

**SYNOPSIS OF THE CONTENTS OF
THE BRITISH MUSEUM.
DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL
ANTIQUITIES: FIRST AND SECOND
EGYPTIAN ROOMS**

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Synopsis of the Contents of the British Museum. Department of Oriental Antiquities: First and Second Egyptian Rooms by Various

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OF THE

BRITISH MUSEUM.

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ORIENTAL ANTIQUITIES:

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NOTE.—The objects in these rooms have attached to them numbers printed in black on small yellow labels. These numbers are continuous, additions having been marked by letters of the alphabet. As in the present Guide the principal objects only of the collections are described, these have been distinguished by an additional blank blue label. For cases which have several shelves, the number of the shelf is mentioned ; but as changes may take place, owing to future incorporations, the visitor, in case of difficulty, will be assisted to find the place of an object by the attendants in the rooms.

S. BIRCH.



A GUIDE

TO THE

FIRST AND SECOND EGYPTIAN ROOMS.

THE Egyptian antiquities in the Museum have been principally acquired from collectors or by purchases at public sales. The chief of these acquisitions are the collection of Mr. Salt, purchased in 1821; another small collection presented by Sir Gardner Wilkinson, in 1834; purchases made at Mr. Barker's sale in 1835, of Mr. Sam's collection in the same year; objects acquired at the sale of Mr. Burton's collection in 1836; collections purchased of Signor Anastasi in 1839, of Mr. Lane in 1842, and of the Earl of Belmore in 1843; purchases at the sale of a collection of Signor Anastasi in 1857: a selection from Mr. Hay's collection in 1868, and a collection purchased of the Rev. Greville Chester in 1871.

As great diversity of opinion prevails on the subject of Egyptian chronology, it is not attempted to assign the older objects to a fixed date, but only to the intervals of time marked by the dynasties which successively reigned over Egypt; and the following succinct sketch of the history of the country will aid the visitor in forming some opinion of the relative age of objects which can be referred to dynasties. In those instances where the locality from which the object came is known, it is indicated. Only the principal objects of each section are noticed in this guide; but they embrace all those of greatest interest, and the visitor will find labels attached to the antiquities which will aid him by information respecting other objects not here described, which may particularly arrest his attention.

The religion of the Egyptians consisted of an extended

polytheism represented by a series of local groups. The idea of a single deity self-existing or produced was involved in the conception of some of the principal gods who are said to have given birth to or produced inferior gods, men, all beings, and things. Other deities were considered to be self-produced. The Sun was the older object of worship, and in his various forms as the rising, midday, and setting Sun, was adored under different names, and was often united, especially at Thebes, to the types of other deities as Amen and Mentu. The oldest of all the local deities, Ptah, who was worshipped at Memphis, was a demiurgos or creator of heaven, earth, gods, and men, and not identified with the Sun. Besides the worship of the solar gods, that of Osiris extensively prevailed, and with it the antagonism of Set, the Egyptian devil, the metempsychosis or transmigration of the Soul, the future judgment, the purgatory or Hades, the *Karneter*, the *Aakhu* or Elysium, and final union of the Soul to the body after the lapse of several centuries. Besides the deities of heaven, the light, and the lower world, others personified the elements or presided over the operations of nature, the seasons, and events.

The language of the Egyptians, spoken for certainly more than 4000 years till it ceased about two centuries ago, was an intermediate form between the Semitic and Hamitic languages, and was in use from the Mediterranean to the land of Ethiopia or Nubia. It was written originally not by conventional signs or letters, but by actual pictures of visible objects, celestial and terrestrial, and these objects were used in different ways called hieroglyphs: 1. As ideographs, or representing an idea, as the *disk of the sun* to represent the sun; 2. As determinatives to fix the meaning of the group of hieroglyphs which preceded, as a *skin* was placed after the hieroglyphs which express the sound *mau*, a *lion*, to show that the word had connection with animals having skins. 3. Phonetics, either as syllables or alphabetic characters, as a *chess-board* for the syllable *men*, a *reed* for the syllable *Aa* or letter A. By combining these three classes of hieroglyphs the language was written or expressed, and the visitor will see many examples of them on objects in the rooms. As early as the 6th dynasty, a cursive or written form of characters, called the *hieratic*, was introduced and superseded the hieroglyphs for books, letters, memoranda, and

other inscriptions written, not engraved on objects, while the hieroglyphs continued in use for monumental and other important purposes. The hieratic was a more concise system than the hieroglyphic, and made use of fewer signs. Still later, at the commencement of the 26th dynasty, or B.C. 700, a more cursive form of handwriting, called *demotic*, came into use, first for civil and subsequently for religious purposes, and to a great extent superseded the hieratic; after which, the Egyptian Christians or Copts substituted for all three forms of writing in the 5th or 6th cent. A.D. the Greek alphabet, with some additional letters for Egyptian sounds not existing in the Greek language; and this form of writing, the Egyptian or so-called *Coptic*, continues in use to the present day. The language, in the course of so many centuries, underwent many modifications, both as to its script or writing, construction, and vocabulary. Examples of all its forms will be seen in the collection.

History.—The Egyptian annals begin with the legends of the gods, the demi-gods and heroes, or Manes, all of whom were supposed to have reigned over Egypt for several thousands of years. History in its true sense commences with Menes the 1st king of the 1st of the 31 dynasties which reigned over Egypt till the days of Alexander the Great. Although no monuments of the age of Menes are known to exist, this name is found at the beginning of all the lists of Egyptian monarchs, and he was worshipped at Memphis. According to the traditions, he constructed a great dyke which turned the course of the Nile. One of the oldest monuments of the earlier dynasties known is that of Sent, monarch of the 2nd dynasty, in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. Towards the close of the 3rd dynasty the tablets and inscriptions of the old kings appear at the Wady Magarah, the first being Senefru, in whose reigns the mines were worked for copper or turquoise. The succeeding monarchs of the 4th distinguished themselves by the construction of the immense and renowned Pyramids of Gizeh; Khufu (Cheops) having built the first, Shafra (Chephren) the second, and Menkara (Mycerinus) the third of these edifices. Indications are found of the works of these monarchs at the mines of the Wady Magarah, in the legends of the temples of Denderah, and in the older books of papyri. After the 4th dynasty,

the kings of the 6th, who reigned in Middle Egypt, still maintained the power of the empire, and one of them conquered Kush or Ethiopia. The most powerful of the monarchs of this line was Pepi-Merira, or Phiops, whose reign is said to have lasted nearly 100 years, of which period many monuments are found in the Museums of Europe. After the 6th dynasty the history of Egypt is not illustrated by contemporaneous monuments till the kings of the 11th dynasty, which sprang from Thebes and reigned at that spot, their monuments having been found at Medinat Habu, and their graves at Drah Abu'l Neggah. The princes of this line chiefly bore the name of Enentef. They did not continue the working of the mines in the Peninsula of Sinai, but many monuments of their period have been found at Thebes, Abydos, and Upper Egypt. The 12th dynasty, which succeeded with its ruler Amenemhat I., was much more powerful. The monarchs exhausted the mines of the Wady Magarah, and transferred their operations to the Serabut el Khadem. In the south they extended their conquests over Kush or Æthiopia, and fortified Samneh. In the Fayoum the last monarch of the 12th dynasty built the labyrinth, and the construction of the lake Moeris on the west is due to the same line. The 13th dynasty appears still to have possessed considerable power and influence, and colossal monuments exist of these monarchs, some of whose works have been found in the island of Argo, but their successors of the 14th, 15th, and 16th dynasties seem to have suffered from the invasion of the Shepherds, and their names are only found in dynastic lists or monuments of small size and importance. The Shepherds formed the 17th dynasty, and their monuments as yet have only been found at San and Heliopolis; these were executed in Egyptian style. Little is known of the monuments of the Shepherd kings, except that Appapi-as, or Appapus—one of their last monarchs—quarrelled with Taaakan predecessors of Aahmes, or Amosis, of the 18th dynasty; that they began to be driven out of Egypt by Aahmes, or Ama-is I., and that a period of 400 years elapsed between the Shepherds and the reign of Rameses II. Aahmes took Avaris, the last stronghold of the Shepherds, and also turned his arms against the revolted Nubians, and rebuilt the ruined or neglected temples. His successor Amenophis I. maintained the conquests on the North and

South, and Thothmes II. began the wars in Ethiopia and Palestine so ably conducted by Thothmes III., whose reign extended upwards of 53 years, the greater part of which was passed in campaigns and conquests in Central Asia, subduing and rendering tributary Naharaina or Mesopotamia, Carchemish, Shinar, Babylon, Nineveh and Ethiopia. The reign of Thothmes III. was the most glorious in the annals of Egypt, and part of his campaigns are detailed in a long inscription on the walls of the sanctuary of Amen-Ra built by him at Karnak. Under the reign of his successors Egypt still remained powerful, but Amenophis III., after he had contracted a marriage with a private person or foreigner, called Tii, introduced the worship of the sun's disk, the so-called *Aten*, into the national religion, and Amenophis IV. endeavoured to substitute this new and single deity for all the other gods of the Pantheon. The Aten was represented as a disk with hands and arms emanating from it like rays. He also attempted to remove the site of the capital from Thebes to Tel el Amarna, or Alabastron, and to efface the name of the Theban god Amen from the monuments of the country. The want of male issue of the heretic kings, and subsequent revolutions and restoration of the worship of Amen, closed the line of the 18th dynasty. The loss of the foreign conquests of Egypt is shown by the record of the campaigns of Seti I., or Sethos, the second monarch of the 19th dynasty, who in the first year of his reign had subdued Palestine and some of the neighbouring countries. His son and successor was Rameses II., the Sesostris of the Greek historians, whose reign of 66 years was one of the most remarkable in Egyptian history. At a youthful age Rameses had mounted the throne, and in his first campaign in Ethiopia had given proofs of skill and courage. In his fifth year the Khita, supposed to be the Hittites, had formed a league against Egypt, comprising the neighbouring people of Carchemish, Ihon, the Khirubu, or Chalybes, and Kadesh. Rameses attacked and defeated them with great slaughter on the banks of the Arunata, or Orontes. This remarkable campaign, in which Rameses is described as performing miracles of valour, is detailed on the walls of the Temple of Karnak, and in a papyrus known as the Sallier papyrus, in which the writer, Pentaur, describes the incident as an Egyptian Epic, of which the king is the hero. In his