

The British
Museum

Free
Open late Friday
Room 3



Royal Headgear
symbolism,
protection &
kingship

10 – 11 August 2017

The reign of Amenhotep III



Egyptian domination over the Levant reached its peak when Amenhotep became king. A series of marriages with foreign princesses was essential part of his diplomacy with the neighbouring countries. By Amenhotep's reign Egypt's control was firm and well organized also in the south.



Amenhotep III was the ninth king of the 18th dynasty and the son of king Tuthmosis IV and Mut-em-wiya. His reign lasted more than 40 years and it was a period of prosperity, changes and developments. The archive of the Amarna letters shows that Egypt had strong diplomatic relationships in that time with the rulers of Assyria, Mitanni, Babylon and Hatti.



The Semna Stela mentions that he attacked and conquered Nubia. He established a cult for himself as deified king in Egypt and Nubia: for example in the temple of Soleb, in addition to the Amun-Re cult. The two Memnon colossi in Thebes are his most famous monument.

The blue khepresh crown



This headdress is called the blue crown (khepresh) and has been known since the early 18th Dynasty. The origins of this crown date back to the late Middle Kingdom. The khepresh is also depicted in the royal crown list of the temple of Dendera. It was originally a military helmet but also used for ceremonial purposes.



Until now no Egyptian crown has ever been found in an excavation. Therefore it is thought that the material used was probably of organic origin like leather or cloth.



The modern name Uraeus (in ancient Egyptian language: j' r.t) derives from the Greek word οὐραϊός which literally means "on its tail" reflecting the position of the cobra. Uraeus, the rearing cobra, was the symbol of the goddess Wadjet, mother of the king, who also represented Lower Egypt.



As the symbol of absolute power of the king was depicted on royal crowns, including Khepresh crown. It was integral part of the king iconography.

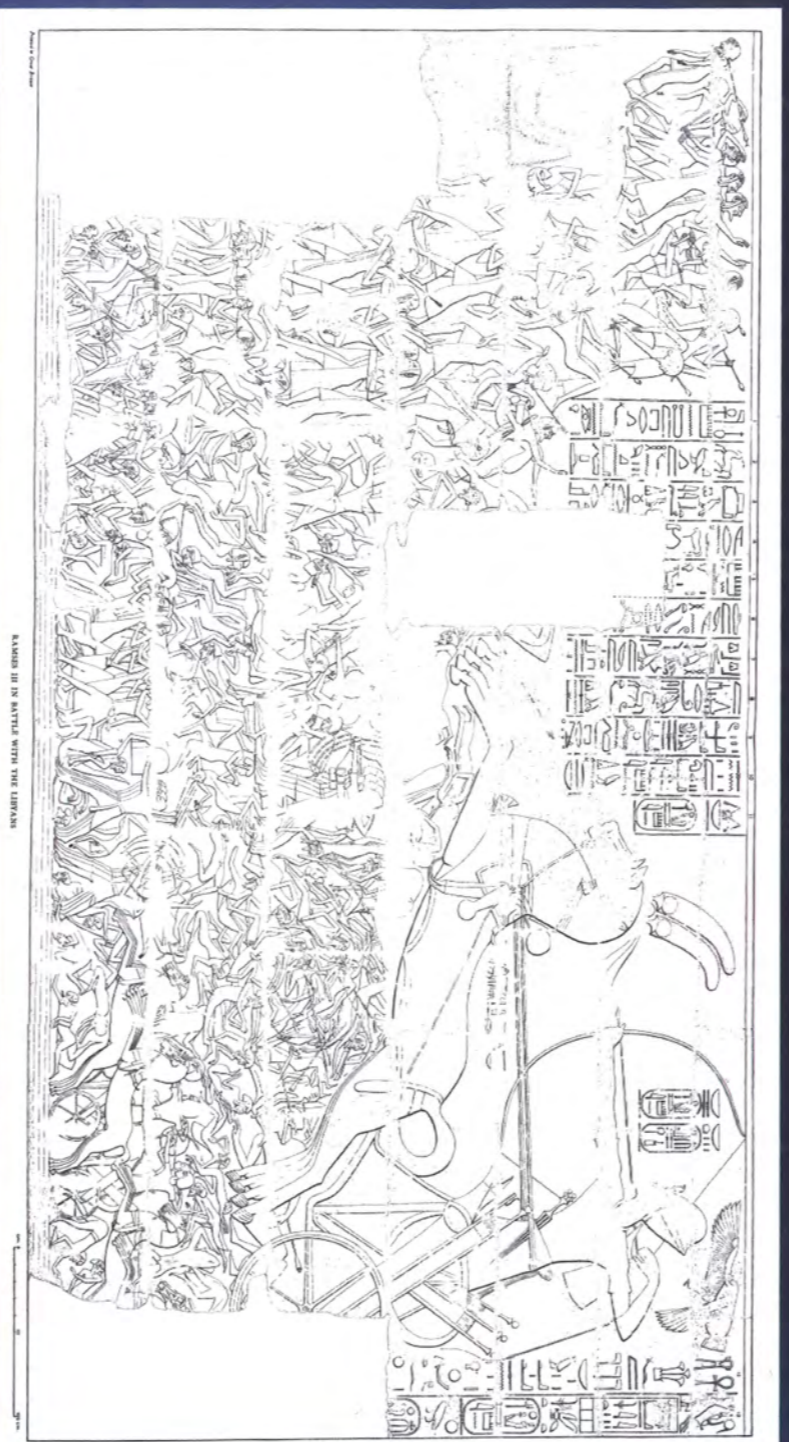


Evidence for military headgear in Ancient Egypt

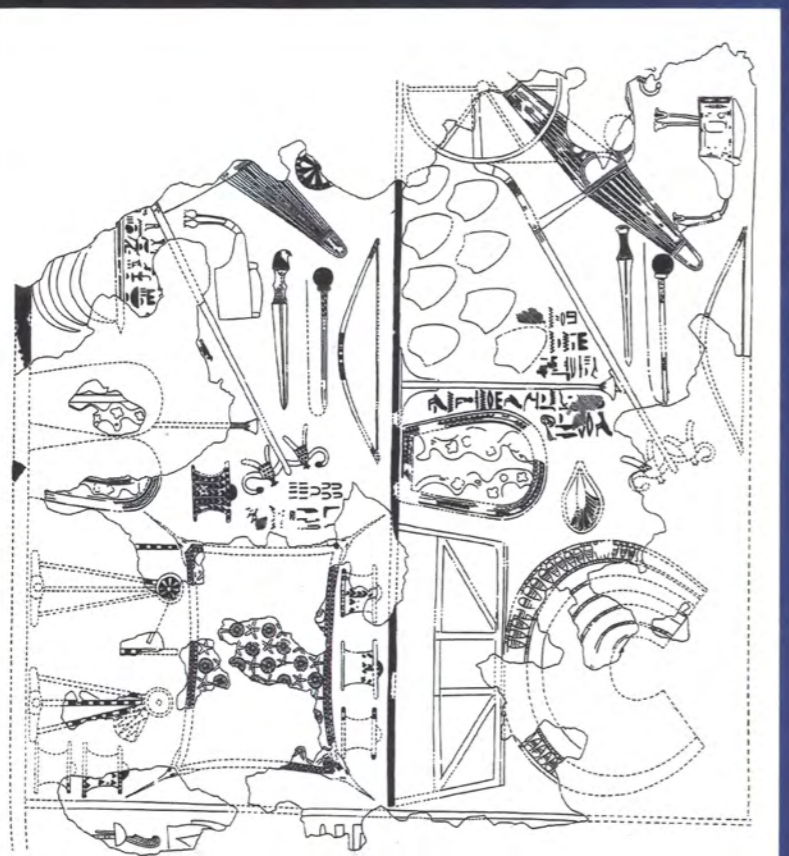


In representation on war scenes of Egyptian temple reliefs, only enemies and foreign mercenaries are shown wearing military helmets of their own culture to indicate their identity. The figure of this picture is depicted in Sherden helmet.-

Egyptian soldiers are usually not shown wearing helmets but wigs, even though they would have worn the helmets in war.

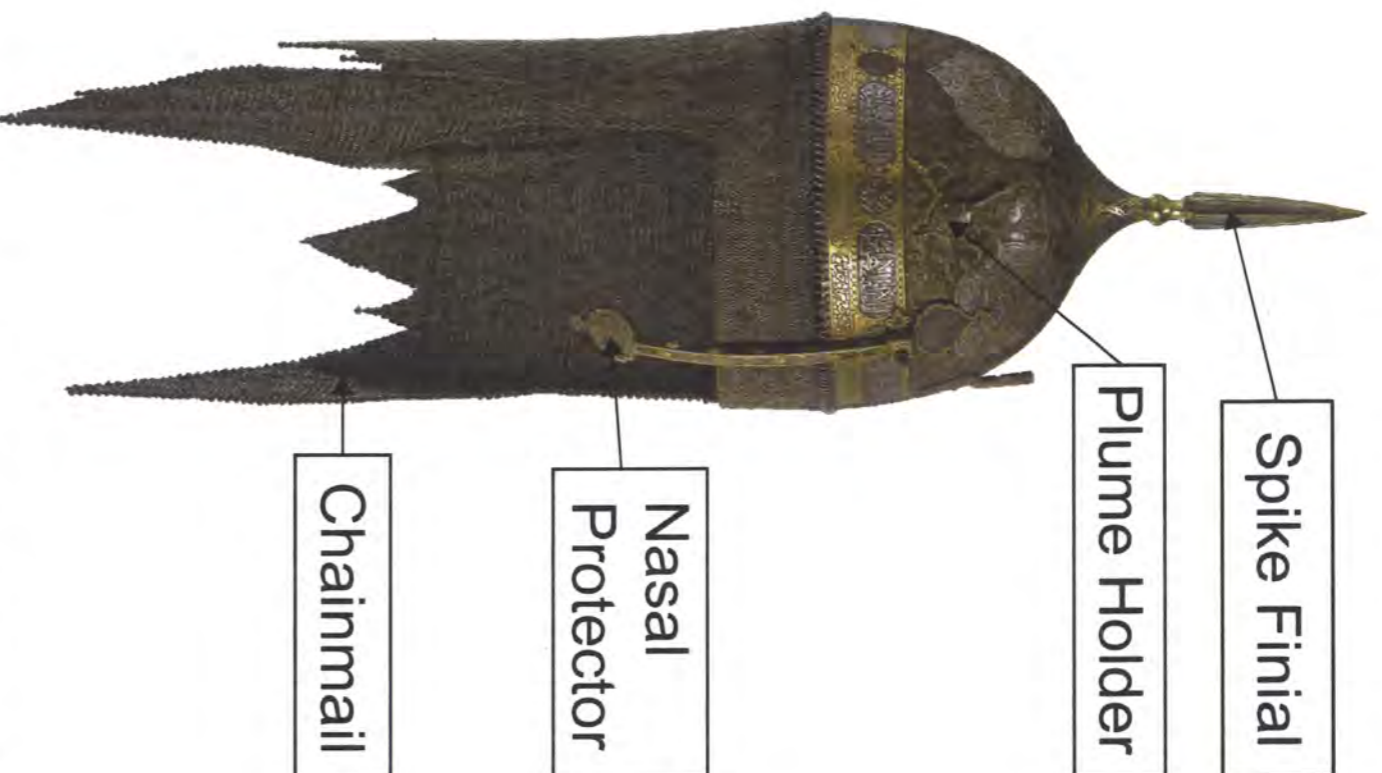


KAMHOU IS IN BATTLE WITH THE LIBYANS



On a representation of military equipment in the tomb of Ken-Amun there are Egyptian helmets depicted between weapons and shields which shows that Egyptians used them in real wars but due to rules of art the helmets are not shown on the reliefs as their identity is marked by their wigs and hairstyles like side-locks or feathers.

Shah Abbas' royal helmet



Spike Finial

Plume Holder

Nasal
Protector

Chainmail

Inscriptions on the top part of the helmet:

'In the year 1035 this golden helmet was finished; keep blessed the head which always carries this helmet on its brow.'

'One with a helmet on his head, all gold and jewels, in the reign of Shah Abbas, world conquering, world sustaining.'

'In the reign of the King of Kings, as exalted as Darius, this golden helmet was finished, an all bounteous, world conquering prince endowed with glory and fame... Padishah, Shah Abbas, whose sway extends from China to Syria.'

I Keep blessed the head which always carries this helmet on its brow... The crown of the heads of the prophets... Oh thou Compassionate, thou Bounteous.'

Inscriptions on the plume holders:

'Oh the Compassionate, Oh the Gracious' and 'Oh the Bounteous, Oh the Benevolent'

Inscriptions on the top part of the helmet:

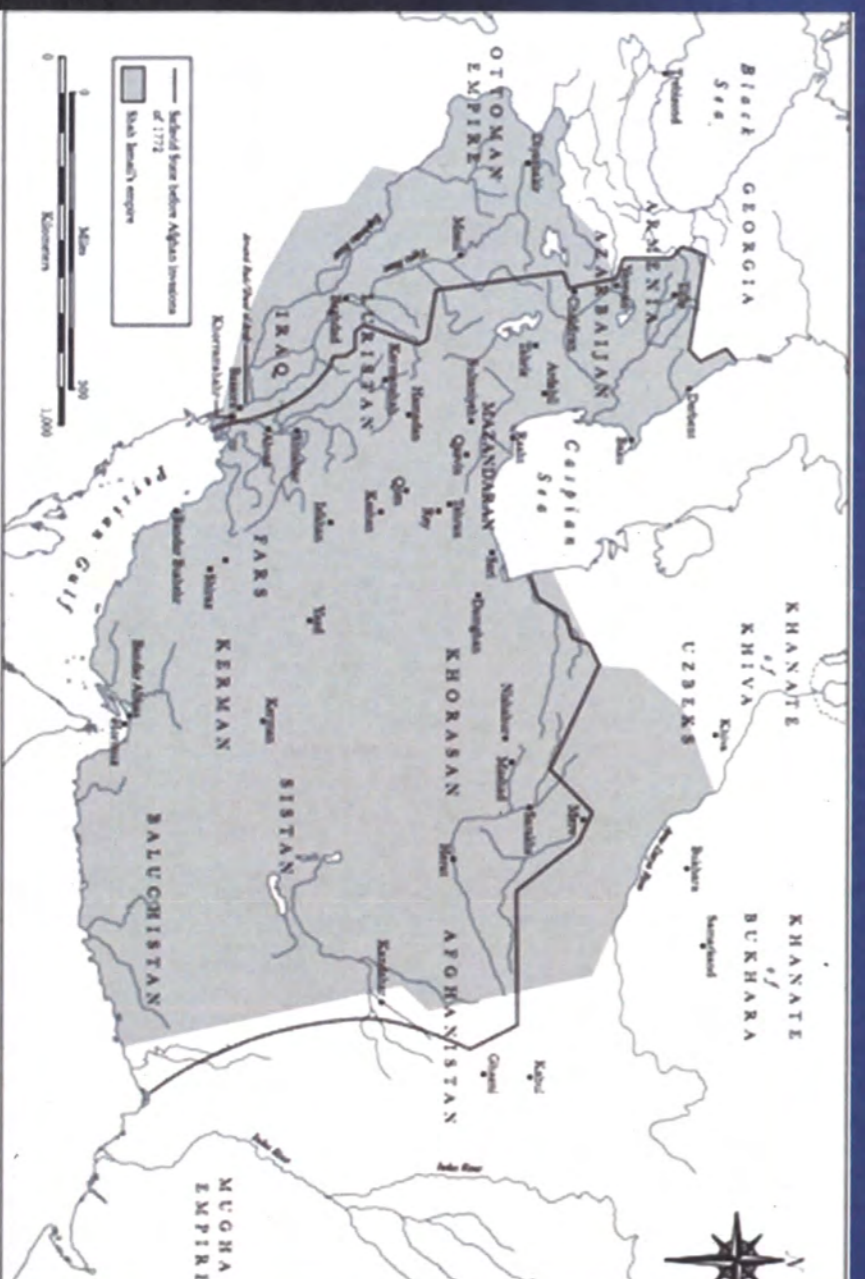
'Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Supporter of all. No slumber can seize Him, nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. He knows what appears to His creatures before, or after, or behind them. They shall not compass any of His knowledge except as He wills. His Throne/dominion extends over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and persevering them. For He is the Most High, the Supreme in glory.' (Surat al-Baqarah, verse 255).'

The rise of Shah Abbas to power

The advent of the 16th century AD in Iran witnessed the rise to power of Shah Ismail Safavi (r. 1501-24 AD), who founded the Safavid dynasty and made Tabriz his capital. The Safavid dynasty was in constant conflict with the Ottoman Empire, which was strategically expanding throughout the region. In 1514 AD, Shah Ismail suffered a devastating military defeat at the hands of a technologically superior Ottoman army. The capital of the Safavid state moved to Isfahan under Shah Abbas (1587-1629 AD), who led the Safavid dynasty to the height of its imperial power. The capital city of Isfahan was transformed into an international hub of commerce and culture.

Learning from his predecessors' military mistakes, Shah Abbas sought to protect his realm from outside incursions. To achieve this, he restructured the Safavid army and introduced new military technology such as firearms.

Following the death of Shah Abbas in 1629 AD, the Safavid dynasty entered a period of decline. The defence of the capital became vulnerable, and in 1722 AD Isfahan was besieged by Afghan tribes. In 1770 AD, the Qajar dynasty (1770-1925 AD) gained control of Persia and declared Tehran as their capital by 1786 AD.



Head of a statue of king Amenhotep III Egypt, about 1386-1353 BC

The king is wearing the so called blue crown (*khepresh*). It is mainly associated with war in ancient Egypt. Often it has a decorative element in the middle of the forehead in the shape of a cobra (*uraeus*). This is a well-known protective motif and a symbol of the goddess Wadjet.

In the ancient Egyptian religion the uraeus could have been converted into a real snake to bite and spit venom at the enemies of the king to protect him from any danger!

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