



ANCIENT STORIES

The people of the ancient world had many stories to tell, and they told them in many ways. Look inside to learn some stories from ancient Greece, Egypt, and the Near East, and discover some Kelsey objects that help tell them.



Silver coin from Athens showing Athena and an owl. KM 1991.2.67.

Athena, Poseidon, and Athens

Long ago, on the coast of ancient Greece, a town sprouted up in a powerful location. Two gods claimed the new town as their own. Poseidon, god of the sea, and Athena, goddess of wisdom and battle strategy, each wanted the people to build temples in their honor and provide them with many gifts. Wise Athena came up with a plan. "Let the people decide," she said to Poseidon. "We shall each create a gift for the town, and the townspeople will decide which gift is more useful." Poseidon agreed, confident that he would win the challenge. He struck

his trident against a rock, and a stream appeared. At first, the people were very excited. A source of fresh water was an important gift! But when they went to drink from the spring, they discovered that the water was salty. Then, Athena touched her spear to the ground, and an olive tree appeared. The people tasted the olives and found that they were delicious. This new tree would be so useful! The townspeople chose Athena's gift, and the town was named Athens after its new patron goddess.

Isis and Ra

Ra, the creator god, was the most ancient and most powerful god in the Egyptian pantheon. Isis, a descendant of Ra and the goddess of motherhood and fertility, wished to be the most powerful god. She devised a plan to trick Ra into giving her more power. She created a viper that bit Ra, and told him she would only give him the cure if he revealed his true name. Ra had no choice, if he wanted to live. He revealed his true name, giving Isis power over him. That is how Isis became known as the goddess of witchcraft and magic.

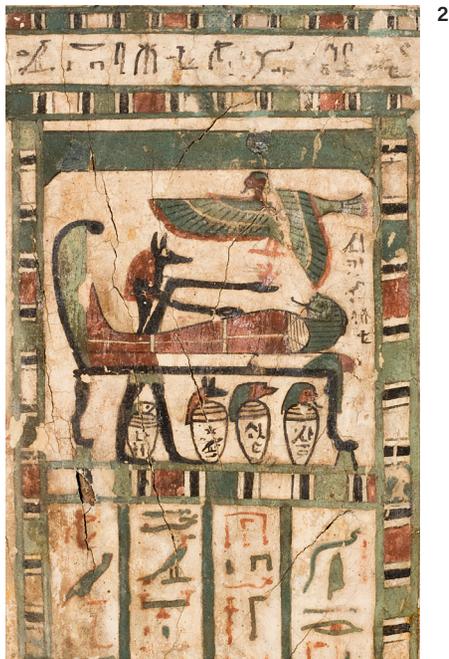


Marble statue of Isis from Karanis, Egypt. KM 25941+8196.

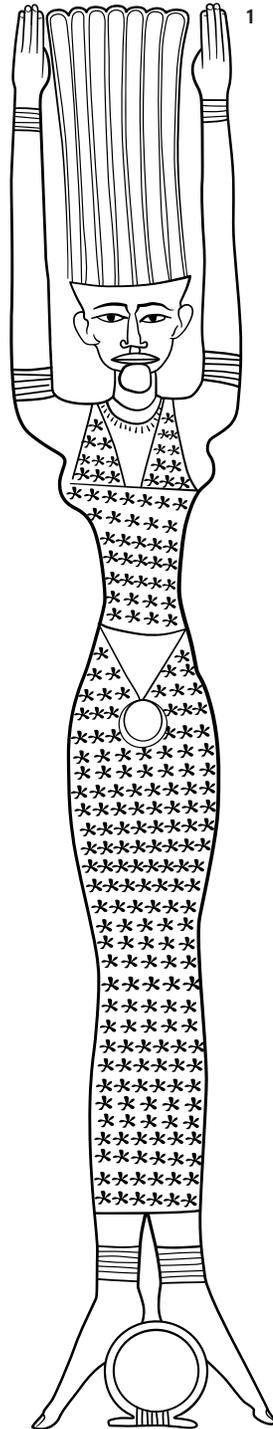
Osiris

The god Osiris was the first king of ancient Egypt, and he ruled with his wife, Isis, by his side. Son of the earth god Geb and the sky goddess Nut, he traced his family all the way back to the creator. However, his brother Set was jealous of Osiris's power. Wishing to be king, Set murdered his brother and scattered the pieces of his body across Egypt. Isis had great powers of healing, protection, and magic. She gathered up the pieces of her husband's body and wrapped them in linen. With the help of Anubis and other gods, she resurrected Osiris. However, having died, he could no longer dwell in the living world, and so took up his place as the god of the underworld.

Can you find other objects in the galleries that have Anubis or jackals on them?



1. The sky goddess Nut. After KM 1989.3.1a.
2. Isis and Anubis resurrect Osiris. Detail of KM 1989.3.1a.



1. Architectural fragment with a dolphin chasing a fish. KM 2853.
2. Bowl fragment showing a boating scene. KM 93898.
3. Marble fragment showing Ariadne and Dionysus. KM 1981.3.1.

Dionysus and the Pirates

Dionysus, the ancient Greek god of wine, took many forms. One day, while walking along the coast in the form of a handsome young man, he was kidnapped by pirates, who thought he was a wealthy prince. The pirates tied Dionysus to the mast of their ship, but the ropes would not hold him. Dionysus only smiled at his captors. Finally, one exclaimed, "Don't you see what we have done? We have brought a god onto our ship! We should bow down and ask for forgiveness, so he doesn't destroy us!" But his companions only laughed and reached out to tie the ropes tighter. Just

then, Dionysus turned himself into a lion, scaring the pirates so much that they jumped overboard. As they hit the water, Dionysus turned them into dolphins.

The only man left on board was the faithful sailor. Dionysus told him that he had nothing to fear and that he would be put ashore on the nearby island of Naxos. It was upon Naxos that Dionysus laid eyes on the sleeping Ariadne, where Theseus had abandoned her after she helped him defeat the Minotaur. Dionysus fell instantly in love with her and took her to be his immortal wife.



1

Trojan War

Perhaps the most famous story of the ancient Greek world is that told in Homer's *Iliad*. The epic poem relates the saga of the 10-year siege of Troy and the fight to retrieve the kidnapped Helen. The long tale includes many stories and characters that we still talk about today. Achilles and his amazing strength and speed, Hector and his honor, and perhaps most famously, Odysseus's Trojan horse.



2

1. Clay oil lamp showing the fall of Troy. KM 29212.

2. Marble fragment showing a scene from Homer's *Iliad*. KM 1979.3.1.

Cylinder Seal: Create your own adventure

Now that you have learned some stories from the ancient world, try making up your own! Find the display of cylinder and stamp seals at the front of the museum. Take a look at the images carved onto the small stone cylinders. Only when the seal was rolled across wet clay did the scene come to life!

What stories do you think the pictures on these cylinder seals are telling? Be creative!



Stone cylinder seal from Mesopotamia, ca. 2500 BCE. KM 26824.

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