1. Group statue of the nomarch Ukhhotpe with wives and daughter, Meir, Dynasty 12, reign of Sesostris III (1878-1843 B.C.), gray granite, h. 14¾ in. (37.5 cm.). Acquired by exchange with the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore. 1973.86. (Photo Walters Art Gallery.)
The Middle Kingdom (ca. 2050-1650 B.C.) represents the reconstruction of the Egyptian state following the famine and political upheaval that terminated the era of the great pyramid builders of the Old Kingdom. About 2050 B.C. Nebhepetre Montuhotep, a king of Dynasty 11, reunified a divided kingdom from his base of authority at Thebes in the south. The rulers of the following Dynasty 12 (ca. 1991-1780 B.C.) provided the land with a stable, centralized administration for over two hundred years, and their successors in the first part of Dynasty 13 (ca. 1780-1633 B.C.) continued to prosper until the state was again divided into rival powers in the south and north, the latter being the foreign dynasty of the Hyksos kings from Syria and Palestine.

Several major traditions in art and architecture characterize the Middle Kingdom: the vigorous and yet frequently crude art of the south at its outset, the accomplished and yet sometimes bland revival of the Memphite schools of the Old Kingdom, and a new tradition of seriousness in royal and private sculpture, which represented a merging of the first two traditions and emphasized in facial features an introspective, careworn, and occasionally almost brutal appearance. In Dynasty 13 elements of mannerism developed in royal and private statuary and to a lesser extent in private relief sculpture.1

In the Egyptian collection of the Museum of Fine Arts the Middle Kingdom has for many years been represented by objects of great interest and appeal: the beautiful life-size seated statue of Lady Sennuwy (early Dynasty 12) from the excavations at Kerma (14.720); the fine painted coffins of Djehutynakhte, a nomarch of the Hare Nome in Middle Egypt (20.1822-27, 21.962), the wooden model of a procession of offering bearers (21.326) from the same tomb at el Bersheh (both coffins and model are of mid-Dynasty 12), and a fine small ivory of a lady with a child carried in a basket.
on her back (54.994). During the past five years we have added to our collection with a view to providing a more complete and continuous series of sculptures, reliefs, painting, and decorative objects from the beginning to the end of dynastic Egypt. Several recently acquired sculptures and reliefs from the Middle Kingdom are introduced here, illustrating their context in the development of the collection.

The most significant addition to our collection, in that it provides our first major group statue of Dynasty 12, is the black granite group of a nomarch of Meir (ancient Cusae), two of his wives, and a daughter (figs. 1, 2). This statue had been for many years in the fine Egyptian collection of the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore and has been acquired by exchange for our Old Kingdom pair statue of Nenkhefetka and his wife from the Egypt Exploration Fund excavations at Deshasheh. At the time the latter piece entered the collection in 1897, it was the cornerstone of our Old Kingdom exhibition. Since then, the museum’s excavations at Giza and the finds obtained through them have made the Deshasheh statue superfluous. Exchanges of this na-
ture benefit both collections and are the best means of enhancing their scope and educational value.

The Walters-Boston statue (henceforth referred to as the Boston statue) is especially interesting in that it provides a comparison with a slightly smaller group of the same four individuals in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (fig. 3). Comparison of the treatment of the subject in the two groups can be pursued at length. Both statues seem to have been designed for the west wall of the chapel of the nomarch Ukhhotpe at Meir (chapel C3). The Cairo version has the figures set against a round-topped slab with the eyes of Horus flanking the nomarch’s head and the heraldic plant of the south on the left and of the north on the right. In the Boston version the round top has been cut away, as it were, with several consequences: the Horus eyes have been moved down to flank the nomarch’s legs, the sculptor has been able to carve the backs of the heads of the adults (fig. 2), and the plants have been kept in the same position. The daughter has been moved to the center and stands squarely in front of her father with feet planted between his. One almost has the sense that the family has been asked by a photographer to stand still in a prescribed position and smile. It may be assumed that the two versions were done by the same sculptor, but it is probably impossible to determine which of the groups is the earlier or to decide which is the more aesthetically successful. Yet the consideration of these matters provides the opportunity for a stimulating discussion.

Several details may be noted in this connection, without entering upon a lengthy

4. Shrine of tomb chapel C, no. 1, at Meir. Detail of rear, showing two wives of Ukhhotpe. (After A. M. Blackman and M. R. Apted, The Rock Tombs of Meir, part 6, pl. 16.)
investigation. The placement of the daughter Nebethet-henutsen in the Cairo group suggests that she is the daughter of the adjacent wife Nubkau; in the Boston group she is placed equidistant between both wives, Nubkau and Khnumhotpe, and this placement eliminates some space for the inscription of her father, Ukhhotpe. The wrap-around skirt of her father with its fringe and tie is more carefully treated in the Boston group. I have the feeling that the volumes of the bodies and the faces are more sensitively treated in the Boston group, although the overall unity provided by the round-topped back of the Cairo group is more successful artistically. The Boston group faces are more rounded, with the eyes more heavily lidded, the latter being a characteristic of the royal and private sculpture of the latter part of the dynasty.

Ukhhotpe lived in the reign of Sesostris II and may have continued into the reign of Sesostris III, as suggested by Henry Fischer. His tomb at Meir has a central niche, with his two wives shown in the same left and right relation, the same plants, and the eyes of Horus (fig. 4). The sculptor or sculptors of the two groups and the designer of the niche most certainly worked together or drew their inspiration from one or the other. The similar use of the plants and eyes and the position of the wives are definitely not fortuitous. On the side walls of the niche a third and fourth wife are shown. The tomb is noted for its extensive borrowing of themes usually reserved for royal representations and for the use of female figures in contexts usually reserved for male figures, the latter practice evidently in connection with the cult of the goddess Hathor, which was so prominent in this region. The tomb merits continued study and investigation.

The seated statuette of a now anonymous official from his tomb at Asyut in Middle Egypt is the earliest of the sculptures shown here (figs. 5, 6), and yet in its simplified concentration on the basic forms it is not unlike some sculpture of our own times. Viewed in relation to comparable examples of the Old Kingdom, this statuette of the First Intermediate Period lacks crispness of execution, strict adherence to symmetry, and articulation of detail. Yet it is these very features read in a positive way that give it a character of its own. The similar statuette of Mesehty in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo has been described by Cyril Aldred in the following terms: “It illustrates in a most direct fashion the vigorous, even brutal, force that underlies the contemporary southern art-style, and which was to infuse the art of the Middle Kingdom with an unusual power. The legs splayed apart, the integration of the upper and lower halves by the linking form of the left arm with its massive hand upon the knee, the thick limbs and neck, barely freed from the matrix, give this little statue an abstract force and intensity that is more “primitive” than the intellectual cubism of most Egyptian sculpture. The hollows and depressions of this statuette are as eloquent as the various formal masses. A unity of form and feeling which is a feature of the best work of the Middle Kingdom is already expressed in this little statue.” It is thought that these statues were set in wooden ship models to represent the owner on his voyage to the next world. Such models, complete with crews, became a feature of Middle Kingdom burial practice, and the alabaster statues from Asyut share in the tradition of the smaller wooden figures created on similar functional lines. One might even say that they reflect a woodworking tradition translated to stone. The eyes are set in
copper frames. Other statues of the same series, perhaps by the same sculptor or workshop, are in the collections of museums in Brussels, Hannover, and Moscow. The Boston statue is the only representative of the group in an American collection.

The transition between the provincial art of the First Intermediate Period and the incipient return to the Memphite traditions cannot be better illustrated than by the art of the court of Nebhepetre Montuhotpe of Dynasty 11 at Thebes. An example of this art may be seen in another of our recent acquisitions: a relief fragment (fig. 7) that can be assigned to the tomb of Queen Nofru, one of the queens of Nebhepetre Montuhotpe, on the basis of its style and a parallel from the same tomb in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (fig. 8). The burial chamber of the tomb was discovered at Deir el Bahri by Mariette in 1858, and in 1925–26 Herbert E. Winlock cleared the corridor, chapel, and burial chamber for the Metropolitan Museum Egyptian Expedition.¹³

At the time that Queen Hatshepsut of Dynasty 18 built her mortuary temple at Deir el Bahri the façade of the tomb of Queen Nofru was covered over. A new entrance to the chapel was provided for the tourists of the New Kingdom, several of whom wrote their names and their appreciation of the tomb on its walls. The construction of the tourist entrance to the tomb is one of the earliest instances of the preservation of an earlier structure for the edification of posterity. A small stone bowl in the Medelhavsmuseet in Stockholm bears a dedication by Hatshepsut to Nebhepetre
Montuhotpe. There are also instances of rulers of Dynasty 18 collecting the art of
their predecessors.14 When Winlock cleared the corridor and chapel of the tomb of
Queen Nofru, it was discovered that later ages had not continued this antiquarian
respect: “In late dynastic times the chapel had been turned into a factory for the
making of limestone dishes, and the chips left after the walls had been turned into
bowls and platters represented only a small fraction of the surfaces once sculptured.
Nothing could be replaced here.”15 Nofru’s use of the finest limestone available for
her tomb thus contributed to its destruction.

The fine relief of the tomb is remarkable for its quality and the variety of the ex-
tensive scenes represented. Most of the fragmentary relief was assigned by the
Egyptian Antiquities Department to the Metropolitan Museum, although portions
were retained for the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The unmistakable stamp of the
relief artist is such, however, that it is now possible to assign to this tomb interesting
fragments in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, the Walters Art Gallery in
Baltimore, the Yale University Art Gallery, the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh,
and in several private collections (fig. 9), as well as our new acquisition, which is one
of the finest examples.
(a: drawing by Suzanne E. Chapman; b: photo by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.)
The Boston bas-relief, illustrated here for the first time, belongs to the chapel, for the relief in the corridor was executed in sunk relief. The execution of the relief has a gemlike appearance softened by the rounded edges. Two serving women are shown carrying a large pottery vessel on a sling attached to a pole borne on their shoulders. The missing lower part of the vessel and the mat on which it rests can be reconstructed through the scene in Cairo from the same procession (fig. 8). In both fragments the women wear a high-waisted skirt. The headdress of the women in the Cairo fragment differs from that in the Boston piece. In the latter one notes the careful treatment of the hair and the curious way in which the forward strand of the first bearer's hair passes in front of the pole, while that of her companion passes behind it. The detail in the strands of the hair and the strands of the rope provides an intentional contrast to the smooth surfaces with rounded edges of the bodies and the jar. Of the faces, only that of the first woman in the Boston relief is well preserved. It has all the features of the type represented in the bas-relief and sunk relief of this reign so well described by Elizabeth Riefstahl: "The exaggerated almond shape of the eyes, pointed sharply downward at the tear-ducts, the over-elongated, spatulate paint-stripe; the strong nose, with a pronounced hollow at the inner tip of the eye and a deep fold in the nostril; the ear-lobe flattened into a disk, often with a corresponding disk at the upper rim; the thick, sharply defined lips, squared at the corners; the firm, yet over-short chin—all of these can be duplicated in other work of the period."16

The Memphite influence, with an element of blandness, is clearly seen in a later bas-relief, provisionally assigned to Dynasty 12, recently acquired from a collection in Paris (fig. 10). It is the left half of a lintel of which the corresponding right half was purchased in 1884 by the Egyptian Museum in Cairo along with two parts of a second lintel.15 The contrast with the fragment from the tomb of Queen Nofru is considerable and significant. The later relief of the lintel is lower, more sophisticated, and
correspondingly less vigorous and interesting. Although the execution is deft and accomplished, one would not describe it as gemlike. Internal detail in the figure and hieroglyphs is sparse; one can cite the feathering of the wings in the bird hieroglyphs, the conventional markings of the lines of the hand hieroglyph, and the simple lines that mark the elements of the figure’s garments. The scene depicted here of the seated tomb owner before a table of offerings is a traditional one that occurs in the reliefs of the Old Kingdom and later. Our relief has not yet been conclusively shown to be the work of a Middle Kingdom sculptor; it is quite possible that it is an archaizing work of a thousand years later in the style of the Middle Kingdom. During Dynasty 25 and the dynasties preceding it earlier styles were deliberately copied.

A recent acquisition of Dynasty 12 in sunk relief (fig. 11) derives from the same Paris collection as the lintel. In this case, however, it can be assigned to a specific tomb, no. 3, at el Bersheh in Middle Egypt, the site from which the Museum of Fine Arts expedition obtained, through the Egyptian Antiquities Department, the fine set of painted coffins of Djehutynakhte and his wife and the model procession mentioned earlier.18

10. Left portion of lintel of Si-Hathor-Nehy. Dynasty 12 (1991-1780 B.C.) or a later archaizing work in this style of Dynasty 25 (760-656 B.C.), limestone, h. 19¼ in. (50 cm.), l. 20 7/8 in. (53 cm.).

The well-known tombs at the site had been cleared and recorded by Newberry at the turn of the century, and he commented in his monograph on the tomb to which our new fragment belongs: “The inside of this tomb [No. 3] had been entirely destroyed by quarrying, as far as we could judge, and it was impossible either to move or to work beneath the huge masses of fallen roof with which it was filled. There seems to have been no portico; but between No. 3 and the next tomb, No. 4, there are the remains of a small shrine belonging to tomb No. 3. The doorway of the shrine was well cut, and had a cornice and moulding, parts of which we found; but unfortunately the greater part both of the shrine and the next tomb, No. 4, were quarried away before the earthquake.” Under these circumstances it is particularly fortunate that our new fragment was found (perhaps by an early traveler) and eventually acquired by a Parisian collector as early as the middle of the last century.

The relief belongs to the right side of the shrine mentioned in view of its size, subject matter, and texts. Tomb no. 3 can be assigned to a great chief of the Hare Nome, the nomarch of Upper Egyptian Nome 15, part of whose name contained the element Djehuty-em. The most logical restoration would be Djehuty-em-[het], although Meket-Djehuty and Djehuty-em-saf are among a host of possibilities. The chief’s son was the scribe of royal documents, Sep. Our relief bears a text that associates it with the tomb: “[——] incense, alabaster, and linen [in this tomb?] which his eldest son, beloved of him, of his body, made for him, the scribe of the royal documents Sep, born of Wadjkaues, the vindicated.” The lady shown at her offering table holding a lotus blossom is evidently this same Wadjkaues, wife of Djehuty-em-[het] and mother of Sep. She has a characteristic Bersheh profile and slim-waisted
figure, and her necklace, amulets, and texts are carefully carved and painted. It is instructive to compare the profile and treatment of the eye with the corresponding elements of the earlier relief of Queen Nofru. Unfortunately, at some time in this or the last century, a previous owner of the relief enhanced the colors by overpainting the relief, and it is difficult to determine in every case where the original color was in part preserved and where it has been invented. The relief adds significantly to our Bersheh collection.

Like the group statue of Ukhhotpe, a miniature offering stand with a short rounded foot comes from Meir (fig. 12). A representation of an offering tray is shown on the top with two lines of text: "A funerary invocation of bread, beer, cattle, and fowl on behalf of one well provided before Hathor, Mistress of Cusae, the count Senbi, the vindicated." Two monarchs of Cusae of the early part of the dynasty bear the name Senbi, and it is likely that the offering stand derives from the funerary equipment of one of these tombs.

A small head in a warm brown quartzite (figs. 13, 14), acquired in 1970, was probably part of a seated figure enveloped in a tight-fitting cloak with knees drawn up to shoulder height, a type designated as “block statue.” The heavily lidded eyes and marked nasolabial furrow represented in the sculpture of the latter part of Dynasty 12 are strikingly evident in this head and suggest a date later than that of the Ukhhotpe groups, toward the end of the dynasty. The large ears and the use of brown quartzite are particularly characteristic of late Dynasty 12 and Dynasty 13. Since this type was copied a thousand years later in the Third Intermediate Period, there is sometimes a lingering doubt as to which period such a sculpture should be assigned. Perhaps at a future date the missing part of the Boston statue with inscribed texts may come to light, and its owner and his era may be determined with greater certainty.

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Another recently acquired relief of offering bearers from Dynasty 12 is accompanied by an interesting inscription, which cites an element of an official’s career under King Sesostris III and his successor Amunemhet III (fig. 15). The inscription provided the main reason for our acquiring this fragment, for the relief is considerably less accomplished than the three examples discussed earlier (figs. 7, 10, 11). There are many details of the curious text, which has been published elsewhere, of interest to the specialist. It records the name and titles of an overseer of the fields and custodian of the menyat-counterpoise called Ankhu, son of a “king’s sister” named Mersytek. He mentions his upbringing at the palace at the feet of his lord. He served as a scribe in the temple of Sesostris III, was praised for his work, and acted as a henchman for the future king Amunemhet III when he was still a youth. Presumably the relief derives from Ankhu’s tomb, which may have been near the funerary temple of the pyramid of Sesostris III at Hawara near the Fayyum. The offering bearers with their trays of meat and vegetables, their bouquets, and their sacrificial fowl walk toward the now missing figure of Ankhu to the right. The text is curiously arranged in retrograde fashion with the columns to be read from left to right. A seated statue of the same individual with the head now missing bears the title “overseer of the fields”; it was discovered in the Hekayeb temple on Elephantine Island opposite Aswan along with statues of Sesostris III and several rulers of Dynasty 13.

The latest in time of our new acquisitions in the Middle Kingdom is probably the family stela of a police officer named Ameny also called Ibi-iau, his wife, and his parents (fig. 16). Ameny and his wife sit on the left and face his parents on the right across a heavily laden offering table. His two servants in the register below him face his father’s two servants. This modest stela may have been the rear wall of a small stela-chapel with two inscribed side walls. Abydos is a likely provenance. The execution of the sunk relief is competent but not distinguished. One of the female servants carries a basket with figs or dates. By Egyptian artistic convention it is shown in section with its contents visible as if in an X ray. It is instructive to compare the
offering bearers in this relief with those in the reliefs of Queen Nofru (fig. 7) and the overseer of fields Ankhu (fig. 15). They all convey the same meaning: the provisioning of the cult of their respective employers. Yet the spacing, rendering, style of execution, and offerings vary immensely from one relief to the next. It is by analyzing and appreciating such differences that we can begin to understand the developments in Egyptian art and the relative merits of the artists, for the art of the Middle Kingdom is a profitable field of research.

The statuary and reliefs that form the subject of this essay constitute in themselves a miniature museum of the art of the Middle Kingdom. Although they are few, they permit us to follow the development of the art of the sculptor and relief carver over a period of nearly three hundred years. Each object adds to and plays its part in an already distinguished collection.

NOTES


7. Terrace and Fischer, Treasures of Egyptian Art, p. 84.

8. Blackman and Apted, Rock Tombs, pls. 15 (south wall of niche), 16 (rear, west wall of niche), 17 (north wall of niche); William Kelly Simpson, "Polygamy in Egypt in the Middle Kingdom?" Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 50 (1964), 100-105.


11. Cyril Aldred, Middle Kingdom Art, p. 34.


For a predynastic or proto-dynastic palette later inscribed for Queen Teye Nebhepetre Mentuhotep, "Chronique d'Egypte 79 (1972), 169-175.

Amarna.


21. Sotheby Parke Bernet, Inc., Antiquities [sale catalogue], December 1, 1972, no. 10, formerly collection of Mr. and Mrs. Willard Golarin.