

Wooden cosmetic spoon

Glass tube and applicator for eye paint

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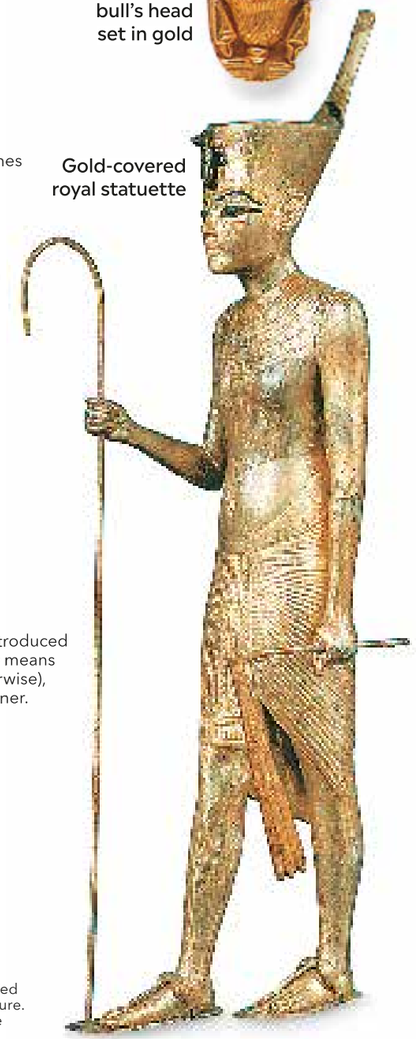
Earrings



Glass ear studs



Pendant of lapis lazuli bull's head set in gold



Gold-covered royal statuette

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Early **Egypt**

In the early Stone Age, people in Egypt lived high up on the land above the Nile. By about 5000 BCE, they were growing wheat and barley and raising cattle. They built villages of mudbrick houses on the flood plain and at the edges of the desert. The local rulers traded with nearby countries, grew rich, and started to form kingdoms. Excavations show that by 3500 BCE, people were already living in cities and had started to invent systems of writing. Recent studies have revealed that they had begun to mummify their dead as early as 4300 BCE. These bodies were then buried with their belongings, which reveal fascinating details of life in Egypt before the pharaohs came to power in c. 3100 BCE.



Ancient body

The earliest Egyptian bodies were buried in a "sleeping" position in a sandy pit. Although the sand dried and preserved the body, research shows that some bodies were also preserved by wrapping them in linen coated with tree resins. This man died about 5,000 years ago, killed by a stab wound.



Macehead

Most maceheads were used as weapons and have been found in burials. This large, well-carved example was probably made for ceremonial occasions.



Comb

The African elephant and hippo provided plenty of ivory for early craftworkers. Many objects were made of ivory as a result, such as this comb with an ibex carved on top.

Early mummies can have well-preserved hair, with hair extensions and evidence of hair dye being used as early as c. 3400 BCE.

EYEWITNESS

Earliest tattoos

In 2018, researcher Renée Friedman examined the Gebelein Man at the British Museum, UK, using a handheld infrared camera, and found tattoos etched on his upper right arm (right). She examined these motifs with a team, confirming that they were images of two animals – most likely of a sheep and a bull. Dating to more than 5,000 years, they are some of the oldest-known tattoos in the world.



Stone vase

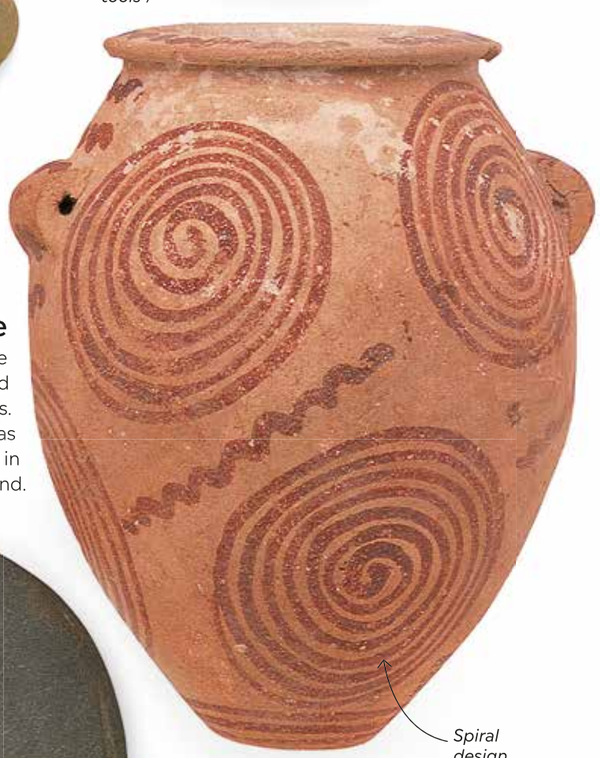
This vase was carved from a mottled stone called breccia, using copper or flint tools.





Necklaces

Early jewellers used semi-precious stones from the deserts, such as feldspar (green) and carnelian (orange). These early craftworkers were valued members of society and were well rewarded.



Pottery vase

Nile silt and clay from the edges of the flood plain provided materials for the early potters. This pot's tapering base was designed to fit in a stand or in a hollow in the ground.



Cosmetic palette

Some of the earliest surviving Egyptian objects are slate palettes. They could be rectangular, or carved in animal shapes, such as hippos, turtles, falcons, or this obese ram. Both men and women owned these palettes used for grinding minerals to make eye paint (see p. 58).

Life on the Nile

Desert covers more than 90 per cent of Egypt and the climate is hot and dry. Egyptian civilization was only able to flourish thanks to the River Nile, which flooded once a year, spreading rich, dark silt across the fields. Most Egyptians lived on the banks of the Nile in a fertile area called “Kemet” or the “Black Land”, after the colour of the silt. The barren desert beyond this strip of farmland was called the “Red Land”. The farming year began with the Nile’s annual flood in July. When the waters finally retreated in October, the farmers got to work sowing barley, flax, and emmer wheat. The result was usually a good summer harvest.



A riverside people

The Egyptians lived on a fertile strip on either side of the Nile. The flood plain is shown in green.



Famine

This statue shows a man begging for food. The extreme climate meant that the crops sometimes failed, leading to famine.



Sickle

Farmers cut the crops using simple tools, such as this wooden sickle with flint teeth. The stalks left behind would be gathered to make mats and baskets.



Winnowing fan

Two wooden fans like this one were used to separate the grain from the chaff (husk).



Winnowing

The grain and chaff were thrown into the air so that the lighter husks were blown away, leaving the grain to fall to the floor. This process is called winnowing.



Shaduf

The farmers dug canals to transport water to the fields. To raise the water to fill the canals, the Egyptians used a device called a shaduf (a trellis supporting a pole with a counterweight). The bucket was lowered into the river then pulled up with the help of the weight.

Cattle counting

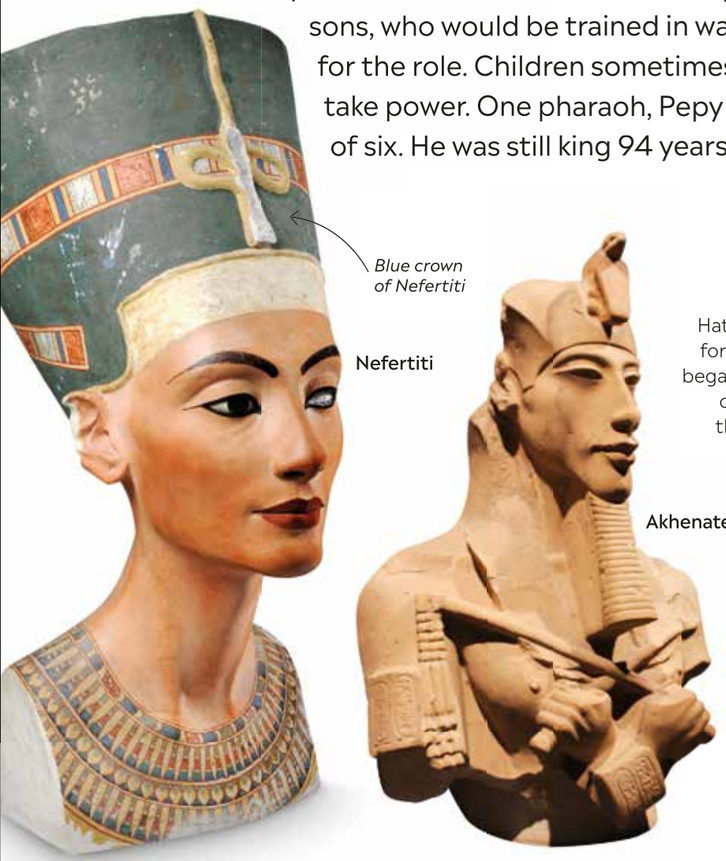
In Ancient Egypt, wealth was measured by the number of cattle a person owned. This tomb model shows Meketre, the mayor of Thebes in c. 2000 BCE. The officials are counting his cattle for tax records.



The oval enclosing the hieroglyphs that spell out a pharaoh's name (here, Tuthmosis III) is called a cartouche.

Famous **pharaohs**

From c. 3100 BCE, Egypt was ruled by powerful kings known as pharaohs. The title pharaoh comes from "*per-aa*" meaning "great house", which refers to the royal palace, and so also means "the one from the palace". The pharaoh was believed to be a god and his queen was a goddess. She was usually given the title of "Great Royal Wife", but at least 13 women are also known to have ruled with the title of pharaoh. On the pharaoh's death the throne usually passed to one of their sons, who would be trained in warfare and sport to prepare for the role. Children sometimes had to wait a long time to take power. One pharaoh, Pepy II, was crowned at the age of six. He was still king 94 years later.



Blue crown of Nefertiti

Nefertiti

Akhenaten

Akhenaten and Nefertiti

Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti ruled Egypt together and built a new capital city at Amarna. They even replaced traditional gods with the sun-god Aten, closed most temples, and took away power from the priests. Due to these drastic changes, thousands lost their jobs and there was unrest in the kingdom. After their deaths, Amarna was destroyed and Akhenaten's son Tutankhamun restored the old gods.

Hatshepsut

Female pharaoh Hatshepsut ruled Egypt for about 20 years. She began by ruling on behalf of her infant stepson, then ruled jointly with him from 1473 BCE.





Tutankhamun

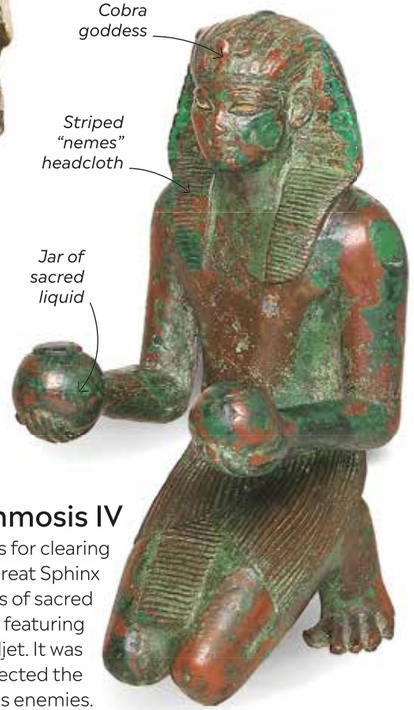
This ruler became pharaoh around the age of nine. The famous golden mask was found in his tomb (see p. 23), although recent re-examination of the inside revealed the name of its original owner – Nefertiti (his stepmother) who ruled before him.



Ceremonial beard

Ramesses the Great

In the 13th century BCE, Ramesses II reigned for 67 years. Although he built many monuments, he also put his name on buildings and statues created by other kings. This statue shows him wearing the striped royal headcloth called the "nemes", under a crown of cobras.



Cobra goddess

Striped "nemes" headcloth

Jar of sacred liquid

Tuthmosis IV

This king was famous for clearing the sand that had buried the Great Sphinx at Giza. He is shown holding jars of sacred liquid and wearing a headcloth featuring the cobra goddess Wadjet. It was believed that Wadjet protected the pharaoh by spitting fire at his enemies.

EYEWITNESS

A royal welcome for Ramesses II

King Ramesses II was issued an Egyptian passport, with his profession marked as "King (deceased)", so that his mummy could be taken to France for conservation in 1976. Arriving in a military jet, he received a royal welcome from researchers (below) in Paris.





Sphinxes

The sphinx was a mythological creature with a lion's body and the head of a ruler. Lions were associated with the sun-god and their strength represented the pharaoh's power. Sometimes sphinxes had other elements, such as the head and wings of a hawk, which symbolized Horus. Huge statues of sphinxes were placed in front of tombs to guard the pharaoh in the afterlife.

In control
This ivory statuette shows a sphinx holding an enemy by the head to represent the pharaoh's power.



The Great Sphinx at Giza
This is the largest of Egypt's many sphinxes and was carved around 4,500 years ago for the pharaoh Khafre.