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PETRIE'S "ARTS AND CRAFTS OF ANCIENT EGYPT"

The World of Art Series. Arts and Crafts of Ancient Egypt.

By W. M. FLINDERS PETRIE, D. C. L., F. R. S., etc., Chicago :
A. C. McCLURG & Co.; Edinburgh: T. N. FOULIS, 1910. pp.
xvi + 158. 148 illustrations.

THE distinguished Egyptologist, Professor Petrie, has prepared for this series a handbook to aid in the understanding of Egyptian art. He lays down the rule that to understand any art we must grasp its conditions and its contrasts. The essential conditions in Egypt are an overwhelming sunshine and its strongest contrasts are between the desert and the prolific verdure of the narrow plain. The brilliancy of light led to adopting an architecture of blank walls without windows, and the results of this system were that the walls were dominated by the scenes that were carved upon them. While the Egyptians were familiar with the arch and used it in brick construction on a large scale, they never employed it on stone buildings.

They built for endurance and worked the hardest rocks, and their structures are characterized by strength, permanence, majesty, harmony tempered with sympathy and kindliness.

In Egyptian art we have to deal with seven revolutions of civilizations and thousands of years. The prehistoric work (8000 to 5500 B. C.) shows more mechanical than artistic ability. This earlier prehistoric civilization was probably connected with Libya and was superseded by a race which came from the East coæval with the first dynasty about 5500 B. C. and gives evidence of a new spirit. The art is no longer clumsy and spiritless but presents vigorous forms full of life and character.

The pyramid ages (4700 to 4000 B. C.) brought in fresh ideals. The chieftainship had expanded into a kingdom. The early pyramid kings created a social organism, massive and strong, which expressed itself in gigantic pyramids to this day unsurpassed in bulk and accuracy of workmanship. Many royal tombs were sculptured, which constitute a larger treasure of artistic work than remains of any other period of the world's history.

From the sixth to the eleventh dynasty was a period of degeneration, and the monuments show coarseness. At the close of the eleventh dynasty a revival took place, its characteristic being the use of very low relief with faint but clear outlines.

The eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties are the best known ages of the art because of the great quantity of remains at Thebes accessible to travelers and tourists.

Statuary began at an early period probably at the second stage of the prehistoric age. Ivory, limestone, slate, pottery, stick, and paste are the materials used. The earliest dynastic age shows spirited drawings of animals, and just before the first dynasty there are many fine figures of men and women in ivory. To the third dynasty belongs the well known Sheik-el-Beled, one of the best known of the small Egyptian sculptures. The statue of Khafra carved in diorite is one of the grandest works in Egypt. Gradually the work became less conventional and more naturalistic, a movement which reached its culmination under Akhenaten which period showed a distinct revolution probably stimulated by the influence of the contemporary art of Crete and Greece. With the Ramessides an age of decadence set in.

From the point of view of naturalistic art the reliefs are greatly inferior to the statuary. Highly conventional in the eleventh dynasty, there begins a new school showing better figure work and more action. The eighteenth dynasty exhibited another revival of the art which continued development until the twenty-sixth dynasty when there set in a deliberate imitation of the work of the Old Kingdom.

Painting was undoubtedly the earliest art of Egypt, but, being more perishable than sculpture, many of its periods are without

remains. As far as we know, the great age of painting was the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties when the painting of scenes in tombs became very common. In outline drawing, too, the Egyptians had great facility.

Egyptian architecture has never as yet been systematically studied. The earliest construction was of bricks or of palm sticks interwoven. Another form of construction was with papyrus stems, the stems being tied above and below to hold them. The row of heads thus created was copied as an ornament along the tops of walls and was continued in use down to the latest times. The outer form of a temple was always a blank wall on all sides. Originally the granite temples had massive pillars which gave place to more ornamental forms, the principal kind being the palm and lotus and later the papyrus.

The labor of stone working was never shirked. Limestone and soft sand stone were commonly used, but red granite, basalt, alabaster, and diorite were also worked. The quarrying and transportation of the great stones and obelisks has excited the admiration of all ages and the method of raising such stones is partly explained to us by extant reliefs.

Although the supply of gold is probably now exhausted in Mediterranean lands, it was found and used for jewelry in the earliest times and was set in beautiful forms with precious stones. We find bracelets, gold seals, chains, pectoral ornaments, crowns, daggers, earrings, in fact every form of gold jewelry which the modern world knows, and occasionally gold statuettes and silver bowls.

But metals were used for other than ornamental work. Copper was worked from the beginning of prehistoric civilization, and we find pins, chisels, adzes, harpoons, needles, and larger tools at the close of the prehistoric age. All of this copper was shaped by hammering. Later, copper ewers and basins were made. Bronze was found as far back as the third dynasty, but it only came regularly into use in the eighteenth dynasty, 1600 B. C. The source of the tin is unknown. It is probable that it was not from Cornwall and that there were other sources which have been exhausted as in the case of the gold deposits. Lead was worked

in prehistoric times in the form of small figures and other objects and was probably brought from Syria. Antimony was very rare and continues so until about 800 B. C.

Glazed ware begins far back in the prehistoric ages, thousands of years before any examples of glass are known. In spite of statements to the contrary, blown glass is unknown in Egypt before Roman times, the earliest working of any glass materials being about 600 B. C.

Pottery is common from the prehistoric age to the later times, and thousands of forms are known.

The elephant was probably still abundant in southern Egypt in prehistoric times and ivory was much used. Wood was much more common in Egypt than now. The early royal tombs make a large use of wood and beautiful pieces of furniture, chairs, caskets, and beds in wood, have been found. Plaster was constantly used in masonry to fill joints and to level up hollows. It was also used for casting in molds and for making molds. While leather was undoubtedly the earliest form of clothing, linen cloth goes back to prehistoric times and is frequently found wrapped around bodies. Looms were known and on them beautiful tapestries were woven in red, green, blue, brown, and gray.

We have sketched in the briefest outline a work which is in itself an outline, but which indicates the truth of the author's statement that scholars would be amply repaid if they would devote themselves to the collection of materials of the art and technical work of ancient Egypt. A careful study based upon such collections would yield adequate results and would be of the highest importance for the history of art and industry in the other countries of the Mediterranean and the West which were at so early a period and for so long a time associated with Egypt.