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CONTENTS

	PAGE
AN ALABASTER FIGURE OF THE FOURTH DYNASTY IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM	H. R. Hall 1
THE SECRET CHAMBERS OF THE SANCTUARY OF THOTH	Alan H. Gardiner 2
THE KLINE OF SARAPIS	J. Grafton Milne 6
THE TOMB OF TETAKY AT THEBES (No. 15) ...	N. de Garis Davies 10
PHILOLOGICAL METHOD IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF ANATOLIAN PLACE-NAMES	W. F. Albright 19
KIZZUWADNA AND OTHER HITTITE STATES ...	L. A. Mayer and J. Garstang ... 23
TOMB-CHAPEL 525 AT TELL EL-'AMARNAH 36
FRESH LIGHT ON THE TOMB ROBBERIES OF THE TWENTIETH DYNASTY AT THEBES	T. Eric Peet 37, 162
SACRED TREES IN MODERN EGYPT	Winifred S. Blackman 56
ATHANASIANA	Norman H. Baynes 58
FRANCIS G. NEWTON 70
A POSSIBLE YEAR DATE OF KING RAMESSES VII	T. Eric Peet 72
A MUMMY OF THE PERSIAN PERIOD	Warren R. Dawson 76
A POSSIBLE LATE REPRESENTATION OF THE GOD 'ASH	Alan W. Shorter 78
PAP. BRIT. MUS. CXXI, VERSO COL. I	Professor S. Eitrem 80
BIBLIOGRAPHY: GRAECO-ROMAN EGYPT. PAPYRI (1923-1924)	H. Idris Bell 84
A RELIEF FROM THE TOMB OF RAMŌSE AT THEBES	W. B. Emery 125
A NEW EDITION OF THE HERMETIC WRITINGS ...	A. D. Nock 126
THE ROMAN ROADS AND STATIONS IN THE EASTERN DESERT OF EGYPT	G. W. Murray 138
LENGTH-MEASURES IN PTOLEMAIC EGYPT ...	Sir Herbert Thompson 151
MAGICAL NOTES	A. D. Nock 154

	PAGE
A JASPER GROUP OF A LION AND BULL FIGHTING, FROM EL-'AMARNAH, IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM	H. R. Hall 159
HADRIAN'S DECREE ON RENTING STATE DOMAIN IN EGYPT	William Linn Westermann ... 165
GREEK SCULPTURE IN PTOLEMAIC EGYPT ...	A. W. Lawrence 179
THE CULT OF THE SUN AND THE CULT OF THE DEAD IN EGYPT	W. J. Perry 191
OSIRIS OR THE SUN-GOD? A REPLY TO MR PERRY	Aylward M. Blackman 201
PHILOLOGICAL NOTES	Aylward M. Blackman 210
A BRONZE DAGGER OF THE HYKSOS PERIOD ...	Warren R. Dawson 216
MEROITIC STUDIES V	F. Ll. Griffith 218
THE LEGEND OF THE CAPTURE OF JOPPA AND THE STORY OF THE FOREDOOMED PRINCE ...	T. Eric Peet 225
A CUNEIFORM VOCABULARY OF EGYPTIAN WORDS	Sidney Smith and C. J. Gadd ... 230
ADDITIONAL NOTE	T. Eric Peet 239
A GREEK-COPTIC GLOSSARY TO HOSEA AND AMOS	H. I. Bell and H. Thompson ... 241
AN ORACLE PAPYRUS. B.M. 10335	Warren R. Dawson 247
ORACLES IN ANCIENT EGYPT	Aylward M. Blackman 249
NOTES ON SOME GREEK GRAFFITI	Marcus N. Tod 256
PAKHORAS—BAKHARÂS—FARAS IN GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY	F. Ll. Griffith 259
DOUBLE ENTRIES IN PTOLEMAIC TAX-RECEIPTS ...	J. G. Milne 269
PAPYRUS LANSING: A TRANSLATION WITH NOTES	Aylward M. Blackman and T. Eric Peet 284
BIBLIOGRAPHY (1924-1925): ANCIENT EGYPT ...	F. Ll. Griffith 299
BIBLIOGRAPHY (1924-1925): CHRISTIAN EGYPT	De Lacy O'Leary 320
BIBLIOGRAPHY (1923-1924): GREEK INSCRIPTIONS	Marcus N. Tod 327
NOTES AND NEWS 107, 331
NOTICES OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS 110, 335
LIST OF PLATES 353
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT 355
NOTICES OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS, DETAILED LIST 356
INDEX 357

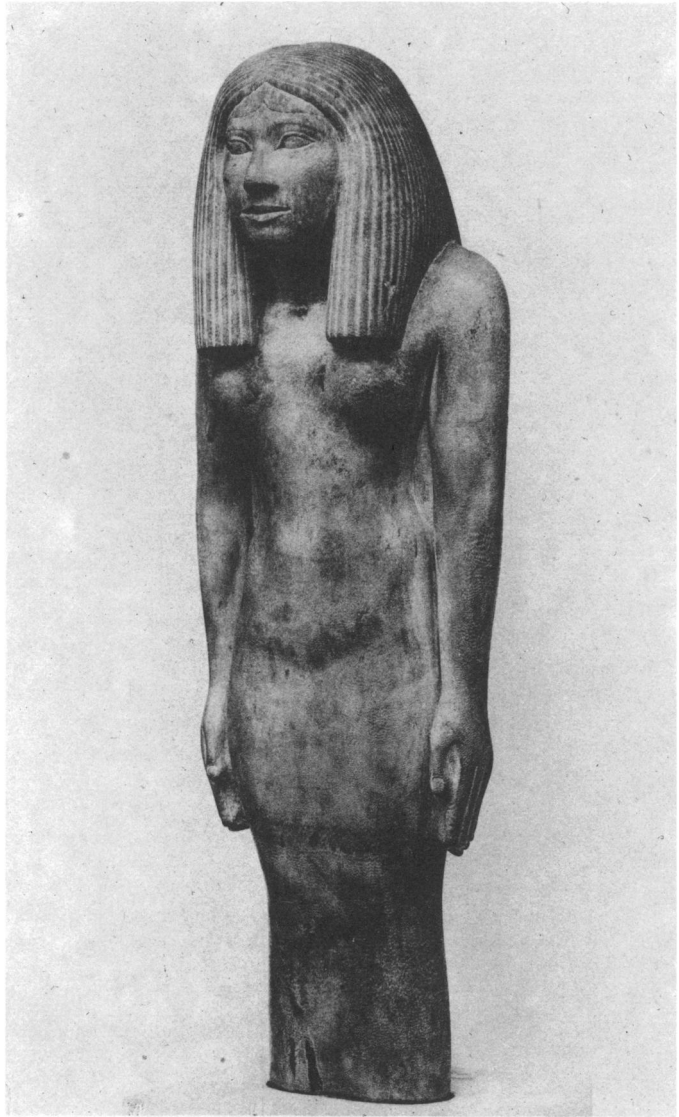
AN ALABASTER FIGURE OF THE FOURTH DYNASTY IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

By H. R. HALL, D.LITT.

With Plate I.

THE fine alabaster or calcite figure of a woman in the British Museum [No. 24619] illustrated by the frontispiece, Pl. I, was acquired many years ago. It has already been published by Sir Ernest Budge in his *Guide to the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Egyptian Rooms* (1922), p. 128. The figure is 1 ft. 7½ ins. (48·75 cm.) tall. It represents a girl, presumably a princess or noble lady, standing with her hands by her sides. She wears the usual tight-fitting shift and a heavy wig over her hair, the natural parting of which appears over her forehead below the edge of the wig. The feet are missing, otherwise the figure is perfect. It was originally coloured, and there are traces of black on the wig and of a green (?) turned to brown on the dress, especially at the back. There is no plinth at the back and, of course, no inscription, so that we do not know who is represented by this beautiful figure. The perfect preservation of the face is a great boon, and makes this one of the finest existing examples of its style. There can, I think, be little doubt in the minds of most as to its date. It could not possibly be later than the Twelfth Dynasty, unless it were an example of Saïte archaism, and were of Twenty-sixth Dynasty date, which it obviously is not. There is nothing archaistic about it. It is archaic, not archaistic, and its genuinely archaic character forbids its being as late as the Twelfth Dynasty, or even the Sixth. I unhesitatingly ascribe it to the Fourth Dynasty, and rather to the earlier than the later period of that dynasty. It might almost be described as Third-Fourth Dynasty, judging by its contour, and the heavy hunched-up effect of the broad shoulders and great wig, which reminds us of the Third Dynasty figure of 'Aper (?) -ankhu or Bezmes (B.M. 171 [70 a]), published by BUDGE (*Egyptian Sculptures in Brit. Mus.* (1913), Pl. I) and WEILL (*La II^e et la III^e Dynasties* (1908), Pl. I), and of the newly discovered figure of King Zoser (*Ill. Lond. News*, Feb. 28, 1925). Personally, however, I think the face much too good for the Third Dynasty. It is in the perfect face that the chief charm of the figure resides. The cheeks have the full rounded contours, with their European effect, characteristic of the nobility of the Old Kingdom. The nose is full and slightly aquiline at the tip: happily it is undamaged. The mouth has a singularly sweet and good-natured expression. The eyes are indicated without any exaggerated convention. The whole face is very natural and obviously is a portrait. The sculptor has known how to use his material with remarkable skill; the figure is a masterpiece of the portraiture of the time of the pyramid-builders, an example of the first rank, on the possession of which the Museum is to be congratulated. It is exhibited in the Fifth Egyptian Room.

Plate I.



Alabaster statuette in the British Museum.

Scale about $\frac{1}{4}$.