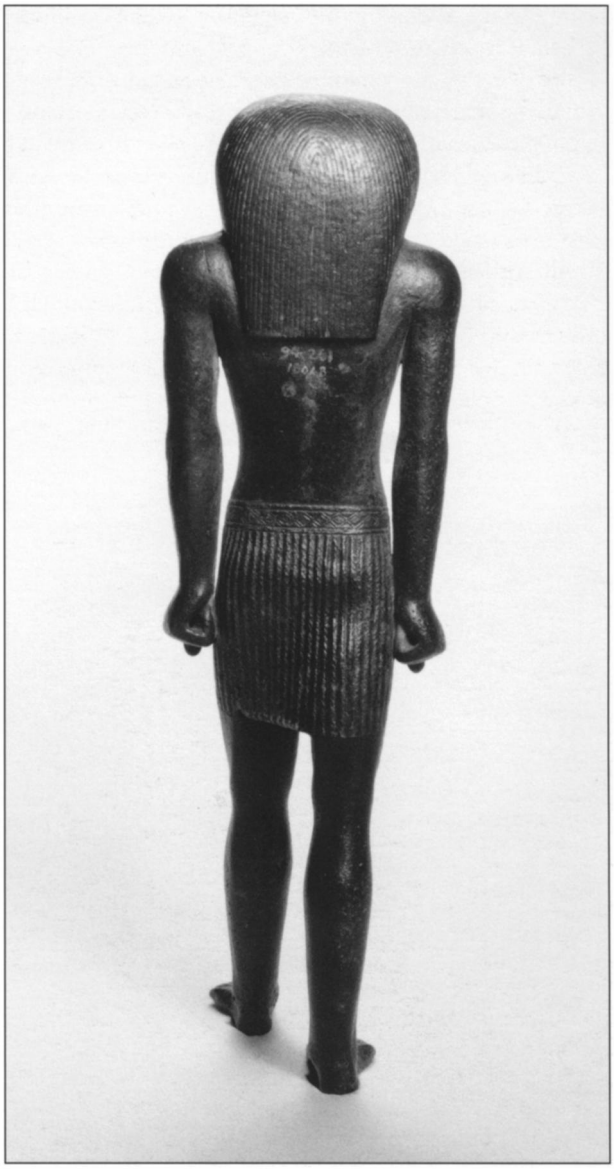
7. Mummy Case of Paankhenamun

In the Twenty-Second Dynasty (c. 945 B.C.), the use of form-fitting cartonnage shells made of linen or papyrus impregnated with gum came into fashion. These splendidly decorated cases were usually enclosed within a set of one or two nested, wooden, anthropoid coffins. The cartonnage mummy case itself was formed around a tem-

7. **Mummy Case of Paankhenamun**
Egyptian
Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 22
(c. 945–715 B.C.)
Cartonnage (gum, linen, and papyrus), gold leaf, and pigment; h. 170.2 cm (67 in.)
William M. Willner Fund, 1910.238
References: Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection,* pp. 7, 12, 13 (ill.), 14–16, 19n., 69, and 124.



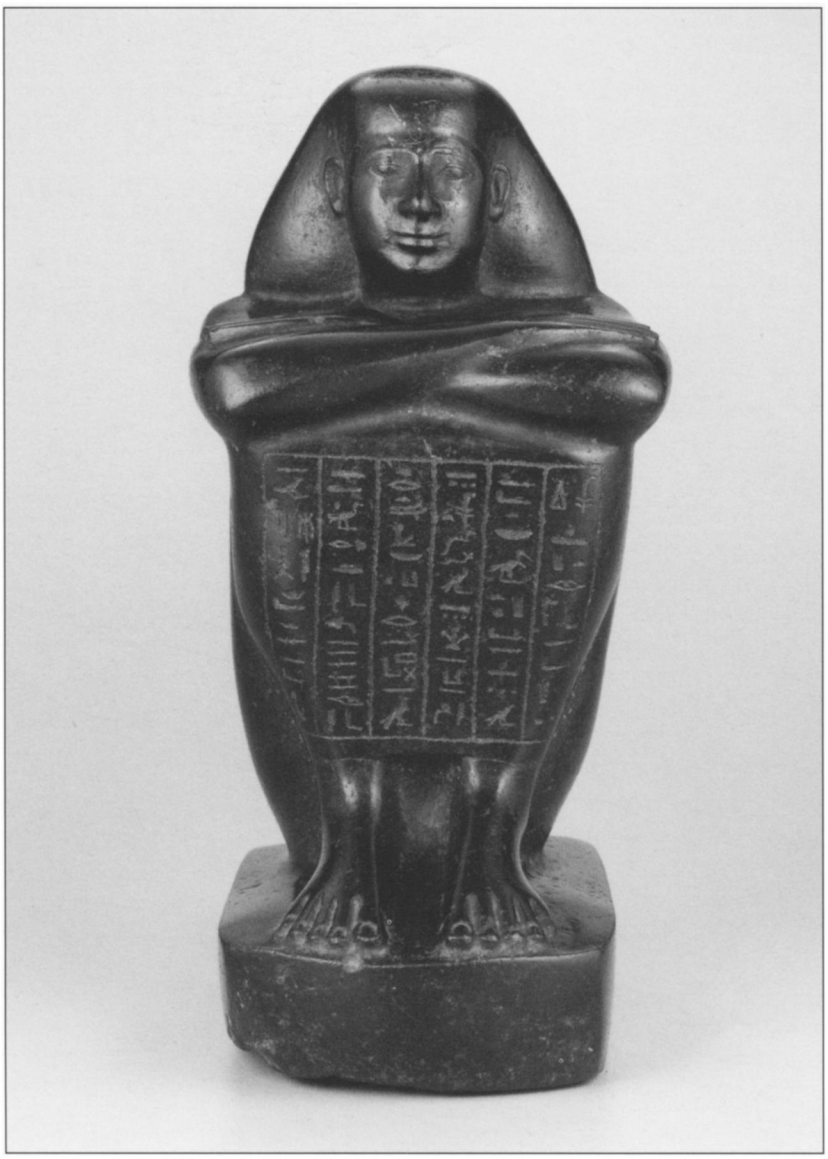


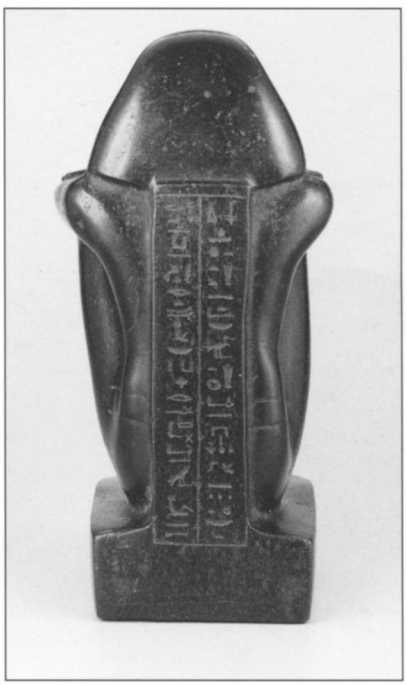


8. **Statuette of Re Horakhty**
Egyptian
Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 21/25 (c. 1069–656 B.C.)
Bronze and gilt; h. 25 cm (9⅞ in.)
Gift of Henry H. Getty, Charles L. Hutchinson, and Robert H. Fleming, 1894.261
References: Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection,* pp. 101–02 (ill.); Günther Roeder, *Agyptische Bronzefiguren* (Berlin, 1956), pp. 9, 80 (no. 114a), Tafel, 74a.

porary core. A lengthwise seam along the back allowed for the introduction of the wrapped mummy. The seam would then be laced closed and a separate foot board would be inserted at the base. Since the cases are normally coated with a layer of inflexible gesso or plaster, it is assumed that the painted decoration was added after the body was in place. Inserting the wrapped mummy into a finished cartonnage would certainly crack the fragile surface of the shell.

Cartonnage cases are usually painted with symmetrically arranged groupings of protective deities. This example in the Art Institute's collection, made for a doorkeeper in the temple of Amun named Paankhenamun (whose name means "The one who lives for the god Amun"), is decorated with a variety of images associated with rebirth, including the scarab beetle, the hawk-headed god Horus, and a winged solar deity. The largest vignette represents Horus leading the deceased (below the left elbow) into the presence of Osiris, who is attended by his sisters Isis and Nephtyes (see detail, p. 14). A phoenix, the mythical bird associated with rebirth, sits at the throat facing a seated figure of Maat, a goddess who attended the judgement of the deceased. The back of the coffin is decorated with a large *djed* pillar, which represents the backbone of the god Osiris and symbolizes stability. (ET)





9. **Statue of Shebenhor**
Egyptian
Saite Period, Dynasty 26 (c. 664–525 B.C.)
Basalt; h. 28 cm (11 in.)
Gift of Mrs. George L. Otis, 1924.754

10. **Statuette of a Jackal**
Egyptian
Saite Period, Dynasty 26 (c. 664–525 B.C.)
Bronze; 9.5 cm (3¾ in.)
Museum Purchase Fund, 1920.252
References: Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection,* pp. 107–08 (ill.); Roeder, *Agyptische Bronzefiguren*, p. 343 (no. 441a).

8. **Statuette of Re Horakhty**

This solid cast bronze depicts Re Horakhty, one of the principal deities of the ancient Egyptian pantheon. He is a combination of the gods Re and Horus, both of whom were associated with rebirth. The figure would originally have worn a disk-shaped crown that was inserted into the square hole in the top of his head. A tenon under each foot allowed the statuette to be set upon a separate bronze or wood base. Delicate strokes above the eye imitate the markings of a falcon.

With the exception of the exotic falcon head, the broad chest, defined pectoral muscles, and muscular arms of this figure are characteristic of an idealized representation of an Egyptian in the prime of life. His heavy wig, pleated kilt with knotted belt, heavy beaded broad collar, and even his stance and his prominent navel and nipples emphasize the humanity of this god.

Bronze figures of the gods are rarely encountered prior to the Third Intermediate Period (Dynasty 21, eleventh century B.C.). From that time onward, however, they appear in great numbers and in a staggering variety of themes and sizes. Many of these figures were inscribed with the name of a devotee, who deposited the statue in a temple as evidence of personal piety. The enormous popularity of this practice may be gathered by the discovery of 17,000 such bronzes in a single deposit at the Temple of Karnak in 1903. This particular figure was evidently cherished, for its left foot was broken centuries ago and then repaired. (ET)

9. **Statue of Shebenhor**

Block-form seated statues first appear in Egypt in the Middle Kingdom (c. 2000 B.C.) and they continue to be popular through the Ptolemaic Period (third to first centuries B.C.). The wide "bag wig," splayed toes, and exaggerated curve of the waist and hips of this statue, as well as the high polish given to its surface, are characteristic of much art of the Late Period (Dynasties 26–31, c. 664–332 B.C.), although the style of this example places it in the early part of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty. The inscription on the front and back calls upon the gods Osiris and Bastet to give funerary offerings of both Upper and Lower Egypt to Shebenhor, son of Hedebhapiirtbin and Iahchaysnakht.

Intercessory statues such as this were commissioned by individuals to be placed in temples where they would serve as evidence of the piety of the donor. There they would absorb the blessings of the sacred area and transfer them eternally to the owner of the statue. Since the inscription runs off the front surface of the statue, and the roughly hammered text contrasts with the fine finishing of the seated figure, one may conclude that this statue was not commissioned by Shebenhor, but that it was purchased and then inscribed for him. One should not

assume, therefore, that this statue makes an effort to be a portrait of the dedicator. The reference to Bastet of Bubastis suggests that the statue may originally have been erected in the temple to that goddess in the Delta. (ET)

10. Statuette of a Jackal

This extremely fine, solid cast bronze depicts a jackal-form god, identified as either Anubis or Wepwawet. The animal's body is slender, its ears erect. The jackal's long thin legs are emphasized by the exaggerated haunches. The snout, too, is long and thin, and the mouth and nose defined. Fine chasing on the body imitates the texture of the animal's fur. The tail, now missing, would have hung straight down from the rear of the figure, an indication that the figure was attached to the edge of a surface.

Both Anubis and Wepwawet were associated with embalming and the protection of the remains of the deceased. From the New Kingdom onward (c. 1570 B.C.), figures of the jackal deity, usually of wood, were attached to the top of funerary shrines or coffins where the image was thought to afford protection to the contents of the container. Two square holes on the underside of the figure allowed it to be set securely upon such a surface.

Bronze statues of recumbent jackals are very rare. In 1919, James H. Breasted, who purchased this figure for the Art Institute, described it as "a magnificent piece" and "the finest animal figure of its size" that he had ever seen in Egypt. (ET)

11. Coin Showing King Ptolemy I

Coinage was introduced into Egypt through its lively trade contacts with the Greek world and Persia. Egypt had long had a barter economy, but, increasingly, weighed silver became the preferred medium of exchange. The Egyptians became familiar with the coinage of their trading partners, especially favoring the Athenian silver tetradrachms, which were dependable in weight and quality. Coinage began in earnest after the conquest of Egypt by Alexander in 332–331 B.C. His general Ptolemy I struck coins there first in the name of Philip Arrhidaeus, then for Alexander IV, and eventually in his own name as he established his independence. The early coinage adver-

11. **Coin Showing King Ptolemy I**
Reverse: Eagle on thunderbolt; around, ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (Ptolemaiou basileos; "[minted by] Ptolemy, King")
Greek (Alexandria, Egypt)
284–247 B.C. (reign of Ptolemy II), Cyprus mint
Gold pentadrachm; diam. 2.4 cm (1 in.)
Gift of Martin A. Ryerson, 1922.4933

12. **Coin Showing Queen Arsinoë II, Deified**
Reverse: Double cornucopia; around, ΑΡΣΙΝΟΗΣ ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΟΥ (Arsinoës Philadelphou; "[minted for] Arsinoë Philadelphos")
Greek (Alexandria, Egypt)
After 270 B.C.
Gold octadrachm; diam. 2.8 cm (1⅛ in.)
Gift of Martin A. Ryerson, 1922.4934

tised Ptolemy's associations with Alexander, but, in time, the new royal dynasty celebrated its confidence with portrait coins of its founders. Ptolemy II and his advisers instituted the ruler-cult honoring the deified Alexander and members of the royal family.

On the obverse ("head") of this coin, the aegis (a magical garment) worn by Ptolemy I alluded to Zeus as well as Athena; it was thought to protect the wearer and repel enemies, and it underscored the divine origins of the dynasty. On the reverse ("tail"), the eagle and the thunderbolt also recall Zeus, with whom, in the form of Zeus-Ammon, the early Ptolemaic dynasty associated itself. (See entry on cat. no. 23 for more information on the "obverse" and "reverse" of ancient coins.) The god Ammon was in residence at the Siwah oasis, and pronounced oracles famous throughout the Greek world. Alexander visited the oasis in 332–331 b.c., where he was greeted by the priests as "son of Zeus," their usual form of address to new pharaohs. (TGD)

12. **Coin Showing Queen Arsinoë II, Deified**

Queen Arsinoë II, the daughter of Ptolemy I and the sister-goddess-consort of Ptolemy II, is honored on this coin. Several Egyptian pharaohs had been depicted with the ram horn of Amun, and it was adopted by Alexander the Great to advertise his position as son of the god and as the new pharaoh. Despite the strong desire by his Ptolemaic successors to bank on their association with Alexander (Ptolemy I had in fact hijacked Alexander's funeral cortege, with the intention of building a shrine around it at Siwah), none of them adopted the divine horns—with the remarkable exception of Arsinoë (note the outline of the horn beneath her veil). Her use of the lotus-scepter also emphasized that she followed in the footsteps of the pharaohs, and is another indication of the Macedonian-Egyptian political synthesis. Arsinoë was by all accounts a woman of tremendous ambition and political savvy, and she knew what it took to rule

13. **Relief Plaque Showing a Queen or Goddess**
Egyptian
Ptolemaic Period, 2nd/1st century b.c.
Limestone and traces of pigment;
h. 21.1 cm (8 1/16 in.)
Museum Purchase Fund, 1920.259
References: Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection,* pp. 44–45 (ill.).

14. **Coin Showing Emperor Hadrian**
Obverse: around, AVT KAI TPAI AΔPIA CEB (Aut[ocrator] Kai[sar] Trai[anos] Adria[nos] Seb[astos]; "Emperor Caesar Trajan Hadrian Augustus")
Reverse: Hadrian receives grain from Alexandria ("Year 15")
Roman (Alexandria, Egypt), Alexandria mint
A.D. 131
Billion tetradrachm; diam. 2.5 cm (1 in.)
Gift of Robert Grover, 1980.824

her mostly Egyptian subjects. Like Alexander in the East, the Ptolemies adopted many local customs, including the policy of royal-divine marriage of siblings. After her death in 270 B.C., Arsinoë was worshiped as a goddess under the title "Thea Philadelphos." (TGD)

13. Relief Plaque Showing a Queen or Goddess

The woman portrayed on this limestone plaque wears a headdress in the form of a vulture, its wings protectively spread along her head. Bead spacers decorate her elaborate coiffeur, and the ends of her curls are accentuated by tiny drill holes. Rows of lotus flowers, marguerites, and papyrus flowers suspended from a band of round beads compose her broad collar.

The basic features of this work—the woman's general appearance, her headdress, and her jewelry—fit well into a tradition of Egyptian art that spans more than a thousand years. Certain features of this composition, however, are characteristic of the Ptolemaic (Greek) Period in Egypt: specifically the fleshiness of the cheek, chin, and neck; the small almond-shaped eye and the extended eyebrow line; the short rounded nose; and the drilled detail of the wig.

As goddesses, queens, and certain types of priestesses wore the vulture cap headdress, it is impossible to identify the status of the woman depicted. This plaque may have been a sculptor's trial piece, or a votive offering carved to be deposited in a shrine to prove the piety of the dedicant.

Artists of the mid- and late Ptolemaic Period (second to first centuries B.C.) employed a curious artistic convention, evident here, of omitting the broad collar on what we take to be the rear shoulder. This omission probably indicates that that area was considered to be a part of the arm and shoulder, rather than the region of the neck and chest. (ET)

14. Coin Showing Emperor Hadrian

Egypt welcomed the long-awaited visit of Hadrian in A.D. 130, the fifteenth year of his reign. Coins of the fourteenth year had depicted Eirene ("peace") in anticipation of the happy occasion; before Hadrian, Roman emperors typically visited their provinces only in times of wars or insurrections.

The elephant scalp worn by the personification of Alexandria on the reverse of this coin is a reference to the African forest elephant, native to Ethiopia and the Red Sea area, which was used by the Ptolemies as a battle mount. By Hadrian's day, however, the elephant was no longer used in warfare, though it was popular in parades and ceremony, and conjured up days of Egypt's military splendor. Alexandria's gift of wheat to the emperor, which is depicted on the reverse of this coin, signifies Egypt's vast grain exports, on which Rome relied.

Hadrian's idealized portrait is typically philhellene. The artistic style of the Alexandrian mint became more Greco-Roman as a result of Hadrian's interest in the imperial province. Although the coinage of Egypt circulated only within the province, and was not current in the rest of the Empire, the more cosmopolitan look of this coin was meant to convey to Egyptians that Egypt was, after all, a part of Rome. Alexandria had been founded by Alexander the Great, who needed a seaport to Europe; the city *was* the province of Egypt, as far as most Romans were concerned. It remained great until the Arab conquest of A.D. 646 turned Egypt's gaze away from Europe, toward Asia. (TGD)

15. Mummy Head Cover

This covering for the head of a mummy represents a highly idealized image of a woman wearing a heavy wig. The front sections of her hair are braided and orna-

15. **Mummy Head Cover**
Egyptian
Roman Period, 1st century B.C.
Cartonnage (gum, linen, and papyrus), gold leaf, and pigment; h. 46 cm (18⅛ in.)
William M. Willner Fund, 1910.221
References: Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection,* pp. 16–17 (ill.).

mented with golden beads and rosettes. The fringe of the woman's own hair appears as curls along her forehead. She wears a locketlike ornament in the form of the hieroglyph for "heart." Her chest is covered with the representation of a wide collar made of rows of floral and geometric ornaments. This lower margin is decorated with a scene of Osiris seated on his throne, flanked by a pair of protective deities, and an image of the deceased (shown kneeling) followed by the so-called four sons of Horus, who were associated with the protection of the vital organs of the mummy. Isis and Nephthys, the divine sisters of Osiris who act as mourners for the deceased, appear on the shoulders.

In the Ptolemaic Period (332–30 B.C.), the head, feet, and chest of wrapped mummies were often covered with cartonnage, which was thought to ensure the function of those parts of the body in the afterlife even if the mortal remains were decayed or destroyed. Such cartonnage headpieces are direct descendants of helmet-style masks like the famous gold covering of Tutankhamun (c. 1334 B.C.). Not only did these head coverings provide a substitute for the vital facilities of the head, but the gilt-covered surface of the mask also served to identify the deceased with the sun god Re, whom the Egyptians described as having skin of gold. (ET)

16. **Mummy Portrait**

The belief that rebirth in the afterlife was dependent upon the preservation of the body, or of an image of the

deceased, was adopted by the Roman population of Egypt. The trappings of these beliefs, however, were modified to meet contemporary tastes. During the Roman Period, the idealized cartonnage head covers (see cat. no. 15) were abandoned in favor of portraits painted in tempera or in encaustic (molten wax) on board. These portraits were secured over the face of the mummy by the linen bandages, damage from which can be seen at the bottom of this panel.

Generally referred to as "Fayum portraits" after the region that first yielded a major find of them, these paintings show the deceased in a very lifelike manner. Diverging from traditional Egyptian art, the painter of this work has positioned the head and torso so that they are not restricted to rigid and formal poses. Instead, the face is turned three-quarters toward the viewer. The heavy lids, arched eyebrows, narrow chin, bowed lips, and beard seek to capture the actual appearance of the individual. As an indication of the strength of traditional iconography, the wreath of ivy in the man's hair is not a Roman fashion, but a reminder of Egyptian funerary scenes in which the convolvulus ivy was associated with rebirth.

These portraits were sometimes painted during the lifetime of the individual, for scraps found among funerary wrappings indicate that some finished panels were cut down to fit the mummy bundle. Several portraits have been discovered in frames, suggesting that they were hung in homes during the lifetime of the individual. (ET)

16. **Mummy Portrait**
Egyptian
Roman Period, 2nd century A.D.
Encaustic (wax and pigment) on wood;
h. 36.8 cm (14½ in.)
Gift of Mrs. Emily Crane Chadbourne, 1922.4798
References: Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection,* pp. 161–62 (ill.); Klaus Parlasca, *Mumienporträts und verwandte Denkmäler* (Wiesbaden, 1966), pp. 42, 176n.; *Bulletin of The Art Institute of Chicago* (Nov.-Dec. 1978), vol. 72, no. 6, pp. 1–4.