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Hippos and Dogs

James Romano: We're now looking at a case containing a number of representations of animals from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom. The Egyptians hated hippos. First of all, an adult male hippo can sometimes weigh two tons, or about the size of a standard S.U.V.

Secondly, they are foul tempered. And thirdly, the tusks of a hippo can be as sharp as a saber. Now imagine, if you're an Egyptian farmer, out in your field one evening, and a herd of twenty of these things comes out and devastates your field. Then how do you explain why the Egyptians buried them in their tombs?

Well, if you look carefully at the legs of these hippos, you'll see that they are all of a slightly different color than the rest of their body. That's because the legs are all modern. You see, when the Egyptians buried a beloved family member in a tomb with one of these hippos, they snapped off the legs so the deceased in the afterlife wouldn't be worried about these hippos, and would be able to kill them with impunity.

Arnold Lehman: Now find the small white figure of a dog on the lowest level of this case.

James Romano: Take a look at this absolutely charming image of an Egyptian dog of the Middle Kingdom. Now, we say, and quite correctly, that the Egyptians revered cats. But we also must remember that they loved their dogs as well. They used them for hunting, for protection, and as pets. They often named their dogs after themselves, or after family members. But we also know that they gave them names that related to their physical characteristics. For example, the name Ebony was often used for dark brown dogs, or Blackie was used for obviously black dogs. Good watchdogs had names like Moon Watcher, or He Who Howls at the Sun.