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Introduction to the Touch Tour

This tour of the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery is a specially designed Touch Tour for visitors with sight difficulties. This guide gives you information about nine highlight objects in Room 4 that you are able to explore by touch. The Touch Tour is also available to download as an audio guide from the Museum's website:

britishmuseum.org/egyptiantouchtour

If you require assistance, please ask the staff on the Information Desk in the Great Court to accompany you to the start of the tour.

The sculptures are arranged broadly chronologically, and if you follow the tour sequentially, you will work your way gradually from one end of the gallery to the other moving through time. Each sculpture on your tour has a Touch Tour symbol beside it and a number.

1



Some of the sculptures are very large so it may be possible only to feel part of them and/or you may have to move around the sculpture to feel more of it.

If you have any questions or problems, do not hesitate to ask a member of staff.

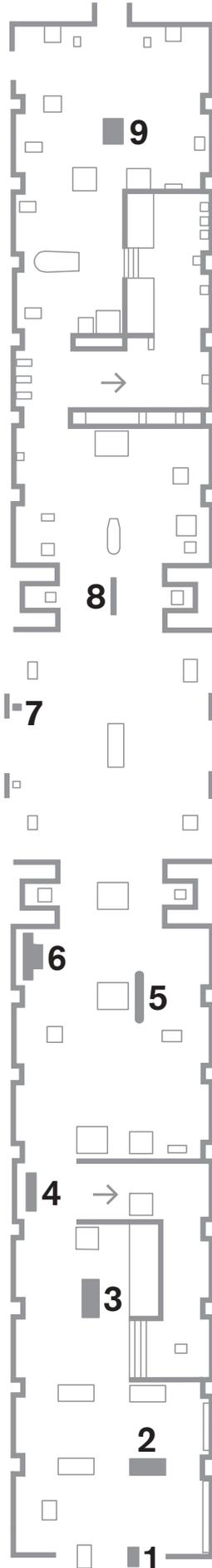
Description and plan of Room 4

Room 4 is a long narrow gallery with objects displayed along the walls as well as down the centre. The tour starts at the entrance/exit to Room 6 with stop 1, a seated statue of Amenhotep III, and finishes at the entrance/exit to the west stairs with stop 9, the colossal scarab beetle.

The plan of Room 4 opposite gives the basic layout of the gallery and shows the position of the nine objects in the Touch Tour, numbered 1 to 9, along with the general position of the other objects.

West stairs ↙

Room 9 ←



Room 8 ←

→ Great Court

↓
Room 6

Object 1

Seated statue of Amenhotep III

About 1390–1352 BC; from Amenhotep's mortuary temple in Thebes (modern-day Luxor), Egypt; granodiorite.

The king, or pharaoh, Amenhotep III, ruled Egypt during a time of great prosperity and artistic splendour. This is one of many monumental statues of him from his mortuary temple in Thebes. An almost identical second statue from this temple is displayed to the left. Both are made of granodiorite, a black hardstone similar to granite.

The king is represented in classic pose and dress. He is seated on a throne with both hands flat on his thighs. His upper body is bare. He wears a striped royal headcloth with two flaps hanging down behind the ears and over the front of both shoulders. The horizontal grooves represent pleats. Above the centre of the brow is a rearing cobra, a symbol of divine protection, called the 'uraeus'.

On his lower body he wears a short pleated kilt, fastened by a wide belt decorated with a zigzag pattern. The king's belt, belly and lower arms are plaster reconstructions. Attached to the kilt, and hanging down between his bare legs in shallow relief, is a ceremonial bull's tail.

There are carved reliefs on both sides of the throne: long, twining stems and bell-shaped flowers. These represent the lily and papyrus plants, which were the symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt: the Nile Valley and Delta. They are tied together around the Egyptian hieroglyph for 'unite', to show that the king ruled over both parts of the land.

On the larger statue displayed to the left, the king is identified by inscriptions on the front and back of the throne, and on his belt. You are welcome to touch this statue too. An inscription, carved into the plinth next to the king's left foot, names Belzoni in capital letters. Giovanni Belzoni was the man who brought the statues to the British Museum in the 1800s. He used to be a circus strongman, but later used his technical skills to collect and transport Egyptian artefacts, many of which are now in the British Museum.



Object 2

Lion statue of Amenhotep III

About 1390–1352 BC; from a temple at Soleb, Upper Nubia (part of northern Sudan); red granite.

This pair of lions once acted as guardian figures in a temple built by King Amenhotep III for the god Amun-Ra. They are displayed side by side. This text focuses on the right-hand lion. The temple is located at Soleb in Upper Nubia (part of northern Sudan) which at the time was ruled by Egypt.

The statue is carved from red granite, which has a pinkish red colour mottled with black. Granite was one of the hardest stones available to the Egyptians, which had to be painstakingly carved using stone and bronze tools. The sculptor has shown the animal in a naturalistic pose, reclining comfortably on its side. The tip of the nose is slightly worn, but the muzzle projects realistically, with solid jawbones, pronounced muscles, a wide mouth and even whiskers that have been carved into the stone. The hollow eye sockets were probably inlaid; the ears are broad and rounded. A stylised circular mane frames the head.

On the breast there is an inscription added by King Amenhotep IV, son and successor of Amenhotep III. The next pharaoh, Tutankhamun, inscribed the front side of the base. Much later, the Nubian king Amanislo added his names on one of the forepaws. Amanislo ruled over Nubia long after the Egyptians had withdrawn their control.

All the inscriptions are in hieroglyphic script. This script was used by the ancient Egyptians for monumental inscriptions and consists of pictures.

There are raised ridges on the lion's flanks indicating its ribs. The hind paws are particularly well observed. The animal has twisted its legs round to the front, and the furthest one, tucked under his belly, has its paw turned upwards, showing its rounded pads. The muscles of the rump are well defined, and the tail is curled round neatly to rest on the front of the base.



Object 3

Sarcophagus

About 2400 BC; Giza, Egypt; red granite.

A sarcophagus is a large stone box that was used to contain a dead person. Sarcophagi were costly and only pharaohs, nobles and important officials were buried in them. This example comes from Giza, a cemetery associated with Memphis, which at this time was the capital of Egypt.

It is made of red granite and rectangular in shape. The lid is slightly vaulted and at either end, on the outside edge, it has two bumps which are the handles.

The sarcophagus is decorated on all sides with a panelling known as 'palace façade' because it mimics the mud-brick façade of early Egyptian palaces. This consists of narrow, upright panels cut into the stone. On one of the two long sides, at either end, there is a wider carved panel, with a square above it. These panels represent doors, to allow the dead person's spirit free passage in and out of the sarcophagus.



Object 4

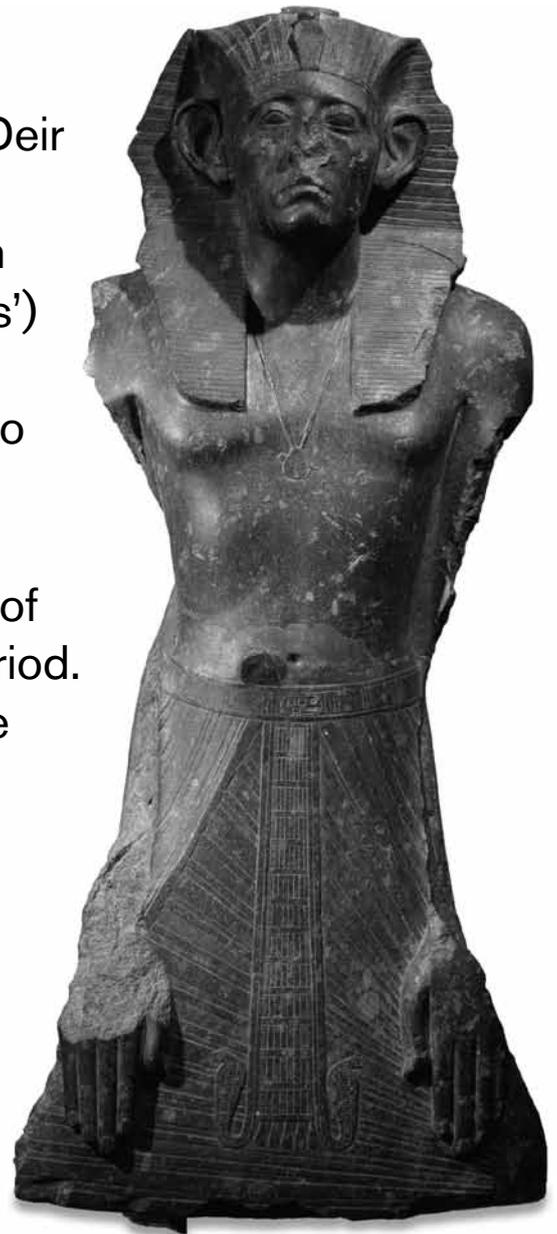
Statue of King Senwosret III

About 1874–1855 BC; Deir el-Bahri, Thebes (modern-day Luxor), Egypt; granodiorite.

There are three larger than life-size sculptures in this group, set side by side on a single modern plinth. You are welcome to touch them all, but the focus will be specifically on the one at the far left of the group.

Like the other two, it shows King Senwosret III and it comes from Deir el-Bahri, on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes. The king is shown wearing a royal headcloth ('nemes') and a kilt, both of which are pleated. The statue is preserved to just below the hem of the kilt.

The statue shows the fine quality of the Egyptian sculptures of the period. The nose is broken, but otherwise the facial features are intact. The baggy eyes are deep set under a slightly furrowed brow, and the mouth turns down at the corners, giving the face a grave expression. This is not a true portrait of the king. The serious face was possibly intended



to suggest the burden of his duties and his care for his people, and many of his contemporaries were represented in a similar way. His ears are unnaturally large, another common feature in sculpture of this era. Above the centre of his brow is an ornament in the shape of a rearing cobra ('uraeus'), now headless; it symbolised divine protection.

Around the top of his kilt he wears a belt, and the knot of his kilt sticks out above it. Although the arms are now missing, the king's hands are still intact, placed flat on his kilt.

Object 5

Left arm from a colossal statue of Amenhotep III

About 1390–1352 BC; Karnak, Thebes (modern-day Luxor), Egypt; red granite.

This gigantic arm is carved from red granite, which is mottled pink, black and white and has been polished smooth. The arm once hung at the side of a colossal standing statue. The underside is rough, where it has broken off from the body. The huge fist and arm are realistically carved with strong, muscular contours.

Displayed on top of a large plinth alongside the arm is an enormous head of a pharaoh, also carved from red granite. This head and the arm both come from the same colossal standing figure, which stood in the precinct of the temple of the goddess Mut in Karnak, ancient Thebes. The torso of the statue also survives but is still in the temple. The identity of the king represented has been disputed but current opinion favours Amenhotep III.



Object 6

Seated statue of the goddess Sekhmet

About 1390–1352 BC; Thebes (modern-day Luxor), Egypt; granodiorite.

There are four statues displayed here representing the goddess Sekhmet. All four are made of the same stone, granodiorite.

Sekhmet, who has the head of a lion and the body of a woman, was associated with pestilence and destruction. According to myth, she was the fiery eye of the sun-god Ra, which he sent against his enemies. Her name means 'she who is powerful'. King Amenhotep III, who commissioned these statues, had special reverence for Sekhmet. He had an enormous quantity of statues of her erected in the temple of Mut in Karnak and in his mortuary temple in Western Thebes. Nearly 600 of these statues have been found.

The statue second from the left is the focus here. The goddess is seated with her legs together and her hands placed on her thighs. The top of her head is crowned by a circular disc representing the sun. The disc is incomplete due to damage. Against the middle of the disc rears a cobra called the 'uraeus'.

The lion's rounded ears stick out at the top of the head. The muzzle is slightly broken at the tip. The face is framed by a circular mane, with carved curvy lines indicating tufts of fur. Lying underneath the mane are the vertical strands of a long wig, which hangs down over the goddess's shoulders.

Across her chest is a wide beaded collar. The goddess wears an ankle-length dress, with shoulder straps that cover her breasts. These straps are made of decorative beading with a daisy-like flower in the middle of each. In her left hand she holds an 'ankh', the symbol of life in the form of a cross with a loop at the top. She is clasping the loop of the 'ankh'. The vertical end of the cross is damaged. Her feet are bare and she wears an anklet on each leg.

There are vertical bands of hieroglyphs carved on the front of Sekhmet's throne. These inscriptions name the king, Amenhotep III, and bear a dedication to 'Sekhmet, who smites the tribesmen of Nubia'. Nubia is a region in southernmost Egypt and northern Sudan, which at the time formed part of the Egyptian empire.



Object 7

Block statue of Amenhotep

About 1390–1352 BC; Abydos, Egypt; granodiorite.

This roughly half-life-size statue was made around 1400 BC and set up in the temple of the god Osiris in Abydos, in Upper Egypt. It shows a government scribe called Amenhotep. He sits with his knees drawn up under his chin and his arms folded across his knees. This is the typical pose of statues of scribes.

He wears a thick wig cut in a fringe across his forehead. His wide lips are stretched into a half-smile, giving him a serene expression. He has a short square-cut beard growing from his chin, but his face is otherwise smooth-shaven. One hand, to the left as you face him, is open, lying flat on the other upper arm; the other hand is clasped in a fist. His cloak is draped over his knees forming a large flat surface, on which a hieroglyphic inscription has been carved. The cloak falls to his ankles. Below the cloak, his bare feet are placed side by side on a plinth carved from the same piece of black stone.



The hieroglyphs on the cloak are enclosed within horizontal bands, which read from right to left. The hieroglyphs include various kinds of birds, cobras, a jackal and zigzag lines representing water. The inscriptions explain that Amenhotep was the king's chief steward in the city of Memphis and in charge of the government's treasuries of gold and silver.

Hieroglyphs are a script used by the ancient Egyptians. The fact that each sign is a picture initially misled scholars into thinking that hieroglyphs were symbols representing ideas rather than sounds. By the 18th century, scholars throughout Europe were attempting to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs, which they believed could help them rediscover the mystical wisdom of the ancient Egyptian priests.

The key to deciphering the Egyptian hieroglyphs was an inscribed stone discovered at the town of Rosetta by the French army in 1799. The stone is inscribed in three scripts that record a decree: one in Egyptian hieroglyphs, another in a cursive Egyptian script called Demotic, and the third in Greek. The stone was handed over to the English after they defeated Napoleon's army in 1801. The work of scholars from both countries, most notably Jean-François Champollion, led to the decipherment of hieroglyphs in 1824. They discovered that hieroglyphs do in fact record the sounds of the Egyptian language. As a result, the Rosetta Stone has become an icon of all decipherments and of attempts to access the ancient past in its own terms. The Rosetta Stone is displayed in the middle of this gallery and there is a copy that you can touch in the Enlightenment Gallery (Room 1) on the opposite side of the Great Court.

Object 8

Boat sculpture of Queen Mutemwia

About 1390–1352 BC; Karnak (Luxor), Egypt; granodiorite.

This sculpture was found in the temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak, a huge sacred complex on the east bank of the River Nile. The sculpture was dedicated to Mut, the wife of Amun-Ra. The name of the goddess means 'mother'. It is displayed on a modern one-metre-high plinth in the centre of the gallery.

The boat, placed on a sledge, is long and narrow and has a flat bottom with a flared-out base. It curves up gently at the prow, and also at the back, but the stern is now lost. At the front, rising above the prow, like a figurehead, is the carved head of the goddess Hathor. She has two faces, one looking forwards and one looking back. Her prominent ears are set in front of the hairline, on a level with her eyes; instead of being human ears, they are the rounded ears of a cow. The goddess Hathor was associated with womanhood, love, music and dance, and she could also be depicted entirely as a cow.

The key element of the sculpture is a female figure seated in the middle of the boat facing forwards. This figure represents Queen Mutemwia, the principal wife of King Thutmose IV, who died around 1390 BC. Thutmose IV and Mutemwia were the parents of King Amenhotep III, the king represented in the first sculpture on this tour (object 1), who also commissioned the pair of lion statues (object 2) and statues of the goddess Sekhmet (object 6).

The figure of Mutemwia is missing from the hips upwards. Her legs and feet are together side by side and there is a remnant of her hands on the thighs, with an 'ankh' in the right hand. Hieroglyphs, at the feet of the figure, give the name and titles of the queen and each side of the boat is incised with a 'wedjat'-eye and an elongated cartouche also giving the name and titles of the queen. The prow is inscribed with cartouches related to Amenhotep III.

Queen Mutemwia helped to establish a temple to the goddess Mut at Karnak. This sculpture makes a play on the close association between the name of Queen Mutemwia and the goddess Mut. The figure is clearly intended to blur the distinction between goddess and queen. The goddess Mut could be represented as a vulture, and the queen's seated figure is shown here protected by a vulture whose wings envelop her body from behind. The vulture's clawed feet are carved in raised relief on either side of the queen's throne, each clasping a ring that symbolised eternity. The bird's tail, with its fanned-out feathers, is at the back. So the queen is seated in the embrace of Mut, sharing in the goddess's power. The whole sculpture is, in fact, a visual pun: the name Mutemwia means 'Mut is in the boat' – which is exactly what the sculpture represents.



Object 9

Colossal scarab beetle

About 300–100 BC; discovered in Turkey; quartz diorite.

The scarab beetle, or 'dung' beetle, is one of the enduring symbols of ancient Egypt and this is one of the largest known representations. It is made from an oval block of hardstone called quartz diorite, which has a mottled green colour so dark that it's almost black. The surface is pitted and scarred.

The beetle is carved from the top half of the block, with the lower half forming a plinth. The scarab is carved naturalistically. The shell is flat on top but gently curves down at the sides. The edge of the shell is defined by a double line incised into the stone all the way round. Another line cuts across the shell, dividing the front section (the prothorax) from the beetle's wing cases. The two wing cases are separated by a groove that runs down their full length.

The giant beetle's protruding head is topped by a shield-like part, known as the clypeus. The front legs of the scarab curve towards the head, following the rounded edge of the plinth. These front legs have notches carved out of the stone. The middle pair of legs emerges from underneath the shell immediately behind the front legs, but curve the opposite way, towards the rear of the beetle. The rear legs curve around the back, but part of one of them is now missing, together with a portion of the plinth on which the scarab sits.

Scarabs had a special significance for the Egyptians: they associated them with rebirth. The scarab lays its eggs in a ball of dung, which it rolls around and then buries. When the young beetles hatch they appear, apparently miraculously, from the earth. The Egyptians watched the young beetles emerging and made a connection with resurrection. They associated the beetle with the god Khepri, who was thought to push the sun disc into the morning sky, like a scarab beetle pushing its ball of dung. Each sunrise was a repetition of the sun-god's first appearance, at the dawn of time, as the creator god Atum.

The sculpture probably once stood in the temple of Atum in Heliopolis, but it was found in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) in Turkey. It had probably been transported there in Roman times. The sculpture was bought by the Scottish diplomat Lord Elgin, who later, in 1816, sold it on to the British Museum.



