

GÖTTINGER MISZELLEN

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An Offering Table Scene in The Art Institute, Chicago

M. Eaton-Krauss

James Henry Breasted acquired the relief that is the subject of this note in 1919 from the Cairene dealer in antiquities Maurice Nahman.¹ Upon arrival at The Art Institute it was accessioned under number 20.265. The slab attracted my attention when I was working on another piece in the collection in March 1999;² in April 2001 I was able to examine it more closely. The slab had been illustrated and cursorily described before as a work of Dynasty V.³ But some remarkable features escaped notice which suggest that an earlier date is likely. For permission to illustrate and discuss the relief I am indebted to Ian Wardropper, at the time Eloise W. Martin Curator of European Decorative Arts and Sculpture and Classical Art, and to Mary Greul, Research Associate for Ancient Art, who provided invaluable assistance on the occasions of my visits to the museum.

The slab (Plate 1) is carved from fine, white limestone and measures approximately 53 by 84 cm. The unevenly rabbated edges on all four sides would have been concealed when the slab was set in place, presumably as part of a false door. The raised relief is comparatively low, with finely executed details, some now worn. Flaking of the limestone across the top has resulted in the loss of several hieroglyphs, especially in the enumeration of offerings above the table and in the labels identifying the woman and the man behind her.⁴ No traces of color are detectable with the naked eye.

The man seated at the left is a *z3b* and scribe named *tnjtj*. The woman opposite him, presumably his wife, bears the title *mjrrt* but most of her name is illegible (see *infra*). The man behind her, also named *tnjtj*, is labelled 'her son'; a partially preserved title includes the phrase *pr* ʕ3. Both his

¹ For Breasted's role in acquiring Egyptian objects for the collection, see the contribution of Karen Alexander, 'A History of the Ancient Art Collection at The Art Institute of Chicago', in *Ancient Art at The Art Institute of Chicago* (The Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies 20: 1, 1994) 12.

² See M. Eaton-Krauss, 'The Head from a Shabti of Queen Tiye in Chicago', *Orientalia* 75 (2006) 84-90.

³ Thomas George Allen, *A Handbook of the Egyptian Collection* (Chicago 1923) 23, 26 (illus.)-27; Emily Teeter, 'Egyptian Art', in *Ancient Art at The Art Institute* 18 (illus.).

⁴ The mounting of the slab in a comparatively deep wall case considerably hampers examination of the damaged areas of the inscription; these may well repay examination under more favorable conditions at some time in the future.

hands, at his sides, are fistled – an unusual gesture.⁵ The nude girl who stands on her own base line behind the seated man is ‘the daughter of his son, *nfr-hwt-hr*’.

For someone interested in Egyptian furniture, the seat used by the woman immediately attracts attention. In sculpture in the round, the block-like seat with a cloth laid over the low backrest is first attested in Dynasty VI; a statuette depicting Pepi II on his mother’s lap shows her using such a seat.⁶ Examples in relief and painting are earlier and more common, but during the Old Kingdom proper (Dynasties IV-VI), it does not normally occur in offering table scenes from false doors where the principal figure or figures regularly use stools with animal legs, like the man seated opposite the woman here. Only two comparable Old Kingdom examples⁷ are known to me of women using this kind of seat in an offering table scene. Both come from tombs belonging to ladies associated with the royal family of Dynasty IV, and both show the female tomb owner alone before the offering table piled high with half-loaves of bread. The earlier example is the false door of the king’s daughter Weneshet from her tomb G 4840, now in Hildesheim⁸; the second is in the tomb of Queen Meresankh III, G 7530, where a lion sitting upright above a niched dado decorates the side of the seat.⁹ The former lady is datable to the period from the end of Cheops’s reign to the beginning of Chephren’s, while the latter probably died under Mycerinus.¹⁰ While the subordination of the woman to the man in the Chicago relief is confirmed by the standard orientation of the couple (man →; woman ←),¹¹ her use of this unusual seat implies that she enjoyed a special status. Furthermore, the space allotted her and her son is noticeably larger than that occupied by the man and his granddaughter.

The combination of neck ornaments the lady wears – a conspicuous beaded pectoral hanging from wide strap-like bands¹² and a ‘dog collar’ – may well be unique, but it compares well to that

⁵ Of respect? It is not, however, included in the tabulation of Brigitte Dominicus, *Gesten und Gebärden in Darstellungen des Alten und Mittleren Reiches* (SAGA 10; Heidelberg 1994) 5-9 where examples with only one hand fistled are cited.

⁶ Bklyn. 39.119; illus.: *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids* (exh. cat.; New York 1999) 437-39 [172].

⁷ For an earlier one, see the slab stela of a king’s daughter, Cairo JE 44135: PM III 436.

⁸ Acc. No. 2971; PM III 139; illus.: Karl Martin, *CAA Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim 3. Reliefs des Alten Reiches 1* (Mainz 1978) 185.

⁹ PM III 198 (4); illus.: Dows Dunham and William Kelly Simpson, *The Mastaba of Queen Mersyankh III, G 7530-7540* (Giza Mastabas I; Boston 1974) fig. 7.

¹⁰ See the review of dating criteria for these women provided by Michel Baud, *Famille royale et pouvoir sous l’Ancien Empire égyptien* (BdE 126; Cairo IFAO 1999) 55-6, 437-8 [48] and 461-63 [76], respectively.

¹¹ Henry G. Fischer, *Egyptian Women of the Old Kingdom and of the Heracleopolitan Period*, 2nd revised and augmented edition (New York 2000) 3, 12 with fig. 10 (one example).

¹² Note that the rendering of her dress omits the usual shoulder strap(s).

worn by the daughter of Cheops's son Khaefkhufu I in the decoration of his tomb, G 7140.¹³ The 'dog collar' in particular suggests a date in Dynasty IV, except when it is worn with a broad collar¹⁴ which is not the case here. The woman's title, too, is especially typical of Dynasty IV even though it does not disappear until mid-Dynasty V.¹⁵

The sagging breast of the lady is a noteworthy anatomical detail which occurs sporadically during the Old Kingdom, apparently without chronological significance. In most cases, its use to signal maturity cannot be doubted. The contrast between the breasts of a mother and her adult daughter embracing on one jamb of the false door CG 1414 clearly demonstrates this (Plate 2): the breast of the younger woman is taut and the nipple points forward while that of her mother sags slightly and the nipple is tilted downwards.¹⁶ (An older woman with a markedly pendulous breast who leans on a staff serves as the determinative for *ḥwt* in the text associated with the group.¹⁷) This is but one of several Old Kingdom examples overlooked by Deborah Sweeney in her recent discussion of this feature.¹⁸ The lady is clearly a member of the elite, like the wife shown in the offering scene in Chicago.

The crucial feature for dating The Art Institute relief is the type of kilt worn by *tnj* and his like-named son. This so-called Rahotep-kilt is rare;¹⁹ short and unpleated, it includes a characteristic looped knot at the waist. None of the tomb owners depicted wearing it can be confidently associated with any king subsequent to Redjedef.²⁰ A date for the offering table scene in mid-Dynasty IV accords well not only with the other iconographic features, but also with the style of carving.

¹³ PM III 189 (4); illus.: William Kelly Simpson, *The Mastabas of Kawab, Khafkhufu I and II* (Giza Mastabas 3; Boston 1978) pl. XVIII and fig. 30.)

¹⁴ Nadine Cherpion, *Mastabas et hypogées d'Ancient Empire: le problème de la datation* (Brussels 1989) 68-70, criteria 45 and 46.

¹⁵ Michel Baud, 'La date d'apparition des *ḥntjw-s'*', *BIFAO* 96 (1996) 41 n. 169; cf. *idem*, *Famille royale* 80, 110 n. 140.

¹⁶ Henry G. Fischer's drawing of the group in his *Varia* (Egyptian Studies I; New York 1976) 9 fig. 11, is not accurate in this detail, as comparison with the photograph published here demonstrates.

¹⁷ As noted by Ludwig Borchardt, *Denkmäler des Alten Reiches (ausser den Statuen) im Museum von Kairo 1, Nr. 1295-1808* (Berlin 1937) 82 n. 1. This anomalous determinative may not be so very unusual. The example cited by Rosalind M. and Jac. J. Janssen, *Getting Old in Ancient Egypt* (London 1996) 70, is actually two examples: see Lucienne Épron and François Dumas, *Le tombeau de Ti 1: Les approches de la chapelle* (MIFAO 65; Cairo 1939) pl. XXXIX.

¹⁸ 'Forever Young? The Representation of Older and Ageing Women in Ancient Egyptian Art', *JARCE* XLI (2004 [sic! – this issue was published in 2008]) 70-76. Note, too, that Sweeney has oversimplified Fischer's remarks (*MMJ* 11, 1976, 14-15) on the female figures with and without pendulous breasts on the false door Fitzwilliam E 6.1909.

¹⁹ Contra Teeter who describes the man's apparel as 'the classic knee-length kilt'.

²⁰ Cherpion, *Mastabas et hypogées* 62, criterion 37.

As noted above, the name of the seated woman is damaged, but I believe I can make out traces of a *nefer*-sign. Checking PM III for a 'judge and scribe' *tnj* married to a *mjrt* named *nfr(t)* I found just such a combination in the owner of G 3035.²¹ This tomb was among those excavated by Clarence S. Fisher under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, in 1915. The published report makes no mention of a false door; but of a 'large double niche near the south end [of the brick-built east face] with a limestone inscribed lintel', bearing the names of the owner and his wife on the sculptured drum in the center.²² The entries for March 2, 1915 in the excavation diaries provide the additional information that the niche itself, described as a 'ceremonial door' was made of mud-plastered bricks.²³ Another 'ceremonial door' or 'niche in west end of chamber' is difficult to reconcile with the published account which remarks 'two single niches and a recess near north'. Only the lintel is illustrated.²⁴ Unfortunately these minimal archaeological data do not furnish any support for the attribution of the relief in Chicago to the tomb.

However, Jaromir Malek tells me²⁵ that The Art Institute scene is not included in PM VIII, Part 4, because it has been assigned to G 3035 in the files of the Topographical Bibliography which are being compiled for a future revision of PM III.

What of the dating of the G 3000 cemetery? Applying the criteria established by Nadine Cherpion, Michel Baud argues convincingly that the tombs there date from Dynasty IV to the reign of Neuserre in Dynasty V.²⁶ If the Chicago relief does indeed come from G 3035, it would be one of the earlier mastabas in this sector of the necropolis.

²¹ PM III, 97; there dated to Dynasty VI.

²² Clarence S. Fisher, *The Minor Cemetery at Giza* (Philadelphia 1924) 121-23.

²³ Information provided by Jennifer Houser Wegner, with covering letter dated May 4, 2000, following on an email from David Silverman cancelling my appointment to consult the archives myself on May 4-5, due to a burst steam pipe which flooded the basement and made the archive area temporarily off-limits. In November 1999 when I sent my initial inquiry, I was advised that 'a number of people [were] involved in working on the Fisher Giza material for publication', but to the best of my knowledge, down to the present nothing has appeared in print with relevance to G 3035.

²⁴ Described by Alan Rowe, in Fischer, *Minor Cemetery* 149, pl. 51.5

²⁵ Personal communication, by telephone, 29 May 2008.

²⁶ 'À propos des critères iconographiques établis par Nadine Cherpion', in *Les critères de datation stylistique à l'Ancien Empire* (Nicolas Grimal, ed.; BdE 120; Cairo 1998) 84-86. My thanks to Michel for his comments regarding my dating of The Art Institute relief (email exchange, Dec. 2003).



Plate I The Art Institute of Chicago, E 27897. 1920.265

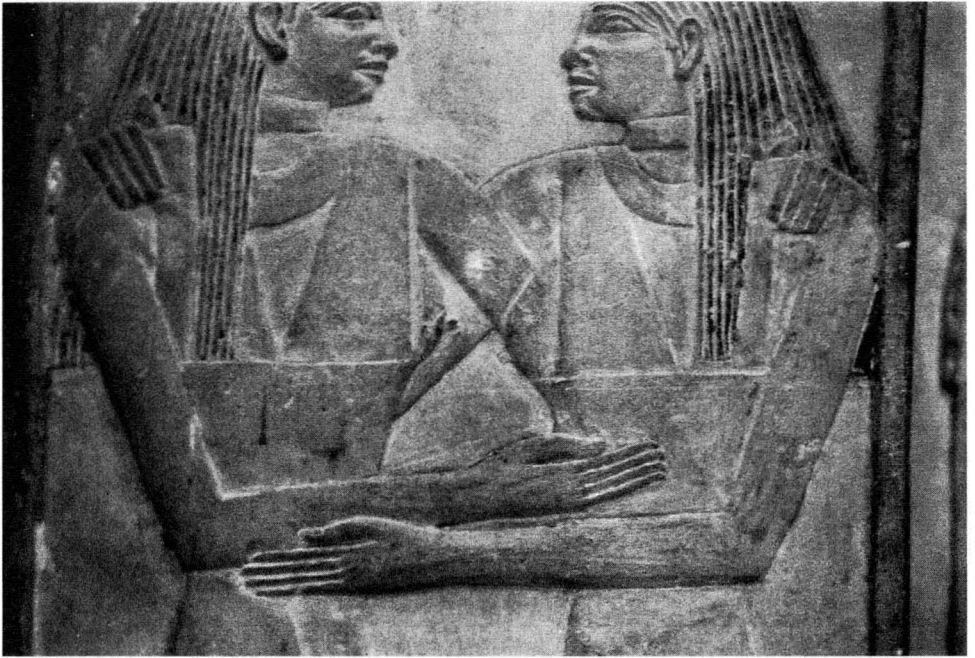


Plate II Details