

Chapter 1 : Masterpieces for Sale | Barakat Gallery Egyptian Art Collection

The British Museum has the largest and finest collection of antiquities from Egypt and the Sudan outside of those countries. Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt presents the highlights of the British Museum's Egyptian collection for the first time in print.

Index of British Museum Numbers. Index of Egyptian Names. The author includes an explanation of how the British Museum acquired its collection and the provenances of the pieces. Strudwick begins with the collections earliest pieces from the Predynastic and earliest dynasties including the small ivory statuette of a king, perhaps Dynasty I found by Flinders Petrie in the ruins of an early temple at Abydos. The picture cannot do justice to this little piece as I found when I last stood in front of it in and for me a favorite piece in the collection. I have always loved the Old Kingdom husband-wife statues and the limestone statue of Kaitep and Hetepheres is no exception. When I saw this piece last I did not like it, in fact, I was unable to appreciate it but my mind has now been changed with a better understanding of a complex piece of provincialism put forward by the author. Strudwick picks the colossal head of Amenemhet III, and I am in complete agreement an awe-inspiring head, the eyes of which give it a ghostly presence. I have always been fond of the Middle Kingdom block statues and Mr. The simple wooden mummiform figures of Qenamun are rarely published gems from the reign of Amenhotep II in the last quarter of the fifteenth century BC. The paintings from the tomb chapel of Sebekhotep are sophisticated and possess great merit. This point in the book Mr. Still I found myself wanting more. The wooden protective figures from a kings tombs in the Valley of Kings capture a fearsome presence and the feeling of what the ancient burial party would have thought of such figures though I might imagine they were in black shrines and unseen by the mourners? For me, it is not good enough to be the actual cult figure but more likely a votive offering of the late period? A sketch on an ostrakon EA , said to have been found in the Valley of Kings of Ramesses IX with a prince and vizier is exquisite in detail of complexity. Though a fine work of art of the period of BC, the mummy board is enhanced further by modern fantasies. Strudwick follows this with the museums Third Intermediate Period receipt for a set of shabti. Fascinating is the Late Period coffin of Menkaure , which colonel R. Vyse found in the pyramid of that king in and of course the museums star piece "The Rosetta stone" is certainly on a first level importance in this collection. The stela of Taimhotep is a wonderful example of autobiographical information complete with a prayer to Imhotep to bring her a son. I often complain in my reviews of Egyptian books which lack mummies this book is very different in that a good selection of mummies from the collection are represented. The book ends with the fourteenth century A. You will find information on the objects in this book that you will simply not find elsewhere. The book is divided in roughly three parts: The end of the introduction is marked by a map which gives all major Egyptian and Sudanese sites from which objects are housed in the collection. The part entitled "The Masterpieces", the main part, is in a two-page format: The last part of the book consists of a short glossary with all necessary terms explained, followed by a short "further reading". Indeed, I think it is a pity that so few objects of "daily life" such as footwear, clothing, utensils are included, even though I understand that such objects are not often regarded "masterpieces". The choice however, is understandable as there is limited space and the number of object to choose from is enormous. In conclusion the text is well written, a joy to read and gives a good insight in ancient Egypt. The British museum is unique and vast. Masterpieces brings it alive with stunning color pictures followed by an in depth description and history of the piece. History has to admire this early civilization and the beautiful artifacts they created. You get a lot for your money and I totally loved the book! Good read, interesting read. Good pictures and clear book structure, easy to look for specific subjects or just open at any page and let yourself be amazed by a new fact. Color photos of artifacts in the British Museum collection, with short descriptions. The artworks of ancient Egypt have fascinated people for thousands of years. The early Greek and later Roman artists were influenced by Egyptian techniques and their art would inspire those of other cultures up to the present day. Many artists are known from later periods but those of Egypt are completely anonymous and for a very interesting reason: A Greek artist like Phidias circa B. All Egyptian art served a practical purpose: Egyptologist Gay Robins notes:

Statuary was created and placed for a specific reason and the same is true for any other kind of art. This is not to say the Egyptians had no sense of aesthetic beauty. Even Egyptian hieroglyphics were written with aesthetics in mind. Simply put, any work needed to be beautiful but the motivation to create was focused on a practical goal: Even so, Egyptian art is consistently admired for its beauty and this is because of the value ancient Egyptians placed on symmetry. It is for this reason that Egyptian temples, palaces, homes and gardens, statuary and paintings, signet rings and amulets were all created with balance in mind and all reflect the value of symmetry. The Egyptians believed their land had been made in the image of the world of the gods and, when someone died, they went to a paradise they would find quite familiar. When an obelisk was made it was always created and raised with an identical twin and these two obelisks were thought to have divine reflections, made at the same time, in the land of the gods. Art reflected the perfection of the gods while, at the same time, serving a practical purpose on a daily basis. The art of Egypt is the story of the elite, the ruling class. The tombs, tomb paintings, inscriptions, temples, even most of the literature, is concerned with the lives of the upper class and only by way of telling these stories are those of the lower classes revealed. This paradigm was already set prior to the written history of the culture. Egyptian art begins in the Pre-Dynastic Period circa B. The Narmer Palette circa B. The importance of symmetry is evident in the composition which features the heads of four bulls a symbol of power at the top of each side and balanced representation of the figures which tell the story. The work is considered a masterpiece of Early Dynastic Period art and shows how advanced Egyptian artists were at the time. The later work of the architect Imhotep circa B. During the Old Kingdom circa B. Statuary of the late Early Dynastic and early Old Kingdom periods is remarkably similar although other art forms painting and writing show more sophistication in the Old Kingdom. The greatest artworks of the Old Kingdom are the Pyramids and Great Sphinx at Giza which still stand today but more modest monuments were created with the same precision and beauty. Old Kingdom art and architecture, in fact, was highly valued by Egyptians in later eras. Some rulers and nobles such as Khaemweset, fourth son of Ramesses II purposefully commissioned works in Old Kingdom style, even the eternal home of their tombs. In the First Intermediate Period B. The lack of a strong central government commissioning works meant that district governors could requisition pieces reflecting their home province. These different districts also found they had more disposable income since they were not sending as much to Memphis. More economic power locally inspired more artists to produce works in their own style. This change can best be seen in the production of shabti dolls for grave goods which were formerly made by hand. Art would flourish during the Middle Kingdom B. Colossal statuary began during this period as well as the great temple of Karnak at Thebes. The idealism of Old Kingdom depictions in statuary and paintings was replaced by realistic representations and the lower classes are also found represented more often in art than previously. Art from this period produced at Thebes retains the characteristics of the Middle Kingdom while that of the Nubians and Hyksos - both of whom admired and copied Egyptian art - differs in size, quality, and technique.

Chapter 2 : The Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt - Masterpieces

Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt presents the highlights of the British Museum's Egyptian collection for the first time in print. This beautiful volume displays of the most important and famous objects, including the Rosetta Stone, as well as a selection of lesser-known but equally significant pieces.

Carved circa b. The sculptor used graywacke, a hard gray stone that the Egyptians prized. This sculpture clearly illustrates the main conventions of Egyptian royal sculpture. The ancient viewer would have recognized immediately that Menkaure was the more important figure of this pair. The king and queen were also conventionally dressed to communicate their rank in Egyptian society. Menkaure wears the nemes, a headdress worn only by the king. The back of the cloth was twisted around a braid of hair. In examples where the artist used color, the nemes is striped blue and gold. The king also wears a rectangular false beard, which was made of leather and was attached by straps that would have tied under the nemes. This beard, worn only by the king, contrasts with the longer beard that ended in an upward twist and was worn only by the god Osiris. He wears a distinctive kilt called the shendjet, worn only by kings. The kilt features a belt and a flap that was placed centrally between his legs. This statue also shows some conventions of representing the male figure used for both nobles and kings. The king strides forward on his left leg, a pose typical for all standing, male Egyptian statues. This coloration was the conventional male skin color in statuary, probably associating the deceased king or nobleman with the sun god Re. Conventions for Female Sculpture. The statue of Queen Kha-merer-nebu II also exhibits the conventions for presenting women in Egyptian sculpture. Unlike kings, queens did not have their own conventions separate from other noblewomen. There is a central part. The queen wears a long, formfitting dress. The fabric is stretched so tightly that it reveals her breasts, navel, pubic triangle, and knees. Yet, the length is quite modest, with a hem visible just above the ankles. In pair statues that show men who were dependent upon their wives for their status, the men embrace the women.

Chapter 3 : Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt by Nigel Strudwick

Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt presents the highlights of the British Museum's Egyptian collection for the first time in print. This beautiful volume displays of the most important and famous objects, including the Rosetta Stone, as well as a selection. The British Museum has the largest and finest collection of antiquities from Egypt and the.

Most ancient Egyptian architecture was inspired from the theology of ancient Egypt which was mainly polytheistic, although during later times of the Egyptian empire monotheism was introduced. Some of the most magnificent masterpieces of ancient Egyptian architecture include the Pyramid of Giza, the Great Sphinx of Giza, and the famous Temple of Horus. Preliminary forms of ancient Egyptian architecture existed from the beginning of the Egyptian kingdom as early as BC. However, structures of importance began to be constructed mainly during the Second and Third Dynasties, around BC. It was during this time of that step pyramids began to be constructed which eventually became the precursors of the later actual pyramids. The practice of constructing grand pyramids in ancient Egypt ceased around BC but other structures continued to be built.

Characteristics of Egyptian Architecture Perhaps the chief characteristic of ancient Egyptian architecture was the conspicuous absence of wood in the structures. This was because Egypt was a dry land and it was not possible to find abundant wood to use in construction, other materials such as sun-baked mud brick and limestone were therefore used. Common houses were built from mud extracted from the Nile River. The ancient Egyptian architecture of grand religious monuments and temples has a few common characteristics as well, for instance, they had thick and sloping walls with only a few openings. Huge stone blocks were used in to construct flat roofs of temples and these roofs were supported by large beams and columns. Ancient Egyptian architecture was fairly advanced with respect to building standards and techniques used at the time.

Building Materials used in by the ancient Egyptians A mixture of the diverse range of architecture created during the ancient Egyptian periods. The most common building materials that were used in ancient Egyptian architecture were sun-baked mud bricks and stones. Limestone was the primary form of stone used in architecture, although sandstone and granite were also frequently used. Eventually, stone became to be used almost exclusively for temples and tombs while houses and even palaces were constructed with bricks. One of the most important features of ancient Egyptian architecture is that no wood was used in construction.

Ancient Egyptian Building Methods Various innovative construction techniques and methods were employed for ancient Egyptian architecture. Since there is a difference in the construction of earlier and later buildings, particularly the pyramids, it is clear that these techniques evolved over time. Various hypotheses exist for the construction methods that were employed for ancient Egyptian architecture. The central problem to be tackled was to move the large blocks of stone across the desert. Special tools were used to cut the stones in the quarries. The generally accepted hypothesis for the transportation of these stones to the construction sites is that sledges used to transport these stones were lubricated by water which made it easier to drag the large weight on the sand. However it is still not known conclusively exactly how the Egyptians managed to build such precise and sophisticated structures which would be challenging even with modern technology.

Architects of Ancient Egypt Names of various famous architects of ancient Egyptian architecture can be found in historical records. One of the most famous architects was Amenhotep who was also a priest and a scribe. He was born during the reign of Thutmose III and supervised the construction of various famous monuments, including the Colossi of Memnon.

Famous Pieces of Architecture in Egypt The temple of Luxor displaying the intricate details in many example of ancient Egyptian architecture. A wide variety of famous Egyptian architecture has survived the intervening centuries and continues to be included in the wonders of the ancient world. The Great Pyramid of Khufu is another architectural wonder of ancient Egyptian architecture and was built by Pharaoh Khufu. Other noteworthy examples of ancient Egyptian architecture include the religious site of Karnak with its giant columns, the rock temple of Abu Simbel, Valley of the Kings, Red Pyramid, Luxor Temple, Step Pyramid of Djoser, the Mortuary temple of Hatshepsut, and others. These great structures of ancient Egyptian architecture continue to be a source of fascination for people of all ages.

Grand Buildings and Temples The main emphasis that was given to the construction in their architecture was the building of

temples and grand buildings. The most important examples are the pyramids which served as the burial site for the pharaohs. Among the temples, The Mortuary temple of Hatshepsut is noteworthy which is located on the west bank of the Nile. It was constructed during the reign of the Pharaoh Hatshepsut and the construction was overlooked by the royal architect named Senenmut. The temple consists of three layered terraces which reach to the height of about 97 feet. Another example is the Luxor Temple in the ancient city of Thebes. This temple was dedicated to three Egyptian gods named Amun, Mut, and Chons. Other grand religious constructions of architecture include the Temple of Abu Simbel and the religious site of Karnak. Ancient Egyptian Architecture in Summary Ancient Egyptian architecture is the most fascinating and awesome architecture of the ancient world and it is hard to find any other examples during the same era. The main driving force behind the construction of these monuments, temples, and pyramids was the religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians. For instance, the pyramids served as the burial sites of the pharaohs and the temples were dedicated to various gods of ancient Egypt. Various kinds of materials including stones and bricks were used in the construction of these buildings, however, wood is conspicuously missing from ancient Egyptian architecture because Egypt was a dry land and procuring massive amounts of wood for construction was not possible.

Chapter 4 : Ancient Egyptian Architecture | The Architecture of Ancient Egypt

The display of the Nebamun paintings had a major impact on British ideas about ancient Egypt. The ancient but vibrant paintings proved to be a fertile source for depictions of Egyptian culture [20].

Art of ancient Egypt Egyptian papyrus Due to the highly religious nature of ancient Ancient Egyptian civilization, many of the great works of ancient Egypt depict gods, goddesses, and Pharaohs , who were also considered divine. Ancient Egyptian art is characterized by the idea of order. Clear and simple lines combined with simple shapes and flat areas of color helped to create a sense of order and balance in the art of ancient Egypt. Ancient Egyptian artists used vertical and horizontal reference lines to maintain the correct proportions in their work. Political and religious, as well as artistic, order was also maintained in Egyptian art. For instance, the Pharaoh would be drawn as the largest figure in a painting no matter where he was situated, and a greater God would be drawn larger than a lesser god. Symbolism also played an important role in establishing a sense of order. Animals were usually also highly symbolic figures in Egyptian art. Color, as well, had extended meaning—blue and green represented the Nile and life; yellow stood for the sun god; and red represented power and vitality. Despite the stilted form caused by a lack of perspective, ancient Egyptian art is often highly realistic. Ancient Egyptian artists often show a sophisticated knowledge of anatomy and a close attention to detail, especially in their renderings of animals. During the 18th Dynasty of Egypt a Pharaoh by the name of Akhenaton took the throne and abolished the traditional polytheism. He formed a monotheistic religion based on the worship of Aten, a sun god. Artistic change followed political upheaval. A new style of art was introduced that was more naturalistic than the stylized frieze favored in Egyptian art for the previous years. Faience that was produced in ancient Egyptian antiquity as early as BC was in fact superior to the tin-glazed earthenware of the European 15th century. Mesopotamia is often considered the "cradle of civilization. Many civilizations flourished there, leaving behind a rich legacy of ancient art. Widely considered to be the cradle of civilization, Bronze Age Mesopotamia included Sumer and the Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian empires. Around BC, Mesopotamia was under the control of the Parthians. Mesopotamia became a battleground between the Romans and Parthians, with parts of Mesopotamia particularly Assyria coming under periodic Roman control. It is widely accepted, however, that early Mesopotamian societies simply referred to the entire alluvium by the Sumerian term kalam "land". More recently, terms like "Greater Mesopotamia" or "Syro-Mesopotamia" have been adopted to refer to wider geographies corresponding to the Near East or Middle East. These later euphemisms are Eurocentric terms attributed to the region in the midst of various 19th-century Western encroachments. A chariot and rider from the Standard of Ur , c. The Sumerians decorated their pottery with cedar oil paints. The Sumerians also developed jewelry. One of the most remarkable artifacts remaining from the Sumerian civilization is known as the Standard of Ur. Dated to approximately B. It depicts, on one side, soldiers presenting their king with prisoners and, on the other side, peasants presenting him with gifts—stunning evidence that attests to the vibrancy of art in this ancient culture. Sumer had made many great advances; for example, there is the wheel, which had made transportation easier for the Sumerians. The arch was the greatest architectural achievement of Sumer. The ziggurats were pyramid-shaped temples the Sumerian architects built. They believed that the gods lived at the tops of the temples. The king had many important jobs like leading the army and looking after irrigation, with which Sumerians could control rivers. The rulers would have battles over land, and life went on for the Sumerians. Babylon[edit] The conquest of Sumer and Akkad by Babylon marks a turning point in the artistic as well as political history of the region. The Babylonians took advantage of the abundance of clay in Mesopotamia to create bricks. The use of brick led to the early development of the pilaster and column , as well as of frescoes and enameled tiles. The walls were brilliantly coloured, and sometimes plated with bronze or gold as well as with tiles. Painted terra-cotta cones were also embedded in the plaster. The seans were also great metal-workers, creating functional and beautiful tools with copper. It is possible that Babylonia was the original home of copper-working, which spread westward with the civilization to which it belonged. In addition, the want of stone in Babylonia made every pebble precious and led to a high perfection in the art of gem-cutting.

The arts of Babylon also included tapestries , and Babylonian civilization was from an early date famous for its embroideries and rugs.

Chapter 5 : Ancient Egypt arts, 3 masterpieces of King Akhenaton - Egypt Guide

Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt is the first illustrated guide to the highlights of the British Museum's wonderful collection. It features over of the most stunning.

Now we are going to talk about 3 masterpieces of the collection of King Akhenaton which locate at the Egyptian Museum. Akhenaton and his family offering to Aten Akhenaten and his family offering to Aton This painted limestone rectangular slab dates back to the new kingdom, 18th dynasty, reign of Akhenaton. It measures 53cm in height and 48cm in width and 8cm in thickness. It was discovered at Tel El Amarna in , by the Egyptian antiquities service, in a chamber of the royal tomb. The slab, which is carved with an offering scene, was found abundant among the debris of the royal tomb. It has traces of grid lines in red ochre, which suggests that it might have served as a model for the sculptors responsible for the decoration of the royal tomb. The relief decorating the slab was once painted. It depicts the divine royal couple while offering Lotus bouquets to Aton, with more flowers piled on a tall stand before them. Aton sends his rays provided with human hands to present them with the signs of life and prosperity. It is really a wonderful and very famous scene in the Egyptian art. One hand even embraces the king below his right arm. Behind the couple, that eldest daughter Meritaten rattles a sistrum, followed by her little sister Meketaten, Whom she holds by the hand. Akhenaten wears the blue crown of war, with streamer floating at the back, and a uraeus on the forehead, a long pleated kilt extending down to the calves, and sandals. Nefertiti wears a long wig tied with a diadem of uraei surmounted by the disk headdress with two feathers inserted between two horns. She also wears a long transparent robe tied under the breast and opened at the front. Her robe reaches down to the sandals. They are similarly dressed in long transparent robes. Once again the figures are exaggeratedly deformed. They show receding front, protruding chin, bulging lips, overlong ears, drown out eyes, and projecting check bones, slender torsos, and deformed buttocks. It dates back to the new kingdom, 18th dynasty, and reign of Akhenaton. It was discovered by the Deutsche orient-Gesellschaft in in a house in a house at Tal el-Amarna. It is made out of limestone and measures 35cm. A composite statue is a statue made of separate parts which were attached to each other after being finished. These parts could be made out of different materials. The technique of composite assemblage was practiced since the old kingdom in wooden statuary. It became employed on a stone under Akhenaton. It aimed at creating specialist in sculpturing each of the different parts in order to achieve perfection and at the same time produce quite numerous pieces. Such statues were more likely to suffer from easy breakage and dismantling and are rarely preserved. The statue shows the king standing on a marble pedestal and wearing a blue crown kheperesh , which is made of a separate piece of stone, a short pleated kilt, and sandals. The marble pedestal was discovered two years after the discovery of the statue itself. Scholars were able to relate them when they found traces of limestone on the marble pedestal. The king is shown holding a tablet of offerings mainly food and flowers for the sun-deity Aton in a posture attitude similar to that of the middle kingdom king Amenmhat III when depicted as a Nile deity. The statue displays facial and physical features much less deformed less exaggerated than those found on his other monuments. However, one can still recognize the characteristic features of Akhenaton represented in: The elongated face, large pelvis, and heavy thighs. His pierced ears and the lines on his neck are two further innovations of this period. Unlike standing male statuary, the king is portrayed with both feet together instead of having the left foot stepped forward. Employment of female artistic in Egypt Amarna art The employment of these female artistic features was probably meant to emphasize the new concepts of atonism according to which the king was not only the unique and fundamental intermediary between the Aton and men but also the spiritual and physical representative of this sole deity on earth. Similar to this deity he should encompass all male and female divine qualities in existence. It dates back to the new kingdom, Eighteenth dynasty, and reign of Akhenaton, B. This sort of stela was kept in the private chapels of Amarna houses. It was protected by shutters of wood whose hinges were set into pivots which are still visible on the base of the stela. The shutters were opened at the time of worship. The scene is shown as a whole unit. Thus breaking the traditional rule of ancient Egyptian art, in which the scene was divided into registers. The solar disk illuminates the scene with

its rays terminating in human hands which hold the sign w3s life and prosperity to the nostrils of the royal couple. The life presented will be transferred through the king as intermediary to others. Akhenaten and Nefertiti are comfortably Akhenaten holds out an earring with strands to Meritaten; a similar earring and two necklaces are placed in his lap. The king wears the blue crown and a long plaited kilt. A collar covers the breast and shoulders. This scene captures an intimate moment with the royal family were the central themes are harmony, love, and affection. This unusual representation of the royal family is exclusive to Amarna art. It is a reflection of the reform made by Akhenaten in both religion and royal iconography. Ancient Egyptian art, the upper part of the 2nd side The lower part of the 2nd side These 3 masterpieces of King Akhenaten consider as great artifacts which belong to the ancient Egypt art.

The Amarna art considers a great part of ancient Egypt arts. Now we are going to talk about 3 masterpieces of the collection of King Akhenaton which locate at the Egyptian Museum.

By Philip McCouat Sometime in , on the west bank of the Nile at Luxor, a young Greek fortune seeker made the greatest discovery of his life -- an ancient tomb, seemingly undisturbed for centuries, with magnificent rich decorations almost as fresh as the day they were created more than 3, years before. More Journal articles on Egypt: In this article we examine how and why these paintings were created, how they were subsequently appropriated by European museums, and how they became the subject of political and religious censorship. Finally, we look at how they have been creatively adapted in modern day paintings, ranging from the precise historical pageantry of Alma-Tadema to the exotic Tahitian art of Gauguin. At this time, museums generally built their collections by purchasing items from private individuals, rather than conducting their own institutional digs. In view of the potential rewards, there was naturally great rivalry -- even violence -- between private collectors, and between nationalities. In the potential treasure troves of the Thebes Valley, some km south of Cairo, the chief rivalry was played out between the English, who predominantly favoured the west bank of the Nile, and the French on the East Bank. However, we can say with some confidence that it was at Thebes present day Luxor , on the west bank of the Nile, in the area of the Tombs of the Nobles, between the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens Fig 2. Typically, it would have been entered through a doorway in a terraced courtyard. This would lead into the tomb chapel, where most of the painted decorations would have appeared. After his funeral, this chamber would have been sealed off, but his family may have continued to visit the tomb chapel itself, performing rituals and prayers, providing an important link between the dead and the living [4]. The museum takes control During this era, archaeological techniques were extremely primitive. The Nebamun fragments formed part of a huge amount of Egyptian antiquities that poured into the British Museum in the s and s [8] , prompting the setting up of the Egyptian Saloon, where the Nebamun fragments were first exhibited in Fig 4. Though this position sounds relatively lowly, it must be remembered that accurate records of grain stocks were vital in a country in which drought could have devastating consequences. Despite the fact that the paintings were over 3, years old, they were and still are remarkably well preserved, due to the dryness of the air in the sealed underground tomb. Their fresh appearance, together with the general liveliness raciness, even of the scenes depicted, combine to present a remarkable effect of immediacy. This effect is enhanced by the fact that many of the scenes -- the herding, the geese market and so on -- could still be seen in Egypt today. The paintings also exhibit a relatively sophisticated level of artistry, particularly evident in the hair, feathers and skin effects see, for example, the animals and birds in Fig 6. This degree of skill is perhaps surprising for the tomb of a relatively middle-ranking official such as Nebamun. Parkinson has suggested that this may have occurred because the tomb was in the neighborhood of other higher ranking tombs, from which the artists may have been co-opted to help out with the Nebamun project. How they were created The painting surface would have consisted of a thick layer of mud plaster, mixed with chopped straw applied to the wall of the rock-cut chambers of the tomb, and covered with a thin layer of white plaster. The paint was applied while the plaster was still setting, using the fresco technique [11]. Paintbrushes would have been made from chewed rushes. Parkinson suggests that the whole job would have been completed in three months [12]. Friends and family would have visited the painted upper part of the tomb, contemplate the paintings, leave gifts and hold feasts to commemorate his life. The surviving fragments depict a huge range of activities -- the making of offerings, a large banquet, the produce of the estates, the extensive gardens, the bringing of offerings, and hunting in the marshes. With his black wig and beaded collar, holding his snake-headed throwing stick, he strikes an athletic, dynamic, almost heroic pose, as master of the whole proceedings [13]. Reflecting his importance, he is shown towering above his respectful, expensively dressed wife Hatshepsut and his submissive daughter at his feet. Around him is an extravagant display of delicately depicted birds and butterflies, with a teeming variety of fish below. While heroic and idealised, the scene also captures some more homely details -- his daughter holding affectionately

on to his leg, or the cat grabbing one of the felled birds. So the identity and the contents of the paintings that we see today have already been preselected and preconditioned by cultural, artistic or personal choices made in the past. In fact, it seems that just about everyone who has had anything to do with the Nebamun tomb paintings has felt the need to put their own spin on them. One step in this process occurred not long after the tomb was completed. And, as we shall now see, it arose in a totally unexpected way. It was an age of prosperity and luxury. Thebes, with its population of 90, and its major temples, was regarded as a sacred place, a cosmic centre [14]. Radical change, however, was in store. When the new pharaoh Amenhotep IV came to power BC , he initiated a religious revolution, banning Amun and the lesser gods, and replacing them with a single god, Aten, the Sun God " thus achieving the distinction of creating a new, compulsory monotheistic religion. He built a temple to his new god at Karnak and moved his court to El-Armana. Akhenaten, his wife Nefertiti and their children, with rays of the sun disc, c BC Wikimedia Commons. If this new style of art seems dramatic even to our eyes, it must have appeared even more so to the ancient Egyptians. Akhenaten often had himself portrayed in a seemingly exaggerated, almost deformed way, with elongated features, a languorous body, thin legs and a curiously slack and distended stomach. Opinion seems divided on whether this was just an artistic style in the same way as Mannerist elongation, or whether it was a realistic representation of that Akhenaten looked like. For our purposes, what is particularly significant about this radical change -- in both artistic style and religious affinity -- is that Akhenaten ordered that all references to Amun be hacked out on all monuments. During the reign of the next Pharaoh, none other than the now-famous Tutankhamen, the old style was reinstated, and rather clumsy attempts were made to the Nebamun tomb to repair the gouged areas with patches of lime and plaster. Moral censorship Thousands of years after the Akhenaten aberration, some of the Nebamun paintings would suffer yet another, very different, form of censorship. One of the alluring servant girls in the banquet scene was defaced [18], presumably in modern times, by having her pubic area " originally stippled black " deliberately and crudely gouged out see Fig 13, servant girl at top left. In the photo of Fig 9, the figures of the two near-naked dancing girls, with interlaced fingers, sinuously bending and stretching, have been erased altogether [19]. The ancient but vibrant paintings proved to be a fertile source for depictions of Egyptian culture [20]. In the absence of actual evidence about how Egyptian houses were decorated, tomb paintings were co-opted to give an air of authenticity to paintings purporting to depict scenes from ancient Egyptian domestic or working life. In this painting, the Old Testament character Joseph, high-ranking chief adviser to the Egyptian pharaoh, is shown sitting imperiously in his raised chair, with his scribal assistant sitting cross-legged on the floor. What is particularly interesting for our purposes is that on the wall panel behind Joseph, Alma-Tadema has directly copied a scene from the Nebamun tomb, which he of course would have seen in London. Parkinson describes the scribe standing at far left, with his pen container under his arm, as reading or presenting a scroll, with his kit bag at his feet. Behind him is a simply-dressed, bowing farmer holding a goose by its wings, and presenting baskets of birds with their beaks and webbed feet poking out. Behind and above him, three men kiss the earth in respect, and another three, shaven-headed to indicate their low rank, squat with respectful gestures. Behind them is a man with a stick who, according to the hieroglyphs in the cartouche beneath his elbow, is ordering them to. From his point of view, the Nebamun scene was not only decorative, but also appropriate, as there are a number of parallels between its subject matter and his own. Both the Nebamun scene and his painting reflect the importance placed on food production in the kingdom. Both prominently depict a scribe serving his master. The theme of grain was obviously relevant both to Nebamun because of his job and to Joseph because it was a part of his job, and also because of its pivotal role in his rise to power. In some other ways, however, this appearance of authenticity is misleading. So, he might have altered their scale, their function, or their period to suit his purposes [24]. Nor was it relevant that the fragment, dating from about BC, was actually not created for centuries after Joseph is generally assumed to have died. Egyptian nobility and Tahitian prostitutes Fig Paul Gauguin, Ta Matete www. In this painting Fig 12 , far from trying to add a veneer of realism to his painting, Gauguin has used his familiarity with the Nebamun paintings to provide a deliberately anachronistic air to the work. At first glance, the painting is capable of being seen simply as a local Tahitian scene. However, the uniform sitting postures of the women and the odd positioning of their

hands hint that something else is going on. In fact, it appears that the painting was almost certainly based on the Nebamun tomb fragment depicting female guests at a banquet lower panel in Fig 13 [25]. In particular, there is strong similarity in the positioning of the hands, especially the distinctive hand gesture of the seated woman at far left in both the Gauguin and the Nebamun works. Belinda Thompson has described this as the nearest Tahitian equivalent to the night-life district of Pigalle, also known as the Meat Market [27]. It appears that the Tahitian women depicted by Gauguin are actually prostitutes who would normally frequent the market, in response to the demands of the European males – in particular, visiting sailors, here suggested by the sailing boat at anchor that we can just about discern on the horizon in the background of the painting, between the trees. It has even been suggested that the rectangular cards held by two of the women are not decorative fans but, rather deflatingly, their official certificates declaring their freedom from venereal disease. Gauguin had a rather sanguine view of prostitutes in Tahiti. There is a fire in her blood, which calls forth love as its essential nourishment; which exhales it like a fatal perfume. These eyes and this mouth cannot lie. However, exactly what Gauguin was attempting to imply in this painting, if anything, is open to conjecture. The painting may possibly be a critical comment on the way in which the more Western style of prostitution was infiltrating local culture. If so, it would be one of the few pictures in which Gauguin deals with the social realities of Tahitian life [30]. Alternatively, Gauguin may have been saying that the local Tahitian prostitutes had their own nobility, comparable to that of the high-born Egyptian women depicted in the Nebamun fragment. In this connection, it may also be relevant that, according to some anthropological theories current at the time, the mysterious Polynesian ethnic origins could be traced all the way back to ancient Egypt [31]. The priestess is burning incense, and has presented the cat with offerings of flowers, food, and a saucer of milk. On the left hand side of the fresco, Weguelin has also incorporated another Nebamun scene of men marching left to right. In effect, Weguelin has brought two separate Nebamun scenes together on the basis that they can both be broadly related to his own subject matter. Conclusion What we see today of the Nebamun tomb paintings is just fragmentary. The amount that was destroyed, lost or never even discovered in the first place, means that what we have left is largely a matter of luck or circumstance. Yet this story also illustrates the vitality of art, in the way that the Nebamun paintings have been re-used and adapted for a variety of artistic purposes. In these cases, there is no attempt to hide the origins of the paintings; indeed, their originality and perceived meaning is the very reason that they have been used, even if that meaning may sometimes have been somewhat distorted in the process. Other smaller fragments found their way to other museums, such as the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, and possibly the Cairo Museum. Parkinson, op cit at 39ff. Parkinson, op cit at 47ff. Parkinson, op cit at Parkinson, op cit at 39, 43, Parkinson, op cit at 18, citing S Moser, Wondrous Curiosities: Prettejohn, op cit at 33ff. Thompson, op cit at Paul Gauguin, Before and After, Paul Gauguin, Noa, Noa, at See also note

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