

# Chapter 9

## The Royal Image

### Objective

To see how the royals were portrayed in Egyptian art.

### Mystery

What did the royals wear and what symbols did they use to indicate their station in life?

### Discussion and Research Projects

1. What type of clothing did the elite class wear?
2. What type of clothing did priests wear?
3. Can you guess the age of the people portrayed in Egyptian art? Why do you think they chose to be portrayed as young adults? What does this say about the value placed on youth?
4. Why would the royals choose to be depicted with an idealized figure rather than as they really looked?
5. Describe the hairstyle of the priests, and the elite men and women.
6. Why do you think the Egyptians wore scented cones on top of their wigs?
7. Describe how young people wore their hair.
8. What type of make-up did the men and women wear?
9. What practical purpose did their eye make-up have?
10. How do you think the clothing and hairstyles of the ancient Egyptians have influenced today's fashions?



11. Find examples of how people and deities are depicted in two-dimensional drawings. How is the body drawn? Which parts of the body are shown in profile and which are shown from the front?
12. Look at drawings to compare the proportions given to the head, torso, arms and legs. Are the proportions generally the same from one drawing to the next or do they differ?

### **Creative Projects**

1. Use **Activity Sheet 19** to learn about the clothing worn by royal women and goddesses.
2. Use **Activity Sheet 20** to learn about the clothing worn by royal men and gods.
3. Use **Activity Sheet 21** to learn about headgear, hairstyles and make-up.
4. Use **Activity Sheet 22** to give your students a chance to dress an Egyptian man and woman.
5. Use **Activity Sheet 23** to learn about how the ancient Egyptians drew the human figure.
6. Use **Activity Sheet 24** to make a drawing of human figures using a grid similar to the one used by the ancient Egyptians.

## FACT SHEET: The Royal Image

### Clothing

When royalty, gods and goddesses were portrayed in statues, temple carvings and wall paintings, it was the beauty and self-confidence of the subject that was conveyed. Egyptian artistic conventions idealized the proportions of the body. Men are shown with broad shoulders, slim bodies, and muscular arms and legs; and women have small waists, flat stomachs and rounded busts. Both wear elegant clothing and jewellery, and stand tall with their heads held high. Their stately appearance commands the respect of all who gaze upon their portraits.

In the Old Kingdom, goddesses and elite women were portrayed wearing a sheath with broad shoulder straps. In the New Kingdom, the dress had only one thin strap. These dresses were made of linen, and decorated with beautifully coloured patterns and beadwork. By the reign of Amenhotep III (1390-1352 B.C.), women's garments were made of very light see-through linen.

The men wore knee-length shirts, loincloths or kilts made of linen. Leather loincloths were not uncommon, however. Their garments were sometimes decorated with gold thread and colourful



Women weaving linen cloth

Drawing: Winnifred Needler  
Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S97 10782)



Queen Nefertari (left) wears a white linen robe in the New Kingdom style. Isis wears a tight-fitting linen dress typical of the style popular during the Old and Middle kingdoms.

Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3534)



A nobleman plays a board game called senet. He wears a long white linen robe in the New Kingdom style.

Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3552)



A sem-priest (left) wears a short kilt and a leopard skin, and the men wear short kilts.

CMC ECD98-014 #9



Tomb painting of a pharaoh wearing a short kilt

CMC ECD98-007 #72



A prince wearing the sidelock of youth and a uraeus on his forehead

CMC S97 9822

beadwork. The priests, viziers and certain officials wore long white robes that had a strap over one shoulder, and *sem*-priests (one of the ranks in the priesthood) wore leopard skins over their robes.

### Hairstyles

The Egyptian elite hired hairdressers and took great care of their hair. Hair was washed and scented, and sometimes lightened with henna. Children had their heads shaved, except for one or two tresses or a plait worn at the side of the head. This was called the sidelock of youth, a style worn by the god Horus when he was an infant.

Both men and women sometimes wore hairpieces, but wigs were more common. Wigs were made from human hair and had vegetable-fibre padding on the underside. Arranged into careful plaits and strands, they were often long and heavy. They may have been worn primarily at festive and ceremonial occasions, like in eighteenth-century Europe.

Priests shaved their heads and bodies to affirm their devotion to the deities and to reinforce their cleanliness, a sign of purification.



Women wearing perfumed cones and wigs

Drawing: Winnifred Needler  
Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S97 10785)



A priest with shaven head

CMC S97 9833

## Make-up

Elite men and women enhanced their appearance with various cosmetics: oils, perfumes, and eye and facial paints. When putting on make-up, they used a mirror, as we do today. Galena or malachite (a mineral pigment) was ground on stone palettes to make eye paint. Applied with the fingers or



Make-up kit: kohl pots and sticks, and a palette for mixing mineral pigments into eyeliner, blush and eye shadow

Photo: Royal Ontario Museum  
CMC ECD98-040 #30



Two bronze mirrors and a razor

Photo: Royal Ontario Museum  
CMC ECD98-040 #32

a kohl pencil, eye paint emphasized the eyes and protected them from the bright sunlight. Rouge to colour the face and lips was made from ochre. Oils and fats were applied to the skin to protect it, mixed into perfumes, and added to the incense cones men and women wore on top of their head.

## Jewellery

From the earliest times, jewellery was worn by the elite for self-adornment and as an indication of social status. Bracelets, rings, earrings, necklaces, pins, belt buckles and amulets were made from gold and silver inlaid with precious stones such as lapis lazuli, turquoise, carnelian and amethyst. Faience and glass were also used to decorate pieces of jewellery.

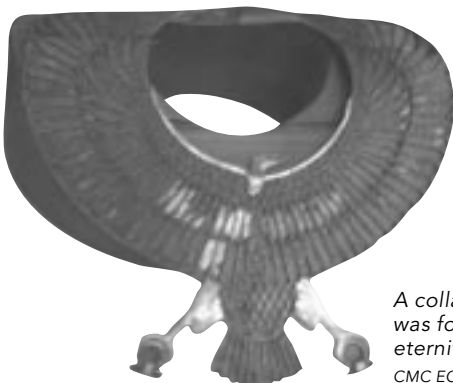
The elegant design of Egyptian jewellery often reflected religious themes. Motifs included images of the gods and goddesses; hieroglyphic symbols; and birds, animals and insects that played a role in the creation myth. Commonly seen were the scarab; the Eye of Re; lotus and papyrus plants; the vulture and the hawk; the cobra; and symbols such as the Isis knot, the *shen* ring (symbol of eternity) and the *ankh* (symbol of life). A person's jewellery was placed in his



Rings

Photo: Royal Ontario Museum  
CMC ECD98-040 #35

or her grave to be used in the afterworld, along with many other personal items.



A collar fit for a king. This collar, in the shape of Nekhbet, the vulture goddess, was found in Tutankhamun's tomb. The vulture holds two shen rings (symbols of eternity) in its claws.

CMC ECD98-028 #9 (photo)



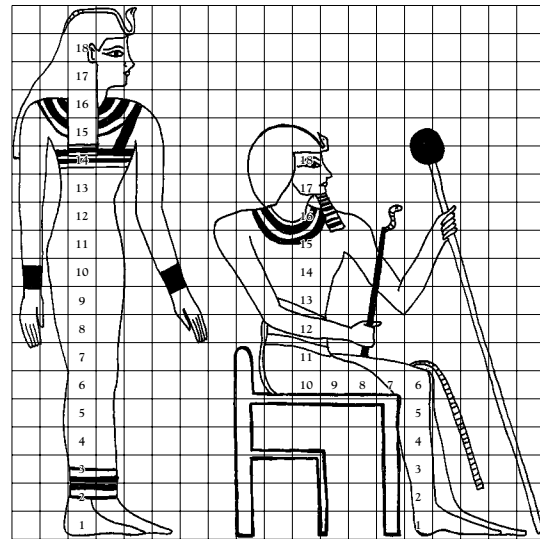
Necklaces

Photo: Royal Ontario Museum  
CMC ECD98-040 #36



This drawing illustrates how artists idealized the human figure. Ramses I (centre) makes an offering to the god Nefertem (left). The goddess Maat stands behind Ramses.

Drawing: Catherine Fitzpatrick  
Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3509)



Artists used an 18-square grid to sketch their figures.

Drawing: Catherine Fitzpatrick

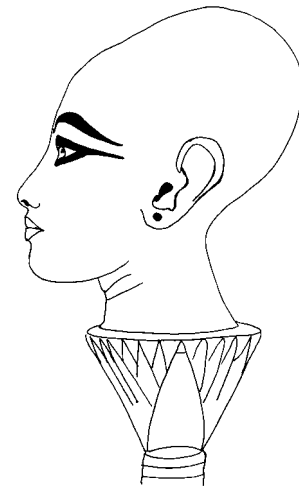
## Depicting Royalty

The main themes found in Egyptian works of art that depict royalty, the deities and daily life are related to the continuity of the universe. For this reason, Egyptian art tends to reflect an idealized world rather than reality.

In two-dimensional images, the parts of the body were drawn from the most representative angle. The torso and the eyes are best appreciated from the front, and the face, arms, legs and feet from the side.

Artists followed a formula that makes standing and sitting figures look stiff. Using a traditional grid of 18 squares, they sketched figures according to a predetermined pattern, making no attempt to show perspective. For example, if a seated figure is shown in profile, the inner leg is drawn behind the outer one but in the same size.

Despite this, the individual style of the artists is still evident, as can be seen in the tomb drawings in the valleys of the Kings, Queens and Nobles. This is particularly true of works created in the Amarna period, during the reign of Akhenaten, who may have been Tutankhamun's father. At that time, the members of the royal family were shown in unusually intimate scenes, and their facial and bodily features were exaggerated: the skull and torso were elongated, the hips enlarged and the belly extended. After Akhenaten's death, the artist reverted to the more familiar classic representation of the human form.



The elongated skull of this bust of Tutankhamun is typical of the Amarna style of art.



Bust of Tutankhamun as the sun god, Re, emerging from a blue lotus in the primeval sea at the moment of his birth

Replica by Abed Zeibdawi  
Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3500)