

## Introduction & Background

Ancient Egypt stands out as the earliest historical period to fully develop the utilization of cosmetics in both daily life and ceremonial contexts. The earliest discovered cosmetic palette dates back to 3100 B.C. (El-Kilany, Raouf, 2017). These palettes were utilized for grinding pigments and mixing them with water-soluble gum and animal fats, creating eye paint, rouge, and ointments. Additionally, other prevalent cosmetic artifacts include kohl eye makeup pots, cosmetic spoons, and jars of various shapes (El-Kilany, Raouf, 2017). Examination of samples from ancient Egyptian cosmetic artifacts at the Louvre revealed the presence of lead mixtures used in kohl eye paint, which served as a dark protective shield against the sun. Additionally, these lead mixtures possessed antibacterial properties that protected the eyes from infections (Tapsoba, Arbault, Walter, & Amatore, 2012). Eye paint was closely associated with Egyptian deities such as Horus and Ra, as they were believed to provide protection for people's health (El-Kilany, Raouf, 2017). Many cosmetic containers are adorned with symbols and names of influential gods (as seen in Figure 2) and kings (as seen in Figure 3).

## Research Question

My research question: Based on a collection of cosmetic vessels at the Met, how did the use and manufacturing of ancient Egyptian cosmetics change over time? I believe that the changes in the manufacturing of cosmetics are more significant over time compared to their usage. The application of cosmetics likely varied from daily use to ritual purposes, potentially differing among social classes. I hypothesize that the manufacturing of cosmetics would reflect changing values throughout different time periods. If cosmetics were used on a daily basis, I would expect to observe a variety of cosmetic vessels that reflect social stratification. In the case of their use in rituals or ceremonies, I would expect the motifs depicted on the vessels and their archaeological context to exhibit this purpose. Additionally, the shapes, materials, and motifs found on these vessels would likely undergo alterations, providing insights into the values and affiliations held by society at different points in time.

## Methods

### Materials

To gather my data, I examined the collection of ancient Egyptian cosmetic artifacts at the Met museum and selected 19 distinct containers. These artifacts originate from various periods, including the Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate period, New Kingdom, Third Intermediate period, and Late period. To evaluate their ornateness, I created a spreadsheet and ranked the artifacts on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing the least ornate and 5 indicating the most ornate. The term "ornate" refers to both the materials used and the overall appearance of the artifacts.

### Procedure

The ranking was determined by the level of detail exhibited by the artifact, with higher rankings reflecting greater complexity. Vessels lacking in decoration or embellishment were placed at a lower rankings of 1 and 2. Artifacts with greater intricacy, such as inscriptions or carved and sculpted decorations, were placed higher on the scale, 3, 4, and 5. If a vessel was adorned with gold, it received the highest ranking of 5.

**19 of the Met's Ancient Egyptian Cosmetic Artifacts from the Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate, New Kingdom, Third Intermediate, and Late Period, Ranked 1-5 Based on Ornateness**

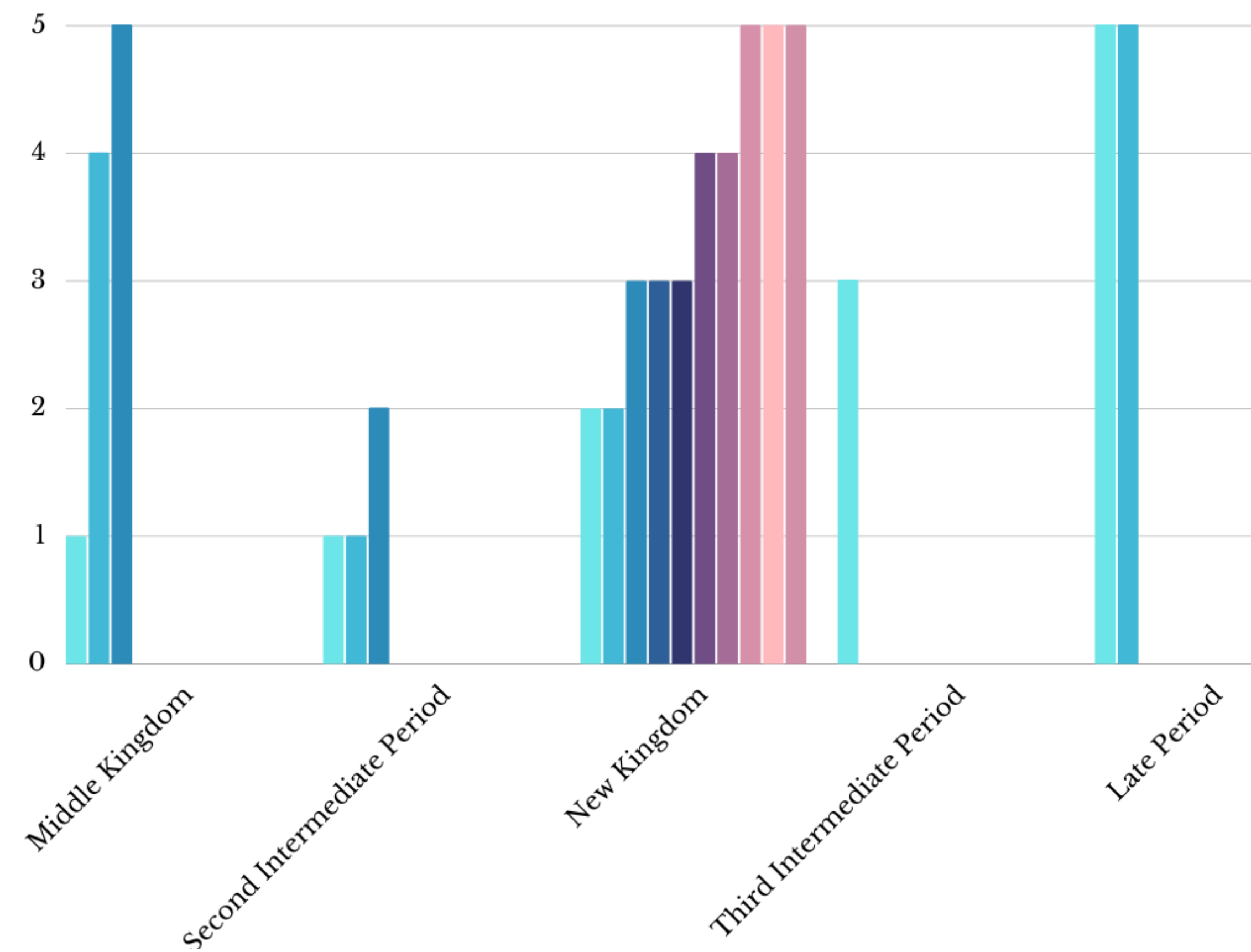


Figure 1: Each bar represents 1 artifact. The Y-axis is labeled 0-5, artifacts were ranked 1-5 based on how ornate they are. The X-axis shows the time period, earliest to latest.



Figure 2: Cosmetic Container in the Form of Bes-Image, Late Period ca. 525-404 B.C.



Figure 3: Kohl Jar Incised with Thutmose III Cartouche New Kingdom ca. 1479-1425 B.C.

## Discussion

Based on my data, the usage of cosmetics during the Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period, New Kingdom, Third Intermediate Period, and Late Period had minimal changes. The types of cosmetic vessels and containers remained relatively consistent, with kohl eye makeup containers being present from the Middle Period through the Late Period. While the ornateness of the vessel shapes varied over time, the overall shapes themselves remained relatively stable.

Artifacts from later periods displayed a higher frequency of colors, carvings, and inscriptions compared to artifacts from earlier periods. The presence of pots likely created using crank drills (Almendron Cultural Association, 2021) was observed from the Middle Kingdom through the New Kingdom period (Middle Kingdom example-Figure 3). The utilization of faience (Figure 2) and glassy faience was evident in artifacts from the New Kingdom through the Late Period. Notably, faience and glassy faience artifacts ranked higher on the ornate scale during the Late Period, potentially indicating different manufacturing processes.

The use of wood in cosmetic artifacts was not recorded after the Middle Kingdom period. Wood artifacts typically ranked as either 1 or 2 on the ornate scale, suggesting that wooden cosmetic vessels were associated with more common people (El-Kilany, Raouf, 2017). Gold was found on three out of the nineteen artifacts, two of which featured inscriptions. One of those two vessels had inscriptions of royal cartouches (as shown in Figure 3), while the other carried the title of a High Priest. This indicates that cosmetics were utilized across all social classes, and the vessels themselves reflected the values and affiliations of specific time periods. The presence of the High Priest Inscription, along with two artifacts adorned with images of deities, suggests that cosmetic vessels served ritual or ceremonial purposes.

## Limitations

I believe that this project would benefit from an equal distribution of artifacts across each time period. Since ten out of the nineteen artifacts belong to the New Kingdom period, my data does not accurately depict the changes in cosmetic use or manufacturing as well as I intended. Additionally, an issue arises from the approximate dates of origin for all artifacts except one, making it impossible to arrange the artifacts precisely by their exact dates in my data.

## References/ Work Cited

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