

Spring 2026 Arts of Asia Lecture Series
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Egyptians and Persians: The Art and Archaeology of a Colonial Encounter
(ca. 526–332 BCE)

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Dynasties

Saite – Egyptian dynasty from Sais in the western Nile delta; also known as the 26th Dynasty.

Achaemenid – Iranian dynasty originating from Persia in southwestern Iran (modern Fars province). The Achaemenid Persian Empire (so-called to distinguish it from later Persian dynasties) was founded by Cyrus ca. 550 BCE and the last king, Darius III, died in 330. In Egypt it is known as the 27th Dynasty.

28th–30th Dynasties – Three Egyptian dynasties that began with a successful revolt against the Persians ca. 404 BCE and ended with the Persian re-conquest of Egypt in 340.

Chronology

The Egyptian *Late Period* spans the period from 664 to 323 BCE. It is subdivided into the following periods:

26 th Dynasty	664–526 BCE
27 th Dynasty	526–404
28 th Dynasty	404–399
29 th Dynasty	399–380
30 th Dynasty	380–340
Second Persian Period	340–332
Reign of Alexander	332–323

Languages

Egyptian – Language spoken by the ancient Egyptians. It was written using multiple writing systems.

These include *hieroglyphic*, which in the Late Period was used mainly for inscriptions, and *demotic*, which was a form of cursive used to write papyrus documents, but also occasionally on funerary stelae or to write literature.

Old Persian – Language spoken by the Persians. It was written using cuneiform, but it was rarely used except for Achaemenid royal inscriptions.

Elamite – Language from Elam in southwestern Iran (modern Khuzestan province), written using cuneiform and used by the Persians as an administrative language, as well as for royal inscriptions.

Akkadian – Semitic language from Mesopotamia written using cuneiform and used by the Persians in royal inscriptions.

Aramaic – Semitic language originating from what is today western Syria. In the Achaemenid Empire it was used as an administrative language and *lingua franca* for communication between different groups of people within the empire.

People and Gods

Amasis – Saite pharaoh of Egypt; reigned 570–527/6 BCE.

Apis bull – Animal form of the Egyptian god Ptah, whose main temple was in Memphis. The Apis bulls were embalmed and buried at Saqqara after their deaths.

Apries – Saite pharaoh of Egypt; reigned 589–570 BCE; namesake of the Palace of Apries in Memphis.

Cambyses – Son of Cyrus; Persian king who invaded Egypt in 526 BCE.

Darius – Successor to Cambyses as king of the Achaemenid Empire; reigned 521–486 BCE.

Djedherbes – Egyptian man attested only by a funerary stela from Saqqara where he is identified as the son of Artam (a Persian) and Tanofrether (an Egyptian).

Herodotus – Ancient Greek historian from Halicarnassus (modern Bodrum, Türkiye); author of the *Histories* (probably written in the 430s or 420s BCE) chronicling the rise of Persia and the wars between the Greeks and Persians in 490 and 480–479. Herodotus espouses a *Hellenocentric* viewpoint, that is, he regards the Persians from an ancient Greek perspective, which until recently was taken at face value by modern scholars.

Psamtik III – Final Saite pharaoh; reigned for six months in 526 BCE.

Udjahorresnet – Egyptian courtier who served Amasis, Psamtik III, Cambyses and Darius. He is known primarily from a hieroglyphic inscription on a naophorous statue from Sais.

Sites

Egypt

Kharga Oasis – Oasis in the desert to the west of the Nile valley; location of several 27th Dynasty sites, including Hibis and Ayn Manawir.

Memphis – Ancient city south of modern Cairo; capital of Egypt under the Saite and Achaemenid kings.

Saqqara – Necropolis located to the west of Memphis; site of numerous burials of people and animals.

Tell el-Maskhuta – Site in the eastern Nile delta located along the course of the canal dug by Darius connecting the Nile and the Red Sea.

Thebes – Ancient city in southern Egypt (modern Luxor).

Iran

Naqsh-e Rostam – Burial place of the Achaemenid kings, just north of Persepolis.

Persepolis – Capital of the Achaemenid Empire built by Darius in southwestern Iran (Fars).

Susa – Achaemenid capital and major city in Elam (Khuzestan).

Other Specialist Terms

Bulla – A lump of clay bearing the impression of a seal; usually attached to papyrus or parchment documents (which rarely survive to the present).

Naophorous – Type of Egyptian statue depicting its subject holding a shrine containing the image of a god.

Ostracon – A potsherd used as a writing surface.

Qanat – Underground irrigation tunnel connecting an aquifer to a cistern.

Stela – Stone (or sometimes wooden) slab, typically inscribed and decorated with relief carvings, used as a dedication to a god or commemorative marker.

Tetradrachm – Large denomination silver (17.2 g) coin minted in Athens. The final syllabus is pronounced ‘dram.’

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