

# Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin

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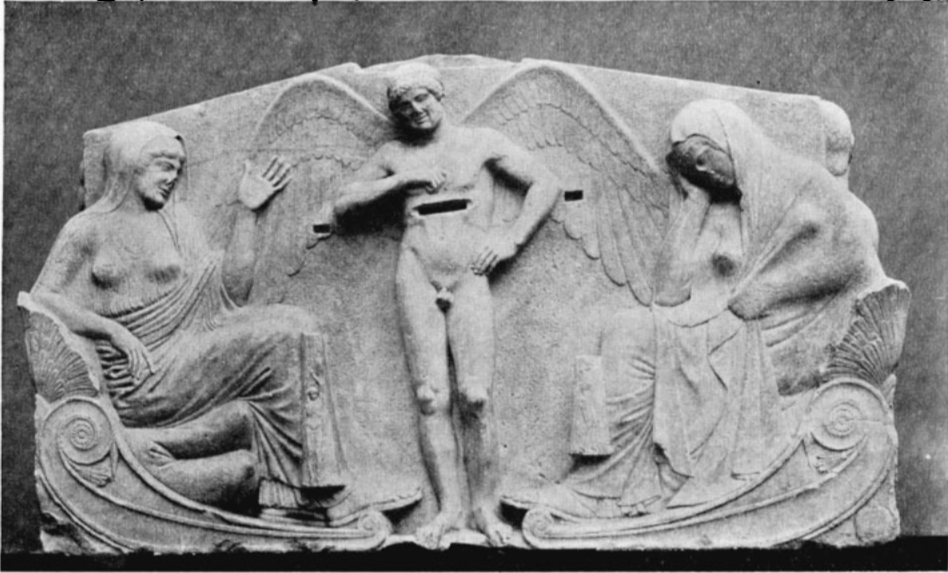
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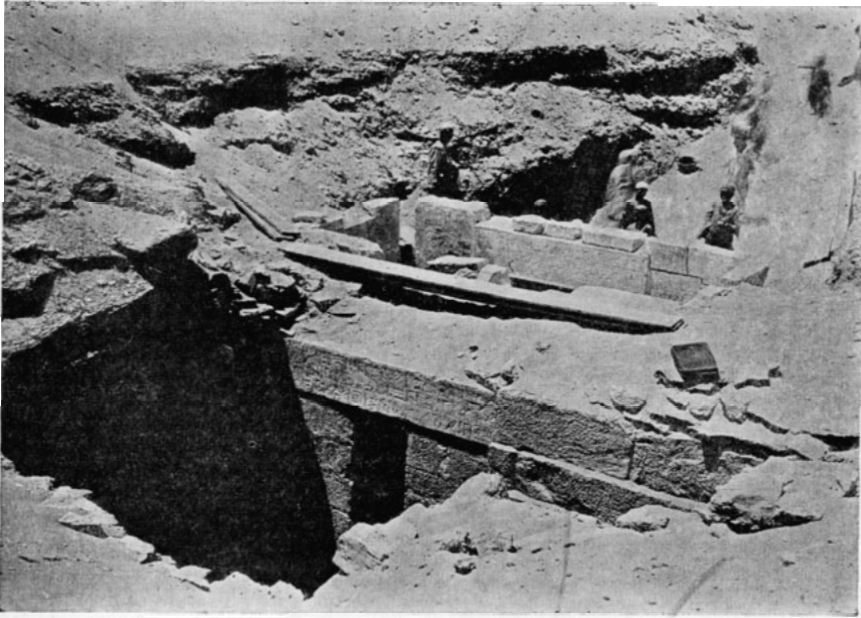
## A Greek Relief of the Fifth Century

IN November the Museum placed on exhibition for the first time a three-sided relief, which will shortly be published in an adequate manner. A preliminary account of it, however, seems desirable at this time.

In general shape it recalls at once the so-called "Ludovisi Throne" in Rome. The dimensions of the two marbles correspond closely but not exactly: the height of the Boston relief is some 5 cm. more than is indicated by the slope of the top of the one in Rome; the width along the face of the top is 7 or 8 cm. more in the Boston relief; the width of the longer "wing" of the Boston relief is almost exactly that of the two sides of the one in Rome, and the dimensions of the inside are practically the same, except that the sides of the former contract toward the top while the sides of the latter spread slightly. It was pointed out by Petersen that the lower part of the relief in Rome had been cut away, perhaps to be covered with metal ornaments, in a way that disturbed somewhat the lower edge of the scene. In the Boston relief sure and delicate scrolls, surmounted by flaring palmette ornaments, reproduce what has

apparently been lost from the relief in Rome. In general shape, in a curved line bounding the bottom of the scenes represented, in the scenes themselves, and in the style of workmanship, the two correspond so closely that we must believe they were made together, presumably for use together.

The scene on the long side of this relief represents a winged figure weighing two small nude youths in the presence of two seated women. On a vase attributed to Amasis in the Louvre Hermes weighs the souls of two warriors in the presence of a woman (Thetis?) and Zeus; on another slightly later vase (kylix) in the Louvre Hermes weighs the souls of warriors between a winged Eros and Thetis, while on the other side the duel is actually in progress between Achilles and Memnon. Not to mention other instances of this scene, one of which is exhibited in the Museum, it is evident that the sculptor drew his inspiration either from Attic vase paintings of the first half of the fifth century B. C. (such as have been found in great numbers in Italy) or from the prototype of these vase paintings. The figure of Hermes — if it be Hermes — closely follows the



*The Mastaba D 23 in process of excavation at Saqqara, Egypt*

### Two Mastaba Chambers

THE edge of the desert on the western bank of the Nile was chosen from time immemorial by the Egyptians as the site of their tombs. In the course of centuries they came to form almost a continuous necropolis stretching from Gizeh, near Cairo, far up the river. The pyramid type, which was characteristic of the Old Empire, was reserved for the king and his immediate family, and at its foot a mortuary temple was dedicated to the service of the *ka*, or ghostly double, of the monarch. About the pyramid were gathered the Mastabas, or tombs of the nobility. Two of these from the pyramid field at Saqqara were purchased by the Museum several years ago from the Egyptian government through the good offices of Professor Maspero, Director-General of Antiquities in Egypt, and Mr. J. E. Quibell, the Director of Excavations at Saqqara. They have been installed in the centre of the first gallery of the Egyptian Department in the present Museum and give its name to the room. These two chambers were described and illustrated by Mariette in 1899.\*

A Mastaba is so called from its external resemblance to the stone seat outside an Arab shop. It

\* A. Mariette, "Les Mastabas de l'Anclen Empire." Paris, 1889. Pp. 242 and 285 ff.

consists of a masonry structure, rectangular in outline, with slanting walls faced with stone or brick, the main axis of the building running generally north and south. Three features are essential to a Mastaba—an offering-chamber accessible from without, a niche adjoining for the statue of the dead, and a vault beneath for the reception of the sarcophagus. The offering-chamber was



*Servants gathering Water Plants*



*Figure of Owner of Mastaba D 23*

usually placed in the southeast corner of the structure. Here the friends and relatives of the deceased brought provisions for his *ka*, or ghostly double, and prayed for its welfare. The chief feature of the chamber was the stele built into the west wall, which in the time of the Old Empire retained the general lines of a doorway, although consisting of a single piece of stone. In some Mastaba Chambers the walls are plain, the stele only being decorated. In other cases carved and painted reliefs decorate the walls, and to this class belong the two chambers installed in the Museum gallery.

The second feature of the Mastaba was the "serdab," a chamber hidden in the masonry, in which were placed figures of the deceased, and which was connected with the offering-chamber by only a very small opening. Through this opening the *ka*, dwelling in the "serdab," could enjoy the incense burned in his honor.

The third feature of the Mastaba was the tomb

chamber itself, a narrow space cut in the rock beneath the others, where the sarcophagus was deposited. This room was reached by means of a rectangular shaft, which was filled up with stones after the body was in place.

The artistic interest of these tombs centres in the statues and reliefs often found in the "serdab" and the reliefs carved on the walls of the offering-chamber. In one of the present Mastaba Chambers\* the reliefs give evidence that the owner of the tomb died before the decoration on the walls was finished, and several courses betray the hasty finishing of the decoration by painting the figures only. The material is a coarse fossil limestone, except for the stele, which is of the finest smooth-grained limestone. This difference in the material may indicate that the block for the stele was given to the noble as a mark of especial favor or a reward for good service. On the stele are seated figures of the deceased, prayers to Anubis to assure to the owner the continuance of earthly blessings, while below are represented four standing figures of the noble. The walls of this chamber show the master fowling in the marshes, reeds on the bank, servants gathering the rushes, a net being pulled in with its catch of ducks and geese, and boatmen poling their craft along the stream. Conventional as the drawing certainly is, it is of no small merit when the material, the attempt to show off the important parts of the figure, and the purpose of the work are considered. In the finest specimens of this period the artist never forgot that his design was to satisfy at least two requirements: it must conform to the type in use for funerary reliefs, and it must be a decoration on a wall. It is this chamber which is shown in process of excavation in the illustration at the head of the present article.

The second chamber† is from the Mastaba of Pthah-Sekhem-Ankh, which was in ruinous condition when excavated, the chamber alone being in fair preservation. The material in this room also varies in texture. On the walls are represented sacrificial scenes dealing with the cutting up of oxen, harvesting scenes, servants caring for the animals, groups of domestic animals, and boatmen in a water-festival, gaily decorated with lotus flowers. These walls also show many traces of the varied colors which once made them brilliant. The freedom and skill of the drawing of the animals is worthy of notice. The stele in this room is of the usual type.

These Mastaba Chambers belong to a class of tombs which went out of general use towards the end of the Old Empire, and were succeeded by the rock chambers found in the cliffs of Upper Egypt.

L. E. R.

\* Marked D 23 in A. Mariette, "*Les Mastabas de l'Antique Empire*," Paris, 1889, P. 243 ff. This chamber is 14 ft., 10 in. long, by 5 ft., 3 in. wide, by 13 ft., 4 in. high.

† D 41 in A. Mariette, "*Les Mastabas de l'Antique Empire*," Paris, 1889, P. 285 ff. This chamber is 14 ft., 8 in. long, by 5 ft., 1 in. wide, by 9 ft., 11 in. high.