

DRINK AND BE MERRY!



ISABEL STÜNKEL

GALLERY 132

EGYPTIAN ART FACSIMILE ROTATION 2019–2021

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Preface

To coincide with the Museum's 150th anniversary, the small installation presented in the following catalogue explores ways in which the ancient Egyptians celebrated by highlighting key components of festivals, such as processions and banquets. The accompanying texts reflect the gallery panel and labels at the time of the exhibition. In order to view each facsimile's record on The Met's website, click on the image in the catalogue.

All objects in this catalogue are part of the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Unless otherwise indicated, additional illustrations are from The Metropolitan Museum of Art Department of Egyptian Art Archives.

The gallery rotation was made possible by the generosity of the Friends of Egyptian Art.

Views of the Installation in Gallery 132



CATALOGUE

“Drink and Be Merry!”

Everyone likes parties, and the ancient Egyptians were no exception. The facsimiles in this exhibition depict a variety of celebrations in New Kingdom Egypt (ca. 1550–1070 B.C.). From ancient calendars, we know that the Egyptians enjoyed many public festivals and they had the day off to participate in the festivities.

During various private celebrations, family and friends gathered to eat and drink. Such banquets are depicted on tomb walls, though the exact occasions are often unknown. Interestingly, the consumption of food is not a central motif, but the paintings frequently feature alcohol and the written exhortation, “Drink and make a happy day!” In addition to social drinking, Egyptians sometimes consumed alcohol excessively, notably in rites of drunkenness performed at certain religious festivals. At these events, participants sought to achieve an altered

state that was thought to lead to communication with a deity or the dead.

Public processions were a fundamental element of most religious festivals. Priests, accompanied by music and singing, carried deity statues or sacred objects from the sanctuaries to other locations within the temple precinct or along public routes between different temples. Processions leaving the temple offered average Egyptians rare opportunities to get close to their deities, as access to the innermost parts of temples was highly restricted. For spectators gathered along the processional routes, being so close to a deity must have been an exhilarating experience. A hymn sung during a procession appropriately began with the words: “The heaven is cheering; the land is in festival.”



Detail of a banquet scene showing a guest vomiting into a jar after excessive alcohol consumption. From the tomb of Amenemhat (ca. 1479–1425 B.C.) in Thebes (modern Luxor)

Scent and Sex (left side of banquet scene)



Scent is known to have a deep psychological impact, and for the ancient Egyptians it was also connected to sexuality, partially due to a pun based on the similarity of the words for “scent” and “ejaculate” in their language. Banquet scenes like this one often include sexual references, and sex was clearly part of some festivals. Sex also implied rebirth, an important funerary concept.

In the bottom register, a servant reaches toward a cone of scented unguent (ointment) on top of a woman’s head, while holding a bowl with another such cone. Other guests also wear cones on top of their heads. Originally, scholars thought the cones depicted actual perfumed objects but later they were interpreted as symbolic representations of scent. However, recent archaeological finds suggest they indeed depict real objects.

Facsimile painted in 1920–21 by Nina de Garis Davies

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.105)

Original:

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep III–Akhenaten (ca. 1390–1349 B.C.)

Thebes, El-Khokha, tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky (TT 181)

“Drink and Make a Happy Day!” (right side of banquet scene)



Banquets happened during funerals or at celebratory occasions, such as the Beautiful Festival of the Valley, which also included processions (see “Procession of Amun,” p. 11). Guests at banquets are usually depicted with fine clothing and elaborate jewelry, and in a state of eternal youth.

This and the previous facsimile (“Scent and Sex,” p. 2) represent one large banquet scene in which living and dead individuals sit together. On the right, the largest figure depicts the deceased, the sculptor Nebamun, with his immediate family members, while other attendees are featured in smaller sizes to the left (“Scent and Sex,” p. 2). Standing before him is a female figure—Henutnefret, his wife or sister—who hands him a bowl of wine with the words “Drink and make a happy day!” Attendees often consumed an excessive amount of alcohol during these celebrations.

Facsimile painted in 1916 by Nina de Garis Davies

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.106)

Original:

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep III–Akhenaten (ca. 1390–1349 B.C.)
Thebes, El-Khokha, tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky (TT 181)

The Mandrake and the Lotus



This detail of a banquet scene shows a female guest offering another guest a yellow mandrake fruit, which the ancient Egyptians associated with love and sexuality. The fruit has a pleasing smell when ripe, while the mandrake plant itself has hallucinogenic and aphrodisiac effects but is toxic.

Several lotus flowers are also depicted. Each headband features a lotus bud, and

two guests hold a lotus flower; one is open (though partially destroyed), and another is closed. The lotus flower, which also has a pleasing scent, was a symbol for regeneration and rebirth because its petals open and close every day. Additionally, the *Nymphaea* species of lotus has narcotic properties and may have been used to achieve an altered state.

Facsimile painted in 1922 by Nina de Garis Davies

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.92)

Original:

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, probably reign of Thutmose IV (ca. 1400–1390 B.C.)
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, tomb of Nebseny (TT 108)

Wine Additives



The consumption of alcoholic beverages was a key element in many celebrations, such as in this detail of a banquet scene. In addition to social drinking, the participants of some festivals, such as the Beautiful Festival of the Valley, drank in excess to achieve an altered state of inebriation, disorientation, and sleepiness that was thought to enable

communication with a deity or the dead. For this purpose, drugs might have also been served. Small flasks, such as the ones held by the servant on the left, might have held herbal concentrates that were added to wine to increase its effect. The accompanying inscription reads, “Make a happy day!”

Facsimile painted in 1925 by Nina de Garis Davies

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.78)

Original:

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Thutmose III–Amenhotep II (ca. 1479–1400 B.C.)
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100)

Music and Dance



Music, singing, and dancing were part of celebrating in ancient Egypt. Here, a harpist leads a group of female musicians. To the right is a lute player, who is naked except for her jewelry. She is dancing, and her tilted head indicates that she is possibly singing as well. Behind her, a young girl also wearing

only jewelry is dancing and might be singing. The fourth female figure plays a double pipe and turns her head toward a lyre player. According to an inscription, this detail of a larger banquet was probably part of the Beautiful Festival of the Valley.

Facsimiles painted in 1921–22 by Charles K. Wilkinson

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.9)

Original:

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Thutmose IV (ca. 1400–1390 B.C.)
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, tomb of Djeserkareseneb (TT 38)

Procession



This facsimile painting depicts a scene from the New Year festival, which originally coincided with the beginning of the annual Nile flood. As part of this celebration, priests staged processions like this one. Here, one group of priests carries the golden vase of the god Amun. Its lid takes the shape of a ram's head with an elaborate crown. At the bottom left, two other priests sing and clap

the rhythm while another group follows and holds smaller ceremonial vases. The building with eight flag posts can be identified as the second pylon (entrance gate) of Karnak temple. During this festival the temple was cleaned, and since the procession moves to the left, the priests are probably on their way to the Nile to gather water.

Facsimile painted in 1923–24 by Charles K. Wilkinson

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.6)

Original:

New Kingdom, Dynasty 19, reign of Ramesses II (ca. 1279–1213 B.C.)

Thebes, Dra Abu el-Naga, tomb of Panehsy (TT 16)

Man Bringing New Year Gifts



The New Year festival celebrated the birth of the sun god and was associated with the rebirth of the king, as well as with renewal in general. Different traditions have been recorded as being part of this celebration. In New Kingdom tombs, scenes depict presentations of New Year gifts to the king, though most of the objects were probably ultimately meant for the temple of Amun. Among them was new temple equipment, including various luxurious vessels such as the two stone jars here. Other types of gifts are featured in the following facsimile paintings (“New Year Gifts,” p. 9).

Facsimile painted in 1914–16 by Hugh R. Hopgood

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.66)

Original:

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep II (ca. 1427–1400 B.C.)

Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, tomb of Qenamun (TT 93)

New Year Gifts



The new year was a time of renewal, and many New Year gifts depicted in New Kingdom tombs feature new gear for the king, such as items of warfare. Here the objects include a bow, whip, dagger, shirt of chain mail with two quivers (top left), and a shield with a horse trapping (bottom left).

Other gifts are temple equipment, such as the golden incense spoon with a long handle (top right). Gold was a popular material that was associated with the sun, and in the context of the new year, might additionally refer to the newborn sun god. Close to the spoon is a duck-shaped cosmetic box with a duckling and a mirror whose disk might also allude to the sun.

Facsimiles painted in 1913 by Norman de Garis Davies

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.75a-c, .174-.175, .177, .179-.180)

Original:

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep II (ca. 1427-1400 B.C.)
Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, tomb of Qenamun (TT 93)

Processional Statue and Flower Bouquet



Each year several commemorative festivals were held in the artisans' village of Deir el-Medina in celebration of its founder, the deified king Amenhotep I. Here, the horizontal beams of his elaborate statue indicate that it sits on top of a palanquin, which was used during processions. Even though the context of this scene does not necessarily derive from an actual festival, it illustrates the type of statues carried during such events.

The tall bouquet of flowers at right was presented as an offering. Such bouquets can often be seen in depictions of celebrations or offering scenes. In addition to the flowers' decorative qualities and pleasing scent, they had symbolic value, since their name, *ankh*, is also the word for life.

Facsimile painted in 1922 by Nina de Garis Davies

Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.5)

Original:

New Kingdom, Dynasty 19, reign of Ramesses II (ca. 1279–1213 B.C.)

Thebes, Dra Abu el-Naga, tomb of Panehsy (TT 16)

Procession of Amun



During the Beautiful Festival of the Valley, statues of the deities Amun, Mut, and Khonsu left Karnak temple to journey across the Nile and visit other temples. The procession also passed many private tombs, where people gathered for elaborate banquets (see “Drink and Make a Happy Day!” p. 3).

Here, the boat of Amun with rams’ heads at each end carries a shrine that houses the

deity’s statue. The ship has just moored and is greeted by a statue of the deified king Amenhotep I, which will join the procession. Though the statue of Amun was not visible, the mere sight of his golden shrine, which was usually in the restricted areas of the temple, must have been a spectacular event for the elated throng of followers.

Facsimile painted in 1930–31 by Charles K. Wilkinson

Rogers Fund, 1931 (31.6.5)

Original:

New Kingdom, Dynasty 19, reign of Ramesses I–Ramesses II (ca. 1295–1213 B.C.)
Thebes, Dra Abu el-Naga, tomb of Amenmose (TT 19)

