

# Ancient Egypt: Early Egypt



Painted pottery group of  
cattle. From el-Amra,  
Egypt. 3500 BC

Visit resource for teachers  
Key Stage 2

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## **Before your visit**

## Background information

The late Neolithic period in Egyptian history is known as the Predynastic period. It began in the sixth millennium BC, and ended with the unification of Egypt under a single ruler (the first pharaoh) which marks the start of the historical period in Egypt. This long period of time is traditionally divided into two periods - Naqada I (4000-3500 BC) and Naqada II (3500-3100 BC). Naqada was an important town in southern Egypt where these periods were first distinguished in modern times.

The inhabitants of the Nile Valley first lived in settlements during the Predynastic period. Cemeteries were located in the low desert near the settlements. Finds from settlements and cemeteries suggest that the north and south of the country were culturally distinct. The south was administered from the city of Hierakonpolis, while the capital of the north was Buto.

The burials of this time were simple pit graves, in which the dead person was laid in a crouched position. The bodies were dried naturally by the hot desert sand. In later burials, the bodies were sometimes wrapped in mats or the head and limbs were sometimes bound with cloth. The objects placed in burials, such as items of jewellery, palettes and pots are the main sources of information about this time.

The Ancient Egyptians made use of the natural environment to provide different materials. There were a wide range of minerals, rocks and soils which were mined from the ground (e.g. flint, clay, copper) while the main plant materials came from the areas near the River Nile (e.g. papyrus reeds). Later, as demand for luxury materials such as hard woods grew, these materials had to be imported. Wild and farmed animals were a source of materials such as leather and bone

## Resources

### British Museum websites

#### Teaching history with 100 objects

Free online resources to support teachers working in the new history curriculum through object-based learning. Access information, images, and video as well as teaching ideas for lessons at Key Stages 1-3.

[www.teachinghistory100.org](http://www.teachinghistory100.org)

### Books

#### For adults

Spencer, A.J (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt*, British Museum Press, Revised edition 2007.

#### For children

Pemberton, Delia, *The Illustrated Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, British Museum Press, 2005  
Strudwick, Helen, *The Pocket Timeline of Ancient Egypt*, British Museum Press, 2005

## **Gallery information**

This resource relates to the objects on display in Room 64. The room covers the development of early Egypt from the Stone Age up to 3000 BC. It contains objects which reflect the change from a hunter-gatherer society to the beginnings of a settled society ruled by a single dynastic ruler. Objects on display include pottery, stone tools, stone palettes and basketwork. The gallery contains an early natural, sand-dried mummy and examples of burials in reed and wooden coffins.

## **What is it like to visit this gallery?**

The area around the natural sand-dried mummy is often very busy. The wall case on the long wall and the other island cases are usually less congested. The gallery has two doorways at either end and the middle corridor of the gallery is a route way for people moving, in both directions, between the neighbouring galleries.

## **Case Numbers**

Please note that case numbers are usually small, white and high up on the glass.

## **Preliminary activities**

### **General introductory activities**

- Think about the different types of political control such as democracy, monarchy or control by a number of local rulers or community leaders.

### **Activities to support gallery activities**

- Make a classroom collection of everyday objects and consider what materials they are made from. Is the source of the material mineral, plant or animal? Discuss what materials the students think were used in Ancient Egypt. Which materials do they not expect to find?
- Discuss the use of surfaces to work on. What modern examples can the students think of and what are they used for e.g. chopping board, ironing board, sushi mat, paint palette? How does the material of the surface relate to its function?
- Talk about the link between animals and environment, for example what animals are found near/in water. What is the difference between a wild and a domesticated animal? Think of, and group, examples.

## **During your visit**

## Gallery activities: introduction for teachers

The gallery activities are a set of activity sheets which can be used by students working in Room 64. The sheets can be used as stand-alone activities or you may wish to develop work around particular sheets as suggested in the before and after sections of this resource.

- Where case numbers are indicated on a sheet, these are usually to be found marked in white numbers high up on the glass of that particular case.
- You are welcome to select the activities which are most appropriate for the focus of your visit and adapt sheets to meet the needs of your students.
- Each activity is designed to support the students in looking at, and thinking about, objects on display in the gallery.
- Individual activity sheets may be undertaken by single students, in pairs or as a small group.
- Where space is provided for recording this may be undertaken by the student or an adult helper as is most appropriate for the students involved.
- Familiarise the students and accompanying adults with the chosen activity sheets at school before the day of the visit. Make sure students and adults know what they are to do and are familiar with the vocabulary used on the sheets or which they may encounter in the gallery.

## Gallery activities: briefings for adult helpers

### Gallery activity: Materials

- Ancient people made full use of their natural environment. Examples of the following materials can be found in Room 64: limestone, granite, flint, mudstone, malachite, garnet, turquoise, carnelian, calcite, gold, copper, bronze, lead, clay, shell, ivory, horn, bone, wood, ebony, reeds and fabric.
- This activity encourages students to scan objects on display and identify materials by observation or using the object label.

### Gallery activity: Palettes

- Mudstone palettes were used to grind minerals used in cosmetics. The palettes were produced in a decorative shape, sometimes enhanced with a small amount of white detail for the eye etc.
- This activity encourages the students to identify the different animals used as the inspiration for the shape of the palettes on display and think about how the shape has to be both suitable and simplified for use as a flat palette.

### Gallery activity: Pots

- Many Predynastic pots are a distinctive pink/red colour due to the natural colour of the local desert clay from which they were made. Decoration was applied using red ochre (a colour made from red soil) and drew on a range of line, shape and motif (usually highly stylized) designs.
- This activity encourages the students to observe and record different line, shape and motif designs used on Predynastic pots.

### Gallery activity: Animals

- Animals represented in and 3D form on objects are a source of information about the wild and domesticated animals known to the Ancient Egyptians. It also tells us about the environment e.g. hippopotamus which lived in the watery environment of the River Nile.
- This activity encourages the students to identify known animals by studying the objects on display.

## Materials

- Choose 9 objects in the gallery and write a short description in the first column e.g. necklace of red beads or a pot.
- Record what the object is made from in the second column. Remember: some things may be made of more than one material.
- In the third column write A if the material comes from an animal; P if it comes from a plant; M if it is a mineral. If the object is made from more than one material, you may need to write in more than one letter.

object	material	Is the material animal, plant or mineral?

- Share your answers to discover the range of different materials used in early Egypt. Which materials are not present?

# Palettes

Egyptians used flat mudstone palettes as a surface to mix make-up on.

- Look at the palettes in case 3 and find one for each of the animals below.
- Think about how the craftworker has used the outline shape of the animal to create the palette. Draw the outline shape for each of the palettes you find.



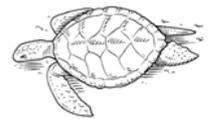
fish



bird



hippopotamus



turtle

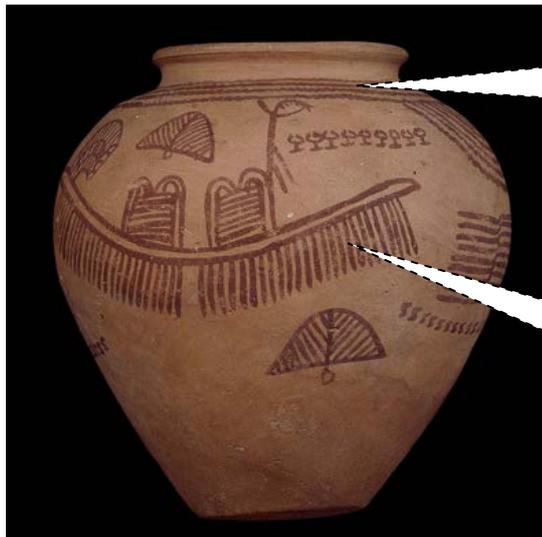
<p style="text-align: center;">fish</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">bird</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">hippopotamus</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">turtle</p>

- When you have finished, discuss whether you think there are any animals whose shape would not work as for a palette

# Pots

Pots were often made from pink clay dug up in the desert. They were decorated with patterns and pictures, often painted in red.

- Find this pot in Case 4



Archaeologists think that the wavy line around the top may be water...

...and the large curved shape may be a boat with oars and cabins on the deck.

- Look around the gallery for other pink clay pots. Pick four decorations and motifs you see on the other pots and draw them:

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- Now think about what your drawings show. Archaeologists think that they may be animals, plants, people, boats and decorative geometric shapes. What do you think?

# Animals

Some objects tell us about the different animals which lived in Ancient Egypt.

- Find the following animals shown in the gallery. Tick each animal when you find it.

<input type="checkbox"/>	frog
<input type="checkbox"/>	falcon
<input type="checkbox"/>	hippopotamus

<input type="checkbox"/>	fish
<input type="checkbox"/>	cow
<input type="checkbox"/>	baboon

<input type="checkbox"/>	gazelle
<input type="checkbox"/>	rabbit (case 61)
<input type="checkbox"/>	lion

- For each animal decide whether you think it was a wild animal which lived in the natural environment, or an animal kept by humans
- Choose one of the animal objects you have found and make a drawing of it below.

front view	side view

I have drawn a .....

- When you have finished, continue looking around the gallery for a further 5 minutes and see if you can see any other animals.

I also saw a .....

## **After your visit**

## Follow-up activities: introduction

Follow-up will encourage students to reflect on the work undertaken in the Ancient Egyptian galleries during their Museum visit.

- Some of the activities draw directly on the information gathered at the Museum while others encourage the students to draw on personal experience or undertake additional research in the classroom.
- Each activity includes a suggestion for classroom work and also an outcome which may be in the form of a written piece, drama presentation or artwork.

## Follow up activity: Materials

Curriculum links: history, science, maths

- Make a collection of modern objects and sort them into material groups. Use a Venn diagram to sort objects with more than one material.
- Make a list of the materials represented by the modern objects and add others which the students know of. Then make a list of all the materials which the students found in gallery 64. Do students think the list represents all the different materials used in Ancient Egypt?
- Compare the two lists. Which materials are the same on each list and which materials are different? What are the sources (mineral, animal, plant) for materials in ancient and modern times? Do the students think materials are local or imported?

## Follow up activity: Palettes

Curriculum links: history, art and design

- Ask the students to research different shapes which would be appropriate for an ancient palette, thinking about the need for a simple clear outline and surface for the grinding to be done on. Alternatively, they could design a palette for the 21<sup>st</sup> century using a modern shape. Remind them that small details can be added in white near the edge of the palette.
- Ask the students to design their own palette and then transfer the design on to a sheet of dark grey sugar paper and cut it out. Grey sugar paper is similar in colour and texture to the ancient examples in the Museum.
- Make a display from the finished palettes.

## Follow up activity: Pots

Curriculum links: history, art and design

- Discuss the decorated pots seen during the visit. Ask the students which images and patterns they recollect. Draw comparisons between the images and activities that took place in early Egypt.
- Reiterate the link between the images on the pots and the everyday life of the early Egyptians. Ask the students to think about an everyday activity that they do, for example travelling to school. What would they see on the way? How would they travel? The students can then use these ideas to draw or craft their own designs for a modern decorated pot using motifs based on Early Egyptian pots.

## **Follow up activity: Animals**

Curriculum links: science, art and design

- Review the animals from Ancient Egypt seen in the Museum galleries. What do these animals tell us about the environment of Ancient Egypt? Group the animals in different ways, for example water and land animals, wild and domestic animals, mammals and non-mammals.
- Repeat the exercise with animals in your local environment. What animals would be found in a pond environment, a domestic environment, a wooded area?
- Use the sketch from the Museum sheet to make models of animals from the Ancient Egypt environment. Create a display with appropriate background landscapes e.g. the River Nile, marshlands, farm land, the desert, human settlements.