

Textile with Erotes Figures in a Boat
The British Museum

From Akhmim, Egypt
4th century AD

Fragment of linen, decorated in multi-coloured wool loops



The design on this textile, perhaps a wall hanging or rug, is characteristic of late Hellenistic work. The subject is drawn from Greek rather than Egyptian mythology. It shows two Erotes, one of which steers the boat while the other seems to be holding a fishing net, below which a fish can be seen in the water.

The use of colour to show modelling, and the naturalistic tones employed, are characteristic of this period. The whole scene is surrounded by a border of interwoven plants, known as guilloche, which became a very popular motif in Roman and Coptic decoration. The masks in the roundels at the corners show the influence of Hellenistic art outside Egypt.

Hellenistic and Egyptian elements were combined in sculpture, temple reliefs and other objects. Egyptian deities were often shown with the accoutrements of Greek deities whose characteristics were similar to their Egyptian counterparts. Artistic influence worked both ways and some Egyptian deities were incorporated into Greek religion in mystery cults, which were popular throughout the Mediterranean world. Perhaps the best example is that of the cult of Isis.

T.G.H. James, *An introduction to ancient Egy* (London, 1979)

F.D. Friedman, *Beyond the Pharaohs* (Rhode Island, 1989)

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