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Egyptian Faïence Jar. Fourth century B.C. H. 9½ in.
Gift of Horace L. Mayer 62.38

THIS FINE JAR is one of the few well-preserved large examples of a series of faïence vessels which were made in a variety of shapes. They were decorated in relief with designs of a distinctive style which had probably developed toward the end of the fourth century B.C. The use of ribboned garlands begins to suggest the playful elements in the luxurious new art of Alexandria, a city that was founded by Alexander the Great after his defeat of the Persians and conquest of Egypt in 332 B.C. Although Greeks had been settled in Egypt since the end of the seventh century B.C. there is little sign of Hellenic influence upon Egyptian art until the fourth century.

In the main frieze of our jar the man on the couch and the lady seated beside him on a chair are obviously Greek, as are the flute player and the woman presenting a garland. Other examples of this type of faïence vessel present us with typical Egyptian figures such as the lion-headed household god Bes. On the other hand, the horned and winged griffon on the neck, the rosettes and the palmettes around the base belong to the eclectic designs of the Persian Empire which still controlled Egypt during part of the fourth century. Indeed, a fragmentary vessel has been found in Cyprus where horsemen and foot soldiers in Persian dress are shown.

Up the Nile at Tunch-el-Gebel, which was the cemetery of the ancient city of Hermopolis in the Hare Nome, the reliefs of the tomb of Petosiris represent a mixture of Greek and Egyptian styles in the last quarter of the fourth century. One wall shows craftsmen making metal vessels which are characteristic of Achaemenid Persian taste. Earlier burials in this cemetery contained examples of faïence drinking cups with designs in raised relief. Some of these may go back as early as the end of the tenth century and they formed the Egyptian basis for the development of the style of our new jar. It may be that this jar was manufactured in Hermopolis where there was an important Greek colony as at Naukratis and Memphis.

The classical banquet scene on the faïence vessel is given a decorative setting that vividly illustrates the transformation of Egyptian plant ornament under new influences, one source of which we have seen in the early palmette at Kerma.

W. S. S.

