

# Egyptian Notes

## Burrell's Acquisitions:

How did Burrell acquire the Egyptian Objects? Did he travel in these countries? - No, he mainly used dealers. This is unfortunate for there is a lack of information about the provenance of many items. His major purchases were made in the late forties and early fifties when he was over 90 years old.

## Faience:



Some of the Shawabtis are made of "faience": what is this? - In Egypt this was a natural compound of quartz and sand, to which natron, sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate were added. When heated this could be moulded with the fingers. Egyptians used it for rings, bowls, scarabs, etc. The word "faience" was only applied to this mixture much later.

### **Egyptian Pottery:**

What class of persons had tombs: Only royalty and nobility. Peasants had their bodies put into hollows and covered with matting. The more affluent would have a hole in a rock as a grave. Favourite officials could be given a tomb by a King.

What tools were used for making pots and jars: A wheel was not used but a plate which could be spun with the feet. To make hollows in hard stones a bow drill was worked backwards and forwards to make a cylinder. The hole was then enlarged with the help of a hand-rotated drill to which were attached hard stones. Quarz sand was used as an abrasive and the object was finished by smoothing and polishing with rubbers made from quartzite or hard granular stones. Tools were copper chisels, bowdrills, saws and adzes.

Why have so many water vessels and drinking pots have pointed bases: They could be stood up easily in the sand.

### **Scarab Beetle:**

What is the significance of the scarab beetle: The scarab beetle is considered a sacred creature. In life it rolls a little ball of dung before it in which it has laid an egg from which new life would spring. It seemed a mystery and therefore became sacred.

### **The Ibis:**



Significance of the Ibis: It is possible that there is a mummified body in it but it has not yet been X rayed. However we now have x-ray equipment and will be applying it to various selected items. The Ibis is from the late period and the mummification of the bird is usual in the area around Sakkara. A mummified body could either be put in an oval jar or in the bird shaped case. The case has a bronze tail grooved on to a wooden body. Is the Ibis connected with a cult: Yes, there would be a cult room in a temple: or underground galleries with niches in which individual ibis burials in pottery jars were placed in special animal necropolis. The Ibis was sacred to the God of the Word, Thoth, who is represented usually with an Ibis as his head on a human body. In Egyptian mythology Thoth is the inventor of the arts and sciences, music and astronomy, speech and letters. Thoth, the name, means "word". Thoth is believed to have escaped the pursuit of Typhon in the guise of an ibis. Its white plumage signifies the light of the sun, its black neck the shadow of the moon, its body a heart and its legs a triangle. It was said that it drank only the purest of water, and that the bird was so fond of Egypt that it would pine to death if transported elsewhere. The practical reason for the protection of the ibis -for it was a crime to kill it - was that it devoured crocodiles' eggs, serpents and all kinds of noxious reptiles and insects. The bull was also sacred and there was only one at a time in the temple whose birth and death were important enough to record.

### **Rameses II Stone relief:**



What is the provenance of the Rameses II piece: We don't know; in fact we know very little about that aspect of any of our Egyptian things. Probably it came from the Delta area, perhaps from Memphis. What numbers of people would be employed in making these things: It was all really a question of organisation with a corvée system operating at the time of the inundation. Groups would be organised to see to the transportation of stone, obelisks, etc. It was really a mark of the prosperity and stability of the times when it was possible to send out expeditions of around 6000 men, especially to the Wadis, and to see to having them fed and watered and protected from the Bedouin attacks. Stone was a royal monopoly and could be in other hands only as a gift from the King for a tomb or a stela. This monopoly lasted 3000 years; whether it was exclusively used by the King or allowed to spread to others depended on the individual King.

### **Stela of Hay:**





What information is there on the small stela in the case with the statuettes? - Information is on the sheet given to Guides previously. But, it is now thought that Hay was not a deputy but rather an ordinary workman. There are 2 other stelae of his and a graffito in Thebes which refer to him.

this is an everyday male wig typical of 2,300 B.C., the 6th Dynasty, Old Kingdom. It is cut straight across the back. Whereas in the stela the wig is longer and fuller, comes from the time of the New Kingdom. One thousand years later when wigs were more elaborate and longer. Viz. the one on the Queen. Wigs were constructed on a shape like a hair net and hair either human or animal woven into this. Double wigs were quite common, with ringlets and a heavier outer layer. In the Mezzanine is a Middle Kingdom one similar to those of the Old Kingdom.

### Pyramidion:



North



West



South



East

What exactly is a pyramidion: The pyramidion is the capstone of a 6 or 7ft high obelisk which is above the tomb chamber. The inscription on the pyramidion gives the dead man's titles etc. Only royalty were buried in pyramids. A round-topped stela usually sits in a niche at the back of a T-shaped space in the tomb or is fitted into the pyramid, giving details of the person and praises to the gods.

Was a pyramid started before a person died and how long did they take to build: Yes, it was, and they could take at least four years to build. In Giza in the 4th Dynasty the pyramid was constructed over the mud mound consisting of layers of diminishing perimeters made up of stone blocks causing a stepped appearance. The final smooth triangular effect was achieved by triangular casing blocks. In the 12th Dynasty the pyramid was constructed with an outer and an inner square wall with cross walls forming 16 sections. The gaps were filled with rubble and the facades completed with triangular shaped casing blocks.

Did they use slaves as labourers: Slaves were part of the society in the 14th Century BC, but at the time of the pyramids the peasants were used as workmen during the annual flood of the Nile they had no work in the fields. Stones were hauled by quarrymen and on the West side of the Nile where there was a limestone plateau, but the main casing blocks came from the East side from the Moggata Hills at Turrah. Sandstone was brought from 90 miles up the Nile near Thebes and grey granite came from Aswan. The blocks were transported on barges.