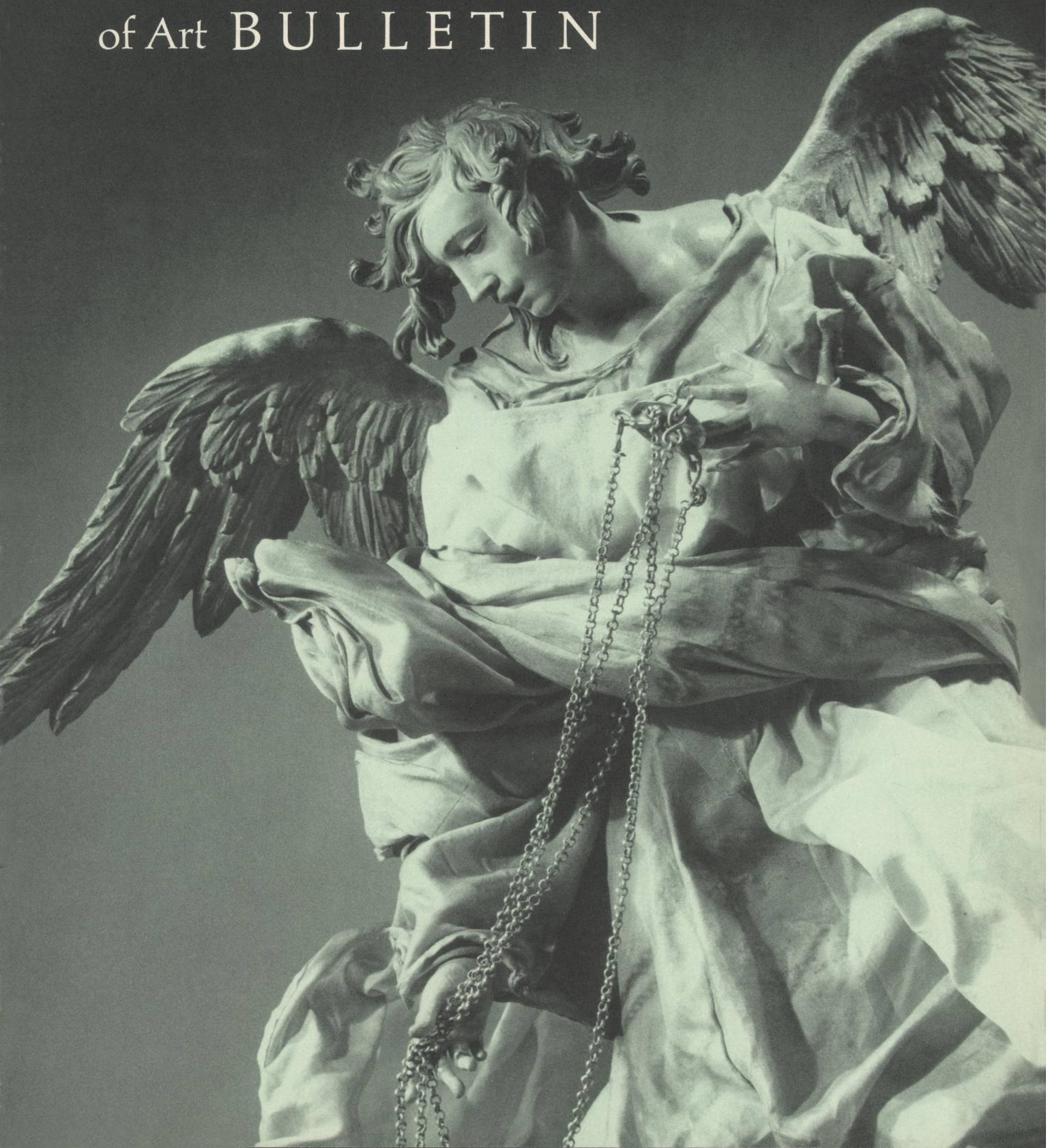


DECEMBER 1965

The Metropolitan Museum  
of Art BULLETIN









# Our Egyptian Furniture

NORA SCOTT *Associate Curator of Egyptian Art*

Egypt is undoubtedly the pleasantest antiquity-producing country in the world to excavate in, if for no other reason (and there are other reasons) than that the dry climate and soil preserve materials which have almost always disappeared in less favored lands.

One of the ancient materials found in Egypt, and seldom anywhere else, is wood. And if wooden objects are nevertheless comparatively rare it is because wood itself was a rare and valuable commodity. Ever since the earliest dynastic period the narrow strip of fertile land along the Nile has been reserved for crops, with here and there at the edge of the river or canal a clump of palms, “their heads in the sun and their feet in the water,” and here and there an acacia, tamarisk, sycamore fig, or willow. Rich noblemen might boast of the trees on their estates – one listed about four hundred and fifty, most of which must have been watered by hand. But on the whole what trees the Egyptians had were prized for their fruit or shade, and only a few produced usable wood. Of these the very hard acacia was the best, although it provided only small planks. Tamarisk and sycamore fig were the cheaper native woods. The fibrous trunk of the palm was useless for carpentry, although in ancient times (as today) it was split for roofing. Otherwise the use of wood in building was limited to such elements as doors and columns.

The wood most widely used for fine carpentry was cedar, which was not native but had to be imported from what is now Syria and Lebanon. Small pieces of cedar have been found among the contents of jars buried in the prehistoric period, about 4000 B.C. These must have been articles of trade, probably valued for their sweet smell and passed from hand to hand until they found an owner who could afford to take them with him to the next world.

It is not known exactly when cedar was first imported in quantity, but about 2600 B.C. Snefru, the first king of the IV Dynasty, “brought forty ships filled with cedar from Lebanon.” The leader of a later expedition wrote, “I went above the clouds to the forest preserve and brought away timbers a hundred feet long. When I brought them down from God’s Land to the plain the procession reached back to the forest preserve. I sailed on the Great Green [our “Blue Mediterranean”] with a favorable breeze, landing in Egypt.” Over eleven hundred years separate the two inscriptions, and it is easy to understand why only a few of the cedars of Lebanon remain today after thirty-five further centuries of deforestation.

Coniferous woods (pieces of cypress and pine have been found, like cedar, in pre-

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FRONTISPIECE: *Amenophis III enthroned. From Tomb 226, Thebes, XVIII Dynasty, about 1400 B.C. Facsimile painting of reconstructed fragments (no longer extant) by Norman and Nina de Garis Davies. Excavations of the Egyptian Expedition of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 15.5.1*

ON THE COVER: *Angel from a Neapolitan Christmas crib, detail of Figure 8, page 155*

historic burials) were not the only ones imported. We can imagine that the Egyptian was always wood-conscious, and that Egyptian travelers and traders were on the lookout for unusual varieties. Birch bark dating from the neolithic period has been found in the Fayyum and is thought to have originated in northern Persia. In the New Kingdom birch-bark decoration was often applied to bows and staves (examples are to be seen in our galleries). Another imported wood, box, an almost grainless, extremely tough hardwood, came from what is now Turkey. Ebony was brought from the south.

Although the Egyptians were importing wood at an early date, their climate was hot and dusty, and they were not interested in cluttering their homes with unnecessary furniture. What they did have, however, they invented; and their designs are still in use today, even when they have been modified for mass production in materials they did not know. Among the articles of furniture introduced by the Egyptians were stools, chairs, beds, tables, and boxes or chests of various sizes, the last more important in ancient times than today, as there were no cupboards or chests of drawers. Light furniture of reeds, rushes, and palm fronds often replaced wooden furniture, even in rich homes. Great wickerwork baskets and pottery crocks and jars big enough to introduce soldiers into enemy cities on occasion (a stratagem ascribed to a general of Tuthmosis III) were more normally used for storage.

Now let us consider some of the constructions employed by the Egyptian carpenter and the tools at his disposal. Since suitable wood was scarce and expensive, every scrap had to be utilized, and to the best advantage; and when metal tools, which made fine craftsmanship possible, became available at the beginning of the historic period, carpenters quickly developed an extraordinary skill in joinery. For instance, a royal coffin of about 2680 B.C. (the beginning of the III Dynasty) was made of plywood, the six layers arranged with the grain running in alternate directions for strength and to prevent warping. Each layer, only an eighth of an inch thick, was a patchwork of pieces carefully doweled together, since none was as long or as high as the finished coffin. A combination of miter and square joints strengthened by square stays was used at the corners. The outside of the coffin was carved in a reedlike ribbed pattern, originally covered with sheet gold.

In our own collection is a coffin of about the same time, its construction simpler but equally up to date (Figure 2). The boards forming the sides, ends, and floor are set into



1. Furniture leg, 1 Dynasty, 3100-2890 B.C. Ivory, height 6½ inches. Carnarvon Collection, gift of Edward S. Harkness, 26.7.1282

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grooves in the “two-by-fours” that form the frame, the corners being strengthened by wooden pegs. The lid is made, like the sides, by inserting boards – this time arched – into the grooved endpieces. This coffin is also interesting because, as the eternal home of the soul, it reproduces the form of the early northern Egyptian house with its curved roof resting on supporting bundles of bound reeds. Such reed-and-rush structures are still to be found in the marsh region of Iraq (Figure 3); they are probably also reflected in the ribbed decoration of the royal coffin described above.

Even older than these coffins are ivory legs from furniture of kings of the I Dynasty, of which the wooden parts have been lost; they illustrate the mortise-and-tenon joint (Figure 1), one of the earliest constructions and one that always remained a favorite. The miter joint, already mentioned, was another favorite. The furniture of Queen Hetep-heres of the early IV Dynasty shows mitering as well as dovetailing, and seven different types of miter joints have been identified in Tut-ankh-Amun’s furniture of the XVIII Dynasty. Other joints in use included the tongue-and-groove and butterfly.

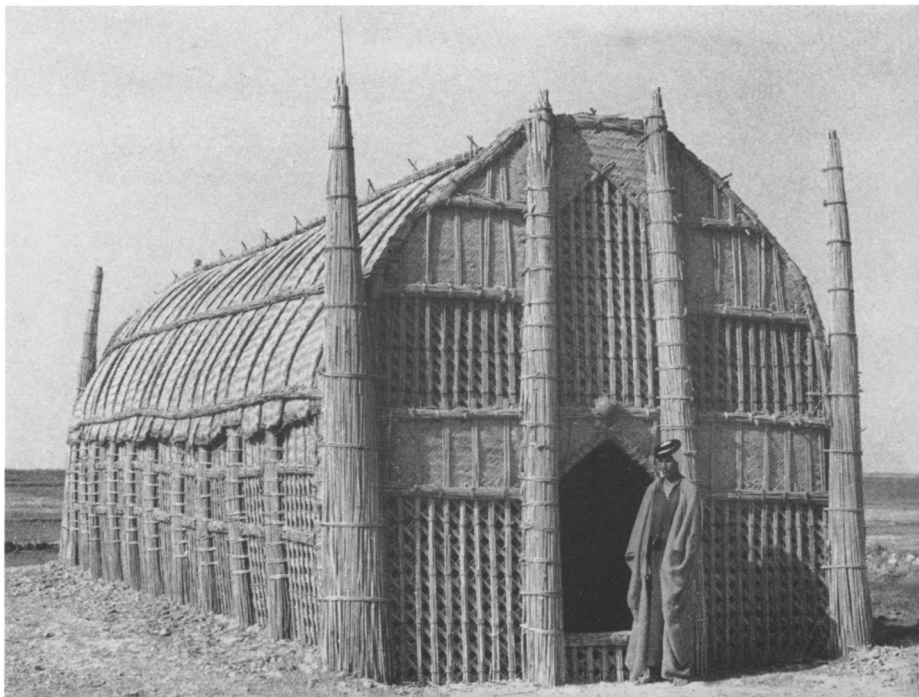
Furniture was often strengthened by angular or curved pieces of wood, which were perhaps grown into the proper shapes on purpose. Although copper nails were used to fasten wood and metal together as early as the I Dynasty, Tut-ankh-Amun’s carpenters were the first to use metal nails in woodwork. Four of these nails are in our collection, two of solid gold and two of silver with gold heads. The “nails” in the earlier furniture of Queen Hetep-heres are actually wooden pegs disguised with gold heads.

Inlaying with ivory and woods of different colors is known from the tomb of an official of the I Dynasty. Veneering of fine over less valuable wood was often practiced; thick veneer was pegged on, thinner glued. Our own most extensive example of veneering is again a coffin, this one of the XII Dynasty, made of cedar of a rather run-of-the-mill quality but covered with other cedar so fine that it was decided not to hide its beauty with the usual painted decoration.



2. Coffin, 11-111 Dynasty, about 2686 B.C. Tamarisk, height 23 inches. Gift of Egyptian Research Account, 12.187.54

3. A present-day mudhif, or resthouse, Iraq; made of bound and interwoven reeds and rushes. From *The Marsh Arabs*, by Wilfred Thesiger (London, 1964), pl. 94





The high standard of excellence maintained by Egyptian carpenters was due to patience, care, skill, and training – and the demands of a discriminating clientele – but not to elaborate equipment, for the tools remained simple. They consisted of saw, adze (Figure 11), axe, chisel, and reamer (mortising chisel) (Figure 5), all of whose copper (later bronze) blades were set in wooden handles. In addition there were squares (Figure 12), wooden mallets (Figure 4), bow drills with granite caps (Figure 8), sandstone rubbers (which did the work of our planes), and stone polishers. The use of the lathe has been suggested but is unlikely.

In an ancient model of the carpenters' shop on the estate of Meket-Re, the Chancellor and Great Steward of King Montu-hotpe II (2060-2010 B.C.), many of these tools are seen in use (Figure 6). The model itself is of sycamore. The twelve busy little carpenters and the handles of their tools are of cedar, the blades copper. Extra tools were kept in the big chest, and at the back of the court, under the protecting roof, there is a forge for reshaping blunted blades. Three men are clustered here, one keeping the fire hot with a blowpipe (Figure 7). A post in the center of the court steadies a timber that is being sawn into planks. A workman straddles a plank into which he is cutting mortises with a reamer and mallet. The rest of the men are sitting against the walls dressing timbers with adzes or planing them with sandstone rubbers. In addition to tools of the types the men are using, the storage chest contained axes, chisels, and bow drills.

The cabinetmakers painted on the walls of the tomb of Rekh-mi-Re, the Vizier of Thutmosis III, six hundred years later, work with equal enthusiasm (Figures 9, 10) at the making of chairs, beds, chests, openwork shrines, and a wooden column. They follow principles laid down by Rekh-mi-Re himself, "a noble who guides the hands of his workmen, making furniture of ivory and ebony, aromatic wood and redwood, and true cedar from the summit of the mountain slopes of Lebanon." In another two hundred years, however – about 1250 B.C. – Egyptian officials were complaining that things were not what they used to be. Although time has not dealt kindly with his tomb, one can still make out the Sculptor Ipy of the reign of Ramesses II, entrusted with supervising the manufacture of temple furniture, as he comes upon a disgraceful scene of sloth in the workshops. A carpenter sits dreaming on the steps of the shrine on which he should be working, another is being hurriedly awakened by a companion, still another is having his eyes painted, while the feverish zeal with which the rest scramble about, banging with mallets and slapping on paint, shows that they have heard the warning cry, "Look out – *he's* coming!"

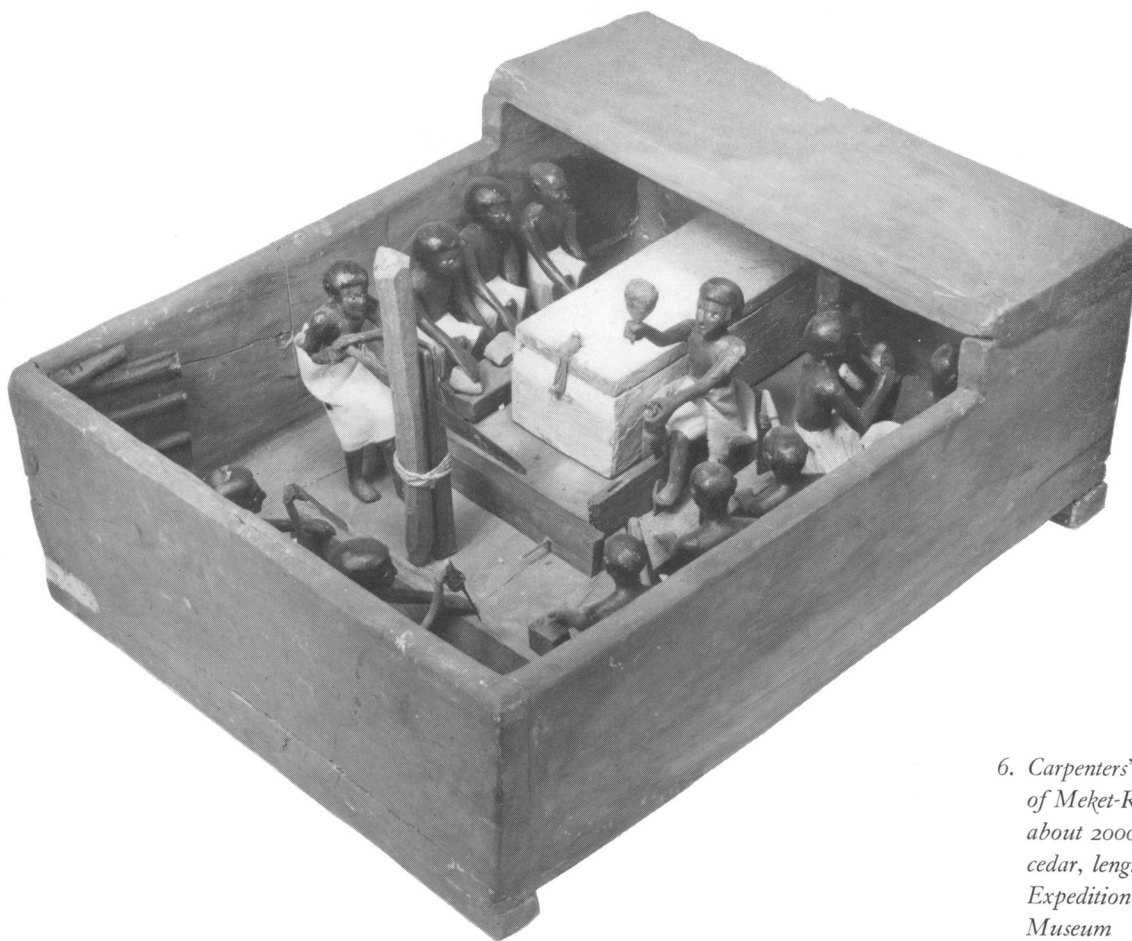
The first piece of domestic furniture we can see actually in use is the stool with rectangular frame. It is found over and over again on early cylinder seals. These seals, short and fat, usually of black steatite (soapstone), are peculiar to the earliest dynastic period. The inscriptions they bear – among the first exam-

4. Mallet, XI Dynasty, about 2050 B.C. Acacia, length 10 inches. *Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 27.3.157*

5. Chisel and reamer, 1496 B.C. (XVIII Dynasty). Tamarisk handles, bronze blades. Length of chisel (below) 10½ inches. *Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 25.3.125, 127*







6. *Carpenters' shop from the tomb of Mehet-Re, Thebes, XI Dynasty, about 2000 B.C. Sycamore and cedar, length 26 inches. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund. Cairo Museum*

ples of writing – often give the name and title of some priest or official, followed by a group of signs that represent the deceased seated on a stool behind a pile of offerings (Figures 13, 14). For the stool, or the chair, has always been the mark of an important personage: it raises him above the level of his inferiors. (Country people in Egypt and other parts of the Near East are still happy squatting on the ground for long periods in a position that seems impossible to us.) This sign, scarcely changing, remained the determinative for *person of rank* in Egyptian hieroglyphic writing.

The stools on the seals are seen either from the side (Figure 13), or from the top (Figure 14) in what was to become a characteristic Egyptian mode of illustration: the representation of each separate part of the whole in its most recognizable aspect. Many of these early seals show a feature retained in pictures of stools throughout the dynastic period and

much exaggerated in late times: the frames end in projections shaped like papyrus umbels, suggesting that the first Egyptian furniture was of wickerwork, and that the frames were made of bundles of reeds bound together.

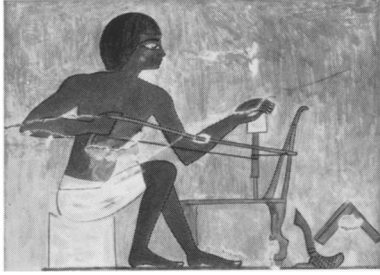
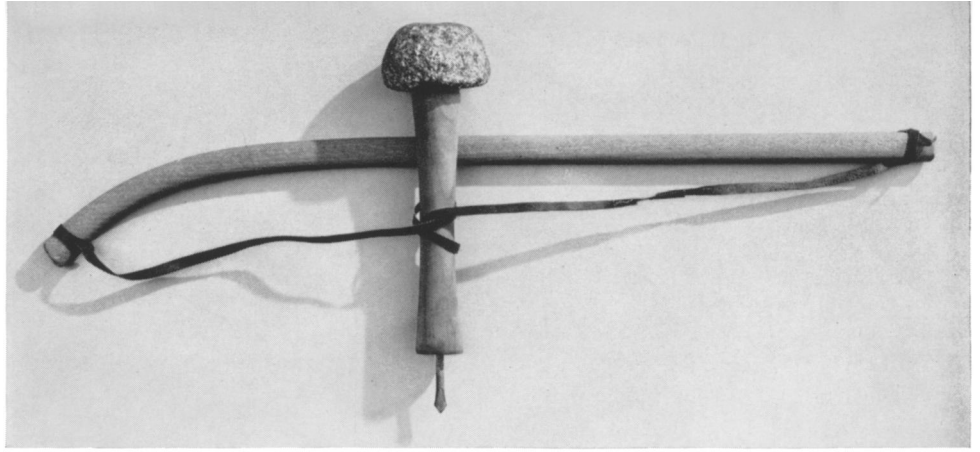
Sometimes the legs of the stools shown on the seals were carved in the form of bulls' legs, like the actual example of Figure 1. Presumably the user was expected to derive some of the strength of the bull (and, in the case of the ivory legs, probably also of the elephant) from furniture embellished in this way. And when the legs of lions began to replace those of bulls, about the end of the III Dynasty, the idea was similar: the sitter was to share the characteristic qualities of the King of Beasts. The spool-like supports under the animal hooves or paws were originally placed there, perhaps, to raise them above the sandy floor and to increase their importance by separating them from the ground. Known as casters, even

7. *Man from carpenters' shop*





8. *Bow drill, XX-XXII Dynasty, about 1200-800 B.C. Granite cap, bronze bit, wood (restored), leather (restored). Length of bow 28 inches. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 12.180.3*



9. *A bow drill in use. Facsimile (detail) of a wall painting in the tomb of Rekh-mi-Re, Thebes, XVIII Dynasty, about 1450 B.C. Width 16 inches. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 31.6.29*

though rigid, they were always present with animal feet. In the early period they were more or less cylindrical; they then increased in diameter toward the bottom; from the New Kingdom on they tended rather to taper toward the ground.

Although, as one might expect, stools were made before chairs, there is a picture of a royal throne of about the same period as the cylinder seals. Narmer, the first king of Egypt, dedicated a giant mace head – symbolizing the weapon with which he had conquered his enemies and united Upper and Lower Egypt – in the temple at Hierakonpolis. One of the scenes carved on its surface pictures Narmer seated on a canopy-sheltered throne mounted on a high, stepped dais (Figure 15). The throne seems to be a rectangular block scooped out to fit the king's posterior and offer support for his back. But possibly he is really shown suspended, as it were, above curving arms, and this, accordingly, would be one of the first examples of the Egyptian artist's reluctance to conceal any part of an object by another closer to the spectator. There is no indication of the material of the throne, but the dais, to judge by its Egyptian name, was of wood. We shall return to thrones later. Narmer's is mentioned now simply to show that a royal seat, of normal height with a back and possibly arms, was represented as early as the stools of commoners.

The Museum's Egyptian Expedition found many stools, later in date than those so far discussed but not very different. The majority are low, with flat seats of woven rushes (Figure 16). These low seats were more comfortable to

a people accustomed to sitting on the ground than we should find them (Figure 17). One has legs of what we should call a more normal height, a downcurved frame, and a leather seat (Figure 18). Two of our stools, of a different type, fold for convenience in carrying; they are held at the crossings by bronze rivets and washers. One ends in graceful ducks' heads inlaid with ebony and ivory (Figure 19). The other, were it not safely locked up in a case, would certainly be picked up by some visitor on her way to a Gallery Talk (Figure 20). A rarer type, not represented in our collection, is the three-legged stool nowadays associated with milkmaids. However, the one illustrated (Figure 21) belonged to a king – Tut-ankh-Amun, whose tomb, found in 1922, yielded the largest and most elaborate collection of Egyptian furniture known.

The canine feet of this stool are unique. The legs are reinforced with elaborate "rungs" in a hieroglyphic design that represents the union of the two ancient kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. This design had long been shown on the sides of seats represented in certain ceremonies – rectangular blocks with architectural and heraldic decoration. Such representations occur in Figures 50 and 52, but no actual examples can be shown, since these seats or thrones were apparently purely symbolic. They recall the architectural form of the ecclesiastical throne used in Christian churches today.

As a device, both meaningful and decorative, under a chair-shaped throne, the *union* hieroglyph is first found in the magnificent diorite statue of King Chephren of the IV Dynasty



in the Cairo Museum. But apparently not until the reign of Tuthmosis IV in the XVIII Dynasty was it realized that such rungs actually gave strength, and not until the time of Tut-ankh-Amun did a simplified version regularly appear in the furniture of common people as well as kings. The anonymous official and his wife shown in our little statue group of the XIX Dynasty (Figure 22) are seated on characteristic stools of the time; one such stool, with a seat made of slats of contrasting woods, was found in the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amun.

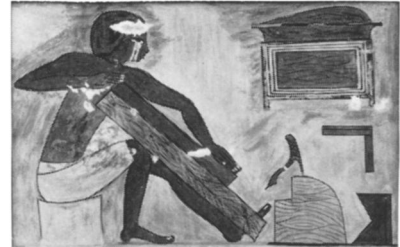
The stool, no matter how it is embellished, remains a raised seat without back or arms. But as early as the II Dynasty, officials as well as kings seemed to feel the need of a support behind them, and the world's first chairs were born. In the beginning the support was low, just enough to keep a cushionlike pad of linen in place. A stela of the XI Dynasty (Figure 25) shows this early form. Soon, however, the chair as we know it now appeared—with a back of medium height or higher, and with or without arms. But the backs of Egyptian chairs were never in one with the legs as ours usually are: the chair remained fundamentally a stool to which a separate back had been joined.

The best early record of "modern" chairs comes from the tomb of Hesi-Re ("Praised by Re"), who, among his other accomplishments, was Chief Doctor and Dentist to King Djoser of the III Dynasty. Along one wall are pic-

tures of his furniture, of which he was evidently very proud: his beds, gaming boards, chests, stools, and chairs, all beautifully made of wood whose grain is carefully delineated—cedar and pine from Syria, ebony from the south, and other fine hardwoods. One low chair (Figure 23) has bull legs mortised into the frame of the seat and lashed in place with thongs. The legs are shown in profile while the back, a rectangular frame with one cross-piece, is shown from the front. Another has a similar back and straight legs of the height preferred today, strengthened with braces of bent wood. A nearby stool has legs of the same type; stools like this are often shown in official sculptures of the period. The chairs are ranged along a wall as they might be in a modern waiting room, but this was no ordinary furniture. It was not only the god who praised the good doctor: these were certainly presents from the king himself, one of Hesi-Re's grateful patients.

Queen Hetep-heres owned the first truly elegant furniture that may be examined in detail: it has been reconstructed with confidence even though the original wood had disintegrated when the queen's tomb was found by the expedition of Harvard University and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Hetep-heres had two armchairs of about the same dimensions, both with lion legs, the front ones slightly taller than those at the back so that

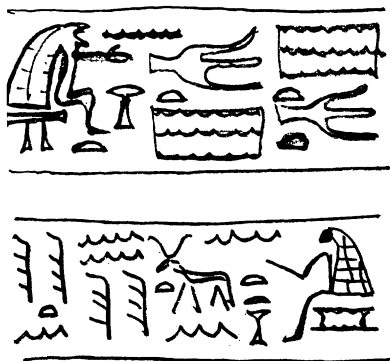
10. *A straightedge in use. Facsimile (detail) of a wall painting in the tomb of Rekh-mi-Re. Width 16½ inches. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 31.6.12*



11. *Adze, XVIII Dynasty, about 1500 B.C. Tamarisk handle, bronze blade, leather binding. Length 11 inches. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 25.3.117*

12. *Square, XI Dynasty, about 2000 B.C. Pine, long side 6 inches. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 20.3.90*





13, 14. Impressions (drawings) of cylinder seals of 1 Dynasty, about 3100 B.C. Height of upper seal  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch, lower  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch. Murch Collection, gift of Helen Miller Gould, 10.130.1600, 1603

the seats slope down from about eleven inches in front to ten behind. Although low, the seats are wide and deep, about twenty-eight by twenty-six inches, suggesting that Hetepheres sat curled up like the little girl (of a later period) shown in Figure 34. The arms of the simpler chair (Figure 24) are about sixteen inches high by twenty long. Its seat and back were left plain, but the arms, legs, and frame were covered with gold, applied after the parts were assembled, and worked into the carving. The frame was mortised, the joints being further strengthened by leather ties and wooden pins, hidden by the gold sheathing. The arms were supported by stylized representations of papyrus reeds (of which the prototype of such a chair was probably made), doweled together and to the seat and back.

The queen's second chair, which also included rush and reed patterns in its decoration, was more elaborately embellished. It had similar gold-covered legs and frame, but the back and arms, sheathed in gold, were inlaid with faïence.

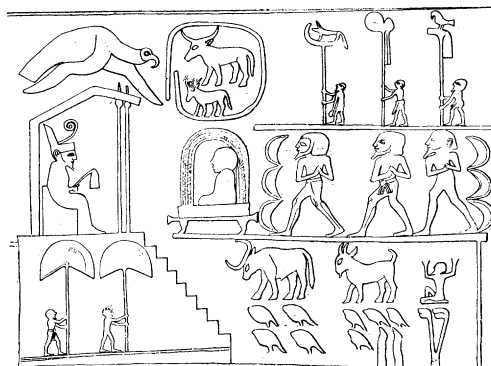
The backs and arms of Hetepheres' chairs were of medium height, but low chairs with high backs and arms that came up to the owner's armpits were well known in her time. The more important officials liked to be portrayed conducting their business in such chairs, their knees drawn up to their chins and one arm thrown over the arm of the chair—and very uncomfortable they look, as in Figure 48. At this time, the Old Kingdom, the arms of chairs were normally rectangular, and they still were when the King's Favorite, Kawiyet,

sat having her hair done (Figure 26) at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, shortly before 2000 B.C.

In the New Kingdom the chairs of commoners were apparently always armless, but by the middle of the XVIII Dynasty there appeared a type of royal chair with rather low arms, sloping down from the back and rounded in front. A lion's head might be placed over each of the front legs so that, viewed from the side, the owner seems to be sitting on the back of a rather emaciated lion. Lions' heads in this position are first seen on the statue of Chephren mentioned above. A hieroglyph in the pyramid of Pepy I of the VI Dynasty implies that his "shining throne" had lions' heads, and Aashyet of the XI Dynasty, one of Kawiyet's rivals in the affections of their king, is shown seated on an armless, low-backed chair with this decoration (Figure 27). However, the idea, like that of the symbolic rungs, did not really catch on until the XVIII Dynasty.

Our own two complete chairs, both of the XVIII Dynasty and from Thebes, are armless. The back of one (Figure 29) consists of a rectangular frame into which five plain slats are set, the center one extending down through both frame and seat for reinforcement (Figure 28). Angle braces, cut from forked branches, strengthen the joining of seat and back, legs and seat. The seat itself, of interwoven linen string, has been restored, but enough ancient string survived—twelve strands to the hole—to show its construction.

The second chair was found by our Expedition at the tomb of Ra-mose and Hat-nufer, the parents of Sen-ne-mut, the Steward of Amun, and Queen Hat-shepsut's favorite. Sen-ne-mut was a self-made man, and thanks to his position at court he was able to furnish the old folks with an ample burial with material drawn from the storehouses of the god and the queen. We can imagine him with his haughty aquiline face (Figure 31) as he made his selections: the furnishings must be fine but unostentatious, *right* in every way for the parents of such a man. The chair he chose (Figure 32) is of the same type as our first example, but two woods were used: box and ebony, held together with pegs of the same materials and a



15. King Narmer enthroned. Drawing from Hierakonpolis, Part I, by J. E. Quibell (London, 1900), pl. XXVI B





16. Stool, XVII Dynasty, about 1600 B.C. Tamarisk with rush seat, one leg replaced anciently. Height 5¼ inches. Carnarvon excavations, gift of Lord Carnarvon, 14.10.3

resinous glue. An attractive feature is the open-work panel composed of hieroglyphs signifying *welfare* on either side of a figure of the household god Bes. The cord seat is the original.

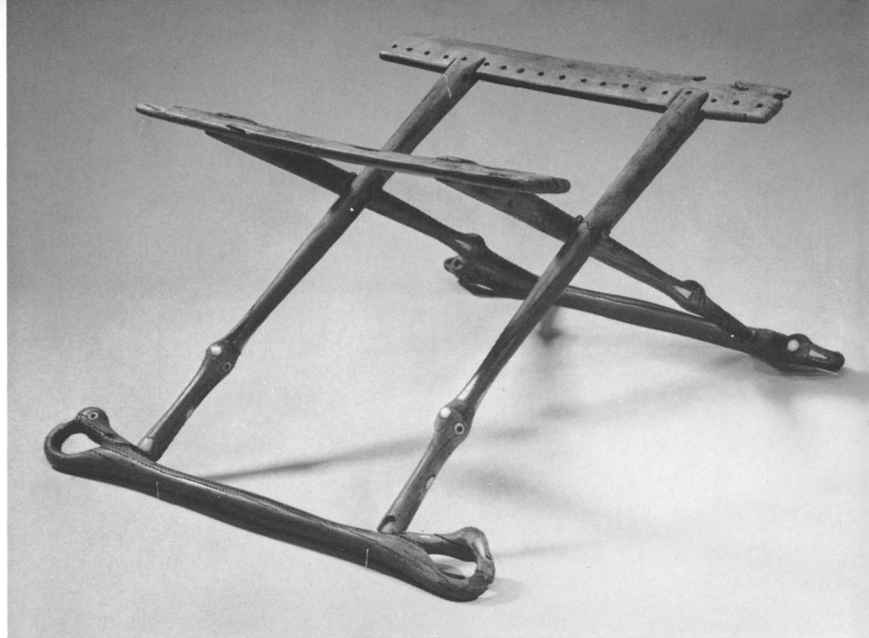
Other chairs were found in our excavations at Thebes, but in such fragmentary condition that they could not be reconstructed. One, similar in shape to Figure 32, was of cypress inlaid with box, ebony, and ivory. A second, of a dark reddish hardwood veneered with ebony and ivory, seems to have had a back that was slightly curved from side to side; its remaining leg gives a seat height of fourteen and a half inches. This chair must have resembled those shown on a stela of the XVIII Dynasty (Figure 34), where we see a design for backs that had been tried tentatively as early as the XII Dynasty. The back is set into the seat just above the front of the rear legs, its top joining the tops of three vertical slats set into the back of the legs and frame. The construction shows clearly in an actual chair that belonged to Tut-ankh-Amun (Figure 35). Our chair was earlier, however, dating from about 1520 B.C., and resembled the chairs of the stela in being without rungs. Tut-ankh-Amun's has rungs of the symbolic design discussed earlier.

At first sight Tut-ankh-Amun's chair may not seem designed for relaxation, but we have only to look at the scene on the golden back of the famous throne from his tomb (Figure 33) to see that this is not necessarily so. Here the king, attended by his wife, lolls on a chair exactly like the ones just discussed, shielded from its uncomfortable bareness by a cushion that appears to be about five inches thick. Such upholstered chairs were still in fashion a hundred and fifty years later: they were among the rich furnishings represented on the walls of the tomb of Ramesses III, where painted designs on the cushions suggest that they were covered with tapestry. (Tut-ankh-Amun's cushion still retains traces of a diaper pattern.) Few actual cushions have been preserved, but one comes from the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amun's great-grandparents, Tjuyu and Yuya. It is squarish, of a double thickness of linen stuffed with pigeon feathers; in the center is a little pink rectangle bordered with strips of yellow, pink, and white. It was made to fit the seat of the chair near which it was found, one of three in the tomb that were of the royal type with sloping arms.

The finest of these three chairs had been contributed to the burial of Tjuyu and Yuya



17. Model figure from the tomb of Mehet-Re. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund. Cairo Museum



18. *Stool, XVII Dynasty, about 1600 B.C. Zizouf wood, leather seat (restored), height 15½ inches. Carnarvon excavations, gift of Lord Carnarvon, 14.10.4*

19. *Folding stool, XVIII Dynasty, about 1400 B.C. Acacia, inlaid with ebony and ivory, height (open) 13 inches. Rogers Fund, 12.182.49*

20. *Folding stool, XII Dynasty, 1991-1786 B.C. Acacia, leather seat, height (open) 14 inches. Rogers Fund, 12.182.58*

21. *Stool from the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amun, XVIII Dynasty, about 1355 B.C. Cairo Museum*

by their granddaughter, Princess Sit-Amun, who, like her mother Teye, became a queen (and was probably the mother of Tut-ankh-Amun). Sit-Amun's chair is unique in having portraits of Teye where one might have expected lion knobs. But her contemporaries must often have regarded that formidable lady with the respect usually reserved for a lioness with cubs – and here she is perhaps to be thought of as protecting her daughter.

Teye and Sit-Amun are not the only queens who have used this chair. When the tomb was found in 1905 its contents were sent to the Cairo Museum. On the final day of packing, when only the chair remained, an old lady leaning on a cane appeared at the entrance to the tomb and insisted on going down to see it. The excavators, J. E. Quibell and Joseph Lindon Smith, apologized for not being able to offer a seat, but saying, "Why, there is a chair which will do for me nicely," she sat down on the priceless antiquity. "The anticipated catastrophe did not take place," Smith wrote later. "The visitor turned to [her companion] and said, 'I see now where the Empire style came from. Behold these carved heads.'" And suddenly they recognized her. It was the former Empress Eugénie, revisiting Egypt thirty-five years after her royal journey to the opening of the Suez Canal.

Now, having traced the development of stool and chair, let us catch up with other kinds of furniture.

Today we should probably say that our minimum requirements were a chair, a bed, and a table. But as we have seen, the Egyptians were happy sitting on the ground, and the majority simply lay down to sleep on a mat or, if they were rather more affluent, on a pad of folded sheets. What they did need, however, was a prop for the head. Not only did every Egyptian use a headrest in this world, he needed one for the next. Some of the funerary headrests are of fine but impractical materials such as ivory or alabaster. The headrest for everyday, or rather everynight, use was of wood and consisted fundamentally of three parts, a curved "pillow," a vertical shaft, and a horizontal base, usually separate pieces doweled together. Of the many headrests in our collection, two are illustrated (Figures 37, 38). The Egyptians slept on their sides (Figure 36), and the headrests were about shoulder height. A member of our staff tried one – once – and maintained that it was comfortable.

Djoser's doctor, Hesi-Re, had a variety of headrests, kept neatly in a special case. He also had nine or ten beds that illustrate well the development of this article of furniture. First, the original rectangular floor covering was put into a frame that was raised from the ground at the head end (Figure 42); then legs, shorter than those at the head, were placed under the foot; then a footboard appeared at the bottom of the bed to prevent the occu-





pant from slipping down. The legs were of two kinds, plain, tapering toward the ground, and strengthened by curved braces, or, as on early chairs, bull legs attached by mortise and tenon and thongs. The “springs” of these beds consisted of a rectangle of leather laced to the frame. The mattresses would have been pads of folded sheets tied in place.

Eventually, as was the case with chairs, beds were made with lion legs, and interlaced cord replaced the leather “springs.” By the XVIII Dynasty the legs at head and foot were regularly of the same height, but although the frame was now horizontal, or even curved down gracefully toward the center, the foot-board was retained (Figure 43). The Egyptians were proud of their beds and considered them a mark of civilization. An expatriate of the XII Dynasty, returning home after an absence of many years, exclaimed, “And I slept on a bed again!”

In our collection are a couch of the I Dynasty – actually it is more a commodious stool – and several beds. The couch (Figure 39) has the familiar bull legs, and its frame shows the slots that once held the lacing of the leather springs. One of our beds, also originally of the earlier dynastic period since it has the bull legs and slotted frame, was reused in the Middle Kingdom, at which time the old leather was replaced with a mesh of fiber cords. It is illustrated as it might have been made up (Figure 40).

Our little traveling bed (Figure 41), a model or perhaps a toy, was made about 1450 B.C. It is of tamarisk painted white, with black where a real bed would have had metal reinforcements; and it doubles back on painted wooden hinges that are like some real bronze ones our Expedition found among a copper-smith’s effects. A hundred years later Tut-ankh-Amun had a traveling bed that folded into three sections on two sets of hinges.

Our third present-day requirement, a table, would probably have puzzled the Egyptian. Tables of wood were apparently rare and were seldom included in funerary equipment, and large tables of any material were unknown. Guests at parties had their own little side tables, usually of wicker or consisting of a pottery stand with a wicker tray on top.

We have one complete wooden table (Figure 46). It is made of numerous small pieces of acacia cleverly pegged together, and inlaid on top and along the edges of the legs with box. A second table, somewhat larger and more elaborately inlaid, was too fragmentary to reconstruct.

To judge by tomb paintings and the actual furnishings of Tut-ankh-Amun’s tomb, chests on legs were not uncommon in fine homes, and these, obviously, could have done some service as tables. There are none of these chest-tables in our collection, but we do have a number of heavy-duty storage chests, among them two that belonged to Ra-mose and Hat-

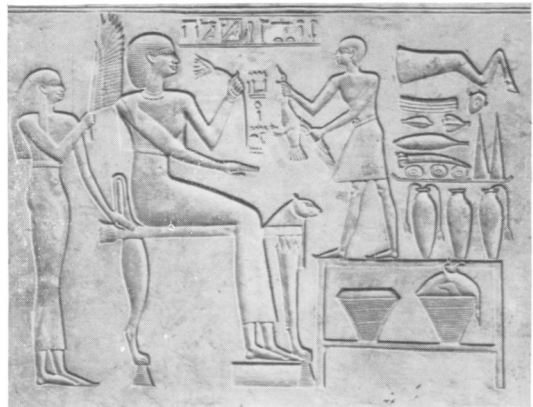
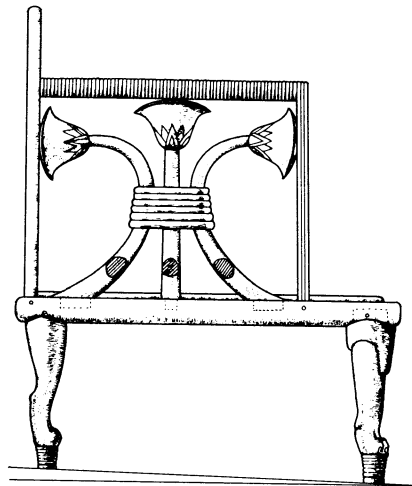
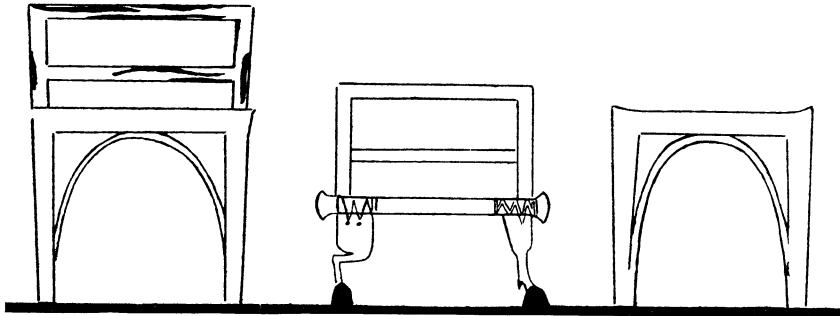
22. *An official and his wife,*  
XIX Dynasty, about 1300 B.C.  
*Serpentine, height 6¼ inches.*  
*Rogers Fund, 07.228.94*



BELOW:

23. Furniture of Hesi-Re, III Dynasty, about 2660 B.C. Drawing from *Excavations at Saqqara; The Tomb of Hesi*, by J. E. Quibell (Cairo, 1913), pl. xx

24. Armchair of Hetep-heres, IV Dynasty, about 2600 B.C. Drawing from *A History of the Giza Necropolis*, II, *The Tomb of Hetep-heres, the Mother of Cheops*, by G. A. Reisner and W. S. Smith (Harvard University Press, 1955), pl. 31



RIGHT:

25. *Stela of Maaty (detail)*, XI Dynasty, about 2050 B.C. Limestone, height 11  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Rogers Fund, 14.2.7

26. *Sarcophagus of Kawiyet (detail)*, about 2050 B.C. Limestone. Cairo Museum

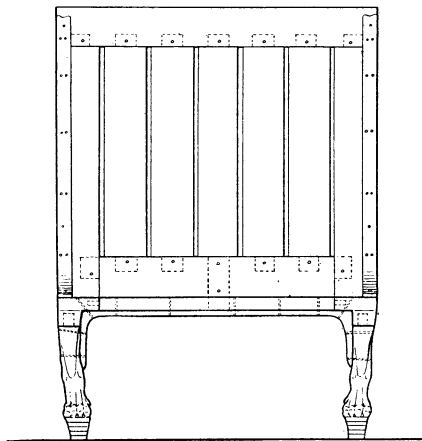
27. *Sarcophagus of Aashyet (detail)*, about 2050 B.C. Limestone. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund. Cairo Museum



nufer. One of these, made of sycamore, is a plain rectangular box with a flat lid (Figure 44). Its corners are dovetailed, its lid and floor strengthened with battens. The other, of pine, stands on four short legs and has a double-pitched lid (Figure 45). Both chests are painted white inside and outside. When found, their lids had been secured by lashing together the knobs at the top and end and sealing the knots. They contained Hat-nufer's supply of household linen: fifty-five folded sheets measuring in length from fourteen to fifty-four feet.

As well as storing his household equipment tidily, the Egyptian had to safeguard his small personal effects. We have several fine caskets for jewelry and cosmetics, among them that of Kemu-ny, who was Chamberlain and Butler to King Amun-em-het IV, about 1795 B.C. Made of carefully joined pieces of cedar, it is veneered with ebony and ivory, and inlaid with black and ivory-colored pastes (Figure 47). The upper section has compartments for a mirror and odds and ends. The drawer below is fitted to take eight oil jars. To secure the contents, two little bronze pegs at the back of the lid were slid into corresponding holes in the box, a silver bolt was slid into place inside the front of the drawer, and the silver knobs were lashed together and sealed.

The Egyptians had one piece of furniture, however, that would not be included in any modern list – the litter. Wheeled vehicles were unknown in Egypt until about 1680 B.C., and even after they were introduced, chiefly in the form of chariots, the Nile remained the highway, and no one would have considered driving farther than necessary on a hot, dusty road. Those who could afford it were carried – down to their dahabiyehs on the river, out to visit friends, or to church. This was already true in the I Dynasty, at least for those of supreme importance. In Figure 15 a carrying chair is placed in front of the enthroned Narm-er. "Carrying stool" might be a better term, because it would seem that a separate construction composed of a floor and a shelter of woven rushes was simply lifted onto a stool or couch of the usual design, the papyrus-shaped knobs at the front and back of the frame acting as handles for the bearers.



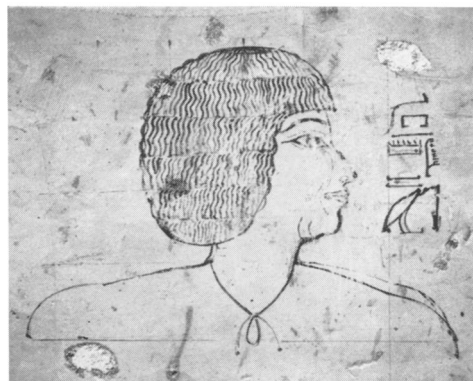
28, 29. Chair, XVIII Dynasty, about 1500 B.C. Tamarisk, height 23½ inches. Rogers Fund, 12.182.28. At left, drawing showing construction





30. Detail of Figure 32

31. The "Steward of Amun, Sen-ne-mut": sketch on a wall of his unfinished tomb, Thebes, XVIII Dynasty, about 1484 B.C.



32. Chair from the tomb of Ra-mose and Hat-nufer, Thebes, XVIII Dynasty, about 1500 B.C. Box and ebony, height 21 inches. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 36.3.152



Early in the IV Dynasty Hetep-heres' litter, of hardwood embellished with gold, was placed in her tomb to make life in the next world more pleasant. It is shaped like a legless arm-chair resting on two poles, the seat extended forward and surrounded by a low railing.

There is no actual example of a litter in our collection, but the unfinished decoration of the outer room of our tomb of Peri-nebi depicts an example of the V Dynasty. The great man, seated in his litter, inspects the produce of his estates (Figure 48). A canopy is stretched over his head; presumably, curtains at the four sides could have been let down or rolled up as required. Peri-nebi's wife squats facing him in the sun outside. She would eventually have been painted the pale flesh color considered suitable for women, who were supposed to lead sheltered lives. Peri-nebi himself has already been given the traditional weather-beaten brick-red of a man who must always be out and about.

Toward the end of the XVIII Dynasty the simple litter developed into a combined carrying chair and throne in which victorious pharaohs sometimes appeared to their people. A wall painting from the end of the dynasty shows an example in which a lion with naturalistically carved body forms the seat and legs while a second, smaller lion forms the arm. A later example shows a chair with lion arms but a frame of the usual type. In still another version it is the arms that are of the usual type while lions form the seat and legs, as in a little bronze that once held the figure of a king or god (Figure 49).

Thrones have been mentioned several times. It was the decoration that differentiated Egyptian thrones from chairs, even from chairs used only by members of the royal family. The decorative elements might be used structurally, but all were symbolic—the hieroglyphs meaning *union*, the lions and sphinxes





33. *Tut-ankh-Amun seated upon a cushioned chair. Detail from the back of his throne, gold, inlaid with silver, semiprecious stones, and colored pastes. Cairo Museum*



34. *Stela of Nen-waf (detail), XVIII Dynasty, about 1450 B.C. Limestone, painted, height 5½ inches. Rogers Fund, 12.182.3*



35. *Chair from the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amun. Cairo Museum*

36. *Bed with reclining figure, XVIII Dynasty, 1567-1320 B.C. Limestone, length 7 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Rogers Fund, 15.2.8*



representing the might of the king, the bound enemies beneath his feet. Even the colors were symbolic – gold, the indestructible material of which gods were made, and the red, blue, and green of life and resurrection.

The most important piece of furniture in our collection – even though it is only a fragment – is the panel from the left arm of a throne of Tuthmosis IV (1425-1417 B.C.). Of cedar, once overlaid with gold, it and its mate (which is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) came from a throne like those of Tuthmosis and his son, Amenophis III, which are represented in several Theban tombs. Today Tutankhamun's throne and these two panels are all that is left of these once splendid symbols of royalty.

The scene carved on the outside of our panel (Figure 51) shows Tuthmosis as a winged sphinx trampling on African enemies and "crushing all foreign lands." The god Horus, as a falcon, stretches his wings protectively overhead, and a sign for *life*, with human arms, holds a symbol of divine royalty, a sunshade, behind the sphinx. The design on the

Boston panel is almost identical, except that the sphinx strikes down Asiatic enemies and the king's throne name, Men-kheper-Re, appears rather than his personal one, Tuthmosis, which is on ours.

The inside of our panel (Figure 52) shows an allegory of some ceremony probably connected with the king's coronation. Tuthmosis, in human form, is seated on a throne of the architectural type supported by the runglike symbols of *union*. Before him stands Weret-hekau ("Great of Magic"), a lion-headed goddess associated with royal crowns. Behind him stands Thoth, the ibis-headed god of wisdom bringing "millions of years, life, well-being, and eternity" to Tuthmosis, his namesake.

To see what the complete throne looks like, we turn to scenes from tombs of the next reign: those of Kha-em-het, Overseer of the Granaries of Upper and Lower Egypt, of an Overseer of the Royal Nurses (the name of the tomb's owner has been lost), and of Onen, the brother of Queen Teye. In all of these Amenophis III, Tuthmosis' son, wearing full regalia, is enthroned upon the stepped dais under a canopy that has not changed essentially since Narmer's time. In the first (Figure 53), carved panels similar to ours are set into the arms; in the second (Frontispiece) the panels are decorated with golden rosettes. The spaces under both these seats are filled with *union* symbols; large figures of bound African and Asiatic captives are added in Kha-em-het's relief, and carved lions once guarded the steps leading up to the badly damaged dais. This relief was originally painted. The scene in

- 37, 38. *Headrests, Thebes, Middle Kingdom, about 2000-1800 B.C. Left: tamarisk, acacia band, height 8 inches. Right: acacia, height 8 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 19.3.147, 31.3.12*

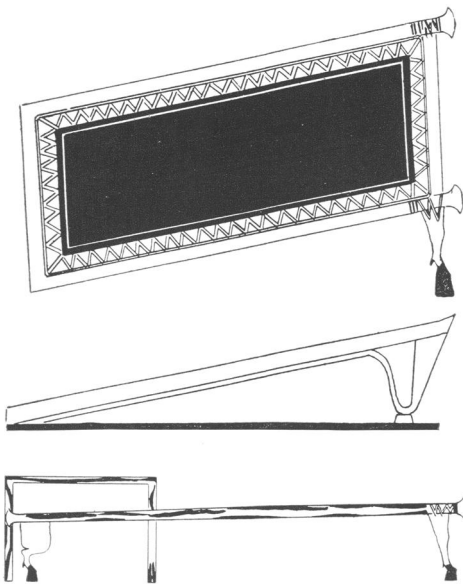
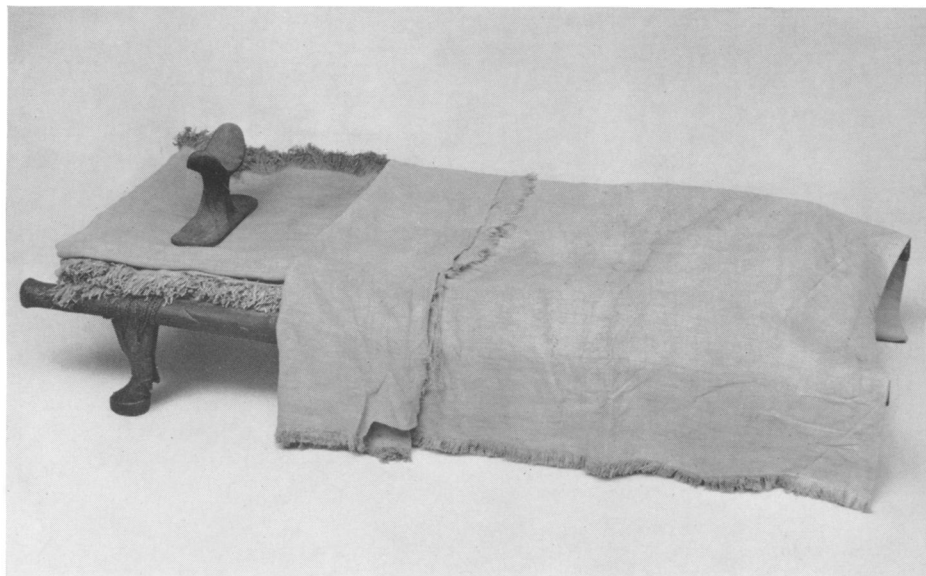
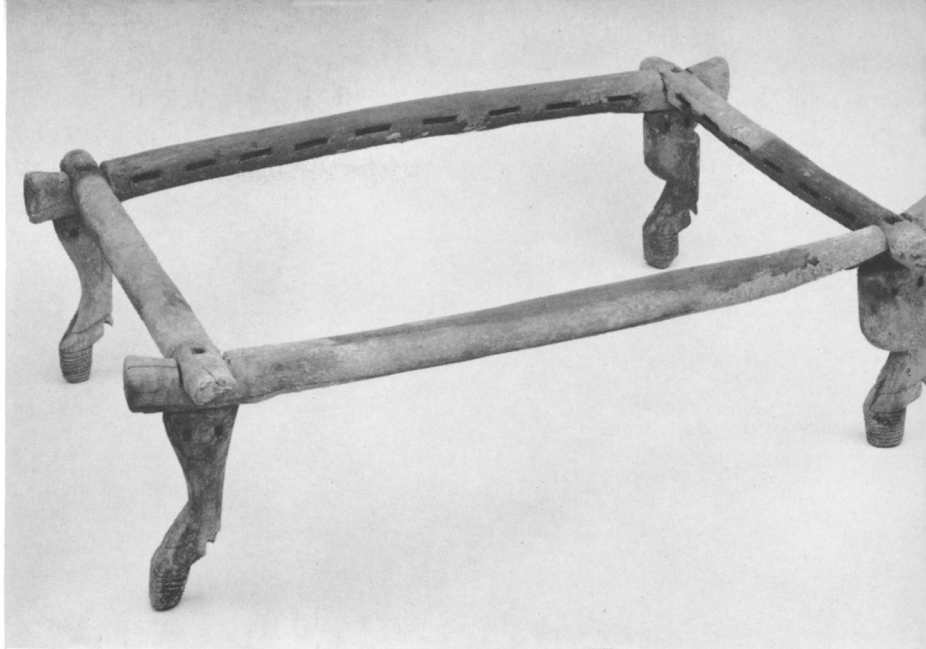


RIGHT:

39. Couch frame, 1 Dynasty, 3100-2890 B.C. Acacia, length 37½ inches. Gift of Egyptian Research Account, 12.187.52

40. Bed, Early Dynastic period, about 3000-2700 B.C., reused in Middle Kingdom, about 2000-1880 B.C. Wood, length 63 inches. Funds from various donors, 86.1.39

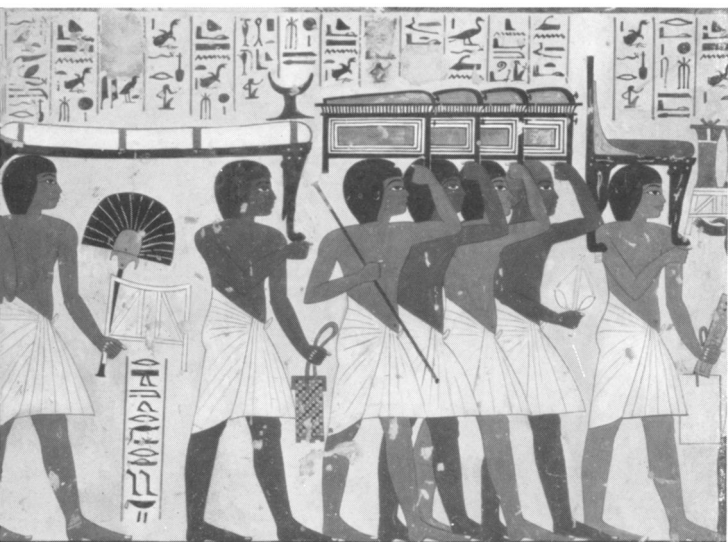
41. Folding bed, a model or toy, XVIII Dynasty, about 1450 B.C. Tamarisk, painted, linen "springs" restored, length 12 inches. Rogers Fund, 20.2.13



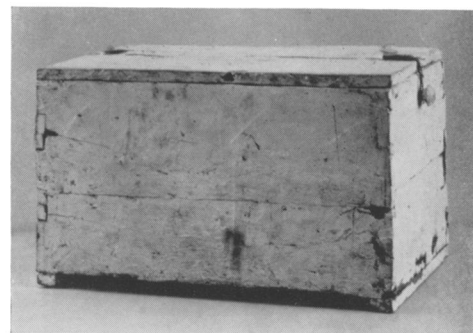
42. Beds of Hesi-Re. Drawings from Excavations at Saqqara; The Tomb of Hesi, pls. XIX, XX







43. *Funeral procession (detail) of Ra-mose, Governor of Thebes, XVIII Dynasty, about 1380 B.C. His bed has a mattress of folded sheets held in place by four red bands. Facsimile of painting in Ra-mose's tomb, Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 30.4.37*



44, 45. *Hat-nufer's linen chests, XVIII Dynasty, about 1500 B.C. Upper: sycamore, painted, length 29 1/2 inches. Lower: pine, painted, length 27 1/2 inches. Egyptian Expedition, Rogers Fund, 36.3.55, 56*



46. *Table, XVII-XVIII Dynasty, about 1567 B.C. Acacia, inlaid with box, length 25 inches. Carnarvon excavations, gift of Lord Carnarvon, 14.10.5*

Onen's tomb (not illustrated here) was in paint alone; the arm panel of Amenophis' throne shows sphinx, fan, and Libyan, Nubian, and Syrian enemies, as well as the winged cobra or uraeus that appears on the panel of Kha-em-het's relief. Bound with a halter of lotus and papyrus, captives from foreign lands form a dado around the dais on which the throne rests. Captives also appear on the stool under the king's feet, recalling the words of the Psalmist: ". . . until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

This scene was painted with all the colors of the Egyptian palette; the original throne may have been inlaid with faïence, like Hetepheres' chair, or embellished with gold, silver, semiprecious stones, and pastes, like Tut-ankh-Amun's throne. The arms of this throne, two generations later, are of a somewhat different design, for in place of sphinxes and enemies the king's title appears in large openwork hieroglyphs under the wings of divine uraei. They resemble the winged divinities, this time falcons, that form the entire arms of a symbolic throne of Amenophis carved on a carnelian bracelet plaque that probably belonged to his queen, Teye (Figure 50). Accompanied by two of their daughters, the king and queen are apparently being carried in some procession. The thrones represented in the tombs of Kha-em-het and Onen, however, rest securely on daises from which slender lotus and papyrus columns rise to support canopies decorated with all the splendor of the East.

The frontispiece shows the complete pavilion with its triple colonnade, each series of columns supporting its own canopy, with cornices of crowned golden uraei and hanging bunches of glass grapes. With his mother standing behind him, Amenophis the Magnificent, wearing his Blue Crown, sits upon a throne of green and gold, his knees flanked by green and gold lions' heads. Once steps led up to the dais, which is guarded by another row of golden uraei. At ground level, far below the pharaoh, conquered enemies praise him and beg for mercy.



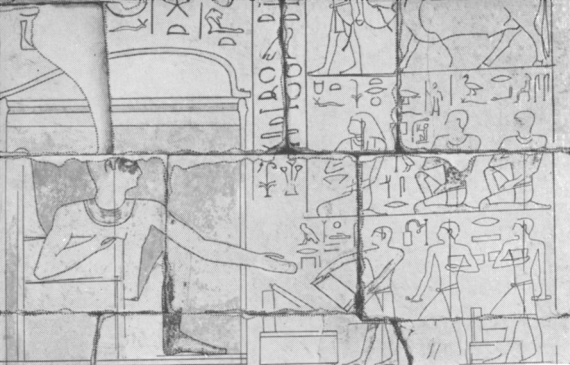
Four hundred years later King Solomon "made a porch for the throne where he might judge, even the porch of judgment: and it was covered with cedar from one side of the floor to the other. . . . Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with pure gold. And there were six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold, which were fastened to the throne, and stays on each side of the sitting place, and two lions standing on the stays: and twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps. There was not the like made in any kingdom."

There was.

#### NOTE

The incident concerning Teye's chair and Eugénie is recounted in full in *Tombs, Temples, and Ancient Art*, by Joseph Lindon Smith (University of Oklahoma Press, 1956) and retold in *Signs and Wonders Upon Pharaoh*, by John A. Wilson (University of Chicago Press, 1964).

47. *Cosmetic chest of Kemu-ny, XII Dynasty, about 1795 B.C. Cedar, veneered with ebony and ivory, height 8 inches. Carnarvon Collection (Carnarvon excavations), gift of Edward S. Harkness, 26.7.1438*



48. Drawing (detail) of decoration  
in the tomb of Peri-nebi,  
V Dynasty, about 2400 B.C.  
Tomb, gift of Edward S.  
Harkness, 13.183.3



51, 52. Arm panel of throne of Tuthmosis IV, from his tomb, Thebes, XVIII  
Dynasty, about 1420 B.C. Cedar, height 9¾ inches. Left: outer surface.  
Right: inner surface. Theodore M. Davis excavations, bequest of Theodore M.  
Davis, 30.8.45

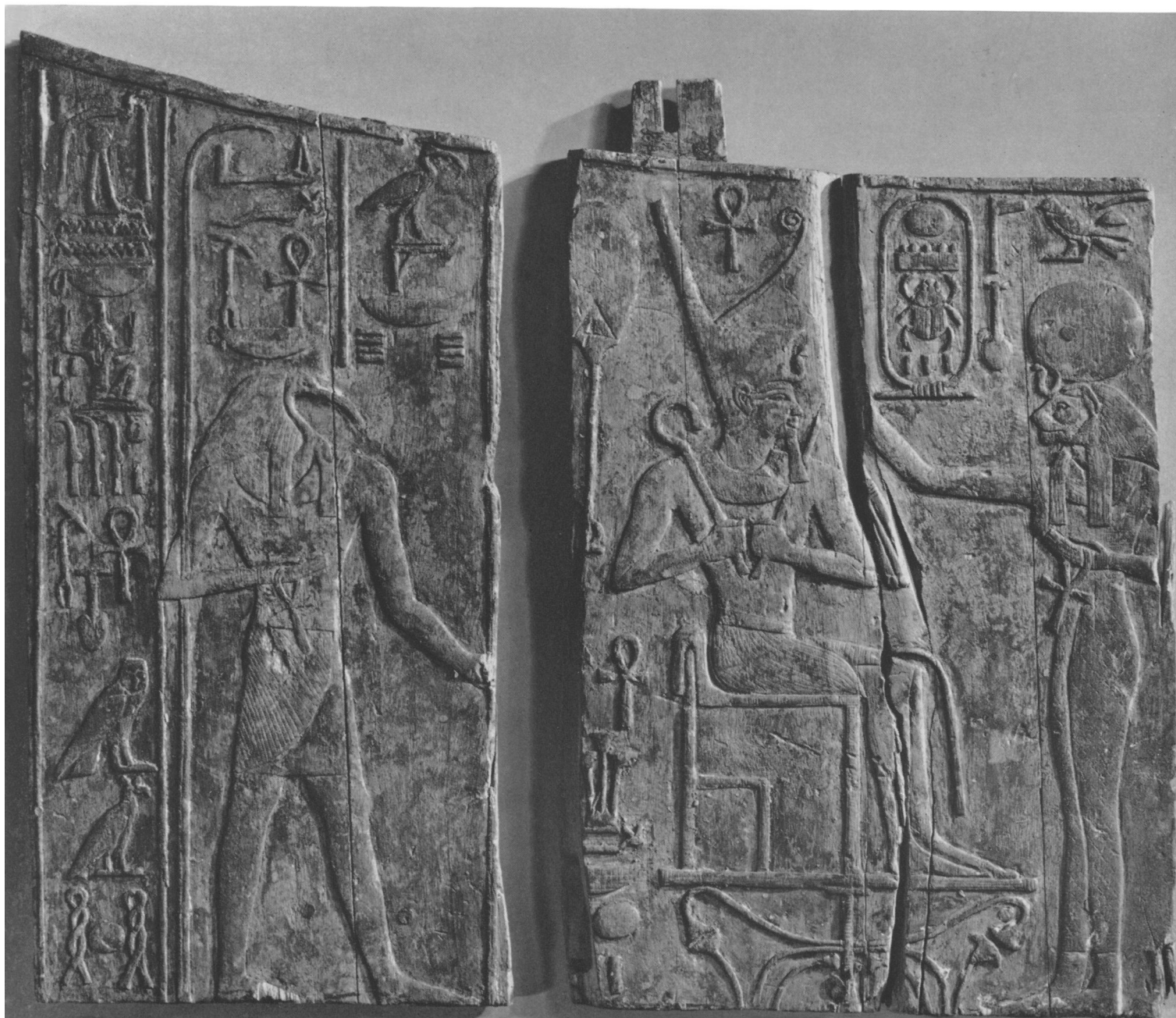




49. Model throne for statuette of divinity, Late Dynastic period, 664-332 B.C. Bronze, height  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Gift of Susette and Marie Khayat, 64.308



50. Bracelet plaque, XVIII Dynasty, about 1400 B.C. Carnelian, length  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Carnarvon Collection, gift of Edward S. Harkness, 26.7.1339





53. *Amenophis III enthroned.*  
*Relief in the tomb of*  
*Kha-em-het, Thebes, XVIII*  
*Dynasty, about 1400 B.C.*

# A Neapolitan Christmas Crib

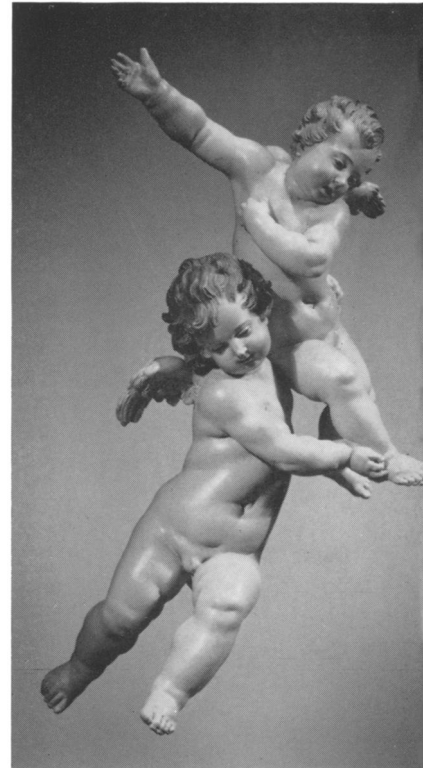
OLGA RAGGIO *Associate Research Curator of Western European Arts*

Writing from Naples in March 1766, Samuel Sharp, a respectable British surgeon and an attentive and perceptive traveler, related that before Christmas, “during three weeks or a month, there is a species of devotion to be seen here, almost peculiar to Naples. . . . This is a dedication of a Presepio . . . in many of their churches, and many of their private houses. . . . It is a group of little figures, or puppets, representing the whole transaction. There are the Wise men of the East, with a star over their heads on one spot: The shepherds attending their flocks, with the Angel descending over them on another: The Virgin, the Infant, Joseph, and the ass, on another. In short the composer has introduced such figures and historical facts, into the group, as the New Testament, and sometimes his own genius, have suggested.” Here, in brief, is one of the earliest descriptions of those removable Christmas cribs that, by the middle of the eighteenth century, had become as much a part of custom in Naples as the gay Carnival in Venice, or the Easter procession in Seville.

Originally a purely devotional practice—a “pious exercise,” as it was called in the seventeenth century—Christmas crib building at home could claim its precedents in the medieval mystery plays of the Nativity as much as in the sculptured Nativity groups set in churches. In the form described by Sharp, with “little figures, or puppets” and stagelike sets, it made its appearance in Naples sometime about 1670, much encouraged, it appears, by the Jesuits. It was soon practiced by the leading families of the aristocracy, who, at Christmastime, kept open house to let a delighted populace come in to see the *presepio*. When in 1734 Charles III of Bourbon became

king of Naples, the royal family itself took a lead in the fashion. Often, we read, the King was seen amusing himself modeling and baking little clay cakes for the Royal Crèche, arranging shepherds and devising perspective views, while the Queen sewed costumes for the figures throughout the year, to please her husband and children.

It is undoubtedly through the interest taken by Charles III, who was as keen on his porcelain factory at Capodimonte as on the excavations he promoted at Pompeii, that the making of Christmas crib figures took its momentum. The crude wooden statuettes produced by the carvers of devotionalia were replaced by more sophisticated *pastori mobili*, “mobile shepherds,” as they were called in Naples. These, we learn from a local historian, Pietro Napoli-Signorelli, were to be portrayed in as natural a fashion as possible, with “faces . . . full of lively expression, soft complexions, speaking physiognomies, the hair finished with utmost care.” The best sculptors of Naples were asked to lend their talents to the new task, ladies of the court no doubt vied in dressing up the figures, and, as sets and lighting effects became more elaborate and were changed every year to make room for new “inventions” and hundreds of figures, still other artists were engaged with the duties of “Christmas crib directors.” For, as noted our British visitor, “. . . what renders a Presepio really an object of a man of taste, is the artful disposition of the figures, amidst scenery of perspective, most wonderfully deceitful to the eye.” “A certain merchant,” he continued, “has one on the top of his house, where the perspective is so well preserved, that, by being open at one end, the distant country and mountains become

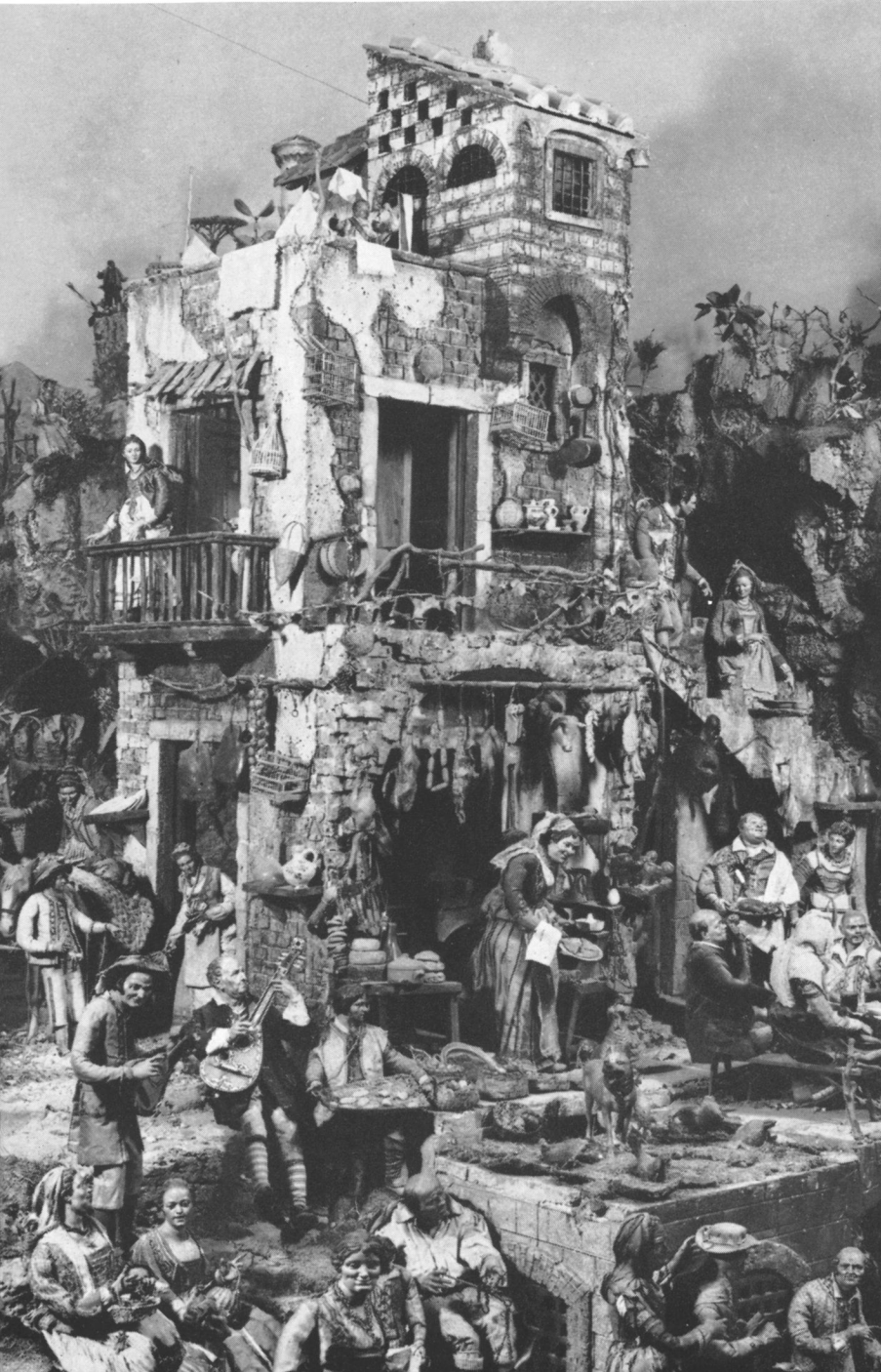


1. *Cherubs. Polychromed terracotta.*  
Height 8 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches. 64.164.60

*All the figures illustrated in this article are Italian (Neapolitan), second half of the xviii century, and are part of a collection of Christmas crib figures given to the Museum by Loretta Hines Howard, 64.164.1-167. They will be displayed on a Christmas tree in the Main Hall of the Museum during the Christmas season*



2. *The Tavern. Detail from the Cuciniello Presepio, installed in 1879. Italian (Neapolitan), XVIII-XIX century. Courtesy of the Museo di San Martino, Naples*



a continuity of the Presepio, and seem really to be a part of it. . . . A nobleman here had one, where so much silver, and so many beautiful scenes were admitted onto the work, that it was valued at eight thousand pounds. . . . All the poor people, if they are not already provided with a Presepio, purchase a cheap trumpery one at this season, which, with care and locking up the remainder of the year, will last them their lives." An Italian eighteenth-century drawing at the Cooper Union Museum (Figure 13) is perhaps the sketch of such a scenic *presepio*. No set has been preserved in its pristine state, and those which can still be seen in Naples and Rome are in fact no more than traditional reconstructions (Figure 2).

Last year, a most distinguished collection of about 140 Neapolitan Christmas crib figures, dating from the second half of the eighteenth century, was generously presented to the Museum by Loretta Hines Howard. They will be put on display in the Main Hall in December. They come for the most part from the famous Catello collection in Naples, where many of them were shown in 1950 at an exhibition of sculptures from Neapolitan Christmas cribs held at the Royal Palace. The varied assortment includes figures from the three traditional scenes of a complete Neapolitan *presepio*: the Nativity, with angels, shepherds, and sheep; the procession of the three Magi, with their colorful retinue of Orientals and Moors; and the varied and gay crowd of coun-



3, 4, and 5. *Burgher, country girl, and Moor. Polychromed terracotta, wood, fabric, and tow and wire. Height about 15 inches. 64.164.101, 80, 86*

6. *Group of Orientals. Polychromed terracotta, wood, fabric, tow and wire, silver, and silver-gilt. Height of larger figures about 15 inches. 64.164.64, 74, 89, 87, 105, 106, 88, 110, 111, 163*



7. *Nativity group. Mary and Joseph, attributed to Salvatore di Franco; Jesus, to Giuseppe Sammartino. Polychromed terracotta, wood, fabrics, tow and wire, silver-gilt, straw, and cork. Height of Joseph 15 inches. 64.164.1-3*

try and town people thronging the tavern, or inn, of Bethlehem – the *diversorium* mentioned by St. Luke, where on the Holy Night there was no place for Mary and Joseph. Averaging between twelve and fifteen inches in height, according to the position they were to take in perspective in the stage set, the figurines are pliable and can be given poses at will, according to their facial expressions. Their bodies are made of tow and wire, their arms and legs are finely carved of wood, and their heads and shoulders are modeled of terracotta and accurately finished. Their attire, often enriched by accessories, jewels, and embroi-

deries, is a sheer joy for the lover of folklore and eighteenth-century costumes. It is still for the most part original.

By far the largest group of figures in the Howard crèche is made up of a host of delightfully dimpled cherubs, delicately modeled like biscuit figurines, and some fifty large and elegant angels (Figures 1, 8, 10). These, clad in swirling pastel draperies, their hair knotted by a mystical wind, their cheeks flushed by sweet celestial emotion, are seen swinging their finely chased silver-gilt censers or suspended in adoration. These heavenly creatures may once have belonged to a famous crib set up







every Christmas, until 1826, by the De Giorgio family, which had an extraordinary Glory of angels that the people flocked to admire. But we will never know for sure. For by the middle of the nineteenth century nearly all the great family cribs of the preceding century had been broken up, their sets dismembered, their figures sold singly or in small groups to dealers and collectors, who would then show them in vitrines, as objects of curiosity rather than devotion.

According to a tradition that seems to be supported by stylistic comparisons with figures in the collections of Naples and in the

8. *Angel with censer, attributed to Giuseppe Sammartino. Polychromed terracotta, wood, fabric, tow and wire, and silver-gilt. Height 15 inches. 64.164.9*

9. *Startled shepherds and their goats. Polychromed terracotta, wood, fabric, tow and wire. Height of shepherds 15½ inches. 64.164.93, 96, 124, 131*



OPPOSITE:

10. *Angel with censer, attributed to Lorenzo Mosca. Polychromed terracotta, wood, fabric, tow and wire, and silver-gilt. Height 15¼ inches. 64.164.7, 145*

11. *Oriental with a camel. Polychromed terracotta, wood, fabric, leather, and tow and wire. Height 15¾ inches. 64.164.75, 109*

12. *Market woman. Polychromed terracotta, wood, fabric, tow and wire, straw, and wax. Height 11⅞ inches. 64.164.104, 150-154*

vast holdings of the Bavarian National Museum in Munich, some of the most winsome heads of the Howard angels are to be credited to the best eighteenth-century masters: Giuseppe Sammartino (1720-1793), well known for his monumental sculptures in marble and in stucco, his pupils Salvatore di Franco, Giuseppe Gori, and Angelo Viva, and one Lorenza Mosca (d. 1789), who was employed at the Royal Porcelain Factory at Capodimonte and as stage director of the Royal Christmas Crib.

In the central group of the Holy Family – the *Mistero*, as Neapolitans used to call it – the noble and tender figures of Mary, Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger are also modeled and carved with exquisite care (Figure 7). They are attributed to Salvatore di Franco, who is mentioned by contemporary sources as one of the best *presepio* sculptors of the time. Next are the three Magi, splendidly attired in long cloaks of silk embroidered with silver, gold, and sequins, topped with simulated ermine capes, their costume perhaps inspired by the colorful garb worn by the Knights of San Gennaro on the yearly festival in Naples. They approach the Divine Infant with expressions of tender awe and piety, marvel or

mystical expectation, gesturing with their delicate, nervous hands.

Behind the Magi came the mingled crowd of brightly dressed, exotic travelers, who symbolized the homage rendered by all nations to the Divine Child: there are Mongols and Moors mingled with Turks and Circassians, advancing on horseback or on foot, carrying their colorful trappings, banners, and lances, followed by their camels, attendants, and dogs (Figures 5, 6, 11). It is in this section of the *presepio* that the imagination of patrons and artists, free from literal fidelity to the Scriptures, fascinated by exotic costumes and types, gave itself full rein and indulged in the wildest flights, in a vein that reminds us of the *Turqueries* and eighteenth-century opera and ballet rather than sacred drama. To these figures belong some of the most elaborate accessories: finely chased and gilded scimitars and daggers, silver baskets, and purses, all miniature masterpieces executed by Neapolitan silversmiths and other specialized craftsmen.

A sure theatrical instinct presided over the creation of a Neapolitan Christmas crèche. The world of the exotic was counterbalanced by the more homely world of humble shepherds and simple folk, who act out their emo-









13. Sketch for a Christmas Crib. Pen and wash on paper. Italian, second half of the XVIII century. Courtesy of the Cooper Union Museum, New York

tions and speak the language of the heart. We see some of the shepherds, clad in rough sheepskin clothes, awakened from their sleep by the Angel of the Lord, dazzled by the light that suddenly breaks through the night or bemused by the celestial music that fills the heavens, their faces reflecting their feelings with pulsating vitality and truth (Figure 9). Nothing is conventional here, and the eighteenth century has hardly left us more lively and natural portraits than these. Academically trained artists, sometimes well known as porcelain-modelers – like Francesco Celebrano, to whom, among others, figures like these are often attributed – have abandoned here the formulas of the “great art” in an effort to achieve the natural expression sought after in Christmas crib figures. A humorous, realistic note is struck by the sheep and goats. Skillfully modeled in terracotta, they are for the most part attributed to Saverio Vassallo, one of the best Neapolitan *animaliers* of the day.

The same naturalistic vein appears in the figures of people in the inn of Bethlehem (Figures 3, 4, 12). Here are rich burghers, merchants, or valets, some of which seem to be individual portraits of exhilarating realism; peasants in the gay attire of the islands of Ischia and Procida; or women coming from the countryside to peddle their produce, colorfully displayed in miniature baskets. All of

them are potential actors of little genre scenes to be spontaneously set into action and made to relate to one another, in chatter or in laughter, under the sharp limelight of the stage, like the puppets of a miniature *commedia dell'arte*.

The magic of the theater and the warmth of simple, sincere emotions are still today the most endearing qualities of a Neapolitan *crèche*. Even the advent of the French Revolution and nineteenth-century rationalism was not able to destroy the charm that for years fascinated Neapolitans and foreigners alike. The Christmas crib remained “un vrai tableau parlant,” as wrote, at the close of the century, Count Giuseppe Gorani in his *Mémoires secrets et critiques des Cours et des Gouvernements*, “qui peut faire passer quelques moments agréables à l’homme le plus raisonnable.”

#### NOTE

Among the rich literature dealing with Neapolitan Christmas cribs, reference should be made above all to the fundamental work of R. Berliner, *Die Weihnachtskrippe*, Munich, 1955, where all historical material is exhaustively discussed and evaluated, and to three shorter publications: B. Molajoli, *La Scultura nel presepio napoletano del Settecento*, Naples, 1950; W. Döderlein, *Alte Krippen*, Munich, 1960; and M. Picone, *Presepio a San Martino*, Naples, 1964.

# Televising the Play of Daniel

Photographs by JAMES DELIHAS

During the Christmas season of 1958, *The Play of Daniel* was performed at The Cloisters by the New York Pro Musica, directed by Noah Greenberg, and produced by Lincoln Kirstein, with the assistance of Margaret B. Freeman, then Curator of The Cloisters. This was the first time since the Middle Ages that the play was presented in its entirety and in its original dramatic form. Based on Chapters 5 and 6 of the Book of Daniel, the play had been a great favorite with twelfth- and thirteenth-century audiences. Now it has become a great favorite with modern audiences as well, so much so that people have asked whether or not a permanent version for cinema or television would ever be made of it.

Just six months ago, a television tape of the entire play, which runs a little over an hour, was completed by the National Educational Television Network. The program will be shown this Christmas Eve all over the United States on the more than ninety educational stations affiliated with the network.

The Cloisters provided the perfect setting for the presentation of the play—the collection of Romanesque halls, brought stone by stone from various European structures, richly complemented the medieval musical drama. But in taping the play there was one formidable problem. The building is open to the public six days a week, which meant that the shooting would have to be done around the clock on the one day it is closed—Monday. There would be little time for a succession of takes, little time for at first not succeeding, and trying again. Accordingly, during weeks of rehearsal every movement of the players

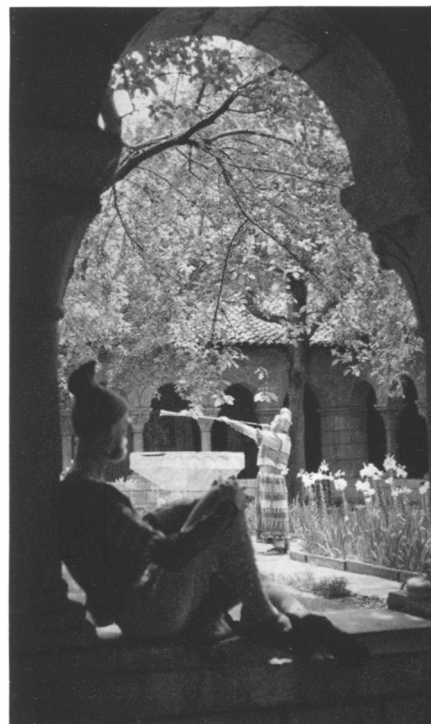
and the many cameras was intricately plotted on maps and models of the six galleries where the play would be performed.

At 6:00 P.M. on Sunday, June 20, the entire production staff and cast moved in and took over the museum. Hundreds of lights, miles of thick black cable, cameras, booms, and dollies were somehow installed in their proper places that evening.

At 6:30 Monday morning, actors, singers, instrumentalists, cameramen, and technicians were milling about in various chapels and halls. The stage manager shouted instructions, and the actual taping began.

More than thirty separate scenes were taped, some done over again because of a boom shadow, or because Belshazzar didn't die convincingly, or because a singer's lip motion was not "in sync" with the recorded music. Crews and cumbersome equipment had to move quickly from cloister to cloister; while one scene was being taped another was set up. Airplanes droned overhead at just the wrong moment. Just before 3:00 A.M., the two sleepy lions napping in the Romanesque Hall were awakened, to pounce upon Daniel when he was thrown into their den.

A half-hour later the weary cast and exhausted technicians left. The production had been completed within twenty-one hours, under conditions described by one of the staff as a "kind of low-pitched chaos kept by some miracle under constant control." At 9:00 the last piece of equipment was carted away. At 10:00 The Cloisters opened to the public, showing no sign of any intrusion upon its medieval serenity and quiet.



Ad honorem tui, Christe,  
Danielis ludus iste,  
In Belvaco est inventus,  
Et invenit hunc juvenus.

In your honor, Christ,  
This Daniel Play  
Was written at Beauvais,  
The product of our youth.



Ridens plaudit Babylon, Jerusalem plorat;  
 Haec orbatur, haec triumphans Balthasar adorat.  
 Omnes ergo exultemus tantae potestati,  
 Offerentes Regis vasa suae majestati.

With laughter, Babylon rejoices; Jerusalem weeps;  
 One has been deprived of her children, while the  
 other, triumphant, venerates Balthasar.  
 Therefore, let us all rejoice at such great power;  
 Offering these vessels of the king to His Majesty.

*Interim apparebit dextra in conspectu Regis scribens in pariete:  
 Mane, Thechel, Phares.*

*Meanwhile, a right hand appears before the King, writing on the wall:  
 Mane, Thechel, Phares.*





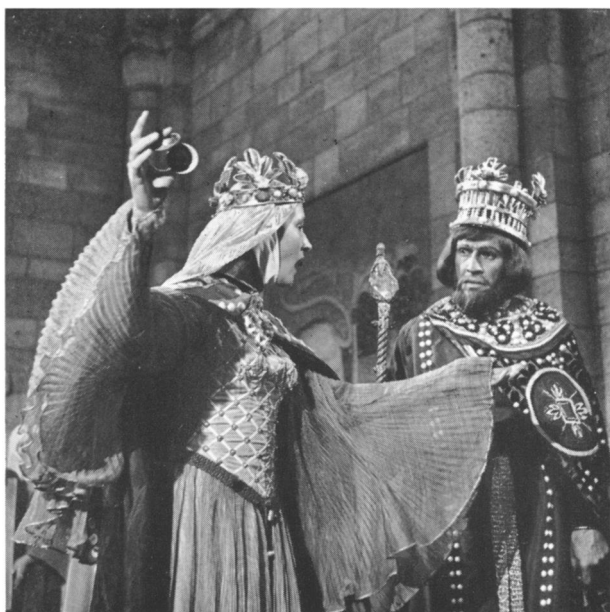
[Belshazzar's queen advises him:]

Cum Judaeae captivis populis  
Prophetiae doctum oraculis  
Danielem a sua patria  
Captivavit patris victoria.

Hic sub tuo vivens imperio,  
Ut mandetur, requirit ratio.  
Ergo manda ne sit dilatio,  
Nam docebit quod celat visio.

With the captive people of Judea,  
Your father's victory captured  
Daniel, learned in prophetic oracles,  
From his country.

Since he now lives under your rule,  
Reason demands he be summoned here.  
Command at once, lest there be delay,  
For he will explain what the vision conceals.



Et Mane, dicit Dominus,  
Est tui regni terminus.  
Thechel libram significat  
Quae te minorem indicat.  
Phares, hoc est divisio,  
Regnam transportat alio.

For Mane, says the Lord,  
Is the end of your kingdom;  
Thechel means a measuring weight,  
Which declares you to be weaker;  
Phares, that is division,  
Your kingdom will be given to another.





[Belshazzar is deposed by Darius:]

Ecce Rex Darius  
Venit cum principibus,  
Nobilis nobilibus.

Cum armato agmine  
Ruens et cum turbine  
Sternit cohortes,  
Confregit et fortes.

Behold King Darius  
Approaching with his princes,  
Noble among nobles.

Rushing with his armed troops  
And with a great tumult,  
He overthrows the enemy hosts  
And destroys even the strong.



Hic est Babylonius  
Nobilis Rex Darius.  
Illi cum tripudio  
Gaudeat et haec contio,  
Laudet et cum gaudio  
Ejus facta fortia  
Tam admirabilia.

Here is King Darius  
The noble Babylonian.  
Let the throng in dance  
Rejoice with him.  
Let them praise with joy  
His powerful deeds,  
So very admirable.



[Tricked by envious courtiers, Darius is forced to throw Daniel to the lions:]

Hujus rei non sum reus;  
Miserere mei Deus; eleison.  
Mitte, Deus, huc patronum  
Qui refrenet vim leonum; eleison.

Of this charge I am not guilty;  
God have mercy on me; have mercy upon us.  
Send, O God, a protector here  
Who will restrain the lion's power; have mercy upon us.

[Saved from the lions, Daniel prophesies the birth of Christ, and all join in a Te Deum:]

Te Deum laudamus, te Dominum confitemur.  
Te aeternum Patrem omnis terra veneratur. . . .

We praise Thee, God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.  
All the earth worships Thee, the Father everlasting. . . .







#### NOTE

The text and music used for the play are taken from a manuscript dating about 1230 (British Museum ms. Egerton 2615), the only medieval record of the play known to exist. The translation in the captions is based upon that of Jean Misrahi. The text and translation are reprinted from *The Play of Daniel*, copyright © 1959 by Oxford University Press, through the courtesy of the publishers.



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