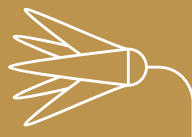


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21ST NOVEMBER 2019 – 19TH APRIL 2020
TOWER GALLERY, ETON COLLEGE



ANCIENT BEINGS

CURATED BY REBECCA TESSIER

FOREWORD

Johns Hopkins University (JHU) is deeply grateful to Eton College for participating with us in a collaborative loan effort which brought the extraordinary Ancient Egyptian artworks, now on display once again at Eton, to Baltimore in 2012. During the four years that these objects were at the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum, faculty, museum staff, graduate students and undergraduate students had the unique opportunity to study and learn from these objects in detail. Thanks to the Museum facility opened in 2010, JHU launched a curricular approach to our objects – including Eton’s magnificent loans – that combines art historical, cultural-historical, and imaging and scientific analyses for our courses.

Three classes, “Made for the Gods: Votive Egyptian Objects in the Archaeological Museum” (taught in 2012) and “Examining Archaeological Objects” (taught in 2014 and 2016), focused specifically on the study of Egyptian objects from Eton, to appreciate their artistic and cultural aspects and to pursue new technical and scientific evidence about these well-known objects. Students carried out analyses on materials, pigments, construction methods, and erosion and degradation effects alongside their research into dating, symbolism, and probable archaeological and cultural contexts. Such an interdisciplinary approach to research has proven valuable, as is demonstrated by the fact that over thirty-one students from different disciplinary backgrounds contributed to the 2016 catalogue. We are delighted to be able to announce that a re-designed digital version of this catalogue is now freely available, thus showcasing the research and analyses conducted by these students, and we hope, circulating far beyond both Eton College and Johns Hopkins University.

Given that our two institutions wish to foster the creation of new knowledge, and to do so collaboratively, we continue to appreciate the opportunity to work together as we learn from the objects in the Eton Collection in a way that deepens and develops the interest and scholarship of all our students. The Ancient Egyptians have much to teach us, and we—both faculty and students at Johns Hopkins—continue to learn from them.

*Betsy Bryan, Director, and Sanchita Balachandran, Associate Director,
The Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum*

FOREWORD

October 2016 saw the return to Eton of some thirty-two prize Egyptian artefacts from loan to Johns Hopkins University (JHU). The objects date from the third millennium BCE to the fourth century CE and constitute a diverse and fascinating assemblage: papyri from Oxyrhynchus, statues (in wood and bronze), faience bowls and chalices, a cosmetic spoon, a tubular receptacle for Ancient Egyptian eye-liner, a coiled basket with flowers woven into the decoration and a 4000-year-old walking stick. The objects now returned to Eton have, in important ways, been much enhanced by their American sojourn. In the first instance careful conservation work was undertaken where appropriate to stabilise objects and prevent the threat of further deterioration; in some cases old repairs made with harmful or degraded resins were painstakingly undone and upgraded. The objects were then able to take centre-stage in an exciting programme of teaching and research led by Professor Betsy Bryan and Sanchita Balachandran. This included precise and comprehensive measurement and photography of objects as well as the application of cutting-edge techniques such as CT scanning, multispectral imaging and x-ray fluorescence. In many cases this has transformed and enriched our understanding about the way these objects were created. Alongside this scientific analysis further significant work was also undertaken to explore the position of these objects within their specific cultural, social and religious contexts.

This small exhibition, expertly curated by our Museums Officer, Rebecca Tessier, aims to synthesise and communicate some of the key elements of this new research (drawing also on earlier research undertaken by the Barber Institute and the University of Birmingham) and puts these world-class artefacts back on display in Eton for the first time in many years. This should, if it does nothing else, whet the appetite for the return from Baltimore in 2025 of the 2000 additional objects from our collection.

Rob Shorrock, Keeper of Antiquities



(17) STATUE OF MESEHTI

PREFACE

Ancient Beings is arranged into four themes: Gods, Plant, Humans and Animals, and aims to demonstrate the wealth of insight and knowledge into Ancient Egyptian culture provided by these thirty-two objects. Displaying a variety of materials and techniques that span over 3,000 years, each theme explores the contemporary contexts, iconography and materiality of the objects within. The connections between these represented forms of life, both living and mythic, reflects the integration of the cosmic and spiritual with the quotidian characteristic of this culture.

Understandings of the visual and material culture of these objects has in particular been drawn out by the loan collaborations with the Barber Institute of Arts, University of Birmingham, and most recently, with JHU. For ease of presentation the text does not include references to the research; JHU has kindly provided a number of copies of *Selections from the Eton College Myers Collection*, to accompany this exhibition. Excitingly, they are also launching this text in an e-publication with the opening of *Ancient Beings*, broadening the access to information about these remarkable objects.

Rebecca Tessier, Collections Cataloguer and Museums Officer
November 2019



Gods and goddesses played an integral role in Ancient Egyptian culture, life and death. Religion was complex, bringing together a polytheistic pantheon of gods across centuries of life in Egypt. Despite variations, this diversity was unified by key religious concepts. All natural life, from animals to the sun and sky, were expressions of the divine as manifestations or embodiments of the gods. Additionally ma'at (or maat), the order of the universe, must be kept in balance. Through worship, humans sustained the gods, thereby maintaining ma'at.

There were a number of major gods that were worshipped in dedicated, state-owned temples. Smaller deities were then supported for their specific attributes by towns, in local temples or shrines. A larger range of gods were then worshipped by individuals. Personal piety usually related to a particular need for the influence or support of a god's specific magical powers.

Each god had its own personality, forms, roles and areas of influence; some, such as Thoth, had multiples of these. The Ancient Egyptians depicted their gods both anthropomorphically (having the characteristics and appearance of human beings) and zoomorphically (having the characteristics and appearance of animals). The attributes of gods also developed over time as new theologies and cultures were embraced.

Material culture from Ancient Egypt is abundant with symbolic representations and manifestations of the gods, in forms that carried the powers and qualities of the deity depicted. These enabled the deities to have multiple roles in religious and everyday life. For example, amulets were worn or placed on the body, in order to allow the secure transfer of these powers. They were sometimes placed in the bandaging of mummified bodies. Figures were also used with a votive function and left as an offering in a temple or shrine, as a form of communication with the gods. The materials and colours used for these representations also had symbolic meaning and their own magic.



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- (1) FIGURE OF THOTH IN BABOON FORM
Late Period, 664–332 BCE
Egyptian Blue [ECM 722]
- (2) FIGURE OF THOTH WITH JACKAL-HEADED FEET
Late Period–Ptolemaic Period, 664–30 BCE
Faïence [ECM 1587]
- (3) FIGURE OF ISIS SUCKLING HARPOCRATES
Late Period, 26th Dynasty, 664–525 BCE
Faïence [ECM 1717]
- (4) FIGURE OF SAKHMET
Late Period, 26th Dynasty, ca. 600 BCE
Faïence [ECM 1716]
- (5) FRAGMENT OF A SCENE FROM
THE BOOK OF AMDUAT
Third Intermediate Period, 21st–22nd Dynasty,
ca. 1069–715 BCE [ECM 1573]
- (6) PECTORAL DEPICTING OSIRIS
IN THE SUN-BARQUE
New Kingdom, Ramessid Period, 1295–1069 BCE
Faïence [ECM 814]
- (7) FIGURE OF A KNEELING PRIEST OF BASTET
Third Intermediate Period–Late Period,
22nd–26th Dynasty, 945–525 BCE
Copper alloy [ECM 1533]
- (8) NAOS-SISTRUM (MUSICAL INSTRUMENT)
DEPICTING THE GODDESS HATHOR
Third Intermediate Period or later,
22nd Dynasty or later, 1069 BCE or later
Faïence [ECM 1693]
- (9) CLOISONNÉ PECTORAL DEPICTING
HORUS AND SETH
Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty, 1985–1773 BCE
Electrum, lapis lazuli, carnelian, feldspar
[ECM 1585]



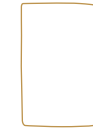
The significance of plants in Ancient Egypt is evident in agriculture, religion and everyday life. The production of plants was complex, despite the celebrated fertility of the Nile valley. The river Nile flooded annually over the summer months; the entire year's harvest had to take place before June. Produce then had to be stored; grain was kept in granaries, used to make food and given as workers' pay. Produce was also stored in clay vessels.

Certain plants in particular were associated with the gods and as a result were held in high regard. Papyrus, *Cyperus papyrus*, featured in mythology where the papyrus marsh was echoed in the creation myth, symbolised eternity in the Field of Reeds ('heavenly paradise', the afterlife), and appeared frequently as a motif in the histories of the gods. It is named from *pa-en-per-aa*, meaning 'belonging to the pharaoh'. It was considered a symbol of youth and joy and used to make paper, rope, baskets and clothing. Papyrus is extensively represented throughout art and architecture. It appears frequently in a stylised form either as a single stem with bud or flower or in a series imitating dense reed beds. The fields of reeds in the marshes along the Nile were habitats for many birds and animals, which are often depicted in artwork in river and hunting scenes. As a result of swamp-drainage and over-cultivation this plant no longer grows in the wild along the Nile.

Plants were even used to promote ideas of national identity. The lotus was used as the heraldic symbol of Upper Egypt and the papyrus reed as the heraldic symbol of Lower Egypt. When placed together, they represented the unification of the country. The lotus appears in two forms, the blue lotus, *Nymphaea caerulea*, and white lotus, *Nymphaea lotus*. Most commonly depicted was the blue lotus, an important symbol of regeneration linked to the cycle of the sun and the endurance of life, as the flower closes at night and opens again each morning. It also blooms all year round. The white lotus blooms at night, linking it to the lunar cycle.



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- (10) CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT
Roman Period, 188 CE
Papyrus and ink [ECM 1616]
- (11) FAIENCE TILE
Old Kingdom, 3rd Dynasty, Reign of Djoser, 2667–2648 BCE
Faience [ECM 1836]
- (12) CHALICE IN THE FORM OF A BLUE LOTUS
New Kingdom, mid-18th Dynasty, 1450–1400 BCE
Faience [ECM 1578]
- (13) CHALICE IN THE FORM OF A WHITE LOTUS
New Kingdom, late 18th–19th Dynasty, 1352–1069 BCE
Faience [ECM 1579]
- (14) CHALICE IN THE FORM OF A BLUE LOTUS
Third Intermediate Period, 22nd Dynasty, 945–715 BCE
Faience [ECM 1676]
- (15) CONICAL BASKET WITH LID
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, 1550–1292 BCE
Basketry, pigment [ECM 1889]
- (16) VESSEL IN THE FORM OF A BASKET WITH LID
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, ca.1450 BCE
Faience (Probably from Tuna-el-Gebel)
[ECM 845]



Human lives run through every object on display in this exhibition: through the hands that made them, the beliefs that imbued them with power and meaning and the interactions with nature that inspired them. Many of the surviving objects were preserved in tombs rather than in domestic contexts. Although these were often items made specifically for funerary purposes, they can still tell us a lot about everyday life. Since death was believed to be a continuation of life on earth, tomb illustrations, surviving texts, and material culture can help us to piece together the story of daily life in Ancient Egypt.

From representations of individuals to things people held and used thousands of years ago, this display brings back to life the society and culture of a people in many ways much like us. We recognise elements of our lives in objects such as the mirror and the dinner invitation. Yet they were also symbolic and magical objects, used to house part of a person's spirit, such as the statue of Mesehti, or were used in rituals and funerary practice, such as the hsmny vessel.

CATALOGUE LISTINGS (17–26)



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- (17) STATUE OF MESEHTI
Middle Kingdom, 11th Dynasty, ca.2000 BCE
Wood [ECM 2617]
- (18) WALKING STICK BELIEVED TO BE
FROM THE TOMB OF MESEHTI
Middle Kingdom, 11th Dynasty, ca.2000 BCE
Wood [ECM 2168]
- (19) KOHL TUBE IN FORM OF REED FLUTE
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty,
reign of Amenhotep III, 1390–1352 BCE
Faience [ECM 1640]
- (20) COSMETIC SPOON WITH A WOMAN KNEELING
ON A SKIFF, PLAYING A LUTE, IN A REED MARSH
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, 1375–1300 BCE
Steatite [ECM 1793]
- (21) DISC MIRROR WITH HANDLE
IN THE FEMALE FORM
New Kingdom, early to mid-18th Dynasty,
1550–1400 BCE
Bronze [ECM 1788]

- (22) OFFERING BEARER
Old Kingdom, 6th Dynasty, ca.2150 BCE
Wood, polychrome [ECM 1591]
- (23) DINNER INVITATION, WRITTEN IN GREEK
Roman Period, 2nd Century CE
Papyrus and ink [ECM 2314]
- (24) HSMNY VESSEL WITH BEAK-SHAPED
DOUBLE SPOUT
Old Kingdom, 2nd-3rd Dynasty, 2686–2160 BCE
Copper alloy [ECM 1837]
- (25) BUTTERFLY CRAMP (DOVETAIL)
New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, ca.1294–1279 BCE
Wood [ECM 1597]
- (26) STRING FIGURE WITH GLASS BEADED HAIR
First Intermediate Period, 2160–2055 BCE
[ECM 1843]



Animals were an integral part of Ancient Egyptian culture. Wild animals, animals domesticated for farming and pets played substantial roles in the life of people at all levels of society. As such, they were also essential for the afterlife. Pets were sometimes mummified and entombed with ceremony. Animals were also mummified, although with less care, to provide food in the next world.

The characteristics of animals were of symbolic importance, and it is thought that the zoomorphic depictions of gods developed from the 'otherness' of animals which implied a link to the divine. The religious symbolism of animals is evoked throughout visual and material culture. Sacred animals act as embodiments of a god whose characteristics can be expressed in that animal's form. For example, the lion manifests the aggression of the goddess Sakhmet.

Gods in animal form were worshipped using amulets and votive statues. In temples, they were additionally venerated in the form of a carefully selected living animal as the embodiment of the god. These sacred animals lived in the temple grounds and when they died they were mummified and interred in dedicated crypts and cemeteries known as Animal Necropolises. This was where the votive animals were also deposited. This custom demonstrates the value placed on the symbolic relationship between animals and gods, but some believe it may have contributed to the disappearance of native species, such as the African sacred ibis, from Egypt. An estimated four million ibises are believed to have been buried at a single necropolis at Saqqara, an ancient burial ground south-west of Cairo.



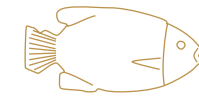
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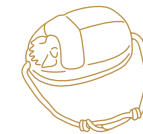
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- (27) RELIEF TILE DEPICTING A HORSE RIDER
(HORUS) SPEARING AN ORYX (SETH)
Roman Period, 300–395 AD
Faience [ECM 2166]

- (28) COSMETIC DISH IN THE
FORM OF A BOUND ORYX
*New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep
III, 1390–1352 BCE*
Steatite [ECM 799]

- (29) BOWL WITH MARSH SCENE
*New Kingdom, early 18th Dynasty,
1475–1448 BCE*
Faience [ECM 1646]

- (30) TILAPIA FISH VESSEL
*New Kingdom, mid-18th Dynasty,
ca.1450–1400 BCE*
Steatite [ECM 1785]

- (31) FIGURE OF A STRIDING IBIS
Late Period to Ptolemaic Period, 664–30 BCE
Copper alloy, travertine, and gold
[ECM 1692]

- (32) AMETHYST AND GOLD SCARAB RING
Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty, 1985–1773 BCE
Precious stone and gold [ECM 1846]



(9) CLOISSONÉ PECTORAL DEPICTING HORUS AND SETH



(13) CHALICE IN THE FORM OF A WHITE LOTUS



(32) AMETHYST AND GOLD SCARAB RING



(32) FRAGMENT OF A SCENE FROM THE BOOK OF AMDUAT



(26) STRING FIGURE WITH GLASS BEADED HAIR



(22) OFFERING BEARER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition is the result of the collaborative efforts between Eton College, the Barber Institute of Arts and Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum to better understand and share these fascinating artefacts. These thirty-two treasures have benefitted from research, analysis, conservation, exhibition and extended access throughout their long loan. We would like to thank the Barber Institute, University of Birmingham and the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum for their involvement in this collection.

Thank you to Betsy Bryan and Sanchita Balachandran for their enthusiastic support of this exhibition and their sharing of knowledge, materials and the publication *Selections from the Eton College Myers Collection*.

Thank you to Rob Shorrock, for supporting this exhibition from concept onward, his curatorial assistance and for hosting the private view.

Thank you to Emil and Mark Mnisko from Cambridge Design Studio for the exhibition and catalogue design, and to Langham Press for printing.

Thank you to the exhibition team who have made this celebration of the returned loans possible: to Bryan Lewis for his immeasurable practical help and solutions; Sara Spillett for ensuring these ancient pieces are safe and sound in their temporary home; to Helen Berwick and Marie Harrison for their fantastic contributions to research and layout; to Lucy Gwynn, Sally Jennings and Eleanor Hoare for editing. Lastly, to Lucy Cordingley for her calm and skilful guidance, and the million things she did to make this exhibition happen.

Rebecca Tessier



(30) TILAPIA FISH VESSEL



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