treasures of
THE NICHOLSON MUSEUM
THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Edited by D.T. Potts and K.N. Sowada
Photographs by R.J. Workman
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Cover image: Diorite statue of General Horemheb
Probably from Memphis or Saqqara, Egypt; late 18th Dynasty, ca 1330 BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1864; Inv. R1138
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I first visited the Nicholson Museum several years ago, well before my arrival as Director of the University’s museums and art collection. Not having a background in archaeology, I entered as a layperson with a curiosity about the ancient world. Inside I was struck by the beauty and elegance of the artefacts. Exquisitely decorated Greek pottery and cast bronzes of Greek gods were displayed, along with finely drawn hieroglyphs on papyrus from ancient Egypt, brightly coloured faience fragments of almost contemporary design and confidently carved and painted portraits.

In one display case, my eye was caught by a small decorated pottery vessel, a chous, made around 400 BC, with a lively illustration of a young girl and her dog. In another, a poignant letter from a young man to his brother, written in carbon ink on a small piece of papyrus in the 2nd century AD, lamented the breakdown of their relationship. Each connected me to another time and place, but a time and place populated by people I recognised. I was enthralled.

Of course I am not alone in my response to the Museum’s collections. For centuries the ancient world has inspired and intrigued artists, scholars, designers and writers. Generations of students have used the Nicholson Museum as their reference point, providing them with the tangible evidence of these civilisations.

This is not a static collection. New finds, ongoing research and occasional acquisitions all add to the bank of knowledge about the art and archaeology of the eastern Mediterranean that is reflected in the Museum’s exhibitions and public programs. In particular, the Museum enjoys a strong and close association with the University’s Department of Archaeology. Recent archaeological work undertaken by the Department in the Mediterranean and the Near East has provided invaluable opportunities for students to gain fieldwork experience and has further strengthened the Museum’s holdings.

While the Nicholson Museum is well known to scholars, it is less familiar to the general community. We hope that this publication will bring new visitors to the Museum to encounter the art and the people of the ancient world.

I would like to thank the Chancellor’s Committee and the Alexander Cambitoglou Nicholson Museum Endowment Fund for the generous financial support that has made this publication possible. Honorary Curator Professor Dan Potts, Assistant Curator Dr Karin Sowada, Photographer Russell Workman and the many other contributors are to be congratulated for their work in bringing it to fruition. The forty-seven superb works presented here open a tantalising window into this unique collection. This book offers rich rewards, both for the expert and for those unfamiliar with the ancient world.

David Ellis
Director, University Museums
ANATOMY OF A COLLECTION

On 28 January 1860, Sir Charles Nicholson, Provost of the University of Sydney, addressed a letter to the Vice-Provost and Fellows of the University which began,

Gentlemen,

During my recent visit to Europe and in a journey along the valley of the Nile I was enabled to make a considerable collection of Etruscan, Greek, Roman and Egyptian antiquities.

I have always had it in contemplation to present, under certain conditions, this Collection to the University. I believe that the acquisition of a Museum of objects of the kind herein referred to is calculated materially to promote the objects for which the Institute is founded, as supplying materials interesting in themselves and most important in the illustration of various branches of historical philological and classical enquiry.

With this act Nicholson endowed what has remained for nearly one hundred and fifty years Australia's largest collection of antiquities from Greece, Italy, Egypt, the eastern Mediterranean, the Near East and Europe.

Charles Nicholson, born on 3 November 1808 in either Bedale, Yorkshire, or Cockermouth, Cumberland (the British Dictionary of National Biography and The Australian Dictionary of Biography differ on this point) was orphaned as a child and raised by a maternal aunt, Mary Ascough. After completing an M.D. at Edinburgh in 1833 he accepted an invitation from an uncle, William Ascough, a ship owner and merchant, to go out to the new colony of New South Wales. This he did but the death of his uncle in 1836 altered his life greatly. As the principal beneficiary of his uncle's estate, Nicholson became independently wealthy and although he continued for a time to practise medicine, he became heavily involved in numerous other activities – commercial, political, scholarly and philanthropic. Beginning in 1836 Nicholson was associated with the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, where he initially held the curatorship of its small museum. Although it was originally conceived as a natural history museum, a donation of coins, most of which were Greek and Roman, was received in 1839 from Rupert Kirk. In the same year John Saunders, a Sydney Baptist minister, delivered a lecture on palaeography, and several years later spoke on the pyramids of Egypt. There was a real feeling that the colony of New South Wales lacked museum collections of archaeological material from the great centres of civilisation then being increasingly explored by Europeans in Egypt, Italy, Greece and the Holy Land. A desire to see more benefactions of the sort made by Kirk began to emerge.

In 1840 Nicholson became involved with the Australian Museum. In his capacity as Speaker of the Legislative Council, Nicholson was automatically one of its twelve official Trustees. Nine years later he presented a number of casts of ancient sculpture to the Australian Museum which at that time was amassing collections in both natural history and fine arts. As Vice-Provost of the University of Sydney, Nicholson had the Secretary of the University write to the Museum Committee in 1852, inquiring whether a transfer of the Australian Museum and its grounds to the University might be entertained. Although Nicholson's
suggestion was politely rebuffed, there can be little doubt that he had the establishment of a University museum very much in mind when, in 1856, he set off on a three-year sojourn which included visits to both Egypt and Italy.

For the University of Sydney, and more specifically for what was to become, four years later, the Nicholson Museum, 1856 was the *annis mirabilis* during which Nicholson acquired the lion’s share of those antiquities eventually bequeathed to the institution he had served since his appointment on Christmas Eve 1850, to the University’s first Senate. The collection, brought to the University in April 1860 from Nicholson’s home in Darling Point, was initially installed in three rooms adjacent to the Southern Vestibule, underneath the clock tower. *The Sydney Morning Herald* announced the installation of ‘The Museum of Antiquities at the University of Sydney’ in an article published on 21 September 1860 and in December of that year Edward Reeve was appointed the Museum’s first curator.

In the course of the Museum’s life, a number of curators have superintended the expansion of the collections, beginning with Edward Reeve (1860–1, 1863–75, 1888–9) who compiled the first catalogue of the Museum, published in 1870. Greek and Etruscan ceramics, Latin inscriptions, Egyptian statuary and papyri, Villanovan *fibulae*, Roman glass and lamps – these along with an autographed letter of Louis XV, medieval candlesticks, and letters patent of Edward I from 1287, are just some of the hundreds of objects which Reeve, a former journalist and eventual police magistrate in Gosford, was called upon to catalogue.

After its establishment, the Nicholson Museum received donations from several members of the Sydney *intelligentsia* including Professor John Smith, first Professor of Chemistry at the University, and Sir John Young, Governor of New South Wales (1861–7). In 1888 the Nicholson Museum acquired its first objects from excavations conducted in Egypt by the Egypt Exploration Fund. These came as recompense for financial contributions made by
the University to the Fund's excavations at Bubastis in Lower Egypt. More objects were to follow from the Fund, including material presented eleven years later from Sir Flinders Petrie's excavations at the cemeteries of Diospolis Parva, followed by finds from Abydos (1901–2) and other sites in the ensuing years.

The year 1898 witnessed the publication of a catalogue of the Museum’s Greek and Etruscan ceramics and Greek and Roman lamps by Louisa Macdonald, M.A., founding Principal of Women’s College (1892–1918) and a Classics graduate of University College London. But this was not the only major event in the life of the Nicholson Museum associated with the end of the century. The Challis Bequest, received in 1890, enabled the University to move ahead with the construction of the South Wing of what is today The Quadrangle. Completed in 1909, the South Wing construction included the three rooms which, ever since, have been identified as the Nicholson Museum. But the move from the original rooms under the clock tower proceeded by fits and starts, beginning in 1910. As late as 1926 some of the Nicholson space was still being occupied by the Department of Architecture, much to the consternation of Honorary Curator W. J. Woodhouse, who had taken charge of the collection in 1903. Under Woodhouse’s stewardship, the Nicholson’s holdings expanded greatly. Ever more Egyptian material from the Egypt Exploration Fund; finds from Ur in Mesopotamia sent by C. Leonard Woolley; a portion of the Cesnola Collection of Cypriot antiquities purchased by Woodhouse; and nearly four hundred plaster casts of ancient sculpture, were all creating enormous pressure on the space available to the Museum. Finally, on 5 October 1926, the Nicholson Museum was formally opened in its ‘new’ premises.

Woodhouse was a Classicist in the broadest sense of the term, with extensive archaeological experience in Greece as well as a gift for conveying the excitement of Classical literature and history to generations of students, and there can be little doubt that his personal contribution to the formation of the Nicholson Museum collection was profound. During Woodhouse’s tenure the Museum received its final Nicholson benefaction, this time the so-called ‘Nicholson Hermes’, a statue which was given by Nicholson’s three sons to the University in 1934, which remains one of its most striking pieces.

Woodhouse was succeeded by two important figures, each of whom remained Curator for but a short period of time. Samuel Angus (1937–8; 1941–2), Professor of New Testament and Historical Theology at St Andrew’s College, University of Sydney, oversaw the acquisition of the A.B. Triggs coin collection, consisting of over six hundred Greek and Roman coins; the Deissmann Egyptian ostraka; and a number of objects, including duck weights, a cylinder seal, and several cuneiform inscriptions from Iraq. J. Enoch Powell, (1938–9), Professor of Greek and eventually known around the world as an outspoken British parliamentarian, was responsible for the acquisition of, among other things, five Greek papyri from Oxyrhynchus, one of which was a fragment of the Iliad.

But it was A.D. Trendall, appointed as Powell’s successor in 1939, who did more than anyone else up to that point in time to cement the Nicholson Museum’s position within the University of Sydney. In the nearly fifteen years of Trendall’s tenure, two editions of a new handbook on the Museum were published (1945, 1948); the Association of Museum Friends (now the Society of the Friends of the Nicholson Museum) was created (1946); and the Department of Archaeology was founded (1948). Two Campanian vases, purchased with
funds donated in memory of Edward Woodhouse, were also acquired by Trendall. These pieces were attributed by Trendall to a hitherto unknown painter, whom Trendall named the ‘Nicholson Painter’, a fitting testimony to the Museum’s founder.

After Trendall’s departure to the Australian National University, J.R.B. Stewart, a distinguished Cypriot specialist, succeeded him and greatly expanded the Museum’s Near Eastern and Cypriot holdings. The next great change in the Museum’s fortunes, however, occurred after Stewart’s untimely death. With the appointment of Alexander Cambitoglou to the Honorary Curatorship in 1963, a four-year long re-installation of the displays, a complete renovation and refit of the lighting and ceiling, and a new colour scheme for the walls were undertaken, culminating in a festive opening on 23 September 1966. After a long and distinguished tenure as Honorary Curator, during which many major acquisitions were made – particularly of South Italian vases – Cambitoglou retired in 2000, having also retired as Professor of Classical Archaeology some years earlier.

Almost one hundred and fifty years after the Museum’s foundation we have great pleasure in offering this small sampler of ‘treasures’ from the Nicholson Museum’s holdings. Some of the objects selected for inclusion here formed part of Sir Charles Nicholson’s original gift, while others were acquired subsequently. All bear witness to the ongoing interest in the peoples and cultures of Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Egypt and the Near East which has been a feature of the University of Sydney since its creation. No other museum in Australia can boast such a large collection of antiquities from this part of the world, and no other university in Australia teaches as broadly and conducts fieldwork in so many parts of this region, so vital for an understanding of much that is central in society today.

Political events during the past two years have led some commentators to speak of a ‘clash of civilisations’. This is particularly unfortunate as, notwithstanding the many wars that have taken place during the past five thousand years in the area represented by the holdings of the Nicholson Museum, there is just as much evidence of a ‘dialogue among civilisations’, at every level, as there is of conflict. In showcasing the civilisations that inhabited the region between Europe and the Hindu Kush, the Nicholson Museum offers a perspective on the extraordinary humanity of our ancestors, on their artistic creativity, on their technical ingenuity and on their spiritual preoccupations. It is not an anthropology museum, but it is a window on the historical anthropology of worlds long gone; worlds that remain with us, however, in the form of their material creations.

With an inventory of nearly twenty-five thousand objects, we offer here but a minute selection of some of the pieces we feel best illustrate the creativity of the ancient peoples of the Mediterranean, Aegean and West Asian sub-areas of the world. Whether or not one has visited Ur, Sardis, Amarna, Corinth or Rome, these pieces inspire a sense of wonder about the human past, a past to which we are all heirs, regardless of which part of the Earth we may call home.

– DTP
17 September 2003

1 The unpublished manuscript, History of the Nicholson Museum of Antiquities, University of Sydney, Part One 1860–1945, by Catherine A. Lawler (completed March, 1990) was used in the preparation of this essay.
CURATORS OF THE NICHOLSON MUSEUM

Edward Reeve  
Curator, December 1860–September 1861

Charles Watt  
Curator, October 1861–October 1862

Edward Reeve  
Curator, November 1863–October 1875

From 1875–1903 the Museum was managed by two committees and four Curators, whose terms averaged three years: the Museum was without a Curator from 1896 to 1901.

Henry W. Willgoss  
Curator, June 1882–December 1886

William S. Mayer  
Junior clerk (temporary appointment), February 1887–April 1888

Edward Reeve  
Curator, May 1888–May 1889 (died)

Laurens Armstrong  
Assistant Lecturer in Classics and Curator, December 1889–95

Frederick Lloyd  
Assistant Lecturer in Latin and Curator, February 1902–August 1903 (died)

From this point, with one exception the Curatorship was an honorary position.

William John Woodhouse  
Professor of Greek and Honorary Curator, August 1903–October 1937 (died)

Frederick A. Todd  
Professor of Latin and Acting Honorary Curator in 1935, during Woodhouse’s absence overseas, and during part of Powell’s term

Samuel Angus  
Professor of New Testament and Historical Theology at St Andrew’s College and temporary (paid) Curator, October 1937–September 1938 (overlapping with Powell’s term), then Honorary Curator, 1941–2 during part of Trendall’s term

J. Enoch Powell  
Professor of Greek and Honorary Curator, March 1938–August 1939

Arthur Dale Trendall  
Professor of Greek and additional chair as Professor of Archaeology from 1948. Honorary Curator, September 1939–54. Absent on war service March 1942–mid-1944

Guy R. Manton  
Acting Honorary Curator, March 1942–mid-1944 during Trendall’s war service

James R.B. Stewart  
Senior Lecturer, then Professor of Middle Eastern Archaeology and Honorary Curator, 1954–62 (died)

Alexander Cambitoglou AO  
Senior Lecturer, then Professor of Archaeology, 1963–89, and Honorary Curator, 1963–December 2000

Daniel T. Potts  
Edwin Cuthbert Hall Professor of Middle Eastern Archaeology and Honorary Curator, January 2001–present

THE NEAR EAST

The Near Eastern collection spans a broad geographical area, from the Mediterranean to the Indus Valley. Objects from over sixty-four different sites throughout this vast area, from many periods of human activity, are represented. This diversity owes much to the foresight of those curators who sought to develop a representative teaching collection by establishing links with many archaeological institutions and scholars working in the region.

As the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sydney grew, a formal relationship was established in the 1950s with Kathleen Kenyon’s legendary expedition at Jericho. Hundreds of objects from Jericho, spanning 7000 BC to 1550 BC, form the largest acquisition in the Museum from a single site in the Near East.

Excavations at places like Jericho were fuelled initially in the 19th and 20th centuries by interests in the Bible lands and sites associated with the Biblical narrative. Much of the Nicholson Museum’s Near Eastern collection reflects this perspective. However, many archaeologists, including those from the University of Sydney, are now pushing the frontiers of knowledge by excavating in lesser known regions such as Central Asia, Arabia and Iran.
CLAY-PLASTERED SKULL

Fragments of a skull (missing the mandible) plastered together, shell inlay used for eyes
Height 14.9 cm Width 16.6 cm (ear to ear) Depth (front to back) 20.15 cm
From Jericho; Levantine Pre-Pottery Neolithic B Period, 8th millennium BC
Donated by the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem; Inv. 57.03
(Field No. D117/2000)

Jericho lies in a lush oasis near the floor of the Jordan Rift Valley and it was here that some of the earliest farming villages in the world first developed. During the change from a hunting and gathering lifestyle to one of settled agricultural communities, societies experienced profound transformations as people had to learn new ways to live together and to organise their social relationships. This resulted in new forms of spiritual practice and ritual. Among these were elaborations of burial cults.

In certain cases skulls were removed from their bodies after death, usually when the body had decomposed. The skulls were then decorated with plaster modelling and various kinds of ornament to resemble a living face. Several plastered skulls of this type have been found at Jericho, as well as at other sites in the southern Levant.

The Nicholson skull is that of a juvenile. The lower jaw is missing, which is a common feature of similar Pre-Pottery Neolithic B skulls, but the plaster has been applied regardless, in the shape of a complete living head. This has created an unusual impression of foreshortening. Bivalve shells have been placed to indicate the eyes and the plaster was originally decorated with red pigment.

It is believed that the practice of plastering human skulls was carried out to bridge the gap between the living and the dead. It was common in the Neolithic periods in Western Asia for people to integrate the dead with their own communities by burying the body within the village, often under floors and benches in the houses where they may once have lived. It seems that the ornamentation of skulls was a continuation of this practice which may have served an important social function by creating the 'return' of selected ancestors back into the world of the living. — AV/GB

Further reading
CYLINDER SEAL

Calcite, surface slightly polished
Length 2.6 cm  Diameter 0.9 cm
Provenance unknown; ca 2700–2500 BC
Probably acquired from the Iraq Museum, Baghdad; Inv. 62.772

One of Charles Dickens’ most lovable characters, the irrepressible Mr Pickwick, is described as wearing ‘a gold watch-chain, and seals, depended from his fob’. Seals – devices to authenticate documents, witness transactions, guarantee payments, and generally identify the bearer – have been used for thousands of years from about 3500 to 330 BC. They often took the form of a small cylinder with a decorative pattern or scene engraved on the outside which could be rolled over the moist surface of a tablet, door lock or jar stopper of clay when identification, ownership and/or security was required by an individual or an institution (e.g. a temple or palace) to protect property. Such cylinder seals, as they are called, could be made of almost any durable material, from baked clay or shell, to bone and stone of every conceivable variety.

Although cylinder seals originated in Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is today southern Iraq, their use eventually spread from Bactria and Margiana (Afghanistan, Uzbekistan) in the east, to Egypt in the west, and from Urartu (Armenia) in the north to Magan (Oman) in the south. Sumerians, Akkadians, Hittites, Elamites and many other peoples throughout Western Asia used cylinder seals, though not every member of society owned a seal, any more than every Englishman in Victorian England owned a seal like Mr Pickwick.

Among the cylinder seals in the Nicholson Museum is this calcite example showing a typical ‘contest scene’ in which a nude ‘hero’ on the left, appears attacking a rampant lion. The hero, who faces right, holds an unidentified object in his left hand and a longer dagger or short sword with an elaborate, crescentic pommel, in his right. The hero’s prey is one of a pair of symmetrically opposed lions shown attacking a rampant bull whose head is twisted around, facing left. On the far right a third, standing lion attacks a rampant caprid (perhaps a short-haired, wild sheep) with long, curving horns.

Contest scenes such as these were particularly popular in Sumer (southern Iraq) during the first half of the third millennium BC, particularly in the so-called Early Dynastic II and IIIa periods, roughly 2700–2500 BC. A strikingly similar weapon with a crescentic pommel, such as the one wielded by the nude hero, was found by Sir Leonard Woolley in the grave of Meskalambug at the Royal Cemetery of Ur. Many examples also appear on Bronze Age stelae in South Arabia (Yemen), where the type may well have originated. – DTP

Further reading
A.D. Trendall, Handbook to the Nicholson Museum, 2nd ed. (Sydney, 1948), 37;
P.H. Merrillees, Cylinder and stamp seals in Australian collections (Burwood, 1990), 70–1;
STAMP SEAL

Steatite, broken along the top and lower right-hand corner
Length 2.4 cm  Width 2.3 cm
From Harappa (modern Pakistan); ca 2300–1900 BC
Acquired from the Government of India in 1948; Inv. 48.71 (Field No. 2811)

In the 1920s, excavations at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa in what is today Pakistan revealed the existence of a previously unknown riverine civilisation which ranks alongside Egypt, Mesopotamia and China as one of the great centres of Bronze Age cultural development in the Old World. Inspired by these discoveries, Professor A.D. Trendall, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Curator of the Nicholson Museum, wrote to the Director-General of Archaeology in India on 30 May 1947 requesting ‘a small representative collection of the antiquities from the Indus Valley for display purposes’. That request was generously granted by the Government of India and on 12 April 1948, fifty-two objects, ranging from sherds of painted pottery to faience bangles, flint blades and terracotta figurines, arrived in Australia.

No object in that collection is more representative of the Indus Valley or ‘Harappan’ civilisation than the partially broken, square stamp seal with a raised, perforated ‘boss’ (handle) shown here. The Nicholson seal was excavated at Harappa by M.S. Vats, who worked there in the 1920s and 1930s. It bears the original excavation number 2811 painted on its side, and Vats’ report tells us precisely where it came from (Area F, Square N 9/13, Trench III, Stratum V, depth 14 feet 4 inches).

Unlike their Mesopotamian contemporaries who preferred to use cylinder seals when sealing documents or goods (cf. p. 18), the ancient Harappans used stamp seals, thousands of which have been found in excavations at numerous sites throughout western India and Pakistan. The sealing face is decorated with what is traditionally termed a ‘unicorn’ – probably an aurochs (Bos primigenius primigenius) in profile showing only one horn – facing left, standing before a ‘double stand’. The folds of skin on the animal’s neck are clearly shown and its head and neck are slightly raised and extended. Above the animal we can just make out the very bottom strokes of three signs, the bulk of which have been broken off, in the Indus Valley or ‘Harappan’ script. An aurochs before a double stand is frequently encountered on Harappan seals, but neither the iconography nor the script itself can be understood. – DTP

Further reading
GRANULATED GOLD EARRING

Gold, with granulated decoration, soldered wire loops
Maximum diameter 3.2 cm  Maximum thickness 1.0 cm
From Tell el-Ajjul, Palestinian Autonomous Zone; Levantine Middle Bronze Age IIC, ca 1650–1550 BC
Purchased from Hilda, Lady Petrie in 1950; Inv. 50.376 (Field No. Hoard 1313, no. 86b)

This gold earring was part of a pair found in a hoard of gold jewellery and figurines by William Matthew Flinders Petrie during his excavations at Tell el-Ajjul in modern Gaza. The excavations generated much excitement because they produced the largest amount of gold jewellery ever found at any site in the Holy Land. This, coupled with the fact that it was at the time the largest known southern city, increased speculation that Ajjul was ancient Sharuhen, stronghold of the Hyksos kings of the 15th Dynasty, foreigners who ruled northern Egypt from their eastern Delta capital, Avaris (modern Tell el-Dab’a).

The hoard was one of several found in City II, probably built during the reign of one of the Hyksos kings and using conspicuous Egyptian building techniques. The inhabitants of the city clearly possessed considerable wealth, largely Egyptian in origin, which they apparently deposited in pits under floors or in walls. The cache in which this earring was found was dug into the wall of a house in the centre of the city. Due to the nature of excavation techniques in the 1930s it is difficult to be precise about the date at which the hoard was deposited. City II has been variously dated by scholars to between 1650–1550 or between 1550–1450 BC.

Petrie interpreted the hoard to be that of a metal dealer, largely because he noted that one figurine and a pendant were rolled into a lump, possibly for re-melting. He also felt that some objects might have been a century or two older than others. This lack of cohesion in the group led him to picture a ‘wandering Syrian trader’ who had deposited the treasure in a wall for safe-keeping. More recently hoards of jewellery like those found at Ajjul have been interpreted as gift offerings, presented to deities by the elite.

The earring itself is of bright pure gold. The loops are of paler gold, and according to Petrie’s original publication these were soldered with silver, but this is not evident from the piece. The edging is of twisted flattened gold wire. The plate is bossed up to support the granules that are all sweated on without solder. The technique of granulation (soldering small grains of gold onto the surface of the ornament) originated in Mesopotamia and arrived at Byblos, Lebanon in the 19th century BC. Its appearance at Ajjul in the 17th century BC attests to the influence of Syrian goldwork, although the granulated crescents are unique to the site. – JLL

Further reading
ZEBU VESSEL

Ceramic, chip missing from the nose
Height 19.0 cm  Length 30.7 cm
From Iran; ca 1300–1100 BC
Purchased in 1986; Inv. 86.09

Visitors to Iran who expect to see nothing but desert and dust are invariably amazed when they enter the lush forests and green, sub-tropical environment of Gilan on the southwestern side of the Caspian Sea. It is here, in a region south of the town of Lahijan, that Amlash is situated, a name used for many years by antiquities dealers to describe the sort of stylised, zoomorphic ceramic vessel illustrated opposite which Tehrani antiquities dealers acquired from clandestine excavations in Gilan.

In 1961–2 Professor E.O. Negahban of the University of Tehran discovered a cemetery containing numerous examples of such vessels at Marlik, in the foothills of the Elburz mountains northeast of Rudbar, and since that time the spurious name ‘Amlash’ has given way to that of ‘Marlik’. Dated by scholars variously to anywhere from 1200 to 600 BC on the basis of jewellery, fibulae and pottery, the Marlik graves contain Elamite and Common Style Mitanni cylinder seals that suggest a date range of ca 150–200 years between the 14th and early 12th centuries BC.

This example represents a standing zebu (*Bos indicus*) bull with short legs, large hump, straight back, and a protruding, open spout, obviously meant for pouring liquid. No fewer than seventeen similar vessels, now in the Iran National Museum, were found by Negahban at Marlik.

The zebu bull features in the iconography of Iran from the Bronze Age onwards but it was undoubtedly in the Zoroastrian religion of the Achaemenids and their pre-Muslim successors that the bull figures most prominently. In one of the Zoroastrian creation myths, *Ewagdat* the bull was created by Ahura-Mazda, the chief deity of the Zoroastrian religion, along with Gayomard, the first human. Another bovid called *Hadayaosh* figures in yet another Zoroastrian creation story and in the *Gathas*, the cow is the symbol of the good animal world and a metaphor for ‘vision’ or the ‘discernment of truth’. In the Zoroastrian philosophy, summed up by the phrase, ‘good thoughts, good words, good deeds’, ‘good thoughts’ are considered a spiritual incarnation of cattle. Cattle were also important in animal sacrifice, and cattle urine was used in offerings, according to the Avesta. Negahban believed that the zebu vessels were a ‘symbol of power and fruitfulness’ for the people of ancient Marlik. – DTP

Further reading
BIRD’S NEST BOWL PALETTE

Ivory, burnt anciently
Length 11.2 cm Width 5.1 cm Thickness 1.1 cm
From Room S 10, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud (modern Iraq); 9th–7th century BC
Acquired from the Institute of Archaeology, London, in 1959; Inv. 59.04 (ND 7648)

Early in his reign, Assurnasirpal (883–859 BC) moved the capital of Assyria from Assur to a
more central location at Nimrud (Akkadian Kalhu, Biblical Calah), about 30 kilometres south
of the modern city of Mosul, on the left bank of the Tigris. The city wall of Nimrud encloses
an area of 4.6 square kilometres, in the southeastern corner of which is a mound, known
locally as Tell ‘Azar, where an ekal masharti or ‘review palace’ was built covering 60,000 square
metres. Christened ‘Fort Shalmaneser’ by its British excavators, the building was used inter alia
as a repository for the booty that flowed into the empire during the 8th and 7th centuries BC
as Assyrian conquests multiplied inexorably. As Sargon II (721–705 BC) said in the entrance
to Room U in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud,

‘The plunder of cities (acquired through) the success of my weapons which I hurled against the foe
I shut up therein and filled it to bursting with luxuries’.

Of all the luxuries brought back to Nimrud and stored in Fort Shalmaneser, none are as
well-known as the magnificent ivories found by Max Mallowan (1904–78) and David Oates.
The Nicholson Museum holds six ivories from Fort Shalmaneser, including this Phoenician-
style bird’s nest bowl palette from Room S 10, the same room in which a small archive of
cuneiform tablets belonging to the queen’s shakintu, ‘woman manager’, was found.

The palette, discoloured from exposure to burning, consists of a small bowl, broken in the
centre and convex on the underside, with a bird, wings outstretched, framing the upper
left-hand and right-hand sides. The surface of the bowl rim is incised with concentric circles
and rectangles. The palette handle is decorated with a carved sphinx, facing left. The sphinx
is depicted with the right forepaw raised, above a long-stemmed lily, resting on the volute of
a ‘sacred tree’. The sphinx wears a double crown, representing the unification of Upper and
Lower Egypt.

Sphinxes associated with sacred trees were popular in the ivory-carving workshops of
Phoenicia, and it is from this area that our piece undoubtedly comes. Nevertheless, the
Nicholson ivory is unique, though a similar piece with couchant sphinx and papyrus flowers
in place of birds is known from a late 7th century BC context at Sultantepe, near Harran in
southeastern Turkey. — DTP

Further reading
G. Herrmann, The small collections from Fort Shalmaneser (London, 1992), 71 and pl. 30;
on the ivories generally, see R.D. Barnett, A catalogue of the Nimrud ivories, 2nd ed.
(London, 1975); I. Winter, ‘Phoenician and North Syrian ivory carving in historical context:
Questions of style and distribution’, Iraq 38 (1976), 1–22; O. Pedersén, Archives and libraries
in the ancient Near East, 1500–300 B.C. (Bethesda, 1998).
IVORY PLAQUE

Ivory, mended from fragments
Length 8.4 cm Width 4.45 cm Thickness 0.6 cm
From Room SW 37, Fort Shalmaneser, Nimrud (modern Iraq); 9th–7th century BC
Acquired from the Institute of Archaeology, London, in 1959; Inv. 59.08 (ND 8001)

A second ivory from Fort Shalmaneser presented here was found in SW 37, an enormous
room (30.3 x 4.3 metres) known as the ‘Great Hall’ which was full of broken brick with
over 1,800 ivory fragments scattered throughout the deposit. So thorough was the
destruction in the room that the excavator, David Oates, suggested it had been looted,
probably twice, by individuals who stripped the ivory fittings from furniture in order
to remove their gold overlay. This looting, one assumes, occurred at the time of Assyria’s
downfall at the hands of the Babylonians and the Medes, in 614 or 612 BC.

The plaque consists of two registers. Above, is a frieze with a large lotus flower flanked by
half buds. Below this is a winged male advancing right, towards a plant in flower. The left
wing and arm are raised and the hand holds a papyrus flower, while the right wing and
arm are lowered, and the hand grasps a feather. The figure wears a short, Egyptian-style
wig, a beaded collar, an open skirt down to the ankles and a double ribbon hanging down
his back. A papyrus flower and lily plant, on the right, complete the scene.

This piece belongs to a group of strongly ‘Egyptianising’ plaques with a degree of repetition
in design and iconography which suggests mass production by different workshops, all
competing for a share of the luxury market. Rather than coming from Egypt itself, it
seems more likely that the Egyptianising ivories, such as our plaque, were the products of
workshops in the southern Levant, perhaps at a site like Samaria, capital of the Israelite king
Ahab, where excavations in the 1930s uncovered an important hoard of ivories, some of
which show a clear similarity to the Egyptianising pieces from SW 37. Either the siege of
Samaria by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V in 722 BC, or its capture in 720 BC by Sargon,
could have afforded opportunities to acquire the ‘spoil of the foe’ for which Fort
Shalmaneser was in fact used. – DTP

Further reading
M.E.L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and its remains*, II (London, 1966), 556 and fig. 495;
G. Herrmann, *Ivories from Room SW 37, Fort Shalmaneser* (London, 1986), 103 and pl. 48;
on ivories generally, see R.D. Barnett, *Ancient ivories in the Middle East* (Jerusalem, 1982), 53.
ASSYRIAN RELIEF

Limestone carved in low relief
Height 67.0 cm Width 27.0 cm
From the Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh; late 7th century BC
Said to be from the excavations of Sir Austen Henry Layard and acquired in 1951;
Inv. 51.323

At its height in the 7th century BC, the Assyrian Empire stretched from western Iran to
Egypt. From their capitals near Mosul in what is today northern Iraq, the Assyrian kings
and their armies ‘swept down like the wolf on the fold’, as Lord Byron so memorably put it
in *The destruction of Sennacherib* (1815).

The Biblical accounts of the Assyrians are just as vivid. In Isaiah 5:28, Assyria and the
Assyrian army’s prowess in archery – ‘Whose arrows are sharp/All his bows are taut’ – are
emphasised in a description aptly fitting a relief acquired in 1951, allegedly from Sir Austen
Henry Layard’s excavations (1847–51) in Sennacherib’s (704–681 BC) ‘Palace without Rival’
at the great mound of Kuyunjik, ancient Nineveh. Royal inscriptions containing annalistic
accounts of Assyrian campaigns, and letters to and from field commanders, leave us in no
doubt as to the importance of archers in the Assyrian war machine.

This relief, which was cut from a larger panel, is made of a type of white limestone known
as ‘Mosul marble’. It shows two archers facing right, aiming at a distant target with their
bows and arrows. The weapons are angled steeply upwards, a common convention in scenes
depicting the Assyrian army attacking enemy fortifications. The archers stand by a stylised
stream, which appears to be running beneath their feet, complete with fish swimming in
opposite directions and swirls of eddying water indicated by a close pattern of incised lines.

The technique of showing a pair of archers in profile is extremely common in the reliefs
of Sennacherib, for whom no subject was more beloved than the depiction of siege and
conquest. The archers in this example are clearly auxiliaries or light infantry bowmen, for
they are equipped with neither helmets nor coats of sewn plate-armour. Rather, they are
bearded, with a headband and a short kilt which appears fringed along the diagonal open
edge. Quivers holding extra arrows may once have been visible immediately to the left of
the archers’ heads, but the relief is too damaged in this area to be certain. – DTP

Further reading
at Nineveh* (London, 1998), 140, pl. 497; on the Assyrian military generally, see
CROESEID COIN

Gold stater
Length 1.55 cm  Weight 8.00 g
Lydian mint; ca 560–486 BC
Purchased from A.B. Triggs in 1938; Inv. 103.04

Of all the names that have come down from antiquity to the modern day, none is as familiar as that of Croesus (560–546 BC), the last king of Lydia and reputedly one of the richest men in the world. ‘Rich as Croesus’, a simile first attested in English in 1577, owes its existence to a reputed exchange between Solon, the Athenian poet and politician, and Croesus, as recounted by Herodotus (The Histories I.29–33), in which the Lydian monarch is told that ‘he who possesses great store of riches is no nearer happiness than he who has what suffices for his daily needs’.

Herodotus also tells us that the Lydians were the first ancient people to mint coinage (I.94), and as such Croesus is often acknowledged as the originator of the ancient monetary economy. The Kroiseis statér was the first gold coin with which the Greeks came into contact, and an Athenian inscription of 439–8 BC, concerning the costs incurred in the manufacture of the famous statue of Athena Parthenos by Phidias, refers to the payment of 110 ‘croeseids’, undoubtedly similar to the one illustrated here.

Croeseids show, on the obverse, the head and foreparts of a lion, facing right, which confront the horned head of a bull, facing left. The reverse shows two roughly square depressions. From the fourth millennium BC onwards, when it first appears on cylinder seals and seal impressions from Susa, the motif of a lion attacking a bull was popular in Iran. Much later, in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, the same motif figured in the decorative program of the staircase leading to the apadana or columned hall at the Achaemenid Persian site of Persepolis. According to Zoroastrian mythology, the lion was an animal of Ahirmans’s (the embodiment of evil), while the bull was associated with Ahura-Mazda (the chief deity of Zoroastrianism, and an entirely positive force).

The chronology of the croeseids has been greatly disputed. While the very name of the type would suggest that some were minted by Croesus himself, none of the croeseids found in hoards are that early. Moreover, some were certainly introduced in the time of Darius the Great (522–486 BC), when Lydia was a satrapy of the Persian Empire, and as such, must be considered Achaemenid ‘royal’ coinage. – DTP

Further reading
Catalogue of a Collection of Greek, Roman and English Coins in the Possession of A.B. Triggs
– Yass, New South Wales (London, 1924), 33, no. 141; on Persian coinage generally, see
ACCHAEMENID COIN DEPICTING AN ARCHER

Gold daric
Diameter 1.5 cm  Weight 8.25 g
Persian manufacture; ca 490–375 BC
Purchased from A.B. Triggs in 1938; Inv. 103.03

In the inscription accompanying his monumental, rock-cut tomb at Naqsh-e Rustam in Iran, Darius the Great (522–486 BC) says, ‘As a bowman I am a good bowman both afoot and on horseback. As a spearman I am a good spearman both afoot and on horseback’. Bow and spear, then, were the quintessential weapons of the Persian army – the backbone of the Achaemenid Empire – and it is little wonder that the coinage of Darius, such as this gold coin, portrays the Great King armed with both.

From approximately 490 to 375 BC coins illustrating the ‘royal archer’ were issued by the Persian state. The obverse shows, in this case, a full-length, bearded figure wearing the pleated, Achaemenid royal garment, in a kneeling-running pose, facing right. In his right hand he holds a spear; in his left hand a bow; and on his head he wears, somewhat worn and struck off the flan here, a crenellated or dentate tiara. The reverse has a rectangular depression (incuse) with no decoration.

In Asia Minor, coins such as these were known to the Greek subjects of the Persian Empire as Dareikoi statēres or xrysoi Dareikoi, and originally attributed to Darius himself, hence the English term ‘daric’. In the course of the 5th century BC dareikos came to be used for any type of Persian coinage and eventually coins of the royal archer type acquired the nickname toxotai (‘archers’). While most scholars believe that dareikos was indeed derived from the name of Darius (Old Persian Darayavahu) others maintain that this is a case of retrospective folk etymology, and that the true origin of the coin’s name is to be found in Old Persian daraniya, meaning ‘gold’.

As for the choice of an archer-spearman to adorn the coinage of Darius and his successors, David Stronach suggests that the royal archer coins ‘may have sought to depict the king ... as a constant warrior in defence of the values of “order-truth” (arta)’. This is a powerful message indeed which is consistent with other aspects of Achaemenid royal iconography and ideology, as illustrated in many of the seal impressions on tablets found in the Fortification Archive at the Achaemenid royal city of Persepolis. – DTP

Further reading
EGYPT

The land of Egypt, perched on the edge of the eastern Sahara and sustained by the waters of the Nile, was first described as the ‘gift of the river’ by the 5th century BC Greek historian Herodotus. Even to the ancient Greeks, for whom Egyptian civilisation was already over two and a half thousand years old, the Nile Valley, its monuments and distinctive culture were a source of wonder and fascination.

This heritage was ‘rediscovered’ by the West in the aftermath of Napoleon’s military and scientific expedition to Egypt in 1798, which encouraged European scholarship, collecting and popular interest in ancient Egyptian culture and language.

The Egyptian collection at the Nicholson Museum owes much to this tradition, embodied in Sir Charles Nicholson’s grand tour of the Nile Valley in 1856–7, when he acquired much of the original collection. Since then, objects obtained via subscriptions to the Egypt Exploration Fund and through the generosity of private donors have augmented Sir Charles’ benefaction. The strength of the collection lies in its holdings of Predynastic ceramics and small finds, New Kingdom material, Third Intermediate and Late Period coffins and mummies, and a substantial collection of Late Dynastic and Graeco-Roman texts, small finds and funerary equipment.
BLACK-TOPPED WARE JARS

Handmade from Nile silt, coated with a red slip, then surface burnished
Heights 15.6 cm and 21.8 cm
From Abadiyeh or Hu; Naqada I–IIb Period, ca 3900–3650 BC
Presented by the Egypt Exploration Fund in 1899; Inv. 62.952 and 00.05

Black-topped ware is a distinctive pottery style that appeared in Upper Egypt during
the fourth millennium BC. Its roots are found in earlier Badarian (ca 5500–3900 BC) ceramic
forms, and in the Sudanese Neolithic period, from where the firing technique may have
originated.

The vessels were formed using Nile silt, an abundant clay type obtained from the banks of
the Nile River and surrounding floodplain. The pots were made by hand using coils or slabs,
then coated with a red ochre slip and burnished before firing. The black-topped effect was
probably produced by placing the vessel mouth-down in the kiln and covering this section
during firing, creating an oxygen-free environment which thus blackened the top. However,
the precise firing technique is still a source of much debate and experimentation by modern
ceramicists.

Shapes varied from simple straight-sided vessels in the Naqada I period (ca 3900–3750 BC)
to more ovoid jars in the Naqada II era. By the Naqada III phase (ca 3300–3050 BC), the
ware was only produced sporadically, until by the Early Dynastic period (ca 3050–2686 BC)
the shape and firing technique were restricted to a form of elegant ritual vessel known
as a hes-jar (see p. 58), found exclusively in tombs and temple deposits. By this time, the
two-tone effect of the surface may have acquired a particular significance, symbolising the
dual concepts of the desert, death and chaos (red), and the fertile earth, resurrection and
the underworld (black). Alternatively, the colour may have represented the desert and Nile
Valley landscape, known to the Egyptians as Dḥrt and Kmt: the Red Land and the Black Land.

Many black-topped vessels, including the jars shown here, have been discovered in Upper
Egyptian Predynastic cemeteries over the last one hundred years. They are found in male,
female and children’s graves, and on settlement sites, so evidently the ware had a wide
utilitarian use in addition to a funerary purpose. That the type was produced throughout
much of the fourth millennium attests to its great popularity in ancient times. Even today,
the shape and surface finish of black-topped ware has a strong contemporary feel, despite
the fact that it was produced over five thousand years ago. – KNS

Further reading
On black-topped ware generally, see K.N. Sowada, ‘Black-topped Ware in Early Dynastic
STONE VESSELS

Calcite, surface polished
Heights 7.9 cm, 5.3 cm and 10.3 cm
From Abydos and Tell el-Amarna; 12th Dynasty, ca 1985–1795 BC and late 18th Dynasty, ca 1350 BC
Presented by the Egypt Exploration Fund in 1913, 1903 and 1926; Inv. 03.03, 03.02 and 62.656

One of the hallmarks of Egyptian material culture is the proficiency and skill with which its craftsmen fashioned stone into objects as diverse as statues, vases, stelae, sarcophagai, jewellery, figurines, offering tables and countless other items. Fine stone vessels of various kinds, manufactured from about 3650 BC, were popular for centuries with everyone from Egyptian kings to people of more modest means.

As with ceramics, the shapes included closed forms used as containers, to platters and miniature jars, with the repertoire often mirroring vessels produced in ceramic workshops and more rarely, metal forms. Sometimes they were made purely for burial with or without any contents, but stone vessels also had a function in daily life, often as containers for fats, scented oils and cosmetics such as kohl.

Numerous different stones were used, obtained from extensive desert quarries flanking the Nile Valley. Egypt’s rich geological history means that craftsmen were able to use varieties ranging from limestone, siltstone and hard volcanic rocks like basalt, to attractive coloured and patterned stones such as breccia, porphyry and gneiss. More rarely, stone vessels were also made from rock crystal, lapis lazuli imported from Badakhshan in modern Afghanistan and obsidian, a form of volcanic glass not native to Egypt, obtained primarily via the Red Sea from sources near the Arabian peninsula and the Horn of Africa. Long-range trade networks supplied the demand for these materials in Egypt and elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean.

Perhaps the most enduring stone for vessel manufacture was calcite, also known as travertine or Egyptian alabaster. It was obtained from several Eastern Desert quarries and was used from earliest times until the Roman era. The attractive calcite examples shown here, from different sites and periods, may once have had their contents sealed with a stopper of cloth or clay, a stone lid, or a thin sheet of metal tied around the rim.

The beauty, craftsmanship and durability of Egyptian stone vessels meant that they were keenly sought in ancient times. Sometimes they were also used as trade items or diplomatic gifts. By the Late Bronze Age (ca 1550 BC), stone vessel workshops could be found in many major towns in the eastern Mediterranean, with some shapes modelled on derivative Egyptian types. Even today, workshops in Egypt still produce stone vessels for the tourist trade, using calcite, and attempting to mimic ancient stone-working techniques. – KNS

Further reading
SHROUD OF THE LADY TANY

Decorated linen, probably cut to shape in modern times
Length (both pieces together) 80.6 cm  Width 47.3 cm
From Thebes; mid-18th Dynasty, ca 1450 BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R.92

The use of linen in mummification was an important part of the ritual and symbolism of Egyptian burial practices. Some of the earliest evidence of bodies wrapped in linen comes from cemeteries of the Upper Egyptian town of Hierakonpolis, and dates to the Naqada IIa–b era (ca 3650 BC).

Scientific study of mummy wrappings from all periods has produced a wealth of information about textile production, quality and the economic status of their owners. Moreover, the style of wrapping a mummy is important in helping define its date, as different bandaging techniques, pigments and cloths were used at various times in Egyptian history. Research has found that sheets and bandages used to wrap the dead were mostly used textiles, with laundry marks, the names of owners and evidence of washing.

Use of a shroud or multiple shrouds was a common feature of mummification that appeared at least as early as the late Old Kingdom (ca 2350 BC). Shrouds were often secured into place by vertical and transverse bandages. During some periods, bandages or shrouds were painted different colours or decorated with texts and vignettes from the Book of the Dead.

The fragment of a painted shroud belonging to the lady Tany is an unusual form of decorated shroud that appeared briefly in Thebes during the reigns of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III. The section, which may have been cut out of a larger panel, features a polychrome decoration with the deceased in the barque of the sun god, preceded by the gods Shu, Khepri, Thoth and Isis at the prow. The name of each figure is written above their heads. The boat has largely disappeared, the result of deterioration of the linen caused by the ancient pigments.

Under this section is a long passage in black and red ink from Spell 100 of the Book of the Dead written in a beautiful cursive hieroglyphic hand. Each sign is carefully drawn, with fine detail visible on the bodies of each animal sign. The medium to fine weave of the cloth and painstaking decoration mark this as belonging to a woman of high status. – KNS

Further reading
STELA OF NEBMOSE

Limestone with added pigment
Height 22.4 cm Width 16.1 cm Thickness 1.7–2.9 cm
Probably from Thebes; mid-18th Dynasty, ca 1500–1400 BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R5

This object is a fine example of an Egyptian private stela that was probably set up at a funerary chapel or over the grave of the deceased. In the New Kingdom, the stela placement at a private tomb marked the place for relatives to leave food and drink offerings for the departed. Although this example has a funerary purpose, stelae were also used for royal commemorative decrees, prayers, hymns, boundary markers and religious texts. They were generally carved into various types of stone or painted on to prepared wooden surfaces.

In this modest example, a simple scene is carved in raised relief on a shaped slab of limestone with a curved top. Traces of colour are faintly visible over the surface, indicating that the stela was once brightly painted. At the top, two protective wedjet eyes flank a shen sign, the symbol of infinity. Below this, two men are shown facing each other; the inscriptions in sunk relief before them name the seated man as Nebmose and the other as Aakheperra.

The scene is a typical offering tableau found on private stelae of this period. Nebmose sits on a high-backed chair with feet in the shape of animal paws, before a table of offerings featuring various foodstuffs. He smells a lotus, a symbol of re-birth, and grasps a fold of cloth; Aakheperra faces him holding an offering of a fowl in one hand and pouring a libation at Nebmose’s feet in the other. The relationship of the two men is unknown, but usually, close relatives are depicted in this way. Perhaps Aakheperra was the brother or son of Nebmose.

The incised inscription below them is a standard form of funerary text designed to provide, when recited, benefits to the deceased. These include ‘cattle, fowl and a thousand of every good and pure thing’, so that Nebmose would not lack provisions that were the staple of Egyptian life in the temporal world.

We know little about Nebmose, save for this unassuming object. However, the name was relatively common in the 18th Dynasty and is known from many other sources. – KNS

Further reading
SHABTI OF SI-IAH

Limestone, missing the lower legs and feet
Height 20.8 cm
Provenance unknown; mid-18th Dynasty, ca 1479–1390 BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R49

This exquisitely carved limestone shabti belonged to a man called Si-Iah, also called Iy.
The inscription names his mother as Ta-Hapu, and his titles are stated as ‘Chief of the serfs
of the God’s Wife’ and ‘Scribe of Bread Offerings’. The former title reveals that Si-Iah had
a supervisory role on temple estates associated with royal females and high-ranking women
who held the important priestly and administrative title of God’s Wife of Amun.

With a long beard and arms crossed over the chest, the shabti deliberately evokes the image
of Osiris, god of the Underworld, with whom the deceased becomes identified. The face
is skillfully carved, particularly around the eyes and brows, which are presented in delicate
raised relief. A shabti formula follows in five horizontal rows of incised hieroglyphs around
the body, and in a single vertical row of text down the front of the chest. The lower part
of the inscription is missing but can be largely reconstructed from those on similar shabtis.
Traces of blue pigment inlay are still visible within each of the signs.

The concept of the shabti (also known as a shawabti or ushabti, the latter meaning ‘answerer’)
grew out of Old Kingdom and early Middle Kingdom funerary practices of including
models and figurines in burial equipment. These included wooden figurines and tableaux
of servants doing various tasks often linked to food production and agricultural work.
By the later Middle Kingdom plain or inscribed mummyform shabti figures appeared, and
by the New Kingdom, the concept of the shabti as an agricultural worker had fully evolved.
By this time, the aim of such figures was to magically replace the deceased if one was called
to do manual corvée labour in the hereafter. The texts on shabtis, invoking their function,
were full or abbreviated versions of Spell 6 from the Book of the Dead.

At the beginning of the New Kingdom, people had only one or two shabtis in their burial
equipment. Indeed, the shabti of Si-Iah may have been one of a pair. During the mid-18th
Dynasty, when this shabti was manufactured, they were sometimes placed in pottery or
wooden coffins, to be included in the burial equipment of the deceased, but a miniature
coffin was not acquired with this example. By the later New Kingdom, shabti numbers had
expanded to 401, comprising 365 worker shabtis for each day of the year, ‘supervised’ by
36 overseers, whose function was to ensure the workers performed their tasks. By this time,
mass-produced ceramic and faience shabtis had largely replaced stone examples. – KNS

Further reading
C. Nicholson, Aegyptiaca (London, 1891), 21, no. 49; E. Graefe, Untersuchungen zur Verwaltung
und Geschichte der Institution der Gottesgemahlin des Amun vom Beginn des Neuen Reiches bis zur
Spätzeit, Band I: Katalog und Materialsammlung (Wiesbaden, 1981), 138–9, 243, pls 18 and 33d;
D.A. Aston, ‘The Shabti of Si-Iah’, in K.N. Sowada and B.G. Ockinga (eds), Egyptian Art in
the Nicholson Museum, Sydney (Sydney, in press).
STATUE OF GENERAL HOREMHEB

Diorite upper torso broken from a larger statue, surface polished
Height 47.1 cm
Possibly from Memphis or Saqqara; late 18th Dynasty, reign of Tutankhamun or Ay,
ca 1330 BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1864; Inv. R1138

Statues of private individuals followed an official portrait style, within strict artistic
conventions, which was established by each king and then adopted in workshops by local
artisans. As a result, the sculpture of different periods can be identified by careful study,
even where the piece bears no inscription or other identification, as in this case.

The near life-size statue is made of diorite, a hard igneous rock that required great skill to
work. The surface is carefully carved and lightly polished to a smooth sheen. Broken just
below the breast, the complete statue was probably a seated figure with hands resting on the
thighs. He wears a fitted tunic with pleated sleeves, and a simple crimped wig parted down
the middle, distinctive of late 18th Dynasty high officials. The delicate, naturalistic treatment
of the mouth, almond-shaped eyes and fleshy, rounded breast are typical of the sculptural
style belonging to the immediate post-Amarna period, which flourished in workshops at
Memphis and Thebes. These elements strongly recall pieces from the reign of Tutankhamun.

There are few officials from this period of sufficient status to have afforded a statue of this
quality. We know of several, notably the Treasurer Maya and General Horemheb, who both
had grand tombs high on the desert plateau of Saqqara, near modern Cairo. Horemheb
seems the most likely person represented here, given the workmanship and the similarities
of this piece with other known statues of him. Sir Charles Nicholson, who visited Egypt
a second time in 1862 on his way home to England, purchased the piece from a dealer in
Cairo along with a number of other objects of certain Memphite origin, thus pointing to
Memphis or Saqqara as the probable provenance of the statue. Perhaps the piece was made
for Horemheb’s Saqqara tomb.

Horemheb was Tutankhamun’s most important high official, serving as regent and general
of the army. Although of non-royal blood, Horemheb later became king of Egypt when
the dynastic succession broken down after the reign of King Ay, Tutankhamun’s uncle.
The statue’s rather disdainful expression and haughty demeanour suggests a man with
complete confidence in his position and power. – KNS

Further reading
E. Reeve, Catalogue of the Museum of Antiquities at the Sydney University (Sydney, 1870), 90,
no. 1138; K.N. Sowada, ‘A Late Eighteenth Dynasty Statue in the Nicholson Museum,
Sydney’, Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 80 (1994), 137–43; on New Kingdom Saqqara
and the pre-royal tomb of Horemheb, see G.T. Martin, The Memphite Tomb of Horemheb,
SHABTI JAR WITH SHABTIS

Wheel-made Nile silt jar, shabtis mould-made; surface decorated
Height of jar including lid 31.5 cm  Height of shabtis 10.4 cm to 13.7 cm
From Tomb 1401, Abydos; 19th Dynasty, ca 1295–1186 BC
Presented by the Egypt Exploration Society in 1927; Inv. 25.16

During the late New Kingdom, shabtis were mass-produced in faience, fired clay and unbaked mud, and in significantly larger quantities than before. While high quality pieces are known, for many lower class Egyptians, shabtis were rudely produced ceramic figures of rough shape with minimal decoration.

In the later New Kingdom, the concept of the shabti container developed as a repository for the tomb-owner’s figurines, which were increasing in number. The most common type is a wooden box with a painted exterior, but these also existed beside ceramic shabti jars with decorative lids.

This example was found in a modest rock-cut tomb at the Upper Egyptian cemetery site of Abydos, during work conducted by Henri Frankfort in 1925–6 on behalf of the Egypt Exploration Society. The tomb contained several bodies which the excavator described as the remains of men and women. A second, unpainted jackal-headed jar containing shabtis was also found in the same grave, along with a faience pectoral featuring a painted scarab and a bronze ring with a malachite wedjat-eye amulet.

The ovoid vessel is decorated with a garland of petals around the shoulder and a single line of hieroglyphs between two vertical lines on one side. The lid is fashioned into the shape of a jackal’s head, possibly representing Anubis, guardian of the necropolis. Inside the jar were eight worker shabtis and two overseer shabtis, the latter identifiable by their protruding kilts. The standard shabti spell has been reduced to a couple of quickly written hieroglyphs down the front of each figure, identifying the deceased with Osiris, god of the Underworld. The shabti texts are too worn to read the owner’s name with certainty; likewise the inscription on the jar is also very denuded, but this would have been an abbreviated shabti spell.

The majority of animal-headed shabti jars have been found at Abydos, although a small number are known from New Kingdom cemeteries elsewhere in Egypt. The surviving examples are few in number and those from Abydos were probably produced over a short period of time. Why this particular type of container was popular at Abydos, a site revered as the burial place of Osiris, is not known. The nature of the context and burial goods suggest that this vessel, along with similar examples, was manufactured for a person of modest means. – KNS

Further reading
FAIENCE TILE

Faience, mended from two fragments
Length 8.1 cm  Width 6.2 cm  Thickness 0.95 cm
Possibly from Thebes; 19th or 20th Dynasty, ca 1295–1069 BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R116

Dogs as companion animals were known in Egypt from at least the third millennium BC, when they were frequently depicted in tomb scenes, often seated under the chairs of their owners during the Old Kingdom. They were sometimes even buried alongside their deceased owners. Tomb scenes, stelae and texts from various periods also show that dogs were used for hunting, herding, as guardians, and in police patrols. As one would expect, there were many feral dogs in ancient times that were as reviled then as they are today, scavenging off the detritus of human settlement.

The elegant breed on the tile shown here is depicted with floppy ears, pigmented skin and a curved hairy tail, indicated by the dots along the outer edge. The animal wears a collar, showing that a domesticated dog is intended by the artist; the dog is held on a lead by a man whose size and proportion to the animal is an artistic device to emphasise the importance of the dog in the overall scene.

Various breeds of domestic dog have been identified in ancient Egyptian art, including types related to the modern basenji from central Africa, the dachshund, and the sloughi. However, matching ancient pictorial evidence with modern types of canine is difficult. In the case of this illustration, the precise breed is unknown, but Jac. and Rosalind Janssen have suggested that its nearest relative may be the modern pointer. Similar dogs are seen in other representations from the same period.

The tile is made of faience and is glazed blue with the decoration painted in black. It is broken at one end showing that the fragment was once part of a larger piece. The purpose of such an object is not known; perhaps it belonged to a longer scene designed to decorate the wall of an important building. – KNS

Further reading
'STRIKE' OSTRACON

Limestone flake with a carbon ink inscription in hieratic, written over an earlier red ink inscription; part of the text missing on one side
Length 11.25 cm  Width 7.5 cm  Thickness 0.95 cm
From Thebes; 20th Dynasty, reigns of Rameses IV–VI, ca 1153–1136 BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R97

As the glory days of the New Kingdom began to fade, Egypt faced increasing economic, social and political turmoil. Whereas under earlier kings of the New Kingdom Egypt had dominated the Near East, by the reign of Rameses III in the 20th Dynasty, its armies were engaged in repelling invading 'Sea Peoples' from the north on the very borders of Egypt itself. Tribute from abroad dwindled as Egypt's grip on the Near East weakened; the palace was rife with conspiracy and the Theban priesthood grew in power.

Internally, many texts on papyri and on stone or pottery ostraca show that the previously strong political and economic order of the country was cracking. In the Theban area, a number of such inscriptions have been discovered over the years, many of which are associated with the famous workman’s village of Deir el-Medineh. This community was a special town of artisans whose role was to construct and decorate the royal tombs at Thebes; the archaeological and textual archive of their lives offers a rich insight into their work day, family conflicts, governance and the economic organisation of the town.

This ostracon is related to a series of well-known texts, such as the Turin Strike Papyrus, which outlines the events of this era. Our text begins on the top right-hand corner and continues on the reverse side: it describes the officials, led by the High Priest of Amun Rameses-nakhte, arriving for the ‘lock-up’ of the tomb to find that the work crew has staged a walkout. The workers have gone on strike because they are hungry, as the food and wood forming part of their wages has not been paid by the administration. The local magistrates have declared them to be the aggrieved party and we can assume that work eventually resumed after payment of the outstanding debts.

That the workman, those involved in preparing a royal tomb no less, downed tools in the face of non-payment of their wages by the Theban administration speaks of an economic order faced with financial difficulties. Other texts speak of workmen from Deir el-Medineh conducting protests for similar reasons at nearby royal mortuary temples. By the end of the 20th Dynasty (ca 1069 BC) the old order had collapsed to such an extent that the Theban high priests of Amun governed Upper Egypt in their own right, and another king ruled from his capital in the eastern Delta. – KNS

Further reading
COFFIN OF MERUAH

Wood, plastered and painted; lid and trough originally joined with mortice and tenons
Length 1.86 m  Width across shoulders 53.7 cm
From Thebes; mid-late 21st Dynasty, ca 1020–945 BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R27

Sir Charles Nicholson purchased this and a series of other wooden coffins and mummies from different historical periods during his first trip to Egypt in 1856–7. At that time, no collection of Egyptian material was complete without at least one mummy; Nicholson bought several complete specimens and a series of body parts, his interest no doubt partially fuelled by his background in medicine.

This coffin is made in the style typical of Thebes (modern Luxor) in Upper Egypt during the 21st Dynasty, with a decorative scheme of closely packed scenes of the deceased, deities and texts painted on a distinctive yellowish background. The interior of the coffin is also decorated with images of different gods, to help ensure the safe passage of the deceased into the hereafter. This whole decorative style reflects the movement away from more expensive painted tombs during this time, to the coffin itself becoming a model tomb, but on a smaller and cheaper scale.

The inscription on the lid names the occupant as the lady Merua, ‘Mistress of the House’, ‘Chantress of Amun’ and ‘Adorant of Mut in Isheru’, the latter being the name of Mut’s temple enclosure at the Karnak complex in ancient Thebes. Mut was the consort of the god Amun and a member of the Theban triad, whose temple structures in Luxor remain one of the largest ancient religious centres in the world. These titles and roles in the temple cult are relatively common for well-born ladies of the period, with the combination of all three suggesting a married woman of relatively high status.

Scientific research on the mummy in the coffin revealed that the torso cavity was packed solid with a dense substance, probably mud and sawdust, padding the body to make it appear more lifelike. Small samples of plaster retrieved from within the wrappings show that the body was encased in a thin plaster shell from head to foot that had been painted different colours. Moreover, DNA testing on a bone sample identified it as the body of a man rather than a woman. How this came to be is unknown: the re-use of burial equipment in ancient Egypt was not uncommon. On the other hand, the dealer who sold Nicholson the ensemble may have simply rustled up a mummy from another source to fill an already empty coffin. – KNS

Further reading
FRAGMENT OF A PAINTED COFFIN

Wood, coated with gesso and painted
Length 62.9 cm  Width 39.2 cm  Thickness 2.8 cm
From Thebes; early 22nd Dynasty, ca 945–889 BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R77

Little is known of how, where and from whom Sir Charles Nicholson acquired his objects in Egypt during his first trip there in 1856–7. Sadly, many of his personal papers were burned in a fire that engulfed his Totteridge (Herts, UK) home in 1899, destroying part of his library, many personal papers and a lifetime of collecting and scholarship.

However, this object is one of the few pieces from his collection for which such information is known. Nicholson claims to have purchased a joining fragment to this panel ‘from an Arab at Thebes [modern Luxor] in 1856’. In all likelihood this individual was a local inhabitant with a personal stock of antiquities that he sold to foreign travellers. The one illustrated here is the largest of three fragments from the same coffin, which were all deliberately sawn off along the register lines, undoubtedly to facilitate their sale to separate buyers.

The coffin from which this piece came was the innermost casket of a series of nested coffins belonging to the same individual. The panel belongs to the upper torso section of the coffin trough; it is broken on one side and stained with residues from the mummy that once rested upon it. The scene is painted on the interior of the base, although the interior and exterior walls (which do not survive) would have been vividly decorated as well.

The main scene depicts the deceased, one Nesy-Pauty-Tauy, pouring a libation over a table of food offerings from a ritual hes-jar. He performs this duty before Osiris who is crowned and seated on a shrine-shaped throne, holding his insignia of a crook and flail. Nesy-Pauty-Tauy is dressed in a fine white pleated linen garment with a beaded wesekh collar. His religious function is outlined in the adjacent inscription, which says that he served as a ‘wab-priest of Amun-Re’ (wab meaning ‘pure’) and as ‘Scribe of the divine offerings in the domain of Amun’. Nesy-Pauty-Tauy thus served at the Karnak temple in Thebes as a lower-ranking priest and a literate functionary of the temple cult.

Such coffins are known for their use of rich emblematic imagery, featuring a combination of funerary gods, solar symbols, scenes, texts and the extensive use of colour, which itself had a symbolic meaning when used in particular contexts and scenes. In utilising these images and symbols, Nesy-Pauty-Tauy hoped to participate in the regeneration and resurrection of the transfigured dead in the hereafter. – KNS

Further reading
COFFIN OF PADIASHAIKHET

Plaster-coated painted wood, lid and trough originally joined with dowels, mortice and tenons, and sealed with plaster-coated linen; foot end restored
Length 1.74 m Width across shoulders 46.5 cm
From Thebes; 25th Dynasty, ca 725–700 BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R28

One of the most popular objects in the Museum is the coffin of Padiashaikhet, who died in Upper Egypt, almost certainly in the Theban area, around the end of the 8th century BC. We know very little of his background, although inscriptions on the coffin mention his father, Horsiese, and Padiashaikhet’s titles, ‘Father of the God’ and ‘Beloved of the God’. This latter title was also held by his father; it appears to have been a priestly title, however little is known about the particular role or rank.

His beautifully decorated anthropoid coffin is vividly painted with scenes of the gods in a style typical of Thebes in this period; indeed, the high quality workmanship of his coffin suggests that Padiashaikhet came from a family of some importance. Moreover, the preservation of the surface colour is remarkable, with most of the original pigment still intact. The quality workmanship and the personalised nature of its inscriptions suggest that the coffin was manufactured particularly for Padiashaikhet rather than bought ready-made. In all likelihood, the coffin was encased in one or more outer decorated cases, the whereabouts of which are not known.

The underside of the trough or lower half, a section of which is shown here, depicts a beautifully painted image of the Goddess of the West, the personification of the realm of the dead, who wears a halter dress and distinctive headress. She is surrounded by a hieroglyphic text taken from Spell 89 of the Book of the Dead, a spell that was designed to ensure the reunion of the mortal remains of the deceased with his ba, or spiritual essence, each night in the Underworld.

Sir Charles Nicholson also purchased the mummy of an adult inside the coffin, which is in the Museum’s collection. Scientific study using X-rays and CT scans indicate that this person was under thirty years old when they died. The cause of death cannot be determined with certainty, but scans revealed large dental abscesses on the mandible (lower jaw). Excavated skeletons from Egypt have shown that this was a common problem in ancient populations, thus it is possible that poor dental health contributed to the individual’s early death, the result of septicemia or a related condition. – KNS

Further reading
VIKNENCT FROM THE BOOK OF THE DEAD

Black ink on fragmentary papyrus with traces of gilding
Height 31.2 cm  Length of whole papyrus fragment 56.0 cm
Probably from Saqqara; early Ptolemaic Period, 4th–3rd century BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R85

This fine papyrus is a section of the Book of the Dead belonging to a man named Petenephthisis, born to a woman called Tamounis. He probably died in the area of Memphis in northern Egypt and was buried in the Saqqara necropolis. Such texts were prepared to accompany the deceased into the afterlife; often they were rolled up and placed in the coffin with the body, sometimes wrapped up within the bindings or positioned between the legs of the mummy, or placed inside a Ptah-Sokar-Isiris statue.

The whole fragment features a long text in a cursive form of hieroglyphic known as hieratic, accompanied by several vignettes, or illustrations, one of which is shown here. It depicts Osiris, god of the Underworld, seated under a shrine-shaped structure in a room flanked by capitals in the form of bound reeds. Osiris wears an atef-crown, a type of headdress with feathers and ram's horns commonly associated with the god, and he holds his traditional insignia of a crook and flail. The detail shown by the artist is exquisite: the costume and throne on which the god sits are carefully and meticulously drawn and his collar is gilded. The accompanying hieroglyphic text beside the god states a number of the many titles associated with his rule over the realm of the dead.

The Book of the Dead was by far the most important funerary text in later Egyptian history. Known to the Egyptians as the 'Book for coming forth by day', it grew out of Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts and earlier still, Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom, which were carved onto the walls of royal funerary monuments. The Book of the Dead consists of about 190 spells, also known as chapters, containing incantations to assist the smooth passage of the deceased into the afterlife. Spells or extracts were often reproduced on the walls of tombs, on coffins, shrouds, amulets and even written on to strips of bandage and wrapped around the mummy, in addition to papyrus scrolls. Only the very wealthy could afford extensive manuscripts; most people had to make do with a chapter, small section or vignette.

- KNS

Further reading
MOSAIC GLASS PLAQUE
DEPICTING A MASK FROM NEW COMEDY

Polychrome glass, broken around the edges
Length 2.3 cm
From Egypt; Roman Period, 1st century AD
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R287

A stock theatre mask from the genre of New Comedy is featured on this tiny glass plaque fragment. It seems likely that most glass plaques of this type were manufactured in Alexandria, but they seem to have had a wide distribution and may have been imitated elsewhere. The period of production is not certain although a small amount of archaeological evidence suggests that the bulk belong to the 1st century AD, and such a date is consistent with the style of masks represented in the series.

Placed on a bright green background, this mask is that of an Old Man, with layered hair, further strands or curls at the bottom below the ears, and with a fairly full beard of straight hair. The hair, moustache and beard are white with golden-brown detailing. The face is yellow, with the outline of the nose, eye and brows shown in black. The mouth is black, outlined by red lips. Red is also used for the wrinkles at the bridge of the nose and for the creases in the cheeks. The corners of the eye are red and the iris is yellow.

So-called New Comedy was developed by Menander and his contemporaries in the later part of the 4th century BC. It developed out of the more knock-about comedy of their predecessors into a style that depended on the interplay of characters. An important factor in the presentation was the definition of character-types who were identified visually by the masks they wore and which the audience recognised from the moment the figures appeared on stage. In this respect the playwright was working quite differently from later writers in the western tradition, such as Shakespeare, who defined the characters through the dialogue.

Two types of mask of the Leading Old Men (or Fathers) of New Comedy were in common use after the early Hellenistic period. One had a roll or ‘wreath’ of fairly straight hair and a reasonably full beard with straight sides and a square bottom. The other had wavy hair and a beard that tended to taper towards the bottom. They remained distinct during the Hellenistic period and were an important practical element in staging. Under the Roman Empire, however, the fine distinctions between mask-types within a given category began to blur. One suspects that artists were certainly aware of the finer points of stage production, but that such details were becoming less relevant on stage, as costume assumed greater importance in the distinction of role-types. – JRG

Further reading
BRONZE BUST OF ISIS

Hollow-cast bronze
Height 14.0 cm Width across shoulders 7.2 cm
From Hu, Egypt; Roman Period, AD 60–270
Presented by the Egypt Exploration Fund in 1899; Inv. 00.135a

The goddess Isis was one of Egypt’s most important deities. She embodied many divine aspects as the mother of the god Horus (and thus, symbolically, mother of the king) and as sister/wife of Osiris, god of the Underworld. In particular, her magical powers in rejuvenating the dismembered and dead Osiris, by blowing the breath of life into his body with her wings, meant that Isis enjoyed popularity as a goddess who protected and sustained the deceased, while also healing and protecting the living with her magic, just as in mythology she did for her young son Horus.

By the Graeco-Roman period, Isis was one of Egypt’s most significant deities, with a large temple located at Philae south of Aswan, which continued to operate until AD 537. Worship of Isis also spread to the rest of the eastern Mediterranean, where, as already earlier in Egypt itself, she was identified with almost every female deity. Like other Egyptian deities she had power over fate, which added to her popularity. This resulted in the production of many statues and small votive objects of the goddess in clay, bronze and other materials.

This small bronze bust of Isis was discovered by Flinders Petrie at the site of Hu in the region of Diospolis Parva in Upper Egypt. Petrie dug there for a single season in 1898–9, during which time objects and structures of many periods were discovered, including thousands of graves dating to the Predynastic era. In addition, a Roman settlement and temple were uncovered, located within an earlier enclosure wall; Petrie interpreted this town as a garrison of soldiers.

The figure wears a headdress consisting of a sun-disk flanked by cow’s horns, a style borrowed from the goddess Hathor and typical for late depictions of Isis. She also wears a wig of long corkscrew curls and Roman dress. Holes flanking the bust are deliberately made and thus suggest that the object was fixed onto something or tied onto another object, perhaps a stand.

The bust was found in a well ‘or the chamber above it’ according to Petrie, along with a group of other metal objects, including silver bracelets, miniature lead vessels, a bronze lamp, a fibula, figurines and other small busts of Isis and the god Serapis, all of which are in the Nicholson Museum. Roman coins found in various levels of the well suggested a period of occupation for the nearby houses of between AD 60 and AD 270. These objects might thus represent a hoard or discarded objects of daily and devotional life from surrounding private households.

– KNS

Further reading
PAPYRUS FRAGMENT
WITH PART OF HOMER’S ILIAD

Black ink on papyrus
Length 9.9 cm Width 4.2 cm
From Oxyrhynchus, Egypt; Roman Period, 2nd century AD
Originally presented by the Egypt Exploration Society
to the Sydney University Library in 1922; Inv. 39.05 (P.Oxy. 1387)

In the years 1896–1907, British scholars Bernard Pyne Grenfell and Arthur Surridge Hunt
uncovered many thousands of papyrus fragments in rubbish heaps at the Graeco-Roman
town site of Oxyrhynchus in Middle Egypt.

Mostly written in everyday Greek, these fragments represent one of the largest collections
of such texts ever found in Egypt. They consist of letters between individuals, contracts,
laws, receipts, invoices, census data, and many other forms of ordinary communication
between people of all classes, offering an important window into the day-to-day lives, social
organisation and local governance of a sizeable community in Egypt during Roman times.

Importantly, the papyrus fragments also included pieces of familiar and unfamiliar sections
of ancient Greek literary works, such as drama and poetry. This fragment, which is one
such example, preserves the central part of a column of Homer’s Iliad V, 206–224. The
text records the dialogue between the warrior Pandaros and the Trojan leader Aeneas,
who appeals to Pandaros to do battle with Diomedes.

Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Homer’s Iliad and the Odyssey remained at
the core of Greek and then Roman culture, a position that was reinforced as more and more
new poetry was written. The poems had also become a subject of serious scholarship from
the time of the foundation of the Library and Mouseion (Research Institute) in Alexandria
in the earlier part of the Hellenistic era. There is little doubt that by the period of our
fragment, anyone with any pretence to education would have owned a text of the poet’s
work. It was also a core school text and many of the versions preserved from Oxyrhynchus
are poorly-written, schoolboy copies of famous passages. Our text is of library quality and
was surely professionally written. It is prepared in well-formed, round upright uncials of
medium size and gives a good idea of what such a text would have looked like at this
period. – JRG and KNS

Further reading
A.D. Trendall, Handbook to the Nicholson Museum, 1st and 2nd eds (Sydney, 1945 and 1948),
186 and 370–1; J.R. Green, F. Muecke, K.N. Sowada, M. Turner and E. Bachmann,
Ancient Voices – Modern Echoes: Theatre in the Greek World (Sydney, 2003), 68.
MUMMY MASK

Made from linen, plaster and mud, then painted; lower section missing
Height 46.7 cm Width 33.0 cm
From Deir el-Bahri, Thebes; late Roman Period, ca AD 250–270
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1860; Inv. R80

Few objects are more representative of ancient Egyptian material culture than the mummy mask, with the famous gold mask of Tutankhamun standing as one of Egypt's most iconic images. Lesser mortals utilised more mundane materials, usually stiffened linen with plaster or mud, decorated with pigments or gilding.

In Roman Egypt, mummification of the dead continued to be widely practised. Burial customs absorbed artistic influences from the Roman world while retaining aspects of Egyptian funerary imagery. For example, it has been suggested that lifelike portraits of the deceased in everyday dress, placed into the mummy wrappings, was a particularly Egyptian response to the traditional Roman custom of venerating the dead with sculptural busts. Moreover, regional fashions in funerary arts meant that burial practices often varied within Egypt itself during this time.

The mummy mask illustrated here is a particular type that appeared in Upper Egypt during the late Roman period. Usually covering the head and torso of the mummy, this example is shorter than normal, having been cut along the bottom, probably by the dealer who sold the object to Sir Charles Nicholson. A textile loop at the top helped fix the panel in place over the mummy.

The mask features a striking three-dimensionally modelled face in plaster and mud on a linen base, which while highly stylised, attempts to recreate a lifelike image of the deceased. The man is adorned with a wreath across the forehead, and is richly attired in Roman dress consisting of a white robe with a clavius and gold tassels, along with a mantle bearing a purple swastika across the left shoulder. He wears a gold shriner-shaped necklace and the hands below, now lost, hold a two-handled glass kantharos (cup) filled with red wine and a garland of rose petals and leaves. In addition, the missing section would have depicted Egyptian funerary imagery and symbols associated with the hereafter.

Originally thought to belong to Christian burials (owing to the association of the wine cup with the Eucharist), these masks are now regarded as belonging to a local tradition of burials that flourished in Thebes for a short time during the late Roman period. They are known from groups of mummies found at Deir el-Bahri, in the vicinity of Hatshepsut's mortuary temple near modern Luxor. – KNS

Further reading
For centuries, the island of Cyprus was at the crossroads of trade and foreign relations in the eastern Mediterranean, occupying a pivotal position on the maritime route from the Syrian coast to Greece, north to Asia Minor and south to Egypt and Canaan. By the Late Bronze Age (ca 1550 BC), copper from its mines was an important international commodity, ensuring that the rulers of Alashyia (as it was then known), enjoyed the wealth and status of their mainland peers.

The island’s rich archaeological heritage has attracted scholars since the 19th century. Professor J. Basil Hennessy and the late Professor James R.B. Stewart from the University of Sydney excavated many sites in partnership with other institutions or on behalf of the University itself. These sites include Vounous, Stephania, Kouklia (Old Paphos), Ayia Paraskevi and Palealona. As a result, the Nicholson Museum holds a substantial collection of well-stratified Cypriot archaeological material from both settlement and cemetery contexts.
WOMAN AND CHILD FIGURINE

Solid ceramic, handmade; two earrings originally in the right ear missing, child’s right arm broken away
Height 12.6 cm Width 5.5 cm
Probably from Tamassos; Late Cypriot II Period, 15th–14th century BC
On permanent loan from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, since 1947;
Inv. 47.347

Nude female figures of this type appeared in Cyprus during the 15th century BC and are relatively common in tombs, houses and cult buildings of the 14th and 13th centuries BC. Over a hundred examples are known, some depicting the female figure alone while others show her as a mother with child. In all instances she has enlarged hips, breasts and exaggerated facial features. The pubic triangle is marked by incised or punctured patterns and her hands are placed on or below the breasts in a typically oriental ritual gesture.

The iconography of these figures is derived from north Syrian Astarte figurines, themselves inspired by Mesopotamian examples with similar jewellery and facial features. A second, somewhat later type of terracotta found in Cyprus depicts a more naturalistic female figure of less overtly oriental aspect. These are thought to imitate painted Mycenaean figurines, examples of which were reaching Cyprus from the Greek mainland in the 13th century BC.

Both figurine types appear to depict fertility deities. They may be at least partially identified with one or more of the family of Near Eastern goddesses, comprising the Sumerian Inanna, Akkadian Istar and Ugaritic Anat and Atthart, all of whom were worshipped during the second millennium BC. Such an assimilation of Cypriot and Near Eastern concepts of the divine is not surprising. From at least as early as 1600 BC settlements on the east coast of Cyprus were in close contact with the harbour towns of the Levant, with copper and other commodities exported in substantial quantities. During the course of these transactions, Cypriots must have come into regular contact with Near Eastern deities. That some of these were adopted into the Cypriot pantheon is apparent from a 13th century BC tablet from Ugarit, which refers to Cypriot deities with oriental names, including Baal, Aštart, Anat and Šapaš.

One or both of these fertility deities may also be the forerunner of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of beauty, love and desire. A relative latecomer to the Greek pantheon, Aphrodite was widely considered by the ancient Greeks to be an eastern deity who reached the Greek world through Cyprus. Cyprus played a major role in her mythology and the Greek goddess retained much of the oriental character of her Bronze Age Cypriot predecessors. – JMW

Further reading
J.M. Webb, Cypriot Antiquities in the Nicholson Museum at the University of Sydney (Jonsered, 2001), 68–9, no. 153; on such figurines generally, see J. Karageorghis, La Grande Déesse de Chypre et Son Culte (Lyon, 1977); J.M. Webb, Ritual Architecture, Iconography and Practice in the Late Cypriot Bronze Age (Jonsered, 1999); S.L. Budin, The Origin of Aphrodite (Bethesda MD, 2003).
AMPHORA

Ceramic with painted decoration; Cypriot Bichrome IV Ware
Height 79.4 cm Diameter (rim) 33.2 cm Diameter (body) 48.0 cm
Diameter (base) 16.1 cm
Provenance unknown; Cypro-Archaic I Period, mid-8th to 7th century BC
Purchased by the Friends of the Nicholson Museum in 1946; Inv. 47.21

This handsome vessel may have been used as a container for wine. It is decorated in black and purple-red paint over a cream slip in a manner known as Bichrome IV, a technique of vase-painting that appears to have been influenced by ivory-carving, metalwork and probably also tapestry and weaving. The symmetrical division of the neck into panels using multiple vertical and horizontal lines, and the use of diamond and lotus motifs, is typical of the Bichrome IV style, which was in use across the island in the late 8th and 7th centuries BC.

During the Cypro-Archaic period, Cyprus was divided into seven city-kingsoms. These were forced to submit to Sargon II of Assyria in 707 BC. Assyrian rule, however, was not harsh. The wealth of the Cypriot kings is illustrated by royal tombs of the 8th and 7th centuries BC at Salamis, which yielded large quantities of Phoenician Egyptianising ivories, bronze horse trappings similar to those known in Syria and Assyria, and imported Greek pottery. Burial customs included the sacrifice of horses with their chariots and the inclusion of magnificent furniture and monumental bronze cauldrons. These and other ‘Homeric’ aspects at Salamis may have had their roots in a revival of the Homeric epic in Cyprus. Certainly by the 6th century BC the majority of Cypriots were Greek.

In 570 BC the Egyptian king Amasis became ruler of Cyprus. Cultural development, however, was not disrupted and relations with the Aegean continued until 545 BC, when Cyprus submitted to Persia. For the next 200 years the island was part of the Fifth Persian Satrapy and was required to pay tribute and provide military personnel to the Persian Empire.

As a result, the material culture of the Cypro-Archaic period is characterised by an eclectic use of external cultural traditions. Egyptian influence on Cypriot art was considerable, especially in the field of sculpture. At the same time contact with the Greek mainland introduced elements which were to have a decisive influence on local work in both limestone and terracotta. In vase-painting a local pictorial style developed, characterised by the depiction of stylised animal and human figures drawn in black outline and filled with purple paint.

— JMW

Further reading
THE CLASSICAL WORLD

Since the Renaissance, the Classical world has fascinated scholars, artists and collectors of art. In particular, the sculptures and painted vases of ancient Greece have been highly prized by museums and connoisseurs for their subject matter, beauty and the embodiment of Greek ideals and ideas.

Sir Charles Nicholson was one such collector, who gave his Attic painted vases — and a considerable number of other objects from ancient Greece and Italy — to the University of Sydney in the 19th century, thus forming the nucleus of the Classical collection. Since then, the Museum’s holdings have grown through purchases and generous donations to include Hellenistic and Roman material from other centres in mainland Greece, the Aegean islands and Italy. The collection of South Italian painted vases is particularly fine, featuring examples from major regional production centres illustrating diverse mythological, theatrical and daily life scenes.
THE DIPYLON KRATER

Ceramic; reconstructed and restored from fragments
Restored measurements – Height 1.26 m Diameter (lip) 94.0 cm
Probably from the Dipylon Cemetery at Athens,
made in the workshop of the Dipylon Master;
Late Geometric I Period, third quarter of the 8th century BC
Purchased from the collection of Charles Seltman, Cambridge, in the 1940s; Inv. 46.41

This monumental ceramic vase, now reconstructed from many fragments, was handmade from coils of clay, decorated with painted designs, and subsequently fired in a kiln at temperatures between 800–825°C.

Although its original provenance is not documented, it can nevertheless be identified as a grave marker since similar vases are known from a limited number of cemeteries in Attica: most notable is the cemetery which was located just beyond the spot where the fortified Dipylon (or Double) Gate of Classical Athens was later constructed. The use of such vases, spanning the years between about 770–720 BC and restricted to members of the wealthy Athenian aristocracy, served to indicate not only the high social status but also the gender of the deceased: kraters, or open vases on a high pedestal foot such as the Nicholson example, being placed above male graves and amphorae, or closed vessels with an elongated neck, above female burials.

Richly decorated with a myriad of designs, the surface of the vessel is broken up into horizontal bands, many of which are filled with the abstract motifs (e.g. meanders, diamonds, triangles and zigzags) which have given the name ‘Geometric’ to the artistic style and period. Artistic attention is, however, focused on the larger bands of human figured decoration, which represent some of the earliest narrative figured Greek art of the post-Bronze Age period.

As befits the function of the vessel, the figured subject matter is funerary in character: a prothesis scene is depicted, representing the mourning of the deceased who lies stretched out on a bier. He is surrounded by mourners who tear their hair in lament, and by armed warriors in horse-drawn chariots who lend a heroic flavour to the scene. Each of the human figures, executed in silhouette, is depicted in a combination of profile and frontal views. Though for the most part extremely literal in its representation of figures and objects – take, for example, the chequered shroud cut away from the body to leave us in no doubt that here lies the deceased – the beginnings of rudimentary perspective are visible in the decreasing length of the necks of the horses positioned farthest from the viewer. — LAB

Further reading
A.D. Trendall, Handbook to the Nicholson Museum, 2nd ed. (Sydney, 1948), 244–7, fig. 48;
THE HESS HORSE

Bronze, lost wax technique
Height 8.8 cm Length 7.4 cm
Provenance unknown, but probably from Athens; Late Geometric I Period,
ca mid-8th century BC
From the Estate of Dr Walter Hess and acquired in 1986; Inv. 86.10

Figurines such as this must have been quite expensive items. They seem normally to have
been created to serve as dedications in sanctuaries such as that at Olympia. In Geometric
Greece, as in many cultures, horses were the prerogative of the upper classes, and the
dedication of a figure such as a horse had a symbolic significance that reflected not only
the importance of the sanctuary but also the status (or would-be status) of the donor.
On the contemporary Dipylon Krater (see p. 80), the procession of horse-drawn chariots
seems to reflect a funeral procession expressed in heroic terms, and something of the same
connotation should be read into this piece too.

The horse stands on a base to which four legs and its tail are joined. It is in many respects
typical of the schematised figurines of the Geometric period, with an emphasis on the legs
and head and a relatively small body. The muzzle is set off from the head; the ears are fairly
flat and thrust backwards. The legs are flat on the inner face and the hooves are barely
distinguished below the prominent fetlocks. The tail is ridged down the outer edge.
The base has four rows of empty triangles, creating a double row of zigzags.

On grounds of style and details of manufacture, our horse has been attributed by
Zimmermann (see below) to the Laconian tradition, and, within that, to the ‘Master of
the New York Centauromachy’ who seems to have been responsible for at least eight
other known pieces. – JRG

Further reading
Centauromachy’, in A. Cambitoglu and E.G.D. Robinson (eds), Classical Art in the
Nicholson Museum, Sydney (Mainz, 1995), 29–38; on bronze horse figurines generally,
see W-D. Heilmeyer, Frühe Olympische Bronzefiguren. Die Tierotive (Berlin, 1979);
J-L. Zimmermann, Les chevaux de bronze dans l’art géométrique grec (Mainz, 1989);
on the importance of horses, see J.L. Benson, Horse, Bird and Man: the Origins of Greek
Paintings (Amherst, 1970).
WARrior HEAd vaSe

Moulded clay, neck of vessel added separately and surface painted
Height 7.5 cm Width 4.4 cm Depth 5.7 cm
Probably from Rhodes, East Greece; early 6th century BC
Purchased at Sotheby's by A.D. Trendall in 1946, previously Cowdray Collection;
Inv. 47.01

This miniature terracotta vessel, which takes the form of a helmeted warrior's head, has survived the centuries in excellent condition. Made in the early 6th century BC, its original function was probably that of an elaborate receptacle for perfumed oil. The head was fashioned from clay pressed into two moulds: once released from the moulds the two impressions were joined and a wheel-made mouth was added before firing.

Between about 610–550 BC many such vases, mainly anthropomorphic or zoomorphic in form, were manufactured in East Greece, Corinth and Etruria. The helmeted warrior's head was a popular product of East Greek workshops, probably located on the island of Rhodes: other common forms included female busts and animals. Market demand for the Rhodian figure vases seems to have come from Italy as well as Rhodes itself.

The facial features of the warrior are clearly represented: he has black eyes and a black moustache. He wears a helmet of the Ionian (East Greek) type, so identified by its hinged cheek-pieces and a vertical projection, here decorated with a white cross, situated above the forehead-gaurd. The helmet is mainly black, with the cheek-pieces and forehead-guard added in purple-red and framed with white.

Though the exact findspot of this vessel is unknown, many such vases have been found in tombs where they were deposited as funerary offerings. Some examples have been excavated in sanctuary contexts, where they were dedicated as gifts to the gods. These ornate containers may also have been used in daily life to dispense fragrant oil to refresh and perfume the body.
– LAB

Further reading
FEMALE FIGURINES

Handmade and mould-made ceramic, with black glaze decoration
Heights 19.0 cm and 15.6 cm
Made in the region of Boeotia, Greece; Archaic Period, ca 600–550 BC
Acquired before 1962; Inv. 51.04 and 62.788

Terracotta figurines are found at virtually all Greek sites in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods. They appear in houses, sanctuaries and tombs, and while many represent deities and their worshippers, others must have been children’s toys or souvenirs.

The region of Boeotia, to the northwest of Athens, has produced tens of thousands of terracotta figurines, from sites such as Thebes, Rhitsona and, above all, Tanagra. These two figurines are from the earliest phase of Boeotian terracotta production, and are known as ‘board’ or ‘plank’ figurines after their flat, handmade bodies. They are also known as ‘Pappas’ figures, since the high headdresses and long robes reminded the early excavators of Greek orthodox priests.

On both these female figurines, the clothes, necklace, hair and facial features have been painted in black glaze. The face of the larger figure has been made in a mould, while the face of the smaller figure is handmade and is more primitive in style. This latter statuette wears a polos headdress, which was reserved for goddesses in Archaic Greek art. The strange spiral volute projecting from the front of the polos has never been adequately explained; its closest parallels are in Egypt and Phoenicia. This motif is one of a number of possible links between Boeotia and Phoenicia, which included the ancient Greek belief that Kadmos the Phoenician founded the city of Thebes and in the process taught the Greeks the use of the alphabet.

The interpretation of these figures is not certain, but the pomegranate necklaces worn by both strongly suggest the cult of Demeter and Persephone. Worship of this mother and daughter, who were able to travel to the Underworld and back again, would not have been inappropriate in a funerary context, from where these two figurines almost certainly came.

— EGDR

Further reading
On this type of figurine, see R.A. Higgins, Tanagra and the Figurines (Princeton, 1986); M. Szabó, Archaic Terracottas of Boeotia (Rome, 1994); on Greek terracottas more generally, see R. A. Higgins, Greek Terracottas (London, 1967).
BLACK-Figure NECK-AMPHORA

Ceramic, with added pigment; reconstructed from a few large fragments, with some modern restoration

Height 27.0 cm Diameter (lip) 15.4 cm Diameter (foot) 11.9 cm
Made in Athens; third quarter of the 6th century BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, probably in 1860; Inv. 98.20 (R716)

The body of this vase is dominated on each side by a single striking figure: a fish-tailed bearded male (a merman) who is probably to be identified with Triton, a son of the god of the sea, Poseidon. He is turned towards the right and gestures with one hand, while holding a fish, possibly identified as a dolphin or tuna, in his left hand.

On the neck of the vessel between the top of the handles is a palmette and lotus chain. There is a plentiful use of added purple-red to enliven the vase on the neck of the vessel, and on the figure itself: the hair, beard, circles around the nipples and tail are all painted. The incision for the details of the figure is carefully done, especially over the scales of the tail. Palmette and tendril designs are placed below the handles. The other side of the vase has a similar figure but with a slightly different handling of the details.

Triton was not commonly represented in 6th century vase-painting except as an opponent of Herakles. Similar figures also appear in the pediment of the so-called Old Temple of Athena on the Athenian Acropolis, with which this vase is roughly contemporary. In later art Triton is shown as a gentler figure, sometimes blowing a conch-shell, and as a male counterpart to the Nereids, the nymphs of the sea. In the 2nd century BC, the poet Moschus created a splendid word-picture of Zeus in the form of a bull carrying Europa across the sea accompanied by the Nereids and the Tritons blowing a wedding-march on their shells.

In stylistic terms, A.D. Trendall (former Honorary Curator and Professor of Archaeology) was right in seeing a link with the circle of the master potter and painter Exekias, one of the major figures in Athenian pottery production of the third quarter of the 6th century BC. In the following generation the red-figure technique of decorating the surface of vases was introduced, leading pottery decoration in new directions. – JRG

Further reading
SILVER COIN

Silver stater
Diameter 2.9 cm  Weight 17.61 g
Terone mint; ca 480–465 BC
Purchased from Noble Numismatics Pty Ltd, Sydney, in 2003,
with the assistance of Mr W.L. Gale; Inv. 103.02

Coinage was first struck in western Asia Minor in the second half of the 7th century BC. Greek cities began minting silver coinage around the middle of the 6th century, and by the beginning of the 5th century, it was being issued by many states throughout the Greek world.

This rare example was minted in the city of Terone (modern Torone), situated in the Chalkidike, northern Greece. Referred to by ancient Athenian writers, it was a tributary ally of Athens in the 5th century at the time when this coin was struck; Thucydides (History, 4.113, 5.2–3) records the struggle of the Athenians and the Spartans for control of the city during the Peloponnesian War. Silver was the principal metal for the coinage of Terone during the period when the mint was operating before Alexander the Great, although bronze coinage was also struck during the 4th century. Gold was rarely used for issues of coinage by Greek cities, although Persian gold coins circulated in the Greek world.

On the obverse, the coin features a metal amphora with a decorative band at the base of its neck, flanked by the Greek letters pi and omicron, the initial letters of the name of the issuing magistrate, surrounded by a circle of dots. The type alludes to the importance of wine production in the region of the city during this period. The reverse has a four-part incuse square in the form of a mill sail. The purpose of the reverse punch was essentially to drive the silver into the obverse die and, for that reason, it did not often have a design in this period. The coin is known as a ‘stater’, which means that it was the standard denomination of the city. It was worth about four days wages for a skilled workman at this time. It weighs 17.61 grams, the Euboean weight standard, which was shared by many cities in the region and elsewhere in Greece, including Athens, whose contemporary tetradrachms, known as ‘owls’, were also on this standard.

The coin is of particular importance for the Museum, since Torone was the site of the Australian excavations begun in 1975 and directed by Professor Alexander Cambitoglou, former Honorary Curator of the Nicholson Museum. Many students and staff members of the Department of Archaeology participated in the project over the years. A number of small silver and bronze coins issued by the city were recovered during the excavations. – NMMH

Further reading
RED-Figure KALPIS-HYDRIA

Ceramic, restored from fragments; attributed to the hand of the Chrysis Painter
Height 42.5 cm Diameter (lip) 18.0 cm Diameter (foot) 14.0 cm
Made in Athens and found at Vulci, Italy; 420–410 BC
Presented by W.G. Kett in 1954; Inv. 54.03

This large ceramic vessel was manufactured in Athens at the end of the 5th century BC. Made on a wheel, it was fired in a kiln at temperatures between 825–950°C. The vessel was subsequently decorated by a craftsman named by archaeologists the Chrysis Painter, after an inscription found on one of his other vases. Like many other Athenian figured vases of the period, the finished product was exported to Italy.

Painted in the red-figure technique, the pot surface is glossy black while the human figures are reserved in the natural orange-red colour of the clay from which the vase is fashioned: details of their clothing, facial features and other attributes are picked out with painted black lines.

The subject on the vase is drawn from mythology, and illustrates the story of Polyneikes and Eriphyle. Polyneikes, son of Oedipus, quarrelled with his brother over the throne of Thebes in Boeotia. In this matter he sought the help of the king of Argos, whose sister Eriphyle was married to the warrior Amphiarao. Determining to help Polyneikes in his struggle, the king prepared a great force headed by seven commanders to march against Polyneikes’ brother in Thebes. One of the seven commanders was to be Amphiarao who, able to see the future, knew that he would meet his death in the campaign and thus hid himself to avoid participation. However, his hiding place was betrayed by his wife Eriphyle who succumbed to the bribe of a golden necklace offered to her by Polyneikes. Her treachery led to Amphiarao’s death at Thebes and ultimately to her own death at the hands of her son, committed to avenging his father.

On the vase we see Eriphyle seated in an outdoor setting. This is indicated by the uneven ground lines lightly incised into the pot surface and by a leafy branch in front of her: this was originally added in white paint which has since flaked off, leaving behind a ghostly impression. Polyneikes stands before Eriphyle, holding on his left arm a jewel chest and in his right hand the golden necklace which he extends towards her: like the leafy branch, the necklace was originally added in the same fugitive white paint which has left behind a faint impression. Eriphyle’s female attendants stand on either side, one of them holding a mirror. The wool basket by Eriphyle’s side and the wedding wreath positioned above the fateful necklace, remind the viewer of the marital and domestic responsibilities which Eriphyle is about to violate.

The painter’s choice of the kalpis-hydria as the canvas for his scene is hardly coincidental. Equipped with two horizontal handles for lifting and a third vertical handle for pouring, the vessel was used by women to collect water from the well. In presenting the Polyneikes-Eriphyle theme, this vessel thus served a didactic function in the moral instruction and edification of its female user. – LAB

Further reading
THE AURA SKYPHOS

Ceramic and intact; attributed to a painter near the Schwerin Group
Height 15.7 cm Diameter (lip) 20.6 cm Diameter (foot) 14.3 cm
From Conversano (Bari) in Lucania, southern Italy; late 5th century BC
Purchased in 1953 with the aid of a donation from Sir Charles McDonald; Inv. 53.30

This vessel is a relatively large version of a skyphos or drinking cup, of Attic type, featuring
on one side a female figure seated on a rock by the sea, holding onto her cloak which
bills out behind. On it is written the word AYRA (Aura). She is barefoot, wears a peplos
with overfall and has a necklace, a headband in her hair and a bangle on her left wrist.
A plant is depicted at the base of the rock. There is no added colour and the whole scene
is placed within a panel flanked by large lattice borders.

The charming scene shows a personification of Aura, the sea-breeze. This is the earliest
certain representation of her even if it seems unlikely that the vase-painter had invented the
idea himself. The scheme of the figure with cloak billowing in the wind is seen again on the
famous Ara Pacis of Augustus in Rome and there is a later reference to it in Pliny's Natural
History 36.29 where he speaks of a piece by an unknown sculptor in the Hall of Octavia in
Rome as showing 'Two Breezes who are spreading their cloaks like sails'. By then it was a well-
known motif but one might guess that it had been originally developed in the so-called
artistic 'Rich Style' of the later 5th century BC, perhaps in a sculpted relief. It brings to
mind, for example, the elaborate drapery of the sculpted reliefs on the well-known Nike
Balustrade on the Athenian Acropolis.

On the reverse side (not shown) is a depiction of a naked winged Eros standing to the right,
looking into a mirror and holding a staff with his left hand. Below the handles are panels of
dot-filled lozenges that cut into the sides of the lattice borders.

The drawing recalls the work of an Athenian vase-painter, the Marlay Painter. Side borders
and panels of this kind are also not uncommon in that painter's work. The manufacture is,
however, South Italian. The vase belongs to an early phase of red-figure vase-painting that
developed in the region, when it was still heavily indebted to Athenian influences, and it was
perhaps made in the other major centre, Metaponto, rather than Taranto. The vase is said to
have been found in the same tomb as an imported Attic red-figure column-krater by the
Painter of Munich 2335 of about 430-420 BC. — JRG

Further reading
Altertumswissenschaft (Bonn, 1957), 167–9; A.D. Trendall, The Red-figured Vases of Lucania,
Campania and Sicily (Oxford, 1967), 70, no. 352, pl. 33.1; F. Canciani, 'Aura', Lexicon
Bell-Krater Depicting Three Chorusmen from a Satyr-Play

Ceramic and intact; attributed to the hand of the Tarporley Painter
Height 32.5 cm Diameter (lip) 35.5 cm Diameter (foot) 15.8 cm
Probably made in Taranto, region of Apulia, southern Italy; early 4th century BC
Purchased at Sotheby's by A.D. Trendall in 1946,
formerly Hamilton, Hope and Cowdray Collections; Inv. 47.05

This vase is probably the best-known object in the Museum and it has a distinguished modern history, going back to the collection formed by Sir William Hamilton in Naples in the later part of the 18th century.

The main scene depicts three members of the chorus of a satyr-play. Two of them hold their masks in their left hands and engage in conversation; the third has donned his mask and has already adopted his theatrical role as a satyr, a follower of Dionysos. To the right is a tympanon, or tambourine.

This is one of the most important pieces of evidence for the costume of classical satyr-play. The scene depicts the chorusmen wearing short tights or trunks, laced in position across the front, with a semi-erect phallus at the front and a small tail at the rear. The wheel-like design on the sides was also standard. The masks too are typical, with their wild hair and unkempt beards, snub noses and equine ears. They are clearly lightweight and were probably made of stiffened linen with hair attached; in this case the painter has shown the loosely hanging hair of the central mask. The third young man wears his mask and it is significant that he performs the role, dancing with arms back and a skipping step.

During the Classical period in Athens, satyr-plays were produced as a fourth item by the writer of the set of three tragedies, serving as comic relief by way of parodies of standard mythological stories, depicting a 'world turned upside down'. Despite the fact that very few texts were preserved for us by later generations, they seem to have been extremely popular with contemporary audiences. Although substantial evidence exists for the increasing popularity of imported Athenian tragedy and comedy in the South Italian city of Taranto from the later part of the 5th century onwards, this vessel is one of the few pieces to provide incontrovertible evidence for the local performance of satyr-play.

The vase has been attributed to the Tarporley Painter, an important vase-painter from Taranto and founder of a considerable school in the early 4th century BC. – JRG

Further reading
THE TILDESLEY MIRROR

Cast bronze with engraved decoration, original handle missing
Length 25.4 cm  Diameter 16.6 cm
No provenance, but undoubtedly made in Etruria; ca 350 BC
Donated by Evelyn and Beatrice Tildesley in 1973; Inv. 73.01

Mirrors were common in Graeco-Roman antiquity. In ancient art they are normally seen in the hands of women, although they were doubtless used by men as well – the Roman man was clean-shaven until the Emperor Hadrian, in imitation of the Greek philosophers he so admired, brought the beard back into fashion. Ancient mirrors were normally made of bronze, which could be polished to a highly reflective surface.

The Tildesley Mirror was made in Etruria (central Italy) around the middle of the 4th century BC, and its maker engraved a mythological scene onto the reverse (non-reflective) side. An episode from Greek mythology was chosen, showing Achilles and Troilos, here labelled in the Etruscanised version of their names, Achle and Troile.

The story is well-known from Homer’s Iliad. A prophecy foretold that while the Trojan prince Troilos lived, the city of Troy would never fall to the Greeks. Riding outside the walls, Troilos was surprised by Achilles, who pursued him to a sanctuary of Apollo and killed him there. This desecration of the sanctuary would be Achilles’ downfall, since it was Apollo who guided an arrow to the proverbial heel, as revenge. In the scene on the Tildesley Mirror, Achilles unseats Troilos by grabbing his hair.

The mirror was probably found in the grave of an Etruscan woman. It is hard to understand how such a bloodthirsty scene was thought appropriate in this context, but a clue is provided by the floral frame of ivy leaves and berries. This plant (especially as here, in the form of a wreath) evoked the god Dionysos (Etruscan Fugluns), whose worship was well-entrenched in Etruria. By 350 BC, Dionysos had become very important in salvationist beliefs. Many Etruscan objects, and particularly those found in tombs, combine a scene of pain and death (perhaps symbolising the travails of daily life) with symbols of the god into whose blissful company the deceased hoped to be reborn. – EGDR

Further reading
BRONZE PILOS HELMET

Cast bronze with attached cheek-pieces and neck-guard
Height (without cheek-pieces and neck-guard) 23.1 cm Diameter 19.7–24.4 cm
Probably from a tomb in southeastern Italy (Puglia); 4th century BC
Purchased in 1982; Inv. 82.29

Greek travellers, hunters and soldiers on route-march would often wear a pointed felt cap called a pilos, to shelter their heads and keep the sun off their faces. Very similar hats are still worn today in Albania and other parts of the Balkans. In the 5th century BC, a version of the felt cap began to be made in metal, and a new type of helmet was born.

The Nicholson Museum example is a deluxe version of the type, with a neck-guard and cheek-pieces attached (rather unusually) by solder. Originally the helmet would have been padded on the interior. Patches of solder on the exterior show where bronze ornaments and horsehair plumes were attached.

This helmet does not, however, come from Greek lands. It was almost certainly made, used, and buried in a tomb in southeastern Italy (modern Puglia, the heel of the Italian boot). While Greek colonists, such as the Spartans at Taranto, controlled many of the coastal plains of South Italy, much of the interior remained in the hands of the indigenous Italians.

The Greek colonists undoubtedly regarded their neighbours as a strange lot. They were ‘barbarians’ of course (from the ‘bar bar bar’ sounds that foreign languages made to Greek ears), and had customs that the Greeks regarded as archaic and odd. One of these was the carrying of weapons and armour, which the Greeks had given up long before the 4th century BC, when this helmet was made. While Greek males would define themselves in life (and in death) with the symbols of the gymnasium, the symposium and the world of politics, amongst their indigenous Italian neighbours prestige and social standing was still expressed through the military sphere. Thus the Greek pilos helmet was enthusiastically borrowed and used in South Italy, and this example, when buried, was a prized possession and a powerful symbol of the social status of its owner. – EGDR

Further reading
NIOBÉ HYDRIA

Ceramic, with added yellow and white pigment;
attributed to the hand of the Libation Painter
Height 42.2 cm Diameter (lip) 15.8 cm Diameter (body) 26.3 cm
Diameter (foot) 14.1 cm
Made in Capua, region of Campania, southern Italy; third quarter of the 4th century BC
Purchased in 1971; Inv. 71.01

The scene of Niobe at her tomb is a relatively popular one on South Italian vases of the middle years of the 4th century BC. It is regularly used to decorate pieces made for a woman’s grave where its relevance is that Niobe was a proud mother of her six (in some versions seven or even ten) sons and an equal number of daughters. This prompted her to claim that she was therefore superior to Leto who had borne only Artemis and Apollo. Leto called on her children to avenge the insult: Artemis killed all her daughters and Apollo her sons. Niobe never ceased her mourning and turned into a rock with water flowing down her face like tears. It has been suggested that scenes such as this were used as lead-items in funerary ritual recalling the qualities of the deceased.

The popularity of the theme seems to have arisen from a famous drama of the 4th century BC rather than Aeschylus’ tragedy Niobe which took a more traditional view of Niobe’s suffering. A number of contemporary vases from Taranto in Apulia include the figure of the stage-messenger who, in an apparently famous passage, recounted the sight of her being turned to stone at the tomb. From these scenes it becomes a standard motif, and was thus transmitted to Campania in southern Italy where this vase was manufactured.

The front of the vase is dominated by the figure of Niobe standing and lamenting. The lower part of her body is painted white, as she is transformed into stone. Her aged father, Tantalos, supported by an attendant, kneels on the steps begging her to desist, while an attendant of Niobe’s sits on the other side in mourning. Across the front is a range of offerings placed at the grave. To the left and right in the upper part of the scene are a seated veiled woman (Leto) and a youth with a laurel-branch (Apollo?). Niobe could be viewed as the paradigm of a dedicated mother. – JRG

Further reading
A.D. Trendall and T.B.L. Webster, Illustrations of Greek Drama (London, 1971), III.1, 23;
A.D. Trendall, ‘The Mourning Niobe’, Revue Archéologique (1972), 309–16, fig. 1;
A. Kossatz-Deissmann, Dramen des Aischylos auf westgriechischen Vasen (Mainz, 1978), pl. 11;
PAIR OF GOLD EARRINGS

Gold disks inlaid with garnets, with pendant figures of sheet gold; some surface damage
Height 6.39 cm
From Patmos, Greece; late 4th century BC
Purchased in 1949; Inv. 49.08

Because of its intrinsic value, Greek gold jewellery has survived only in limited quantities
and what has been preserved comes mostly from graves. It was not uncommon for women
of status to be buried with necklaces, earrings and bracelets.

These earrings each comprise a disc with a loop for attachment to the ear at the back and,
suspended from it, a figure of Nike (victory) holding a wreath. The Nikai were created as a
matching pair, in mirror image. They are in good condition, with remarkably little distortion
given their delicacy.

Each disc is flat and slightly up-turned at the edges. They are decorated as rosettes with eight
petals around translucent, purple-red circular garnets and edged with a border of twisted wire.

The Nikai have one hand raised, holding a wreath, the other held below with fingers
outstretched. They wear a sleeveless chiton with the overfall extending to the level of the hips.
The figures are constructed from thin sheet-gold with careful detailing at the front but plain
at the back. They are largely closed off below and the dainty feet were added. The wings too
were made separately and soldered onto the shoulders at the back. The facial features are
somewhat blurred. The head of one is slightly tilted, not unattractively.

One leg is forward and the drapery is blown back against it as the figure is thought to fly
through the air, an effect which must have been emphasised as the earrings swung when
worn. The wreaths held up by the figures were presented as a symbol of success and it is
characteristic of such pieces that they allude to good fortune for the wearer. – JRG

Further reading
On Greek jewellery generally, see D. Williams and J. Ogden, Greek Gold, Jewellery of the
ETRUSCAN CINERARY URN

Ceramic, with moulded and painted decoration in relief on one side
Height 26.5 cm  Length 43.3 cm  Width 21.5 cm
From the territory of Chiusi, Italy; 2nd–1st century BC
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, probably in 1860; Inv. R1020

This urn was produced in northern Etruria in the centuries after its conquest by the Romans, and originally contained the cremated remains of an Etruscan man. These objects were mass-produced in moulds, and made principally for a rapidly expanding class of poorer people, often former slaves, who lived and worked around the once great Etruscan city of Chiusi.

The scene shows an episode from the Theban Cycle of Greek mythology. In the battle to inherit the kingdom of Thebes in Boeotia from their father Oedipus, Eteocles pushes aside his brother’s shield to plunge a sword into his neck; Polynices at the same time thrusts upwards, and the brothers die at the same instant. The scene is watched on either side by a torch-bearing Etruscan underworld demon known as Vanth. The figures were painted in vivid red, pink, blue and gold on a white background, with an inscription in red identifying the deceased as Arnza Petru Manthvate, son of Clanti. The urn would have been covered with a lid showing the deceased either sleeping or banqueting in the afterlife.

The meaning of these images is much debated. Objects such as this have contributed to the belief that the Etruscans were characterised by bloodthirstiness and cruelty (here fraticide) on the one hand, and luxury (banqueting) on the other, but in truth a north Etruscan ex-slave peasant farmer is unlikely to have seen much of either. A penchant for cautionary tales to show the suffering of life, together with a statement about the hoped-for pleasures of the afterlife, is largely responsible for this reputation.

Here the tale of Eteocles and Polynices presumably spoke to the mourners not only of the painful loss of family members but also of the dangers, in this period of growing population pressures and conflict between classes, of the breaking of family bonds in disputes over heredity. – EGDR

Further reading
THE NICHOLSON HERMES

Marble, mended from three large fragments; lower limbs missing and surface damaged
Height 1.56 m
Collected in 1881 by Sir George Macleay, probably in the vicinity of Smyrna
(Izmir, Turkey); late Hellenistic or early Roman Period,
second half of the 2nd century BC to 1st century AD
Donated in 1934 by Sir Charles, Dr Sydney and Mr Archibald Nicholson,
the sons of Sir Charles Nicholson; Inv. 104.01

The statue is made of white marble, the surface of which has been deeply weathered through
contact with running water. Though now damaged and incomplete, missing both lower arms
and hands, penis and both lower legs, this imposing over life-size figure would originally have
stood well over two metres tall.

The identification of the figure as the god Hermes is suggested by his close similarity to a
number of other statues of the god. As divine messenger and god of travellers a *chlamys*, or
short travelling cape, is wound about his left arm and shoulder: he may perhaps also have
originally held his herald’s staff, the *kerykeion* or *caduceus*, in his missing left hand. The figure
stands in a relaxed stance, resting all his weight on his flexed right leg while bending his left
leg at the knee. His right hand originally rested on his right hip. Naked except for his *chlamys*,
he possesses the athletic physique of a man in his prime, reflecting the Classical ideal of heroic
male beauty.

Though the exact findspot of the piece is not known, the figure originally may have
functioned as a grave marker. A closely comparable statue of Hermes from the island of
Andros is known to have served such a purpose, befitting the god’s well-established role as
conductor of souls between the world of the living and that of the dead.

Made in the late Hellenistic or early Roman period, the statue is a copy of an earlier ancient
work, ultimately tracing its roots back to a statue of Hermes sculpted by the famous 4th
century BC artist, Praxiteles. Since a growing taste for Classical Greek sculpture in the late
Hellenistic and early Roman periods meant that there were simply not enough original
statues to satisfy the market, many copies of the originals were produced. As, however, there
did not yet exist any mechanised means of exactly reproducing the original, each copy was
a handmade product modified to some degree by contemporary style and the individual
commission. – LAB

Further reading
C. Waldstein, ‘Notes on the Collection of Ancient Marbles in the Possession of Sir Charles
Nicholson’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 7 (1896), 241–6; F.A. Todd in *The Sydney Morning Herald*
2/11/1935, reprinted as ‘The Nicholson Hermes: Gift to the University’, in *The Union Recorder*
7/11/1935, 251–3; A.D. Trendall, *Handbook to the Nicholson Museum*, 1st and 2nd eds (Sydney,
1945 and 1948), 2, 167, frontispiece and 3–4, 351; on Roman copies of Greek works generally,
PORTRAIT OF THE EMPEROR TITUS

Marble; some surface damage
Height 39.8 cm
Provenance unknown; Roman Period, 1st century AD
Formerly Epstein Collection, London, and acquired before 1965; Inv. 64.325

An entity as large and diverse as the Roman Empire was not easily held together. Perhaps the most important propaganda tool was the cult of the emperor, who was formally honoured with statues and other dedications. Portrait types were created by artists of the Imperial court, then distributed and copied throughout the provinces.

This, clearly, could become a burden – a large number of Roman Imperial portraits were not made from scratch, but were re-cut from portraits of earlier emperors. The head in the Nicholson Museum belongs to this class, as is evident from the folds on the back of the head, which shows evidence of re-cutting. The original portrait depicted the emperor in a well-known pose, conducting a religious ceremony with the edge of his toga pulled up over his head. Enough remains of the original features to be fairly sure that this head started life as a portrait of the Emperor Claudius (AD 41–54).

The artist who re-cut the portrait did not bother removing the folds of the toga from the back of the head, presumably because the new version was to stand in a niche. The wedge-shaped base of the head shows that it would have been set into a full-length statue. The new portrait seems to have represented the Emperor Titus (AD 79–81), famous for his role in the recapture of Judea and the sack of the Temple at Jerusalem. The hairline has been made to recede slightly, and Claudius’ distinctive high-set nose has been remodelled, with quite a deep groove cut across the bridge. The most complete reworking has taken place around the mouth, an area regarded by the Romans as very important in capturing an individual’s facial features. Nothing could be done to reproduce Titus’ broad, round face, but out in the provinces such details were apparently unimportant.

Claudius could not have felt too aggrieved at this turn of events – many of his own portraits had started their lives as likenesses of his unpopular predecessor, Caligula, which were systematically destroyed or modified after the latter’s death. – EGDR

Further reading
ROMAN WALL-PAINTING

Plaster painted in the fresco technique
Height 44.5 cm  Width 31.3 cm  Thickness 1.3 cm
Probably from a building in the Bay of Naples area; Roman Period, AD 60–80
Acquired by gift in 1980; Inv. 80.49

Roman buildings, from the most splendid patrician palace and villa to the lowliest bar or brothel, usually had plastered and painted decoration on their interior walls. Roman wall-paintings were executed in the true fresco technique, with paint applied when the plaster was still wet. This is why so many wall-paintings in the towns and villas covered by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 have been preserved with their vivid colours intact.

Paintings such as this were executed in many parts of the Roman Empire, but the volcanic inclusions in the plaster of the Nicholson Museum painting indicate that it almost certainly came from Pompeii or Herculaneum, or from one of the villas nearby. The painter has represented a plant with enough precision that the Iris albicans Lange can be identified – a type of iris that still grows in the Bay of Naples area.

Roman wall-painting is quite formulaic, and it is certain that this fragment comes from the lower (socle) zone of a wall. The iris has been rendered in broad brush strokes in an impressionistic style that is especially characteristic of the period of the Emperor Nero (AD 54–68). It was probably executed in the years after AD 62, when a strong earthquake damaged many buildings in Pompeii and Herculaneum, and led to the repair and repainting of many walls. The Romans, alas, did not know enough about volcanoes to heed the earthquake’s warning, and this painting cannot have been admired for many years before it disappeared under Vesuvius’ ash in AD 79. – EGDR

Further reading
MOSAIC DEPICTING A PEACOCK

Coloured stone and glass *tesserae* with some restoration, mainly around the edges
Length 93.0 cm Width 58.0 cm
Said to be from southern Italy; late Roman Period, *ca* 4th century AD
Donated by Sir Charles Nicholson, probably in 1860; Inv. R1062

Mosaic pavements first appear in Greece in the 5th century BC, when natural pebbles were set into beds of mortar or plaster. Cubic pieces of stone (*tesserae*) were widely used from about 200 BC onwards, and the technique was enthusiastically adopted by the Romans. Mosaic pavements were a sign of civilised life, and are found in the furthest corners of the Roman Empire.

The multicoloured plumage of the peacock fascinated the Romans. The bird was kept in gardens and aviaries, and is one of the most common motifs found in late Roman mosaics, being equally at home in pagan and Christian contexts.

For pagans, the peacock was above all a bird of Dionysos, a god strongly associated with a joyous afterlife. Peacocks, whose flesh was believed to be incorruptible, are often found drinking from the kantharos (cup) of Dionysos in Roman tomb-paintings and mosaics. Deified Roman empresses were carried up to heaven by peacocks, and many ordinary Romans hoped for a similar apotheosis. The magnificent plumage of the bird, particularly when fully displayed, symbolised the starry heavens.

This celestial imagery also appealed to Christian patrons, and the motif was adopted more or less unchanged on mosaics in Christian tombs, houses and churches. As a bird symbolising immortality, the peacock drinking from a life-giving cup had obvious resonances in Christian beliefs. As a prime example of the magnificence of God’s creation, the bird figures prominently in scenes of Paradise, the glittering feathers being particularly well-suited to the mosaic craft, in which the stone and shiny glass *tesserae* could be combined.

One can imagine this panel forming part of a much larger mosaic in a late Roman villa, with numerous single motifs in rectangular frames. If it was indeed found in South Italy, it may owe something to North African mosaic traditions. The vitality of the provinces generally surpassed that of Italy at this time. – *EGDR*

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<tr>
<td>Achaemenid</td>
<td>Pertaining to the Persian royal dynasty or historical period, <em>ca</em> mid-6th century to 331 BC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aeschylus</td>
<td>A leading Athenian tragic playwright, <em>ca</em> 525/4–456/5 BC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>centauromachy</td>
<td>A battle scene showing the half man-half horse centaurs fighting men or mythical creatures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>chous</td>
<td>A small jug used for pouring liquids.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>clavus</em> (pl. <em>clavi</em>)</td>
<td>A tapestry decoration on a Roman tunic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>corvée labour</td>
<td>The obligation of providing free labour for a sovereign or feudal master.</td>
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<tr>
<td>dentate/crenellated</td>
<td>Tooth-like, indented.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dionysos</td>
<td>The Greek god of fertility, wine and intoxication, also associated with theatre.</td>
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<tr>
<td>faience</td>
<td>A compound of silica mixed with an alkaline binder and tinted with mineral pigments, which was fashioned into objects such as beads, amulets and statuettes, and then fired.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>fibula</em> (pl. <em>fibulae</em>)</td>
<td>A metal brooch or pin, used to hold a garment in place.</td>
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<td>gesso</td>
<td>Plaster mixed with gum, often used to prepare a surface for painting or gilding.</td>
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<td>gymnasium</td>
<td>A public sports and educational institution in ancient Greek cities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hathor</td>
<td>An Egyptian goddess often depicted in either cow-form or human with bovine features, who had various aspects associated with funerary belief, foreign lands, women, childbirth and music.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horus</td>
<td>An Egyptian god who was the son of Isis and Osiris, commonly depicted as a hawk or with a human body and the head of a hawk. Associated with the sky and protector of the living king.</td>
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<td>hydria</td>
<td>A type of large-bellied jar with three handles, used for carrying water.</td>
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<td>incuse</td>
<td>In coinage, an impression made by stamping into the coin surface.</td>
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<td>Isis</td>
<td>An Egyptian goddess who was the sister/wife of Osiris, god of the Underworld, and the mother of Horus. Imbued with magical powers, she was associated with healing and protection for both the living and the dead. In Ptolemaic and Roman times, associated with female fertility.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khepri</td>
<td>An Egyptian creator-god often depicted as a scarab beetle or in a human form with a scarab beetle for a head.</td>
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<tr>
<td>krater</td>
<td>A type of wide-mouthed vessel used typically for mixing wine with water.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laconian</td>
<td>Pertaining to Sparta and Laconia in Greece.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Levant</td>
<td>An antiquated French term for the coastal eastern Mediterranean region comprising Israel, the Palestinian Autonomous Zone, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.</td>
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## GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>libation</td>
<td>Liquid poured in honour of a god, or the act of pouring it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>lost wax technique</td>
<td>A technique of casting in metal where the object is modelled in wax then covered in clay, which is fired. Firing melts the wax, which escapes via vents. Molten metal is then poured into the resulting void, taking the shape of the wax model.</td>
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<tr>
<td>malachite</td>
<td>A green mineral composed of copper carbonate.</td>
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<td>Menander</td>
<td>A leading Athenian comic playwright, <em>ca</em> 343–292/1 BC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mitanni</td>
<td>A Hurrian kingdom in the area of the foothills between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, <em>ca</em> 1500 BC, which lasted for about one hundred years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mut</td>
<td>An Egyptian goddess who was the wife or consort of Amun, also closely associated with the lion-headed goddess Sekhmet. Usually shown wearing a vulture headdress with the White Crown or Double Crown.</td>
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<td>ostracon (pl. ostraca)</td>
<td>A piece of broken pottery or flake of stone bearing an inscription or graffito.</td>
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<td>pectoral</td>
<td>An ornament of jewellery or small piece of armour, worn on the chest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>peplos</td>
<td>A Greek woman’s sleeveless dress made of woollen cloth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phoenicia</td>
<td>The land of the ancient Phoenicians located on the narrow coastline of the Levant, mostly in modern-day Lebanon and Syria.</td>
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<td>polos</td>
<td>A cylindrical Greek headdress.</td>
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<td>prothesis</td>
<td>A body lying on a bier as part of Greek funeral ritual.</td>
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<tr>
<td>provenance</td>
<td>The modern-day findspot of an object.</td>
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<td>register</td>
<td>In the layout of artwork, a vertical or horizontal division or grouping of pictures or lines of writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>sanctuary</td>
<td>A sacred place dedicated to a god, its form ranging from a simple open area to a formal construction or temple tended by priests.</td>
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<td>satrapy</td>
<td>An administrative region of the Achaemenid Empire.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serapis (or Sarapis)</td>
<td>An Egyptian god who emerged in the Ptolemaic period (<em>ca</em> 332–30 BC), assimilating aspects of certain Greek and Egyptian deities, notably Zeus, Dionysos, Apis and Osiris. Associated with male fertility and the corn supply.</td>
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<td>Shu</td>
<td>The Egyptian god of the air, also associated with the sun, represented in human form, often wearing a feather on his head.</td>
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<td>skyphos</td>
<td>A type of deep cup usually standing on a low foot, with two horizontal handles on or just below the rim.</td>
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<td>slip</td>
<td>A slurry of fine clay and pigment mixed with water, usually applied to pottery before firing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>sphinx</td>
<td>A mythical creature with the body of a lion and the head of a human, or more rarely that of a ram.</td>
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GLOSSARY

steatite  A soft stone easily cut for figurines, vessels, seals, beads, amulets and other objects, sometimes also called soapstone.

stela or stele  A stone column or upright slab, often decorated with carvings, paintings and/or inscriptions.
(pl. stelae)

strigil  A blunt metal blade-like instrument used to scrape an athlete's skin clean after exercise and bathing.

symposium  A formal Greek drinking party held after the evening meal, conducted to an agreed procedure.

tetradrachm  A Greek silver coin with the value of four drachmae.

Thoth  An Egyptian god who was the patron of scribes and learning, often shown as a baboon or in human form with the head of an ibis.

votive  Pertaining to objects or offerings to a god, found in a sacred place.

uncials  A type of Greek script written in ink.

wedjat eye  An Egyptian symbol denoting the eye of Horus, lost during a contest with his brother Seth. Associated with protection and healing, commonly used for amulets and beads.

wesekh collar  A broad multi-strand collar worn by the Egyptians, usually made of glass, faience or metal beads and amulets strung together.