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-
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QUEENS OF EGYPT

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With revolt rumbling during a troubled period in the New Kingdom, a conspiracy was hatched up in the harem. Led by Tiye, a secondary wife of Ramses III, the plot involved killing the pharaoh and placing Tiye's son Pentawer on the throne in place of the crown prince borne by the Great Royal Wife.

The plot was successful and the pharaoh was killed, but the conspirators were discovered and tried. Some 30 dignitaries and harem workers were implicated, such as the director, scribes, supervisors, doormen's wives, and magicians tasked with bewitching palace guards.

A remarkable document, the "harem conspiracy papyrus" records the conspirators' names and the punishments delivered by a court of justice. Ramses III (in reality Ramses IV) questions the accused while taking care to exempt himself from all responsibility for their fate, lest the condemned take their revenge on him from the afterlife. A risk better left to the judges! Some, such as Pentawer, were forced to commit suicide. Another was severely reprimanded. And some judges, who became inebriated with some of the accused women during the trial, had their noses and ears cut off. As for Tiye, her fate remains unknown.

Papyrus, ink
Likely from Deir el-Medina
New Kingdom, 20th dynasty
(1190–1076 B.C.)

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Lid from the coffin of Hory, "head of the domain of Amun-Ra," depicting the deceased with Osiris and other funerary deities.

Stuccoed and painted wood
Unknown provenance
Third Intermediate Period, 21st–22nd dynasties
(1076–746 B.C.)

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Shabtis of Seti I. The tomb of Ramses II's father contained hundreds of these figurines depicting the deceased's mummy.

Blue faience
Unknown provenance
New Kingdom, 19th dynasty, reign of Seti I
(1290–1279 B.C.)

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Discovered in the tomb of the Deir el-Medina workman Karo, “stonemason of Amun in Thebes,” this funerary stela depicts him pouring water on food he has offered to Osiris, Ptah, Anubis, Horus and Hathor. In the middle panel, he does the same for his father, mother and other family members. Below, it is he, with his wife and brother, who receive offerings from his children.

Painted limestone
Deir el-Medina
New Kingdom, 19th dynasty, reign of Ramses II
(1279–1213 BCE)

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During mummification, the deceased’s organs were placed in canopic jars, to be protected by the four sons of Horus: human-faced Imset protected the liver; baboon-faced Hapi protected the lungs; jackal-headed Duamutef protected the stomach; and falcon-headed Qebehsenuef protected the intestines.

Limestone
Unknown provenance
Third Intermediate Period, 21st–24th dynasties
(1076–722 BCE)

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The goddess Mut (“Mother”), wife of the Sun god Amun-Ra. As wives of the pharaohs, who were themselves sons of Amun-Ra, the queens of Egypt were often closely associated with this goddess. In fact, one of the queens featured in this exhibition, Nefertari, was called the “beloved of Mut.” On the back of this statue, the donor prays to the rising sun, represented by the scarab-beetle god Khepri.

Limestone
Unknown provenance
New Kingdom, 18th–20th dynasties
(1539–1076 B.C.)

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By marrying a pharaoh, a queen could embody goddesses. Here, the standing posture and belly of a pregnant woman depict Tiye in the form of Taweret, goddess of childbirth.

Wood
Unknown provenance
New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, reign of Akhenaten
(1353–1336 B.C.)

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Here, in all his glory, is the pharaoh who brought Ancient Egypt to the height of its power: Ramses II. Seated between Amun, the Sun god, and his wife, the goddess Mut, he is taking the place of their son Khonsu and joins the “divine triad” (Amun-Mut-Khonsu) that watches over Thebes the magnificent. Note the double crown of Horus reserved for the pharaoh, just as the queen wears Hathor’s headdress.

In Ancient Egypt, statues were imbued with the power of life and action, allowing people to pray to the pharaoh to intercede with the gods as necessary. Ramses II’s reign lasted an astonishing 67 years!

Granite
Temple of Amun, Karnak
New Kingdom, 19th dynasty, reign of Ramses II
(1279–1213 B.C.)

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Figurine of Ahmose-Nefertari. The name and titles of this deified queen were likely inscribed on the base, which is missing.

Polychrome wood
Deir el-Medina
New Kingdom, 18th–20th dynasties
(1539–1076 B.C.)

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Statue of the goddess Sekhmet seated, holding a cross of life (*ankh*) in her left hand. Daughter of the Sun god, fierce Sekhmet was so terrifyingly destructive that her divine father, fearing she would exterminate the Egyptian people, devised a strategy to pacify her. One night, he poured out 7,000 jars of red-dyed beer over Egypt. Upon awakening, Sekhmet, believing it to be human blood, drank until she became so intoxicated, she forgot about her plans and rejoined the gods.

Granodiorite

Thebes

New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III (1390–1353 B.C.)

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For high-resolution images, please contact Stéphanie Verner at 819-776-7169 or stephanie.verner@historymuseum.ca.