



EMORY

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# classroom TUTORIALS

## Crowns of the Kings of Egypt



**A**ncient Egyptian kings wore many different types of crowns and royal headdresses. These accessories were associated with various aspects of divine kingship. They were also probably worn for different religious or stately functions. Very few actual crowns survived from ancient Egypt. We know about them mostly from artistic representations.

### The White Crown, *Hedjet* (also called the White or Bright One)

Shaped like a bowling pin, the white crown was the crown of Upper (Southern) Egypt. This type of crown was used from the beginning of Egyptian history. One such example of this crown can be seen on the statue of Sobekhotep in the exhibition, a king who ruled Egypt at the end of the 13th Dynasty (ca. 1690 BC). In this depiction the king wears a short cloak associated with the jubilee (or *sed* festival), a ceremony where the king celebrated his right to rule and renewed his royal powers. He is also depicted with his arms crossed and holding the crook and flail, a position that was associated with the god Osiris (for more information about the god Osiris, see the *Osiris* PDF). On this statue's base, Sobekhotep's feet rest upon a depiction of nine bows. Each of these bows represents an enemy of Egypt crushed underfoot by the mighty pharaoh.

### The Red Crown, *Deshret* (The Red One)

The crown of Lower (Northern) Egypt is also seen from the earliest periods of Egyptian history. From the side it looks somewhat like a chair, with a short front and a tall back, with a large coil protruding from its seat.



TOP  
Sobekhotep  
wearing a white  
crown (*hedjet*)

LEFT  
Montuhotep  
wearing a  
red crown  
(*deshret*).  
This object is on  
exhibit in the  
Cairo Museum.

## classroom TUTORIALS Crowns of the Kings of Egypt



### The Double Crown (Two Mighty Ones, or *Pschent*)

Combining elements of both the Red and the White crowns, this crown was worn to symbolize the king's authority over both Upper (South) and Lower (North) Egypt. The two crowns began to be worn together after Egypt was unified in the First Dynasty (approximately 3050–2890 BC).

An example of this type of crown can be seen on the colossal statue of Akhenaten. In this depiction the crown is placed on top of a *nemes* headdress (described below), and paired with other royal symbols like the crook, flail, uraeus, and false beard. While the iconography is traditional, the features of Akhenaten look quite different from images of other pharaohs. His full lips, long face, narrow eyes and long, thin nose seem exaggerated. This dramatic change in artistic representation of the pharaoh likely coincided with a desire to be associated with the *Aten*—the androgynous sun god.

### The *Nemes* head cloth

While not technically a crown, but more like a kerchief, this striped cloth was pulled tightly across the forehead and tied in the back, forming a pony tail of sorts. When it was worn, two panels of fabric hung down in front, just below the king's shoulders. The *uraeus* (cobra), a symbol of the king's power, decorates the brow.

King Psusennes I wears the *nemes* headdress in this funeral mask, found in the Delta city of Tanis. It is made almost entirely out of gold. The *nemes* headdress was often used in funerary contexts. In this case, the gold would have been associated with the rising sun, a symbol for rebirth. The eyes, eyebrows, and beard strap in this mask were inlaid with black and white glass.

This funerary mask looks much like the famous mask of King Tutankhamun. The circumstances of its archaeological find were also much like that of the boy king's. Except for the tomb of King Tutankhamun, the finds at Tanis are the only other royal tombs to be discovered intact by archaeologists!



TOP LEFT  
Akhenaten wearing  
a double crown  
(*Pschent*)

LEFT  
Psusennes I wearing  
a *nemes* head cloth





### The Khat (also called *Afnet*)

A kerchief somewhat similar in form to the *nemes*, the *khat* headdress is thought to be associated with the rejuvenation of the deceased king. In this red granite depiction of King Hatshepsut, she wears the *khat* wig and holds a vessel attached to a *djed*-pillar, the symbol for stability. This symbol was associated with Osiris and thus likely represented rejuvenation. The combination of the *djed* pillar and the *khat* headdress has led Egyptologists to suggest that Hatshepsut may have commissioned it to celebrate her jubilee. Notice that the female king is represented as a man, with a male torso, false beard, and kilt.

### The Blue Crown (*Kheperesh*)

This *kheperesh*, or blue crown, was introduced in the 18th Dynasty and became increasingly popular over the duration of the New Kingdom. An example of the blue crown, worn by Amenhotep III, can be found in the exhibition, though strangely, it is painted red! The front of the crown is adorned with a *uraeus*. In life, the crown was probably made of cloth and embellished with faience or golden disks, represented here by circular designs in the clay. Also unusual is the fact that this statue is made from clay rather than stone. Found in a pit underneath the temple of Karnak, it is possible that it was made for temporary use in a temple ritual.

### The Atef Crown

This crown dates to the reign of Sahure in the 5th Dynasty (around 2487 BC). It resembles the white crown but the central element is flanked by two ostrich feathers. Beginning in the New Kingdom the *atef* crown was sometimes embellished with *uraei* and solar disks. The *atef* crown is associated with the god Osiris and is also linked to the solar cycle. In this depiction the god Osiris is shown as the king of the Underworld.



TOP  
Hatshepsut wearing a  
*khat* headdress  
ABOVE  
Amenhotep III with a  
blue crown (*kheperesh*)  
RIGHT  
Osiris wearing the *atef* crown