

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

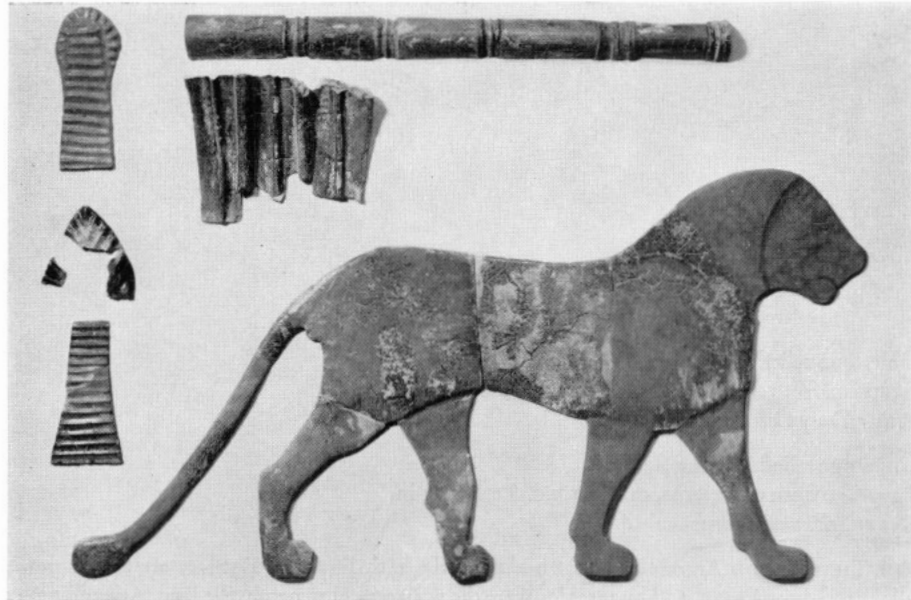
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Glazed Faience Tiles found at Kerma in the Sudan, ca. 1800 B.C. Length of Lion 46 in.
Harvard-Boston Expedition 20.1224

THESE LARGE moulded tiles with a brilliant blue glaze formed part of the revetment of the mud brick façade of a chapel in the cemetery of the fortified trading post established south of the Third Cataract at Kerma in the Sudan early in the Middle Kingdom. Dr. George A. Reisner found them during his excavations in 1913 and preliminary drawings were included in his great publication of the Kerma site. The pieces were assembled and studied by Elizabeth Eaton (Mrs. Stephen Weld) but it has been possible only recently to bring them out of storage and to undertake a partial restoration of the principal elements of a design which cannot be completely recovered.

The wall around the entrance to the chapel was evidently topped by a typical Egyptian cornice of curved palm fronds with a projecting upper border of bound reeds imitated in black and blue glazed faience tiles. Somewhere on the lower part of the wall were employed tongue-shaped pieces with raised cross-rilling which end at the top in a very early form of the palmette.

The most striking feature of the Kerma faience architectural decoration is, however, the best preserved of several figures of a striding lion. The head was not recovered, although part of that of another was found. The animals were evidently shown facing in toward the doorway on each side of it. It was thought best to restore the head and a few broken portions in plaster tinted to distinguish it from the blue glazed surface of the original parts. Such representations of the royal beast are well known as ornamenting the dais of the king's throne in the stone carvings of Egyptian temples as early as the Old Kingdom. No faience examples have yet been found in the lower part of the Nile Valley before the Ramesside Period. It is inevitable that this early example from Kerma should call to mind the lions composed of glazed bricks which decorated the Ishtar Gate and the Processional Way at Babylon in the sixth century B.C. (one of which is familiar to visitors in the Gallery of Ancient Near Eastern Art in our own Museum), or even later in the Persian palaces. Perhaps it will never be possible to trace the connecting links over such a wide span of time, but one suspects that they existed.

W. S. S.