

Colors in Ancient Egypt

Information collected by Giorgio DN

Egyptian painters relied on **six colours in their palette**: red, green, blue, yellow, white and black. Red, the colour of power, indicated life and victory, plus anger and fire. Green symbolized new life, growth, and fertility, while blue represented creation and rebirth, and yellow stood for the eternal, such as the sun and gold. Yellow was the colour of Ra and of all the pharaohs, which is why their sarcophagi were constructed from gold to symbolize the everlasting and eternal pharaoh who was now a god. White hues represented purity, symbolized all things sacred, and were usually used in religious objects used by priests. Black was the colour of death and symbolized the underworld and the night.

(Source: <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/artist-paints/egyptian-colour-palette.htm>)

The Egyptian palette had six colors: red (desher), green (wadj), blue (khesbedj and irtiu), yellow (kenit and khenet), black (khem or kem), and white (shesep and hedj). Most of these colors were made from mineral compounds, which is why they retained their vibrant colors throughout thousands of years.

(Source: <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/colorcode.htm>)

Other sources:

<https://www.thoughtco.com/colors-of-ancient-egypt-43718> Nice web site! Various colors with their hieroglyphic writing

<https://www.worldhistory.org/article/999/color-in-ancient-egypt/>

<https://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/colour/#:~:text=The%20ancient%20Egyptian%20palette%20was,add%20colour%20to%20their%20art.>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/208871706_Color_in_Ancient_Egypt

From

- Faulkner, Raymond O. - A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian (Modernized by Boris Jegorovic, 2017)
- Secco, Livio - Dizionario egizio-italiano italiano-egizio - 9788854814394 - Aracne, 2007
- <https://www.thoughtco.com/colors-of-ancient-egypt-43718>

Red



- *dšr* - adj. **red**, Urk. V, 43, 10; M. u. K. 1, 1 (det. \); *dšr ib*, *dšr hr* 'furious', JEA 35, 72.

Red - 'deshr' (Translit: *dsr*) 



Red Lead



Red ochre - 'ded'

(Translit: *dd*) 

Dark red dye - 'demy' (Translit: *dmi*)

Blood red dye - 'ines' (Translit: *ins*)



Madder lake



Kermes (Carmine) lake

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Green



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w3d

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adj. **green**, Peas. B1, 22 (); Adm. 3, 10; Siut, pl. 19, 33; **pale**, of lips, etc., Barns, Ram. p. 22; **fresh**, Urk. IV, 335, 11; 755, 9 (); 756, 10; **raw**, of food, P. Kah. 5, 5; Peas. B1, 246; **hale, strudy**, Pyr. 457; Eb. 2, 5; Th. T. S. II, 22; **fortunate, happy**, Les. 76, 16; Urk. IV, 260, 11 (); 261, 15; 324, 12; *r w3d* 'vigorously', Gr. §205, 5; *m w3d* 'successfully', Les. 86, 21; trans. vb. **make green**, Urk. IV, 132, 12; **make to flourish**, 2157, 15.

(confirmed in Secco)

Green - 'wahdj' (Translit: *w3d*) 



Malachite - 'wahdj'

(Translit: *w3d*) 



Verdigris - 'hes-byah'

(Translit: *hs-bi3*) 



Chryscolla

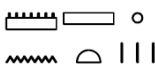


Turquoise - 'mefkaht'

(Translit: *mfk3.t*) 

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Yellow



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mnšt

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yellow (?) ochre, JEA 20, 188; Barns, Ram. p. 33, or **red o. (?)**, op. cit. 147.



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knit

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a yellow pigment, BD 374, 1; 379, 11; var.  P. Kah. 20, 38; **orpiment**, Harris, op. cit. 153.

Yellow - 'khenet' (Translit: *hnt*) 



Orpiment



Lead antimonate



Yellow ochre - 'sety' (Translit: *sty*)

Yellow-red mineral - 'qeny'

(Translit: *knit*)



Ochre



Realgar



Gold - 'nebw' (Translit: *nbw*) 

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Blue



- *hsbd* - **blue**, Pyr. 253; Siut, pl. 19, 33 (𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏); BD 7, 10; **blue-black**, of hair, BD 14, 7.

Blue - 'irtyu' (Translit: *irtyu*) 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏



Egyptian blue
(various tones)



Azurite - 'tefer'

(Translit: *tfr*) 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏



Lapis lazuli - 'khesbedj'

(Translit: *hsbd*) 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏



Indigo

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White



- *hḏ* - **white**, Sin. B196; Eb. 10, 10; Urk. IV, 701, 13 (𓂏𓂏); **bright**: *hḏ t3* 'the land becomes b.' = dawn, Sin. B20.248; Sh. S. 185, Urk. IV, 896, 4, sim. Adm. 10, 1, *hḏ hr* 'b. of face' = cheerful, Pr. 14, 12; JEA 4, pl. 8, 8 (𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏); Les. 79, 11 (𓂏𓂏𓂏); 80, 20 (𓂏).

(confirmed in Secco)

White - 'hedj' (Translit: *hḏ*) 𓂏



Chalk white



Lead white



Silver - 'hedj' (Translit: *hḏ*) 𓂏𓂏

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Black



- *km* - **black**, ZÄS 57, 10*; BD 231, 11 (det. 𓂏); 232, 1; 426, 4; Hymnen, 11, 4; varr. 𓂏 Urk. IV, 168, 7, 𓂏 1098, 8.

Black - 'kem' (Translit: *km*) 𓂏𓂏



Lamp black



Ivory black