

An Artifact Speaks • Artifact Information Sheet

Artifact Name: Palette of Narmer

Time Period of the Original: c. 3000-2920 BCE

Culture/Religion Group: Predynastic Egypt

Material of the Original: Siltstone or Schist (sources vary)

Reproduction? Yes (original is 2' 1" high)

Background Information:

Palettes made of siltstone were used to grind and mix the cosmetic eye pigments used by both men and women in ancient Egypt. Palettes have been found in gravesites as remote as 5500 BCE. Early pigments consisted of green malachite (copper ore). During the Old Kingdom, this was replaced *kohl*, which is based on black malachite (iron ore). Like athletes of today, streaks of black were placed under the eyes to help reduce the glare of the sun.

Examples as large and intricately carved as the Palette of Narmer are found in temples, not graves. It was discovered in 1898 in the remains of a Pre-dynastic temple of the god Horus in the town of Hierakonpolis, which was the capital of Egypt during this time period. These larger palettes, the gifts of kings or other important individuals, are believed to have a ceremonial function and may have been used to grind the make-up applied to images of the gods. On this palette, the circular area designated for grinding is the space created by the interweaving of the necks of the animals in the center of the palette's front side. These animals are called *serpopards*, leopards with long, snake-like necks.

The motifs/scenes depicted on this artifact are those found in Egyptian art for thousands of years. One of these is called the "smiting pose" and shows the king about to crush the skull of a defeated enemy with his mace. In fact, most of the artifact is covered with scenes that show military victories by the king. Also common to much of Egyptian art is that the scenes are carved in spaces called registers, that are divided by thick lines, and that important people, like the king, are shown much larger than unimportant ones.

Egyptologists disagree on the interpretation of the scenes on the Palette of Narmer. The most common interpretation is based on the portrayal of the king as wearing the crown of South Egypt on one side and the crown of North Egypt on the other side. Many believe this means that the king being shown is the one whose military efforts united the two halves of Egypt. Others have suggested, though, that these two crowns also represent the king's relation to the sun god. Detailed information on the interpretation of the artifact's iconography can be found in the Narmer Palette pdf file included in the lesson plans and in the links found in the source list.

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Sources for Palettes and the Palette of Narmer:

- Calvert, Dr. Amy. "Palette of King Narmer." *Khan Academy*. Khan Academy, 1 Jan. 2015. Web. 23 Mar. 2015. <<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ancient-art-civilizations/egypt-art/predynastic-old-kingdom/a/palette-of-king-narmer>>; <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ancient-art-civilizations/egypt-art/predynastic-old-kingdom/a/palette-of-king-narmer>.
- "Cosmetics." *Cosmetics*. Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, Egypt Center, University of Wales, 1 Jan. 2010. Web. 23 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.egypt.swan.ac.uk/index.php/collection/141-cosmetics>>;
- Kinnaer, Jacques. "The Ancient Egypt Site." *The Narmer Palette*. The Ancient Egypt Site, 10 May 2014. Web. 23 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.ancient-egypt.org/history/early-dynastic-period/1st-dynasty/horus-narmer/narmer-artefacts/narmer-palette.html>>;
- Roberts, Paul. "Egyptian Cosmetic Palettes." *Academia.edu*. Academia. Web. 23 Mar. 2015. <https://www.academia.edu/1580238/Egyptian_Cosmetic_Palettes via @academia>

Date Notes:

BCE (Before Current Era) = B.C.

CE (Current Era) = A.D.