

Stele of Nectanebo

Anne Austin: I'm Anne Austin, and I'm a professor of anthropology and archaeology at the University of Missouri in Saint Louis.

This stele is remarkably preserved. If you look at the hieroglyphs, you can see incredible detail in each one, and it doesn't look like they're broken, it doesn't look like they've faded. And we think the reason for that is because they were intentionally preserved. There was clay put on the side of this stele, and then it was buried.

This is incredibly important for this exhibit because this stele is the one that told the archaeologists that the city of Thonis and the city of Heracleion are the same. And the reason they know that is because the very last column, the one on the far left, has the name of Thonis in the upper left hand corner. So if you look in that corner you should see a couple hieroglyphs that look like a circle with an "X" in between them. That hieroglyph means "town," and around those are other hieroglyphs making the sounds of Thonis, to tell us that we're looking at a stele erected in the city of Thonis and this was found in the excavations of Heracleion.

The way you know what way to read hieroglyphs, is you look in to the faces of the animals. So in this case you are going to be reading the hieroglyphs from the right side to the left.

This stele belongs to the pharaoh Nectanebo I, and we know that because we have his name in cartouches written around the stele. A cartouche is a circle that captures the king's name with a line underneath it. It actually comes from an old French word for bullet.

So at the top of this stele we have Nectanebo the pharaoh giving offerings to the goddess Neith. She's one of the creator gods in Egypt, and she was affiliated with war and hunting. The text below it describes something that's much more mundane – it's a taxation text. It tells us that the king is enacting a tax to rebuild Egyptian temples after the Persian occupation of Egypt which led to the desecration of many of the Egyptian temples.

What's remarkable about this though, is that we've found another copy of this exact same text at a similar site 40 miles southeast of Heracleion, called Naucratis. And both of these texts are the same, but you see they each have the city mentioned in the text. So these kinds of stele would have been erected in various important Egyptian towns to advertise the fact that there is going to be a change in taxation for the Egyptian people, and then to tell them what that's going to lead to – what the king is planning on doing with those funds.

Eric Bruce: I'm Eric Bruce, Head of Visitor Experience here at Mia. At the end of each stop, I'll let you know where to find the next object on the audio guide. There are one or two stops per gallery.

But there's no rush, and I hope you take the time to explore the many wonderful objects in each gallery before moving on to the next audio stop.

As you enter the next gallery press 2 to hear from Kaywin Feldman, the Nivin and Duncan MacMillan, Director and President of Mia.

Welcome

Kaywin Feldman: Hello. I'm Kaywin Feldman, the Nivin and Duncan MacMillan, Director and President of the Minneapolis Institute of Art. And I'm delighted to welcome you to *Egypt's Sunken Cities*, presented by US Bank.

Many of the objects you are about to see were lost for more than 1,200 years under the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. In 1996, marine archaeologists initiated a search for two cities, whose histories were only known through ancient accounts.

The underwater research team, led by director of excavation and underwater archaeologist Franck Goddio, has since discovered a variety of incredible objects from these underwater excavations and confirmed the two cities' names: Thonis-Heracleion and Canopus. In this exhibition you will find exceptionally preserved artifacts, which offer us a better understanding of life in Egypt in the first millennium.

Along the way, you will hear from Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, co-curator of this exhibition and curator of African Art at Mia, as well as Anne Austin, Assistant Professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, and underwater archaeologist Franck Goddio. Thank you for visiting Mia and *Egypt's Sunken Cities*. I hope that you have a wonderful time with us today.

Eric Bruce: The next object on the tour is the large stone shrine. Press 3 to hear about it.

Naos of Amun-Gereb

Franck Goddio: Hi I'm Franck Goddio, I am the director of the excavation in Egypt, in the city of Alexandria and in the Bay of Aboukir.

You are here in front of the main monument of the city of Thonis-Heracleion. It's called a naos. A naos was a kind of a shrine, which was the heart of the temple. Inside that shrine was a statue of the main god of the temple. That shrine was closed by two doors. Only the priest of the temple and the pharaoh himself could open those two doors in order to see the god inside.

On the face of that monument, there are inscriptions and those inscriptions told us that we were in the temple of Amun-Gereb, and we knew from ancient texts that the temple was located in the city of Heracleion. We discovered that monument the very first week of the excavation, after our discovery of the city. And one week after the start of the work, we knew for sure that we were in the city of Heracleion.

This shrine contains the statue of the main god of the temple, Amun-Gereb. Amun was one of the greatest gods of the Egyptian pantheon. He was the one who gave the title of legitimacy to the new pharaoh. All new pharaohs of that period had to come to that city of Heracleion, go inside the temple, open the two doors of that monument, which is in front of you, and at that time, the god was passing to him the title of his power as universal king. He was then pharaoh of Egypt.

When we found underwater that monument, it was totally buried under the sediment. We first cleaned it and before raising it, we had to decide with the Egyptian [officials], if it was worth raising or not. And when cleaning it, one of the divers could see some inscription on the front face. Underwater, we took some silicone prints of those inscriptions and we could read them above. And we saw that we were in

the presence of the main shrine of the temple of Amun-Gereb, and of course it's a very important historical monument. We raised, we restored it, and here it is today.

Eric Bruce: Your next stop is in the next room. Look for two sculptures of seated figures. Press 4 to hear about these sculptures of Isis and Osiris.

Isis and Osiris

Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers: My name is Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, and I am the curator of African Art and the Head of the Arts of Africa and the Americas here at Mia.

We stand in front of two beautiful statues in polished greywacke, which is a kind of dark sandstone, of Isis and Osiris, two very important gods in the Egyptian pantheon, and we will encounter them much more in the subsequent galleries. These two statues date from the 6th century BCE, so they are pre-Ptolemaic, pre-Greek. They were not found in the delta of the Nile. They were found in a tomb of a court official in central Egypt.

We see Isis wearing a sheath dress that shows her belly button. And she has a crown that is made of a solar disc between two cow horns. And so the solar disc is kind of her celestial aspect, whereas the cow horns emphasize her nourishing character. She is often called the mother of humanity. And in her right hand she holds an *ankh*, which is an Egyptian symbol for the origin of life. And that symbol, that same symbol, is also visible on the Osiris stele behind you in this gallery.

Next to Isis is Osiris, her husband, and he's wrapped in fine cloth, including his feet, you don't see his toes. That's because in the mythology of Ancient Egypt he was the first mummy. And he wears a feathered crown, in front of which is a rearing cobra. All these are symbols of divine authority, and such emblems of power were also visible on the giant statue, the colossus, of the Pharaoh, that you saw as you walked into the museum, in the lobby on the first floor.

Now, Egyptian gods were often multitaskers, and so Isis is at the same time the protectress of humanity, a feeding mother, a loving wife who defeated death, and has many other positive aspects. And Osiris is the bringer of civilization, he introduced agriculture, laws, and even religion to the Egyptians. He's the ruler of the afterlife and the judge of the dead. And then later on he became also the god of wine drinking. Both statues have inscriptions around the bases in hieroglyphs, and these are invocations. So, these statues were used to invoke the gods, and the text on the Isis statue mentions, "the one great in magic." And she was indeed a magician who was able to resuscitate her husband who had been killed. And on the Osiris statue one can read, "he who presides in the west," and the west was the direction where the sun sets and is also the reign of the dead.

Eric Bruce: Isis and Osiris' son, Horus, is on a stele nearby. Look for a stone tablet with a curved top and a basin underneath. Press 5 to hear about that object.

Horus Stele

Anne Austin: This stele is one of my favorite pieces in this exhibit because it's an opportunity to see how some of these beautiful objects were actually used. The stele itself shows the child god Horus, standing on two crocodiles, holding some of the most dangerous kinds of animals in Egypt, like scorpions. And it references a really important point in the mythology of Horus. It talks about the time when Horus, and his mother Isis, were hiding in the Egyptian marshes from his uncle Seth who had murdered Osiris.

Horus is in a place that is extremely dangerous. He's surrounded by poisonous snakes, crocodiles, hippos; the kinds of animals that could easily kill a young boy. And in fact he does get poisoned while he's in the marshes, and his mother Isis reaches out to the god Thoth to get magic to heal him.

So this piece is an opportunity for other people to be healed. How it would have worked is that the Egyptians would have poured water over top of the piece. And as the water trickled down over Horus' body, it gained that magical power to cure, just as Horus was cured.

And luckily we also have the basin. So if you look at the basin underneath, you can see where it was used. You can see where water was pooled. You can see that they had to line it over and over again because it had been used so much. People would have taken water from this Basin and drunk it or applied it to wounds in order for them to be healed. Just like Horus was healed by Thoth.

At the bottom of the piece you can see an inscription that looks very different from any of the texts that are in this exhibit. It's a Phoenician inscription that tells us that this base was dedicated by a man named Paal-Astarte, son of Chemrebi. Now this piece dates to around 300 BCE which is a time when Egypt is extremely international. Egypt had recently been conquered by the Persians. The Greeks are also in Egypt. We're on the delta – a place that's right on the Mediterranean. Egyptians are interacting with people all over the Mediterranean, and people are sharing their religions, sharing their beliefs. And we see that very clearly with Horus and Isis in particular.

The back of this piece has incredibly detailed hieroglyphs. They're made in sunken relief, with incisions and inscriptions made into each hieroglyph, so that you can see the amount of detail and work that was done on this greywacke piece. Greywacke is an incredibly hard stone, so it preserves these very well.

This inscription starts at the upper right hand corner at the bottom of the curve. And if we read into the faces of birds, which is how you can tell which way to read in hieroglyphs, then you know that you're reading from the right to the left. And it starts saying *inek Djehuty* (I am Thoth.) It's a reference to the god Thoth, the magician, the healer. He was one of the primary gods associated with medicine. And it would have been something spoken by a magician, by a healer, by a medical practitioner in Egypt. And as they spoke the words on the back of the Stele, somebody in front of it might have been using the waters to heal. So the healer would read this text in the back as somebody is being healed through these curative waters associated with Horus.

Eric Bruce: Stop 6 is in the next room. Look for a small coffin-shaped object with a doll-sized figure inside.

Corn Mummy

Anne Austin: This corn mummy shows the moment where Osiris is about to conceive with Isis, and that's the moment that he himself is reborn, just as he impregnates his wife. This was something that was incredibly important to the Egyptians because it not only symbolized what happened between the gods, but also what will happen in their agricultural cycle. They used these corn mummies to represent how Osiris' rebirth could also enable an agricultural rebirth. And they made them out of grains, watered them, and carefully ensured that plants could grow out of the body of Osiris. So just as the soil represents death, so too do the grains and their growth represent rebirth and life.

Worshiping Osiris was incredibly important to making sure that the agricultural cycle could happen again and again. Osiris died and was reborn, just like every winter your plants can die, but every spring they too can be reborn. And we see that symbolized in this corn mummy, because it's showing him as dead but the grains within him will grow out, and they will bring life back. And that's something that you can do to ensure you have a strong agricultural cycle year after year.

Eric Bruce: In the next gallery is a large carved stone tomb with Osiris several birds on top. Press 7 to hear about it.

Tomb of Osiris

Anne Austin: This cult statue of Osiris is a fantastic piece, and exceptional because it's rare that such a beautiful piece gets an opportunity to leave Egypt. And I doubt that this piece will go on exhibit across the world ever again. Now this statue depicts a key episode in the myth of the god Osiris. At this point, Osiris had been killed by his brother Seth, and Seth spread his body in pieces all throughout Egypt. Osiris' wife Isis flew as a bird to find his parts and reconstruct him. Here he lies mummified on a table. His body is wrapped. He's dead. And yet, we see a bird landing in the center of Osiris' mummy. This bird is Isis and it's depicting the moment of her divine conception with Horus. And in this moment where Osiris and Isis conceive Horus, that creative power of making a new life also rebirths Osiris himself. And what's beautiful about this piece is that Isis is not only shown in the statue as a bird in the center of the piece, but also with her sister Nephthys on either end of Osiris, protecting and enshrouding him. By showing her in both of these places, it's showing what's happened after that moment of conception. After Horus is conceived, after Osiris is reborn. And if you look around the exhibit, you'll see many other examples of how the Egyptians played with this moment of death and rebirth.

There are a variety of poses that Osiris is placed in to show that he is being reborn. They're very careful to show not only that he has died, but also that there is this moment where he can conceive Horus, where he is reborn. So that they ensure that that has happened and will continue to happen in the future. Here Osiris is not only representing being reborn in the afterlife, but also the Egyptian agricultural cycle which relied on the Nile being flooded every year and the crops re-growing in an annual cycle.

We think this dates to the Middle Kingdom, but we're not entirely sure. If you walk around the piece, you probably notice that the cartouches have been carefully chiseled out. So the name of the king who dedicated this piece is missing. We can't reconstruct it. It was found in the tomb of Djer, one of the earliest Egyptian pharaohs. Djer ruled Egypt over 1500 years before the Middle Kingdom. So at this point, his tomb was being revered as the tomb of Osiris, the king of the gods; the first king of Egypt. It's amazing to see how the archaeology of Egypt really must have started during the pharaonic period itself. The fact that over that period of time (1500 years) this individual, this real king had turned into a god suggests that there was a disconnect between when he was originally buried and when this statue was made.

Eric Bruce: As you walk to the next room, you'll see a sculpture of a standing hippopotamus. This is the goddess Tawaret. Press 8 to hear about her.

Tawaret

Anne Austin: This is a statue of the goddess Tawaret, it means “The Great One.” And Tawaret was a protector goddess. One way we know that is by the symbols underneath each of her paws. So if you go to either side of the statue, you’ll see a symbol underneath her claws that looks like a circle of cloth that’s been folded onto itself and tied together. That hieroglyph means “to protect” – *za*. And Tawaret above everything was a protector goddess. Her body is made in the shape of a hippo, with the teeth of a crocodile, and the claws of a lion. She was composed of some of the fiercest most dangerous animals that the Egyptians encountered, but also animals that were fierce mothers, and Tawaret is a protector of children – protects the children of people who pray to her.

Eric Bruce: Tawaret protected Horus when he was young. Horus is Isis and Osiris’ son, and after Horus was born, Isis hid Horus in the Nile Delta to protect him from his jealous uncle Seth, who had killed Osiris.

Anne Austin: If we look at Tawaret’s body we can see signs of motherhood. She has this large stomach that almost looks like she’s pregnant. She has pendulant breasts as if she’s been breastfeeding. Tawaret would have been a household goddess and was revered in houses across Egypt. You can imagine small statues of Tawaret made of less precious materials, or maybe even something more common like ceramic, in the front of many Egyptian homes. They would have kept her in their homes as a way to protect children. The reason Tawaret is composed of some of the fiercest animals in Egypt was that she was able to protect children from all of the different kinds of dangers that they might face – real and invisible like demons or other gods. This piece is made out of greywacke, an incredibly hard stone, and it would have been more likely found in a ritual setting. It was donated by an Egyptian king, Psamtik, in order to protect his own daughter, Nitocris.

Eric Bruce: The next room features many objects related to celebrations of the Mysteries of Osiris. Press 9 to hear about processions as you look at the many ritual objects in the center cases.

Mysteries of Osiris – JLK

Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers: We’re here at the heart of the Osirian Mysteries, one of the oldest rituals in ancient Egypt, which every year reenacted and celebrated the death and resurrection of Osiris. Some aspects of the ritual were highly secret, like the preparation by priests of the effigies of Osiris: Osiris Vegetans and Osiris Sokaris, which you encountered in a previous gallery. Other aspects of the Osirian Mystery were very public ceremonies, like the processions of boats on the canals between Thonis-Heracleion and Canopus.

The large sunken boat shown on the wall may well have been used in these ceremonies that carried effigies of Osiris, accompanied by statues of other gods, from the Amun-Gereb temple in Thonis-Heracleion to the Osiris temple in Canopus, some two miles apart.

Imagine people lining up along the banks, singing and making music, offering food and gifts to Osiris on dishes, throwing votive boats made of lead into the water. While the songs and music are lost forever, underwater archaeologists have excavated the ritual paraphernalia for everybody to marvel at and enjoy today. Those are the objects you see in the cases around you.

Eric Bruce: Press 10 to hear about skin color and identity in ancient Egypt, and how it differs from current U.S. constructs of race.

Skin Color and Identity in Ancient Egypt

Anne Austin: So many people have asked me do I think the ancient Egyptians were White or Black. And one of the first things I tell them is my experiences with modern Egyptians. Now if I flew to Egypt, and talked to my friends that live there and asked them, “Do you think you’re Black or White?” they would laugh at me. They wouldn’t know how to respond. They wouldn’t identify as either. And in fact, the ancient Egyptians we see have a similar response. They show themselves and they show their neighbors. They show their neighbors to the south and they show their neighbors to the east. And when they show them, they often show that Egyptian skin color sits somewhere in between. They have people to the south of them that have darker skin, and people to the east of them that have lighter skin.

Ancient Egyptians actually used skin color to tell us about completely different things. For instance, in the Old Kingdom the Egyptians showed women as being yellow-skinned and men as being red-skinned to show us that women spent more time inside the house and men spent more time outside of the house. Our definitions of Black and white are not only different between ancient Egypt and today, but also between the United States and modern Egypt.

Now, do I think ancient Egypt has been white-washed? Yes, 100%. Let’s take a recent example. Recently there was a forensic reconstruction of Nefertiti. Now this is a woman who’s incredibly famous, and famous because we have a life-like, realistic bust depicting what she looked like. And yet, if you look at this reconstruction, her skin color is much lighter than the skin color on the bust. So I think there has been a huge problem with ancient Egyptians being shown as if they’re European, as if they’re northern European. As if they’re white. And the ancient Egyptians certainly didn’t depict themselves as if they looked like Europeans.

If you look at who’s often cast to be kings, queens, or gods in Egypt, you usually see people who are seen as European. And you rarely see people who come from the Middle East or from Africa, which would be the most appropriate places to expect. That’s where Egypt sits. It sits at the cornerstone between sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. And if you look at modern Egyptian populations that’s really what they look like.

Yeah, an Egyptian today wouldn’t call themselves White or Black. They would call themselves Egyptian. And the ancient Egyptians felt the same way.

Eric Bruce: You can’t miss the life-sized bull sculpture in the next gallery. Press 11 to hear about it.

Apis Bull

Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers: Here we have a life-sized bull, and it’s the Apis Bull – a royal deified bull. Worship of a divine bull who acted as an intermediary between humans and other deities, started very early in Ancient Egyptian history – probably around 2500 BCE. And the Apis Bull then became identified with Osiris, and with the Pharaohs. It’s an animal that displays courage and strength, great fertility, and fighting spirit: all characteristics that a king was supposed to have.

And this statue of Apis was found in Alexandria and it dates from around 130 CE. It was commissioned by the Roman Emperor Hadrian in Egypt. It illustrates the incredible vitality of ancient Egyptian beliefs and rituals that were adopted and appropriated by new rulers. The Greeks, with Alexander the Great and his successors, the Ptolemaic Kings, conquered and colonized Egypt, giving it its current name of

Aigytos, and replacing the original name Kemet or Kumat. But at the same time the Greeks, and later the Romans, took over the Egyptian deities and kept good relations with the Egyptian priesthood. So Alexander the Great offered valuable sacrifices to the Apis Bull in Memphis, the old capital of Egypt, thereby recognizing the power and authority of Egyptian gods. And his successor, Ptolemy I, brought the cult of Apis from Memphis to Alexandria, where this statue was found.

Eric Bruce: For the next stop, find the corner case in this gallery that has two wooden statues. It's stop 12.

Serapis and Osiris

Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers: In this case we have two wooden sculptures, and wood is relatively rare in Egyptian art. You have encountered mainly stone sculpture and metal so far – from gold to lead. And there was one piece in wood – the Osiris Vegetans, the Corn Mummy, in one of the previous galleries. Now wood is much more perishable than metal or ceramics or stone, that's why there's less of it that remains. And also in the first place wood was a rare material because of the desert climate of Egypt. So there was less wood available.

These two statues are separated by 200 years. The smaller figure, the standing one, is from the 4th century BCE, and the large seated figure is from the 2nd century BCE. The small one represents Osiris and he is in this rigid, mummy-like position. Whereas the larger statue next to it represents Serapis, and it dates from the Greek/Roman period and shows much more movement. The figure is wearing a draping tunic and has a curly beard and moustache, and his hair is all over the place. The difference in style between these statues illustrates the aesthetic change that took place in Egypt under Greek rule that this show highlights.

Both of these statues are made in sycamore wood, which was a holy tree for the Egyptians and was also known as the Tree of Life.

Osiris and Serapis are somewhat the same god. Serapis is a Greek invention – and a cocktail of Egyptian and Greek gods. He combines the Egyptian Ptah, one of the major father gods in ancient Egypt, and also Apis, which is often represented as a bull, and Osiris. And at the same time Serapis also integrates the supreme god of the Greeks, Zeus, as well as Hades (who's the god of the underworld) and Dionysus (the god of wine).

Under the Ptolemaic rulers, Serapis became the patron deity of Alexandria, which was the new capital of Egypt that had been founded by the Greeks. And he was venerated together with his wife Isis and their son, Horus the Child. In other words, he became increasingly identified with the Egyptian god, Osiris, hence their association within the same case.

Eric Bruce: In the next and final gallery, press 13 to hear about the three sculptures on the left as you enter.

Priest Holding an Osiris Canopus – F. Goddio

Franck Goddio: You are in front of the priest holding one of the main gods of Egypt, Osiris.

We found that statue on the rural sunken island of Antirrhodos in Alexandria, inside a temple devoted to Osiris. You can see a priest of Osiris holding Osiris in the form of a vase from where he is emerging. It is called the Osiris-Canopus. The priest cannot touch a god. Thus, he is holding the god through the linen of his tunic. On each side of the priest you can see two sphinxes. They were found exactly as you can see them here, on each side of the statue. The left sphinx is a likeness of Ptolemy XII, father of Cleopatra.

When we found the statues, we started first to clean them underwater, and when we raised them out of the water, we have to put them in some basins with fresh water for several months in order to extract all the salt. And then after we had to clean them very meticulously in order to take out all marine encrustations.

The god Osiris existed since the very beginning of Egyptian history in 4,000 BC. His presence was constant all over the exhibition. The cult of Osiris it lasted for centuries and centuries.

You are here at the end of the exhibition and I hope you have enjoyed it. Thank you very much and goodbye.

Eric Bruce: Thank you for visiting Mia and "Egypt's Sunken Cities." We hope you enjoyed the exhibition and look forward to seeing you again soon. "Egypt's Sunken Cities" was organized by the European Institute for Underwater Archaeology with the generous support of the Hilti Foundation and in collaboration with the Ministry of Antiquities of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

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