

Ancient Egypt

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1-4 - Roberts pictures

David Roberts (1806-1885)

Hand-coloured lithographic prints.

Engraved by Louis Haghe.

Published by FG Moon, London, between 1842-1849

David Roberts toured Egypt and the Holy Land from September 1838 to May 1839. He produced hundreds of sketches from which finished watercolours were produced for the lithographer after his return home. The prints were published in a series of volumes between 1842 and 1849.

1 - The Great Sphinx

Pyramids of Gizeh

July 17 1839

French engineers, originally working for Napoleon, had uncovered the head of The Great Sphinx by 1816. By the time of Robert's visit little further work had been done. He was nevertheless impressed: "The Sphinx pleased me even more than the Pyramids."

2 - Temple of Esneh

November 25 1838

This Ptolemaic temple, dedicated to Khnum, is now about 10 metres below street level under an accumulation of rubbish and silt. Roberts found it: “covered with the houses of the town... it is now used as a powder magazine, the walls are black and covered with the usual deities.”

3 - The Great Temple of Aboo Simbel, Nubia

The Great Temple of Abu Simbel was carved out of the rock for Ramesses II. This was the southernmost stop on the Nile for most tourists in the 1800s. For centuries, the entrance had remained buried until it was opened by Belzoni in 1817.

4 - Dendera

December 7 1838

The Dendera temple complex covers some 40,000 square metres and is one of the best preserved in Egypt. On his first visit, Roberts declared it: “the most beautiful of all the Egyptian temples.”

5 - Carving of a bennu bird

About 100-200 years old

Made in Egypt

This plaque was made to deceive unwary tourists. The dirt around the bird has been carefully placed to look like it has been buried in the ground for thousands of years.

6 - Stone sphinx

About 100-200 years old

Made in Egypt

This statue was in the large collection of ancient objects collected by a local married couple. Recent study has shown it is a fake. It has been made from an old piece of stone to make it seem older than it actually is.

7 - Jars with faces

About 100-200 years old

Made in Egypt

These vases are decorated in the Egyptian style and show women with long hair and cattle with head-dresses. They were made in a mould and are nearly identical. They were probably deliberately broken to make them seem older than they are.

8 - Shabti figure

About 100-200 years old

Made in Egypt

Shabti were popular tourist souvenirs as they were closely associated with mummies. Fake figurines were made by entrepreneurial locals and sold to tourists as genuine ancient objects. This shabti was identified as a fake only after it was donated to the museum.

9 - Roman flagon

About 1,700-2,000 years old

Found at Ehnasya, Egypt Flagons were used for storing and serving drink and are found across the Roman Empire. This flagon was made in Egypt, and was excavated from a townhouse in a Roman-period Egyptian town.

10 - Roman bowl

About 1,700-2,000 years old

Found on rubbish mounds near Cairo

This bowl was made in Egypt or Palestine, but the shape copies a type of pottery bowl first made in Roman France. It is a cheap copy of a luxury item, and shows people in Egypt adopted the lifestyle of the Roman Empire.

11 - Model arm and horse head

About 2,000-2,300 years old

Found in Herakleopolis Magna, Egypt

Small models of people or animals were made as offerings to the Greek gods. They could be purchased at temple entrances.

12 - Female figurines

About 1,700-2,000 years old

Found at Ehnasya, Egypt

These small pottery figurines probably represent Roman goddesses and were mass-produced for household shrines. Similar clay figurines were made in Cyprus and Greece.

13 - Marble bust of Jupiter Serapis

About 1,700-2,000 years old

Allegedly found at the Pyramids, Egypt

Jupiter Serapis was a god who combined Roman, Greek and Egyptian ideas. He was introduced to Egypt when the Greeks ruled the country. Serapis's name and characteristics were based on the Egyptian gods Osiris and Apis, but he wears Greek clothing. When Egypt was under Roman rule Serapis was combined with Jupiter, the chief of the Roman gods.

14 - Mouse figurine

About 1,700-2,000 years old

Found in Egypt

Small metal mice are found throughout the Roman Empire and were probably toys or religious offerings. Mice were a daily problem as they ate stored food, but they were also an omen for good or bad events.

15 - Silver figurine of Mercury

About 1,700-2,000 years old

Found in Egypt

Figurines of gods and goddesses were popular throughout the Roman Empire. Mercury was the Roman god of trade, profit and commerce. As this figure is made from silver it suggests its owner was successful and wealthy.

16 - Kohl pots

About 3,750-4,000 years old

Made from stone and pottery

Small jars with lids were used to store cosmetics, and traces of these powders can still be seen inside the jars. Recent scientific analysis has identified these powders contain a high percentage of lead, and would have been highly toxic to the person wearing the make-up.

17 - An Egyptian woman

About 1,900 years old

Made from pottery

This oil lamp shows a young woman with braided hair wearing a large beaded collar. Lavish jewellery and clothing were a sign of wealth and prestige.

18 - Hand mirror

About 3,750-4,000 years old

Made from copper alloy

When new, this mirror was an orange colour and polished to a reflective surface. It had a wooden or ivory handle. Mirrors had mystical properties, and were believed to capture the image of the person using them. This mirror was found with a burial. Traces of the cloth it was wrapped in can be seen on the surface.

19 - Snake armlet

About 2,000-4,000 years old

Made from copper alloy

Jewellery in the shape of snakes is found throughout the ancient world, the shape being very suitable for forming rings, bracelets or armlets like this. Egyptians thought the snake was a symbol of evil and danger, but it was also linked to creation.

20 - Earring

About 2,000 years old

Made from copper alloy

Earrings were a popular fashion accessory for wealthy Egyptian women. This simple metal design was not as expensive as gold or jewelled earrings, but was still an indication of status.

21-22 - Necklaces

About 2,700-4,600 years old

Found in Abydos and Saqqara, Egypt

These necklaces are made from beads of green, white and red faience, and dark blue glass. Jewellery was worn as a sign of status and prestige, and the colours of the beads had different meanings.

23 - Amulets

About 2,330-4,160 years old

Made from faience, stone and metal

Amulets were worn to protect the wearer from harm, or to provide physical characteristics such as strength. These amulets represent protection and rebirth.

24-25 - Bes

About 2,000-2,700 years old

Made from faience, stone and ceramic

Bes was an impish god with many roles. As well as protecting women during childbirth, he guarded homes against snakes.

26 - Ptah-Pataikos

About 2,000-2,700 years old

Made from faience

Ptah-Pataikos was a dwarf character associated with times of change such as falling asleep, childbirth, and life and death.

27-28 - Isis and Horus

About 2,000-2,700 years old

Made from faience and metal

Isis was an extremely powerful goddess with many roles. She was the symbolic mother of the king, whose son Horus was represented on earth by the king. These amulets and figures show Isis with Horus, and would have been powerful protective images.

29 - Qebehsenuf

About 2,200-2,700 years old

Made from faience

Qebehsenuf had the head of a bird of prey. She was one of the Four Sons of Horus, and a protector of the dead.

30 - Hawk amulet

About 2,200-3,000 years old

Made from stone

Birds of prey were the symbol for the god Horus. He was a powerful god of the monarchy, sky, war and protection.

31 - Sekhmet

About 2,200-3,000 years old

Made from faience and stone

Sekhmet was a lion-headed goddess, whose name literally means 'she who is powerful'. Unlike many other deities who were good-natured, she was revered for her aggressive traits.

32 - Taweret

About 2,200-2,700 years old

Made from faience

Taweret was a goddess in the form of a hippopotamus. She was a good-natured deity who protected women in childbirth.

33 - Nefertum

About 2,200-2,600 years old

Made from faience

Nefertum was a god who personified the blue lotus flower. The lotus was a flower of beauty and fragrance, and in one ancient myth was the source of the rising sun.

34 - Osiris

About 2,200-2,700 years old

Made from copper alloy

Osiris was one of the most important and powerful of all Egyptian gods. Murdered and brought back to life, he ruled the underworld and guaranteed the resurrection of the dead.

35-40 - Pottery jars

About 5,000-6,000 years old

Found at El Mahasna cemetery, Egypt

These jars were placed with burials and probably contained food and provisions for the next life. This pottery is among the earliest made in Egypt and was very carefully made. The red and black colours were deliberately achieved through control of the firing process. The surfaces were then burnished to create a shiny finish.

41 - Flint arrowheads

About 4,000-5,000 years old

Found near Cairo, Egypt

These arrowheads were made by skilled craftsmen with the ability to produce very fine stone tools for hunting and fighting. The arrowheads were attached to shafts and fired from bows.

42 - Sickle

About 5,000 years old

Found near Cairo, Egypt

This serrated knife or sickle was used for cutting grasses and harvesting crops.

43-44 - Sickle and handaxe

About 5,000-7,000 years old

Found in the Eastern Desert, Egypt

These tools were found at the site of an ancient stone quarry. The different colours of the fragments show they were broken in ancient times and discarded in different places. Remarkably the fragments were reunited by their finder, Mr Seton-Karr, around 6,000 years after they were broken.

45-46 - Axeheads

About 5,000-8,000 years old

Found in Egypt

These stone axes date from the Neolithic period in Egypt and are very similar to axes found across Europe and North Africa. One of these has been carefully worked to a smooth finish.

47 - Handaxe

About 100,000-250,000 years old

Made from chalcedony

Handaxes were an effective multi-purpose tool and were made over thousands of years. This handaxe has been carefully worked on both sides to produce a sharp cutting tool.

48 - An Egyptian pharaoh

3,290-3,330 years old

Made from syenite (stone)

This is part of a large monumental sculpture of a pharaoh, either Tutankhamun or Horemheb. The nemes-headcloth and the remains of a double crown are symbols of his divine power. Two hundred years ago it was fashionable to collect ancient relics, and this was among the first ancient Egyptian objects given to the museum. Sadly no records survive to show where it came from.