THE MATERIAL WORLD OF ANCIENT EGYPT

*The Material World of Ancient Egypt* examines the objects and artifacts, the representations in art, and the examples of documentation that together reveal the day-to-day physical substance of life in ancient Egypt. This book investigates how people dressed, what they ate, the houses they built, the games they played, and the tools they used, among many other aspects of daily life, paying great attention to the change and development of each area within the conservative Egyptian society. More than any other ancient civilization, the ancient Egyptians have left us with a wealth of evidence about their daily lives in the form of perishable objects, from leather sandals to feather fans, from detailed depictions of trades and crafts on the walls of tombs and a wide range of documentary evidence from temple inventories to personal laundry lists. Drawing on these diverse sources and richly illustrating his account with nearly one hundred images, William H. Peck illuminates the culture of the ancient Egyptians from the standpoint of the basic materials they employed to make life possible and perhaps even enjoyable.

William H. Peck is retired curator of ancient art at the Detroit Institute of Arts. He excavated for many years in Egypt, first as a field archaeologist at the site of ancient Mendes in the Nile delta and later in the Precinct of the Goddess Mut in Karnak, where he was co-field director and architect with the Brooklyn Museum mission. He was a recipient of an American Research Center in Egypt Fellowship to study New Kingdom tomb painting, a Smithsonian Institution Travel Grant to Egypt, and an Award in the Arts for an outstanding alumnus from Wayne State University. His major publications include *Drawings from Ancient Egypt*, which was translated into French, German, and Arabic; *Splendors of Ancient Egypt*, an exhibition catalog; and *Egypt in Toledo*, on the Egyptian collections in Toledo, Ohio. He has lectured widely in the United States and Canada and has acted as consultant to several museums, including the Virginia Museum, Richmond; the Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock; and the Art Museum, Toledo.
The Material World of Ancient Egypt

WILLIAM H. PECK
University of Michigan–Dearborn
CONTENTS

List of Figures  page vii
Preface xi
Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction ................................. 1
1 Geography and Geology: The Land .......... 9
2 Brief Outline of Egyptian History .............17
3 Study of the Material World of Ancient Egypt 34
4 Dress and Personal Adornment ...............48
5 Housing and Furniture .....................74
6 Food and Drink ............................93
7 Hygiene and Medicine .....................110
8 Containers of Clay and Stone ...............122
9 Tools and Weapons .......................134
10 Basketry, Rope, Matting ..................146
11 Faience and Glass .......................154
12 Transportation ...........................162
13 Sport and Games ..........................171
14 Music and Dance ..........................180
15 Weapons and Armor .......................192
16 Conclusions ..............................199
Contents

Sources of Chapter Heading Quotations 203
Bibliography 205
Index 211
FIGURES

1  Fishing and fowling, tomb of Nakht  page 2
2  The Nile valley at Saqqara  10
3  The Nile in the region of Beni Hassan, in Middle Egypt  11
4  A cultivated area in the narrow fertile land along the Nile  12
5  The rock-cut tombs of the Middle Kingdom at Beni Hassan  13
6  Elephantine Island at Aswan  15
7  The Bark Station or Chapel of Senusret I at Karnak  25
8  The Temple of Luxor  28
9  Abu Simbel in Nubia  30
10 Sarcophagi and other monuments in classical style  32
11 Greco-Roman fresco  32
12 Giovanni Belzoni  38
13 Page detail from Champollion’s Monuments de l’Egypte et de la Nubie: notices descriptive  39
14 Page detail from Champollion’s Monuments de l’Egypte et de la Nubie: notices descriptive  40
15 A page from Wilkinson’s Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians  42
16 Pages from Wilkinson’s The Egyptians in the Time of the Pharaohs  43
17 Old Kingdom costume of the elite  50
18 A linen garment with a V-shaped neckline  52
19 A scribe with his palette  53
20 New Kingdom costume of various classes  54
21 A leather loincloth  55
22 New Kingdom costume  63
23 A double wig arrangement of human hair  64
24 Gable-topped chest and linens  72
25 Painting illustrating the making of mud brick  75
26 An ancient Egyptian model of a house
27 Remains of houses at Deir el Medina
28 Model of a garden and portico
29 Painting of a garden
30 Remains of houses at Deir el Medina
31 Funerary procession
32 A group of furniture pieces
33 Carpenter splitting planks
34 Chair of Renyseneb
35 Wooden stool
36 Workmen carrying a bed and cloths
37 Basket, box, and jar
38 A pile of food offerings
39 Typical wooden agricultural implements
40 Plowing and distributing seed
41 Reaping and gathering of wheat
42 Tomb model of a plowman
43 A sickle used for harvesting grain
44 Harvesting grain
45 Packing wheat into a carrying basket
46 Winnowing the wheat
47 Model of a granary
48 Squeezing the grapes
49 Slaughtering a bull
50 Catching fish with a dip net
51 Large-scale fishing
52 Circumcision scene
53 Circumcision scene
54 Cattle drovers
55 Surgical instruments
56 Predynastic pottery jar
57 Pottery making
58 Pottery vessels
59 Workmen carrying objects and vessels
60 Early Dynastic alabaster jar
61 Workmen shaping flints
62 An assortment of tools
63 Using a bow drill
64 Jewelers at work
65 Three measuring aids used in construction
66 Basket with figs
67 Detail from a tomb painting with baskets
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>ix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Sandals made of basketry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Eye of Horus amulet made of Egyptian faience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Fragment of a figurine made of Egyptian faience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Lotus cup made of Egyptian faience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>A glass flask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Kohl tube in the shape of a palm column</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>A large vessel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Fishermen hauling in their nets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Model boat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Loaded donkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Wheelwrights’ workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>A detail from a scene of hunting in the desert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Wrestling scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Children’s games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>A selection of children’s toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>A senet game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Man with a pet dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Two female musicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Musicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Elaborate wooden harp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Three musicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Playing a harp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>A man, his wife, and his daughter entertained by a harpist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Dancers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>A troop of soldiers or marines armed with shields and spears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Soldiers with bows and arrows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My interest in ancient Egypt began early in my childhood and became more intense during my secondary school years when I discovered Piazzi-Smyth’s *Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid*. I eventually sought to know more about the culture of Egypt as it was preserved in its own artifacts, somewhat in the way that Flinders Petrie was to debunk Piazzi-Smyth’s famous work by accurately measuring the monuments. After experience in the U.S. Army as a topographic surveyor and a technical illustrator I was privileged to participate at length in two major excavations, first at the site of Mendes in the Nile delta and later in the Precinct of the Goddess Mut at Karnak. Those activities, my lengthy museum experience of dealing firsthand with a wide range of Egyptian artifacts, and an early involvement with the investigation of mummies as a founding member and participant in the just-emerging Paleopathology Society have given me a series of varied and immediate experiences in the art and objects that make up the material world of ancient Egypt.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The historical list of scholars I am personally indebted to must include William Stevenson Smith, Henry George Fischer, Nicholas B. Millet, Edward L. B. Terrace, Bernard V. Bother, and Donald P. Hansen. Each of these distinguished Egyptologists and scholars encouraged me at some time in my career or contributed in some way to my professional development. Richard A. Fazzini and Jacobus van Dijk, colleagues in the Brooklyn Museum excavation at the Precinct of the Goddess Mut at Karnak, have offered continued support and been constant sources of information. In addition to the preceding, Francis Waring Robinson of the Detroit Institute of Arts must be named as my mentor and friend who guided me in my early museum career.

I am indebted more than I can acknowledge to the advice, help, and continued support of Emily Teeter, at the Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago. Her guidance, friendly criticism, and friendship have been invaluable to me at almost every stage in the preparation of this work. In addition, W. Benson Harer, M.D., and Sandra Knudsen, formerly a curator at the Toledo Museum of Art, commented on some part of the text, for which I thank them. Many discussions with Elsie Holmes Peck, my wife, have added greatly to the substance of this work. Considerable credit and thanks must go to Beatrice Rehl, Sarah McColl, Anastasia Graf, Camilla Knapp, and the other members of the staff at Cambridge University Press who have made this book possible. Opinions, errors, or omissions are my responsibility alone.

My thanks to the following individuals and institutions: The Metropolitan Museum of Art through the agency of Art Resource, Eileen Sullivan; Kristen Wenger of the British Museum; Ruth Bowler of the Walters Art Museum; and Robert Hensleigh of the Detroit Institute of Arts, for providing a number of illustrations. James Allen kindly supplied one image and Duane Stapp provided some of the drawings, for which I thank them. Other drawings and images were supplied by the author.