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Made For Eternity, March 15, 2013-December 31, 2013

This selection from the Museum's ancient Egyptian collection presents objects made between 3700 BCE and 250 CE, organized by material: stone, ceramic, Egyptian faience, wood. The craftsmanship indicates that most of these objects once belonged to the upper and middle classes of ancient Egypt, with the more finely made (and thus more desirable) works owned by those of higher status. While the names of the artisans are no longer known to us, the materials they used and the techniques they employed tell us much about artistic practices that endured for many centuries. The quality of the craftsmanship also attests to the care and attention that they lavished on these objects, all of which functioned as important components of a complex system of Egyptian religious beliefs and ritual practices.

Support for *Made for Eternity* is provided in part by Shawmut Design & Construction.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Egyptian
Paint box, 1307-1070 BCE
Ceramic and pigment cakes
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1997.82A

Only a handful of paint boxes survive from ancient Egypt. This ceramic example has a sliding lid with a grip in the form of a genet, a small rodent-like creature. The genet's habitat of tall grasses and shrubs was painted on the lid as stylized papyrus thickets. The box features a hollow well for water and brush storage and holds seven pigment cakes of yellow ochre, Egyptian blue, calcium carbonate for white, hematite mixed with calcium carbonate to create a dark red, and two charcoal blacks. Painters used pigments such as these to decorate statuary and the walls of temples and tombs.

Egyptian
Sculptor's Model of a Woman, 332-30 BCE
Limestone
Anonymous gift 2011.40.2

Certain features of this relief suggest that it was used as a model for training sculptors in ancient Egypt. The grid incised on the back of the piece reveals that both sides were originally intended to be carved; the grid allowed the artist to compose the figure according to the Egyptian canon of proportions. The raised ledges at the top corners of the front indicate the original height of the stone, showing trainee sculptors how much stone they should cut away.

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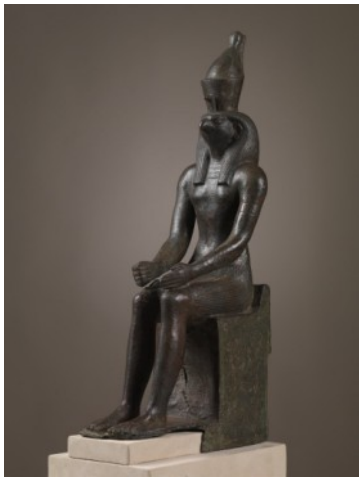
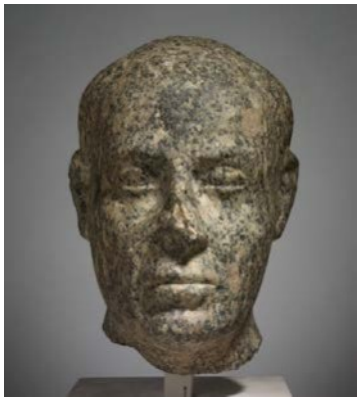
This relief depicts a woman wearing a vulture headdress, a type of headdress that appeared on images of goddesses and royal women as early as the Old Kingdom. The smooth area above the woman's brow is unfinished; in similar reliefs, this section was carved with locks of hair.



Egyptian
Temple god, 664-332 BCE
Bronze
Museum Appropriation Fund and Mary B. Jackson Fund 38.207

This statue of the falcon-headed Horus, the deity most closely associated with the living king, was produced by the lost-wax method of bronze casting. The sculptor made a beeswax model of the figure and encased it in clay; it was then fired, melting the beeswax and thereby creating a clay mold. Molten bronze was poured into the mold and allowed to harden, then the mold was chipped away and the statue polished.

Statues of deities such as this one were the focus of ritual activity in Egyptian temples, where the ruler and the priests interacted with the gods through their divine statues. This seated figure of Horus is depicted frontally, allowing him to participate in cult rituals and receive offerings.



Egyptian, Said to be from the area of Tanis (Northeast Nile Delta)
Portrait of a man, ca. 150-100 BCE
Granite
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 58.001

This head looks quite different from other sculptures of people in the gallery: the man is depicted with his natural hair, rather than a wig, and the furrows around his eyes, mouth, and forehead lend a more naturalistic appearance. These changes are partly explained by the Hellenistic influence in Egyptian art during the Ptolemaic Period, when this statue was made.

However, there are also many ways in which older Egyptian traditions of stone carving are visible in this sculpture, showing the continuity of traditions and skills over thousands of years. The back pillar visible behind the head is a stylistic feature of Egyptian sculpture from the earliest times. The man faces the front, showing no movement, another Egyptian characteristic. The granite used is extremely difficult to carve, yet the detailed modeling of the face demonstrates that the skill of Egyptian stone carvers had not diminished over the millennia.

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Egyptian
Funerary statuette of a man, 1991-1783 BCE
Wood (probably sycamore) and paint
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 11.033

Funerary statuettes, placed within or beside a coffin and intended to serve as a home for the deceased's soul, or ka, have been found in tombs of non-royal officials dating back to the Old Kingdom. Unlike works in stone, wooden statuary was produced unabated during the political disunity of the First Intermediate Period. Due to the scarcity of large timber, this figure was produced on a small scale and of separate parts. Wood, more easily worked than stone, allows for greater detail and individualization, seen here in the face. The now-empty eye sockets are missing their original inlays, which were probably made from colored stone.

Egyptian, From Meir
Model of a funerary boat, 2100-1900 BCE
Wood (probably sycamore) linen, and paint
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 14.491

Funerary objects were modeled after the supplies needed in the afterlife. This model boat, placed within a tomb, mimicked papyrus boats that sailed the Nile; note the bundled papyrus detailing painted on the stern. The use of wood allowed the artisan to create a more animated representation, as seen in the rowing figure. Such figures were important in the afterlife in their roles as servants. Here the deceased is transported on a pilgrimage to Abydos, the religious center of the god Osiris.

Egyptian
Head of a man, 2289-2246 BCE
Wood
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 25.031

While the body of the statue is missing, its head suggests the large size of the original sculpture, which would have been buried with its owner. Large pieces of wood, unusual in Egypt, were imported from what is modern-day Lebanon. The luxury status of wooden representations meant that only the wealthy could afford them, making this statue an object signifying high status. The qualities inherent in wood allowed Egyptians to create new forms of representation, and its soft surface allowed more expressive carving, seen here in the detail of the hair, brow, and lips. Wood, more easily worked than stone, allows for greater detail and individualization, seen here in the face.

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Egyptian
Cylindrical vessel, 2920-2150 BCE
Travertine (Egyptian alabaster)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 15.170

Travertine, the material of these vessels, was prized by the ancient Egyptians for its translucence and beautiful veining. The piece of stone from which a vessel was to be carved was chosen with care to maximize the decorative qualities of the veins, as is particularly visible on the squat jar. Travertine is also, however, an extremely hard material and difficult to work, especially with the copper tools used in making these vessels. The skill needed to produce such beautiful shapes and smooth finishes is considerable, and even more remarkable in these examples, given their extreme age.

The expense and difficulties of working with stone made it an important status marker for ancient Egyptians, and its permanence endowed it with reliigious significance. These vessels were deposited in the tombs of elite Egyptians as part of their funerary equipment.

Egyptian
Tall cylindrical vessel, 2920-2770 BCE
Travertine (Egyptian alabaster)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 15.172

Egyptian
Squat jar, 2770-2150 BCE
Travertine (Egyptian alabaster)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 15.176

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Egyptian, From the Fayum Oasis
Portrait of a woman, ca. 70 CE
Encaustic on wood
Gift of Mrs. Jesse H. Metcalf 17.060

"Fayum portrait" refers to a style of funerary panel painting named for the Fayum Oasis in Egypt, the region in which many examples were found. This style arose after the Romans conquered Egypt in 31 BCE, the final event in the transition of the eastern Mediterranean from Hellenistic to Roman rule. The Egyptian funerary practice of mummification was synthesized with Greco-Roman tradition of life-like portraiture, an example of the fluid nature of the cultural practices in the Roman Mediterranean. Depicting elite members of Hellenized Egyptian society, these painted panels were mounted over the faces of the mummified dead.

Fayum portrait painters worked in tempera (pigments mixed with animal glue) or encaustic (pigments mixed with either melted or emulsified wax). Tempera dries quickly and would have been applied very delicately, using extremely fine brushes. Portraits in encaustic were usually also painted with brushes, though painters working with hot wax often used a hard tool to blend tones and create texture and depth.

Egyptian, From the Fayum Oasis
Portrait of a Man, ca. 150-160 CE
Probably tempera on wood
Mary B. Jackson Fund 39.025

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Egyptian, From the Fayum Oasis
Portrait of a Man, ca. 260 CE
Probably tempera on wood
Mary B. Jackson Fund 39.026

Egyptian
Black-topped pot, 3700-3450 BCE
Ceramic (Nile silt clay)
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1999.55.1

Black-topped red-ware pots were formed from coils of clay that were joined together and smoothed by hand or with a paddle and anvil. By manipulating the firing conditions, Egyptian potters were able to oxidize the iron-rich clay, producing its characteristic bright red color. To create the black-topped effect, the pot was inverted and placed in sawdust or ash to cut off the oxygen supply around the rim.

Egyptian, From Abydos, excavated in 1895
Furniture Support in the Form of a Bull's Leg, ca. 2800 BCE
Hippopotamus ivory
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1999.55.2

This rare object from Egypt's earliest dynasty was excavated in 1895 from the royal cemetery at Abydos, in southern Egypt. A hippopotamus tooth carved into a bull's leg and patterned with stylized veining, this furniture support was originally equipped with a tenon, a projecting piece of wood that fit into a rod above. Leather thongs were fastened through the holes at the top to further secure the leg to the rod. A complete set of four such ivory bull's legs, fitted to rods, originally supported a chair, stool, bed, or gaming board of a First Dynasty king.

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Egyptian
Jar with water, plant, and animal motifs, 3450-3300 BCE
Ceramic (marl clay)
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2000.30

Decorated ware was often formed from marl clay, which is a typically fine clay that fires to a light red or buff color. Decorative scenes were painted with a dark red or brown pigment.

The consistency of style found across decorated ware indicates that these objects were likely produced in a limited number of workshops which traded them up and down the Nile. The scenes they feature are among the earliest examples of figurative painting from ancient Egypt. This example depicts the common motifs of a multi-oared boat and a horned desert animal; other decorated vessels from the period featured paintings of male and female figures on boats and hunts in the desert.

Egyptian
Figure of a woman, 3700-3450 BCE
Terracotta
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund and gift of friends and colleagues in honor of Florence Dunn Friedman 2000.82

This rare clay figure, dating to the Predynastic Period likely depicts a serving woman. Her abbreviated legs suggest that she may have been mounted on a base with other similar figures, creating a procession scene. The cavity on top of her head perhaps supported a basket of offerings for the deceased. Her thick curls retain the natural red color of the clay, differentiating them from her body, which was painted with a light slip. Figures such as this one were believed to serve the deceased in the afterlife, and became a consistent feature of elite Egyptian burials in subsequent periods.

Egyptian
Ptolemy II with ritual rattle (sistrum), 285-246 BCE
Granite
Museum Appropriation Fund 18.740

King Ptolemy II was of Macedonian rather than Egyptian descent, but this monument adheres to older Egyptian sculptural traditions, with the king's face shown from the side and his shoulders from the front. His body is an ideal of youth and strength, and he wears a traditional Egyptian crown. In his right hand he holds a sistrum, a rattle used in Egyptian ritual. A faience sistrum from an earlier period is displayed in this gallery.

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The technique employed here is sunk relief, a method of stone carving that the Egyptians used to decorate temple walls. The depth of the carving would have created shadows in the bright north African sunlight, allowing the details of the image to stand out far better than if they were executed in raised relief or painted. Here, the muscles of Ptolemy's torso and the shape of his face are clearly visible.

Egyptian, Possibly from the sacred animal catacombs at Tuna el Gebel
Goddess Maat, 664-525 BCE
Bronze
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1989.088

The goddess embodying truth, balance, and proper action, Maat pervaded all aspects of Egyptian culture throughout its 3000 years of history. Traditionally represented as a seated woman with an ostrich feather on her head, Maat sits on an altar in this example. Because Maat was closely tied to the ruler's role as lawgiver and maintainer of order, rulers were often depicted offering a figure of Maat to the gods.

This figure appears to be cast in three pieces: the altar, Maat, and the feather. The smooth and highly polished surface of the figure contrasts with the smaller areas of concentrated detailing of the ostrich feather, wig, broad collar, and openwork altar.

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Egyptian
Coffin and mummy of Nesmin, 250 BCE
Coffin: wood, gesso, gilding, paint, and colored glass
Museum Appropriation Fund and Mary B. Jackson Fund 38.206

The mummiform coffin of Nesmin, a priest of the fertility god Min, served as the final resting place for his mummy. The wooden panels that form the sides of the coffin's base and lid were dowelled together, while the shorter panels at the head and feet show dovetailing. The mask and beard, which signifies divinity, were carved from separate pieces of wood and then attached. A layer of gesso was applied to the wood, and the hand of more than one artist is evident in the painted scenes and columns of hieroglyphic texts.

The inscriptions on the lower portion of Nesmin's coffin lid provide his titles and genealogy. His father and many paternal ancestors had also served as priests of Min, and his mother played the sistrum (ritual rattle) in the service of this god. Nesmin's duties as a priest included clothing the statue of Min and caring for other gods' statues and their temple home.

The gilded face and deep blue hair present Nesmin as having successfully passed through the divine tribunal, and assimilate him with the god Osiris. The images of amuletic deities and lines of funerary spells, typical of Ptolemaic coffins from Akhmim in Middle Egypt, granted magical protection to the mummy of Nesmin and transported him into the landscape of the netherworld, where he hoped to enjoy the afterlife for eternity.

Egyptian, From Naga-ed-Der
Funerary stela of Heni, 2134-2040 BCE
Limestone and paint
Museum Appropriation Fund and Mary B. Jackson Fund 38.208

For a successful afterlife, Egyptians had to be regularly supplied with sustenance after death. The items seen on the right of this stela ensured that Heny would never go without food and drink. The slightly awkward proportions of Heny's figure are typical of monuments of the First Intermediate Period, when there was no centralized political power in Egypt. Current research suggests that the lack of royal control over artistic production during this time allowed artists to explore new methods of composition. The layering of multiple levels of relief on Heny's kilt is evidence of this experimentation, as are the craftsman's color choices: the green of the hieroglyphs uses a pigment not commonly seen before this period, while the striped border is also an innovation.

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Egyptian
Wadjet-eye, 305-30 BCE
Faience
Gift of William M. Grinnell 15.242

Faience was a favored material for Egyptian amulets, which were magically protective charms worn or carried on the body. The small size of amulets meant that they were particularly well suited for production in clay molds, which have been found during excavations. The wadjet-eye, a composite symbol of a human eye with the markings found around the eyes of Egyptian falcons, invoked the protection of the eye of the god Horus. Wound into the bandages of a mummy, this amulet was intended to preserve the body from decay and damage.

Egyptian
Ritual rattle (sistrum), 664-525 BCE
Glassy faience
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1995.050

A sistrum was a type of rattle used in the cult of goddesses such as Hathor, whose image appears on this object's handle. Sistra were also created in bronze or wood, so the use of faience in this example may indicate that it served a votive, as opposed to practical, function. The precise detailing of Hathor's wig and face was made by hand, after the sistrum was first shaped through hand carving or in a two-part mold. Microscopic analysis reveals marks from the artist's tools, and suggests that some areas may have originally received gilding or colored decoration. Bright green glassy faience was characteristic of Dynasty 26 production.

During religious festivals, priestesses or sometimes the king shook sistra to appease the violent aspects of the goddess's nature. In functional examples, metal disks on rods strung across the open space atop Hathor's head would have produced a rustling sound when shaken.

Egyptian
Winged Isis pectoral, ca. 1075-712 BCE
Faience
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1996.73.1A

This amulet, in the form of the winged goddess Isis, was originally sewn onto the linen bandages of a mummy. The goddess's wings spread across the mummy's chest (thus it is a "pectoral"), embracing and protecting the deceased in the afterlife.

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The pectoral was made in three pieces. A mold was probably used for the body, and the two wings made with either molds or templates. The delicate feathering on the wings was perhaps impressed by hand with the flat side of a blade before firing.

Egyptian
Shabti (funerary figurine) of Psamtek, 664-525 BCE
Faience
Anonymous gift 22.130

Like the sistrum, this pale green shabti (or funerary figurine) with matte finish is typical of faience workshops of Dynasty 26. The mummiform figurine was produced in two molds, creating the detailed striations of his wig, the cosmetic lines around his eyes, and the braiding on his beard. In a second step, nine rows of text were incised into the paste by hand. The inscription, adapted from a Book of the Dead spell, made the shabti effective for his owner: when the deceased, whose name was included in the spell, would be called upon to perform physical labor in the afterlife, the words of the text and the symbolic properties of faience would magically animate the shabti. The shabti would then answer "Here I am," and serve in his owner's place.

Egyptian
Hippopotamus, 2040-1638 BCE
Faience
Museum Appropriation Fund 29.119

The blue glaze on this hippopotamus figure seemingly contrasts with the naturalistic modeling of the face and ears, but it was purposefully employed to allude to the animal's riverine habitat in the marshes of the Nile. In using this glaze and covering the hippo's body with the images of plant and animal life, the artist symbolically represented the hippo immersed in the waters of the Nile and of Nu, the watery expanse of the primordial universe, which held the creative potential for life and rebirth. The Egyptians' wish for life after death may account for the inclusion of hippos such as this one in the tombs of Egyptian officials during the latter part of the Middle Kingdom.

The placement of hippo figures in tombs, sometimes in direct contact with the mummy, required that the animal's dangerous aspects be negated so that the deceased would not be physically harmed. To ritually restrict this hippo's movement in the afterlife, its legs—now restored—were broken off during the funeral.