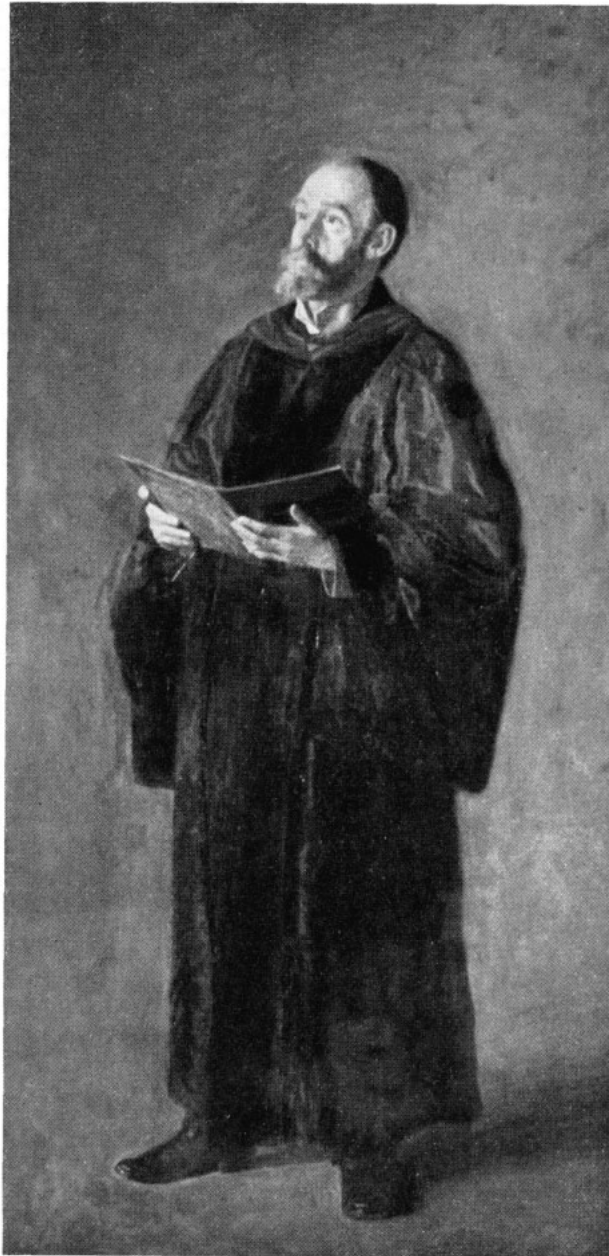


# BULLETIN OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

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The Dean's Roll-call

Thomas Eakins (1844-1916)

Abraham Shuman Fund

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SUBSCRIPTION ONE DOLLAR

some dozen other pictures, skating lightly over the question of authenticity. But at least one interesting fact emerges from the *Scribner* article. Sumner avoided putting the names of artists on his paintings, sometimes even removing labels. Also, he did not like turning visitors loose to look for themselves, and was reticent about history and attributions. It is said that he only spoke about these with "Mr. Barlow, the dealer, who restored, remounted, and framed many of his treasures."<sup>1</sup> It almost looks as though doubts had begun to trouble Sumner's mind, and the idea that everything he had was not of museum quality had taken root. Perhaps he thought, as Calvin Coolidge said, when a friend remained embarrassedly silent in front of a recent portrait, "I agree."

W. G. CONSTABLE.

<sup>1</sup>"Mr. Barlow" was H. N. Barlow, who first appears in the *Washington Directory* in 1866. For a time he oscillates between being an artist and a restorer, and then emerges as running a "Gallery of Fine Arts." He may well have sold pictures to Sumner, and have known the worst about them.

### Portraiture in Ancient Egypt

IT is peculiarly difficult for persons living in the twentieth century A.D. to acquire a sense of the personal reality of those who walked this earth in the twenty-seventh century B.C. The social background, and the physical and psychological environment of the Egyptians who lived when the pyramids were new are so foreign that it is hard for us to think of them as living individuals with distinct personalities, very much like ourselves. Perhaps the

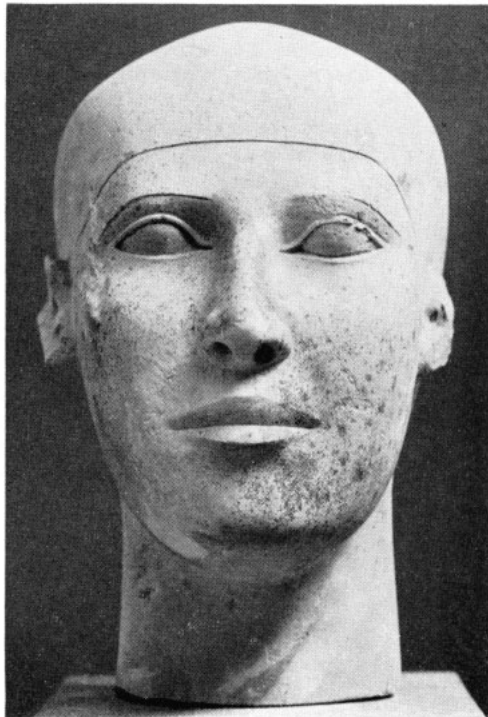


Fig. 1. A Prince Giza, Fourth Dynasty

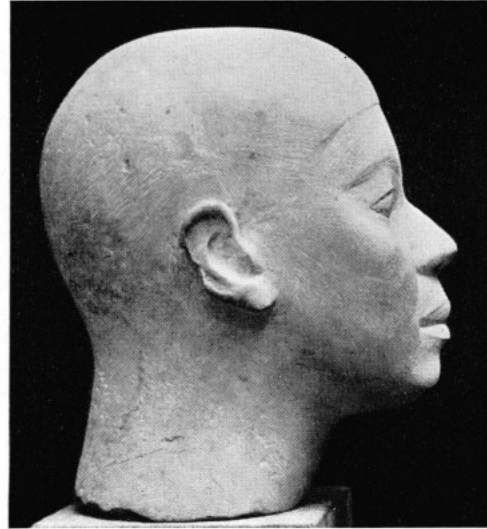


Fig. 2. A Princess Giza, Fourth Dynasty

best way in which a modern man can learn to appreciate them as real people is by examining the portraits which they made, a few of which have survived and are preserved in museums. And it is in the study of the works of the Pyramid Age that we can best grasp the fundamental character of Egyptian portrait sculpture, for in this period it remained direct and relatively unaffected by external influences, and by the sophistication and conscious striving for effect which later overlaid its essential character.

The use of the term "portraiture" to describe the Egyptian's representation of an individual is not entirely satisfactory, for it carries connotations to the modern mind which were not felt by the ancients. To us a portrait is a likeness of the physical appearance of the individual, and at its best a study of his character as well. It is intended to remind the observer of the person portrayed; to be an interpretation of him to his fellow-men, whether contemporaries or posterity; its essential function is to help others to see and understand him. Ancient Egyptian portraits are quite different in purpose. They were not made primarily to remind others of the individual represented, but rather to furnish his own spirit with an artificial shell in which to be embodied after death: they were addressed by the artist exclusively to the subject of the portrait, not to other men. There can be no doubt that the best of the portraits which have survived from ancient Egypt are real physical likenesses of particular persons. On the other hand, the great mass of stereotyped statuettes of minor officials, which lack all evidence of individualization, were also portraits in the Egyptian sense—that is, they represented an individual. How may we explain these differences?

The element of physical likeness came about when the skill of the sculptor, seeking after perfection in his craft, led him subconsciously to individualize his subject, and when the more intellectual and sensitive members of the aristocracy had developed

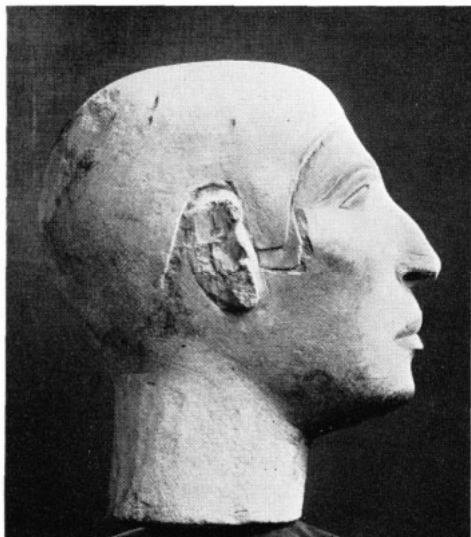


Fig. 3. Nofer Giza, Fourth Dynasty



Fig. 4. Nofer Giza, Fourth Dynasty

an appreciation for the subtler qualities in art which induced them to demand a true likeness. Yet the essential requirement for the Egyptian of untrained perception was to have a figure in his tomb which had the semblance of a man—a figure which, by means of the name inscribed upon it, or by the magic formulae recited by the priests in its presence, became identified with the spirit whom it was supposed to represent—and which had that spirit infused into it by these mysterious means. We have to realise that the business of providing funerary equipment was an industry like any other. The purveyors of sculpture produced their wares according to the taste and pocketbooks of their patrons. The great work of art was custom-built, to use a modern commercial term. The highest officials, the princes, and above all the kings commanded the services of the relatively few master-sculptors, and their portraits were commissions representing both the refined taste of the patron and the superlative skill and sensibility of the artist. The man of modest means could neither afford to employ a great artist to make his funerary figure, nor had he the fineness of perception which would make him dissatisfied with a reasonably attractive generalization to which his personality would become attached by the magic ritual of the priests and the addition of the inscribed name. One has the impression that a goodly proportion of routine funerary sculpture was made in advance of the specific demand, and was given the necessary identity by later inscribing the purchaser's name upon it.

It is the misfortune of most people today that their impression of Egyptian art is based in no small degree on objects which, whatever their archaeological and historic importance, are distinctly mediocre as works of art, and they are disappointed with their stiffness and lack of vitality. The great works by which Egyptian art should be judged are rare, and are all too often so submerged in the mass of mediocrity that they are not apt to come to the notice of visitors to

museum galleries. Perhaps the isolation of a few such pieces may serve to call attention to what Egyptian portrait sculpture was capable of achieving.

The accompanying illustrations are of objects in the Museum of Fine Arts which were excavated by our Expedition at Giza. All are of the Fourth Dynasty (2680-2560 B.C.) and fall into two groups; first, portraits of private persons, high officials or princes, and second, representations of kings and queens.

Figure 1 is the head of a prince whose name is not known. It is rather conventional and represents a man of regular features approximating to the Egyptian ideal of masculine beauty. While the face is somewhat lacking in individuality, the head is one of the finest examples of technical skill in handling

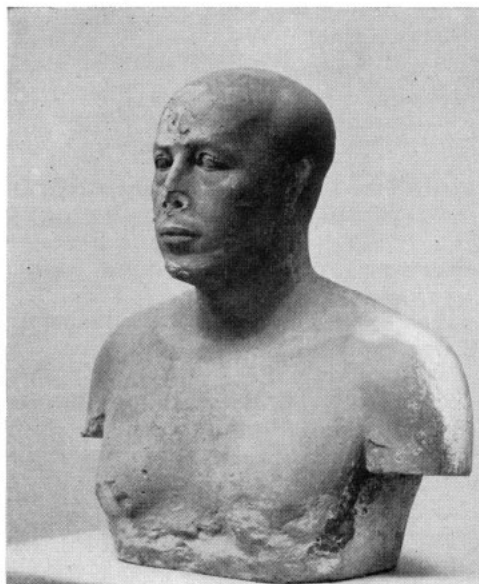


Fig. 5. Ankh-haef Giza, Fourth Dynasty

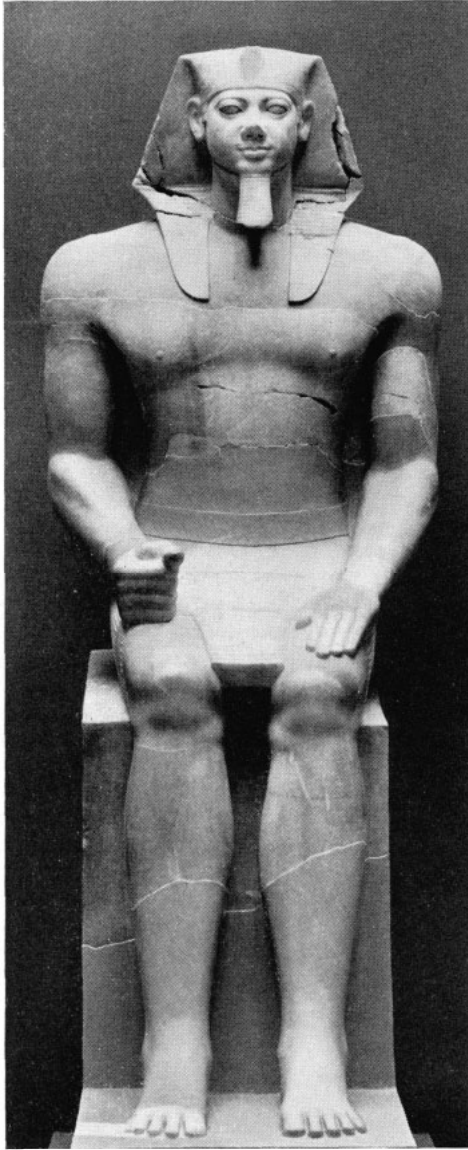


Fig. 6. Mycerinus Giza, Fourth Dynasty

soft white limestone of which the sculptors of the Old Kingdom were capable. Figure 2 is conceived in a very different spirit. It represents a woman, wife of a prince of the royal house, and reveals the artist's interest in a strongly individual head. The heavy skull and jaw, thick lips, broad nostrils, and peculiar structural formation of cheek bones, brow, and eyes contrast sharply with the regular features seen in Figure 1. It has often been pointed out that this head shows strong negro characteristics, and it is indeed quite possible that the woman represented was of mixed blood, possibly the daughter of an upper Nilotic chieftain allied by marriage to the ruling house of Egypt. No concrete evidence of this exists, however, and the question remains little more than an interesting speculation. In any case the head is no conventional type—whether



Fig. 7. Mycerinus Giza, Fourth Dynasty

negro or not—but a strongly individualized representation of a particular person.

Figure 3 also carries conviction as a true portrait in the modern sense. Somewhat summary in execution and finish, it betrays the hand of a master working in broad planes and is instinct with personality. In the case of this head we are fortunate in having a second portrait of the same person, this time in relief (Figure 4). He was an official of the highest rank in the financial affairs of the government, "Overseer of the Two Houses of Silver," Nofer by name. In the relief the eye is, of course, rendered according to the universal Egyptian convention which sought to avoid foreshortening in two-dimensional representation; but if one compares the profiles in the head and in the relief one cannot fail to note the faithful rendering in each of the aquiline nose,



Fig. 8. Mycerinus and his Queen

Giza, Fourth Dynasty

the peculiar formation of the upper lip, and the contours of chin and throat.

The most convincing example of individualized portraiture in the Pyramid Age is the painted limestone and plaster bust of Ankh-haef shown in Figure 5. This unique masterpiece is remarkable for several reasons. The subject was of the highest rank, had the largest tomb in the royal family cemetery at Giza, and the inscriptions on it tell us that he was the "eldest son of the king's body" (probably Cheops, builder of the Great Pyramid), and that he held the highest administrative offices in the kingdom, those of Vizier and "Overseer of All Works of the King." It is clear that he was an important member of the immediate royal circle with the best sculptors of the court at his command. The bust is exceptional both in form and material. It is neither a "reserve head" nor was it ever part of a complete statue, and we know of no other busts in the round like it. The technique also is unusual, for the figure is carved out of fine white limestone and completely covered with a layer of plaster of Paris in which the finer modelling of the surfaces has been executed. This was doubtless done while the plaster coating was still wet, and the whole figure was then painted with the brick-red color normally used to represent the flesh of men. This red color was even laid over the closely cropped hair, a quite abnormal procedure, and only the eyes appear to have been white with dark pupils. But what is most note-

worthy about this unique head is its utter lack of convention and the startling realism of its modelling. The magnificent shoulders, neck, and skull reflect keen observation of nature and a thorough grasp of the structure beneath the surface. The realistic rendering of the rather small eyes is in marked contrast to normal Egyptian practice, and the careful modelling of the face, the muscles round the mouth, and the pouches under the eyes give evidence of minute observation of the living model. In the writer's view the bust of Ankh-haef is the supreme example of realistic portraiture which has survived from ancient Egypt, alike for its freedom from convention and for its perfection of execution.

In discussing the representation of kings from the point of view of their portrait value it is necessary to consider the special position of the sovereign in Egyptian thought during the Old Kingdom. He was not a man like other mortals, but a god who, living for a time upon earth, passed at death into the company of the other gods. Even in life he partook of the worship accorded to divine beings, and after death his funerary monument was at once a tomb more magnificent in its equipment than those of ordinary men and a temple where posterity might do reverence to the god. The statues of mortals existed solely for the benefit of their own spirits in the hereafter. The figures of kings, even those placed in their funerary monuments, added another element; that of the divine image to be worshipped.

Thus the royal statue was at once a likeness of the individual and a representation of the idea of kingship. It partook of the quality of an icon, and into it the sculptor sought to infuse the conception of divine majesty, the aloof dignity and formality befitting the figure of a superhuman being.

One of the best examples of this blending of the human and the divine is the colossal alabaster statue of King Mycerinus shown in Figure 6. Unfortunately incomplete, the mighty seated figure has been reconstructed so as to present a close approximation to its original appearance. The head and left shoulder, the massive chest, and the powerful knees with the hands resting upon them are preserved and have been assembled to form a seated figure eight and a half feet high. The head is noticeably small in scale for the body, and this gives a striking impression of power to the beautifully modelled figure, perhaps an intentional device on the part of the ancient sculptor. The face is full and rounded, the eyes somewhat protuberant, the nose broad with a low bridge, and the lips full. The highly conventionalized beard, which projects downward and slightly forward from the chin, is universally found on royal figures, and, like the uraeus-serpent commonly depicted on the forehead, was a symbol of kingly rank. How good a likeness of King Mycerinus have we in this statue? We cannot, of course, answer that question with certainty, but may suggest an answer by comparing it with other faces of the king found in the precincts of his pyramid.

Very similar in modelling is the head shown in Figure 7. This is taken from a group statuette in slate representing the goddess Hathor seated, embracing the king who stands at her left, and flanked on the other side by a female figure personifying one of the provinces of Egypt. The peculiar tall head-dress worn by the king is the crown of Upper Egypt. Despite the difference in scale between the two faces of Figures 6 and 7 there can be no doubt of their substantial identity of feature. Figure 8 shows a third representation of Mycerinus which presents certain differences from the two previously mentioned. This is a detail of the heads from the well-known slate pair statue of the king and queen, about three-quarters life size. In this portrait the king's face is distinctly leaner than in the others, the bridge of the nose is straighter, and the features have a slight suggestion of gauntness, all indicative of greater maturity. The late Professor Reisner has explained the difference between these faces by assigning them to different sculptors or schools, considering the difference to be due to the varying interpretations of two master-artists. This explanation is entirely plausible, but it seems to me also possible to explain the matter by supposing that the slate pair version of the king's face was produced when Mycerinus was older than when the other portraits were made, and this suggestion is supported by the fact that the slate pair was unfinished at the king's death. In its lower portion it is still in the rough, and it had not been supplied

with the inscription which regularly appears on the bases of finished statues. Indeed, the unfinished state of the work is clearly evident in the tool marks still visible on the bodies of both king and queen, for only their faces have received the final polish. Before leaving this splendid example of royal sculpture tribute should be paid to the superb quality of the queen's face, a truly appealing example of the Egyptian conception of feminine beauty and queenly dignity.

DOWS DUNHAM.

### Greece and Luristan

NOT long ago the excavators of the Greek island of Samos discovered a bronze jug of peculiar shape (Fig. 2) which turned out to belong to the civilization of Luristan in the highlands of Persia, which at that time had just begun to swamp the markets and startle archaeologists with a seemingly unending wealth of bronze objects. A bronze jug of similar shape is in the Department of Asiatic Art in this Museum (Fig. 1). Mr. Tomita and Dr. Coomaraswamy have kindly permitted me to illustrate and discuss it here with other Luristan material pertinent to my subject.

The jug from Samos is not the only Luristan piece found on Greek soil. In 1933 the English excavated in Knossos on the island of Crete "a very curious object which is presumably oriental." It is a bronze cirlet with the oriental "Lady of the Wild Creatures" in the center and her two animals crouching on the curve of the ring (Fig. 3). The specimens of this type in the Boston Museum differ slightly: they show only the bust of the goddess, and one of them is surmounted by a goat's head with long horns (Fig. 4); but they are near enough to identify the Cretan piece beyond doubt. There must be more Luristan objects in local Greek museums, unrecognized and generally classified as "barbarian." I saw a Luristan bracelet in Athens which was said to have come from the Peloponnesos. Relationship between the Luristan region and Greece, then, did exist. What does it signify, and did it exercise an influence on Greek art proper?

The spouted jug is a type which occurs also in painted pottery of the early first millennium B.C., found at Tepe Sialk in Persia. One of these pots (Fig. 5) is especially interesting because on it appears a motif which is familiar from Greek iconography of about the same time, the "geometric" period: a bird perched on a horse, or, at least, on a fantastic animal which, though it seems to have horns, might pass as a horse. The relationship of the two animals is lively indeed. The bird, with feathers bristling and neck thrust forward, is the active partner in this relationship; the bigger animal, to which an enormous diamond-shaped eye lends an air of surprise, is the passive partner. What it signifies we cannot tell yet; it is certainly a symbolic representation. At any rate, the picture appears in Greek geometric art, hardly altered in its basic elements down to the object in the horse's mouth. The