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12 Gebel-el-Arak: obverse and reverse of an ivory-handled flint knife, illustrating the earliest Egyptian relief carving. The figure supported by two lions in the hunting scene makes a striking comparison with the Mesopotamian archer in Ill. 17, while the naked figures in the battle scene are almost identical with those on the Sumerian stone vase (Ill. 18)



31
"The art of the ANCIENT NEAR EAST"

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13 The Predynastic 'Hunter's palette' in slate with a central mixing panel shows two groups co-operating in a lion-hunt; they wear head-feathers and kilts and carry various weapons. On the lower right-hand fragment one of their number has a lasso. Compare with *Ill. 17*

on which two groups of people, distinguished by standards, collaborate in what must have been a traditionally famous lion-hunt; and others with wild animals and more fantastic beasts, whose significance for the most part escapes us. Finally, though it does not properly belong to the period, there is the famous 'Narmer palette' (*Ill. 14*)—a twofold monument, commemorating a royal victory and the final amalgamation of Upper and Lower Egypt under a single ruler. For the ancient Egyptians traced their history back to Menes, the first king of their First Dynasty, who ruled at Nekhen (Hierakonopolis), and who traditionally united the whole land into a single Kingdom. Narmer and Menes are now generally considered to be identical.

Taken in sequence, these sculptured reliefs represent the earliest stages of Egyptian art. The knife-handle, for instance, shows a pattern of figures which, in their arbitrary horizontal arrangement, have hardly even begun to conform to the outline of the object.