

3100

Cosmetic Palette

Edna Russmann: The objects in this case are the kinds of objects that would have been found inside the home of a wealthy family at the very beginning of Egyptian history, that is, about 3000 B.C. The most personal of these objects is that simple rectangular slab of green stone. That was a make-up palette. A little palette like this, which was usually just big enough to hold in the hand, would have a lump of the pigment placed on it and would then be ground by rubbing with a pebble. Everyone who was anyone, apparently, had to have his or her own. Both men and women wore this eye makeup.

Cosmetics, then, as today, were treasured, sometimes expensive objects that required the best containers you could find, and you see two elegant cosmetic containers in this case. One is in the shape of a fish, a tilapia fish, which is a Nile fish and is still eaten today not only in Egypt but here in the United States. For the Egyptians, it was a symbol of fertility and rebirth, because the tilapia fish has a lot of offspring apparently, and protects them when they're in danger by gathering them in her mouth. The lid doesn't lift off, it swivels off. You can see the hole for the pivot in the tail of the fish.