

BULLETIN OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

VOLUME LI

BOSTON, FEBRUARY, 1953

No. 233

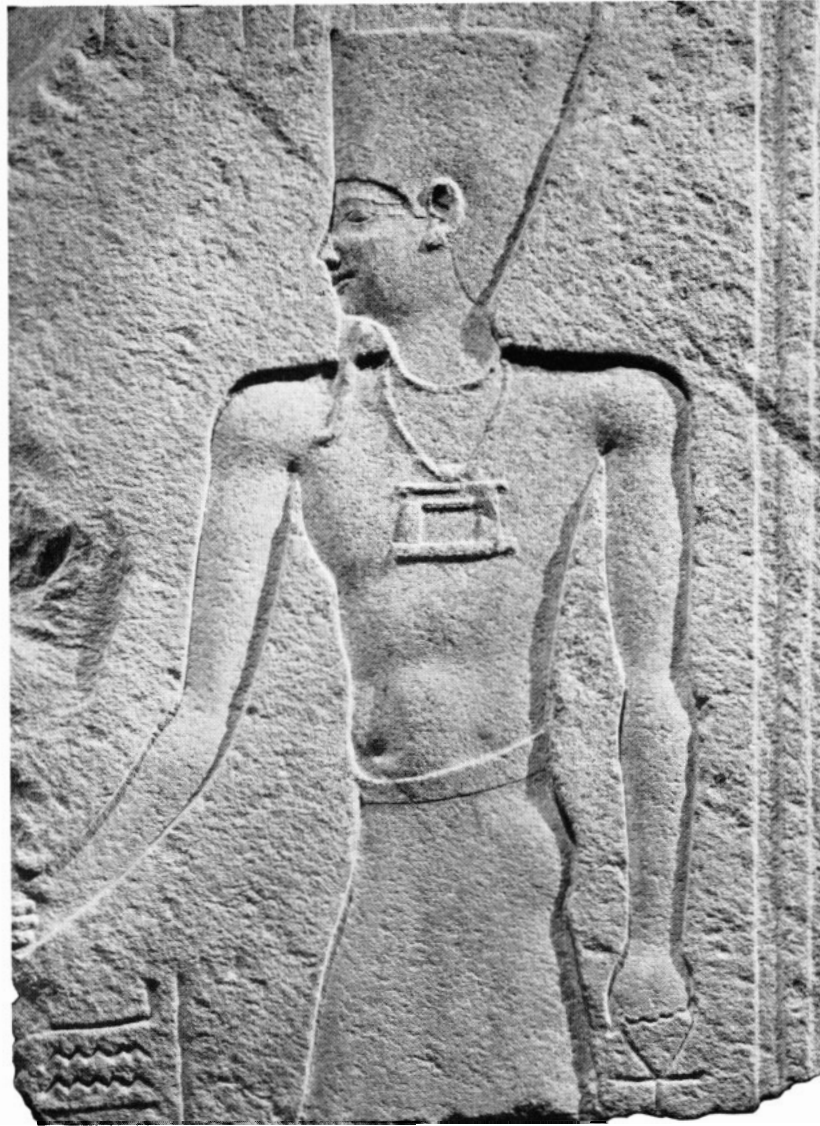


Fig. 1 *Granite Relief*

Detail: The God Amun
Martha A. Willcomb Fund

Time of Ptolemy II

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

SUBSCRIPTION ONE DOLLAR

PTOLEMAIC RELIEFS
III
Deities from the Time of
Ptolemy II Philadelphus

IN two notes previously published in the *Bulletin* stone reliefs of the early Ptolemaic period have been discussed which are representative examples of the art of Egypt in the times of Philip Arrhidaeus and Ptolemy I Soter.¹ In both instances provenance as well as inscriptional evidence made it easy to identify the two kings and to establish the approximate date at which the representations on the blocks were carved. Although it is the framework composed of works of art the date of which is indisputably fixed, that alone can serve as basis for outlining the development of style and craftsmanship in any given period, the result is not always gratifying to the reader, and often the picture thus gained appears blurred since divergent tendencies and seemingly contradictory features do not fit the pattern which the orderly mind of a student of Egyptian art might like to construct. The main difficulty encountered in treating problems of Late Egyptian art lies in the lack of a reliable art history dealing with the period from the seventh to the first century B.C., and more specifically one which concerns itself with the fourth and third centuries; the epoch during which the worlds of Egypt and Greece met for the first time on nearly equal terms. This is the period at which, generally speaking, the Egyptologist leaves off and the Classical Archaeologist takes over, each mainly occupied with his own field and hardly familiar with whatever documentation is available to the other.² As a result we are faced with a lack of stylistic definitions, taking into account the foreign as well as native elements in Late Egyptian art, and have no firm ground yet on which to base the study of an unrelated monument, specifically of a relief primarily executed in traditional style and devoid of any inscriptions which might offer a clue to its date of origin.

Such a work of art is the large relief block illustrated in Fig. 2, which was acquired by the Museum from the estate of the late Dikran G. Kelekian in 1951.³ Its subject matter, the upper part of two gods skilfully carved in sunk relief, is not unusual in itself, and at first glance the slab might even pass as one of numerous similar representations found on the walls of many an Egyptian temple. The material, however, is red Assuan granite which occurs much less frequently than limestone or sandstone, and the modeling of

the torso of the deity on the left (Fig. 1, Cover) shows nothing of that subtle, almost reticent, treatment for which the relief work of the classical periods of ancient Egypt is justly famous. As a matter of fact, it appears even more pronounced when compared with the strictly traditional mode in which the figure of the god on the right has been cut.

Thus only the workmanship of the left figure provides us with a first indication of the approximate date of the relief: it must belong to the Late Period, and within this period to post-Persian times when a relief style employing more accentuated modeling of the human body makes its first appearance under King Nectanebo I (378–360 B.C.) of Dynasty XXX.⁴ This stylistic feature persists from that date onward in many royal reliefs although the traditional style, using more subtle surface treatment, continued. A well-dated relief of red Assuan granite (Fig. 3), cut during the reign of King Nectanebo II (359–341 B.C.), which entered the Museum's collections in 1890,⁵ shows on the left a male deity, the torso of which is treated in a manner similar to that of the left figure on the newly acquired relief block (Fig. 1, Cover). The latter is a representation of the god Amun adorned with his characteristic two-feathered crown, the ceremonial beard, and a short loincloth. A pectoral in form of a miniature shrine is suspended from a necklace which is twice wound around the god's neck.⁶ The outstretched hand held probably the scepter denoting *Lordship* while the other hand holds the sign of *Life*. The inscription above the forehead of the god is lost; it presumably contained his name and epithets and ends with *Life and Lordship*. The text below the outstretched arm is the beginning of his speech: *I give to thee . . .*, addressed to the king in response to whatever the king may have to offer. Behind Amun is a chapel or shrine harboring the figure of the god Ptah. As the caption over his head (*Words spoken by Ptah-Sokar-Osiris*) implies the deity appears here in syncretistic form as Ptah-Sokar-Osiris.⁷ He wears a tight-fitting headcloth and a mummy shroud, and is adorned with a long straight beard and, hanging over the collar of his garment at the nape of the neck, a tassel. In his hands he holds the scepter of *Lordship* which is combined with the hieroglyphs for *Life* and *Stability*, and, below, the beginning of his speech repeats the words carved in

⁴G. Kleiner, in *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, 52 (1937), cols. 473–476.

⁵Acc. No. 90.233; red granite; from the Hall of Nectanebo II in the Great Temple at Bubastis; gift of Egypt Exploration Fund. Height 1.05 m., width 1.315 m.; thickness 57 cm. Edouard Naville, *Bubastis* (London, 1891), p. 57, pl. XLIV fig. L. William Stevenson Smith, *Ancient Egypt as represented in The Museum of Fine Arts* (third revised edition, Boston, 1952), pp. 157–158, fig. 103. B. Porter and R. L. B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography*, vol. IV (Oxford, 1934), p. 30.

⁶Such a pectoral with its long necklace is offered to gods by Ptolemy II in reliefs published in E. Naville, *Détails relevés dans les ruines de quelques temples égyptiens* (Paris, 1930), pl. 5A; and *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* (Baltimore), vols. VII–VIII (1944–45), p. 52, fig. 13. Its Egyptian name is *wd(w)*, literally *Well-being* or *Prosperity*. For pectorals in general, see E. T. Whyte in *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, 15 (1892–1893), pp. 409–416.

⁷Maj Sandman Holmberg, *The God Ptah* (Lund, 1946), pp. 138–146.

¹*Bulletin M. F. A.*, Vol. L, No. 280, June, 1952, pp. 19–27; and Vol. L, No. 281, October, 1952, pp. 49–56.

²Greek and Demotic papyri are still our main source for the history and civilization of the Ptolemaic Period (ca. 330–30 B.C.) of Egypt. The wealth of hieroglyphic inscriptions on private monuments, statues and stelae, has not been exploited nearly as much.

³Acc. No. 51.739; red granite; Martha A. Willcomb Fund. Height 82 cm., width 90 cm., thickness 13 cm.; width of shoulders of figure on left 25 cm. Original dressed surfaces of block preserved on all sides except at bottom.



Fig. 2. *Amun and Ptah-Sokar-Osiris* Granite Relief from the Iseion at Behbeit el Hagar Time of Ptolemy II
Martha A. Willcomb Fund

front of the god Amun. Behind the chapel of Ptah are visible the wig, shoulder, and arm of another deity facing to the right where a parallel representation of gods must have decorated the adjoining block.

There can be no doubt that this relief came from a temple the walls of which were covered with representations of deities to whom the king brought various offerings. Fortunately the source from which the block was acquired provides in itself a suggestion as to two possible places of origin. There is a number of large granite temple reliefs of the Late Period in American collections, and one of the many services rendered by the late George Steindorff was to collect and present these in an attractive study which was published in 1945.⁸ Since most of these slabs had, at one time or another, passed through the collection of Dikran G. Kelekian, from whose estate the Museum acquired the new relief, it evidently belongs to the same lot, although, due to the fact that the relief was in a warehouse for many years and no

photograph of it was available to Steindorff when he collected the others, it has not been published with them.

As for their place of provenance these reliefs fall into three groups: those which come from the temple of Samannud (Sebennytos),⁹ others which are from the temple at Behbeit el Hagar (the *Iseion* of the Classical authors),¹⁰ and a third group the origin of which is still uncertain.¹¹ Steindorff was able to distinguish these groups partly on the basis of earlier accounts which mention certain reliefs when they were still *in situ*, and partly on the basis of the inscriptions which name one of the two localities or its principal deities. It would have been impossible, however, to determine the exact origin of the Boston relief solely by means of Steindorff's study since the block had not been published before and neither its inscriptions nor the representation of the two deities offered in themselves a reference to one or the other of the two sites. In general the impression prevailed that stylistically the relief belonged rather

⁸ George Steindorff, "Reliefs from the Temples of Sebennytos and Iseion in American Collections," in *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, vols. VII-VIII (1944-45), pp. 38-59 with 23 figs.

⁹ *Id. ibid.*, figs. 6, 7, 16, 9 and 12, and probably figs. 1 and 8, 10, 11, 23

¹⁰ *Id. ibid.*, figs. 3, 21, and probably figs. 2, 4, 5, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19.

¹¹ *Id. ibid.* figs. 14, 20, 22.



Fig. 3. Granite Relief from the Temple of Bubastis

Gift of the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1890

Time of Nectanebo II

to the group known to have come from the great temple of Behbeit el Hagar in the Delta, but before any serious study of it was undertaken a fortunate coincidence brought forth a quite unexpected lead.

In recent years Professor Pierre Montet of the Collège de France and his assistants have done intermittently some work of clearing and recording at the temple of Behbeit el Hagar, the ruins of which cover more than an acre and, for centuries,

have presented themselves as a maze of large granite blocks, strewn about as if overthrown by a giant's hand. The early visitors who ventured to the place have left us some notes and descriptions;¹² later Edouard Naville explored the site in 1885 and in the nineties had paper squeezes taken of over one hundred blocks.¹³ And finally G. Roeder and C. C. Edgar copied the accessible

¹² Porter and Moss, *loc. cit.* pp. 40-42.

¹³ Edouard Naville, *loc. cit.*, pp. 39-63, pl. 1-15.

blocks and furnished a summary description of the scenes represented on them.¹⁴ Although some of the reliefs recorded by Naville before the turn of the century found their way into American collections,¹⁵ none of those published by Roeder and Edgar¹⁶ have ever appeared in the market. In 1909 the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek at Copenhagen acquired in Cairo two reliefs from Behbeit el Hagar,¹⁷ and in the following year C. C. Edgar noticed the destruction of another block.¹⁸ It is therefore most likely that the bulk of these reliefs were taken from Behbeit el Hagar during the first decade of this century.

The French scholars who have worked at the site since 1947 and studied the temple have continuously reported on their findings.¹⁹ Due to their efforts numerous new decorated blocks have been cleared, and one of them bears a representation of the god Ptah (Fig. 4)²⁰ which is so strikingly similar to that on the Boston block (Fig. 2) that one is tempted to ascribe them both to the same hand. On closer examination certain small differences become apparent;²¹ yet style and workmanship of the recently discovered Iseion block are so surprisingly akin to those of the relief under discussion that it seemed almost assured that the two pieces belonged to the same temple decoration.

But yet another indication of the provenance of the Boston slab has become available, and it came to light as a result of the find of the new Iseion block with the representation of the god Ptah. This deity had not been mentioned in the list of gods and goddesses drawn up by Professor Montet as a result of his first study of the temple of Behbeit el Hagar,²² and thus the earlier lists compiled by G. Roeder were consulted.²³ Although they did not furnish any additional evidence for the god Ptah, they do give one reference to the name of the god Amun in a hieroglyphic inscription at Behbeit²⁴ and furthermore cite C. R. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien, Text* vol. I (Leipzig, 1897) for a block which Roeder did not find at the Iseion, but which was seen by Lepsius when he visited Behbeit el Hagar on September

26, 1845. He has left us in his *Denkmäler* a short description of a few blocks and among them noted one as showing "Amon; Ptah-Sokar-Osiris."²⁵ The mention of these two gods can only refer to the Boston relief; both Amun and Ptah have been recorded only once at Behbeit thus far, Ptah-Sokar-Osiris never, and the combination of the two gods Amun and Ptah-Sokar-Osiris is so rare that it has to be concluded that the Boston block was the one which Lepsius saw at the Iseion more than a century ago.

It is far more difficult to come to a conclusion as to the date at which the relief of the two deities was carved. The temple to which it belonged was built by King Nectanebo II (359-341 B.C.) or by one of his predecessors.²⁶ This ruler also began the decoration of the walls where his name appears in the captions of several reliefs. But by far the largest part of scenes are inscribed for Ptolemy II Philadelphus who was King of Egypt from 285 to 247 B.C. He, too, left some of the relief work unfinished, and the name of his successor, Ptolemy III Euergetes I (247-221 B.C.), is found in the captions of a few scenes as well as on cornices and columns of the temple. It would seem simple to assume that each representation accompanied by inscriptions with the name of a king, was cut during the reign of that particular ruler, and thus gain stylistic criteria by which the undated reliefs could be judged. But at Behbeit el Hagar this method cannot be applied with any reasonable amount of certainty; Steindorff himself remarked: "Artistically, the reliefs of Nectanebos II and of the Ptolemies form a unit," and he concluded: "I am unable to discern any stylistic differences between them."²⁷ This remarkable unity, achieved in spite of the fact that Nectanebo II and Ptolemy II lived nearly a century apart, is due to the frequently noticed ability of the Egyptian craftsmen to imitate the style of an earlier period with well-nigh complete fidelity. The outstanding stylistic feature of the Boston relief, the elaborate modeling of the torso of the god Amun, is one which is already found on reliefs of the time of King Nectanebo I,²⁸ and yet the representation of the deity is unfinished: the outline of the crown is not as deeply carved as that of the body or as that of other divine crowns on blocks from the Iseion, and the same holds true for the knuckles of the hand with the sign of *Life*. Some day, perhaps, when all accessible blocks at Behbeit el Hagar have been cleared and published the riddle of the semi-finished state of many of these reliefs will be solved.

The question now arises whether the degree of modeling as exemplified by the torso of the god Amun is of any help in determining the date of the slab, and here we are on somewhat safer ground.

¹⁴ *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache*, 46 (1909-10), pp. 62-73; *Recueil de Travaux*, 35 (1913), pp. 89-116.

¹⁵ Steindorff, *loc. cit.*, figs. 3 and 21.

¹⁶ See above, note 14.

¹⁷ Maria Mogensen, *La Glyptothèque Ny Carlsberg, la collection égyptienne* (Copenhagen, 1930), p. 108 (A 774), p. 109 (A 776), pl. CXVIII.

¹⁸ *Recueil de Travaux*, 35 (1913), pp. 90 and 91 (Block 2).

¹⁹ P. Montet, in *Kémi*, 10 (1949), pp. 43-48; A. Lézine, *ibid.*, pp. 49-57; P. Montet, in *Chronique d'Égypte*, 24 (1949), pp. 33-34; *id.* in *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Égyptologie*, 2 (October, 1949), pp. 41-43; *id.* in *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*, 50 (1950), p. 44; J. Leclant, in *Orientalia* 19 (1950), p. 496 and figs. 18-25 on pl. LXVI-LXXIII; *id.* *ibid.*, 21 (1952), p. 246 and figs. 22-23 on pl. XLIV-XLV.

²⁰ *Id.* *ibid.*, 19 (1950), p. 496, fig. 23 on pl. LXXI; here illustrated by the courtesy of Mr. Jean Leclant to whom is also owed our Fig. 5 which shows Ptolemy II further to the right on the same block. The inscription above the god reads: *Ptah, South of His Wall, Lord of Ankh-tawy*.

²¹ Notably in the cutting of the cap's contour and in the treatment of the eye.

²² "Les divinités du temple de Behbeit el hagar," in *Kémi*, 10 (1949), pp. 43 ff.

²³ *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache*, 46 (1909), pp. 71-72; *Recueil de Travaux*, 35 (1913), pp. 115-116.

²⁴ *Loc. cit.*, p. 93 (Block 10).

²⁵ C. R. Lepsius, *loc. cit.*, p. 220.

²⁶ Lézine, *loc. cit.*, p. 56. Steindorff, *loc. cit.*, p. 40.

²⁷ *Id.* *ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁸ See above, note 4.



Fig. 4. *The God Ptah* Behbeit el Hagar

There is no doubt that the Ptolemaic craftsmen who worked on the temple reliefs of Behbeit el Hagar faithfully followed the style set under the earlier king, but in so doing they also slightly exaggerated certain features, and it is this slight exaggeration which, at present, is perhaps the only stylistic indication of the date of the slab's representations. Though photography cannot do justice to the nearly three-dimensional quality of a few details, it may be pointed out that the depth of the navel, the globular bulge of the abdominal region as it springs from the linea alba, and the projection of the brachioradialis agree with similar features on well-dated reliefs of Ptolemy II at the Iseion.²⁹

There is yet another point which helps to confirm this attribution. As stated before, the name of the god Amun occurs only on one block hitherto observed at Behbeit el Hagar,³⁰ while the god Ptah (Fig. 4) too is represented only once on a block which happens to be dated to the reign of Ptolemy II (Fig. 5).³¹ Ptah-Sokar-Osiris is never shown anywhere else in the reliefs of the Iseion. As both Ptah and Amun are principal deities of the Egyptian pantheon it might be surprising to find that there are so few representations of them in the temple. The reason lies in the purpose of the building which was primarily dedicated to the Osiriac family of gods and to the deities con-

nected with them; such at least may have been the original intention of the founder. Only when work on the reliefs was resumed under Ptolemy II Philadelphus may the tendency to do justice to other Egyptian gods as well, have developed. Osiris, Isis, and Horus had long been associated with Behbeit el Hagar,³² but Amun of Thebes and Ptah of Memphis have no primary connection with the place, and it is hardly possible that it was intended to represent them when the decoration of the temple walls was begun during Dynasty XXX. Their presence at Behbeit el Hagar is most likely to be a result of the pantheistic tendencies for which the Ptolemaic Period is so well known.

In closing, a word might be said on the "Greek influence" to which so many salient features of Late Egyptian art have been ascribed, especially the treatment of bodies in relief as shown in the left figures on the reliefs of Nectanebo II (Fig. 3) and of Ptolemy II (Figs. 1-2). It is true that such modeling makes its first appearance in relief work shortly before the middle of the fourth century B.C., but it is generally overlooked that in Egyptian sculpture in the round it occurs already in the second half of the sixth century B.C., that is, at a time when Greek Archaic sculpture was still far from a naturalistic approach in the treatment of the male torso. For instance the modeling of the kneeling figure of Psamtik-seneb in the British Museum³³ clearly shows what might be termed "tripartition," the subdivision of the front of the torso into three distinctly separate

³² See the references cited in notes 22 and 23 above.

³³ No. 16041; for references see Porter and Moss, *loc. cit.*, IV, p. 51. Psamtik-seneb is dated to the time of Amasis (568-525 B.C.) by Serapeum Stela no. 4128 in the Louvre (information kindly provided by Mr. G. Posener).

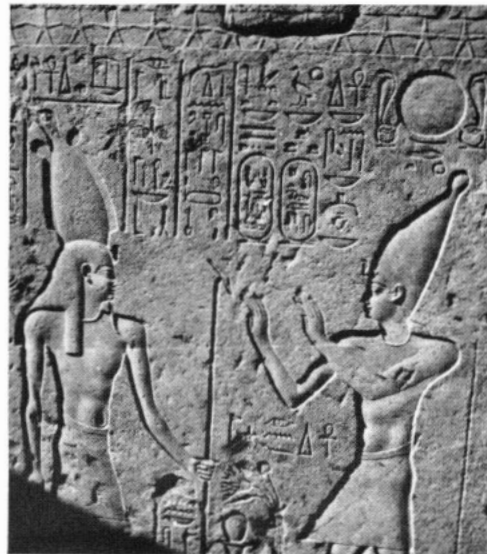


Fig. 5. *Ptolemy II Offering to Osiris* Behbeit el Hagar

²⁹ This conclusion is partly based on a study of numerous photographs of unpublished blocks at Behbeit el Hagar which Mr. J. Leclant kindly placed at the disposal of this writer.

³⁰ See above, note 24.

³¹ Photograph by courtesy of Mr. J. Leclant. To the left of this scene appears the goddess Nut and, further to the left, the god Ptah (Fig. 4). This block, which is decorated on three sides, belongs to the door embrasure of a partition wall between two rooms of the temple.

units, each of which is of swelling rounded form without any flat surfaces: the breast with pronounced lower boundary, below it the rest of the rib cage within the limits of the thoracic arch, and then the upper abdomen with the navel near its base.³⁴ In relief work this tripartition is first found on temple decorations of King Nectanebo I, but its translation into two-dimensional representation resulted in a curious shifting of the planes, due no doubt to the unwillingness of the Egyptian sculptor to deviate from certain traditions. Thus the navel always remained near one side of the torso's contour line as noticeable on the reliefs in Fig. 1 (Cover) and in Fig. 3. This form of modeling in relief is a native development derived from a mode established much earlier in sculpture in the round, and it took place without foreign influence. The same holds true for realistic portraiture which time and again appears in Egyptian art, from Dynasty IV to Dynasty XXV and more frequently in the following centuries down to the Roman period. It constitutes an inherent native trend, and in its final form is based on long-established Egyptian practice rather than on foreign motivation. Parallel with the development runs the traditional trend of pious conservatism, in relief as well as in sculpture in the round, and frequently these two modes of representation are found side by side, as on the Boston relief in the figure of Amun on the one hand and in that of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris on the other.³⁵

BERNARD V. BOTHMER

³⁴ For the anatomy of contemporary Greek statues, see the masterful analysis in Gisela M. A. Richter, *Kouroi* (New York, 1942), pp. 34-40, 157-158, 194-196, and *passim*.

³⁵ This may be the place to record the following changes in the location of certain reliefs as published by Steindorff, *loc. cit.*: Fig. 10, in 1951 on loan at the Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio; Fig. 13, Museum of the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (No. 1948.33); Fig. 14, Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, Columbus, Ohio (No. 47.107); Fig. 15, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington (No. Eg 11.27).

A New Publication of the Egyptian Department

ROYAL CEMETERIES OF KUSH, VOL. III, *Decorated Chapels of the Meroitic Pyramids at Meroë and Barkal*, by Miss Suzanne E. Chapman of the Museum staff and Dows Dunham, Curator of Egyptian Art, is shortly to appear, its price to be announced. This large folio volume (23³/₄ x 18¹/₂ inches) has a 6-page text by Mr. Dunham and contains 34 collotype plates, including reproductions of 55 original drawings by Miss Chapman, as well as photographs and material from other sources, illustrating the relief decoration of all the funerary chapels at Meroë and Barkal, based on the records of the Harvard University-Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition as well as on earlier photographs and copies of these monuments. It constitutes the most complete presentation now possible of the elaborate scenes with which the kings and queens of

the Meroitic Kingdom of Kush embellished the offering places of their pyramid tombs, and provides comprehensive illustration of the art of sculpture in relief in the ancient Sudan: an art reflecting local interpretations of Egyptian prototypes.

Volume I in the same series, *El Kurru*, an archaeological report on the excavation of that earliest of the royal cemeteries of Kush, was published by the Museum of Fine Arts in 1950. Volume II, *Nuri*, a similar treatment of the principal cemetery of the Napatan Period, is now in an advanced stage of preparation. Subsequent volumes dealing with the excavation of the cemeteries at Barkal and Meroë are planned to follow the completion of *Nuri*. The illustrations now published as Vol. III are directly associated with the archaeological material which will form the subject matter of these projected volumes.

Errata

In *Bulletin* Vol. L, No. 282 (December, 1952) dates in captions of Cover illustration and Figs. 1, 9, and 11 should read *ca. 1350*, and in Figs. 2 and 3, *ca. 1360*.

Two Recently Acquired Sieneese Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts

THE Museum of Fine Arts has recently acquired two very interesting Sieneese paintings.¹ One by Simone Martini represents a Male Saint with a Book (Fig. 1). It is impossible to identify the subject more exactly. The picture was bought by the Museum from a dealer in New York in October, 1952. It had formerly been in the collection of Paul B. Bottenwieser. Then it passed to the Meinhard Collection in New York, and later was sold at auction at Parke-Bernet to the dealer from whom the Museum purchased it. Comparatively little, therefore, of its history is known. The attribution is based on internal evidence alone, but is unassailable. Incidentally, the painting was attributed to Simone by Mr. Berenson.² It is a work of the artist's maturity. It is related to the series of frescoes that he did in the Lower Church of San Francesco at Assisi, but would seem to be later. The frescoes in the Lower Church were done probably between 1322 and 1326, but our piece looks later than this. To be sure, there is a close relation between the painting in the Museum and the figure of Christ in the *Dream of St. Martin* in the Lower Church (Fig. 2). In the latter, however, the lines are suaver, the

¹ Simone Martini, acc. no. 51.2397; Ambrogio Lorenzetti, acc. no. 51.378; both Charles Potter Kling Fund.

² Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance*, Oxford, 1932, p. 534.