

ETERNAL EGYPT

Masterworks of Ancient Art from The British Museum

Guide for Families





 GUIDE FOR FAMILIES 

Eternal Egypt

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This guide has been written to help kids and grown-ups explore some amazing objects created thousands of years ago in ancient Egypt. Keep this guide after you leave. It has lots of information you can use when you look at Egyptian art in other museums.

A word of advice: Look carefully but don't touch. Oil from your skin or the tiniest bump on a glass case could damage these fragile objects. The only other rules to remember are: have fun and keep your eyes open. There's a lot to see and learn!



Find the section of the exhibition called EARLY DYNASTIC

The earliest objects in this exhibition are from the period known as Early Dynastic, the time before Egypt became a country with one king. This was more than 5,000 years ago—a very, very long time ago!



Game Piece in the Shape of a Lion.
Predynastic Period, ca. 3050 B.C.
Ivory, 1½ × 1½ in.

Find object #3, the **Game Piece in the Shape of a Lion**. (Hint: It's near the beginning of the exhibition and it's very tiny.) This little lion was once used like a checker in a board game. Its sides are worn from being played with so often. At some point, someone decided to make the lion into a magic charm (an amulet), so they put a hole through it so it could be worn as a necklace. The Egyptians believed that magic amulets could protect them. Do you have a good luck charm? Do you think it really works?

Most Egyptian art had a special purpose. Some things, like the game piece, were for everyday use. Other things—like scrolls with magical spells, mummies, and statues of gods, kings, and everyday people—were made for religious purposes. These works of art explained important ideas and had magical powers. They were often placed in tombs (where people were buried) and temples. Egypt had many temples, usually one temple for each of its many gods.



Animal Alert!

Animals were very important to the ancient Egyptians. They kept dogs, cats, and monkeys as pets. In this exhibition you will see gods with animal heads, animal symbols, and hieroglyphs (Egyptian writing) that look like animals.

Look for the following animals as you walk through the exhibition. Can you think of a magical power or special purpose for each animal and write it down here?

Lion (a different one than the game piece) _____

Snake _____

Fish _____

Bird _____

Monkey _____

Turtle _____



Find the section of the exhibition called

MIDDLE KINGDOM

Throughout Egyptian history, there were thirty families of kings, called dynasties. Sometimes several people claimed to be the king at once.

When that happened there was a lot of confusion. (Imagine if two people claimed to be president of the United States at the same time?) At the end of the Old Kingdom there was chaos, but finally Egypt was reunited under one king and a new period in its history began—the Middle Kingdom.

Find #29, the **Standing Statue of Sesostris III**, a very important king during the Middle Kingdom. Take a look at his face. How do you think Sesostris felt about being king? The Egyptian king, also called a pharaoh, had to maintain order among every living creature in the universe and also keep the gods happy. Some kings during the Middle Kingdom thought that this responsibility was a heavy burden. Maybe that is why Sesostris has such a serious look on his face. This statue may represent Sesostris's feelings toward the world. He lived during a time when people were not hopeful, so his expression is serious and sad.



Standing Statue of Sesostris III. From Thebes, Middle Kingdom, ca. 1874–1855 B.C. Granite, 56 in. high

We think of a portrait as a statue or picture of someone in particular. For the ancient Egyptians it was not always important that a portrait

look like a person. But this statue of Sesostris really does look like him. Look carefully at the shape of his jaw and the shape of his eyes. Nearby is another portrait of Sesostris. Compare the two faces. Can you tell it is the same man?

How would you show your feelings about the world in a portrait? Write down some thoughts here and when you get home, try to make your own self-portrait.

Keep an eye out for kings!

Not every king looked as serious as Sesostris III. Check out these other kings in the exhibition and write down something about how they look. Here are some words you might use to describe the attitudes of these kings: calm, peaceful, happy, angry, stern. You might think of other words to describe the way these kings look.

Head of Amenhotep III _____

Ramesses II _____

Amenemhat III _____

Find the section of the exhibition called NEW KINGDOM

During the New Kingdom, Egypt became huge, rich, and powerful. It was known as the “land of gold.” The kings built an empire—meaning that they conquered lots of other countries and took their land.

Symbols

Find #48, the **Stela of Amenhotep**.

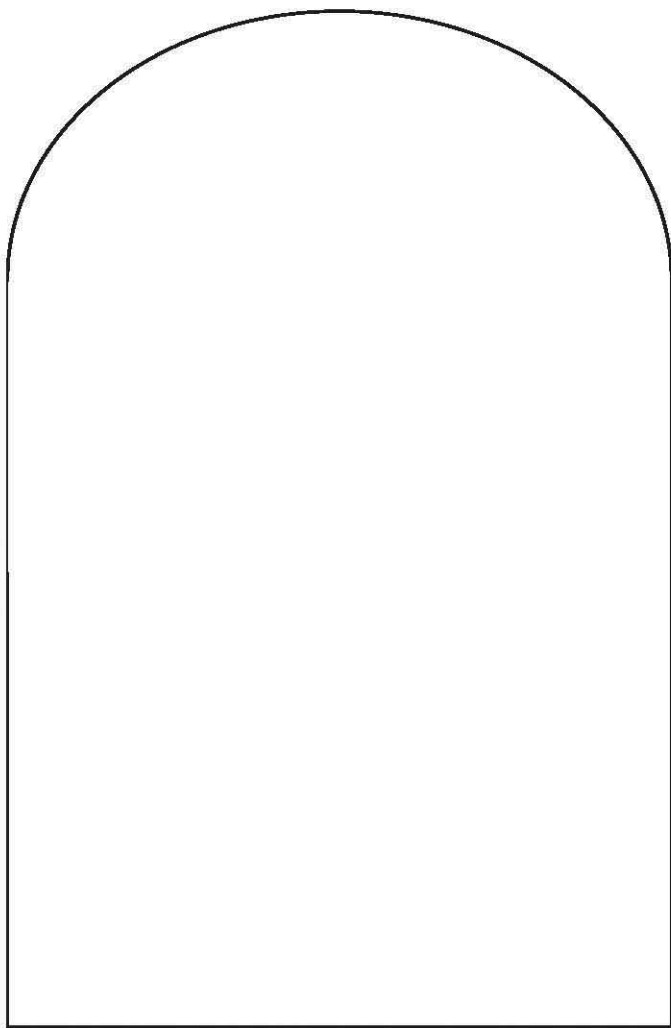
(Hint: A stela is a stone slab decorated with carved or painted figures and writing.)



Stela of Amenhotep.
New Kingdom,
ca. 1400–1390 B.C.
Limestone, traces of
paint, 35 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. high

This stela (pronounced STEE-la) was made for a man named Amenhotep, who was a priest. He had the same name as a king who ruled at this time. In ancient Egypt famous people and not-so-famous people sometimes had the same name—just like now! (Can you think of a famous person who has your name?)

A stela was often created to tell the story of a person's life. Use the space below to make a stela about your life.



The Egyptians had many magical symbols that they carved and painted onto their art. They are almost like a code you can use to “read” the art. Two of the most important symbols are on the Amenhotep stela.



Ankh

This hieroglyph means “life.” Today, people sometimes wear this symbol as jewelry and so did the ancient Egyptians. But only the gods, kings, and queens were allowed to hold this symbol because only they had the power to create life. On this stela, Osiris, king of the Underworld (on the right) and Wepwawet (on the left), a dog-headed god who kept watch over the dead, are shown holding the *ankh*. Can you find them?

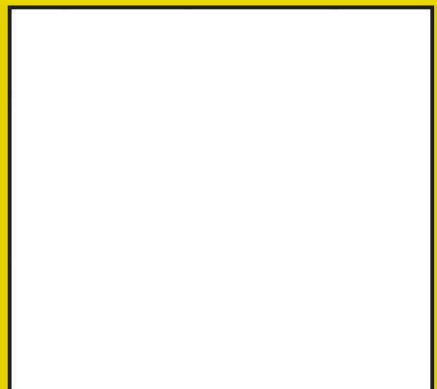


Wedjat-eye

The eye symbol comes from a myth about the god Horus who fought against his wicked uncle Seth. Seth ripped out Horus’s eye and tore it to pieces. Thoth, the god of wisdom, magically made the eye whole again (in Egyptian the word for wholeness is *wedjat*). The eye offered good health to the living and rebirth to the dead. Can you find it on this stela? It was carved to protect Amenhotep.

Symbol Search!

Look for the *ankh* and the *wedjat-eye* elsewhere in the exhibition. How many can you find? Can you think of a symbol that we use in the United States? Can you draw a picture of it here?





The Book of the Dead

The ancient Egyptians believed in life after death. To learn how they passed on to the Afterworld, find the area containing paintings from *The Book of the Dead*. Look for #102, **Ani's Judgment**.

Ani was one of the king's accountants. Like lots of other people, he was buried with a *Book of the Dead*—a scroll filled with magical spells to help him in the Afterworld.

Egyptians believed that before they could enter the Afterworld, they had to pass many tests and trials. This is a picture of Ani's trial. Ani is at the left with his wife Tutu, bending forward to show the gods



*"Book of the Dead," Papyrus of Ani:
Ani's Judgment. From Thebes,
New Kingdom, ca. 1295–1186 B.C.
Painted papyrus, 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 26 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.*

respect. Anubis, the god kneeling next to the scale, was the guardian of mummies, tombs, and cemeteries. Anubis has a dog head and pointy ears. He will help take Ani to the Underworld.

Ani's heart is on one side of the scale, and a feather that is the symbol of truth is on the other side. On the right side of the painting do you see the monster with a crocodile head, the front part of a lion, and the back legs of a hippopotamus? If Ani's heart is heavier than the feather, the monster will devour it to destroy his evil soul. Do you see the bird resting on a box to the left of the balance? It symbolizes Ani's soul. If Ani is judged innocent, his soul will fly free.

The judging gods are seated in thrones at the top of the painting. Thoth, the god with the bird head who is writing, records the judgment. Ani's heart balances perfectly with the feather! Now his mummy can pass into the Afterworld and his soul can go free.



Mummy Mask of Satdjehuty.
New Kingdom, ca. 1500 B.C.
Cartonnage, painted and
gilded, 13 in. high



Mummies

The ancient Egyptians believed that a person's spirit could live forever, but only if their dead body was preserved. So they became good at making mummies. The *Mummy Mask of Satdjehuty* (pronounced sat-ya-HOOT-ee) once went over the head of a mummy. The gold face and black hair were considered very beautiful. Made for a woman named Satdjehuty, the mummy and mask would have been buried in a tomb. Satdjehuty's spirit could return to the mummy to receive food, clothing, and other things her relatives might bring for her to use in the Afterworld.



**Find the
THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD
and LATE PERIOD part of
the exhibition**

After the New Kingdom, rulers from other countries conquered Egypt. It was a confusing time when as many as four people claimed to be king at once. This was called the Third Intermediate Period.

During this period, Egyptian artists became very skilled at using metal to make wonderful statues. Look for #115, the **Divine Consort or Queen**. This statue is made of bronze. The artist has put layers of gold and silver on top to make interesting patterns.

Have you noticed how many different materials ancient Egyptian artists used to make statues, pictures, and other objects? Can you list a few? Which materials were used for large objects and which for small?



Divine Consort or Queen. Late Third Intermediate Period, ca. 716–656 B.C. Bronze, gold and silver inlays, 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. high



We are coming to the end of the story.

**Find the PTOLEMAIC PERIOD and the
ROMAN OCCUPATION at the end of the exhibition**

A Greek family named Ptolemy (TOLL-e-mee) took over for a very long time. After that Egypt became part of the Roman Empire.

Find #141, **Sematawy Holding a Naos.**

Sematawy (sem-a-TAH-wee) placed this statue in a temple to show his devotion to the god Atum. Notice that the head is bigger than it should be for the size of the body. Experts think this man was made by two artists. The body was probably made by an ordinary sculptor who just left a block of stone where the head should be. Later the head was probably sculpted by a specialist hired by Sematawy to make a likeness of himself. Look carefully at the shape of the skull, the wrinkles in the forehead, and the creases around the mouth. Do you think the head is more lifelike than the body?

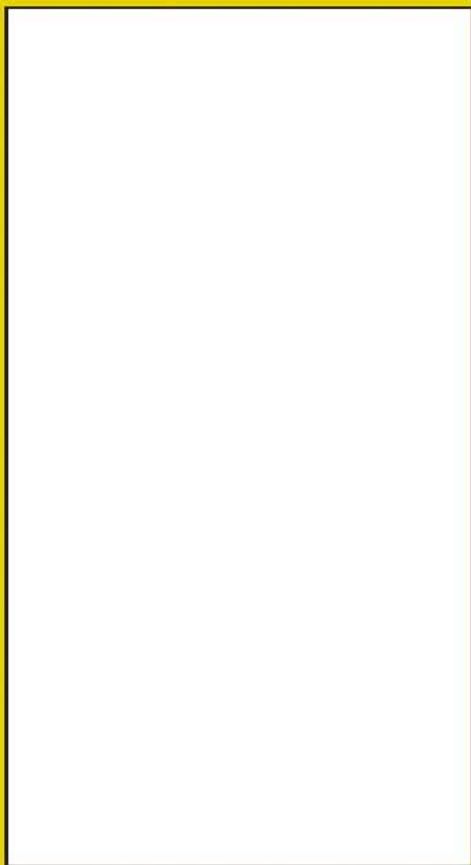


Sematawy Holding a Naos. Ptolemaic Period, mid-second to first century. Basalt, 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. high

The ancient Egyptian beliefs you've learned about in this exhibition were eventually replaced by new ways of thinking. Christianity and Islam were two important new religions in Egypt. Arab peoples spreading Islam conquered Egypt in the year A.D. 641. Hieroglyphic writing disappeared and the kind of art produced under the pharaohs was no longer made.

You have learned a lot about ancient Egypt, but there is much more to learn. The Egyptians had amazing myths, a fascinating system of writing, and many gods, kings, queens, and symbols we haven't even mentioned! The next time you're at the library or another art museum, check it out.

Remember, the more carefully you look, the more you will learn. One way to finish your visit to the museum is to take a minute to think about your favorite work of art. What is it? Why? Can you draw it here?



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American Federation of Arts
41 East 65th Street
New York, NY 10021
212.988.7700
www.afaweb.org

