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Seven painted limestone statuettes

Giza, Dynasty V

Recent Acquisitions from Egypt

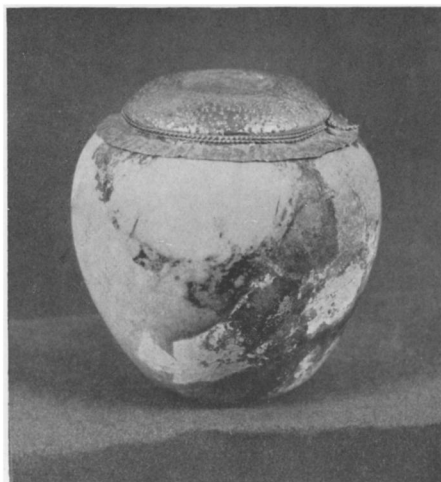
New Installation of the Primitive and Old Empire Rooms

THE arrival from Egypt and the Sudan during the latter half of 1921 of the greater part of the Museum's share of the material recovered by Dr. Reisner in the course of the work of the Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Egyptian Expedition since 1914 has necessitated a rearrangement of the Egyptian collections in order that the more important new acquisitions may be exhibited. The installation of large and heavy pieces of sculpture requires much time, and this task cannot be immediately accomplished; but the Primitive Room and the Old Empire Room are now in order and open to public view. A chronological arrangement of the objects in all the Egyptian Galleries is in process so far as space available permits.

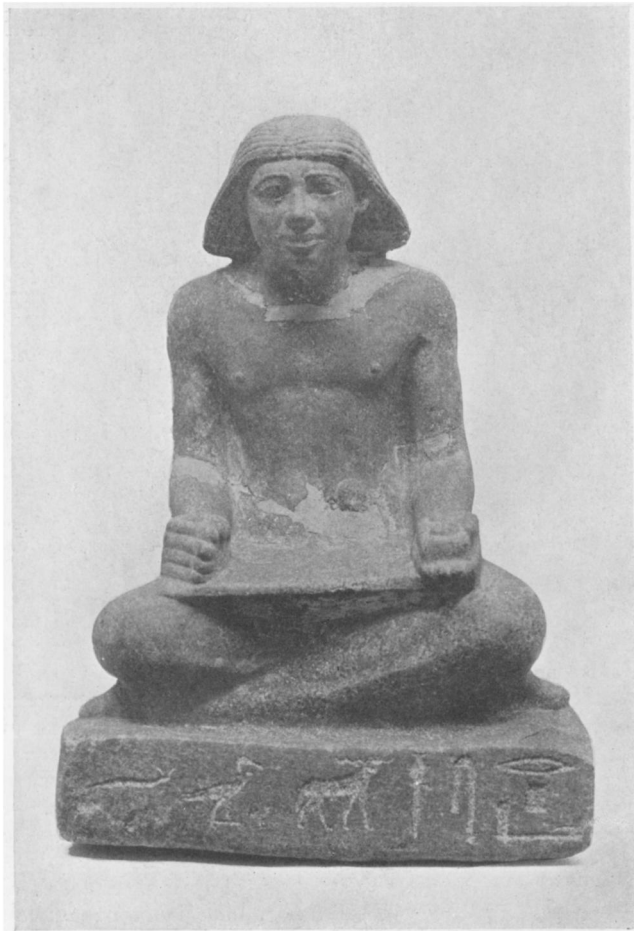
The Primitive Room contains decorated pottery, stone vessels, weapons and implements, slate palettes, ornaments and amulets of bone and ivory, which mark the highly developed state of the arts and crafts in the Nile Valley during the fifth millennium B. C. and which reveal the fundamental racial traits of appreciation of form and of mastery of obdurate materials inherent in Egyptian art throughout its long extended activity of more than five thousand years. Stone vessels and other objects dating from the Early Dynastic Period (about 3500-3000 B. C.), especially those from tombs of kings of the First and Second Dynasties at Abydos, and stone vessels of the Old Empire (Dynasties III-VI) are also shown in this gallery for convenience of comparison with earlier examples. One case contains the funerary outfit of gold and faience ornaments, of model vessels of

copper, slate, translucent crystal and alabaster from the mastaba tomb at Giza of Impy, a royal architect of the Sixth Dynasty.* On the walls above the cases are hung paintings of Egyptian reliefs, frescoes and architecture. The subjects range in date from the Old Empire to the Meroitic Period (about 2700-250 B. C.), and by the remarkable truth of their presentation convey a clear impression, both in form and color, of the persistence and continuity of those traditional modes of expression which characterize Egyptian art and which make its products throughout its whole extent so easily recognizable even by the layman. The

*Cf. M. F. A. Bulletin No. 66, November, 1913.



Stone vase with gold cover
Tomb of King Khasekhemuwy, Abydos, Dynasty II



*Granite portrait-statette of the nobleman Khnum-ba-ef
Giza, Dynasty V*

paintings are the work of Mr. Joseph Lindon Smith and of his daughter, Miss Rebecca Smith.

Sculpture of the Old Empire (about 3000-2475 B. C.) is exhibited in the Old Empire Room. The central case contains seven statuettes of painted limestone found together in the *serdab* (sealed statue chamber) of a mastaba tomb of the Fifth Dynasty at Giza. The largest standing figure represents the owner of the tomb; the two smaller standing figures are probably his sons, and the two pair-statuettes his brothers and their wives. Sculptors of the Old Empire excelled in achieving highly individualized portraits even when, as in this instance, their work was not intended for a royal patron. The other statuettes are two female servants — one kneeling grinding grain, the other cooking at an open fire and apparently shielding her face from its heat with raised left hand. The base of this figure was broken in antiquity and the pieces fastened together by means of a wooden peg before the statuette was placed in the tomb.

In the case on the east wall five unfinished diorite statuettes of King Mycerinus* show suc-

*Handbook of the Museum, page 24.

cessive stages in the process of modeling sculpture in hard stone; guiding lines in red were drawn on the stone block by a master craftsman, and the rough breaking away of the surface to these lines was done by an apprentice, probably by the use of stone implements. This process was repeated until the last stage, when the master himself worked out the details and gave the final polish to the finished portrait. From the tomb at Giza of the architect Nekhebuw of the Sixth Dynasty come the two small portrait heads in limestone, exhibited in this case, the carefully executed figures in flat fresco technique, shown on this same wall, the line of figures in painted low relief, on the opposite wall, and the seated portrait statuette in the alcove of the west wall. Among the reliefs on the east wall are also two stelæ of limestone. One in high relief is from the tomb, at Dendera, of Mena, a provincial prince of the time of Pepy II, late in the Sixth Dynasty (about 2400 B. C.); the other is in sunk relief, and both are typical examples of the degenerating art of the period of economic and artistic depression which followed the lavish expenditures and the supreme



"False Door" and obelisk, of limestone, from the tomb of Redynes
Giza, Dynasty V

achievements in the arts and crafts of the Pyramid Age.

Beauty of material and perfection of technique are combined in the alabaster basis of a seated figure of Mycerinus, more than life size, which is in front of the window. With other portraits of this king the statue once stood in the Valley Temple of the Third Pyramid at Giza. Of the king's figure there remain only the feet and legs and portions of the pleated skirt; but the throne



Sunk design on side of alabaster throne basis
of statue of Mycerinus
Giza, Dynasty IV

is intact and has carved upon its sides and back in sunk relief, once colored bright blue, finely cut hieroglyphics and traditional designs, including the symbolic union of the "Two Lands," represented by the close knotting together by two Nile deities of the lily and the papyrus, which had been from predynastic times the emblems respectively of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Along the west wall are four standing limestone figures of the nobleman Khnum-ba-ef. These statues all lack the head, but a portrait of the man is preserved in the small squatting figure in black granite shown in a case on the south wall. The "log" lintel from a doorway in the Fourth Dynasty tomb of Nofer at Giza copies in stone an architectural detail which originated as wood in the mud-brick mastaba tombs of the earlier dynasties before the erection of structures in stone had been attempted. This is another illustration of the persistence of traditional forms in ancient Egypt. In the corner is a small "false door" and obelisk of limestone from a mastaba tomb in the Giza cemetery. The occupant of the tomb, Redynes, is represented *en face* issuing from the doorway. Egyptian artists very rarely represented a figure from this point of view, as it involved problems in perspective which they never attempted to solve.

The changes of installation now nearly completed in the remaining galleries of the Egyptian series will be described in a later Bulletin.

A. S.

Note

A MEMORIAL EXHIBITION of oil paintings, water colors, illustrations, and decorative work of the late Lucy Scarborough Conant opened at the Museum on March 26 and will continue through April.