



SMITHSONIAN



Holy Roman Empire reliquary



Bronze Age Nebra Sky Disk



Star-Spangled Banner



19th-century European Facile safety bike



Paleolithic stone handaxe



12th-century Indian silver coin



15th-century French book of hours

# HISTORY *of the* WORLD *in* 1,000 OBJECTS



Qing snuff bottle



Viking animal head decoration



WWI German reconnaissance aircraft



Egyptian faience amulet



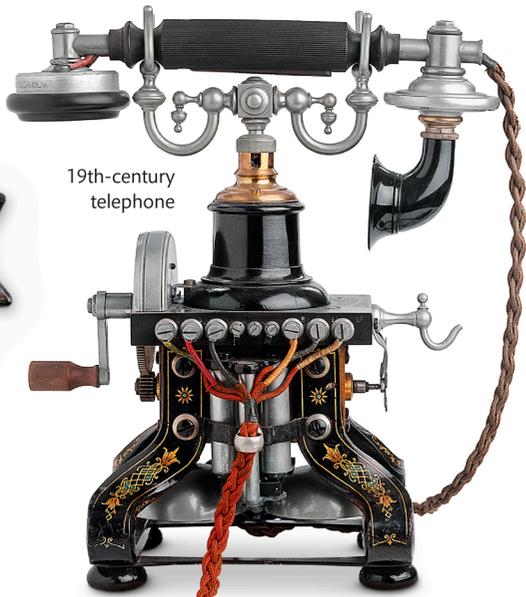
Tang ceramic horse



18th-century English armillary sphere



Anglo-Saxon bird brooch



19th-century telephone



Celtic chariot part



16th-century German eagle helmet



Etruscan amphora



Civil War drum



Mesopotamian bull's head



Japanese Edo pouch



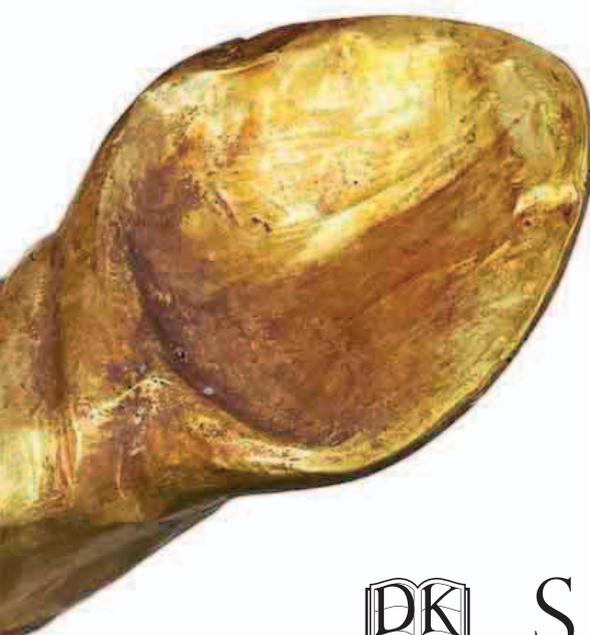
Sicán ceremonial knife



# HISTORY *of the* WORLD *in* 1,000 OBJECTS







DK SMITHSONIAN   
**HISTORY**  
*of the* **WORLD** *in*  
**1,000 OBJECTS**



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دشمن خراب  
 بسم سینه  
 شک دو مرغ آمده دیریکه کرد  
 کت وزیر ای ملک روزگار  
 وز دل شاهنایه شایک  
 گویم اگر کشت بود آموزگار

# FOREWORD

**There is something magical** about the survival of human-made objects from the past. A piece of jewelry, a cup, a sword, or a sandal that has, often arbitrarily, survived the general tide of oblivion seems in some degree to bridge the gulf of years that separates us from the world of our ancestors—whether inhabitants of ancient Egypt or the Roman Empire, the Aztecs of Mexico or Japanese samurai. A collection of such artifacts can vividly represent a long-lost civilization, its daily life, its art and culture, its ways of making war and conducting trade, its rituals and its beliefs.

Many objects have come to us from ancient times through the rituals surrounding death. Our knowledge of the ancient Egyptians, for example, would be much poorer but for their habit of burying personal possessions with the dead. The exquisite decoration and furnishing of palaces and places of worship has been another rich source of surviving artifacts. We are also beholden to the desire of people to record the great events of their own time, which has given us Trajan's column in Rome and the Norman Bayeux Tapestry. Some objects were created to celebrate heroes or gods, like the statues of ancient Greece and Rome. Some are exquisite craft work, such as Japanese Samurai armor and the gold figurines of the West African Asante. Others are famous puzzles, such as the Rosetta Stone, which eventually allowed scholars to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs.

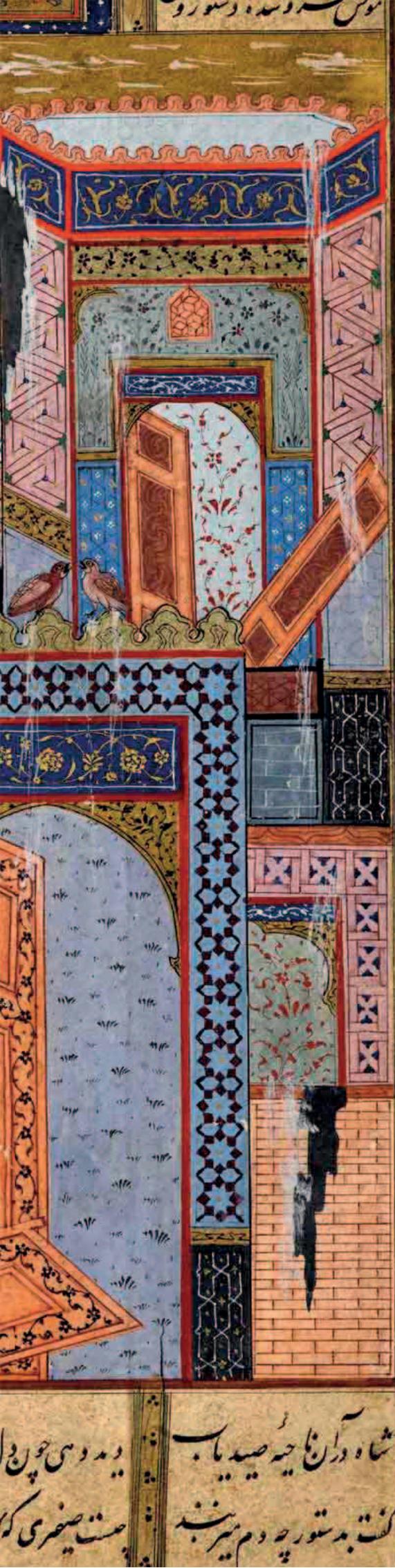
Objects are particularly important when evoking human societies that have left no written records, such as that of the hunters and farmers of the Neolithic era. But objects are also a rich source of information about the more recent past. Historical documents such as England's Magna Carta and the United States Constitution have remained alive as a basis for current political practice, as well as existing as physical objects preserved for posterity. The Watt steam engine shows the mix of practical good sense, skill, and basic science that was to advance the Industrial Revolution, while the Ford Model T transports us back to the early days of modern motorized society.

Collected together in this book, objects from all periods generate a striking impression of the overarching shape of human history and its development from stone tools to spaceflight. They also take us on a breathtaking journey through the ever-varying stages of the human adventure.

**R. G. GRANT**

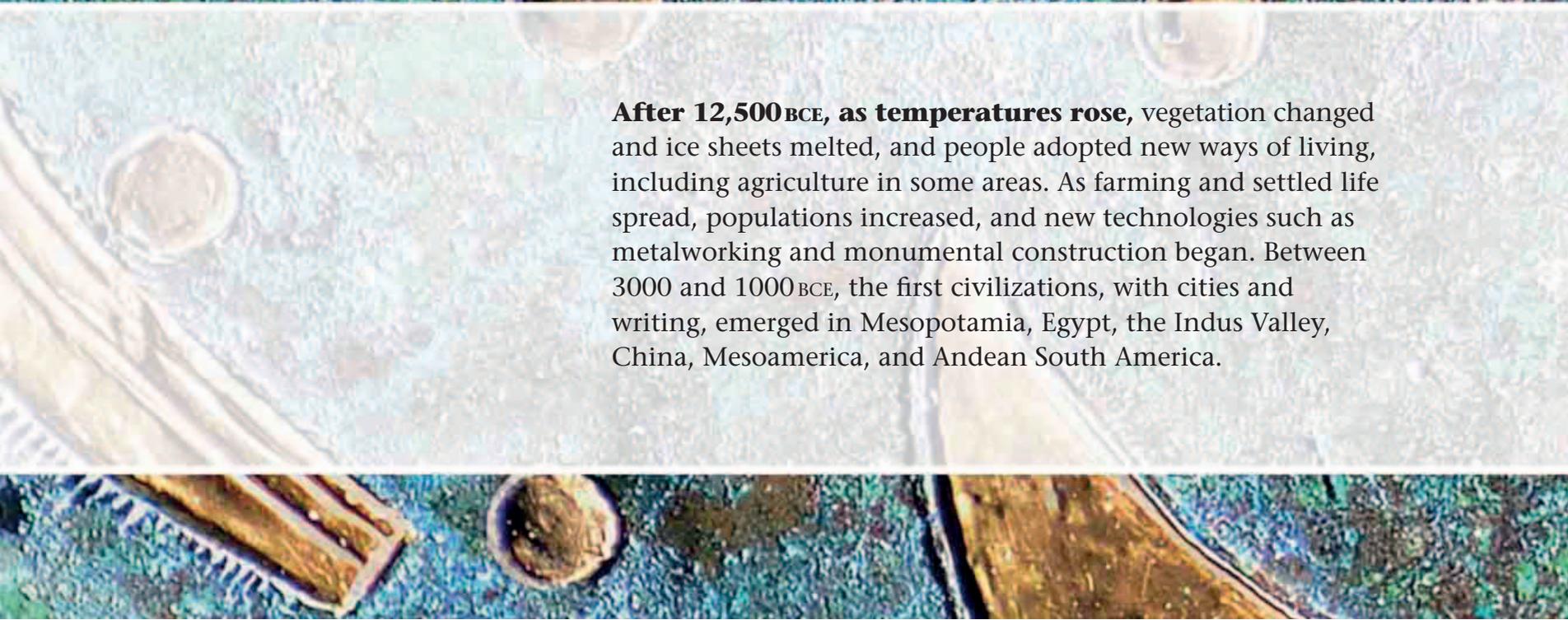
## **Persian life**

This Persian illuminated manuscript is from a book of poems completed in 1548. Brightly colored pigments were used to produce works that show aspects of daily life including style of dress and architecture.





**After 12,500 BCE, as temperatures rose,** vegetation changed and ice sheets melted, and people adopted new ways of living, including agriculture in some areas. As farming and settled life spread, populations increased, and new technologies such as metalworking and monumental construction began. Between 3000 and 1000 BCE, the first civilizations, with cities and writing, emerged in Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley, China, Mesoamerica, and Andean South America.





# EARLY SOCIETIES

20,000–700 BCE

# EARLY HUMANS SHAPING THE WORLD

Humanity's extraordinary success is due to our ingenuity in devising cultural means to overcome our physical limitations. Early stone tools seem crude, but they were the first step on the road to computers, the Moon, and beyond. Along the way we developed language, allowing the sharing of knowledge, skills, and ideas.

## Settling down ▽

The huge Neolithic village of Catalhöyük in Turkey had closely packed houses entered through the roof via a ladder. The main room had a hearth, cabinets, benches, and platforms for sitting and sleeping. The walls often had paintings of bulls.

Our early ancestors evolved in Africa and spread into Asia and Europe. Around 2.5 million years ago, they developed stone tools, initially to cut through tough hides to access meat. This began a period called the Stone Age, divided into the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic. Paleolithic people tamed fire for protection, warmth, and cooking. Several human species continued to evolve. One, the Neanderthals, began burying their dead and caring for their disabled. Around 200,000 BCE, *Homo sapiens* (modern humans) emerged in Africa.

Outcompeting other human species, by 11,500 BCE they had spread across Asia, Europe, and the Americas and crossed open ocean to Australia. They had created art, sewn clothing, made shelters, and domesticated dogs.

## THE FIRST FARMERS

Late Paleolithic people inhabited an ice age world. By around 9600 BCE, however, the world's climate was similar to today's. Communities began exploiting newly available resources, and in some areas settled permanently instead of traveling to

obtain seasonally available resources. For different reasons in different areas, some communities began cultivating plants, and in some parts of the world herding animals. As agriculture and a settled way of life brought population growth, Neolithic farmers expanded into new areas.

To obtain useful materials from other places, sedentary communities developed exchange networks. They also sought luxuries with which they could demonstrate their superiority over others. These included fine stone and eventually, in some areas, metals.



### Mysterious serpentine ball

We don't know why balls were carved from stone in northeast Scotland, but the skill required suggests they were highly valued.



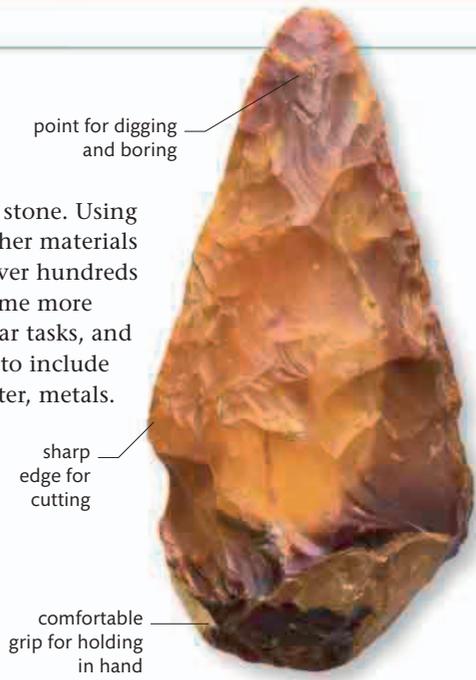
## TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

The earliest known tools were of stone. Using their cutting edges, wood and other materials could also be made into tools. Over hundreds of thousands of years, tools became more specialized, designed for particular tasks, and the range of materials expanded to include clay, leather, fibers, shell, and, later, metals.

### THE FIRST TOOLS

#### Handax

The first stone tools, made around 2.5 million years ago, had one simple cutting edge. Handaxes, from around 1.65 million years ago, were carefully shaped digging, cutting, and general-purpose tools.



#### Obsidian core and blades

Modern humans invented blades, which they used as cutting tools or reshaped for other purposes. Many small blades could be struck from a single core.

## AGRICULTURE

#### Early sickle

As grains became important in the diet, sickles were developed to harvest them, as well as to cut reeds used in matting, basketry, and construction.



#### Digging stick

Digging sticks were used to dig up tubers and to make holes to plant seeds and bulbs. A stone weight on the stick increased its power of penetration.

## HUNTING

fluted base for attaching to haft

#### Clovis point

Elegant points were made by the North American Clovis culture as tips for spears, which were used as projectiles to hunt bison and mammoths. This example was found in a mammoth skeleton.



#### Barbed harpoon

Fishing, begun by early modern humans, became increasingly important after the last ice age. Fishing gear included wood, bone, and antler fishhooks and harpoons, nets, and elaborate fishtraps.

#### Flint arrowheads

Bows and arrows, to kill prey at a safe distance, were invented in the late Paleolithic. Later times saw many improvements in their efficiency, such as these arrowheads with barbs to embed them more securely in prey.

## EARLY SAW

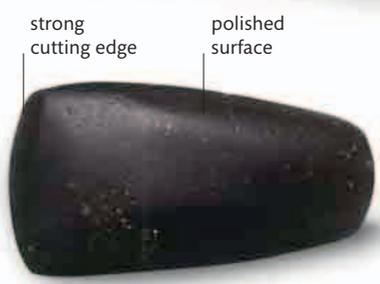
edge chipped to form series of teeth

#### Egyptian saw

Although some multipurpose tools continued to be made, over time tools for specific purposes proliferated. This cast of an early Egyptian saw, made around 3000 BCE, is one such specialized tool.



## AXES



#### Neolithic diorite ax

In the later Stone Age after 10,000 BCE, people developed new techniques, grinding and polishing hard stone to make axes for felling trees and other purposes.



#### Stone shaft-hole ax

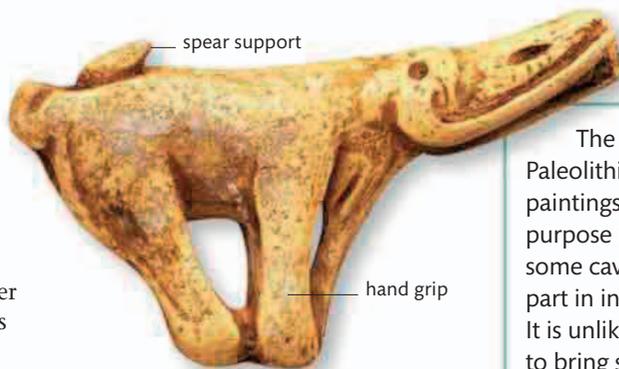
As metal objects spread in 3rd-millennium BCE Europe, communities that did not use metal made fine stone imitations of them, not as tools but as prestige fashion items.

#### Mesolithic stone tool

Heavy stone tools served various purposes, such as adzes to plane and trim wood, and picks perhaps to dig up plants or knock limpets off rocks.

## ART AND CULTURE

In many parts of the world, the late Paleolithic saw the flowering of art, including painting, engraving, and sculpture. Fired clay came into use at this time, providing a medium with huge scope for later artistic expression, as did textiles woven from plant fibers. Stone monuments, often with a ritual purpose, were created from at least 9500 BCE (see, for example, Stonehenge, p.40).



### Mammoth speargrip

This fine bone carving from France combined practical utility as a speargrip with artistic sensitivity to the natural world.

## CAVE ART

The most impressive Paleolithic artworks are the cave paintings found in France. Their purpose is unknown, although some cave art may have played a part in initiation or religious rites. It is unlikely animals were drawn to bring success in a hunt—the people who painted this horse and mammoth at Lascaux hunted reindeer almost exclusively.



## HOME LIFE

People with a mobile lifestyle could only afford to carry a few small objects. Sedentary communities, however, could accumulate possessions, including fragile pottery and heavy querns (grindstones). After 11,500 BCE, such communities included some hunter-gatherers and most farmers. With the spread of farming across much of the world, objects proliferated.



### WOODEN WEAVING COMB

#### Weaving equipment

Weaving on simple looms began in Neolithic times, using cotton in India and South America, and flax and other plant fibers in western Asia and Europe. More complex looms, and silk and alpaca and sheep's wool, came into use later.



### CLAY LOOM WEIGHT



### SPATULA



### SPOON



### FORK

decorated handle



hard stone quern

sandstone rubber

### Grinding tools

Cereal grains (also seeds and nuts) were ground into flour, to cook as bread, porridge, or gruel. Grinding with a quern and rubber became an arduous daily task for many women.

### Bone cutlery from Catalhöyük

The shift to sedentary life and agriculture in many regions brought dietary changes and the associated development of new cooking and eating utensils.

## POTTERY



### Later Jomon pot

Pottery was independently invented many times, in different parts of the world. The earliest pots, including Jomon wares, come from late Paleolithic East Asia.

typical scalloped rim

incised designs and impressions made by cord



### Bell Beaker culture pot

The Bell Beaker culture made a distinctive style of pottery beaker with an upside-down bell shape, in parts of Europe after 2900 BCE.

typical zoned decoration  
bell-like beaker shape



### Wagon-shaped pot

Invented in the 4th millennium BCE, wheeled transportation, using draft animals, revolutionized work by making it easier to transport heavy or bulky goods. This pot was found in Eastern Europe.

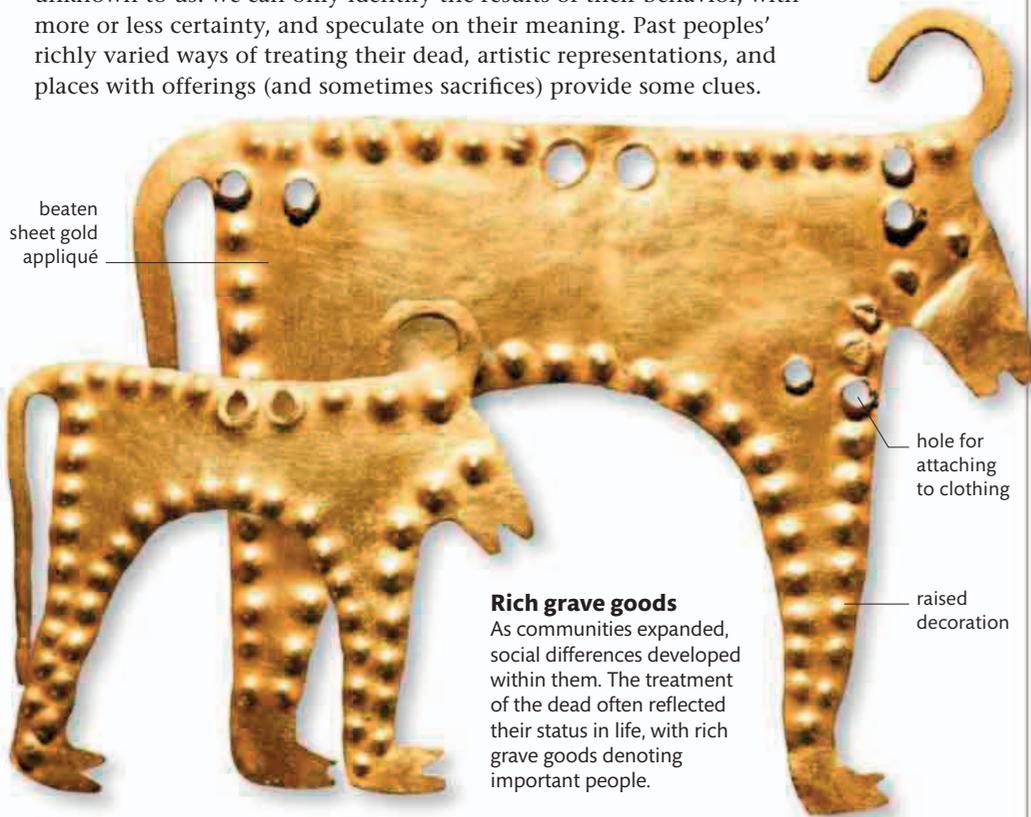
incised decoration

fixed axle

solid wheel

## BELIEFS AND RITUALS

The religious beliefs of people who lived before writing was invented are unknown to us: we can only identify the results of their behavior, with more or less certainty, and speculate on their meaning. Past peoples' richly varied ways of treating their dead, artistic representations, and places with offerings (and sometimes sacrifices) provide some clues.



beaten sheet gold appliqué

hole for attaching to clothing

raised decoration

**Rich grave goods**  
As communities expanded, social differences developed within them. The treatment of the dead often reflected their status in life, with rich grave goods denoting important people.



SCHIST PLAQUE



CIST (STONE BOX) COVER

**Burial art**  
Some European late Neolithic megalithic tombs included stones bearing geometric designs. These designs may have held some religious significance. They sometimes also appear on the associated grave goods, such as plaques, made from a hard stone called schist, found in southern Spain and Portugal.

burial design visible only to dead person inside the tomb



features modeled in painted plaster

cowrie shells for eyes

skull visible where plaster has fallen off

**Jericho plastered head**  
In some parts of early Neolithic West Asia, bodies were buried beneath house floors, but skulls were removed and modeled with lifelike features, probably for use in ancestor rituals.



clay mask

plant packing inside

**Chinchorro mummy**  
Some cultures preserved their dead by mummification; the earliest were the South American Chinchorro, from 5000 BCE. They removed the flesh, reassembled the bones, and replaced the skin.

## HUMAN FIGURINES

**Late Neolithic figurine**  
Stone figurines were made by cultures across the world. Some were for use in rituals; others were decorative, or made social statements, or were toys.



schematic arms

slot for mounting figurine

**Venus figurines**  
These female figures, from late Paleolithic Europe, are known as Venus figurines. Made from mammoth ivory, stone, and baked clay, they have strongly emphasized hips and breasts, and are generally faceless. They may have played some part in rituals.



FIRE CLAY

small arm



featureless head

damaged area

pronounced buttocks

hair, a feature rarely shown

tiny arms resting on breasts

small, tapering legs

LIMESTONE

MAMMOTH IVORY

# THE ENIGMA OF THE INDUS CIVILIZATION

Around 2500 BCE, the world's first planned towns and cities appeared throughout the Indus region (part of present-day India and Pakistan). Indus society was highly organized and produced many fine artifacts, but some details of the culture remain obscure because their script has not yet been deciphered.

**Public buildings** ▾ Mohenjo-daro, in present-day south Pakistan, was the largest Indus city, covering more than 620 acres (250 hectares) and with a population of perhaps 100,000 people. Many of its structures, which included more than 700 wells, were built of baked bricks of standardized size.

Most Indus towns and cities had a massive raised sector, the citadel, with monumental public buildings. These included the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro, which was probably a place of ritual purification. Indus political organization remains a mystery, partly because the writing invented by the Indus people defies decipherment. However, society was organized and controlled, with a good standard of living and highly developed craft specialization. A warehouse and workshops at Lothal in southern Gujarat, as well as Harappa in the

Punjab, exemplify the role of towns and cities in manufacturing, storing, and distributing goods for external trade and circulation within the Indus realm. Rivers provided transport networks, and goods were carried by herders moving between seasonal pastures. Hunter-gatherers brought in ivory and other materials from beyond the settled lands.

## GULF TRADERS

The valleys, mountains, and coasts of the Indus state provided agricultural and pastoral abundance and many

raw materials. The Indus people also obtained metal ores and lapis lazuli from Afghanistan. They shipped lapis lazuli to Mesopotamia, along with carnelian and other gemstones, ivory, timber, gold, copper, and other materials, probably in exchange for silver and woolen textiles.

After 1800 BCE, unknown changes brought about the disintegration of the Indus realm. Towns and cities were abandoned, and writing ceased. However, farming communities continued to flourish in many parts of the region.



### Lands of the unicorn

A unicorn is the most common design found on Indus seals, often with a ritual brazier, as seen in this partial impression.



## BELIEFS AND RITUALS

The symbols used on Indus objects (including some seals, see opposite) suggest that the Indus religion had some similarities to later Hinduism. These included deities resembling Shiva and Parvati, and reverence for aspects of the natural world, particularly powerful animals such as the bull and the tiger. Some copper tablets depicting a hairy man with horns suggest that a form of shamanism was part of Indus folk religion.



**Votive offering**  
Stains on figurines with large pannier headdresses suggest they may have been used as ritual lamps.



**Sacred tree**  
The pipal tree was venerated by the Indus people, as it would be by Hindus, and the unicorn had an important role in Indus iconography.



**"Proto-Shiva"**  
This three-faced deity is surrounded by a bull, rhino, tiger, and an elephant. It has been suggested that he is a precursor of the god Shiva.



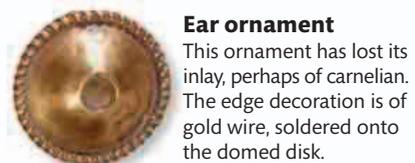
**Mythological scene**  
Some seals depict a deity wrestling two tigers, as here, while others feature a half-tiger, half-goddess composite figure.

## ADORNMENT

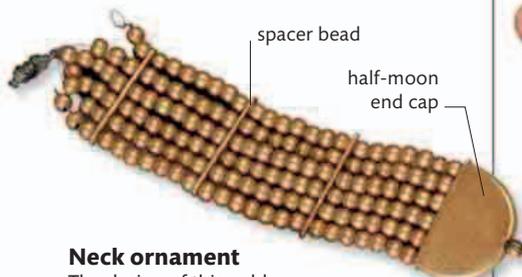
The Indus people set great store by personal adornment, wearing necklaces, pendants, hair and ear ornaments, rings, anklets, and bead belts, made from materials such as metal, ivory, faience (glazed ceramic), terracotta, shell, and stone. Bangles were particularly important. Indus beadmakers were extremely skilled in working gemstones such as agate, carnelian, serpentine, and steatite.



**Gold bangle**  
Indus women generally wore bangles. Their materials give clues to social status: pottery or shell for the majority, silver or gold for the elite.



**Ear ornament**  
This ornament has lost its inlay, perhaps of carnelian. The edge decoration is of gold wire, soldered onto the domed disk.



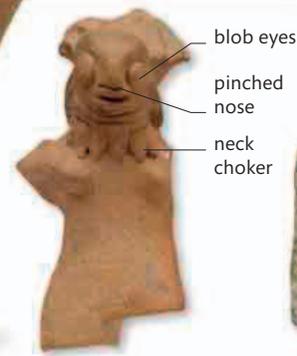
**Neck ornament**  
The design of this gold neck choker, which has been broken in two, reveals a high level of skill on the part of the goldsmith who made it.

## ART AND CULTURE

The uniformity of Indus culture suggests it was part of a well-organized, controlled society. Skilled artisans manufactured high-quality goods from materials such as fine flint quarried in Sindh, gemstones mined in Gujarat, and seashells. Indus art included a few bronze and stone sculptures, miniature images of animals carved on seals (see above), and vibrant terracotta figurines.



**Terracotta bull**  
Indus figurines portrayed domestic and wild creatures, including pet dogs, rhinos, birds, and squirrels. Bulls were the most popular subject.



**Naked lady**  
Female figurines usually wear nothing apart from jewelry. Only rarely are they portrayed clothed and undertaking domestic tasks.



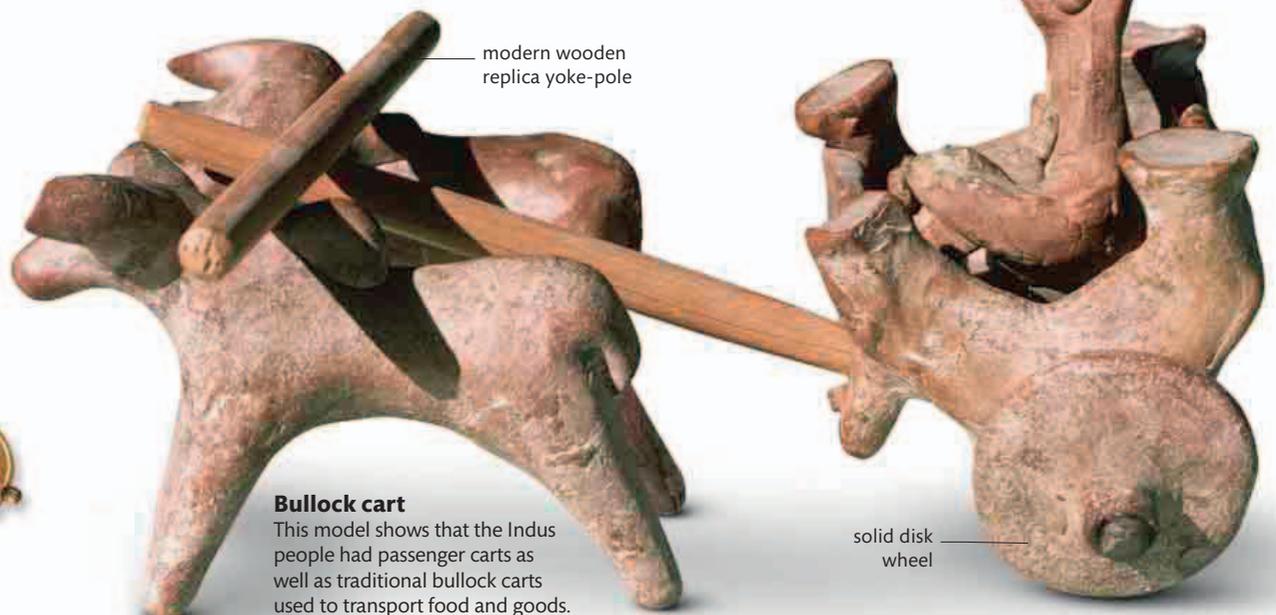
**"Priest-king"**  
This tiny stone sculpture, only 7 in (17.5 cm) high, is often said to represent an Indus ruler, but there is no evidence to support this.

## TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Indus towns and cities were all set out in a well-defined grid pattern, and the residents enjoyed a highly sophisticated water supply and drainage system. Specialized Indus craft products included fine flint and copper tools, and a wide range of pottery. Fine cotton textiles—dyed various colors including yellow, blue, and red—were made at home.



**Cubic stone weights**  
Indus officials used standardized weights, ranging from a base unit of 0.03 oz (0.9 g) up to 23.9 lb (10.9 kg) or 12,800 units.



**Bullock cart**  
This model shows that the Indus people had passenger carts as well as traditional bullock carts used to transport food and goods.

solid disk wheel

modern wooden replica yoke-pole

# THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION

The world's first civilization emerged in southern Mesopotamia, the birthplace of writing, around 3300 BCE. Early city-states were united around 2350 BCE, and Babylon became the capital of later empires in this region. In northern Mesopotamia (Assyria), linked culturally with the south, empires emerged from around 1800 BCE. Later, the Assyrians expanded to control all of western Asia.

## Strength and beauty ▷

Babylon grew into a magnificent city. It boasted massive city walls, the ziggurat of Marduk (the “Tower of Babel”), and the Ishtar Gate and Processional Way, clad in glazed brick friezes of bulls and dragons. Similar tiles in the palace throne room depicted fearsome lions.

Southern Mesopotamia created many innovations of world significance during the 4th millennium BCE.

Farming on the lower Tigris and Euphrates rivers depended on irrigation. The invention of the seeder plough made preparation of the soil easier and maximized productivity. Crops included barley, dates, and vegetables. Cattle kept for ploughing also gave milk and dung fertilizer. Sheep were now bred for wool, woven into textiles. Pastured locally or grazed farther afield by shepherds, sheep and goats also provided milk, meat, and leather.

The temple dominated society at this time. Grain from temple lands was used to pay people working for the temple as farmers, laborers, artisans, or traders. Such public service or employment, paid in grain rations and cloth, continued later, when power passed to secular rulers.

The first cities appeared around 3300 BCE in Sumer, centered on temples. The first known is Uruk, which yielded clay tablets inscribed with the earliest writing, invented to aid the temple authorities in their administrative

tasks. By the mid-3rd millennium BCE, texts also included literature, such as epic tales of the early Uruk king Gilgamesh. Secular authority, vested in kings, who were originally war leaders, grew in importance as city-states came into conflict over land and water for irrigation.

## THE FIRST EMPIRES

Around 2350 BCE, Sargon of Akkad created the Akkadian Empire, uniting the south. He standardized many aspects of the administration, including weights and measures. The later Ur III Empire imposed stifflingly detailed bureaucratic control. Following Ur III's fall in 2004 BCE, smaller city-states rose to power, but these were conquered in the 18th century BCE by Hammurabi of Babylon (famous for his “law code” inscribed on a stone stela).

Agriculturally rich, Babylonia was poor in raw materials. It traded copper from Oman and later Cyprus; lapis lazuli and tin from Afghanistan; and lumber, gold, ivory, and gemstones from the Indus. In exchange, it offered manufactured goods,

cuneiform  
(wedge-shaped)  
writing made by  
pressing a reed  
stylus into soft clay



## Making a mark

Inscribed clay nails set into the walls of major public buildings, such as temples, bear texts describing the kings' close involvement in their construction.

especially fine textiles produced on an industrial scale in workshops staffed by women and children.

## NORTH AND SOUTH

Diplomatic correspondence reveals shifting patterns of alliance and hostility between the major later 2nd millennium BCE powers: Egypt (see p.26), the Hittites (see p.43), Mitanni in northern Mesopotamia, and the Kassites in Babylonia. The small northwestern state of Assyria expanded as Mitanni declined. Its fortunes fluctuated, but for long periods it dominated western Asia. Palace relief sculptures bring Assyrian campaigns vividly to life (see p.21). One depicts King Sennacherib's beautiful terraced garden at Nineveh, perhaps the original of the Hanging Gardens attributed to Babylon.

Babylonia conquered Assyria in 612 BCE, but then fell to the Persians in 539 BCE. However, Mesopotamia's cultural legacy included inventions such as glass, the potter's wheel, and improved knowledge of medicine, astronomy, and complex mathematics including geometry.

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“I have **no equal** among even the most distant rulers... **Everything is achievable** by me.”

Shulgi, king of the Ur III Empire (2094–2047 BCE), *A praise poem of Shulgi*

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## POLITICS AND POWER

In city-states, the king and people had a shared sense of identity, and citizen assemblies had some decision-making power. Larger states were administered through officials from the ruler's own family, city, or tribe, but shared cultural values ensured the king remained answerable to the gods for his subjects' prosperity.



### Babylonian temple text

Kings often founded temples and restored and embellished earlier ones. They recorded these pious deeds on clay texts placed in the foundations or in inscriptions.



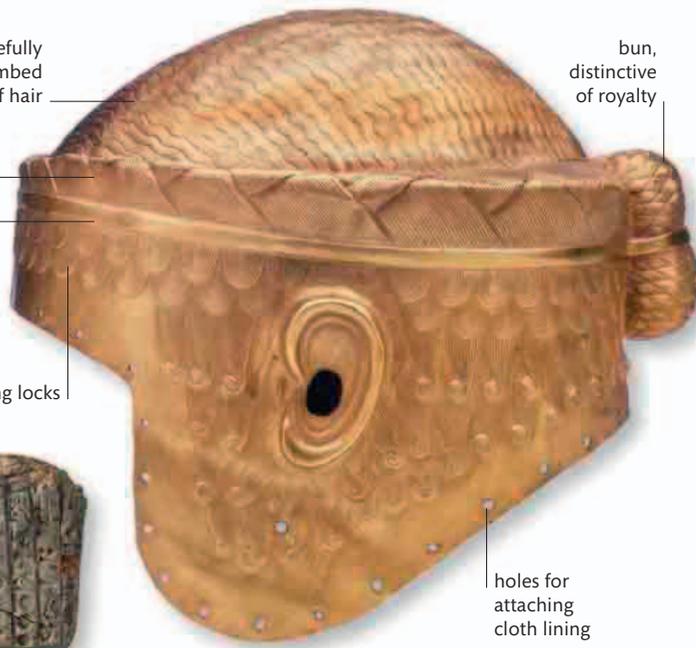
### Boundary stone

Kassite kudurrus (boundary stones) were documents recording royal grants of land to those who had served their rulers well. They were publicly displayed in temples.



### Accounting tablet

Writing was invented around 3300 BCE to manage the administration of temple receipts, outgoing, and labor. Most surviving later texts are also administrative.



### Meskalamdug helmet

This beautiful helmet of beaten gold is from a grave at the Ur cemetery, possibly that of King Meskalamdug. It would have been parade armor, not worn in battle.

symbols of Babylonian deities

carefully combed lines of hair

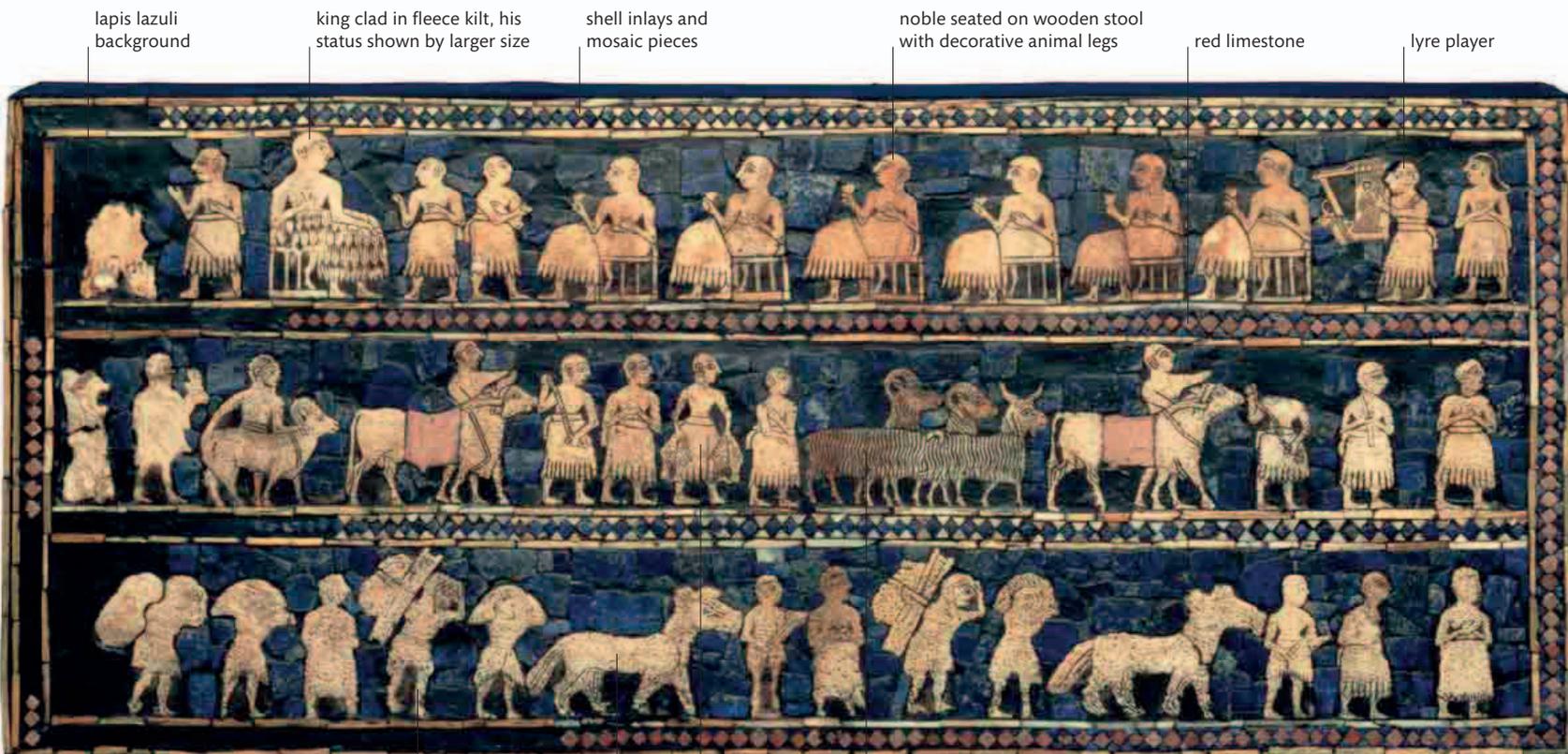
bun, distinctive of royalty

braided hair

gold rendition of gold ribbon

curling locks

holes for attaching cloth lining



### VICTORY FEAST

lapis lazuli background

king clad in fleece kilt, his status shown by larger size

shell inlays and mosaic pieces

noble seated on wooden stool with decorative animal legs

red limestone

lyre player

war captive carrying captured booty

pair of asses from a chariot team

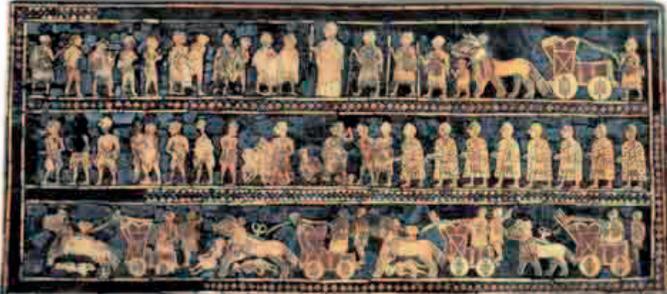
fisherman carrying fish

sheep, goats, and cattle for victory feast

### Standard of Ur

This unusual object from the Ur royal graves may have been a royal standard (or flag) or the sound box of a musical instrument. One side is decorated with scenes of warfare. The panel of the other side depicts the preparations for and celebration of the victory shown on the war side.

### WAR SIDE



## BATTLE AND CONFLICT

Warfare between rival city-states and with enemies from the hills and desert is recorded at length in Mesopotamian literature and art. Armies originally had infantry and chariots; cavalry was added in the 1st millennium BCE. The highly efficient Assyrian military were greatly feared. Subject peoples paid tribute and were defended against their enemies, but rebellions were mercilessly suppressed.

### Assyrian siege

Siege warfare inspired frequent improvements in ways of defending and attacking cities, such as fortifications and wooden siege towers and ladders.



### Assyrian scale armor

Small plates of bronze, or later iron, were attached in overlapping rows to a leather coat, protecting the torso and upper legs. Assyrian armor also included metal helmets.

### Copper arrowheads

From the late 3rd millennium BCE, composite bows (made of layered horn, wood, and sinew) improved archers' efficiency, giving greater penetration and range to the metal-tipped arrows.

### Spear and javelin heads

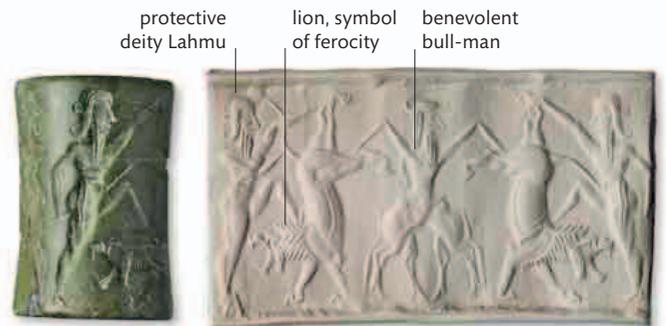
Wooden javelins tipped with copper or bronze heads were used by infantry and chariot fighters. A leather throwing thong (ankyle) was attached to the butt. Silver was used for display weaponry.

### Military adze

Copper or bronze adzes, like this example from Ur, were used by Sumerian soldiers in combat, as artistic representations illustrate. They must also have served as tools.

## BELIEFS AND RITUALS

The temple enjoyed great political and social power throughout Mesopotamian history. Sumerian cities each had their own gods but acknowledged the supremacy of the storm god, Enlil. Babylon's city god Marduk later became the principal deity, mirroring the political rise of Babylon itself. Although the Assyrians worshipped their city god, Ashur, they also venerated the Babylonian pantheon.

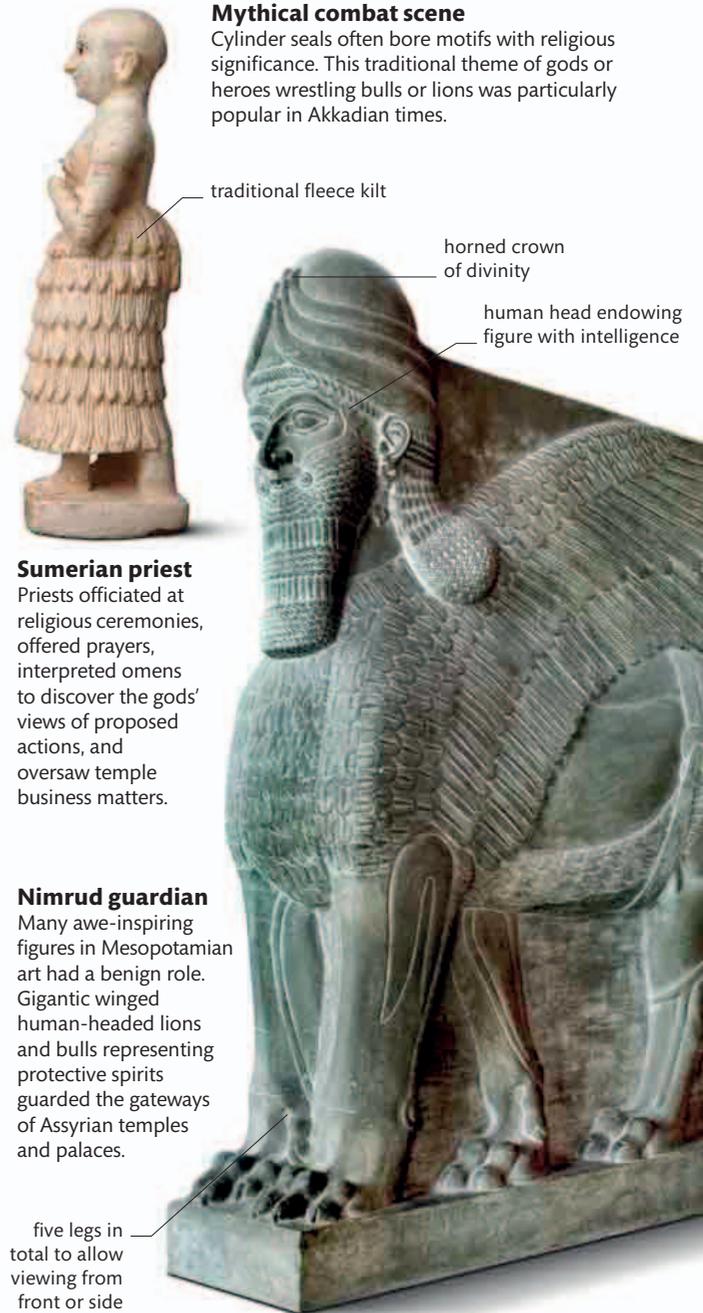


CYLINDER SEAL

IMPRINT OF SEAL

### Mythical combat scene

Cylinder seals often bore motifs with religious significance. This traditional theme of gods or heroes wrestling bulls or lions was particularly popular in Akkadian times.



### Sumerian priest

Priests officiated at religious ceremonies, offered prayers, interpreted omens to discover the gods' views of proposed actions, and oversaw temple business matters.

### Nimrud guardian

Many awe-inspiring figures in Mesopotamian art had a benign role. Gigantic winged human-headed lions and bulls representing protective spirits guarded the gateways of Assyrian temples and palaces.

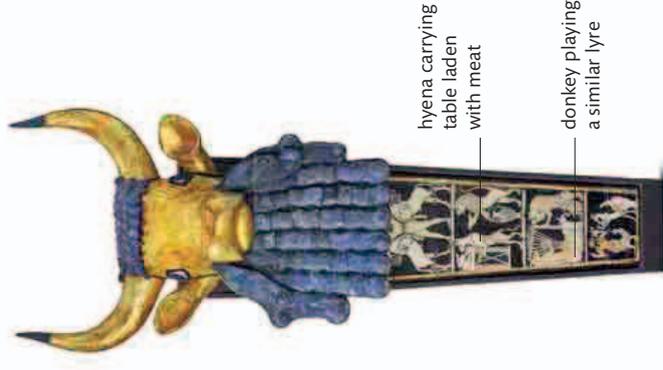
five legs in total to allow viewing from front or side

# RAM CAUGHT IN A THICKET

In the 1920s, the British archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley discovered some remarkable burials at Ur (in modern Iraq), dating from around 2550–2400 BCE. Most graves in the huge cemetery were simple pits, but 16 were barrel-vaulted chambers, often with large associated grave pits approached by a shaft. They contained lavishly rich grave goods, and Woolley identified them as royal graves. One pit grave also contained rich furnishings, including a beautiful gold helmet and two gold bowls inscribed “Meskalamdug,” an early king of Ur. One royal grave yielded a seal inscribed “Puabi the queen.”

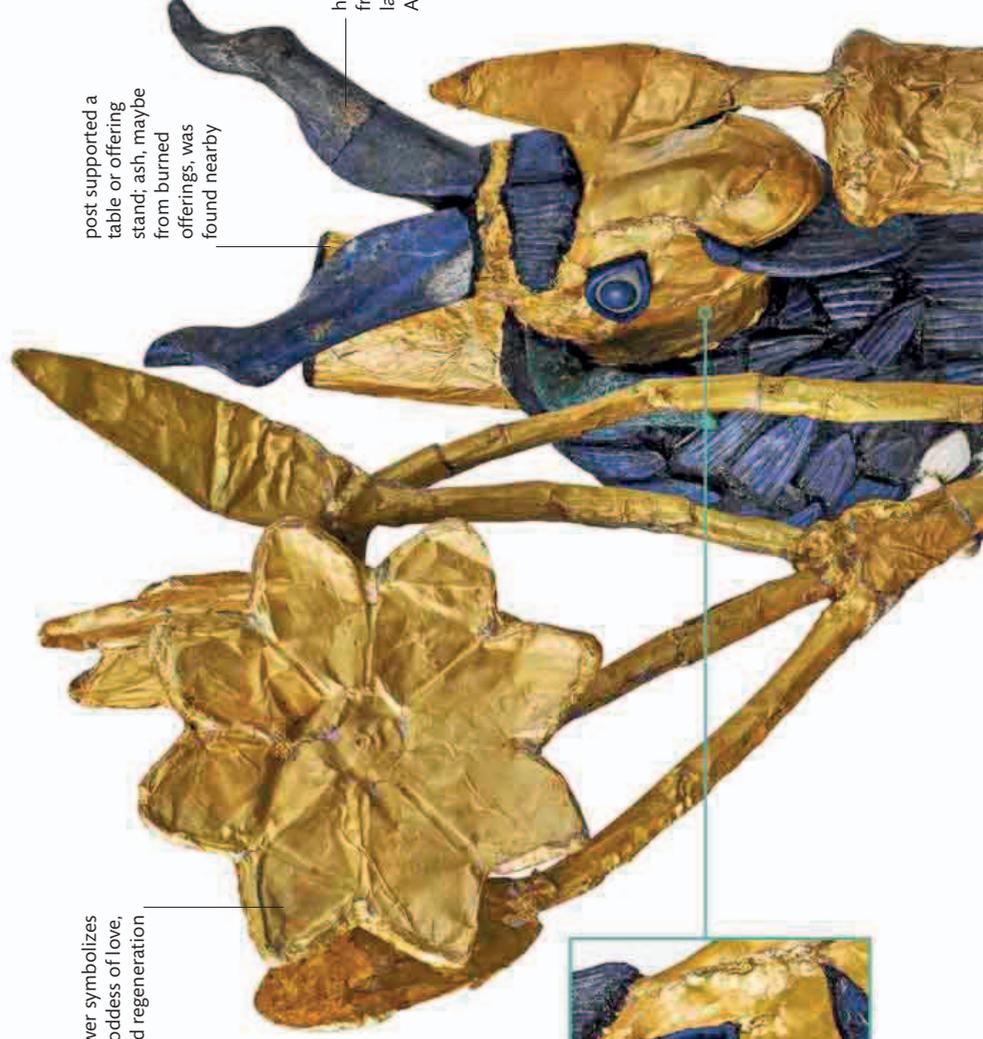
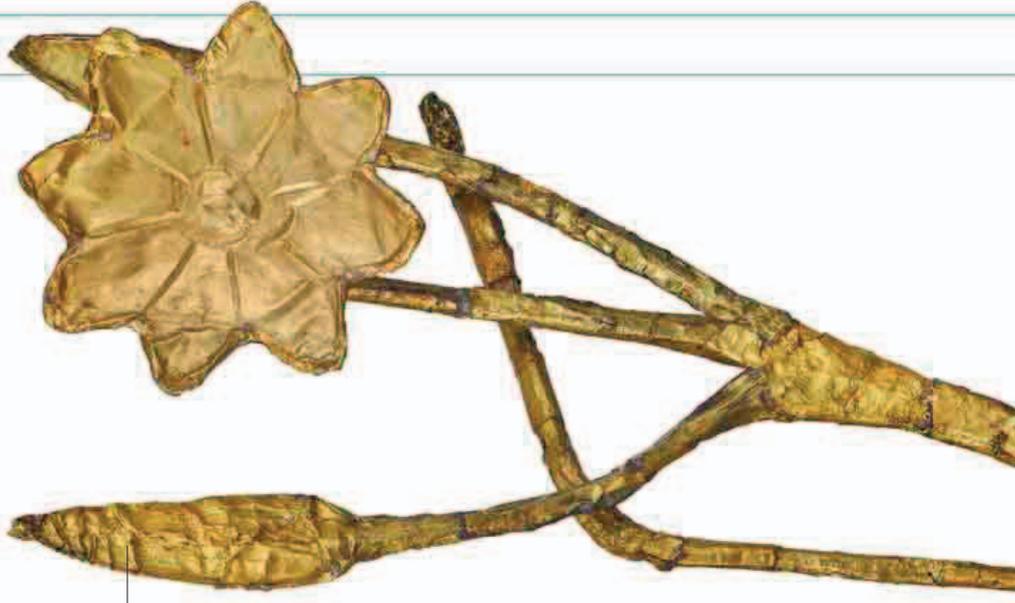
The objects from these graves represented enormous wealth and extraordinary artistic creativity. They were made from imported exotic materials, such as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, Indus carnelian, and fine stone. They included not only vessels and jewelry but also animal-headed lyres, a gaming board with mosaic decoration, a sled drawn by asses, and gilded furniture. While some objects were the deceased’s personal possessions, buried for their continued enjoyment, others were meant as gifts to placate the grim underworld deities in the hope of receiving favorable treatment in the joyless afterlife.

In addition to the principal, royal person, the 16 graves contained the bodies of others who may have been sacrificed: at least 26 in Puabi’s grave and 74 in what Woolley called the Great Death Pit. Their positions and associated finds showed them to be guards, grooms, musicians, and personal attendants, most of them women. Woolley argued these were willing victims, who chose to die with their royal master or mistress. Recent investigations show that some, at least, died from blows to the head, but whether all were sacrificed is still uncertain. No other Mesopotamian cemetery contains such sacrifices.



## Bull-head lyre

Wooden lyres were found with many of the female attendants. Their sound boxes ended in an animal head, usually that of a bull or cow, decorated with lapis lazuli, shell, and gold.



gold flower symbolizes Inanna, goddess of love, fertility, and regeneration

## Facial features

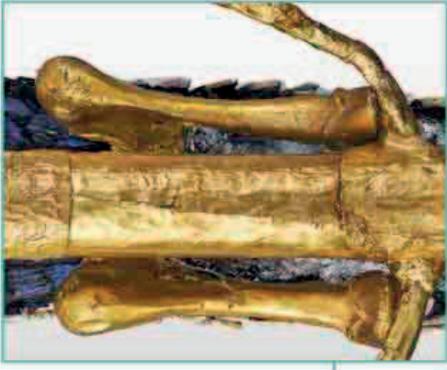
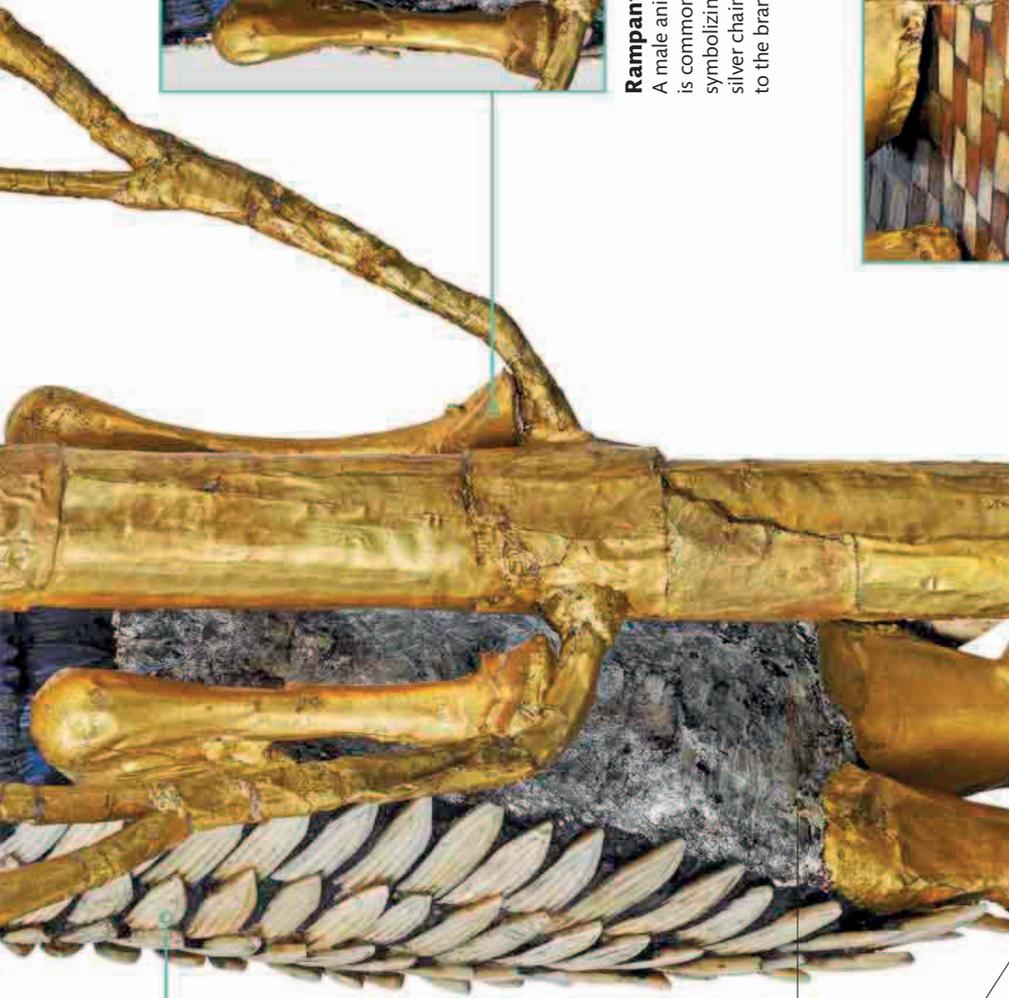
Brilliant blue lapis lazuli was used for the eyes (with shell whites), forehead fringe, and flowing beard. Copper (now greenish blue) was used for the ears.





**Intricate details**

The goat and bush were modeled in wood and thinly coated with bitumen (tar) to glue in place the precious, colorful outer elements. These included individually carved locks of hair, in shell on the back and lapis lazuli on the shoulders.



**Rampant goat**

A male animal eating the "plant of life" is common in Sumerian iconography, symbolizing fertility. Originally, a silver chain fastened the goat's legs to the branches.

thin silver coating on belly, badly preserved since silver, unlike gold, corrodes

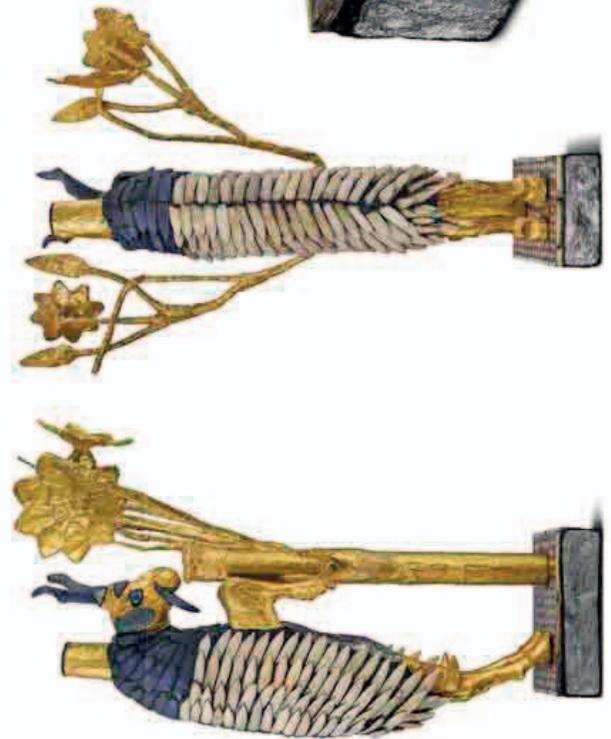
locks of hair around goat's lower legs were modeled in gold

thin sheet gold covers bush and goat's face, legs, and hooves



**Mosaic base**

Thin silver coats the sides of the wooden base, while a mosaic of shell and red limestone pieces decorates its surface.



**SIDE VIEW**

**REAR VIEW**

**Sumerian scene**

This magnificent wooden table support has been known since its discovery as the Ram Caught in a Thicket, from the biblical story of Abraham and his son Isaac. However, it actually depicts a goat standing to graze on a flowering bush, a scene with Sumerian religious significance. This is one of a pair, of slightly different sizes, found in the Great Death Pit.

## HOME LIFE

Cups, bowls, dishes, goblets, and jars for cooking and serving food at home were usually made of pottery. Well-off households also acquired metal and stone vessels, often made of exotic imported materials. Many of these vessels were buried at Ur in both royal graves and those of lesser people.



**Decorated bowl**  
Distinctive soapstone bowls were manufactured at Tepe Yahya and Jiroft, in modern Iran, and Tarut, in Saudi Arabia, in the 3rd millennium BCE. They were widely traded.

scorpion design      typical hatched infill



### Boat-shaped bowl

Silver was imported from Anatolia to make luxury tableware and decorative objects. Weighed silver was used as a form of currency.



**CYLINDER SEAL**

**FEAST SCENE IMPRESSION**

### Beer drinkers

Sumerian barley beer was unfiltered so it was drunk through a long tube. Three tubes, of gold, silver, and copper encased in lapis lazuli, were found in Queen Puabi's grave.



### Soapstone tumbler

Many tumblers of gold, silver, and stone were found at Ur. Soapstone, being soft and therefore easy to carve, was frequently used for stone vessels and seals.



### Alabaster vase

Stone was used in early Mesopotamia to make luxury vessels. Most was imported, from Iran and farther afield, but alabaster was locally available.

## CLOTHING AND ADORNMENT

Intact rich graves are rarely found, so most information on Mesopotamian clothing and adornment comes from texts or art. These reveal that Sumerian men, for example, wore fleece kilts and the women wore woolen wrap-around robes. The largest collection of surviving jewelry is from the royal cemetery at Ur (see p.22).



### Finger rings

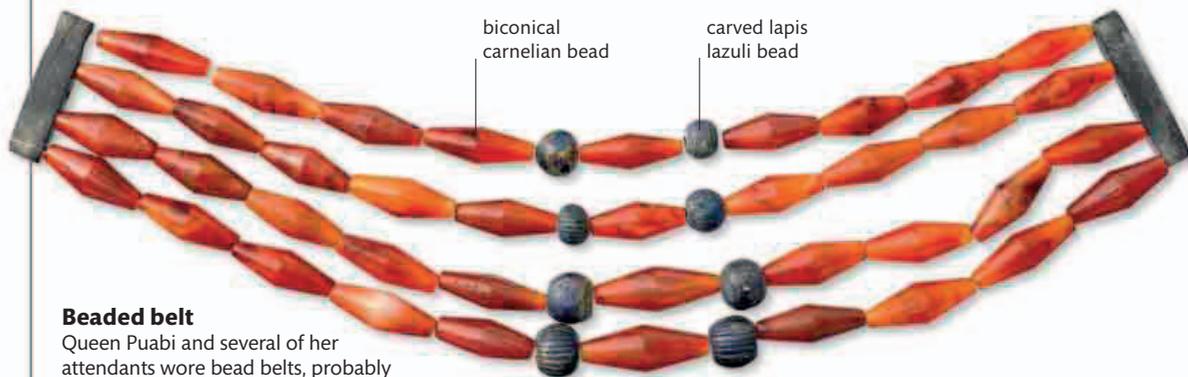
These rings were made from very finely twisted gold wire, soldered to plain gold bands. Ordinary people wore rings made of copper.

poplar leaves of engraved beaten gold



### Garment cuff

Beaded cuffs were found with many of the women in the Great Death Pit. Surviving threads show that these were sewn onto short-sleeved red garments.



### Beaded belt

Queen Puabi and several of her attendants wore bead belts, probably stitched to a backing of leather or cloth, sometimes with pendant rings of gold or shell.



### Unusual choker

A number of the female attendants in the royal graves wore unusual chokers made of triangular beads. The gold beads were made of sheet metal doubled over.



lapis lazuli bead

gold bead

carnelian disk bead

### Wreaths, pendants, and necklaces

Elaborate hairstyles were held in place by a gold or silver ribbon wound around several times. Over this were arranged wreaths of gold poplar and willow leaves. The double spiral of the gold pendant was a common symbolic element in Mesopotamian decoration.

biconical carnelian bead

carved lapis lazuli bead

carved lapis lazuli bead

gold tube for suspension cords



lapis lazuli fly  
 fluted gold bead  
 lapis lazuli bead  
 gold fly

Indus carnelian bead

twisted gold wire pendant



hair comb topped by 7 gold flowers

carnelian-tipped gold willow leaves

gold sheet ribbons



hammered sheet gold

**Loop earrings**

Many of the women found in the Ur cemetery wore earrings. These large gold crescent-shaped earrings were probably worn hanging down, with the thin wire over the top of the ear.



silver support for petal, now missing  
 gold leaf petal

frit (vitreous paste) petal  
 silver hair support



gold and lapis lazuli head

gold ring to attach cylinder seal

**Dress pins**

Pins fastened a cloak draped over one shoulder and passed under the other arm. Often the wearer's cylinder seal was attached by a chain to a ring near the pin's head.



multiple strands of gold, lapis lazuli, silver, agate, and carnelian beads

banded agate bead

gold pendant rings hanging from belt

**Queen Puabi's finery**

With great skill, Woolley used the position of surviving elements to reconstruct original forms. These included the queen's elaborate hair arrangement, outlined by her gold ribbons and headdress, and her magnificent cape, made of long pendant strands of beads.

**Hair comb**

Queen Puabi and several attendants in the royal graves wore "Spanish combs," which supported an elaborate raised hair arrangement. The flowers would appear to be growing out of the hair.

# EGYPTIAN LIFE AND AFTERLIFE

From its inception, ancient Egypt was defined by its religious beliefs. Worship of all-powerful deities was part of daily life, and ancient Egyptians believed that when they died they would enjoy an afterlife. Its pharaohs, kings who were regarded as gods, controlled the vast resources of the kingdom, using them to build architecture on a grand scale and tombs filled with beautiful objects.

## Scenes from real life ▷

The tomb of the astronomer and scribe Nakht, who lived around 1400 BCE, is decorated with magnificent paintings depicting scenes from life at that time. Here he hunts birds in a papyrus thicket, watched by his wife and three children.

Egypt is often called “the gift of the Nile,” and ancient Egypt owed much to the river. Its annual floods brought water and fertile silt to sustain agriculture and, by the late 4th millennium BCE, supported a few towns, with growing regional control. The regions of Upper and Lower Egypt were eventually united in 3100 BCE by the legendary King Menes, who made his capital centrally at Memphis. A pattern of alternating regional division and centralized control was repeated throughout subsequent Egyptian history. During times of prosperity and under strong rulers, the land was united; when troubles arose, weakened rulers lost overall control and the kingdom disintegrated into smaller political realms enjoying varying degrees of independence.

## OLD KINGDOM

Comparatively little is known of Egypt’s first two dynasties (the Early Dynastic period). The Old Kingdom began with the 3rd dynasty in 2686 BCE. Its pharaohs built the first pyramids (see p.28). They obtained gold from Nubia and traded with the

city of Byblos (see p.47) for lumber. The Sun god Re became Egypt’s supreme deity. However, poor floods and subsequent famine brought political disintegration from 2181 BCE (the First Intermediate period).

## MIDDLE KINGDOM

Upper and Lower Egypt were reunited under Mentuhotep II around 2040 BCE. In 1985 BCE, the throne passed to Amenemhat I, founder of the 12th dynasty, who built a new capital at Itj-tawy. The borders of the kingdom’s administrative divisions (nomes) were fixed. Kings were still buried beneath pyramids, now surrounded by nobles’ tombs. Substantial temples were built, and the cult of Osiris (see p.34) grew in importance.

To gain better control of Nubia’s gold deposits, fortresses were built and a canal constructed. The early 17th century BCE saw a decline in royal authority, and the usurpation of power in the delta by the Semitic Hyksos dynasty in 1650 BCE began the Second Intermediate period. Itj-tawy was abandoned, but an Egyptian dynasty still controlled Upper Egypt.



## Behind the mask

After bandaging, a mummy’s face was often covered by an idealized portrait mask, made of gilded and painted cartonnage (linen and glue stiffened with plaster).

## NEW KINGDOM

Around 1550 BCE, the native dynasty drove out the Hyksos and founded the New Kingdom. Egyptian domination of Nubia was extended southward. Pharaohs were now buried in rock-cut tombs in the Valley of the Kings. The Theban god Amun was preeminent, and large temple complexes were built, particularly at Luxor.

In the 14th century BCE, the pharaoh Akhenaten broke with tradition, instituting worship of a single god, the Aten, and building a new capital at Amarna. Neither survived his death, the status quo being restored under his youthful successor, Tutankhamun. International trade flourished, and the Egyptians expanded their rule eastward.

By the 11th century BCE, political control was disintegrating. A general of Libyan origin seized control of Upper Egypt in 1069 BCE, ushering in the Third Intermediate period during which Upper and Lower Egypt were ruled by separate, although related, dynasties. Egypt was reunited in the late 8th century BCE by the Kushite (Nubian) 25th dynasty.

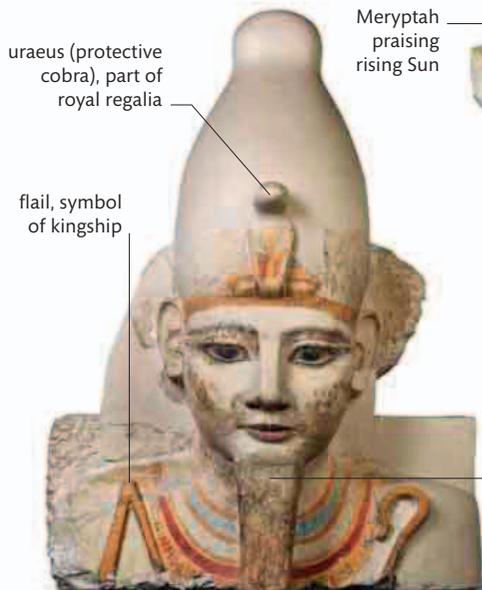
“**Enjoy yourself** while you live... follow your heart’s command **on earth**, be joyful and make merry.”

Harper’s Song, inscribed on the tomb of King Inyotef c.2125–2055 BCE



## POLITICS AND POWER

The mythical first king of Egypt was the god Osiris, followed by his son Horus. From Horus, both kingship and divinity were passed on to his male successors, making the Egyptian pharaoh an absolute monarch. Under royal authority, Egypt's administration was in the hands of state officials and provincial governors.



uraeus (protective cobra), part of royal regalia

flail, symbol of kingship



stela inscribed with hymn to Sun god

Meryptah praising rising Sun

**Meryptah, priest of Amun**  
As Amun-Re, Egypt's principal deity Amun represented the Sun. His chief priest wielded considerable political power, particularly under weak pharaohs.

beard, symbolizing divinity

### Ramses II

Ramses the Great was one of Egypt's most powerful and long-lived rulers. In the 13th century BCE, he built many temples, monuments, and statues, and a new city, Pi-Ramesse.



lion's body

man's head, badly eroded

false royal beard

royal nemes (headcloth)

cartouche of Ramses' son Merenptah added after his father's death

cartouche, line and oval enclosing royal name

### Middle Kingdom sphinx

Sphinxes symbolized both the Sun god and royal power. In the New Kingdom, processional avenues of sphinxes were built as the approaches to many temples. This sphinx was recarved with the five royal names of Ramses II.



**Royal name**  
This cartouche gives the throne name adopted by Ramses II on his accession, Usermaatre, which means "the Justice of Re is Powerful."



**Hieroglyphs**  
The hieroglyphic script included logograms (signs representing a word or idea) but was mainly composed of phonetic signs signifying one, two, or three consonants.

## PYRAMIDS



King Djoser constructed the first pyramid, the step pyramid at Saqqara, in the 27th century BCE. In the following two centuries, Sneferu at Dahshur and his successors at Giza (shown above) built smooth-sided pyramids, along with mortuary temples, subsidiary pyramids for their wives, and other monuments.

## ART AND CULTURE

Despite its conventions—which dictated, for example, that human faces, arms, and legs be depicted in profile, while torsos be shown from the front—Egyptian artworks give a wonderfully detailed and realistic picture of Egyptian life. They include paintings, reliefs, models of people and scenes, and stone sculptures.



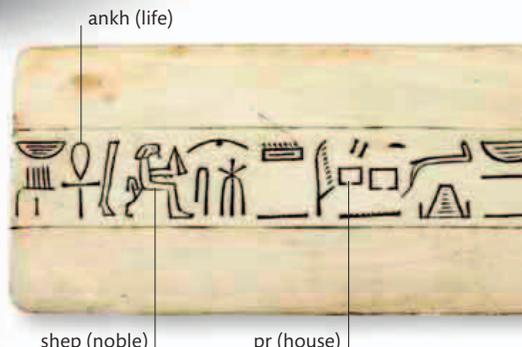
black pigment on wig and eyes

pleated kilt

traces of red pigment on body

### Standing scribe

The self-confident pose reflects the advantages a scribe enjoyed, including potential access to high office and freedom from the backbreaking work endured by the majority.



ankh (life)

shep (noble)

pr (house)



**False eyes**

False eyes were made to insert into statues and funerary masks. These are constructed of bent copper wire surrounding a stone eye.

dark stone pupil



hole for black ink  
hole for red ink  
reed brush for precise writing  
portable wooden palette



palette and brushes

**Educated man**

Only a tenth of Egyptians could read and write. Written education included astronomy, geography, medicine, mathematics, and law.



basalt palette

blue minerals and red ochre

grinder for crushing pigments

**Writing implements**

The scribe's palette, brushes, and inks were so distinctive a mark of the profession that they were used as the hieroglyph for "scribe" and "writing."



shaved head

**Servant girl**

This wooden statuette of a servant girl is a decorative form of cosmetic container. Unlike most Egyptian sculptures, the girl is highly naturalistic, her unbalanced pose dictated by the heavy jar she is carrying.

amulet of popular god Bes

ivory pin holding lid in place

fine-grained boxwood, stained brownish red

gilded girdle

hole for tie



rearing cobra



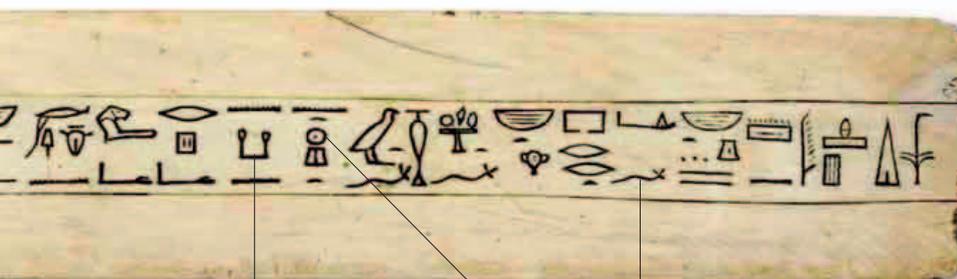
hieratic script, written from right to left

**Hieratic wooden label**

Children attending the House of Life (temple school) first learned to read and write in hieratic, a simplified form of the hieroglyphic script used for informal documents and texts.

**Hieroglyphic inlay**

Monumental inscriptions and other display texts, such as those on mummies, were written in the hieroglyphic script, which was elaborate and highly pictorial.



ka (dead person's spirit) Re (Sun) f (his)

**Ibis and cobra**

The Egyptians were acutely aware of the natural world around them. Many of their deities had an animal aspect, so animals featured prominently in Egyptian art.

## CLOTHING AND ADORNMENT

Egyptian clothing was made from white linen, and the best pieces were very finely woven. Men wore a kilt, with or without a shirt, or a loincloth for manual work. Women wore a long, straight dress, with one or two shoulder straps. Children usually went naked (see p.29), although some children's clothes were found in Tutankhamun's tomb.



### Amulet bracelet

Protective cowrie shell amulets were worn by women from Predynastic times. Pigs were associated with the violent god Seth who, surprisingly, also had a protective aspect.

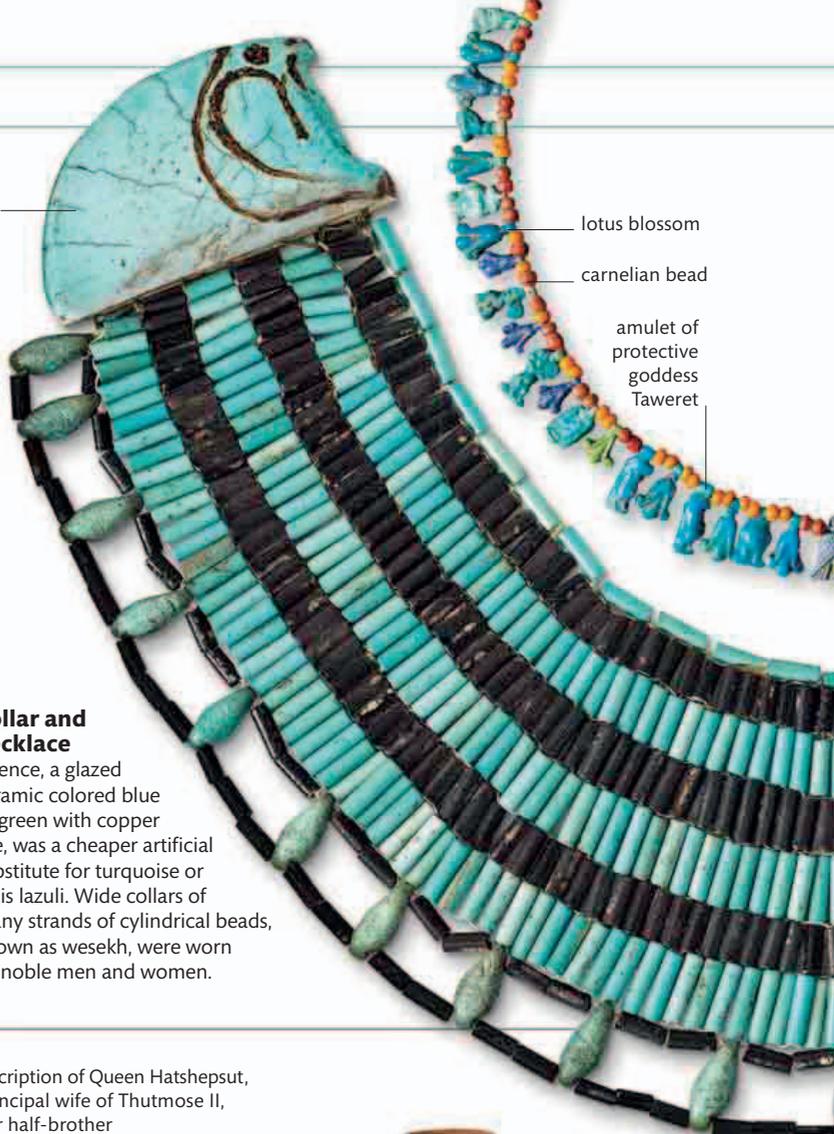


### Finger rings

These rings all held a swiveling bevel in the shape of a protective scarab beetle, its underside inscribed with a good luck charm.

### Collar and necklace

Faience, a glazed ceramic colored blue or green with copper ore, was a cheaper artificial substitute for turquoise or lapis lazuli. Wide collars of many strands of cylindrical beads, known as wesekh, were worn by noble men and women.



## HOME LIFE

Paintings and models in tombs vividly document both nobles' enjoyment of the good things in life and the daily toil of those supporting them. Egypt's arid conditions have also preserved many everyday objects made of organic materials, such as basketry, and documents in perishable materials, such as papyrus, which also describe many aspects of daily life.



### Alabaster jar

This stone vessel, inscribed with the name and titles of Queen Hatshepsut, may have been a gift to place in the tomb of a favored royal official.



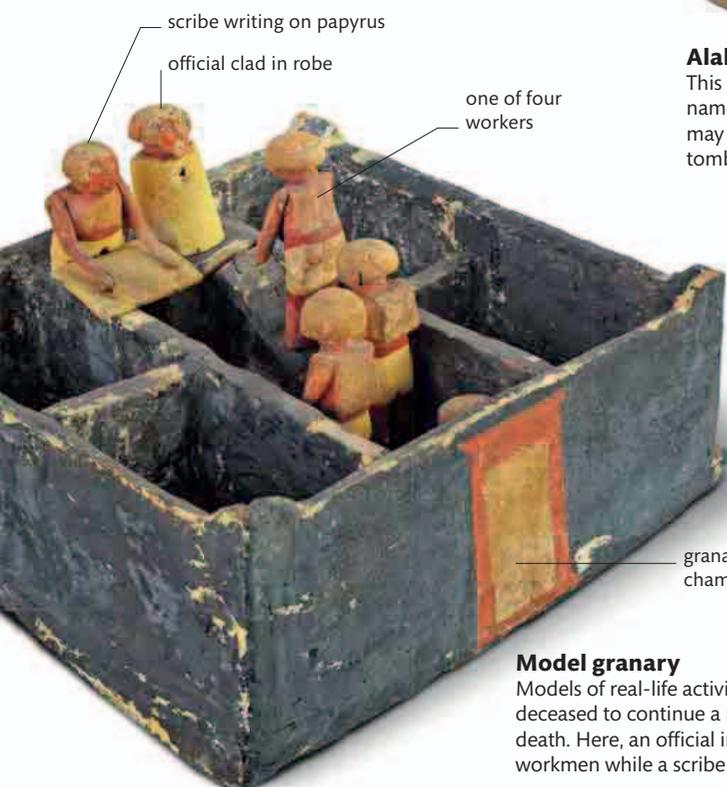
### Badarian culture bowl

This handmade Predynastic bowl, with a characteristic black rim, shows the great skill achieved by Egyptian potters even before 3000 BCE.



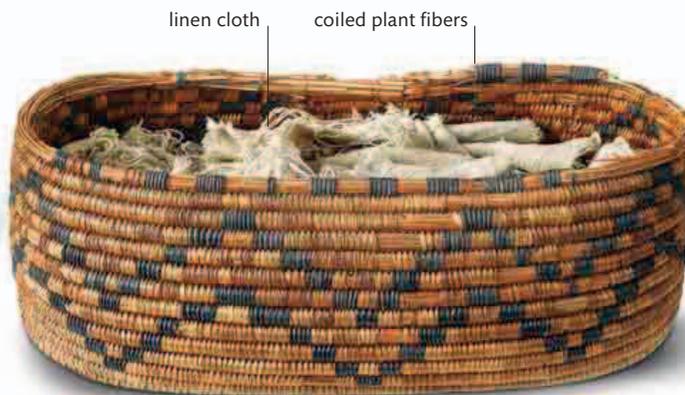
### Drinking vessels

Most Egyptian pottery is basic red-brown coarse ware, for everyday use. It is known as "Nile Silt ware" after the material from which it was made.



### Model granary

Models of real-life activities enabled the deceased to continue a normal life after death. Here, an official interviews four workmen while a scribe records the details.



### Linen basket

Egypt is unusual in preserving ancient matting and basketry, used in many cultures for everyday containers. Dom-palm leaves and grasses were used in making these objects.





amulet of Hathor, goddess of love and motherhood

**FAIENCE NECKLACE**

faience cylinder bead

**WESEKH COLLAR**



wooden stick

wooden kohl pot

fish-shaped palette

pebble grinder

hematite stick

alabaster vase for white cream

alabaster makeup jar

alabaster kohl pot and lid

flower bud

papyrus stem

**Beauty kit**

Noble ladies kept a large set of tools with which to beautify themselves, including a stone palette on which to grind and mix makeup pigments.

**Cosmetics spoon**

This exquisitely carved little wooden spoon would have been used for scooping up cosmetics. Its papyrus stem handle is a symbol of Lower Egypt.



slaughtered cow

stylized figure with exaggerated limbs

**Butchery scene**

Servants prepare meat for a deceased noble's table. Ordinary people would seldom have eaten meat: their diet was bread, fruit, vegetables, fish, and beer.

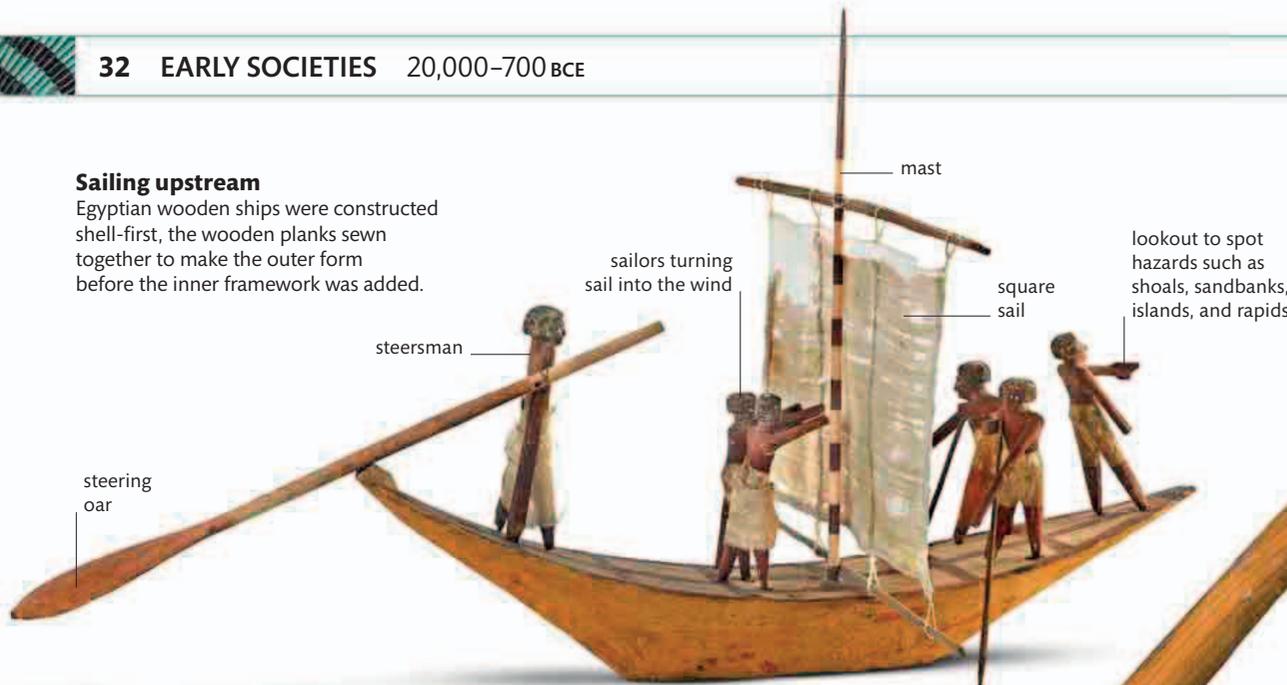
red pigment on body

black pigment on wig

fire

**Sailing upstream**

Egyptian wooden ships were constructed shell-first, the wooden planks sewn together to make the outer form before the inner framework was added.

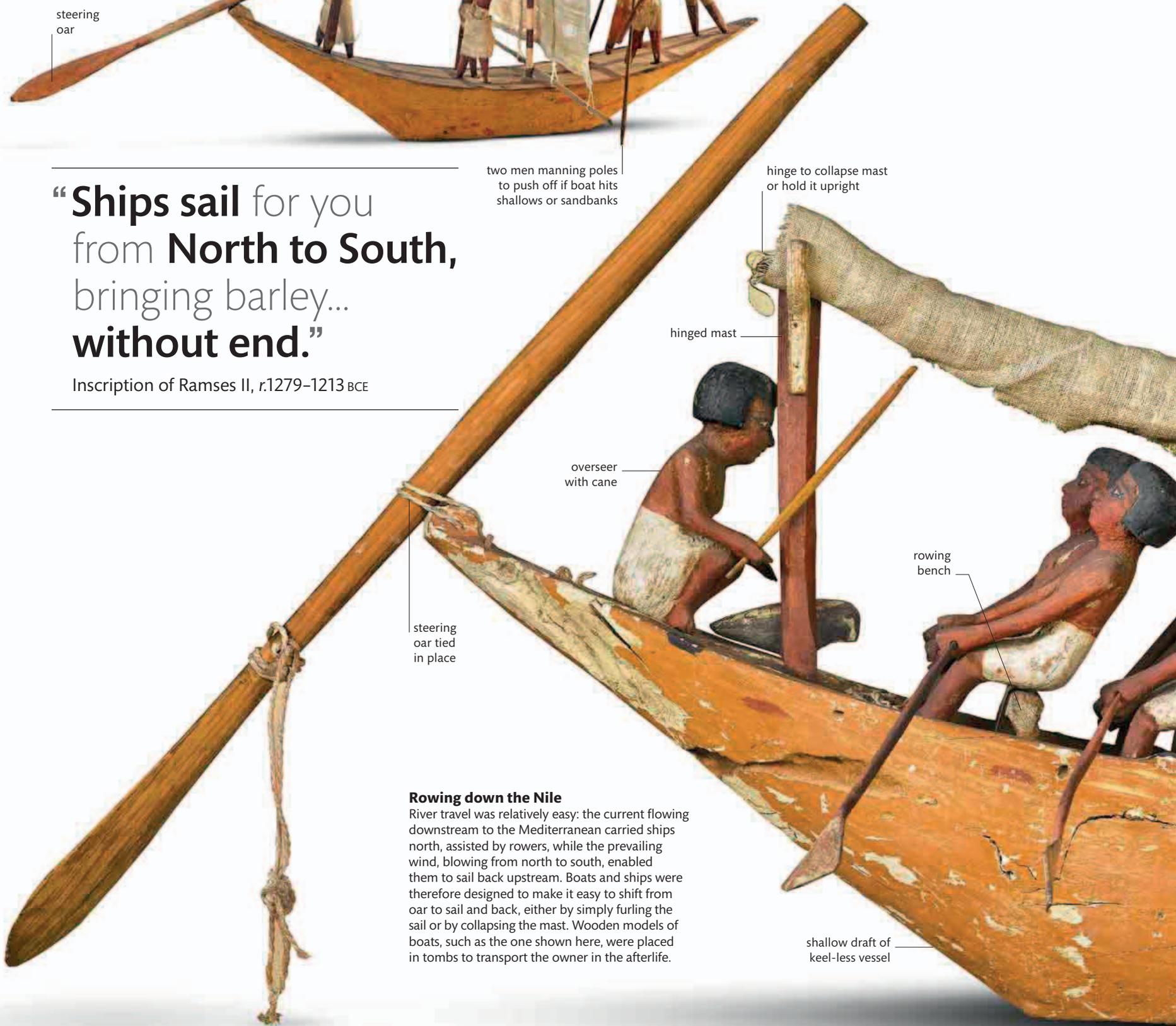


“Ships sail for you from North to South, bringing barley... without end.”

Inscription of Ramses II, r.1279–1213 BCE

two men manning poles to push off if boat hits shallows or sandbanks

hinge to collapse mast or hold it upright



**Rowing down the Nile**

River travel was relatively easy: the current flowing downstream to the Mediterranean carried ships north, assisted by rowers, while the prevailing wind, blowing from north to south, enabled them to sail back upstream. Boats and ships were therefore designed to make it easy to shift from oar to sail and back, either by simply furling the sail or by collapsing the mast. Wooden models of boats, such as the one shown here, were placed in tombs to transport the owner in the afterlife.

## THE LURE OF THE EXOTIC

## RIVER CRAFT

Simple craft for fishing, hunting wildfowl, or crossing the Nile were made of papyrus reeds bound in bundles, but most long-distance river traffic was in wooden boats, ideally of Lebanese cedar. Some had cabins, in the center of the vessel or at one or both ends. Substantial ships were required to transport stone from quarries, and for trade in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

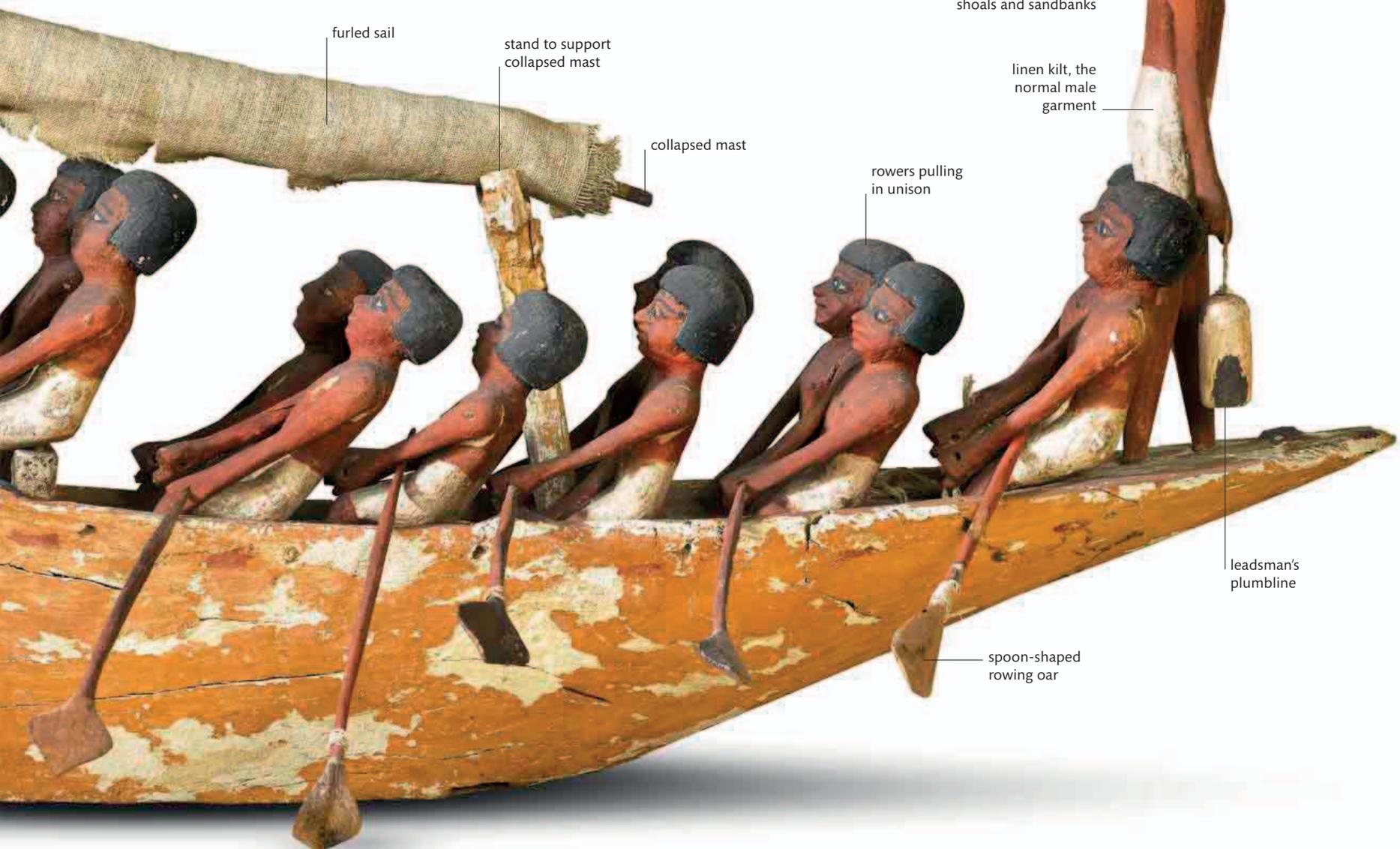
Boats were essential for moving the goods and materials on which Egypt depended. Copper, stone, and semiprecious stones came from the desert east of the Nile. Copper was also sourced from Sinai farther east.

To the south, the lands around the Nile cataracts provided Egypt's seemingly limitless supplies of gold, along with ebony, ivory, and copper, and a route to the exotic produce of sub-Saharan Africa.

African exotica were also obtained from the land of Punt, reached by sailing down the Red Sea as well as overland. Its chief attraction was incense, much used by the Egyptians for religious ceremonies and mummification. In the 15th century BCE, Queen Hatshepsut even sent an expedition to Punt to obtain incense trees. Punt also yielded gold, ebony, blackwood, ivory, slaves, and wild

animals. Pygmies skilled in dance were imported from sub-Saharan Africa. The tomb of Harkhuf, an Egyptian governor, contains a copy of an excited letter from the 8-year-old King Pepy II in about 2276 BCE, urging that every possible care be taken of the pygmy dancer that Harkhuf was bringing him.

Egypt also imported timber and copper from its eastern neighbors, and Minoan and Mycenaean pottery and military equipment. Egypt's own exports included grain, wine, Egyptian caviar, dried fish, linen cloth, and luxury goods such as faience vessels.



## BELIEFS AND RITUALS

Egyptian religion had a rich mythology, and the story of Osiris, by which he became god of the afterlife, was particularly important. Religious and secular life were intertwined. Nobles acted as priests or temple officials for short stints of three months, returning to ordinary life for the rest of the year.

## GODS AND GODDESSES



**Amun**  
Amun ("the hidden one") was king of the gods, the creator of the cosmos, responsible for all fertility. As Amun-Re, he represented the Sun.



**Thoth**  
In his role as god of scribes, Thoth was both the keeper of all kinds of knowledge and the recorder when Osiris judged the dead.



**Sekhmet**  
A daughter of the Sun god Re, Sekhmet was both the goddess of war and a protective deity associated with healing.



**Nefertem**  
Often seen as the son of Ptah and Sekhmet, Nefertem was the god of the lotus blossom and the Sun rising from it. He was more feared than worshipped.



**Anubis**  
Anubis was called "lord of the sacred land" (the desert where tombs were situated). He was responsible for mummification and protecting the dead.



**Osiris**  
Murdered by his jealous brother Seth but brought back to life, Osiris was the ruler of the afterlife and judge of the dead. He symbolized fertility and resurrection.



**Isis and Horus**  
Isis, wife of the murdered god Osiris, was regarded as mourner and protector of the dead. As the mother of Osiris' son Horus, she was venerated as the divine mother and as mother to the pharaohs.

## SHABTIS



**Early shabti**  
In Old Kingdom times, models of workers who would perform specific tasks for the deceased were placed in tombs. By 2000 BCE, these were replaced by all-purpose shabti ("answerer") figures.



**Faience shabtis**  
Shabtis were made in many materials but faience was the most common. Later tombs might contain several hundred shabtis.

mass-produced shabti



kohl-painted eyes

heavy wig

elaborate collar

painted detail on wooden body

inscribed hieroglyphic text

**Wooden shabti**

Later shabtis were sometimes depicted with tools, and this figure wears a basket on her back. She is inscribed "Of the Lady Maya," referring to the owner of the tomb.

**AMULETS**

**Sons of Horus amulets**

Each of the four Sons of Horus—Qebehsenuef, Imsety, Hapy, and Duamutef—protected one of the four canopic jars in which were stored the liver, lungs, stomach, and intestines, which were removed when the deceased was mummified (see p.39).



solar disk

**Pectoral amulet**

From New Kingdom times, amulets frequently portrayed deities. This amulet depicts a god between two birds, all wearing the horns and solar disk of Isis or Hathor.



**FALCON-HEADED QEBEHSENUEF**

**HUMAN-HEADED IMSETY**

**BABOON-HEADED HAPY**

**JACKAL-HEADED DUAMUTEF**



faience pectoral scarab amulet

**Scarab**

The Egyptian dung beetle, patiently rolling a ball of dung many times its size, came to symbolize resurrection. It was popular in amulets.



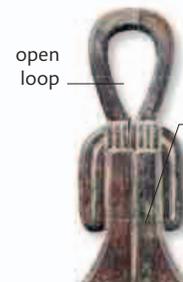
**Wedjat amulet**

The left eye of Horus, plucked out by his uncle Seth but magically restored, symbolized healing, wholeness, strength, and protection.



**Djed amulet**

Originally seen as a pillar, the djed was later taken to represent the backbone of Osiris, symbolizing stability and his resurrection.



open loop

**Tyset amulet**

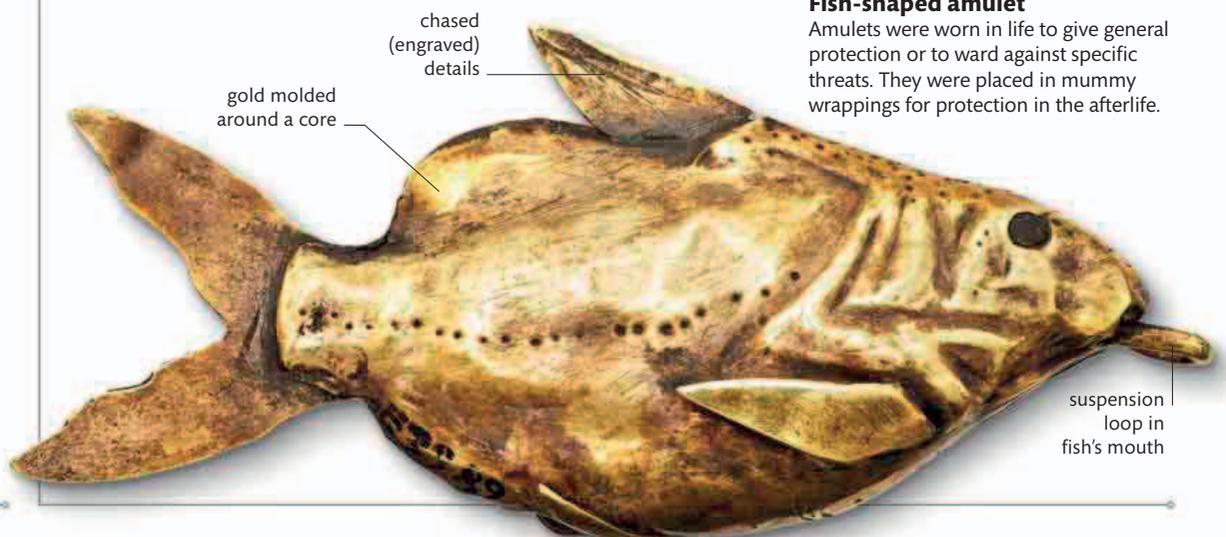
The tyet was an early sacred symbol. The tyet amulet became popular in New Kingdom times, when it was described as the knot of Isis.



girdle tied in a bow

**Bes amulet**

The aggression of the dwarf god Bes was all directed toward external threats. He was the protector of the family, particularly women in childbirth.



chased (engraved) details

gold molded around a core

**Fish-shaped amulet**

Amulets were worn in life to give general protection or to ward against specific threats. They were placed in mummy wrappings for protection in the afterlife.

suspension loop in fish's mouth

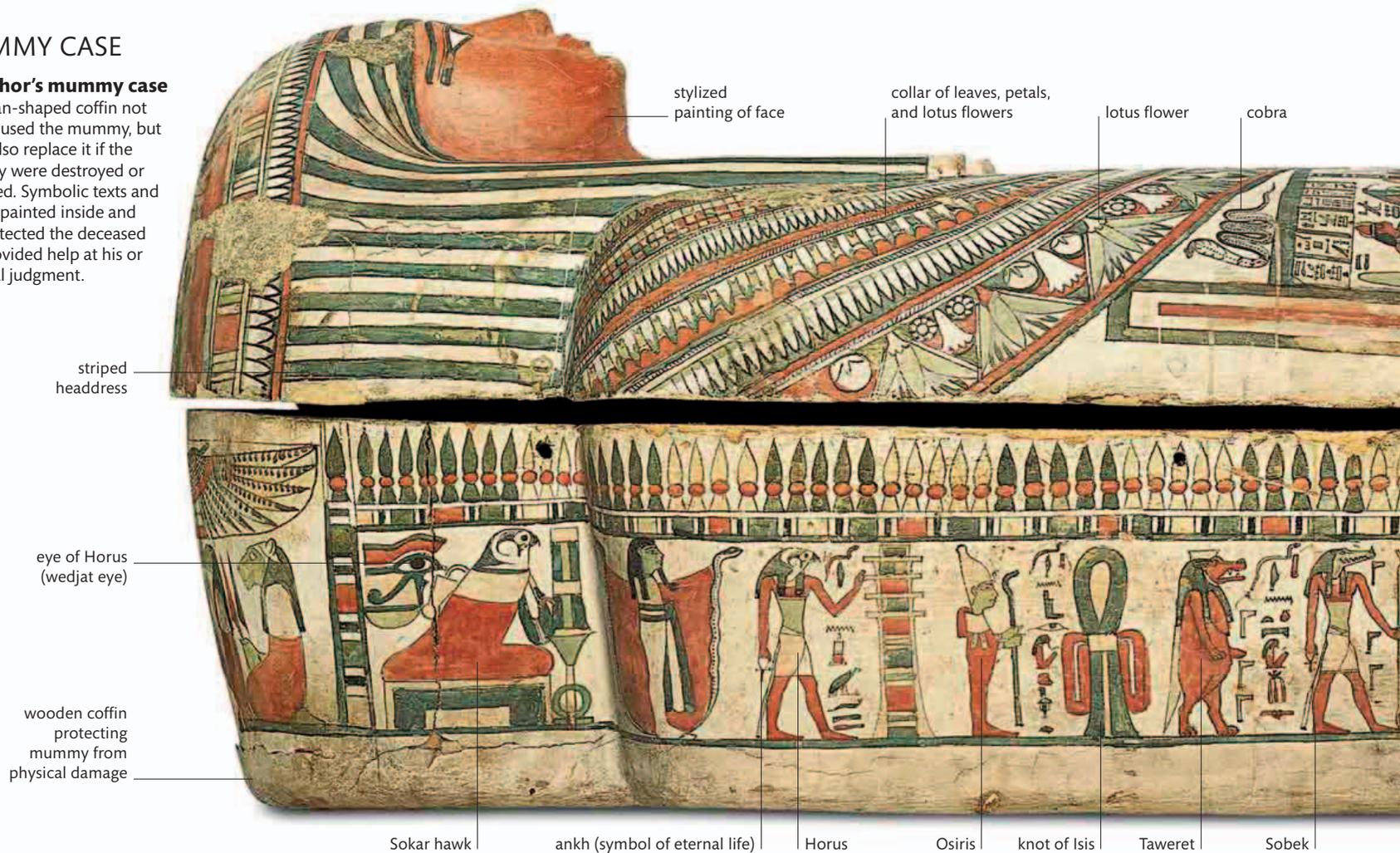
## GRAVE GOODS



## MUMMY CASE

### Pasenhor's mummy case

A human-shaped coffin not only housed the mummy, but could also replace it if the mummy were destroyed or damaged. Symbolic texts and images painted inside and out protected the deceased and provided help at his or her final judgment.



cartouche of Amenhotep II (1427–1400 BCE)



**Water jar**  
Water was regarded as the source of creation. It symbolized life, regeneration, and purity, so faience water jars were an important burial offering.

painted floral band



**Wine jar**  
Wine, made from grapes and mixed with honey and spices, was important in the Egyptian diet. This large wine amphora is from a rich woman's tomb.

gold leaf on eyes



**Bronze cat**  
Cats were kept as household pets and as animals sacred to Re and to the fertility goddess Bastet. This hollow figure may have held a cat mummy.

human face



bird's body

**Ba**  
The Ba (personality spirit) was one of the five elements making up a person. Its bird form helped it return nightly from the underworld to the deceased.

inscription naming tomb owner Hekay, a noble court official

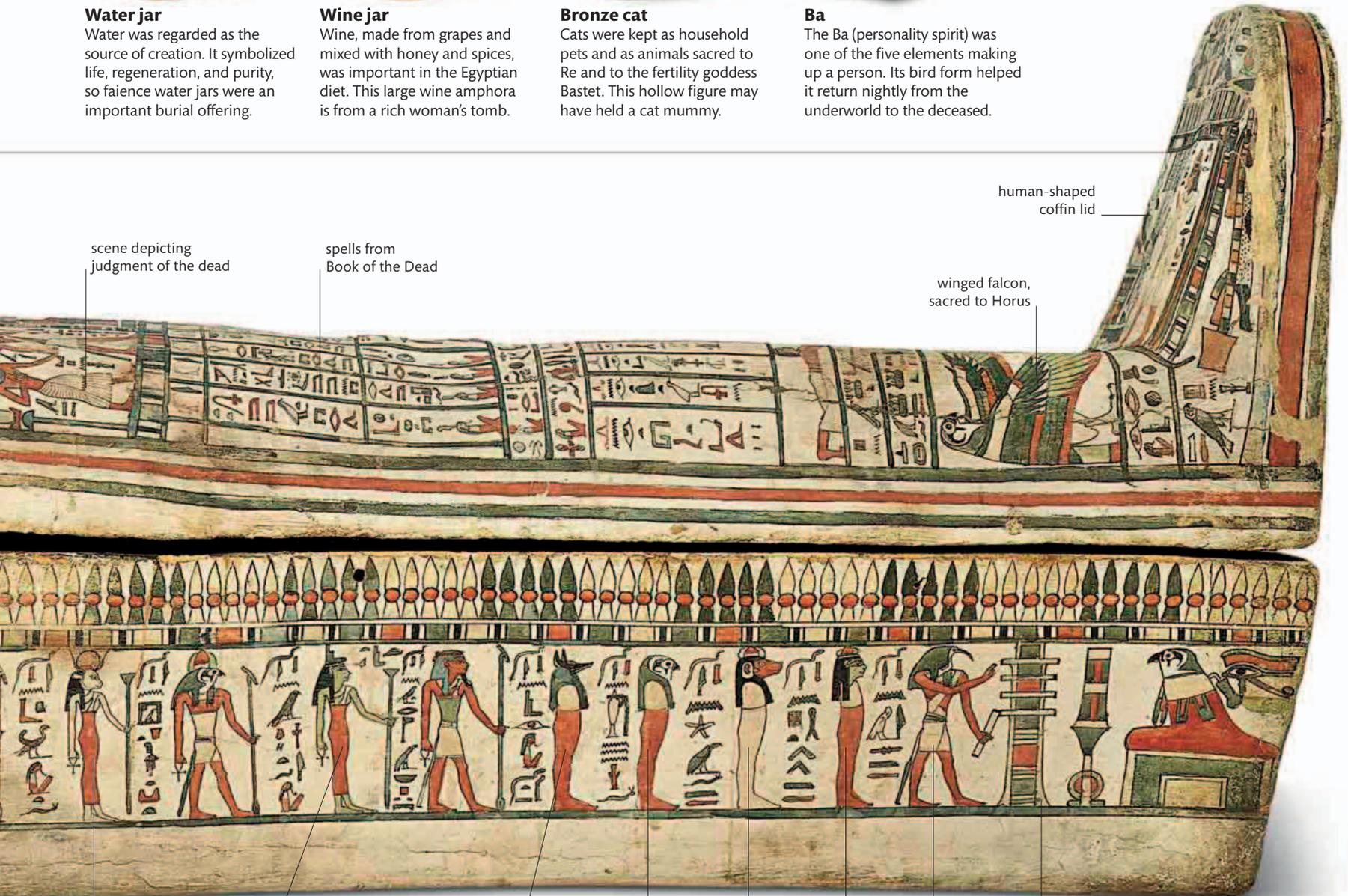


**Headrest**  
Instead of pillows, the Egyptians slept with their heads on a headrest, usually of wood. This luxury alabaster version was placed in an Old Kingdom tomb.

scene depicting judgment of the dead

spells from Book of the Dead

winged falcon, sacred to Horus



human-shaped coffin lid

Hathor

Isis

Duamutef

Qebehseuef

Hapy

Imsety

Thoth

djed pillar (symbol of resurrection)

Neferssekhy

geese, bred for meat, were sometimes force-fed



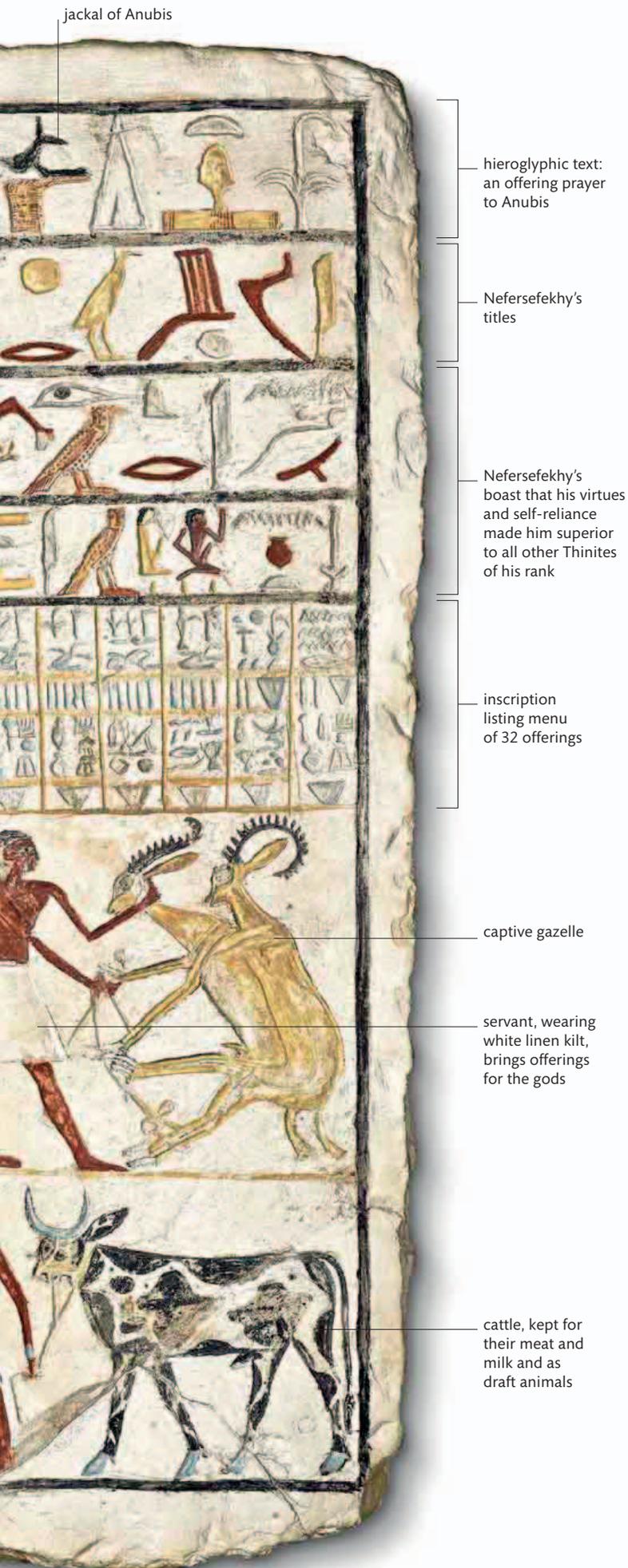
leopard-skin robe of sem-priest, who undertook the final rites of resurrection on a mummy

staff symbolizes Neferssekhy's authority

baskets of food offerings

leg of beef

servant carrying calf carcass



jackal of Anubis

hieroglyphic text:  
an offering prayer  
to Anubis

Neferssekhy's  
titles

Neferssekhy's  
boast that his virtues  
and self-reliance  
made him superior  
to all other Thinites  
of his rank

inscription  
listing menu  
of 32 offerings

captive gazelle

servant, wearing  
white linen kilt,  
brings offerings  
for the gods

cattle, kept for  
their meat and  
milk and as  
draft animals

## PREPARING FOR JUDGMENT

# FUNERARY STELA

The Egyptians considered that death was just an interruption in a life that continued from birth to eternity. In order to enjoy the afterlife, however, it was necessary that the body should be preserved and sustained. It was therefore mummified: the internal organs were removed and stored in canopic jars, and the flesh was dehydrated by packing natron (soda salts) within and around the body. When the process was complete, the body was repacked with fresh natron and resin-soaked bandages, to restore its natural shape. Layers of linen bandages were wrapped around the body, and amulets set among them to protect the deceased from spiritual harm.

## OPENING THE MOUTH

The mummy was placed in its coffin, and an elaborate ritual, called the "Opening of the Mouth," was enacted by the deceased's heir. This restored the senses to the deceased, enabling him or her again to see, hear, speak, eat, and behave as in life. The mummy was now placed in the tomb, where funerary offerings of food, furniture, clothing, jewelry, and other objects,

as well as shabtis (see p.34) and reliefs or paintings, provided it with all the necessities of continued existence. A memorial stela to the deceased, like the one shown here, was sometimes erected outside the tomb.

## WEIGHING THE HEART

In the netherworld, the deceased was held to account by Osiris and the 42 judges of Maat (truth and justice). His or her heart (seat of the human intellect) was weighed on the divine scales against the feather of Maat.

The Book of the Dead, included in the mummy wrappings, prepared the deceased for this judgment and gave advice on how to act. Benevolent Anubis, standing by, might adjust the scales in the deceased's favor. If not, the crocodile-headed demon Ammut sat ready to eat the heart and destroy the dead person's eternal life. For the majority who passed the test, eternity beckoned. But it could only be enjoyed if the Ba (see p.36) was reunited every night with the mummified body, in order to sustain the Akh, the union in the afterlife of the Ba and Ka (life-force spirit, another of the elements making up a person).

"It is better to be **praised for neighborly love** than to have riches in your storeroom."

*Instruction of Amenemope, c.1300-1075 BCE*

### Neferssekhy's memorial

As well as decorating the inside of their tombs, wealthy Egyptians often erected memorial stelae outside. These bore their name and titles and a funerary prayer, along with offering scenes involving the deceased and often their family. This stela belonged to Neferssekhy, an official who also served as a priest, in the town of Thinis near Abydos, around 2175 BCE.

# EUROPE'S BRONZE AGE WARRIORS

Metalworking began with soft metals, such as gold or copper, used to make prestige objects. Later, people discovered that alloying copper with tin produced bronze, a metal strong enough for tools and weapons. As bronze-working spread across Europe, the need for tin (a rare metal) promoted international trade.

## Monumental achievement ▾

Built of massive sandstone blocks and smaller Welsh bluestones, Stonehenge is the most impressive of a series of interconnected monuments on England's Salisbury Plain. It achieved its final form by 1900 BCE.

By the Early Bronze Age (from the late 3rd millennium BCE), weapons in burials reflect a society in which status depended on prowess in combat. Horse-drawn chariots with spoked wheels, introduced from the steppes on Europe's eastern fringes after 2000 BCE, were elite fighting vehicles. Increasing demand for metals, and for other prestige and practical materials, such as amber and salt, stimulated international trade, changing the direction of existing routes and promoting the rise of a continent-wide trading system.

Societies that were rich in metal ores benefited especially from the shift in trading patterns. Ships now plied long-distance trade routes around the Atlantic seaboard of Europe and along rivers. Warmer climatic conditions allowed farming to spread into previously uncultivable areas. Arable farming intensified, and livestock were particularly important.

## THE LATE BRONZE AGE

By around 1300 BCE bronze was used for everyday tools. Cremation burials, often in vast urnfields and



### Status symbol

Ordinary axes were made in large numbers as bronze became more common, but prestige decorated versions were also produced.

usually with few grave goods, were now the norm over most of Europe. The onset of colder, wetter conditions around 1100 BCE brought harsher times, increasing conflict between neighbors and offerings to the gods.

Fortified settlements now became common, providing a place of refuge for rural farmers and a high-status residence for local chiefs and their entourage. These settlements developed particularly at key places along trade routes, where chiefs could enhance their power and wealth by controlling the passage of goods.



## TECHNOLOGY

As craftsmen came to appreciate the potential of metals, they developed new technologies, producing elaborate jewelry, weapons, and figures. By 1300 BCE they were using multiple-piece molds and lost-wax casting, and creating large sheet-bronze objects. Other crafts also flourished, including textile production, now using wool as well as plant fibers.



one-piece mold for two axes



### Mold and axes

The first, simplest bronzes were cast in one-piece molds, consisting of a shape cut into stone: this produced objects with a flat, horizontal upper surface.

one identical half of two-piece mold



### Pin mold

Two-piece molds allowed the production of more complex three-dimensional objects. The two halves were bound together and molten metal poured in at the top.

pin with spherical head, made in this mold

## BATTLE AND CONFLICT

Bronze Age burials and art reflect a warrior society, engaged in cattle rustling and raids rather than mass pitched battles. Swords made their first appearance and rapidly became a vehicle for fashion and display. Late Bronze Age elite warrior equipment comprised a slashing sword and spear, a helmet, shield, greaves (shin armor), and cuirass (breastplate).



### Swiss knife

Knives would have served many purposes: in daily life for tasks such as butchery, but also as weapons, particularly for casual defense or attack.

hole for securing wooden or bone handle



flame-shaped spearhead



loop for securing spear to shaft

socket

crest covering join

### Spearheads

Spears appeared after the Early Bronze Age, and most seem designed for throwing rather than thrusting. Early forms have a tang to attach the head to the shaft; later ones are socketed.

### Urnfield helmet

In the Late Bronze Age crested helmets became popular in Western Europe and especially Italy, while Eastern Europeans preferred a dome-shaped bell helmet.



holes for riveted handle



GERMAN



CENTRAL EUROPEAN



ENGLISH

### Slashing swords

Rapiers, designed like daggers for stabbing, gave way to slashing swords in the later Bronze Age. These three swords illustrate regional diversity in their form.

helmet made of two joined pieces of sheet-bronze

rivet holes, possibly for attaching horns

## CLOTHING AND ADORNMENT

Bronze Age women enjoyed a growing range of designs in jewelry, such as brooches, pins, earrings, and bracelets. In Scandinavia, coffins made from oak trees preserve a rare glimpse of woolen clothing. Women were buried in long-sleeved blouses and skirts, the men in shirts and kilts. Both sexes had hats and cloaks.



**Double spiral brooch**  
The double spiral design was a popular motif used in jewelry in the Bronze Age. This brooch is coiled from a single piece of bronze wire.



bronze collars

central boss

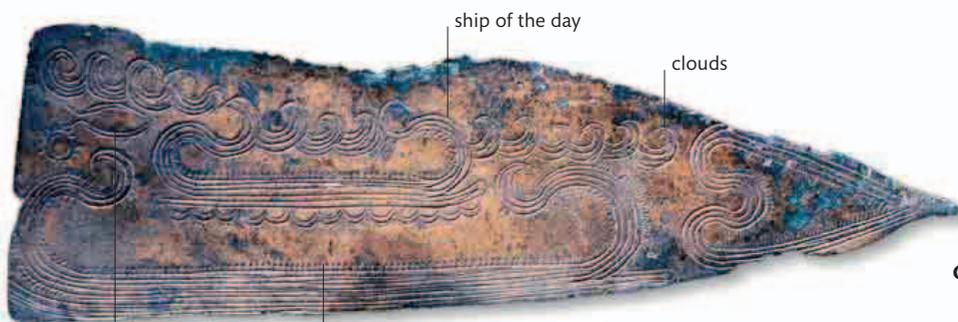
**COLLARED PIN**

**FLOWER-HEADED PIN**



rolled-up sheet-gold

**Ear ornament**  
When metals (copper and gold) were first used in Britain, experimentation produced distinctive ornaments, including basket-shaped earrings.



ship of the day

clouds

fish towing the Sun between ships

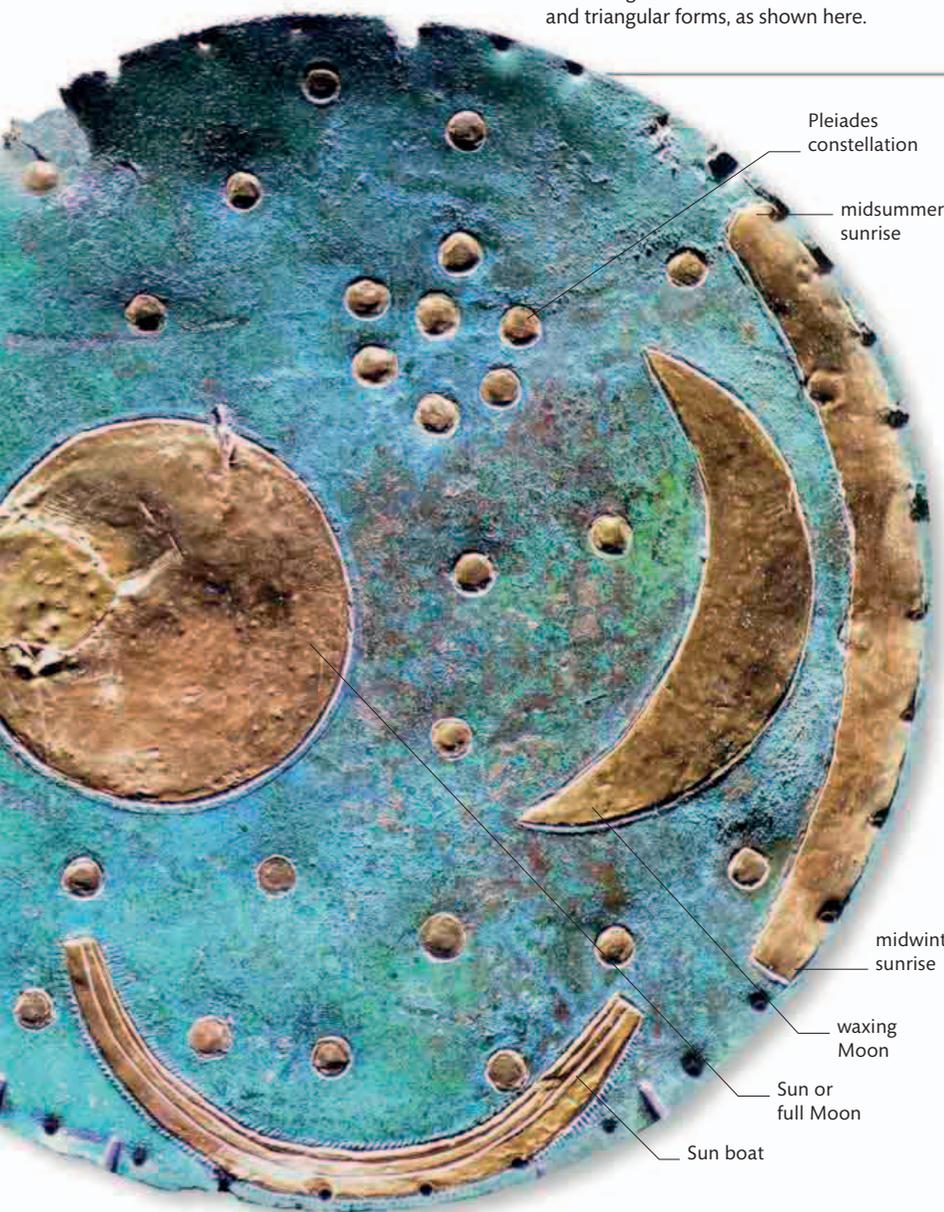
ship of the night

**Scandinavian razor**  
Personal equipment such as razors reflects male concern with their appearance in the Bronze Age. Razors included both lunate and triangular forms, as shown here.

**Elaborate pins**  
Bronze jewelry provided a vehicle for metalworkers to display their versatility. Pin designs were particularly open to flights of fancy.



**Irish tress ring**  
Gold hair ornaments made in Ireland were widely traded during the Late Bronze Age. Gold was mined in the Wicklow Mountains from around 2200 BCE.



Pleiades constellation

midsummer sunrise

midwinter sunrise

waxing Moon

Sun or full Moon

Sun boat

## BELIEFS AND RITUALS

Traces of Bronze Age religion show a preoccupation with the heavens. Some monuments, including Stonehenge, mark moments such as the summer solstice. Artworks depict the Sun carried by a boat or chariot across the sky. Many ritual offerings of metalwork were buried in significant places or deposited in rivers, lakes, or bogs.

**Astronomical instrument**  
The Nebra Sky Disk was used in central Germany around 1600 BCE as an instrument for making astronomical observations, to calibrate the lunar and solar calendars.



**Cremation urn**  
Early Bronze Age British burials were often accompanied by a so-called "Food Vessel," containing a special drink. Later, Food Vessels were used as cremation urns.



small container for food offering

**Kernos**  
Libation tables, stone disks with a number of hollows to take offerings, were used in Early Bronze Age Aegean rituals. This rare ceramic vessel, called a kernos, served the same purpose.



**Marble figurine**  
3rd-millennium BCE figurines from the Cyclades, Greece, probably represented both gods and individual humans. Some were deposited in graves, others may have been placed in shrines.

# THE MIGHTY HITTITES

Around 1650 BCE, central Anatolia's city-states were united by conquest into a kingdom with its capital at Hattusa. Vigorous rulers of this Hittite Old Kingdom campaigned into Syria and even sacked Babylon in 1595 BCE. However, the series of succession disputes that followed reduced their dominions.

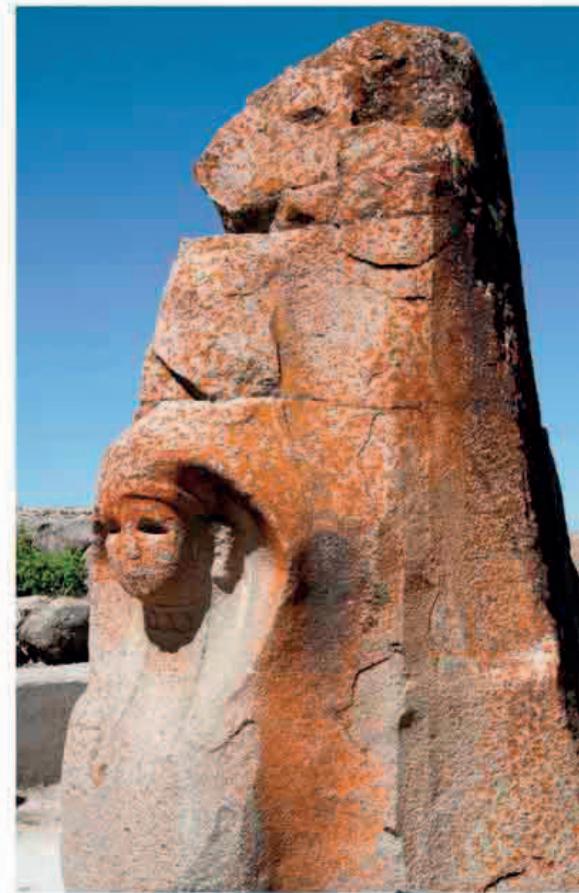
## Guarded gateway ▽

The massive defenses of city gateways were enhanced by carved figures of deities and spiritually powerful creatures, giving divine protection. This sphinx guarded Alacahöyük, a city north of Hattusa (present-day Bogazkale, Turkey).

From the 14th century BCE on, strong Hittite kings regained previously lost territories, expanded into western Anatolia (part of modern Turkey) and destroyed the Mitanni Empire in Syria, thus bringing them into direct territorial competition with the Egyptians. After the inconclusive Battle of Qadesh around 1274 BCE, Egypt accepted Hittite control over Syria, which the Hittites governed through viceroys. Widespread human and natural troubles in the eastern Mediterranean around 1200 BCE destroyed the Hittite Empire, but a number of small

Neo-Hittite kingdoms sprang up in southern Anatolia and Syria, prospering until the Assyrians conquered them by 700 BCE.

Barbarian raiders ever present to their north and a tradition of armed conflict made the Hittites invest heavily in defense. Massive and complex city fortifications included towers, huge stone gateways with difficult approaches, and long tunnels under the walls to secret exits. Often a citadel and inner defensive walls protected the palace and other key buildings.



## ART AND CULTURE

Hittite art included both miniature designs on seals and monumental sculptured reliefs, mainly of deities and kings. The designs incorporated inscriptions: the Hittites used both cuneiform and a hieroglyphic script; the Neo-Hittites used just hieroglyphs. Huge surviving archives of Hittite texts include diplomatic and administrative correspondence, descriptions of rituals, annals, literature, and mythology.



### Hunting chariot

Neo-Hittite sculptured reliefs included narrative scenes, such as this deer hunt from Arslantepe (present-day Malatya). Chariots were also used effectively by the Hittites in warfare, as mobile fighting platforms.

### Beaked pitcher

In Hittite times, the traditional Anatolian pitcher took on a slim form. Pottery was made on a wheel and by hand and standardized. Forms included bowls, flasks, wide-rimmed plates, and miniature vessels.



### Storm god

The principal deity was the storm god, Teshub. He leads a procession of gods carved at Hattusa's shrine, Yazilikaya. This Neo-Hittite relief of Teshub is from Sam'al (present-day Zinjirli).

## BELIEFS AND RITUALS

Religion permeated Hittite life. Every natural feature was imbued with a divine spirit. Individual cities had local variants of major deities, and cosmopolitan Hittite society embraced deities from every community. Temples were prominent in towns and cities, and reliefs of deities were carved at key places in the landscape.

### Silver rhyton

Probably made as an offering to the stag god, this rhyton (drinking vessel) depicts two deities, a procession of three worshippers, and (on the reverse) sacred trees and a sacrificed stag.

# PALACE SOCIETIES OF THE AEGEAN

Discoveries at Mycenae in the 1870s and at Knossos in the 1900s showed that the heroic world described by Homer in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* was not mere legend but a record of Greece's first civilizations, the Mycenaeans and Minoans: adventurous sea traders, skilled craftsmen, and painters of exquisite frescoes.



#### Cultural influence

Many Mycenaean seals, like this carnelian example, bore animal designs, a style inspired by Minoan art. They were often worn on the wrist or neck as talismans.

#### Palace ritual ▽

Bull-leaping, often shown in Minoan art, probably actually took place, as a ritual. Bull iconography also permeates Minoan religion, and bulls may have been linked, as in later times, to the god held responsible for Crete's frequent earthquakes.

The 3rd millennium BCE saw changes that revolutionized life in the Aegean, including vine and olive cultivation and woolly sheep. Wine and olive oil could be stored as insurance against agriculturally poor years and accumulated as wealth by those with growing power; and wine played an important role in feasting. In the 2nd millennium BCE, sailing ships spurred participation in international trade. Exports included colorful woolen textiles, while metal ores were a major import, as bronze became increasingly part of life.

Around 2000 BCE, Minoan palaces appeared across the island of Crete. With large central courtyards and magazines of huge pottery storage jars, they originally hosted religious and public events, including processions and feasts. After an earthquake around 1750 BCE, the palaces were quickly rebuilt, but political changes saw the rise of increasingly powerful new elites. Widespread destruction of unknown origin around 1500 BCE left Knossos as the only functioning palace. A change in the language of official

records reveals that it was now Mycenaeans from the southern Greek mainland who began to control Crete.

The Mycenaeans were already familiar with Minoan culture and craftsmanship, but theirs was a very different society, in which warfare between rival palace-states played a major role. Their palaces were built on citadels, surrounded by defensive walls of massive stone blocks. Artisans lived within or near the citadel, their products including bronze swords and boar's tusk helmets. Palace society collapsed around 1200 BCE.



## ART AND CULTURE

The Minoans and the Mycenaeans were skilled artisans, manufacturing perfumed oils, luxury pottery, fine miniature bronze, faience (a glazed ceramic), and ivory sculptures, and jewelry, particularly of gold. Like the Minoans, the Mycenaeans participated in the flourishing eastern Mediterranean trade networks, but they also sailed as far west as Sardinia and Italy to obtain metal ores.



### Perfume jar

Mycenaean stirrup jars were popular exports to western Asia. They were used to transport perfumed oils, a major Mycenaean product, but were also valued as attractive pottery.

### Mycenaean octopus pot

Fine Minoan pottery was often beautifully decorated with a realistic octopus, its tentacles wrapping around the vessel. Later Mycenaean potters produced lifeless imitations.

## POLITICS AND POWER

Minoan and Mycenaean palaces were the administrative centers of a stratified society, exercising political and economic control over associated towns and extensive territories. Minoan palaces also fulfilled a major religious role. The hinterland of Mycenaean citadels often encompassed agricultural land, hills for pasture, and access to the sea for communications and trade.

### Death mask

Early Mycenaean warrior kings were buried with considerable finery in shaft graves at Mycenae, five with gold masks, dated to around 1600–1500 BCE.



beaten gold chin

embossed gold beard and mustache

## BELIEFS AND RITUALS

Minoan palaces were linked with peak sanctuaries, holy places on adjacent mountains where offerings were made. The Mycenaeans had shrines within their citadels. Both cultures had gods and goddesses. The Minoan deities were associated with animals and the countryside, while Mycenaean texts include some deities later worshipped in Classical Greece.

### Ritual vessel

Perforated vessels were used as sprinklers in Minoan rituals. Some were made of pottery; others of fine stone or metal. Shapes included vases and animal heads.



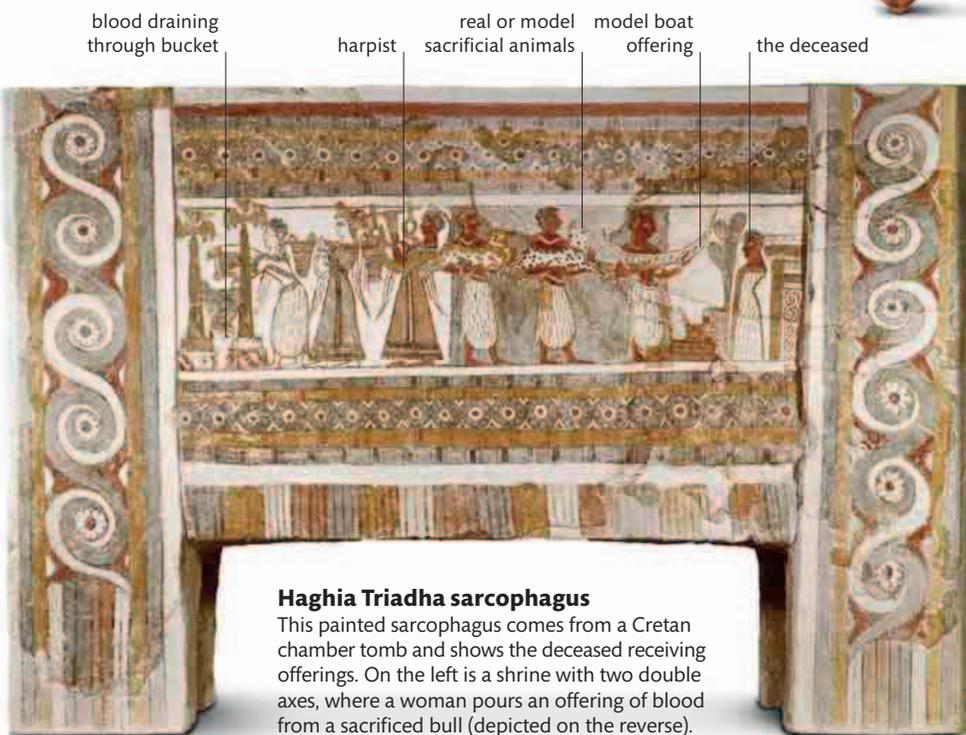
dolphin

## HOME LIFE

Fascinating insights into daily life are provided by beautiful frescoes. These show musicians playing lyres and boys boxing, Minoan fishermen carrying their catch and ladies gathering crocuses, and Mycenaeans riding in chariots, hunting boar, or sitting on folding stools drinking from elegant cups. Faience plaques from Knossos depict town houses several stories high that mirror surviving houses.

### Minoan cooking pot

Valuable bronze tripod cauldrons used in feasting appear in frescoes and are listed in texts. This smaller pottery version was used by ordinary people for cooking and heating food.



### Hagia Triadha sarcophagus

This painted sarcophagus comes from a Cretan chamber tomb and shows the deceased receiving offerings. On the left is a shrine with two double axes, where a woman pours an offering of blood from a sacrificed bull (depicted on the reverse).

### Steatite pedestalled lamp

Minoan and Mycenaean craftsmen produced stone seals and jewelry, as well as larger objects including elite domestic vessels, such as this Minoan lamp.



groove in rim for wick



simple spout

### Spouted cup

The Minoans used a range of plain domestic pottery, including cups, jugs, bowls, and storage jars. By later Minoan times, even domestic wares were often of high quality.



crown of Upper and Lower Egypt

nemes headcloth, symbol of royal power

wing, typical of West Asian sphinxes

human head

apron with uraeus (rearing cobra), a royal symbol

palmette, a widely used decorative feature

# THE INTREPID PHOENICIANS

Canaan (the region between Egypt and Anatolia) was home to coastal city-states whose prosperity depended on trade and industry. Their inhabitants were known to the Classical Greeks as Phoenicians, after their fabulously expensive purple (*phoinix*) dye.

Exporting timber from their region's mountains to timber-poor neighbors enabled the city-states of Phoenicia (roughly, modern Lebanon) to obtain the grain, oil, and wool that their narrow coastal territories could not produce in sufficient quantity. Byblos, in the center, traded with Egypt by 1900 BCE. Others, especially Arwad in the north and Tyre and Sidon in the south, joined this trade later in the same millennium.

A ship wrecked off Anatolia around 1300 BCE gives a vivid picture of trade at this time. It was carrying copper ingots and fine pottery from Cyprus; tin, probably from Afghanistan; African ivory and ostrich eggs; and terebinth resin (for making perfume), glass ingots, and gold jewelry from Canaan. It had probably plied a circular route from Canaan via Cyprus and the Aegean to Egypt and home to Canaan.

## PHOENICIAN FORTUNES

The Phoenician city-states experienced a checkered history—the region was fought over and often controlled by the surrounding major powers, including the Egyptians, Hittites, Assyrians, and Persians. The Phoenicians' value as traders and skilled artisans, however, ensured that they retained a large degree of independence under foreign domination. The city-states were often

bitter rivals, particularly Tyre and Sidon. To facilitate trade, obtain raw materials, particularly metals, and gain other economic benefits, some city-states established overseas colonies. Foremost was Tyre, which had colonies in the eastern Mediterranean, such as Kition on Cyprus, but also Carthage in Tunisia and Gadir (Cadiz) in Atlantic Spain. As seafarers, the Phoenicians were in demand by inland states such as Assyria and Persia to provide ships, ship-building and navigational know-how, and sailors and navies. King Solomon engaged Phoenicians from Tyre for his expedition to Ophir (probably the Horn of Africa).

lion's tail

lion's body

stylized lotus flower

### Ivory sphinx

Fine carved ivory panels for decorating wooden furniture were exported widely or made on location for foreign rulers. These owed much in style and subject matter to Egypt, with which the Phoenicians had enjoyed long, close relations. This winged sphinx, recovered from the Assyrian royal palace at Kalhu (present-day Nimrud, Iraq), is a typical example.

### PHOENICIAN INGENUITY

The Phoenicians were skilled artisans. Among their finest creations were purple textiles, bronze bowls, and gold jewelry. In faience (a glazed ceramic) they produced both exquisite cosmetic jars, like the hedgehog shown below, and mass-market trinkets. Masters of glass manufacture, they developed new technologies, for example making transparent glass that imitated expensive rock crystal (quartz).

copper  
oxide glaze



HEDGEHOG  
KOHL POT

# CHINA'S FIRST CELESTIAL EMPIRE

Northern China's Shang dynasty is famously associated with oracle bone divination, bronze and jade craftsmanship, warfare and human sacrifice, and walled settlements. However, many of these cultural features began with their predecessors, the Xia culture, traditionally the first kings of northern China, or their 3rd-millennium BCE ancestors, the Longshan culture.



## Ask the ancestors

The earliest Chinese script, ancestral to that of today, appears on Shang oracle bones. Used to divine the future, they were inscribed with questions to the ancestors.

## Towers in the mist

China's Great Wall reached its present form under the Ming dynasty (14th–16th centuries CE), but its early beginnings were in the Zhou period, when rival states constructed stretches of rammed-earth ramparts to defend their borders.

Around 1500 BCE, the Shang succeeded the Xia culture. Work at Zhengzhou has revealed a city that was probably the first Shang capital. Its center, containing buildings that may have been palaces and elite burials, was surrounded by a massive wall of rammed earth. Outside lay a distillery, pottery, bone, and bronze workshops, and the artisans' houses.

Recent excavations have revealed the remains of another Shang city at modern Huanbei, which was probably a later capital, Xi'ang. After 50 years of occupation, however, its rulers appear to have deliberately destroyed it. The city was stripped of all its goods before being burned to the ground.

Around 1300 BCE, the final Shang capital, Anyang, was built just across the Huan River at Yinxu. Excavations here have uncovered a palace and temple complex, with pits containing chariot burials, complete with horses and charioteers. Suburbs contained the homes of both the elite and ordinary people; industrial workshops, where artisans created prestige goods for the royal family and their entourage; and several cemeteries.

In one was the richly furnished grave of Fu Hao, consort of King Wu Ding, who died around 1200 BCE. Her burial chamber lay at the bottom of a huge pit, above which were many regal grave goods, including ivory vessels inlaid with turquoise, jade items, and the sacrificed remains of 16 people and six dogs.

Texts written on oracle bones reveal the numerous concerns of the Shang dynasty. These included many aspects of warfare, harvests, rainfall, hunting, settlement construction, and general good fortune. The Shang had conflicts with a number of their neighbors, such as the people inhabiting the area near the Yangtze (Changjiang) River to the south.

## ZHOU DYNASTY

Another Shang enemy were the Zhou in the west, whose ruler overthrew the Shang king around 1027 BCE and established a new kingdom. Western Zhou kings were strong rulers, backed by a large, well-organized army. They pursued a policy of expansion, settling conquered areas under the rule of members of the royal clan.

Around 771 BCE, however, the Zhou kings were forced by invaders from the north to flee from their capital Zongzhou (near modern Xi'an) eastward to Luoyang, initiating the Eastern Zhou period. Centralized Zhou authority had declined and regional power had grown. The kingdom began slowly to disintegrate, with the rulers of the small states often fighting either the Zhou king or each other.

The situation declined throughout this "Spring and Autumn period," turning into all-out war for supremacy between the states after 481 BCE (see p.101). By this time Zhou had shrunk to a small state itself.

The Zhou period saw the extension of many of the technological and social developments of the Shang period. These included bronze casting and other crafts, and trade and city life. It also included warfare, with more organized and larger armies, new weapons, and the growth of defensive architecture, including the rammed-earth border defenses that were eventually developed into the Great Wall.

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“It is **through fear** that **goodwill and harmony** reign between **superiors and inferiors.**”

Zi Han, Song ruler in the Spring and Autumn period (771–476 BCE)

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