Egyptomania: The Western Fascination with Egypt

A Special Collections Exhibition
at Pequot Library
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancient</td>
<td>Of, or belonging to, earliest known civilizations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Anything made by human skill or work.</td>
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<td>Archaeology</td>
<td>The study of human history through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artifacts and other physical remains.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canopic Jar</td>
<td>Jars used by Ancient Egyptians to hold mummified remains. During the mummification process, the organs of the body were removed and preserved separately in canopic jars.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Egyptology</td>
<td>The study of the language, civilization, and history of Egypt.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Egyptomania</td>
<td>From Greek Egypto- ‘Egypt’ and mania ‘madness, fury’, refers to the enthusiasm for everything that is related to ancient Egypt. Egyptian motifs have been adopted throughout visual culture including architecture, on clothing and jewelry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hieroglyph</td>
<td>A picture, character, or symbol that represents a word, idea, or sound.</td>
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<td>Mummy</td>
<td>A body of a human being or animal that has been ceremonially preserved and wrapped in bandages. Preserving a person, and in some instances, animals, for the afterlife was commonly practiced in ancient Egypt.</td>
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<td>Obelisk</td>
<td>A stone pillar, typically having a square or rectangular cross section and a pyramidal top, set up as a monument or landmark.</td>
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<td>Papyrus</td>
<td>Common Egyptian plant whose reeds were used to make a writing material similar to paper, also called papyrus.</td>
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<td>Pharoah</td>
<td>A ruler in ancient Egypt.</td>
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<td>Pyramid</td>
<td>Ancient pyramid-shaped masonry structures located in Egypt. As of November 2008, sources cite either 118 or 138 as the number of identified Egyptian pyramids. Most were built as tombs for the country’s pharaohs and their consorts during the Old and Middle Kingdom periods.(<a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_pyramids">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_pyramids</a>)</td>
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<td>Rosetta Stone</td>
<td>A stone with writing on it in two languages (Egyptian and Greek), using three scripts (hieroglyphic, demotic and Greek), found by French soldiers in 1799 near a small Egyptian village called Rosetta. The Rosetta Stone made it possible to decipher ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarcophagus</td>
<td>A coffin made of stone, wood or paper, that the Egyptians used to house the mummified remains of all types of people – not just the pharaohs. Sarcophagi were covered with carvings or paintings depicting the person entombed, important symbols, and hieroglyphics, all which were to help the individual enter and peacefully reside in the afterlife.</td>
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<td>Scarab</td>
<td>A large beetle of the eastern Mediterranean area, regarded as sacred in ancient Egypt.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sphinx</strong></td>
<td>In Ancient Egypt, an imaginary creature having the head of a man or an animal and the body of a lion.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tomb</strong></td>
<td>A monument for housing or commemorating a deceased person.</td>
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Suggested Reading

**Early Readers:**


Krebs, Laurie. *We’re Sailing Down the Nile*. (2007)


**Middle Readers:**


**Young Adults:**


What is *Egyptomania*?

Scientific discovery in Egypt between the late 18\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) centuries sparked a surge of interest for all things Egyptian in Europe and the United States. This fascination with Egypt inspired a wave of tourism to the country. It was also was expressed in western architecture, art, and culture through a variety of Egyptian-inspired designs, or *motifs*. We call this enthusiasm related to ancient Egypt *Egyptomania*. (https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/what-is-egyptomania)

*What were some of the scientific discoveries that kindled Egyptomania? ¹*

**Napoleon’s Expedition to Egypt**

Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France, led a military expedition to Egypt from 1798 to 1801 that created a wave of Egyptomania across Europe. This is because many scientists accompanied him and recorded the remains of ancient Egyptian monuments — a type of documentation that had never been done before.

One of the most important discoveries during Napoleon’s expedition was the Rosetta Stone, which his soldiers found in 1799. In 1822, a French scholar and archaeologist named Jean-François Champollion deciphered hieroglyphs on the Rosetta Stone. This was the beginning of the science of *Egyptology*.

*Check out this video to learn about the Rosetta Stone:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yeQ-6eyMQ_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yeQ-6eyMQ_o)

**The Discovery of King Tut’s Tomb**

In 1922, British archaeologists Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon discovered the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun in ancient Egypt, causing Egyptomania to spread throughout the west again. In addition to the discovery itself, the tale of the mummy’s curse, which supposedly killed Lord Carnarvon in 1923, created a craze among those fascinated with Egypt.

King Tut has been exhibited in museums around the world since the 1960s — keeping ‘Tutmania’ alive still today.

*Check out this video to learn about the discovery of King Tut’s tomb:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Avqafc6fZwc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Avqafc6fZwc)
Experiencing Egypt through Art and Architecture

According to Manon Schutz in her article “What is Egyptomania?”, few could afford to travel to Egypt during these peaks in Egyptomania. So, the only experience most people had with the country and its mysteries was through memento photographs, literature, art, and architecture, most of which represented exotic and romantic images of Egypt.

Schutz explains, “Many popular stories about Egypt focus on the search for immortality and eternal love. Egyptomania expresses these longings visually through obelisks, sphinxes, pyramids, and other Egyptian motifs”. These images are reflected in western architecture, art, and culture. (https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/what-is-egyptomania)

Le Sphinx Armachis a Gizeh, P. Sebah, Turkish, active ca. 1823-1886

Cover to My Sahara Rose song book, 1919

Tiffany & Co. ormolu and marble mantel set, c/ 1885. Courtesy of https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/68.97.4--6/

Luxour Cinema, Paris, built in 1921

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, *Egyptomania* sparked a wave of tourism in Egypt. Imagine you’re a traveler on a steamboat voyage along the Nile. What do you see?
Egyptomania in Architecture

Westerners were so inspired by Egyptian design, they replicated it in many ways through their own architecture and art. Do you recognize these Egyptian wonders? Where have you seen images like these in western architecture or art?

Images left to right:
The Sphinx Armachis at Giza, Albumen print, Artist: P. Sebah, Turkish, active ca. 1823-1886
Great Pyramid at Giza, Albumen print, Artist: P. Sebah, Turkish, active ca. 1823-1886
Abou-Simbel. Grand Temple. Statue de Ramsses II., Albumen print, Artist: P. Sebah, Turkish, active ca. 1823-1886
Temple of Isis at Philae Heliogravure Egypt. Heliogravures After Original Views by R.M. Junghaendel, with a preface by C.G. Rawlinson Berlin: Cosmos Art Publishing Co. Ltd., 1893
Which Egyptian images do you see?

Grove Street Cemetery Entrance (1845)
New Haven, CT

Foire du Caire Building (1828)
Paris, France
The Louvre Museum
Paris, France

Martin Milmore: Sphinx,
Mt. Auburn Cemetery,
Cambridge, MA, 1872
Obelisks are Everywhere!

Obelisks are some of the most recognizable monuments of ancient Egypt. To the Egyptians, obelisks represented many things: creation, tribute to the sun god Ra, and memorials to the living representatives of the gods, the pharaohs.

Did you know that there are more obelisks outside of Egypt than there are in Egypt? Have you seen monuments like this here in the United States, or in other countries outside of Egypt? Where?

_Cleopatra’s Needle on its Former Site (Alexandria)_

*Mizraïm* Vol. 2, Plate XXVI
Prints collected and edited by Samuel Augustus Binion
Buffalo, NY: American Polytechnic Company of Buffalo, 1887-1896
Washington Monument, Washington, DC

Fontana del Panteon, Rome

Luxor Obelisk, Place de la Concorde, Paris

Obelisk of Sao Paolo, Brazil
Egyptomania in Design, Fashion, & Culture

Take a look at the following Egyptian motifs. What do you notice? How would you describe them?

The Grammar of Ornament: all 100 color palates from the folio edition of the great Victorian sourcebook of historic design
by Owen Jones

Image courtesy of https://echoesofegypt.peabody.yale.edu/overview/grammar-ornament-2nd-edition
Do you see any of the same patterns here?

Chrysler Building, New York City

How about here?

Box by Marie Zimmermann (American, Brooklyn, New York 1879–1972 Punta Gorda, Florida) ca. 1910–20
Vintage “winged pharaoh” celluloid purse frame
(http://koraflora.blogspot.com)

Egyptian inspired gown

Courtesy of L’Art et La Mode, 1924
You couldn’t buy it at the drug store 3000 years ago

The elegant Egyptian had her “Palmolive,” but it came by sea and caravan from far countries, in the form of the Palm and Olive oils esteemed as the greatest of all toilet luxuries.

The crude combination of these costly oils produced a mild and beneficial cleanser. Today their scientific combination gives fortunate modern women the mild and beneficial lather of

Palmolive Soap

If you could see the immaculate factory in which Palmolive is made, how every process is mechanical, the pleasure of its use would be heightened. The oils that produce its fragrant, creamy, profuse lather are those that ancient Egypt prized.

B. J. Johnson Soap Company, Inc.
Milwaukee, Wis.

Canadian Factory: 255-257 George St., Toronto, Ont.
Does Ancient Egypt inspire YOU?

If you could create something inspired by Egyptian art or architecture, what would it be?

Plate from Le Description de L'Egypte
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/531D451Q/
Internet Resources

**Egyptian Art and Architecture:**
https://www.britannica.com/art/Egyptian-art

**Egyptian Revival Art and Architecture:**
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/erev/hd_erev.htm
http://parisegyptomania.blogspot.com/
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_Revival_architecture

**Echoes of Egypt at the Peabody Museum:** https://echoesofegypt.peabody.yale.edu/overview

**Color Tour of Egypt**
https://www.memphis.edu/egypt/resources/egypt.php

**Ancient Egypt:**
The British Museum  http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/menu.html
NOVA Online Adventure – Mysteries of the Nile: http://pbs.org/wgbh/nova/egypt/

**King Tut:**
https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/egypt/tutankhamun-facts/