

# 03 Lecture Art of Ancient Egypt

# Egyptian Art

- **Time Period**
  - 3000-30 bce
- The most relevant artistic periods in Egyptian art are the following:
  - Old Kingdom                      2575-2134 bce
  - New Kingdom                      1550-1070 bce

- **Enduring Understanding:** Egyptian art was created around ideas concerning eternity, the afterlife, and rebirth
  - Funerary objects dominate, including large-scale sculptures, stone architecture, and tomb artifacts – all in the service of the god-like pharaohs
  - Strict Egyptian stylistic formulas are applied to the gods and the pharaohs; they clearly show others to be subordinate and lacking in idealization

# Historical Background

- Old Kingdom
- Middle Kingdom
- New Kingdom – includes the Amarna Period

# Patronage and Artistic Life

- Egyptian architecture was designed and executed by highly skilled craftsmen and artisans, not by slaves
- Process of mummification was handled by embalming experts
- Most artists could more properly be called artistic overseers

# Egyptian Architecture

- Pyramids were part of great complexes called necropolises
- Started out as mastabas, a simple tomb that has four sloping sides and an entrance for mourners to bring offerings to the deceased
- The body was buried beneath the mastaba
- Egyptian specialty was carving from living rock – Great Sphinx was hewn from a single great rock
- Mortuary temples – temple dedicated to a deceased pharaoh
- Pylon temple – temples dedicated to gods
- Columns used in New Kingdom temples were based on plant shapes

# Egyptian Painting and Sculpture

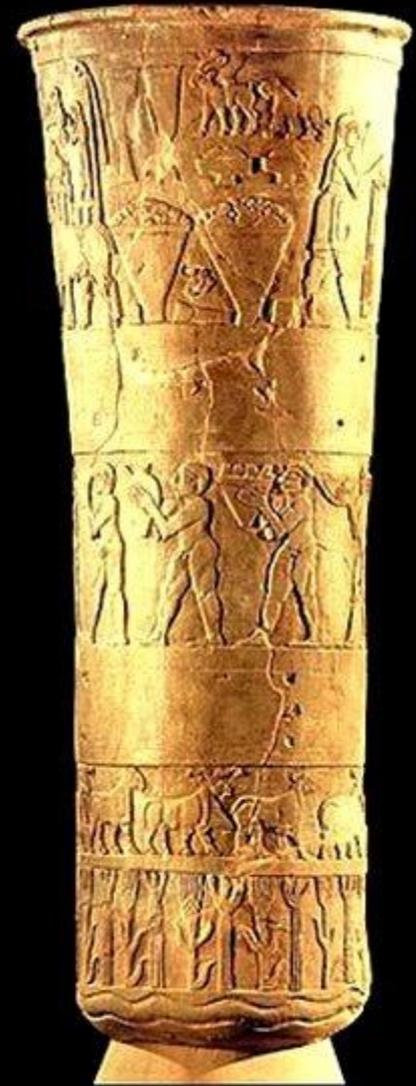
- Ankh – a symbol for life
- Ground line – a base line upon which figures stand
- Register – a horizontal band, often on top of another, that tells a narrative story
- Relief sculpture – sculpture which projects from a flat background – a very shallow relief sculpture is called bas-relief
- Stylized – a schematic, non-realistic manner of representing the visible world and its contents, abstracted from the way that they appear in nature
- Sunken relief – a carving in which the outlines of figures are deeply carved into a surface so that the figures seem to project forward



**#13**  
**Palette of King Narmer**  
Predynastic Egypt  
c. 3000-2920 BCE  
Greywacke

# Our Earliest Historical Documents?

- The Narmar Palette is a piece of dark gray stone measuring 63 centimeters high and 42 centimeters wide, carved in low relief on both sides, and polished
- It has the shape of a shield
- It dates to c. 3100 BCE, a similar timeframe to the Uruk Vase from Mesopotamia

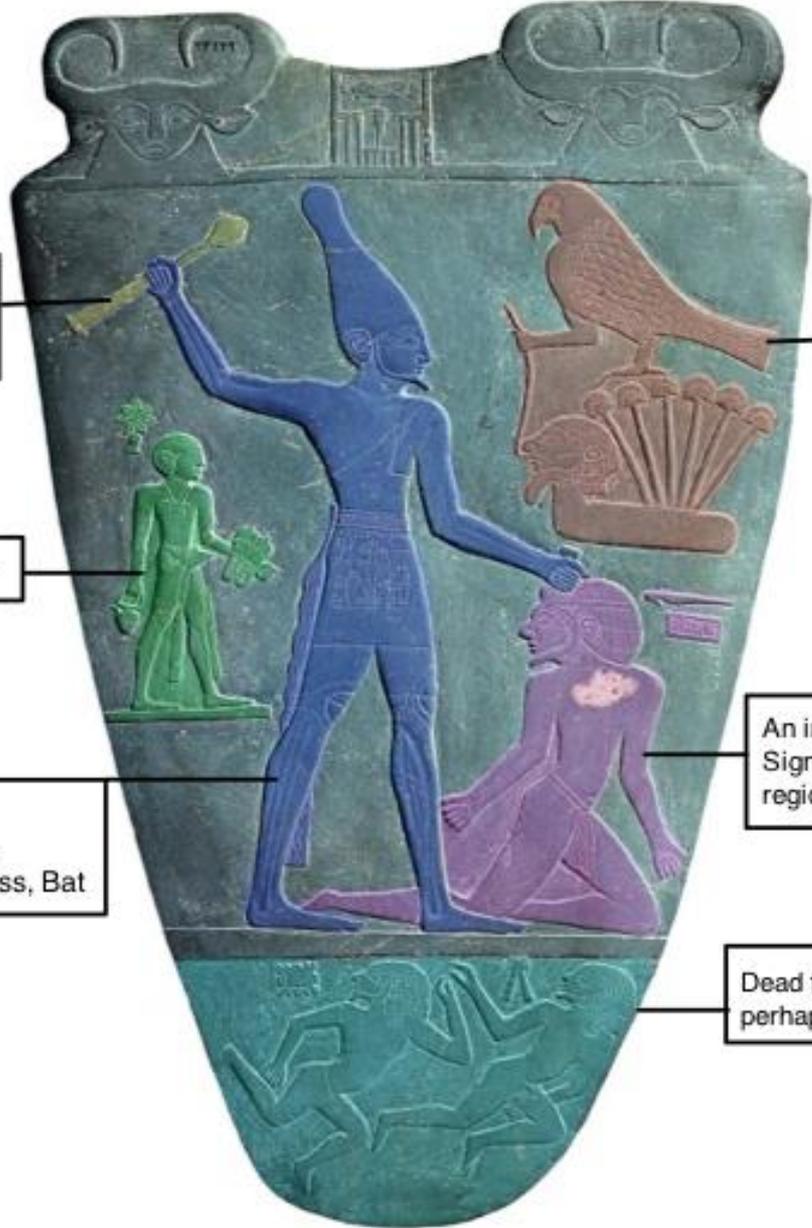


- The palette was excavated at Hierakonpolis in a temple offering deposit
- It is one of a series of similarly shaped objects from that site and elsewhere
- They were formed in the shape of cosmetic palettes meant to grind eye makeup, but this and others are ritual palettes, perhaps meant to grind eye powder for images for the gods



- Relief sculpture depicting King Narmer uniting Upper and Lower Egypt
- Hathor, a god as a cow with a woman's face, depicted four times in the top register
- Figures stand on a ground line
- Hierarchy of scale





Mace-Pose used for the next 3000+ years, also referred to as a 'smiting' pose

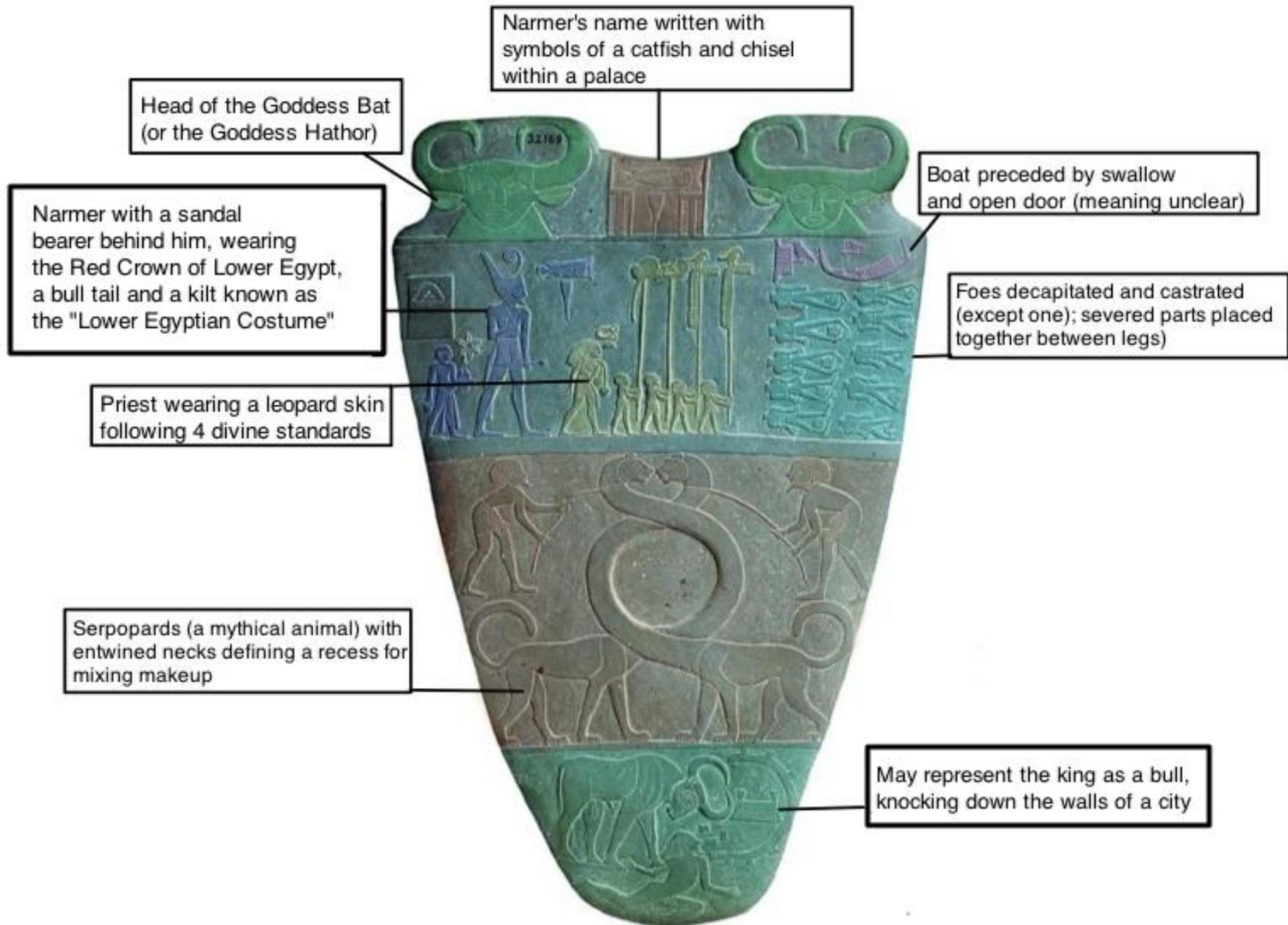
Sandal-bearer

Narmer wearing the "White Crown" of upper Egypt, bull tail, royal beard, and a kilt associated with the Goddess, Bat

The Falcon with a human arm is the God Horus, shown holding a rope binding foe's head, which is emerging from a marsh (likely a personification of Lower Egypt)

An impotent foe. Signs may name his region of origin.

Dead foes with a walled city, perhaps personifications of cities



Front

- Schematic lines delineate Narmer's muscle structure: forearm veins and thigh muscles are represented by straight lines; half circles for the kneecaps
- Palette used to prepare eye make-up for the blinding sun, although this palette was probably commemorative, or ceremonial
- Hieroglyphics explain and add to the meaning
- Scholars believe the palette conflates actions taking place over many years into one event
- Narrative





The enemy  
appears to be a  
representative of a  
people from the  
north

- The palette may be documenting the beginning and the unification of the Egyptian state, perhaps by the conquest of the south over the north
- Some scholars see it as metaphoric
- Others more literally, as an actual act or series of battles



# Duality in Egypt

- Whether metaphor or real, the visual symbolism and message set forth were important for Egypt as a state for the next 3,000 years
- The state of Egypt was seen as a union of “the Two Lands, the Red Land and the Black Land, the North and the South, Upper and Lower Egypt”



- This Egyptian worldview shows that duality was an important facet of Egyptian life, religion, and art
- It's undoubtedly related to the geographic location of the Egyptians
- Unlike the south-flowing, meandering, unreliable Mesopotamian rivers, Egypt has the north-flowing, reliable and straight Nile River





- Nile provides a layer of rich silt for farming, but it only covers a thin strip
- The steadiness of the sun, along with little or no rain, make the sun a major factor in religion
- On the most basic level, Egyptian society made a clear demarcation between domestic and wild lands, between order and chaos, and between native and foreign enemies
- Predictability of nature allowed the Egyptians to maintain one of the most stable traditions in art, religion, and culture ever known
- The people of Egypt could be easily united by the Nile's spine and its north-south axis

# The King

- Central to Egyptian worldview
  - Uniter
  - Bulwark against chaos
  - Hero who maintained order
  - Interceder with the gods
  - Holder of divine office





Horus

Associated with  
Horus when he  
was alive and  
Osiris when he  
died and became  
fully divine



Osiris



Iconic victory pose

Wears the crown

False beard

Kilt with false tail



## Egyptian Canon

- Face is in profile
- Eye is shown frontal
- Shoulders depicted by frontal view
- Below the waist, the figure is in profile
- Both feet are the same – with the instep and big toe showing



Stance of dominance and victory



And let's not forget our own George!



Only time we see this animal  
in Egyptian art

The circle between the necks  
was is where the eye powder  
would have been ground

We see this animal in  
Mesopotamian art quite a bit



# The Theme of Kingly Power

- Hierarchy of scale
- King's position
- Representation in metaphors using animals and building
- He wields military might
- His sphere of authority is demonstrated by the two crowns of Egypt
- He creates order out of chaos
- It sets the tone and the canons for the representation of the Egyptian king for the next 3,000 years

# Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Symbolism



Delacroix, *Liberty  
Leading the People*

Costiogo, Hide  
Painting of a  
Sun Dance



Ruler's Feathered Headdress



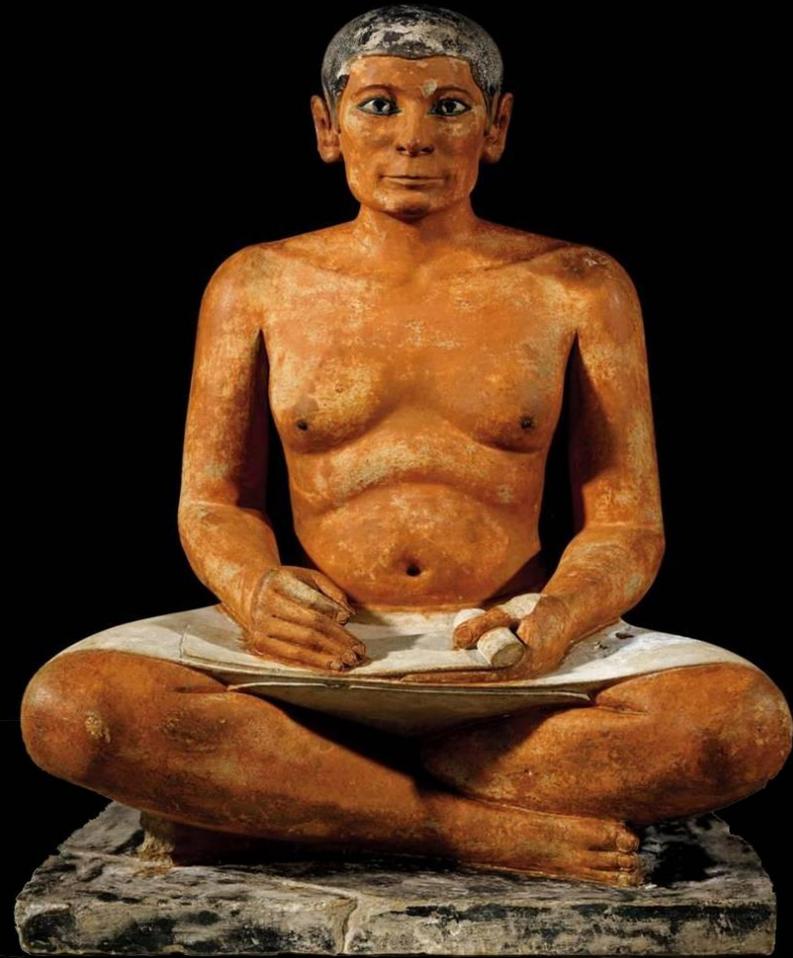
Old Kingdom  
2575-2134 bce



**#15**  
**Seated scribe**  
Saqqara, Egypt  
Fourth Dynasty  
c. 2620-2500 BCE  
Painted limestone



- Created for a tomb at Saqqara as a provision for the ka
- Not a pharaoh: sagging chest and realistic rather than idealistic features
- Amazingly lifelike, but not a portrait – rather, a conventional image of a scribe
- Attentive expression; thin, angular face
- Contrasts with the ideally portrayed pharaoh
- Holds papyrus in his lap; his writing instrument (now gone) was in his hand ready to write



# Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Human Figure

Great Buddha from Todai-ji



Shiva as Nataraja



Abakanowicz, *Androgyn III*



**#17**  
**Great Pyramids (Menkaure, Khafre, Khufu)**  
**and Great Sphinx**

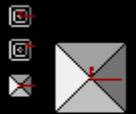
Giza, Egypt

Old Kingdom, Fourth Dynasty

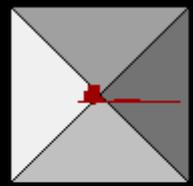
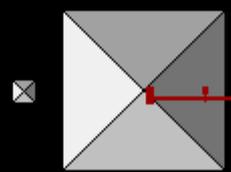
c. 2550-2490 BCE

Cut Limestone

Menkaure  
(Mykerinos)



Khafre (Chephren)



Sphinx

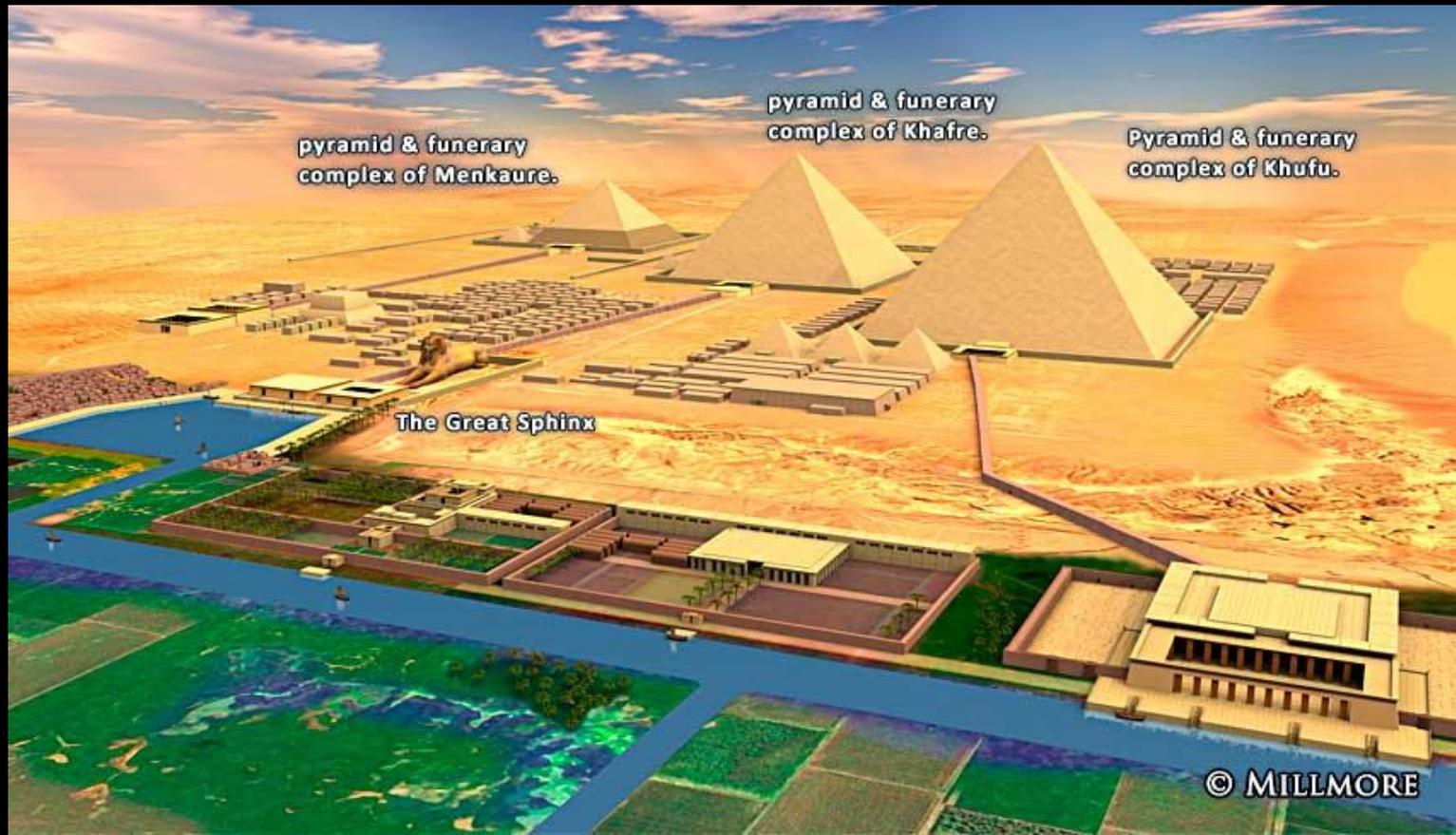


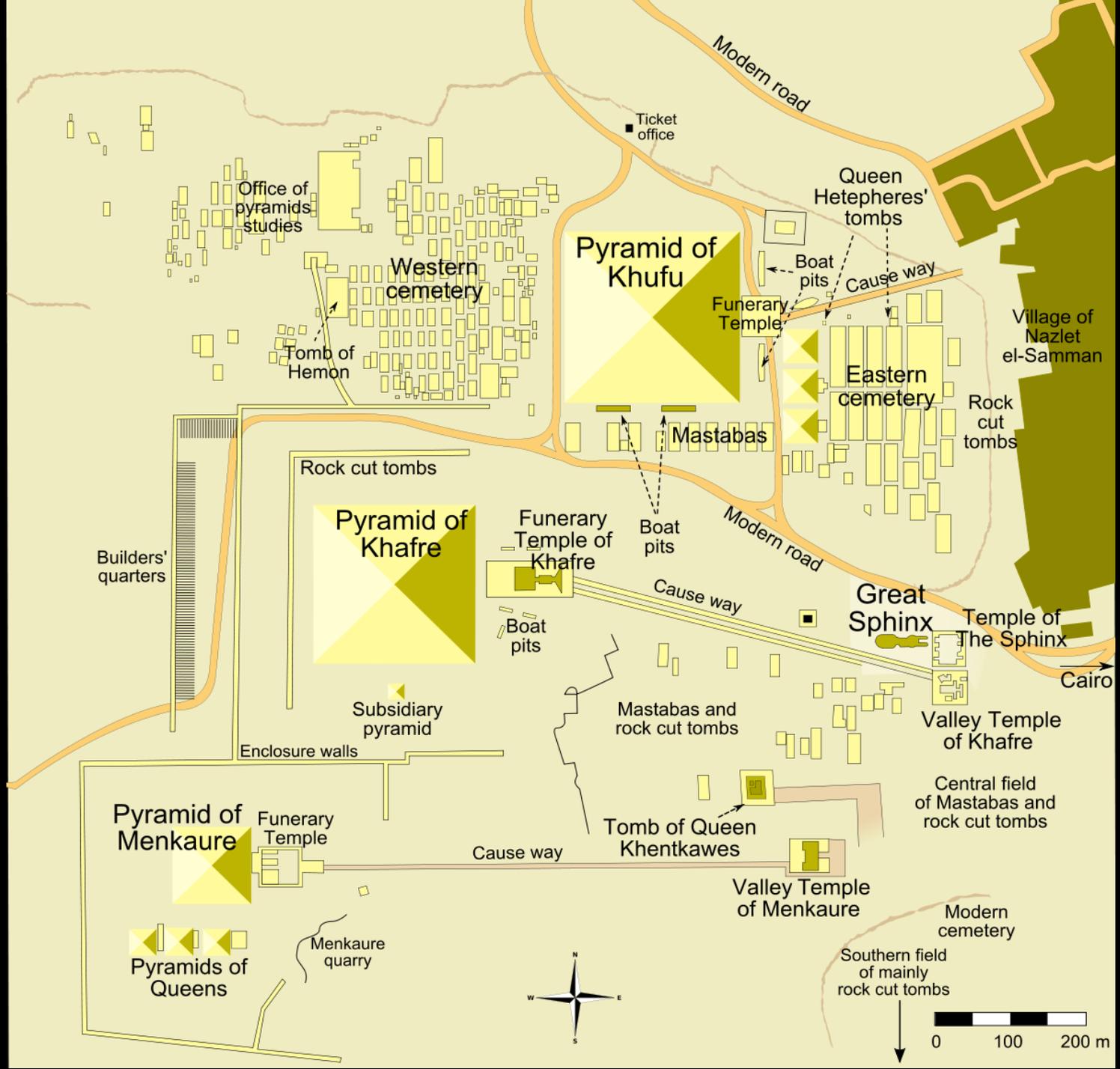
Khufu  
(Cheops)

- Giant monuments to dead pharaohs
- Each pyramid has an adjoining mortuary temple
- Huge pile of limestone with minimal interior for the deceased; pharaoh buried within the pyramid, unlike Stepped Pyramid, in which the pharaoh is buried under the building
- Each side of the pyramid oriented toward a point on the compass
- Great Pyramids were faced with stone, most of which has been lost



- Each pyramid has a funerary complex adjacent connected by a formal pathway used for carrying the dead pharaoh's body to the pyramid to be interred
- Shape may have been influenced by a sacred stone relic, called a benben, shaped like a sacred stone found at Heliopolis – the center of the sun god cult
- Tombs of pharaohs Menkaura, Khufu, and Khafre



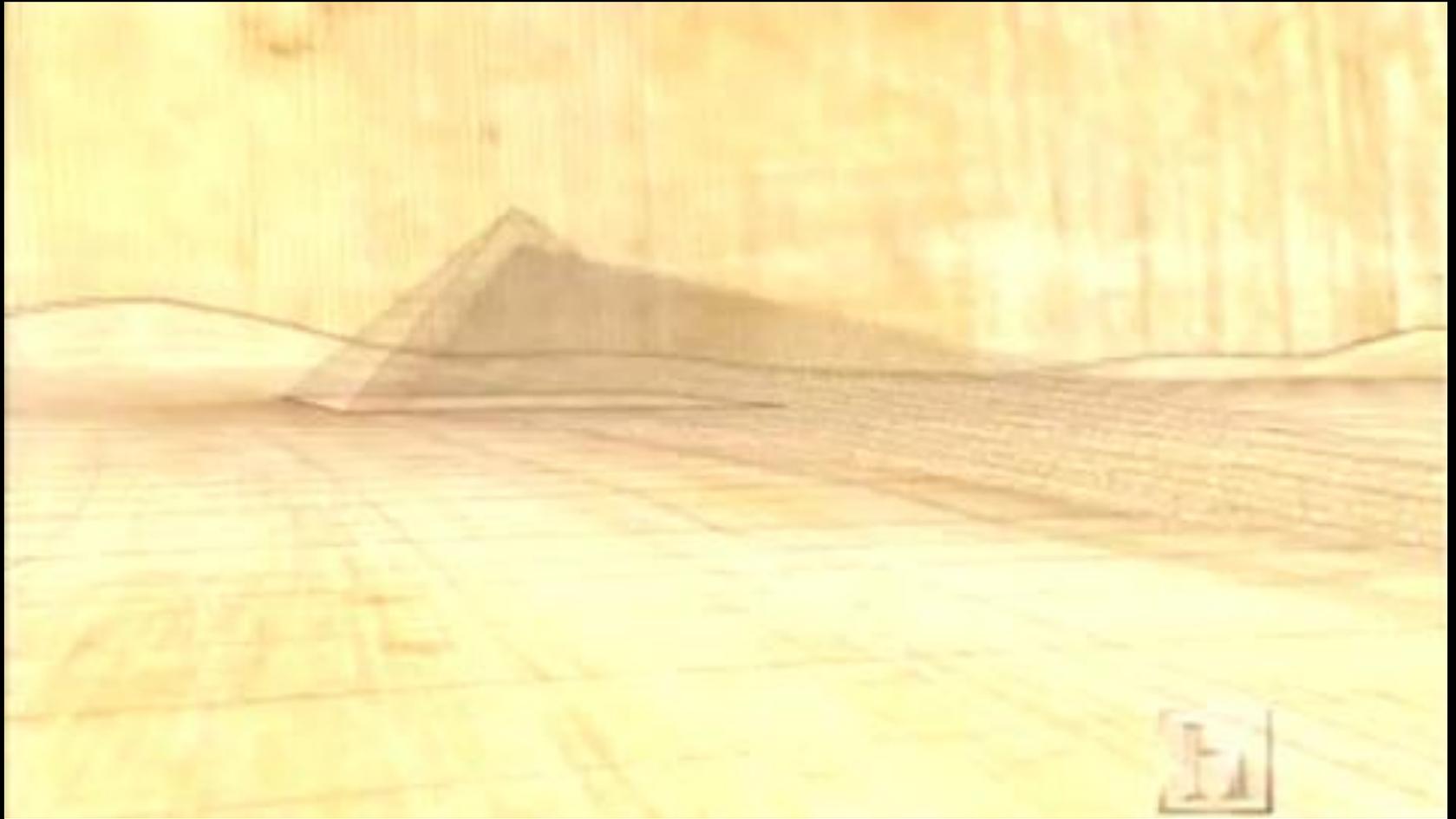




# Engineering an Empire: Mastabas

(11:00)

# Engineering an Empire: Pyramid



# Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Commemoration of Ruler and Country



Taj Mahal



Terra-Cotta Warriors



Houdon, *George Washington*



# Egyptian Concepts of the Afterlife

- Egypt seems to have concrete and colorful ideas about life and death, and much of the art that survives had a funerary purpose
- Egyptians were a death-denying culture
- They loved life and believed that by making the proper preparations for death and provisioning their tombs, they would be granted eternal life

- The statue of Khafre is part of that preparation for death
- The pharaoh prepared for immortality as a god and actually became the god Osiris, king of the underworld, in the afterlife
- The pyramids show the lengths to which the Old Kingdom Egyptians were willing to go to ease this transition from pharaoh into eternal life

- The pyramids were the center of a religion, as well as tombs
- The Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom bring to life some of the Egyptian religious beliefs
- “You have gone away to live. You have not gone away to die.”
- As the home for the soul of the deceased, the physical body was enormously important, thus the need for mummification and preservation

- Egyptians also realized that not all bodies would or could continue to exist for eternity
- A statue or relief made in the image of a person could serve as an alternative space inhabited by that person's *ka* (soul) in the afterlife





Khafre  
Egypt  
Old Kingdom  
c. 2555-2532 BCE  
Diorite



# Descriptions of Khafre's Statue

- The statue of Khafre shows the seated figure of the king carved from diorite
- Highly polished, stands about 5 ½ feet tall



- Khafre wears an expression of divine grace, serene and unchanging
- He looks straight forward
- He has high cheekbones and rounded cheeks
- His nose is straight and wider at the nostrils and tip
- His eyes are set into his head in a very naturalistic fashion



Khafre projects majesty in his pose, with his head held erect and his arms at rest

He wears a distinctive headdress, called the *nemes*, a symbol of kingship

It had pleated lappets (loose folds) and extends onto his chest

His brow is crowned by a *uraeus* – the stylized upright form of a striking cobra – carved in relief, another symbol of royalty



The smooth, wide surface of his chest presents an ideal and youthful body – wider at the shoulders, robustly muscled, perfect



The arms are also muscular, and the closed position of the hands including the clenched fist, speaks of his authority

The throne on which Khafre sits has lion heads modeled at the level of his knees, and their feet are carved below



- Khafre's head is enfolded by the wings of the Horus falcon carved behind him
- This melding represents the idea that the king is the living Horus, the embodiment of this god of the sky, while he is on earth
- The enfolding wings seem to protect the king, perhaps ensuring his eternal life



- A side view of the statue shows that the body of the lion in the throne extends to the rear, and the rear legs of the throne are those of a lion, as well
- They are carved in relief, unlike the frontal view of the throne, which is sculpted



- Carved in high relief on the space between the throne's legs is the *sema-tawy* motif, symbolizing the union of Upper and Lower Egypt
- This symbol also conveys the central importance of the king; he is both the manifestation of the united lands and the uniter

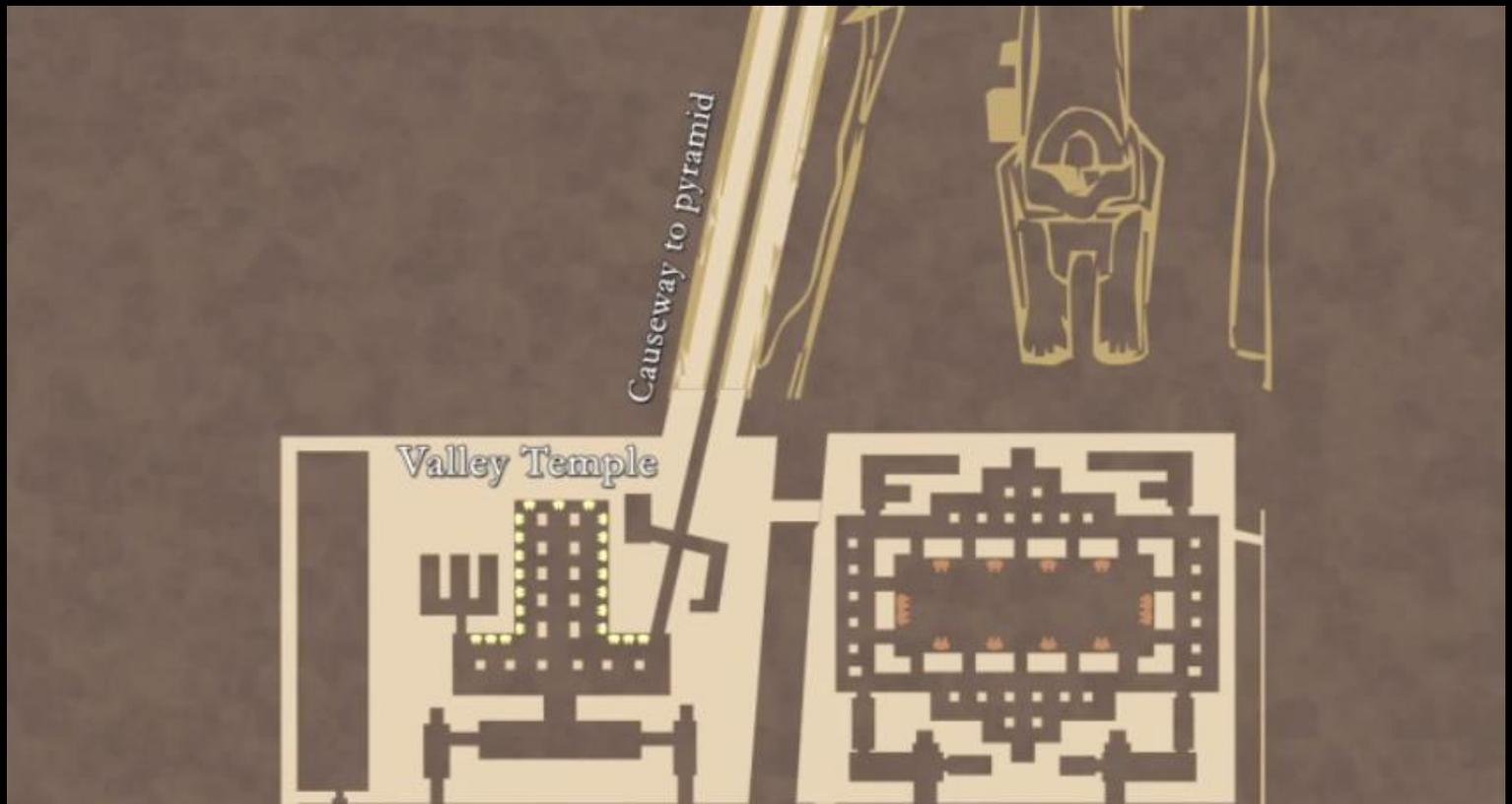


- The statue is meant to be viewed mostly from the front and is based on the shape of a cube
- Egyptian sculpture is almost always characterized by the “cubic schema”
- This is how the sculptors conceptualized their work as it emerged from a block of stone
- The figure was meant to be static and eternal, not conveying movement

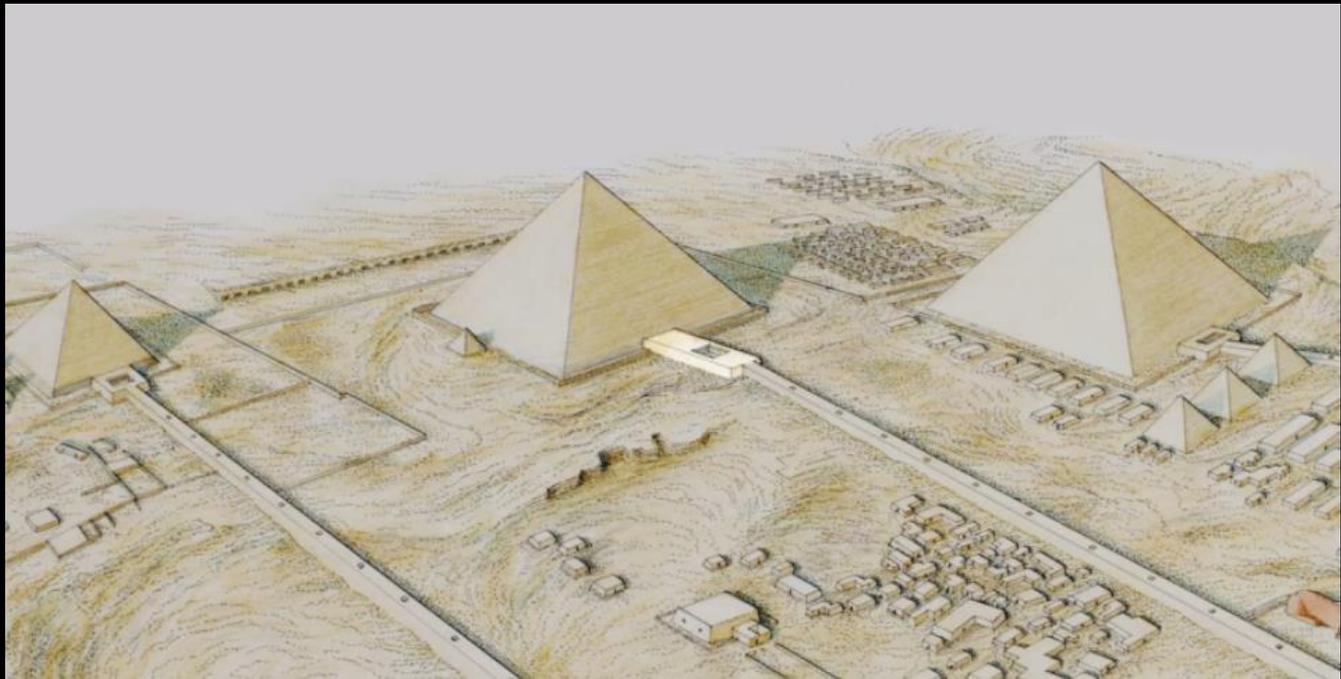


# Context of the Statue

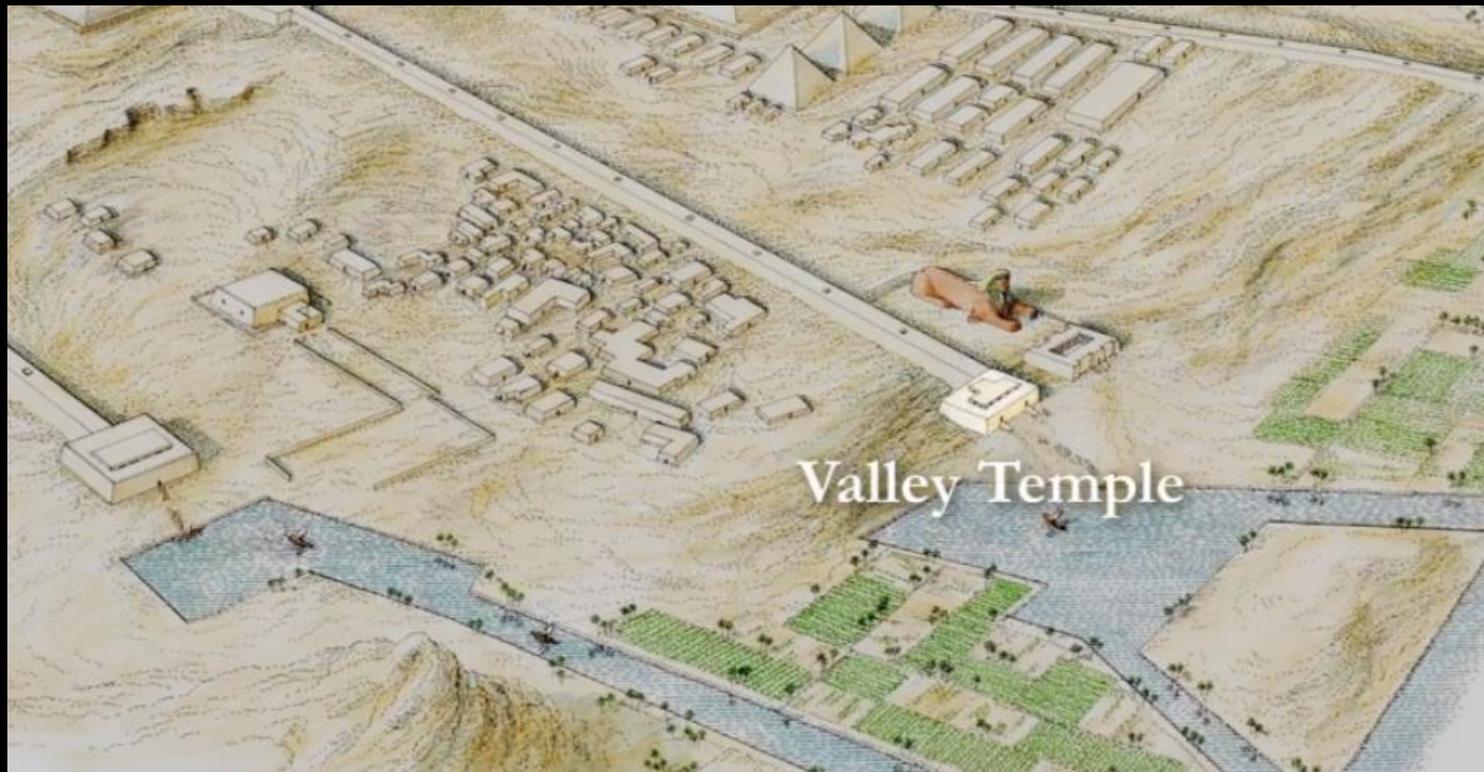
- This work was one of a series of 23 sculptures of Khafre
- They were installed in the valley temple connected to his pyramid



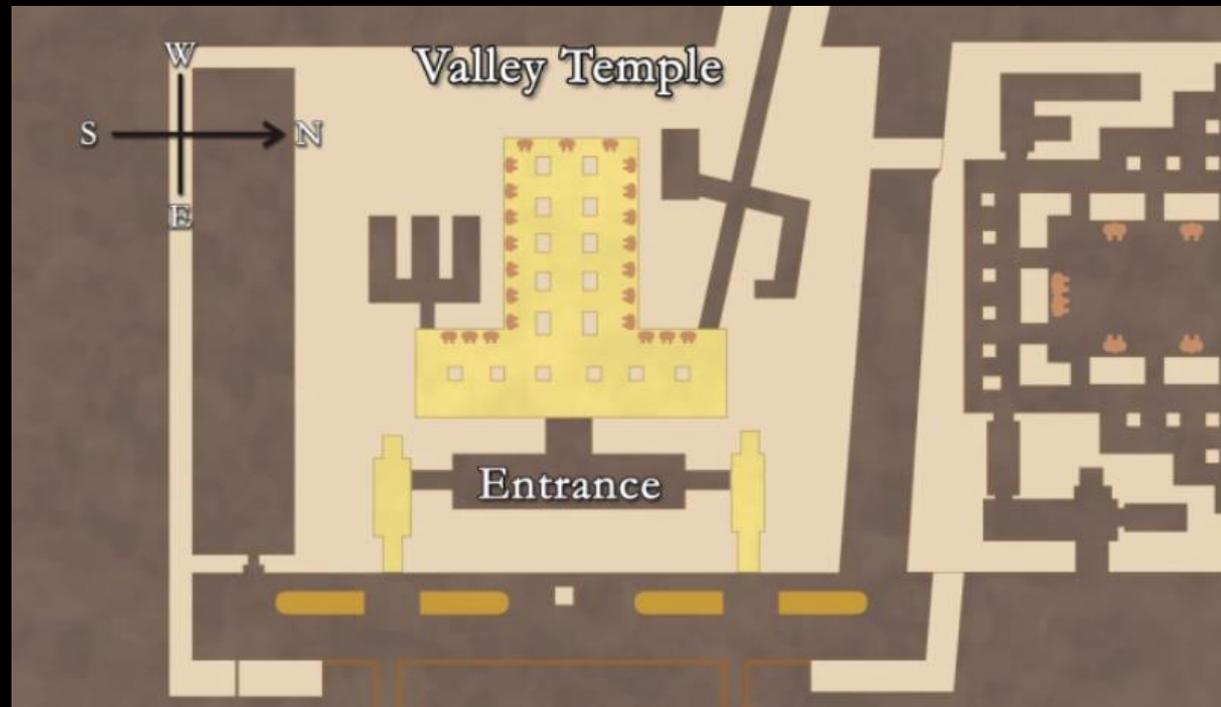
- The pyramid of Khafre, originally 471 feet high, contains his burial chamber
- The massive bulk of the pyramid lies toward the west, in the desert realm of the dead
- The eastern front of the pyramid was a pyramid temple, used for the cult of the king's *ka*



- Attached to this temple was a long causeway that led eastward to the valley temple, which was on greener land and marked the place where the sun rose: the east
- It placed the king in the realm of the solar cycle, where the sun is reborn endlessly



- Khafre's valley temple is quite grand; it is T-shaped and had a double entrance to the east
- The walls there are still preserved to a height of 43 feet
- A great hypostyle hall with large columns would have exhibited the 23 statues of Khafre



- The statues were part of the cult of the dead king
- They were meant to receive offerings of food, drink, and prayer
- A retinue of priests was dedicated to continuing the king's cult and ensuring his immortal life

# The Great Sphinx

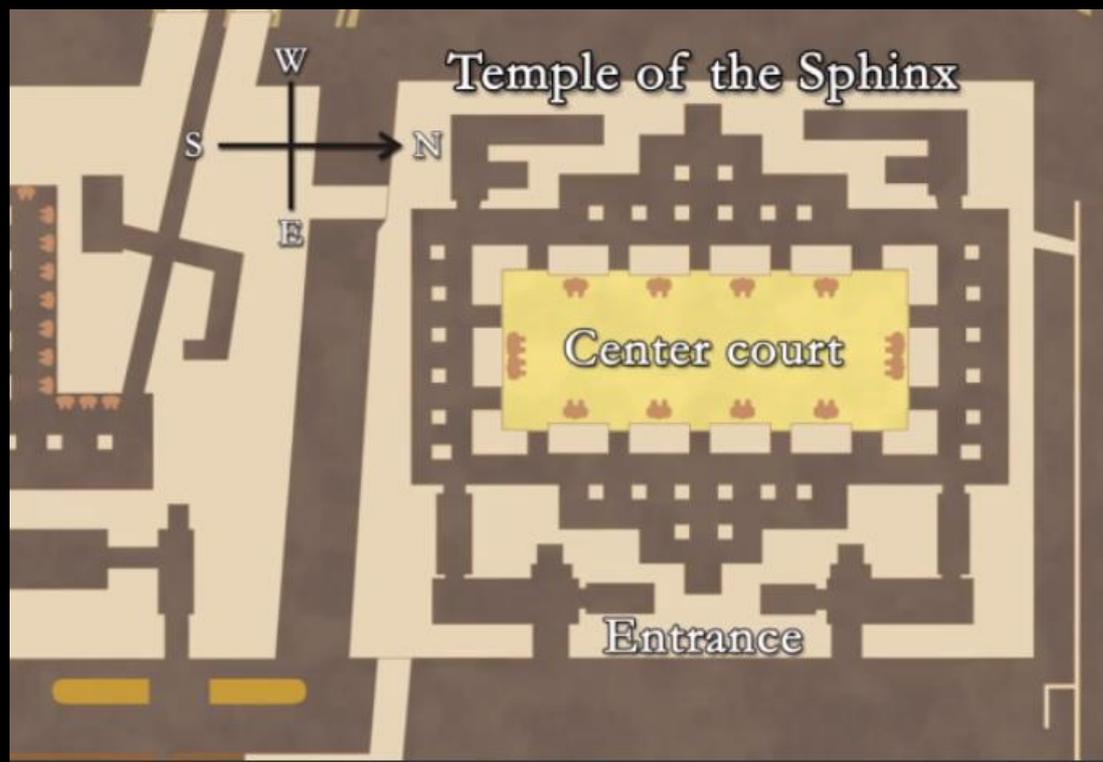




- What remains of Khafre's mortuary art is impressive, including the Great Sphinx
- It is 66 feet high and 240 feet long, and is thought to be from Khafre's reign



- The temple in front of the Sphinx has a double entrance and center court, just like Khafre's valley temple
- There is a niche at the eastern end of the temple that is aligned with both the Sphinx and the setting of the sun at the equinoxes



- Sphinxes seem to be a brilliant Egyptian invention
- They are copied in art all over the ancient Near East



- The choice of the lion for the colossal depiction of the king captures and uses the lion's regal demeanor and power as the king of beasts
- The lion, a fierce and brave predator, is also one of the most territorial of beasts
- His roaring at dawn and dusk made him a messenger of the sun's passage



- Very generalized features, although some say it may be a portrait of Khafre, whose pyramid stands behind it
- Carved *in situ* from a huge rock, symbol of the sun god
- Body of a lion, head of a man
- Sphinx seems to protect the pyramids behind it
- Originally brightly painted to stand out in the desert



- Cats are royal animals in ancient Egypt, probably saved the grain supply from mice
- Head of the Sphinx badly mauled in the Middle Ages
- Fragment of the Sphinx's beard is in the British Museum





**#18**

**King Menkaura and Queen**

Old Kingdom, Fourth Dynasty

c. 2490-2472 BCE

Greywacke

- Figures attached to the block of stone; arms and legs not cut free
- Figures stare out into space
- Wife's simple and affectionate gesture, and/or presenting him to the gods
- Menkaura's powerful physique and stride symbolize his kingship
- Society's view of women expressed in the ankle length and tightly draped gown revealing her form covering her body; men and women the same height, indicating equality
- Original location in the temple of Menkaura's pyramid complex at Giza



- After Khafre's death, the third and smallest of the Great Pyramids was built by his son, Menkaure
- It is possible that he died during the building of the pyramid because it remained unfinished, and his valley temple was made of mudbrick, not stone

- A fabulously carved, forceful portrayal of King Menkaure and his queen makes a good comparison with the statue of his grandfather, showing us the development of some of the new trends while remaining in the tradition of Egyptian depictions of the king

- This statue of the pair of royals fulfills every demand of Egyptian mortuary sculpture
- It is
  - Eternal
  - Ideal
  - Timeless
  - Grand



- The faces have all the qualities of Khafre's:
  - Idealized
  - No emotion
  - Serene gaze
  - Finely modeled features



- The king wears the same identifying paraphernalia as his father and is muscular, youthful, and vigorous



- The queen is similar
- She is
  - Slim
  - Young
  - Shapely,
- She represents the ideal of the perfectly feminine

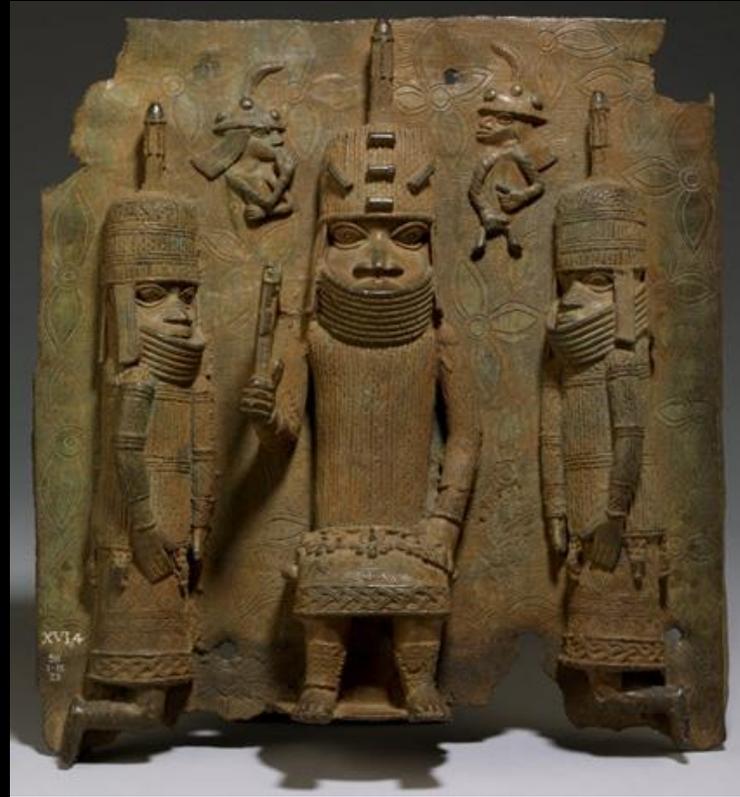


# Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Royalty

Wall Plaque from Oba's Palace



Lindauer, *Tamati Waka Nene*



*Augustus of Prima Porta*

New Kingdom  
1550-1070 bce



**#20**

**Temple of Amun-Re and Hypostyle Hall**

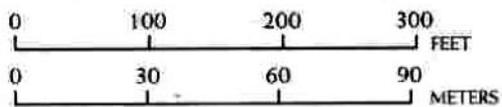
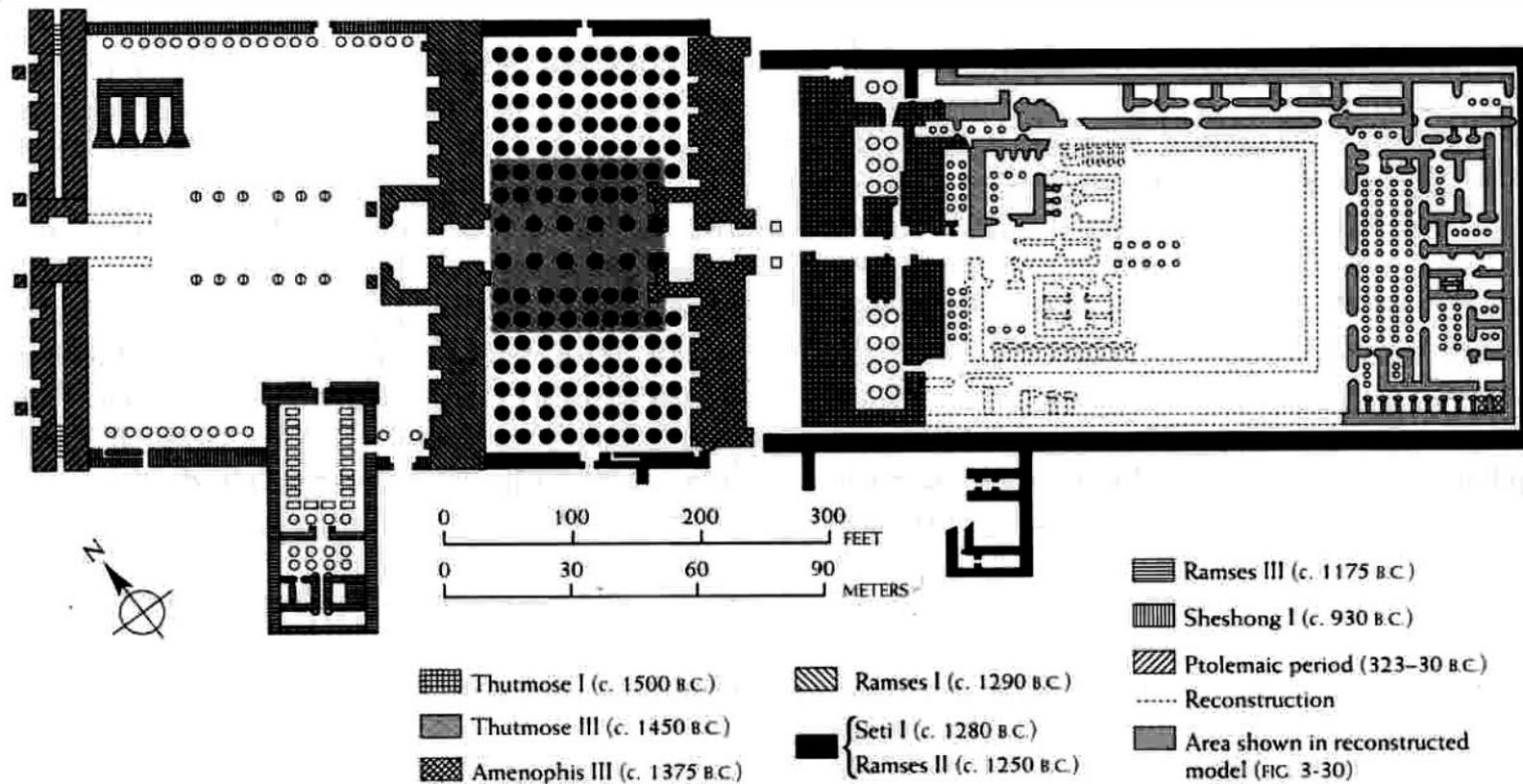
Karnak, near Luxor, Egypt

New Kingdom, 18th and 19th Dynasties

Temple: c. 1550 BCE

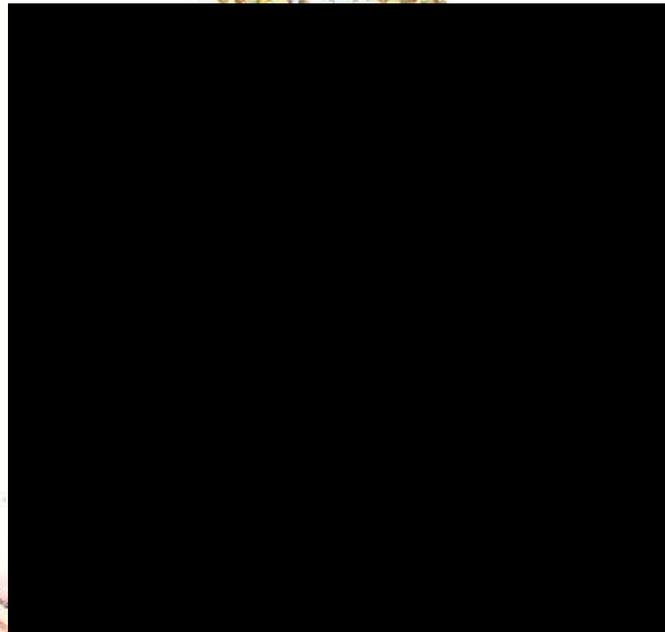
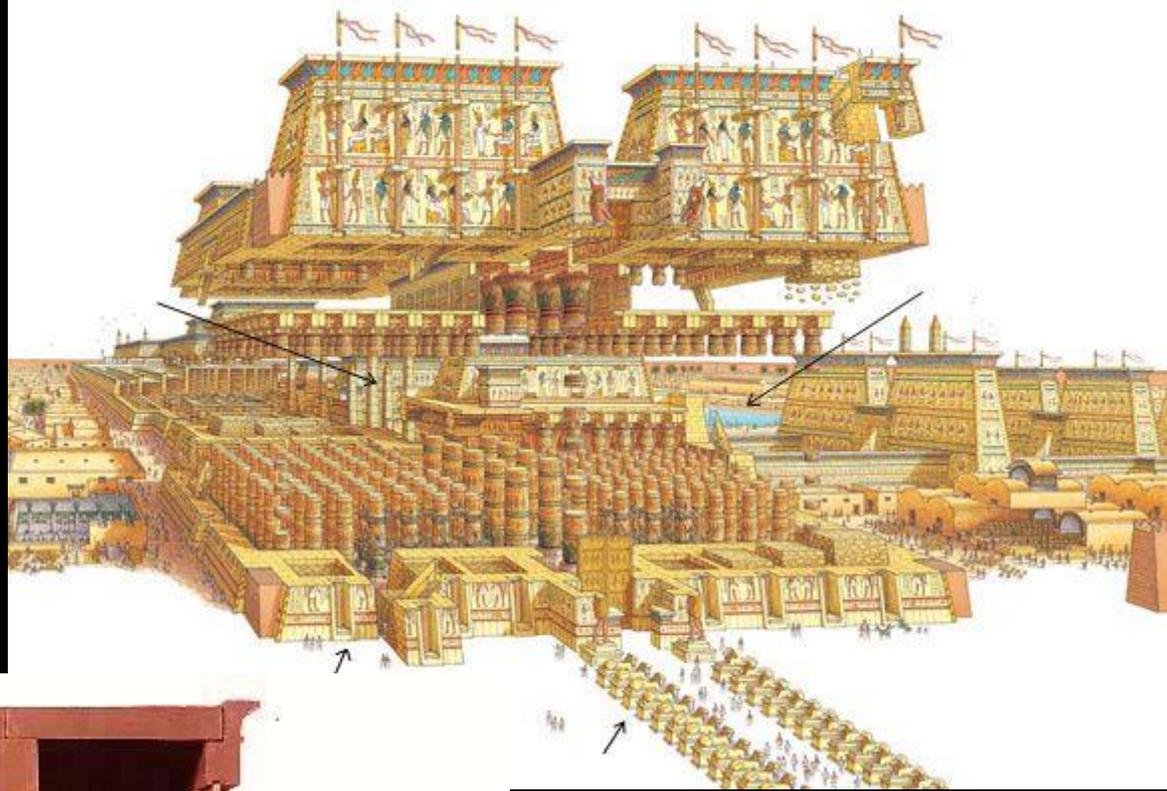
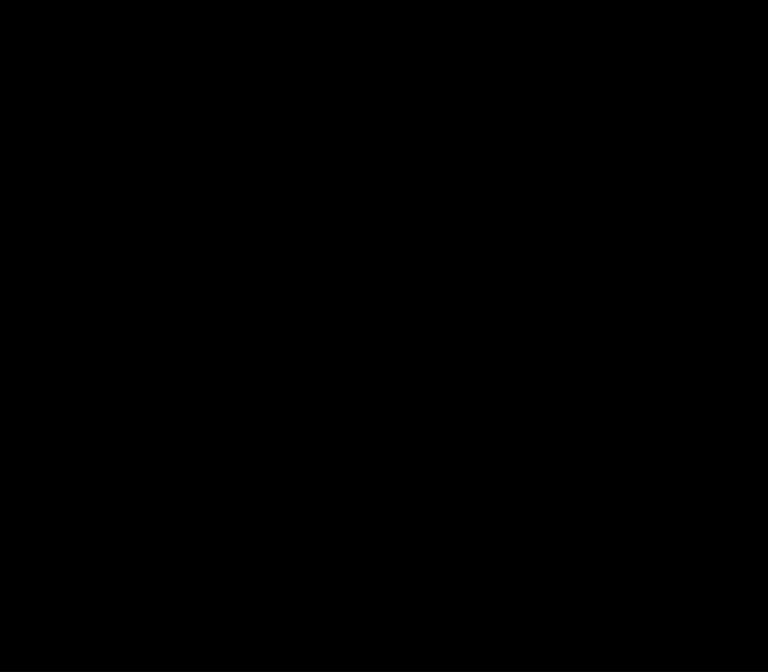
Hall: c. 1250 BCE

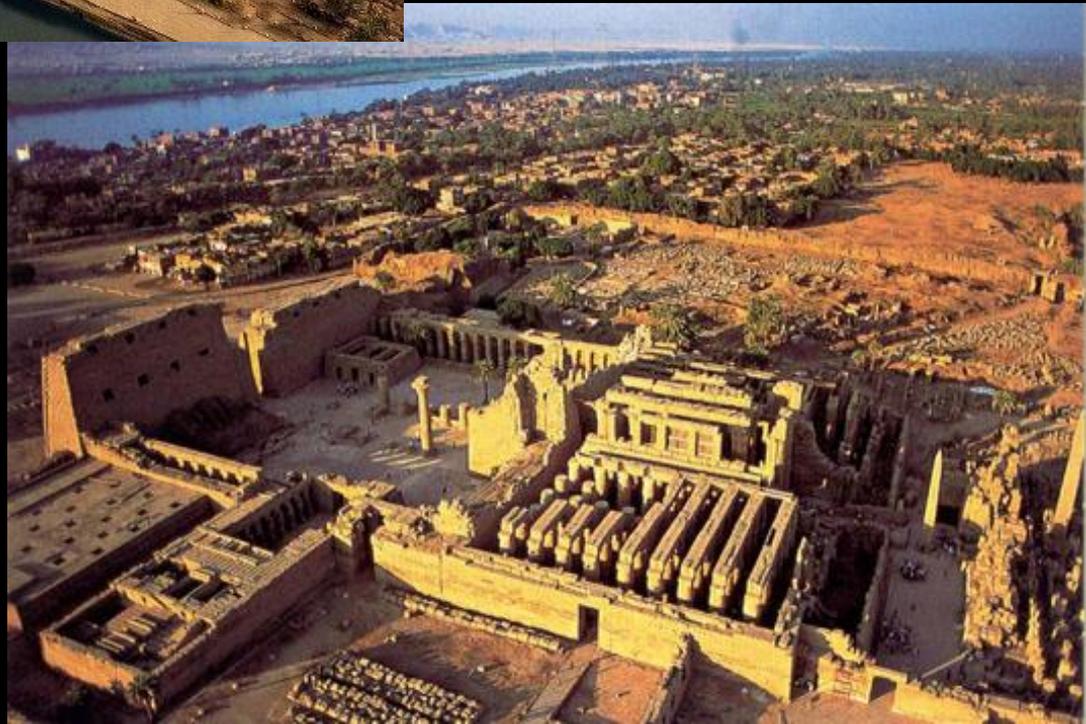
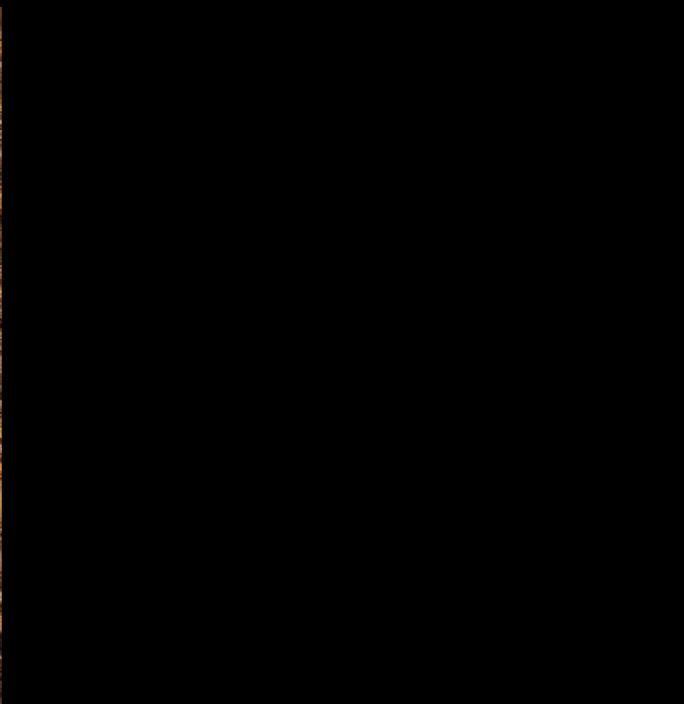
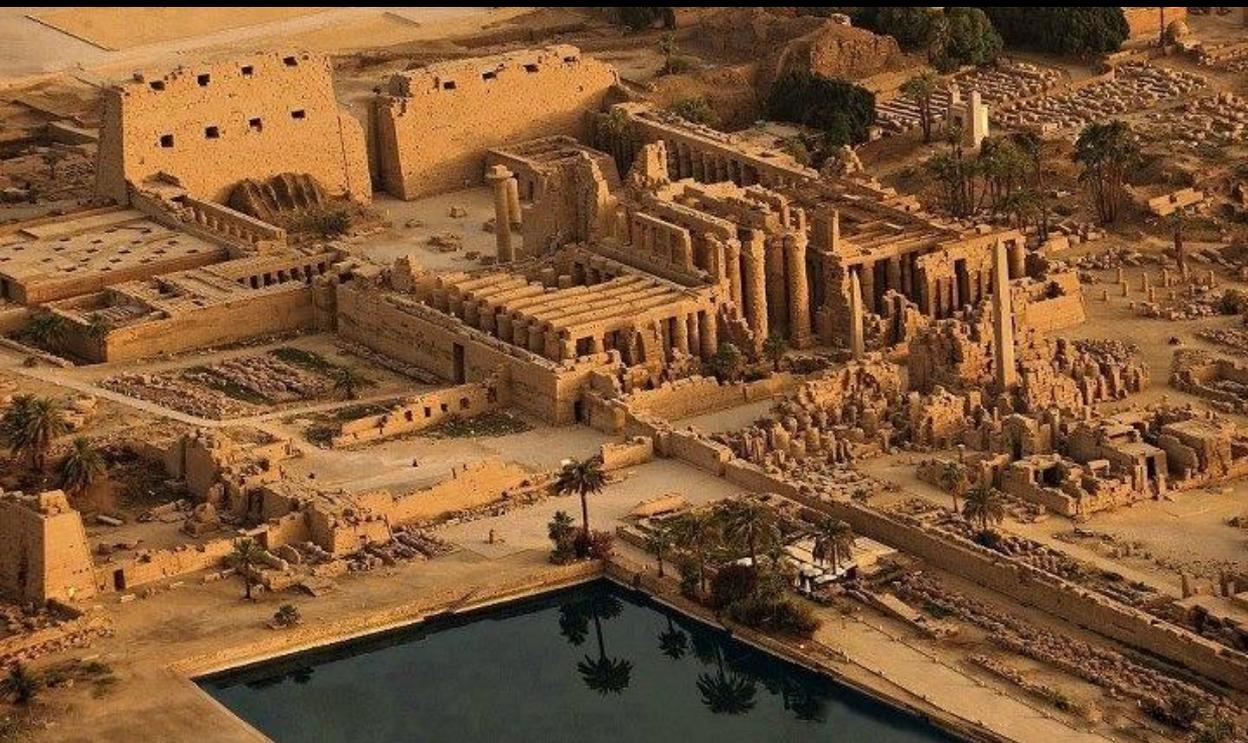
Cut sandstone and mud brick



- Thutmose I (c. 1500 B.C.)
- Thutmose III (c. 1450 B.C.)
- Amenophis III (c. 1375 B.C.)
- Ramses I (c. 1290 B.C.)
- { Seti I (c. 1280 B.C.)  
Ramses II (c. 1250 B.C.)

- Ramses III (c. 1175 B.C.)
- Sheshong I (c. 930 B.C.)
- Ptolemaic period (323-30 B.C.)
- Reconstruction
- Area shown in reconstructed model (FIG. 3-30)





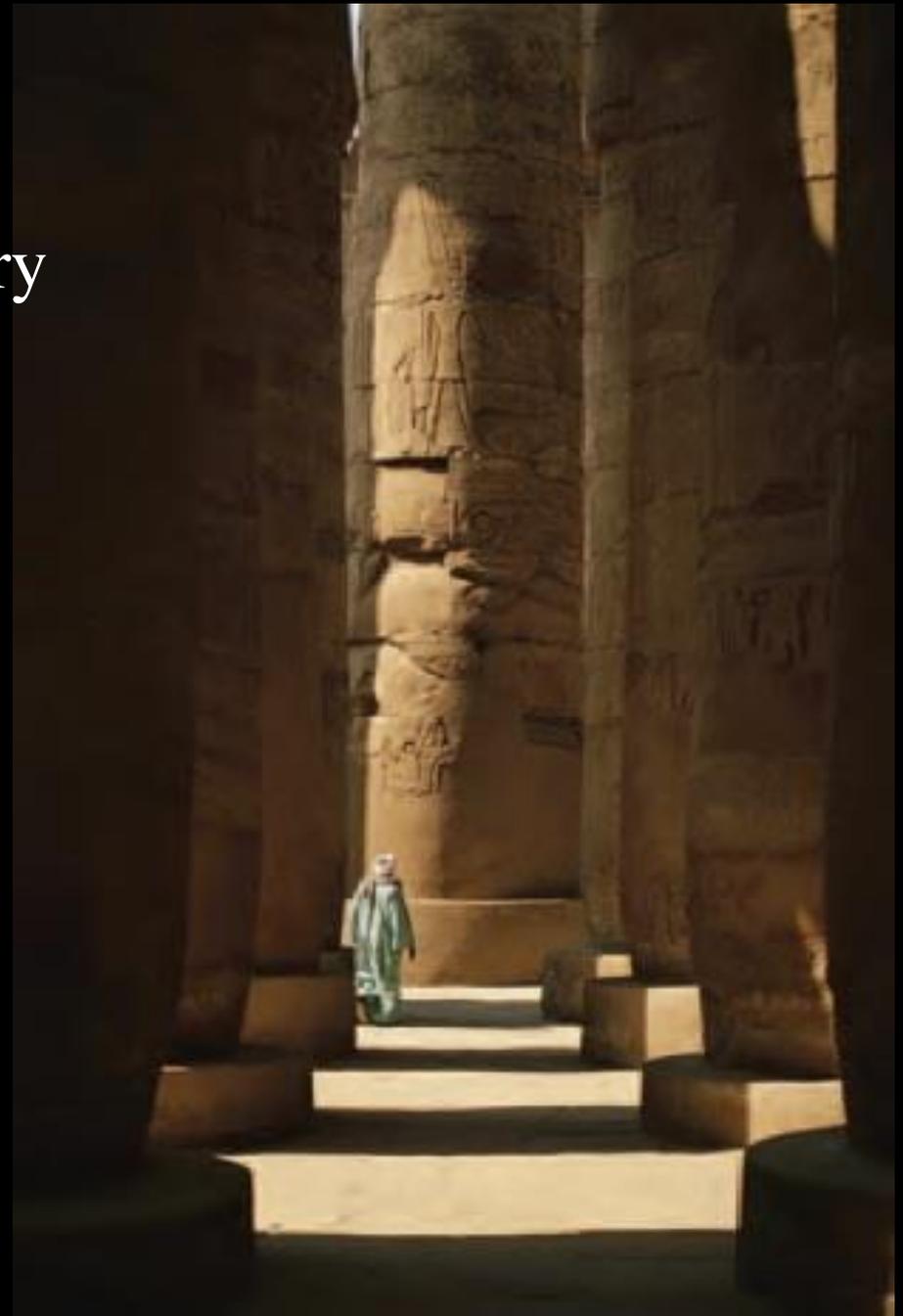
- Enter complex through massive sloped pylon gateway into peristyle courtyard (a colonnade surrounding a building or enclosing a courtyard), then through a hypostyle hall and then into the sanctuary where few were allowed



- Massive lintels bind the columns together
- Axial plan
- Tallest columns have papyrus capitals; have a clerestory to allow some light and air into the darkest parts of the temple
- Lower columns have bud capitals
- Columns carved in sunken relief



- Huge columns, tightly packed together, admitting little light into the sanctuary
- Hypostyle halls
- Columns elaborately painted



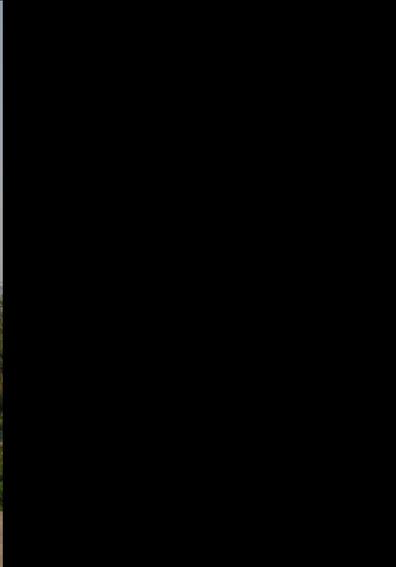


Egyptian Columns

# Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Houses of Worship



Lakshmana  
Temple



Santa Sabina



Great Mosque, Isfahan



**#21**  
**Mortuary temple of Hatshepsut**  
Near Luxor, Egypt  
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty  
c. 1473-1458 BCE  
Sandstone, partially carved into a rock cliff

- 3 columned terraces and 2 ramps
- Visually coordinated with the natural setting; long horizontals and verticals of the terraces and colonnades repeat the patterns of the cliffs behind; patterns of dark and light in the colonnade are reflected in the cliffs
- Terraces were originally planted as gardens with exotic trees
- First time the achievements of a woman are celebrated in art history: her body is interred elsewhere



Temple of Thutmose III

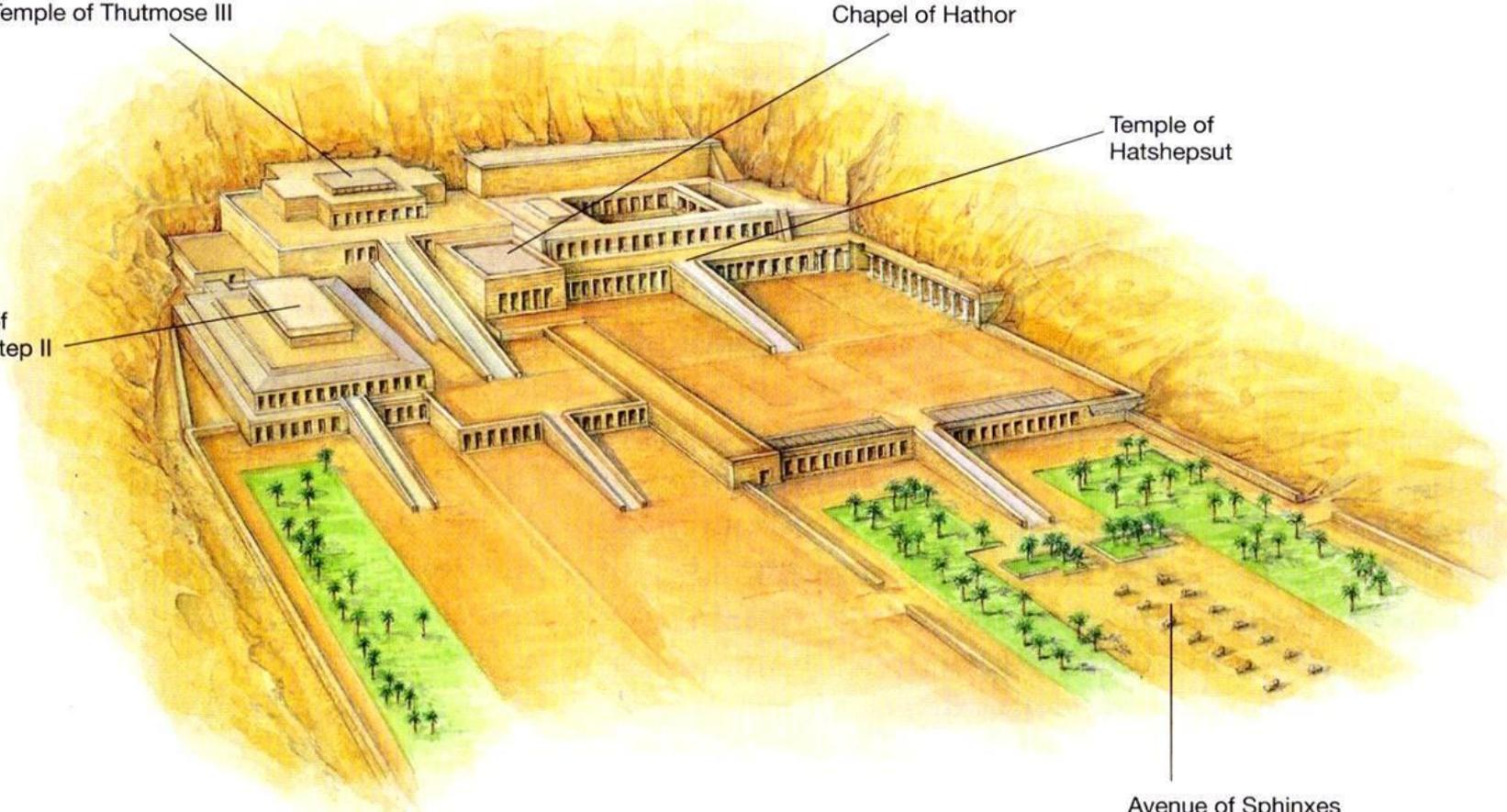
Chapel of Hathor

Temple of  
Hatshepsut

Temple of  
Mentuhotep II

HEMATIC  
OF THE  
TEMPLE  
EPSUT

Avenue of Sphinxes  
leading to Karnak



- One of 200 statues placed around the complex
- One of ten statues of Queen Hatshepsut with offering jars, part of a ritual in honor of the sun god; pharaoh would only kneel before a god
- Statue of the god brought before sculpture in a procession
- Inscription on base says she is offering plants to Amun
- Male pharaonic attributes: false beard, kilt
- Queen represented in male costume of a pharaoh, yet slender proportions and slight breasts indicate femininity
- Wears white crown of Upper Egypt



*Queen Hatshepsut with Offering Jars, 1473-1458 bce, red granite*



# Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Guardian Figures



Nio guardian figure



Staff God



Lamassu



**#22**  
**Akhenaton, Nerfertiti, and three daughters**  
New Kingdom (Amarna), 18th Dynasty  
c. 1353-1335 BCE  
Limestone

- Akhenaten hold eldest daughter (left), ready to be kissed
- Nefertiti holds daughter (right) with another daughter on her shoulder
- State religion changed by Akhenaten from Amun to Aton, symbolized by the sun-disk with a cobra
- At the end of the sun's rays, ankhs point to the king and queen

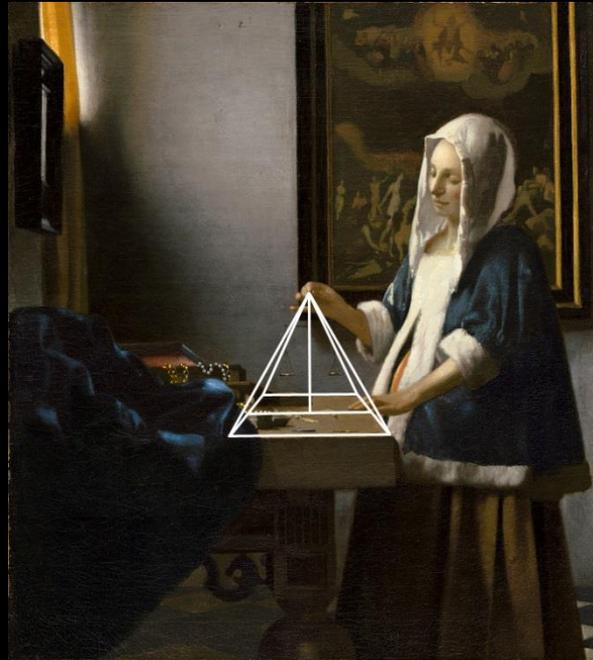


- State religion shift indicated by an evolving style of Egyptian art:
  - Smoother, curved surfaces
  - Low hanging bellies
  - Slack jaws
  - Thin arms
  - Epicene (having characteristics of both sexes or no characteristics of either sex; of indeterminate sex) bodies
  - Heavy-lidded eyes
- Domestic environment new in Egyptian art; panel is from an altar in a home
- Akhenaton and Nefertiti having a private relationship with their new god, Aton

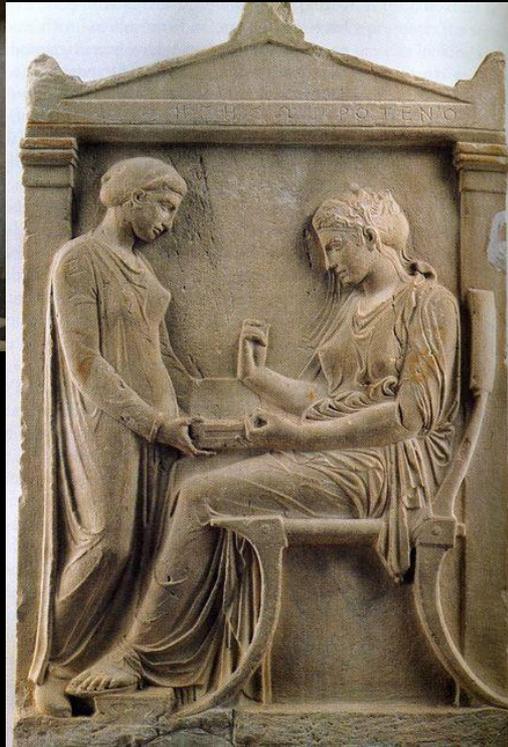


# Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Genre Scenes

Courbet, *The Stone Breakers*



Vermeer, *Women Holding a Balance*



*Stele of Hegeso*

**#23**  
**Tutankhamun's tomb, innermost coffin**  
New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty  
c. 1323 BCE  
Gold with inlay of enamel and semiprecious  
stones



- 01 - most outer shrine
- 02 - linen pall
- 03 - inner second shrine
- 04 - inner third shrine
- 05 - inner most fourth shrine
- 06 - granite sarcophagus
- 07 - coffin
- 08 - coffin
- 09 - coffin





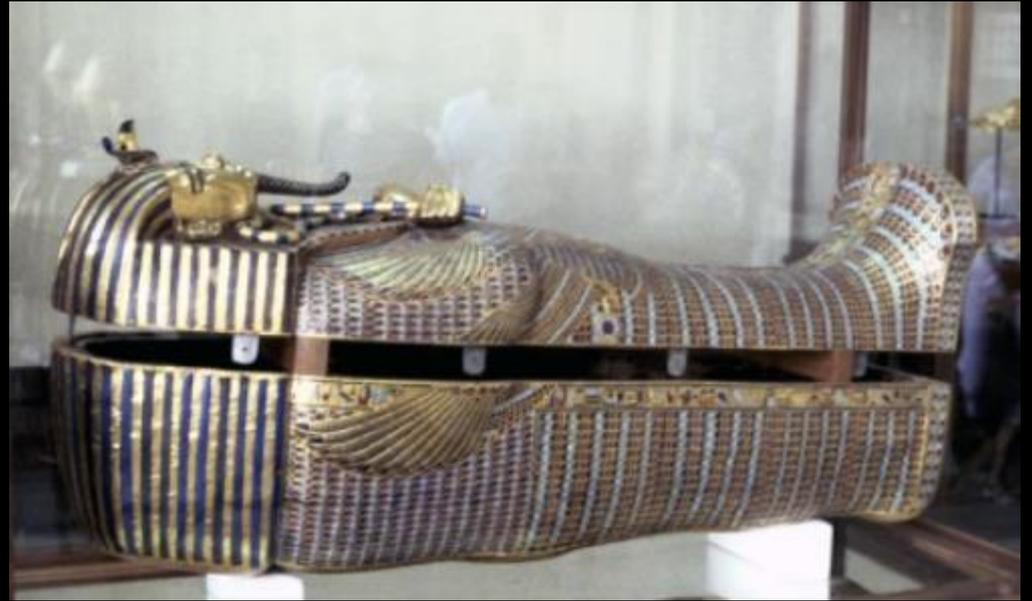
The Great Shrine  
17' x 11' wide  
9' tall



Within the Great Shrine were 4 other gilt wooden shrines which houses the coffin

# Tutankhamun in Life

- Cleft lip, clubfoot, malaria
- Died at 9 from malaria and necrosis of his leg
- Product of royal practice of sister-brother incest
- Only one set of grandparents



- *Nemes*
- Head cloth is merged seamlessly with his face
- Consists of gold inlaid with stripes of blue past, intended to resemble lapis lazuli
- False beard
- *Uraeus* – cobra representing Lower Egypt
- Vulture representing Upper Egypt
- Gold falcon head – symbol of Horus







Protective  
spells  
carved on  
back and  
shoulders







Gold inlaid with semi-precious stone including turquoise, carnelian, obsidian, and lapis lazuli



# The Coffin

- The three coffins his mummified body was placed in represent Osiris
- The innermost coffin resembles the mask, but his arms are crossed on his chest and hold more symbols of kingship: the scepter and flail
- Solid gold weighing 250 pounds





Gilded wood outer two coffins





Face mimics the mask, but does not have the blue stripes on the *nemes*; instead it is solid gold



The scepter and flail, traditional symbols of the king



Body protected by the Vulture and  
Uraeus of Upper and Lower Egypt

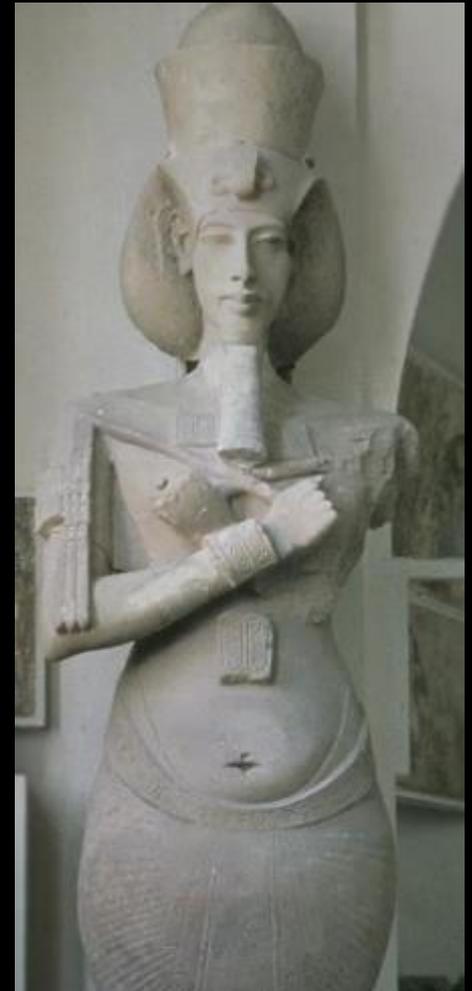


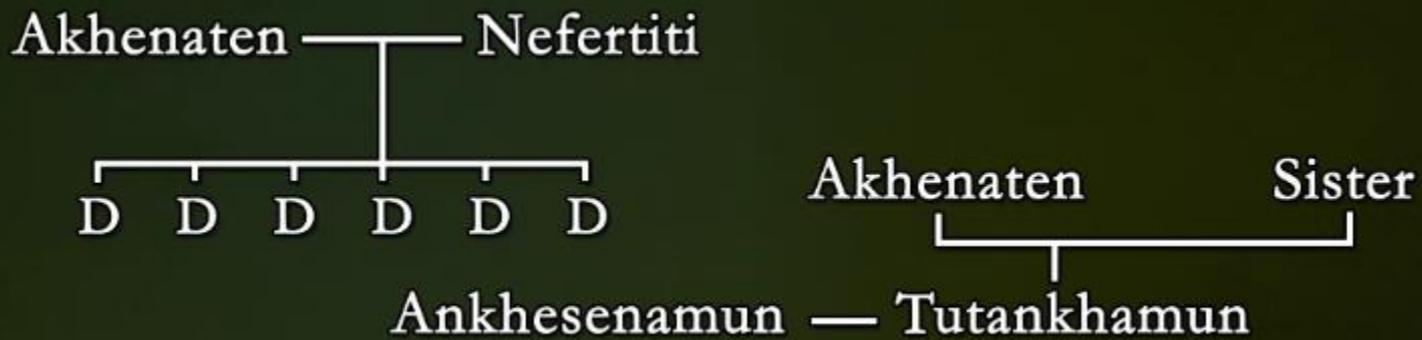




Nefertiti depicted smiting an enemy – this was a typical male depiction

Akhenaten wanted to have both the characteristics of male and female in order to stress his importance as the center of the new religion of Atenism





What the DNA tells us:

- King Tutankhamun is the son of Akhenaten and his full sister
- King Tutankhamun married Ankhnesenamun, one of the daughters of Akhenaten (his father) and Nefertiti (his father's primary wife)
- King Tutankhamun was buried with the fetuses of two of his and his sister/wife's children



*Mediterranean  
Sea*

*Euphrates  
Tigris*

Memphis ●

*Nile*

Akhetaten ●

Thebes ●

*Red  
Sea*

**DYNASTY 18**



Golden throne of  
King  
Tutankhamun





Depicts Tutankhamun and his sister/wife  
Ankhesenamun in the Amarna style



Another element of the Amarna style is the depiction of Aten as the sun disk, and its rays ending in hands and ankhs, blessing the two royals



The whole scene takes place in a pavilion, which acts as a frame, containing the image



Chest found in tomb

- Order v. chaos
- protector
- Rosettes
- Hieratic scale





A chariot was also found in the tomb



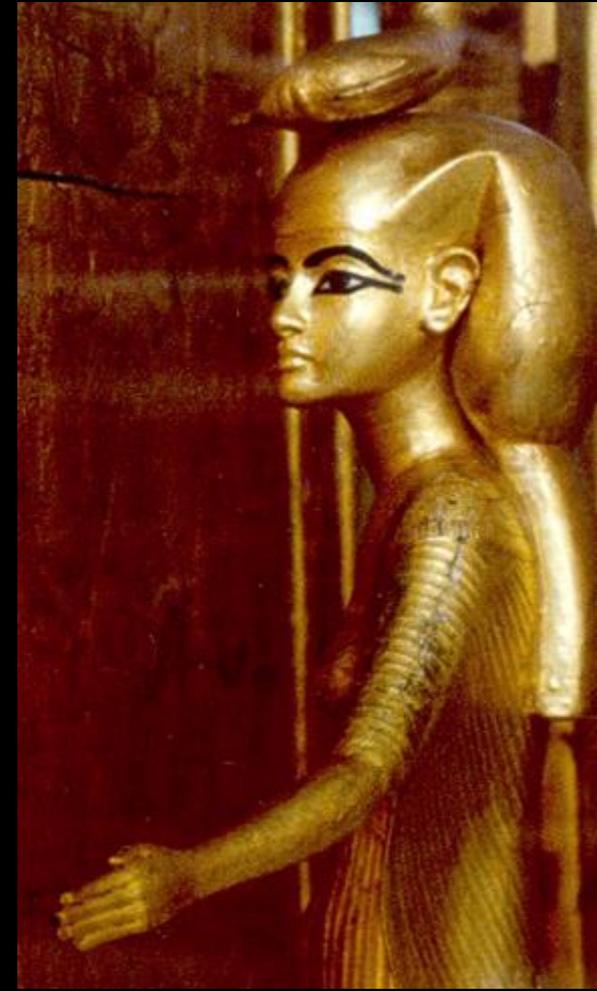
Alabaster canopic jars that held the organs of the mummified Tutankhamun



Notice the uniformity of the depiction of Tutankhamun



The canopic chest was placed in this shrine, which was watched over by 4 goddesses, such as this one on the right





Other objects  
found in the  
tomb



Black leopard seems to be conducting Tutankhamun into the underworld



Anubis, the jackal-headed god who guides the deceased through the mummification process, then on to the afterlife

# Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Commemoration



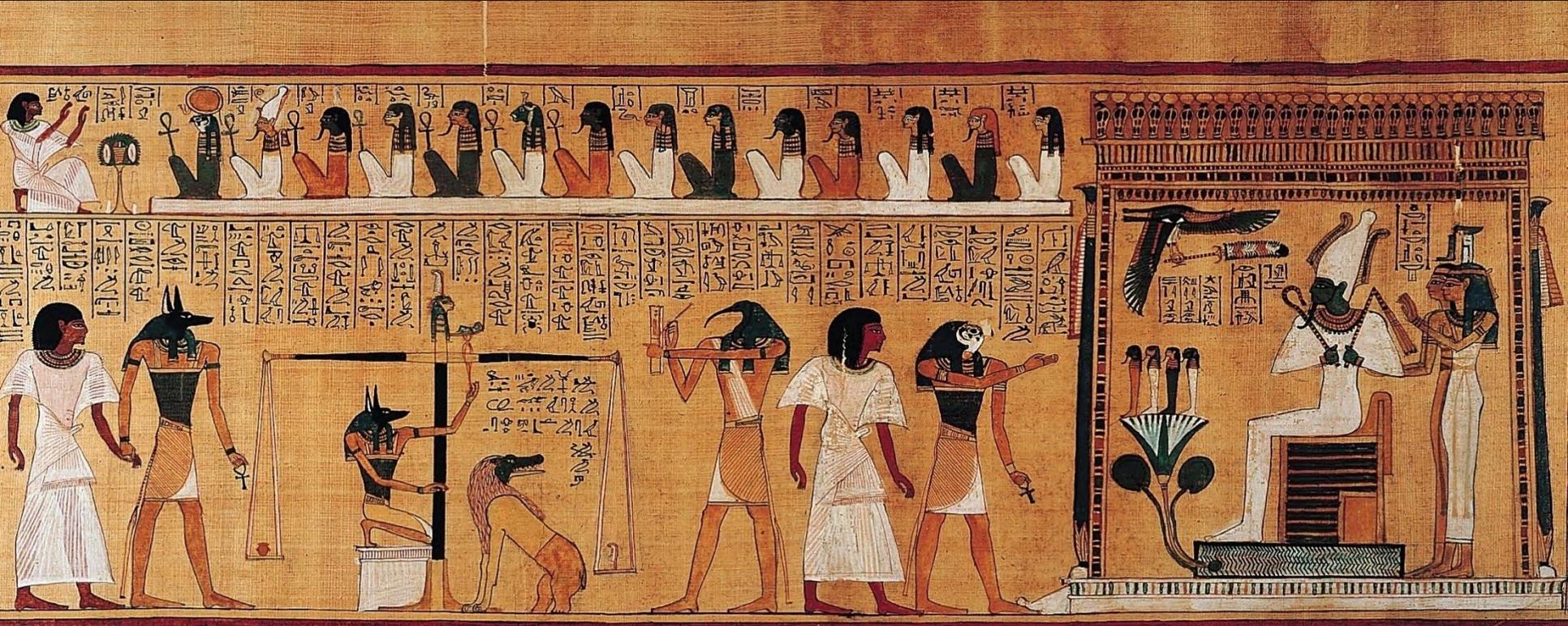
Sarcophagus of the Spouses



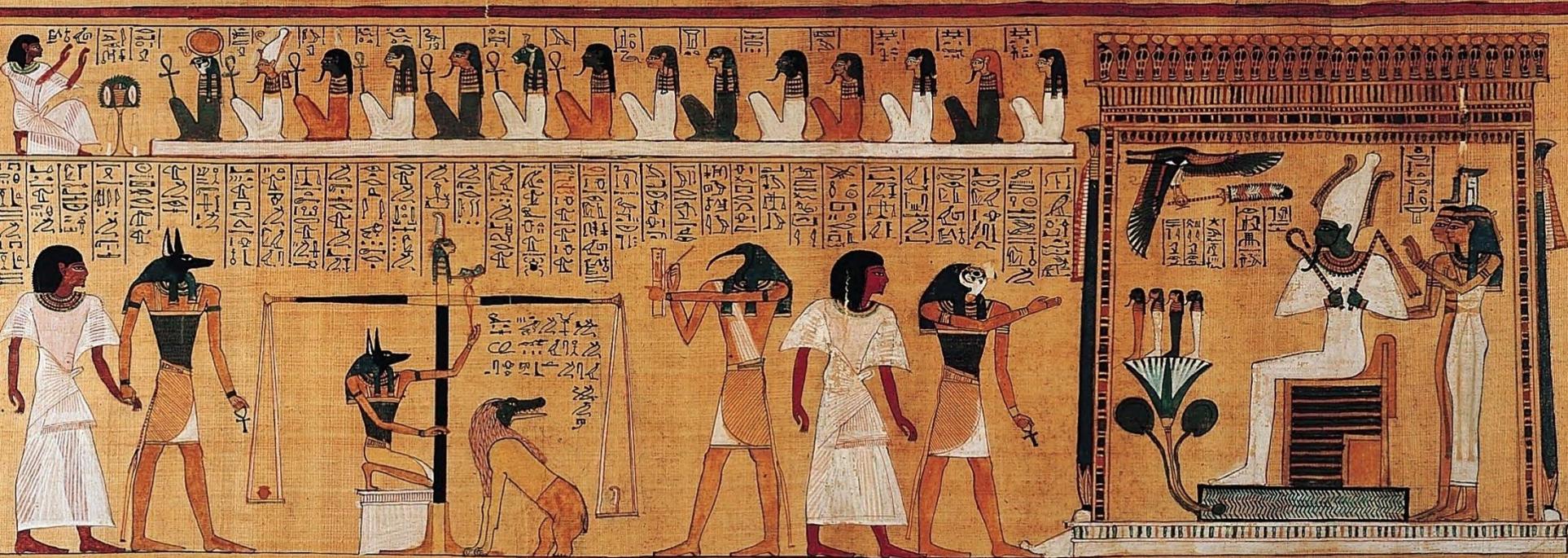
Moai



Ndop

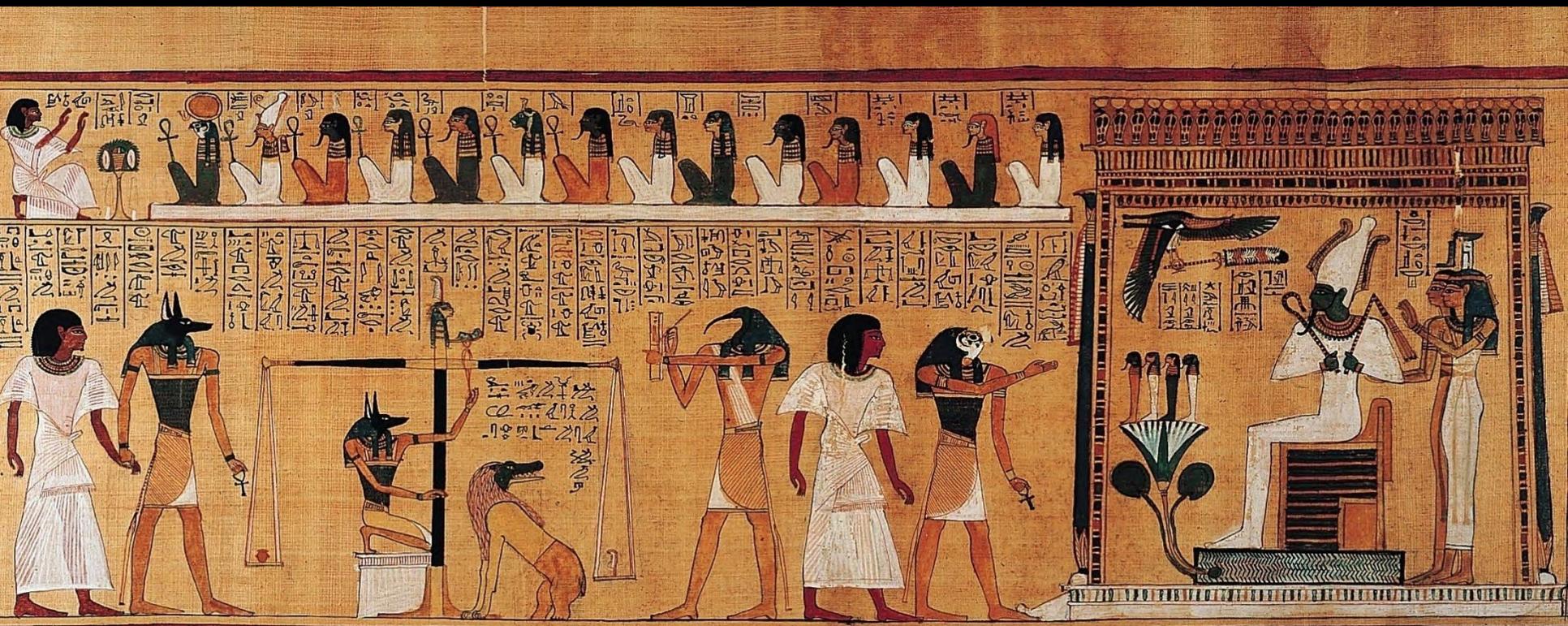


**#24**  
**Last Judgment of Hu- Nefer, from his tomb**  
**(page from the Book of the Dead)**  
New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty  
c. 1275 BCE  
Painted papyrus scroll



- Illustration from the Book of the Dead, an Egyptian book of spells and charms
- The god of embalming, Anubis, has a jackal's head. He leads the deceased into a hall where his soul is being weighed against a feather. If the sins weigh more than the feather, he will be condemned
- The hippo/lion figure, Ammit, will eat his soul

- The god Thoth has the head of a bird; he is the stenographer writing down these events in the hieroglyphics that he invented
- Osiris, god of the underworld, appears enthroned on the right to subject the deceased to a day of judgment

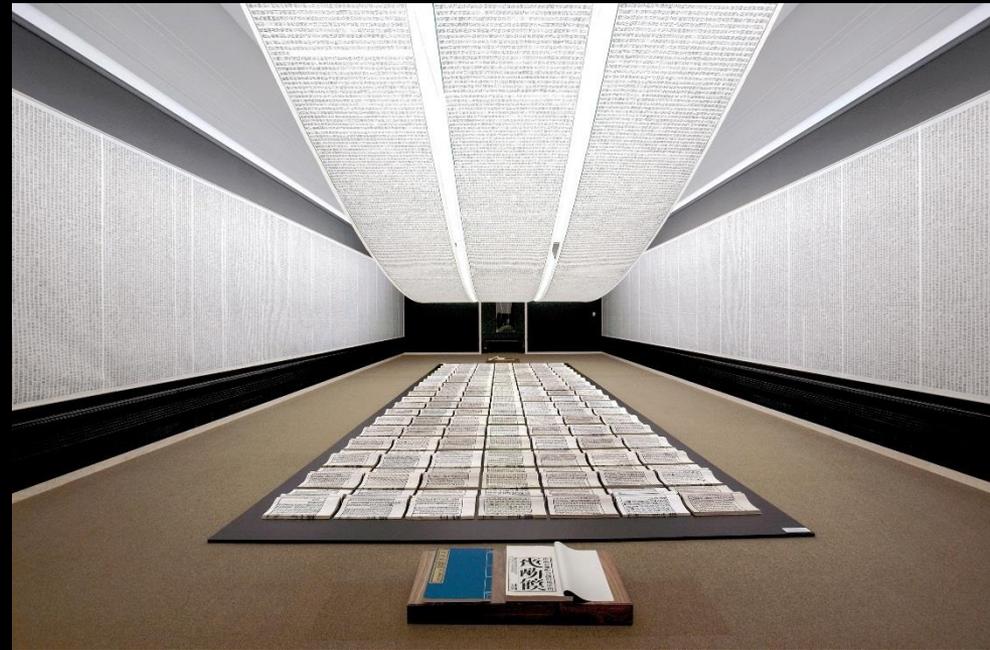


# Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Scrolls

*Bayeux Tapestry*



*Night Attack on the Sanjo Palace*



*Bing, A Book from the Sky*