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Gold jewelry of the Bronze Age. *Centennial gift, 1968. 68.115–139.*

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Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts

Ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern Acquisitions and Loans from the Horace L. Mayer Collection

DOWS DUNHAM



Horace L. Mayer

During frequent sojourns in Europe, chiefly in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, Mr. Horace L. Mayer and his wife became interested in collecting Egyptian antiquities. They assembled their gradually increasing acquisitions in their home in Williamstown, Massachusetts. In 1930 Mr. Mayer began to consult the Egyptian Department of the Boston Museum and at the same time to place objects on loan for exhibition or for study. Thus developed the Mayers' close association with the department, during which they have generously made available to us more than three hundred and fifty objects as either loans or gifts. Since Mr. Mayer's death in February 1968 Mrs. Mayer has continued her interest and support.¹

The major part of the Mayer collection (one hundred and eighty-six items, some of them still on loan to the museum) was acquired from the "Vassalli Collection." Luigi Vassalli (1812–1887) was an Italian artist-antiquarian who settled in Egypt in 1859. He became an assistant to Auguste Mariette, founder of the Black Museum (predecessor of the Cairo Museum) and of the Egyptian Antiquities Department in 1858. Through his association with Mariette in the latter's pioneering excavations and his position as conservator in the newly established museum, Vassalli had the opportunity to assemble an extensive collection of his own at a time when the Department of Antiquities was still in the process of organization.

Chosen for special mention here are only a few of the objects that are of outstanding historical or artistic significance and that have added greatly to our collection.²

In 1931 Mr. Mayer lent us for study two fragments of linen bearing ink inscriptions in cursive hieroglyphs (fig. 1). These proved to have come from the famous Deir-el Bahari cache discovered by Mariette in 1881 and formed part of the mummy wrappings of King Tuthmosis III of Dynasty 18 (the major parts of which are in the Cairo Museum). The fragments had come into the possession of Vassalli shortly before 1885

1. Fragment of mummy wrappings of Tuthmosis III. Dynasty 18. Linen; 1.1 x 63 m.
Gift of Horace L. Mayer. 60.1472.



2. Pendant on chain. Dynasty 19, probably reign of Rameses II. Gold with traces of lapis and glass inlays; height of pendant 7.2 cm., length of chain 63 cm. *Gift of Mrs. Horace L. Mayer in memory of Horace L. Mayer. 68.836.*

3. Portrait head of a Ptolemaic ruler. Blue glass inlay; 2 x 1.5 cm. *Lent by Mrs. Horace L. Mayer. 52.59.*

4. Jackal head. Ptolemaic. Black glass inlay; 4.5 x 4.2 cm. *Lent by Mrs. Horace L. Mayer. 53.59.*

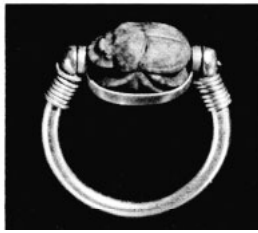
5. Plaque showing Apis bull. Ptolemaic. Mosaic glass; 2.8 x 2 cm. *Lent by Mrs. Horace L. Mayer. 54.59.*



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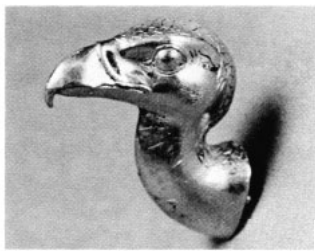
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6. Necklace with pendants. Late Period. Gold; length 13.7 cm. *Lent by Mrs. Horace L. Mayer. 48.59.*

7. Signet ring. Dynasty 22 or later. Gold; 2.2 x 1.9 cm. *Lent by Mrs. Horace L. Mayer. 49.59.*

8. Scarab of King Sheshonk II. Dynasty 22. Lapis in gold ring; diam. 3 cm. *Lent by Mrs. Horace L. Mayer. 51.59.*

9. Vulture head, perhaps from a queen's diadem. Ptolemaic. Gold; height 2.2 cm. *Gift of Mrs. Horace L. Mayer. 1971.748.* (Photo John F. X. McKeon.)

and passed thence into the collection of Clemente Maraini, from whose heirs they were acquired by Mr. Mayer about 1928. Mr. Mayer generously permitted me to publish them and eventually made them a gift to the museum in 1960.³

Among our most precious examples of the jeweler's art is the gold pendant representing a youthful king seated on a lotus, together with its original gold chain (fig. 2). The obverse of the figure was originally inlaid with lapis lazuli and colored glass or paste, but many inlays have fallen out, and we can no longer see their full effect. The reverse is of gold, the details in relief or chased, and it still retains its full delicacy. This beautiful necklace was bought by Mr. Mayer from Spink and Sons in London and is said by them to have come from Abu Gurob in the Fayum. It was lent to us in 1964, but after Mr. Mayer's death in 1968, Mrs. Mayer made it a gift to the museum in memory of her husband. The figure is thought to represent King Rameses II of Dynasty 19, and since it shows him wearing the sidelock of youth, it may well have been made at the time of his accession to the throne, ca. 1300 B.C.⁴

In 1959 Mr. Mayer lent to the museum extremely interesting examples of glass, lapidary, and goldwork. They include a tiny, blue glass inlay portrait head of a Ptolemaic ruler (fig. 3), a black glass inlay head of a jackal (fig. 4), a fused mosaic glass plaque representing an Apis bull (fig. 5), a gold necklace with pendants (fig. 6), a gold signet ring (fig. 7), a lapis lazuli scarab of King Sheshonk II swiveled in a gold ring (fig. 8), and a magnificent solid gold vulture head once part of a queen's head-dress (fig. 9). This last has recently been made a gift by Mrs. Mayer.⁵

Bronze figures of deities are well represented by loans and gifts from Mr. Mayer in some twenty examples. Illustrated here is one of the best, originally lent to us in 1930 (fig. 10). It is a seated figure of the goddess Isis, crowned with disk and cow's horns, nursing the child Horus. The figure may be dated approximately to the Late Egyptian Period. Because of its exceptional quality, Mrs. Mayer made it a gift after her husband's death.⁶

Another bronze of special interest is the kneeling figure of King Necho II of Dynasty 26 (fig. 11). The piece was acquired from a dealer in Switzerland and had previously been in the Michaelides collection. Mr. Mayer lent it to us in 1965, and in 1970 Mrs. Mayer made it a gift.

One piece of royal sculpture has come to us from the Mayer collection, a small kneeling statuette in glazed steatite, representing King Amunhotpe III of Dynasty 18. Mr. Mayer acquired it at the Sotheby sale in November 1965 of the Filmer collection and lent it to the museum in the following year. After her husband's death Mrs. Mayer generously made it a gift.⁷

While Horace L. Mayer's primary interest was in Egyptian antiquities, his acquisitions were not exclusively in that field. Instances of his wider interests are evidenced by two of his pieces that have been added to our small but growing collection of Ancient Near Eastern art.

In 1958 he lent us a little figure of a recumbent lion in gold over a paste core, its mane inlaid with blue glass. It was at first thought to be Egyptian, but further study



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10. Seated figure of the goddess Isis nursing the child Horus. Late Period. Bronze; height 20.5 cm. *Gift of Mrs. Horace L. Mayer. 1971.-749.* (Photo John F. X. McKeon.)

11. Kneeling figure of King Necho II. Dynasty 26. Bronze; height 26.5 cm. *Gift of Mrs Horace L. Mayer. 1970.637.*

12. Statuette of Amunhotpe III. Dynasty 18. Glazed steatite; height 12.8 cm. *Gift of Mrs. Horace L. Mayer. 1970.636.*

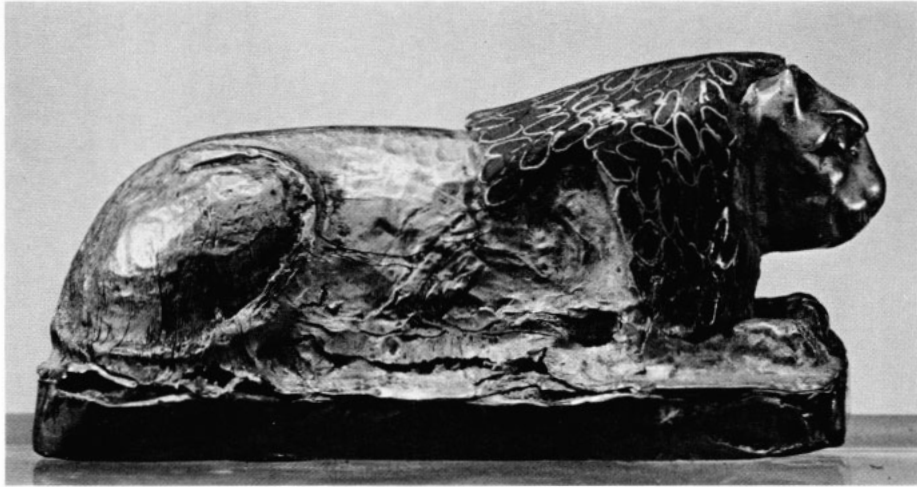


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13. Recumbent lion. Syro-Egyptian, ca. 14th century B.C. Gold over paste and glass; length 5 cm. *Gift of Horace L. Mayer. 62.1193.*



14. Bowl. Achaemenian, 5th century B.C. Bronze; diam. 14 cm. *Gift of Horace L. Mayer. 1962.1194.* (Photo John F. X. McKeon.)

has led to the conclusion that it would be more accurately classed as Syro-Egyptian, perhaps of the fourteenth century B.C. In 1962, Mr. Mayer made it a gift and it is now exhibited in our Near Eastern gallery.⁸

In 1958 also Mr. Mayer kindly lent us an Achaemenian bronze bowl with fluted exterior in perfect preservation. It may be dated to the fifth century B.C. This fine, small vessel, exhibited in the Near Eastern gallery, was made a gift in 1962.⁹

NOTES

1. From 1930 to 1966 seventy-two objects were lent. Between 1956 and 1971 fifty-three pieces on loan were made gifts, and, in addition, two hundred and thirty-four came to us as outright gifts.

2. This short text, illustrated with black and white photographs, can scarcely do justice to the beauty and color of some of these pieces. The special exhibit "Gifts and Loans from the Horace L. Mayer Collection," September–November 1972, represents a more fitting tribute both to the Mayers' generosity and to the quality of their collection. The fine selection of objects displayed includes gifts to the Departments of Classical Art as well as to the Department of Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern Art.

3. Dows Dunham, "A Fragment from the Mummy Wrappings of Tuthmosis III," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 17 (1931), 209–210, pls. 31–36; William Stevenson Smith, "Linen Shroud from the Mummy of Tuthmosis III," *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Bulletin* 59, no. 318 (1961), 120–121.

4. Edward L. B. Terrace, "The Age of Empire and Rebellion: The New Kingdom in Boston," *Connoisseur*, Vol. 169 (Sept. 1968), 49, fig. 1, and cover illus. (in color); *Centennial Acquisitions*, special issue of *Boston Museum Bulletin* 68, nos. 351–52 (1970), 20–21, fig. 5; Cyril Aldred, *Jewelry of the Pharaohs* (London:

Thames & Hudson, 1971), no. 138, p. 232; *The Rathbone Years* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1971), 21, no. 8.

5. E. L. B. Terrace, "Ancient Egyptian Jewelry in the Horace L. Mayer Collection," *American Journal of Archaeology* 67 (1963), 269–274, pls. 53–58; idem, "Urbanity and Verism: The Late Period in Boston," *Connoisseur* 169 (October 1968), 117 ff., and color plate facing p. 121.

6. William Kelly Simpson, "Recent Museum Acquisitions: Egyptian and Near Eastern Art in Boston, 1970–71," *Burlington Magazine* 114 (April 1972), 241, fig. 45. A very similar figure in the University Museum, Philadelphia, has been published in *Egyptian Sculpture of the Late Period* (Brooklyn Museum Publication, 1960), p. 50, no. 43.

7. W. K. Simpson, "A Statuette of Amunhotpe III in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston," *Boston Museum Bulletin* 68, no. 354 (1970), 260–269, figs. 1–6, 8, 9; idem, "Recent Museum Acquisitions: Egyptian and Near Eastern Art in Boston, 1970–71," p. 238, fig. 40.

8. E. L. B. Terrace, *The Art of the Ancient Near East in Boston* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1962), fig. 14; idem, "The Age of Empire and Rebellion," color plate facing p. 50.

9. Terrace, *The Art of the Ancient Near East in Boston*, fig. 55.