Dr. Adams' two lectures were concerned with the arts of the Palaeolithic and Neolithic peoples and of the village communities of the bronze and iron ages in Europe. Today I will lecture on Egyptian art and on Monday on Mesopotamian art. And with the study of the arts of Mesopotamia and Egypt we begin the study of the art and culture of cities. The discovery of methods working copper and later its harder alloy bronze, is closely associated with this change from village to city life. The urban revolution begins somewhat earlier in Mesopotamia than it does in Egypt, about 3500BC. In Egypt it comes about 30 years later in 3200BC. Before these ancient civilizations were formed the story of art is intermittent and disconnected. It is the art of hunting of village communities, and of the sporadic and often accidental contacts between them. With the rise of cities, however, the story of art becomes continuous. From Mesopotamian and Egyptian times onwards, the technical methods of working materials, styles of carving, modelling and drawing, and a traditional languages of graphic symbols are passed down from one artist and craftsman to the next. Again, both Egypt and Mesopotamia initiated a written script: and from thenceforward the history of art separates itself from the techniques of archaeology, by becoming a study of art objects in association with relevant contemporary written documents.

Then again, prior to the development of cities, works of art are almost entirely the work of individual artist-craftsmen. Cities brought division of labour, which lied to the emergence of architecture, monumental sculpture and forms of painting that involve the participation of many craftsmen. Indeed architecture, sculpture and painting in their monumental forms (and these arts are our special concern in this course) arise first in Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The civilization of Egypt arose out of the Neolithic village culture which by 4000BC was widespread all over the Near East. Primitive village communities were dotted along the western edge of the Nile delta, on the heights outside the reach of the Nile flood.* The area under flood was at that time swampy and uninhabitable. It was the people of these Neolithic communities who began the ling process of controlling the flood waters by dykes and canals. This involved the co-operation of a number of villages under the leadership of a particular village. Each village possessed a local deity of its own, and the growing importance of a village in a community of villages led to the growing importance of its god. The gradual coalition of villages led to the formation of two kingdoms, the Kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. The two kingdoms were united about the year 3000BC.

I want to begin by looking at some examples of the art of these Neolithic communities. Egypt produced a number of distinct Neolithic cultures: the Tasian, Gerean, Amroatian, and Semainean. Whilst the Neolithic art of Egypt has much in common
with the Neolithic art of the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East, in its later phases it begins to foreshadow the art of Dynastic Egypt.

Take this Pre-Dynastic pottery bowl in the Boston Museum for instance.* The bowl has been fired to a dull red and then polished by burnishing, and the design painted over in white. Note the basic wave pattern and rosette pattern in the centre. Such patterns are characteristic of Neolithic art as a whole. But by this time, the Egyptian craftsman is beginning to introduce animal figures: here the hippopotamus. And they are repeated rhythmically around the bowl.

Such animals were also modelled in clay as in this clay hippopotamus.* The essential characteristic of the animal is captured the forms are curved, and posses that air of vitality so characteristic of primitive art.

Our next slide is a pre-Dynastic slate jackal.* There is the same sense of vitality of the animal, however incorrect the proportions. Egyptian gods were first conceived and represented in animal form, a characteristic they never lost entirely, and this slate jackal probably represents the jackal god Anûbis, a protector of the dead.

The gods, however, were not, invariably conceived as animals. The image of the Neolithic mother goddess is present in Egypt as she is present in most Neolithic cultures. Pottery and ivory figurines, often of great liveliness and vigour, are frequent throughout the pre-dynastic period.* Towards the end of the period, however, sculptors began to carve large figurines of gods out of limestone, one of the softest and most easily worked of stones. They often represented the male fertility god Min. From limestone, the Egyptian carvers moved on to harder stone such as basalt. Here, in our next slide, is a small predynastic figure f a man, from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.* It may represent the god Min. Note that the hands are firmly by the side, a position determined by the cylindrical nature of the stone from which it was cut. Note too the long beard, which became an attribute of divinity and kingship in Egypt from earliest times. The smoothed surface of the hard stone, the careful and symmetrical treatment of the face with its almond-shaped eyes and carefully modelled lids and brows, indicate the improved technical methods of the carver, and the beginnings of a formal treatment of the human figure based upon axial symmetry, ie the division of the figure into equal parts about a central axis.

This imposition of a formal, symmetrical structure deriving probably from a new awareness of mathematical order, may be traced in a series of slate palettes which run from late Predynastic times through to Dynasty I. In the lion palette the figures of the dead are freely disposed in a disordered manner. There is a looseness and freedom in the drawing and in the proportions of the figures of men and animals, that indicates there still primitive character—there is no base-line. When we turn to the Narmer palette of Dynasty I, however, we note that the figures are now placed upon a base-
line, and ordered in a series of superimposed registers. The large size of the principle figure dominates the composition, and the Egyptian conventions for drawing the standing figure are now reaching their standardized form: the shoulders, the eye, and the hands being disposed frontally, while the rest of the body is depicted in profile. The same conventions have been used in drawing the other figures. Note too the description of muscles and anatomical details by clear incisions.*

The meaning of the images, ie iconography of the palette is concerned with the unification of Egypt by the subjugation of the north by the south. In the top register we have two heads of the cow-goddess Hathor. She has the horns of cow but a human face. Rather, she was a mother goddess of love, joy and fertility. Sometimes her functions were conflated with those of the sky-goddess Nut—and perhaps she is helping to hold up the sky here. In any case, she is certainly guarding the house of the king, here in the centre. We see it represented in elevation—with the vertical lines of its buttresses, and the enclosed court beyond. Within the court his name is inscribed in the hieroglyphic writing then just coming into use. Note the projecting bastions on either side of the entrance. The meaning of the scene is depicted in the large hieroglyph at the right. Here the Horus falcon, who is identified with the god-king, Horus—Narmer holds a man tethered by a cord by the nose. The man with papyrus sprouting from him is the hieroglyphic sign for land. The king has subjugated the land. The king wears the tall white crown of the south, but on the other side, in our next slide, he wears the crown of the north.

Let us turn now for a moment to architecture. The earliest forms of building in Egypt appear to have consisted of reeds and matting stretched over light framework and daubed with clay. There are some primitive representations of such huts on predynastic palettes. This was succeeded by brick architecture, and it is possible that Egypt may have learned something from Mesopotamian brick construction which was already well advanced there by 300BC.

A monumental brick architecture developed in Egypt in the predynastic period, that is the period immediately before the First dynasty, but side by side with it Egyptian quarrymen gained mastery in cutting stone. This first began in the north with the cutting of fine white limestone from the hills near Memphis. The white limestone was at first used to line the interiors of brick tombs. It was here at Saqqara near Memphis that the first great building in stone which has survived has been excavated. This is the step-pyramid of King Zoser which we see in our next slide.* The pyramid was not an isolated monument but part of a large complex of buildings, which included the pyramid, the tomb of the king, and funerary temple, and a large court in which the king ran a ceremonial race. You will find a reconstruction of the temple plan in Lange and Hirmer.
Recent excavations at Saqqara have shown that the Egyptian masonry techniques were already highly advanced during the first dynasty. Our next slide shows a finely cut and joined wall of fine ashlar masonry,* with attached columns, with delightfully proportioned capitals, the forms of which are based upon the papyrus reeds of the delta. Our next slide shows a reconstruction of the tomb area.* Note the large bastions and smaller buttresses which help to strengthen the wall—a mode of construction having its origin doubtless in the monumental brick construction of proto-dynastic times.

It is in the time of King Zoser, at the beginning of the III Dynasty that we see Egyptian art reaching its first maturity. As in architecture, so in relief sculpture. Our next slide comes from Zoser’s tomb and we see him running his ceremonial race.* The law of *frontality* is now well established: the face in profile, he eye *en face*, the arms and legs in profile, the shoulders full face. By this time, too, the system of proportions which governed Egyptian draughtsmanship was also well established. You will find a good account of this in Erik Iverson: *Canon and Proportion in Egyptian Art*, 1955, in the University library. There has been a long discussion about the Egyptian system of proportion since the time of the Egyptologist Lepsius began to discuss the matter in the 19th century. It seems clear, however, that the proportions of the human figure are based on the basis unit of measurement of ancient Egypt. This was the small cubit, and represented the distance from the elbow to the tip of the thumb. The height of a man was taken from the base of the big toe to the point where the hair meets the top of the forehead. Other parts of the body were divided according to accepted ratios. In constructing a drawing, an Egyptian artist drew out a square grid first, and having ascertained the figure intended, drew each part of the body by marking it off on the appropriate lines of his grid. Note in this relief as in the Narmer palette the emblems of divine kingship: the conical headdress of the northern kingdom, the divine falcon Horus, the jackal god Anubis, protector of the dead, the royal beard.

A life-size seated figure of King Zoser was also found in his pyramid.* The statue was carved out of a quadrangular block of limestone, and the four faces of the stone are still in evidence. We usually describe free-standing sculpture as sculpture in the round: it would be more appropriate to describe Egyptian free-standing sculpture as sculpture in the square. For the similar methods of construction were adopted as in the case of relief sculpture. In this case four grids were drawn on the vertical faces of the block, and sometimes a plan on the top face also, and the block worked from the four sides. And the frontal and two profile planes continue in consequence to dominate the conception in the round as in relief.

Now, for the Egyptians, this stone image contained and sustained the magical presence of the god-king. It was not intended to be seen and to be admired; it was not a monument to the greatness of the Pharaoh. It was placed in a closed statue chamber.
(serdab), and it faced two holes in the wall so that the smoke of incense could penetrate into it, and the spirit or *ka* of the king could move freely to and from it.

The king wears the royal beard, a heavy wig, along ceremonial gown. Even though the inlaid eyes have been torn out we can see that already by the III Dynasty Egyptian craftsmen had invented a formula to express ‘the majesty that doth hedge a king’.

Such seated figures of the king became traditional. Our next slide of King Kephren of the IV Dynasty, carved in diorite (a very hard stone) is one of the masterpieces of the Old Kingdom. The Horus falcon both symbolizes and protects the king. The *ureaus*, or divine cobra, stands erect in the centre of his forehead, symbolizing the divine wrath. The hieroglyph on the side of the throne means ‘to join’, and symbolizes the union of Upper and Lower Egypt. Lions are represented on either side of the chair. Here, then, is a magnificent sculptural embodiment of the concept of the god-king.

It was only the Pharaoh, however, who was endowed with such idealized majesty. And during the Old Kingdom it would seem that the idea of an eternal life attached with certainty only to the king alone. His court and the ruling families gained what afterlife they achieved by their association with him. This question is discussed in some detail in John Wilson’s *Burden of Egypt* (Pelican). In this connection it is to be noted that people beneath the king are invariably rendered in sculpture more naturalistically than the king himself. Prince Ra-Hotep and his wife, for instance, in our next slide.* The prince was a son of the king and a great state dignitary. Both he and his wife are rendered far more realistically. It is a completely painted tomb statue in limestone. Hw convention whereby the flesh of the man is a dark brown and his wife’s a light buff persists into Greek times. The forms possess the same cubic simplicity that we have noted already, but there has been greater concentration upon producing portraiture in the heads. The large feet and thick ankles are a feature of IV Dynasty sculpture.

In our next slide, we have the wooden statue of Ka-aper, or the Sheikh El Beled, as it is often called, which belongs to the V Dynasty. It is a highly realistic likeness of a fat middle-aged man.** The Louvre Scribe, which belongs to the same period, similarly possesses a high degree of realism. Next we have the dwarf, Seneb, and his family. According to the funeral tablet, Seneb became very rich and married a cousin of the king. She holds him with wifely devotion, very pleased, apparently, to possess a husband who, if not tall, is at least dark and handsome. Judging by her calf-like expression and thick ankles, she has good reason to be. The children are delightfully placed so as not to draw attention to the deficiency of daddy’s legs. There own, unfortunately, take after their mother’s. The statue of Seneb and his family, the wooden statue of Ka-aper, the seated figure of Kephren, the standing figure of Mycerinus all have one thing in common. They all express confidence, optimism. There is nothing solemn or mournful about Old Kingdom art. It is an art of a young,
self-confident nation. In this respect the art of the Old Kingdom presents us with something of a paradox. Although it is concerned with life after death, few arts have concerned themselves so busily with the here and now. This is particularly apparent in paintings of the Old Kingdom.

During the V and VI Dynasties the centralized administration of the Old Kingdom gradually collapsed as provincial rulers became more powerful. The First Intermediate Period was a time when the power of the Pharaoh did not extend much beyond Memphis, and there was little control over the south. During this period art declines, but some of the earliest reflective and meditative literature of Egypt reveals that traditional values were now being questioned. Men saw temples and pyramids falling into decay and disrepair as the central administration collapsed and began to speculate upon the vanity of earthly things. One scribe of the time wrote:

Behold the places thereof
Their walls are dismantled,
Their places are no more,
As if they had never been…
Lo, no man taketh his goods with him.
Yea, none returneth again that is gone thither.

And another wrote:

They that build in granite and fashioned a hall in the pyramid, that achieved what is goodly in this goodly work—when the builders are become gods, then their offering tables are empty (and they are) even as the weary ones which die upon the canal without a survivor; the flood has taken its end and likewise the heat of the sun, and the fish of the river bank hold converse with them.

Unity in Egypt was re-established by the Pharaohs of the XI Dynasty who ruled from the south at Thebes. There was now, after the troubles of the intermediate period, a greater awareness of the responsibilities of the ruler. The youthful confidence of the Old Kingdom departed. ‘A theme of the Middle Kingdom’ writes Professor Wilson, ‘was social responsibility: the king was a herdsman who cherished his herds; the official had a positive duty toward the widow and the orphan’. This change was to be witnessed in the portraits of the Middle Kingdom Pharaohs. Our next slide shows a youthful portrait of King Amenhemet III.* Here there is brooding seriousness and naturalism that is absent from the idealized god-like conception of, say, king Kephren of the Old Kingdom. The same quality is apparent in heads of Sesostris III.* The vigour, strength, and realism of these pharaohs who reunited Egypt is there, but so too is the realization of the responsibilities of the ruler. Expressions became more serious. Take this ka (or soul) statue of King Hor in the Cairo Museum.* We know that it is a ka statue by the upraised arms. It represents the immortal essence of the ruler.
incorporated in the body. The expression is devout and withdrawn, so different from the self-confident Mycerinus walking with great confidence into the after-life.

At the level of everyday life, however, the realism of the Old Kingdom persists. One of the most appealing aspects of Middle Kingdom sculpture is the series of small wooden models from tombs portraying scenes of everyday life. Whatever their magical intention, the models from Meket-Ra’s tomb provide us with a full picture of life on a great estate of the time. This one, in our next slide, shows a group of spotted cattle being driven before a columned shelter beneath which Meket-Rā and his scribes count the herds. The pavilion gives us an interesting insight into the domestic architecture of the time. Note the gaily striped fluted papyrus columns, and the projecting waterspouts.**

In one field the Middle Kingdom reached the highest field: that is in jewellery. The finest Egyptian jewellery comes from the Middle Kingdom. One of its masterpieces is the Dashur Crown,* in our next slide. It consists of interlacing strands of fine gold wire dotted with small star shaped flowers inlaid with carnelian and turquoise. Another masterpiece is the Lahun croan(?) with its fine inlaid uraeus viper and is intricate rosettes.

The Middle Kingdom collapsed under the impact of a foreign invasion by the Hyksos, who were Semitic warriors from Asia. They established themselves in armed caps in Italy. They were eventually thrown out by the Pharaohs of the XVIII Dynasty who established the New Kingdom. Egypt now became an Empire, the frontier being pushed up north into Syria. An extensive trade was developed with Asia Minor, Cyprus and the Levant. The architectural achievement of the XVIII Dynasty was expressed in great temples at Deir El Baharis and Karnak. Here, in our next slide is the magnificent rock temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Deir El Bahari. The splendid siting, and the planned unity suggests the work of a single mind. Our next slide shows a seated figure of Queen Hatshepsut herself.* Over one thousand years separate this figure with the figure of King Kephren,* yet the basic conventions have been retained. Indeed, sculptors of the New Kingdom paid great attention to the precedents set by the Old Kingdom. The long elegant and rather sophisticated line of the statue is particularly characteristic of New Kingdom work, as may be seen in the procession of princes, from the Tomb of Khufu.* I want to use this illustration to support some general remarks on the nature of Egyptian art.

Egyptian art, as we know, possessed a magical intention; it was concerned with maintaining and nourishing the dead. But it is not the magic of primitive art in which the artist is so completely involved in the process of sympathetic magic that he is solely concerned with recreating a sense of vitality and magic power in his images. In the art of the cave painters there are no formal conventions except those imposed by materials and customs. But Egyptian art is a magical art into which the rational
intellect has entered. In it we can witness the emergence of an alienation of rational from magical thought. In measuring and plotting his dykes and canals the Egyptian became conversant with the straight line and the right angle, he discovered mathematics and geometry. This awareness of rectilinear space made it possible to set his figures on a base line to become conscious of an up and a down, and hence a left and right in his drawing. Although Egyptian reliefs are still flat, the conjunction of the profile position with the frontal position was the first step in the realization of 3-dimensional space. Because both the profile and the frontal positions are abstractions from a solid world, and because they are abstractions which lie at right-angles to one another. The Egyptians made very little use of foreshortening, though there are some perfunctory attempts at three quarter positions in New Kingdom reliefs. Depth was suggested by such devices as overlapping and repetition as we see here, and the use of multiple baselines.

If we look at the harvest scene, fro an XVIII Dynasty tomb, we do see that there is some attempt at foreshortening and a tendency to depart occasionally from the convention of frontal shoulder position. There is a surprising freedom in drawing as in these fish, and in the XVIII Dynasty relief carving reaches a height of elegance, grace and sophistication, such as in this head of a man from the Tomb o Ramose, which it had never before attained. There is a strong trend towards naturalism in XVIII century Dynasty art which was greatly advanced during the reign of the heretical king Amehotep IV, better known as Ikahton. Here are a series of plaster casts of the time. The practice of taking masks of the dead is an implicit recognition of an interest in portraiture.

- Plaster head of Amenhotep III
- Palster Head of an Old Man
- Plaster Head of an Old Woman

Our next slide is a sandstone statue of Iknaton. Note the pointed eyes, the exaggerated nostrils and mouth, the large ears, the deep cutting of the figure and the emphasis upon the belly. Here formal mannerisms are combined with a sensuous appeal in a way unprecedented in Egyptian art. The head of his wife, Nofretete, though highly naturalistic, has more of the formal qualities characteristic of the XVIII Dynasty in general. The magnificent gold mask of Iknaton’s son-in-law, Tutenkhamon witnessed a return to the traditional formal elegance of the XVIII Dynasty.

1. Hunting scene of a painted chest of Tutankahmaon
2. Inlaid chair of Tutankahmaon
3. Tomb of Senndejem. Dyn 19
4. Cat and Serpent. Tomb of Senndejem on door jamb.

Here we might say that Egyptian art has become truly naturalistic: just the family puss patting the friendly family snake. Alas it is not so: the Egyptologists inform us that the cat is the sun god Ra in the form of a cat and ere he raises a knife to cut off the head
of the serpent god Aphophis which nightly obstructs the passage of the sun back through the Underworld.

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...a symbol of power. Note the position of the arms, which we have already seen in the statue of Djoser. The statues were coloured the man a dark brown, his wife a light buff colour.**

We have been looking at Old Kingdom seated figures. Let us look in our next slide at an Old Kingdom standing figure.* It represents King Mycerinus of the IV Dynasty. He walks between the cow goddess Hathor on his right and regional goddess on his left. Both goddesses wear their divine attributes on their heads to distinguish them. Notice how they fold him in their arms in a sisterly fashion to protect him from evil. Notice, too, how symmetrical the king’s figure is, how he holds his fists clenched by his side, and strides forward with his left leg, his head held high. Such standing figures as these were, many centuries later to exercise a profound influence upon the development of Greek sculpture, as we shall see in later lectures. And in our next slide we see a wooden standing figure of the V Dynasty called Ka-aaper, an official.* The pose is not dissimilar from that of Mycerinus, but it is more realistic, less regal in effect—and if we had it in its original painted form it would be till more so. Here is a detail of the Ka-aaper head.*

The Old Kingdom was highly centralized, but there were powerful regional rulers who gained more and more power until the kingdom collapsed into a state of feudal anarchy due to this process of progressive decentralization. It became…

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