

***Ancient Egypt: The Late Period***  
**The British Museum**

The name 'Late Period' is usually given to the time from the end of the Third Intermediate Period to the beginning of Greek rule. Earlier historians saw it as period of decline, but it was in fact very mixed. During the Late Period, Egypt alternated between native rule and domination by Persia. Psammetichus I (Twenty-sixth Dynasty) used Greek mercenaries to seize power in the vacuum left by the withdrawal of both Assyria and the Kushite kings from Egypt. The Persians installed a new administrative system; all business was conducted in Aramaic, the language of the Persian empire. Several Persian kings carried out building projects in Egypt but followed the Egyptian traditions of art and architecture.

Egypt periodically returned to native rule. At such times the Old Kingdom (about 2613-2160 BC) was regarded as a golden age and this was reflected in the art of the period. Tombs were laid out like temples and decoration borrowed Old Kingdom themes and conventions. Although some aspects of statuary were archaizing, new ideas were also introduced, such as a more naturalistic depiction of the individual. Sacred animal cults had become an important aspect of the religion of the period and gods such as Bastet and Apis were often represented in bronze. These small figures of gods were an important part of the sculptural repertoire.