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Head from a Statue of a Lion

Edna Russmann: This head of a lion comes from a statue that originally showed the animal either lying down or crouching. As with so many of the artworks from the very earliest period of Egyptian history, we don't really know for sure what this lion represented. It was almost certainly made for a temple, so it may have represented a lion god. However, later in Egyptian history the lion was very much identified with the king's might and power, so it's also possible that this is a royal symbol of some kind. The stone is very, very hard, and it has been worked with minimal detail.

The only tools the Egyptians had throughout most of their history, and certainly in this very early period, were things to pound and rub stone. So you have to imagine the sculptor pounding to break away the stone to the depth he wanted, and then finishing it and sharpening ridges and details by simply rubbing with an abrasive, with a powdered stone. And he kept on doing that until the surface, as you can see, was smooth and fairly well polished. The details that he has put in are of course the eyes, a strong muzzle of a ferocious lion, the ears, and just the suggestion of the ruff around the neck.