

GREETINGS FOR THE NEW YEAR

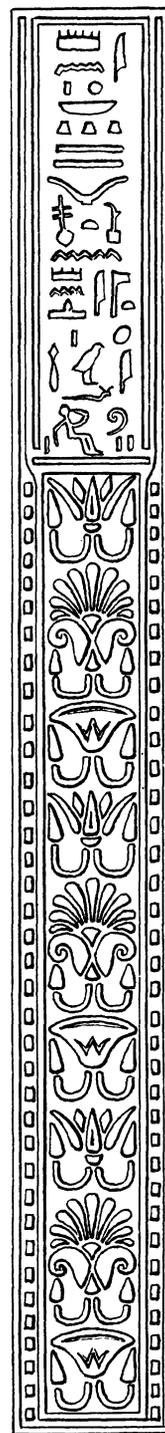
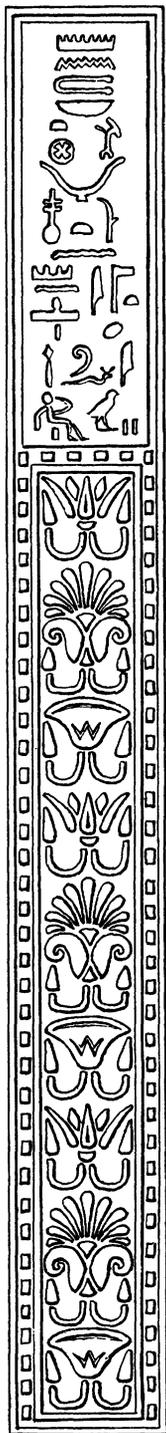
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Whether "Happy New Year" is printed on a modern card or engraved on an ancient Egyptian faience bottle, its purpose is to usher in with due festivity a new twelvemonth of prosperity and felicity. Our calendar is continuously corrected so that January 1, New Year's day, always falls in the midwinter season. In most other calendars New Year's day varies more or less from year to year. The first day of the year in ancient Egypt regressed slowly and made the complete circuit of the seasons every 1,460 years. But whether in hot weather or in cold, in the ancient world or the modern, the custom of exchanging gifts and greetings has been universal.

There are in the Egyptian Department a number of ancient New Year's bottles. By far the most handsome of these seasonal gifts is illustrated on the opposite page, and was presented to a priest named Amen-hotpe some 2,500 years ago. In type all these bottles are similar—lentoid in shape, usually with text and decoration on the front and on the vertical band running around the circumference. The inscriptions on the shoulders of Amen-hotpe's bottle are followed by a repeating pattern of stylized flowers based on the lotus, lily, and papyrus (see panels to right and left). The neck and mouth are formed by alternating lotus and papyrus flowers and stems, and are flanked by two cynocephalous apes, sacred to the god Thôt, whose festival was celebrated in the first month of the civil year and after whom that month came to be named in the later dynasties. The collar, reminiscent of the garlands of fresh flowers and leaves which decorated the jars of wine and oil in the festivals of the New Kingdom period, has been reduced here to decorative bands whose elements consist chiefly of geometric designs and debased papyrus and lotus flowers. Although the glaze of the bottle is now almost completely destroyed, bits remain to give an idea of the original brilliance of the color—the incised inscriptions and decoration, inlaid with lapis lazuli blue paste contrasting with the turquoise blue glaze. The workmanship is typical of the Saite period (663-525 B.C.).

Nothing is known of the provenance of any of the New Year's bottles in our collection, but we can venture to guess that our Priest Amen-hotpe lived in Thebes, for the gods invoked to grant him a Happy New Year are the most important deities of that city—Amen Rē', Montu, and the Theban triad, Amūn, Mūt, and Khonsu. Nor do we know what the bottle contained when it was presented, although it was





Faience New Year's bottle. Egyptian, Saite period. Height 8¼ inches

likely to have been a perfume or an oil suitable for use in the ceremonies connected with celebrating the New Year.

The inscriptions read: front—"(May) Amūn, Mūt, and Khonsu give protection to the Divine Father Amen-hotpe, son of the similarly titled Ef-ow, the Younger"; left shoulder—"(May) Montu lord of Thebes (grant) a

Happy New Year to the Divine Father Amen-hotpe, son of Ef-ow, the Younger"; right shoulder—"(May) Amen Rē^c lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands (Karnak) (grant) a Happy New Year to the Divine Father Amen-hotpe, son of Ef-ow, the Younger."

I have to thank Dr. Ludlow Bull for this translation and L. F. Hall for the drawings.