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Fig. 1. Head of Methethy

Arthur Tracy Cabot Fund

Dynasty VI

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SUBSCRIPTION ONE DOLLAR

A Wooden Statue of Dynasty VI

THE sands of Egypt have preserved works of sculpture better than the soil of any other country. This is true not only of statues of durable stone, but also of those made of wood. However, in the Museum's excavations at Giza wooden sculpture has fared badly. Much of it was eaten by white ants or had perished by decay, and only one major work of art in wood, the statue of Mehy (M.F.A. 13.3466), has been recovered from that site.

Conditions have been more favorable at Saqqara, the royal cemetery of Dynasties V and VI, and a number of well-preserved wooden figures were discovered there. The famous "Sheikh el Beled," now in Cairo, is the earliest and perhaps the most magnificent piece fashioned in a material which was always scarce in Egypt and had to be imported from abroad.

Recently the Museum has been fortunate in adding a painted statue to its small collection of wooden sculpture of the Old Kingdom. It shows the standing, or rather striding, figure of a man complete with its base which is inscribed with his title and the name Methethy.¹ The statue is said to have come originally from the area south of the Serapeum at Saqqara.

Head, body, and legs including the heels are made of a single piece of hard wood which now has a dark brown color. The arms were carved separately and joined to the body by tenons which are held in their mortises by means of round wooden pegs driven through holes at the back of the statue. They do not show in front. The figure is let into the base in the same way: tenons extending below the heels all the way through the base hold it in place; they are anchored by horizontal pegs, the square ends of which can be seen on either side of the base. The front part of the feet, too, was made separately and joined to the base by round wooden pins driven in from the top. The statue is of cedar or some other coniferous wood; the wood of the base has a coarser grain and is probably of local origin. It seems to be a re-used block; deep-cut hollows on the sides and bottom have been filled with pieces of wood and plaster to give it a neat appearance.

The passing of almost 4500 years has not left this statue unscathed. The wood has dried completely and, as is so often the case with figures of this type, the base and feet have suffered more than other parts of the sculpture. Two deep cracks deface the right side of the head and thus give it an asymmetry and a noticeable turn which it did not have in ancient times. There are other longitudinal fissures, especially on the right side of the body, in front as well as at the back, which have moved the right shoulder backwards; a dis-

¹ Acc. No. 47.1455. Height (with base) 80 cm., height of base 7.5 cm., length of base 44.5 cm., width of base 17.8 cm. Arthur Tracy Cabot Fund.



Fig. 2. Methethy
Dynasty VI
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Fig. 3. Upper Part of Statue of Methethy

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Dynasty VI

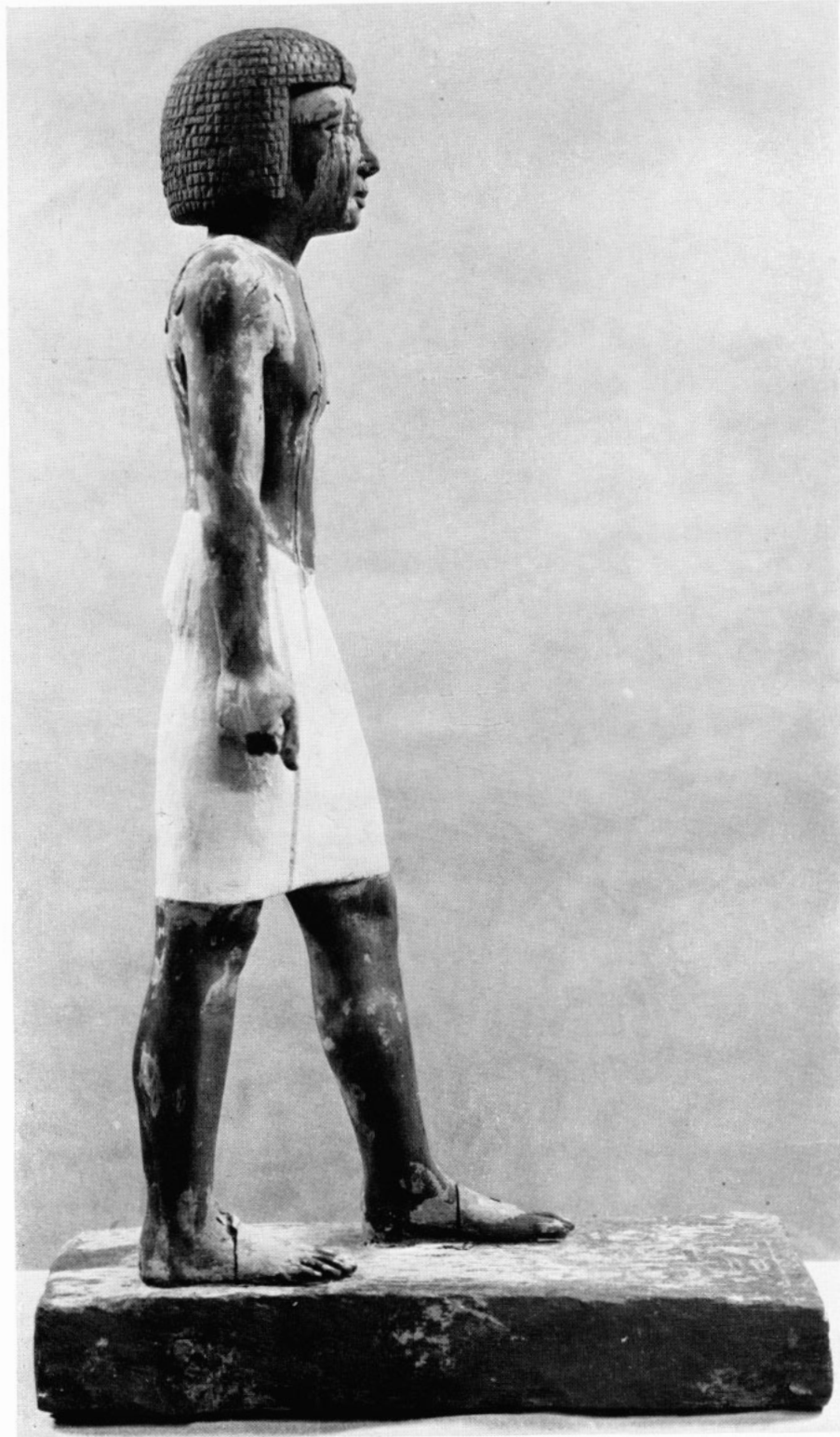


Fig. 4. Side View of Statue of Methethy
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Dynasty VI

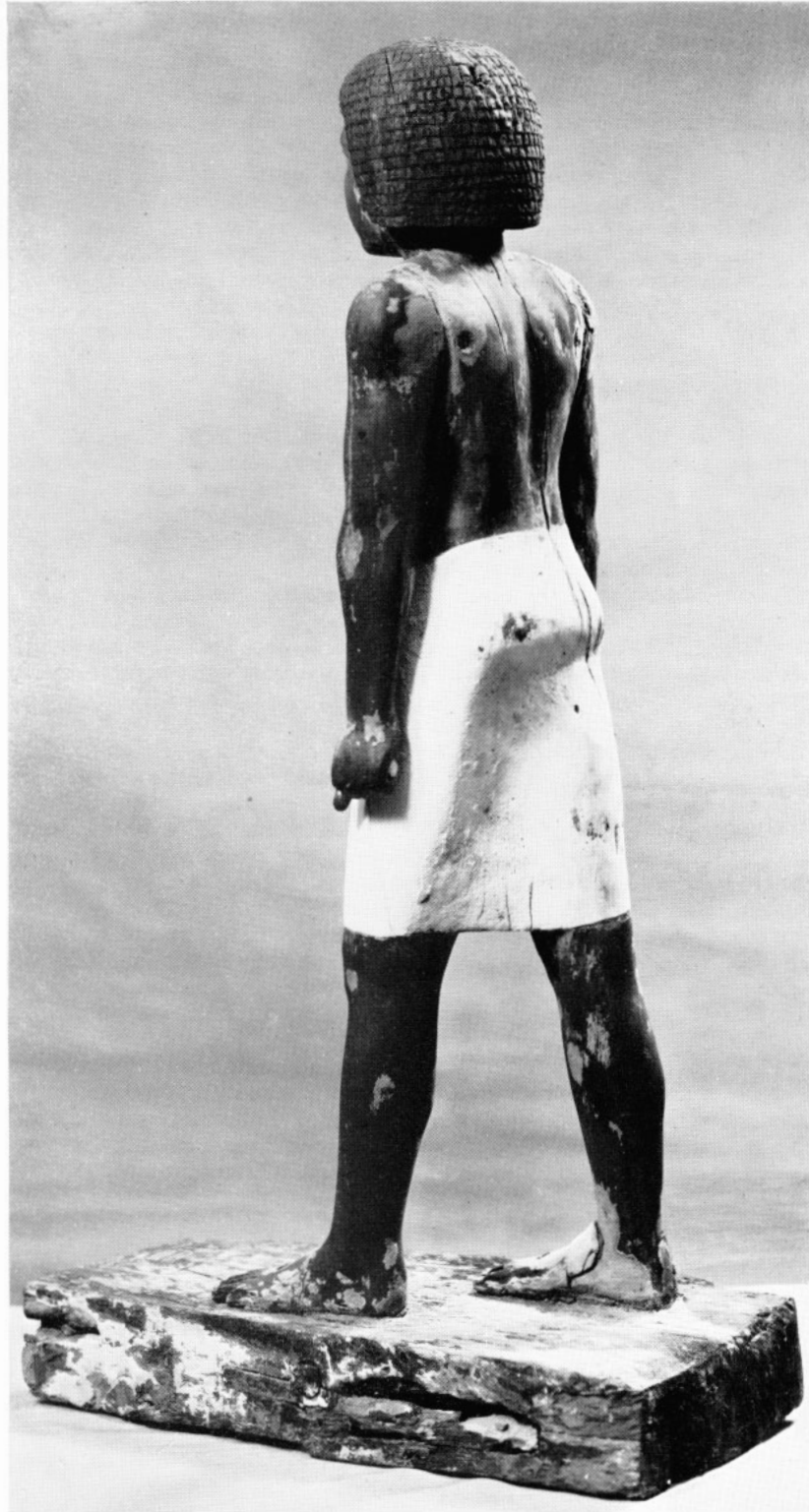


Fig. 5. Back View of Statue of Methethy
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Dynasty VI

tortion which certainly did not exist originally. Since the statue reached the Museum these cracks have been filled in with plaster and have been painted the surface color of that particular area in order to render them less distracting. Otherwise no restoration has been attempted. The joints of arms and feet as well as the refilled hollows have opened up and thus forced off the ancient red plaster covering under which they were originally hidden. A piece on the back of the right fist has fallen out, and the left thumb is damaged. The toes appear clipped and shriveled; the small toe of the left foot is missing. Judging by the color of the break this may have occurred in antiquity. The base is badly weathered and somewhat warped so that top and bottom are no longer truly horizontal.

Methethy wears a short curled wig which covers the ears and hangs lower at the back than at the sides. The forehead with its perceptible vertical groove recedes, and the short upper eyelids form a distinct angle with the well-rounded brows. This, combined with the slight curve of the eyeballs, lends to the face a vivid and intense expression. The lower lids are not indicated, but the cheekbone has been marked up to the point where it meets the frontal bone. The nose is straight, and the nostrils are sensitively carved. A deep line runs down from the base of the nostril past the corner of the mouth. The upper lip is divided. The square chin is set firmly under the full lower lip.

The short stocky neck rests on the torso almost without transition. The shoulders are broad and straight, with sharp collar bones between which an even groove descends to the navel without much modulation. The chest is flat although the lower edges of the breasts appear rounded; at the sides they rise steeply toward the armpits. Two round pegs indicate the nipples, but the areolae have not been marked.

The nape of the neck lies deep between the shoulder blades. A plain groove, following the spine to the waist, divides the back. The shoulder blades are beautifully modeled by a sickle-shaped depression which repeats their curved outline. Otherwise the carving of the back has been done rather summarily. Thus the small of the back appears flat, and only a sharp bend marks the line on which the buttocks meet the back of the thighs. Yet, seen in profile, the statue offers an attractive outline.

The high waist is accentuated by the pronounced muscle above the upper edge of the skirt which curves down, leaving the upper abdomen bare. The careful treatment of head and torso is equalled by that of the extremities although the arms are better carved in front than at the back. The outline of the upper arm is indicated simply, but the joining of the forearm as well as its main muscle are distinctly modeled and betray close observation on the part of the sculptor. This

gives the impression that the fists really grasp the emblematic staves with their slightly rounded ends. The bent fingers are not articulated, but the thumb is remarkably slender and long, and greatly increases in width toward the tip. Its nail has a plain outline, and the cuticle, often indicated on statues of a similar type, is not visible.

The short skirt ends above the knee. Its simple shape follows the line of the figure without reflecting the play of the muscles which appear so striking elsewhere in the body. As if in contrast to the even surface of the linen garment the sculptor has taken great care to render the bone structure of the knees as naturally as possible, observing such detail as the raised kneecap of the left leg which is advanced in its stride. The calf of the leg is sturdy without being plump, and the shinbone, sharp above, divides the leg evenly before it flattens out toward the ankle. The upper surface of the advanced foot appears less flat than the other, but the bad state of preservation does not permit too exact a judgment here. Remarkably well formed is the outer ankle bone of the left foot, presumably as an indication of the greater weight carried by that leg. The toes are separated: the big toe, shorter than the second one, continues the straight line of the instep.

This rather detailed account of the modeling seems justified since a search for comparative material emphasizes how rarely full descriptions of similar figures are encountered. In Methethy's statue the sum total of the finely executed details is in happy agreement with the impression of a work of art taken as a whole. Thus he is represented as a figure not merely standing with its left foot advanced, but as a person striding forward, his whole body conforming in every part to the underlying conception of the artist.

All Egyptian statues of the Old Kingdom were painted, and happily Methethy's figure has preserved a great deal of its original coloring. Apparently, the entire statue was first covered with a coat of reddish-brown color. Traces of it can be found even under the black of the wig and under the white plaster of the skirt. In its present state the statue shows darker areas of brown where no paint is preserved, and regions with a lighter coloring (almost white on the illustrations) where the red-brown of the skin still exists. The wig and eyebrows are black, and there are traces of white on the eyeballs. Iris and pupil are marked by a circular black spot while a black line on the rim of the eyelids was meant to accentuate the eyelashes, a rare but not altogether unknown feature of Egyptian statues. A spot of white inside the nostrils rounds out what has remained of the polychromy of the head.

Methethy must have had a painted broad collar over shoulders and chest of which only a few specks of white and blue color are left today. The ends of the objects held by the fists are painted a pale yellow, and the same color is found on the

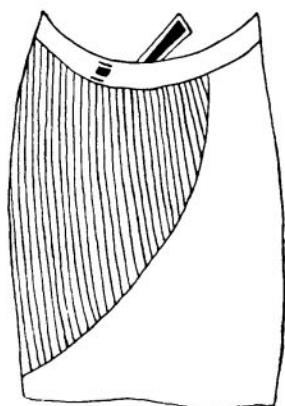


Fig. 6. Skirt of Methethy with Original Pleating

thumbnails. What now appears to be the white of the skirt is actually the stucco base on which the gala garment was painted. Only on the left thigh, near the wrist of the left hand, a piece of plaster *with its original white paint* is preserved. It is about $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch thick; therefore the original layer of plaster must have closely resembled a garment worn on the body. It was, however, not a plain white skirt; it had a pleated part, painted yellow, which overlapped the plain section on Methethy's right side and ended in front in a wide curve (reconstructed in Fig. 6). There the plaster coating still shows the traces of some vertical ripples (Fig. 2), and on the right groin in front, as well as on the back of the right hip remains of yellow can be found. The skirt had a polychrome border of yellow and green which served as a belt; its loose end is painted neatly on the body above the garment (Figs. 2, 3, and 6).

The base was painted black. On its left side the color was applied to a layer of white plaster which in turn lies over the red plaster coat with which the surface of the wood was evened out. There are, on several parts of the body, traces of white which lie over the red-brown coloring of the skin and have yet to be explained. On the forehead and on the right shoulder they may result from secondary adjustments of the modeling done in white plaster, and on the feet they probably were caused by plaster that had fallen from the skirt.

The inscription (Fig. 7) is set in front of the right foot in a rectangle which is outlined on three sides. The hieroglyphs face right in very shallow carving without interior lines. They are arranged in two vertical columns, containing the "Justification" formula and the title, and below them stands Methethy's name, written horizontally. The inscription reads: *im;hw hr ntr* ⁶; *imy-r; st hntyw-s pr-s*; *Mtly*. "Justified before the Great God, the Overseer of the Bureau of Tenantry of the Court, Methethy." The proper reading of the elaborate title is made clear by the

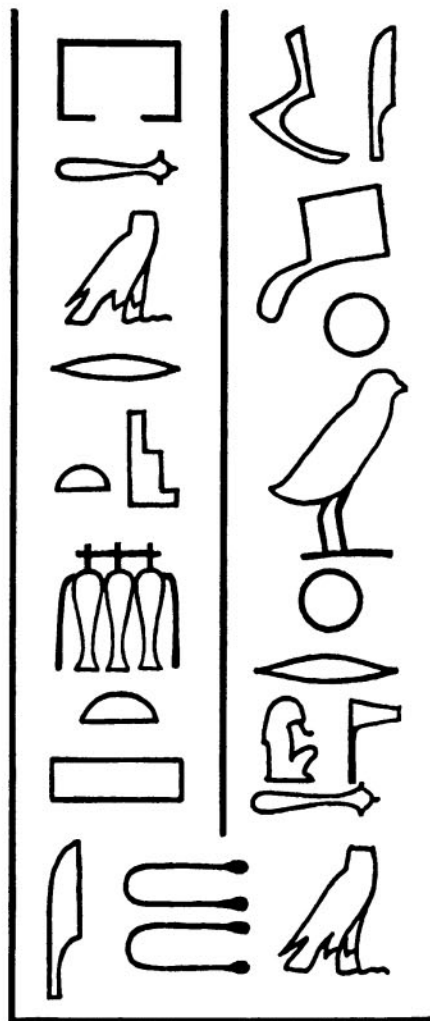


Fig. 7. Inscription on Base of Statue

inscription of a certain Akh-merut-nesut (M.F.A. 13.4352) who bears the same title, less summarily written (Fig. 8). The office of "Overseer of the Bureau of Tenantry of the Court" must have been of some importance as shown by the statue of one Imy-set-kay of Dynasty VI which bears only this title although the owner had some twenty other titles which are duly recorded in the inscriptions of his mastaba at Giza. This title occurs several times in Dynasty V (ca. 2560-2420 B.C.), and is found frequently in Dynasty VI (ca. 2420-2280 B.C.). Thus far the name Methethy has been found only in the case of a subsidiary figure in the chapel reliefs of Akhet-hetep at Saqqara at the end of Dynasty V.

Stylistically the statue is related to a group of wooden figures which range from the close of Dynasty V well into Dynasty VI. Among them are Cairo 152, Cairo 154, Cairo 370, that of Ka-em-senu in New York, that of Per-her-nofret in Berlin, and the statues from the recently discovered tomb of another Akhet-hetep at Saqqara.

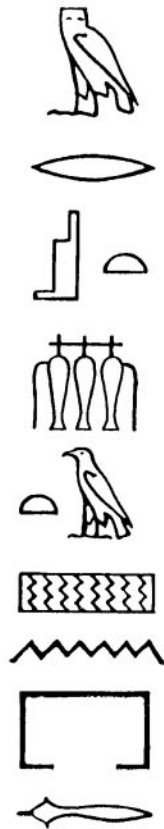


Fig. 8. Title of
Akh-merut-nesut

These have much in common with the figure of Methethy as far as attitude, modeling, and dress are concerned, but in general their style seems to have been taken over from sculpture in stone while that of Methethy shows certain characteristics which point to a technique more adapted to wood than to stone. His statue is smaller than those mentioned above, and the eyebrows, belt buckle, and the loose end of the skirt have not been carved in relief, but were painted on the wood. The delicate treatment of the surface and, to name only one striking feature, the over-elongated thumb appear to lend a new refinement to a well-established type of statue. There is no reason to believe that this is to be found before the end of Dynasty V although it may not have been long after the beginning of Dynasty VI that Methethy's statue was created.

This conclusion suggests that a further examination should be made of the occurrence of Methethy's name in the chapel of Akhet-hetep at Saqqara which has been dated to the end of Dynasty V. There, the bearer of that name has only the titles "Judge" and "Scribe" which occur commonly at that period and designate men who have not yet reached a rank of importance. It has

been stated above that the statue is said to have been found south of the Serapeum, an area which lies only a few hundred yards west of the mastaba chapel of Akhet-hetep. One is therefore tempted to assume that the two names refer to the same person although they are accompanied by different titles in each case, and that the owner of the wooden statue was buried not far from the tomb of one of the great nobles of the time to whose entourage he had belonged in his younger years.

BERNARD V. BOTHMER.

The Vicar of Boldre 1724-1804

SOON after 1750 when Gilbert White of Selborne began to keep his *Garden or Naturalist's Calendar*, later made part of his great classic, a brother parson, the Rev. William Gilpin, Vicar of Boldre in the New Forest, commenced to take notes, innocently enough, too, on prints and print collecting. Hesitant because they were "very far from being so perfect as he could have wished," he published them anonymously in 1768 as *An Essay Upon Prints*. Gilpin was moreover an enthusiastic lover of nature and a skilled draughtsman, and is remembered also for numerous books on picturesque scenery and travel, illustrated by aquatints from his own sketches.

His little manual on print collecting was at once a success and quickly sold out. Within a month or two a second edition appeared; a third followed in 1781 with the author's name, the simpler title of *An Essay on Prints*, and a dedication to Horace Walpole. Fourth and fifth editions were issued in 1792 and 1802, while on the continent where taste had always been entrenched above paltry connoisseurship it was translated into German, Dutch, and French.

The volume was concise and well written, its approach fresh and personal. It judged prints by strict canons of pictorial art, not by the amateur's whims or values. Having a painter's eye and long practice in drawing, Gilpin understood the rules of design and composition. One by one he defined them, showed how they applied to both engraving and painting, and named and compared examples to support his arguments. Obviously his remarks were not addressed to experienced collectors like Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Hudson, Sir John St. Aubyn, Robert Udney, or John Thane. He did not even pretend that all his comments were new or original; but he may fairly claim to have fulfilled his intention of putting "the elegant amusement of collecting prints on a more rational footing."

The most useful handbook in English before Gilpin's *Essay* was *Sculptura Historico-Technica or the History and Art of Engraving*, an omnium gatherum from many sources published in 1747. But more interesting as an expression of the age