Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture

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I N 1988, WHEN W. KELLY SIMPSON INVITED ME TO TEACH AT YALE FOR a couple of weeks and when I was preparing a lecture on Egyptian portraiture, I had the opportunity to discuss this topic with Kelly and to profit from his great knowledge and infallible judgment. I thought it appropriate, therefore, to contribute a version of this lecture to his *Festschrift*, in affectionate memory of his hospitality and our many conversations on Egyptian art, literature and other subjects.[1]

1. SCULPTURAL AND INSCRIPTIONAL SELF-THEMATIZATION

Portraiture is by far the most important and productive genre of Egyptian art, just as biography is the most ancient and productive genre of Egyptian literature. Both genres are self-thematizations[2] of an individual subject, one in the medium of art, the other in the medium of language. To be sure, the Egyptian portraits are not self-portraits in our sense of the term, nor are the biographical inscriptions autobiographies in our sense. It is not the self of an artist or writer which is revealed by a statue or speaking in an inscription, but the self of the patron, who had the portrait sculptured or the inscription carved. What matters is the "self" that gives the order, not the one that executes it. I shall use the term "self-thematization" for every kind of sculpture, relief or inscription representing such an order-giving individual. By using the term portraiture in this sense of self-thematization, we are spared the thankless task of discussing whether there is any "real" portraiture or biography in ancient Egypt. In this essay, the focus is shifted from the sculptor to the model. Consequently, we can dispense with the anachronistic idea of "artists"

[1] I wish to thank Dr. Christine Lilyquist for the invitation to deliver a lecture on Egyptian portraiture at the MMA, New York, on Sept. 25, 1988, and my friend Dr. Dorothea Arnold for her kind assistance. The paper has profited greatly from discussions with W.K. Simpson, M. Lehner and J.P. Allen during my stay at Yale Sept./Oct. 1988. I am grateful to William Barrette and Peter Der Manuelian for providing photographs, and to Maria S. Rost for correcting my English.

[2] Cf. J. Assmann "Sepulkrale Selbstthematisierung im alten Ägypten," in: A. Hahn and V. Kapp, eds., *Selbstthematisierung und Selbstzeugnis: Bekenntnis und Geständnis* (Frankfurt, 1987), pp. 196–222.

being "attracted" by, for example, "faces that express experience and sharp intelligence."[3] We can deal rather with the order-giving, self-thematizing self, which wants to convey these qualities in its iconic self-thematization.[4] No one will deny that self-thematization prevails in the artistic and inscriptional evidence of Ancient Egypt to an extraordinary degree and that both genres of self-thematization account for the singular character of Egyptian culture. For underlying almost every Egyptian inscription and every monument there is such an "order-giving self." Since, as has rightly and repeatedly been stressed,[5] Egyptian art is always functional and never decorative, it is this notion of self which seems to determine its functional contexts to the greatest extent. These are closely linked to Egyptian ideas about immortality, about self-eternalization and self-monumentalization. As everybody who has had some experience with Egyptian monuments is very well aware, there is a deep desire for eternity, for overcoming death and transience, at the root of almost everything Egyptian culture has bequeathed to us, which Paul Eluard called "le dur désir de durer." In this essay I shall investigate how this desire for eternity is linked to conceptions of the self and how these conceptions are translated into forms of artistic expression.

2. REALISM AND IDEALIZATION IN PORTRAITURE

Egyptian portraiture ranks among the most enigmatic and amazing challenges which history has in store for us. The enigma does not lie in the fact of its remoteness and strangeness, but quite to the contrary in its very closeness, its seeming familiarity and modernity. The bust of prince Ankh-haf, for example, which is from the Fourth Dynasty and thus removed by more than four and one-half thousand years, shows the face of modern man. This work, slightly restored and cast in bronze, and exhibited in the hall of any official building, could very well pass for a statesman or businessman of our time.[6] The bust of queen Nefertiti from the Amarna Period (some twelve hundred years later) was, after its discovery, immediately welcomed into the world of Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden, where it decorates the windows of innumerable beauty salons. But these busts of Ankh-haf and Nefertiti appeal to the

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[3] B.V. Bothmer "Revealing man's fate in man's face," *ARTnews*, 79 no.6 (New York, 1980), p. 124f.

[4] For a similar approach, cf. L. Giuliani, *Bildnis und Botschaft: Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Bildniskunst der römischen Republik* (Frankfurt, 1987). Cf. also W.K. Simpson "Egyptian Sculpture and Two-dimensional Representation as Propaganda," *JEA* 68 (1982), pp. 266–71, whose concept of "propaganda" is akin to "self thematization."

[5] Cf., e.g., W.K. Simpson, *The Face of Egypt: Permanence and Change in Egyptian Art* (Katonah, N.Y., 1977).
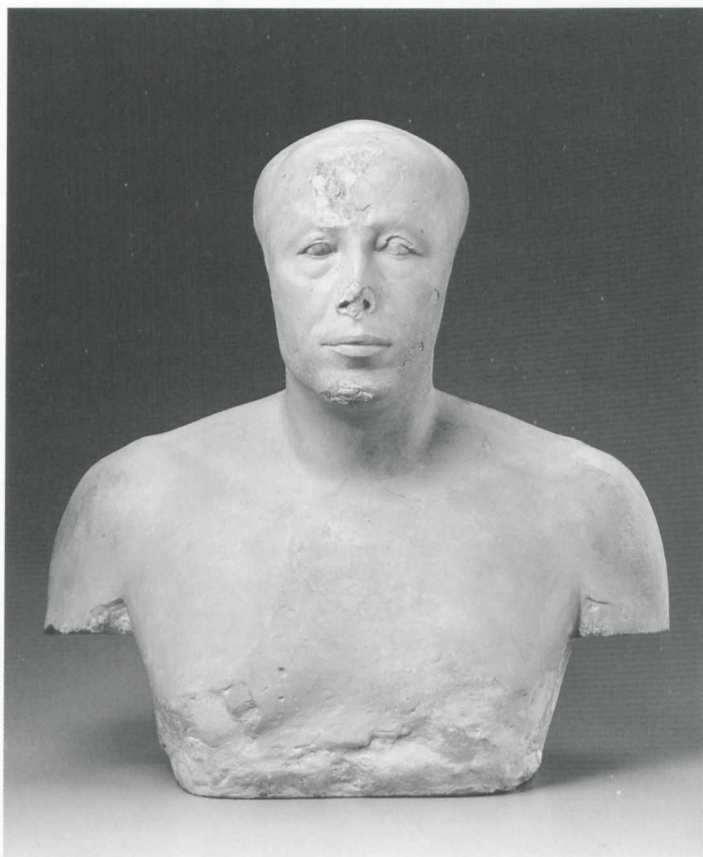
Fig. 1. Bust of Ankh-haf from Giza G 7510, MFA 27.442. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig. 2. Bust of Nefertiti from Amarna; Berlin 21 300; from W. Kaiser, *Ägyptisches Museum*, *Berlin* (Berlin, 1967), cat. 767.

modern eye in two different ways. Nefertiti seems to incarnate an ideal of beauty which we share, while with Ankh-haf just the opposite applies; there is a total absence of any idealization or type. Instead, there is an incredibly realistic rendering of individual traits in their almost expressionless, unemphatic state of relaxation.

[6] Cf. the experiment of D. Dunham, who had a cast of the bust "fitted with modern clothing in a somewhat jocular effort to satisfy the writer's curiosity as to what an ancient Egyptian would look like living today in our own familiar world": "An Experiment with an Egyptian Portrait. Ankh-haf in Modern Dress," *BMFA* 41, (1943), p. 10. The cast was "tinted in flesh tones and the eyes, eyebrows and hair were coloured in an approximation to lifelike values." The result, shown in a photograph, is most striking. Ankh-haf wears Mr. Dunham's clothing, hat, shirt, tie, and tweed jacket which fit him perfectly (D. Dunham being then, as he indicates, 6 feet tall and weighing 160 pounds) and looks absolutely plausible. What we have in mind is, of course, an experiment of a different kind. We do not propose to convert the bust into a modern mannequin which shows clothes, but into a modern portrait which shows a face.

Realism and individualism are not commonly found at the beginning of a tradition of portraiture. In fact, two points are generally taken for granted. One is that realism and individualism always coincide, and the other is that this syndrome can only appear at the end of a very long evolutionary process.

Thus at the beginning there is ordinarily the general, the abstract, the non-individual. Individualization evolves by differentiation, by a "gradual sub-division of the general image."[7] This evolution of individuality started with abstract geometric symbols like menhirs, developed into highly idealized figures like the Greek *kouroi*, and only at the very end of this process was the scene sufficiently prepared for the entrance of the individual. In Egypt, this evolutionary process was turned upside down. Here, tomb sculpture started with portraits of the utmost realism.

3. Magic Realism

The typical tomb sculpture of the Fourth Dynasty is the so-called reserve head.[8] Generally, the reserve heads render individual features, but in a much more summarizing or abstract way than does the bust of Ankh-haf. Most of these heads show a remarkably coarse treatment. The surface of the stone has in most cases not received the final polish. The plaster coating, which covers the Ankh-haf head and into which the details of the facial features are modelled, is missing in all of them. Some even seem unfinished, perhaps because the original plaster coating is now missing. The beauty of the more carefully worked examples, like the heads in figs. 3–6, lies in the summarizing treatment of features which nonetheless must be recognized as indvidual, for there is in general very little resemblance between them. They are not realizations of a common ideal or convention. The two examples shown in figs. 3–4 are from the same mastaba in Giza and represent a man and his wife who are clearly different from one another. Also, the two examples in Cairo (figs. 5–6)—the left one a man, the right one a woman—do not seem to reflect some generalized conception of a human face, but rather to render individual physiognomies. The hooked nose of Nefer (fig. 7) reappears on his relief representations. On the reserve head, it is the result of a rather coarse rewiring. Nefer was apparently not content with the first version and wanted his nose, which he may have regarded as a particularly distinctive feature, to be more emphatically shown on his

[7] Ernst Buschor, *Das Porträt. Bildniswege und Bildnisstufen in fünf Jahrtausenden* (Munich, 1960).

[8] W.S. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*, 2nd ed. (London, 1949), pp. 23–27.
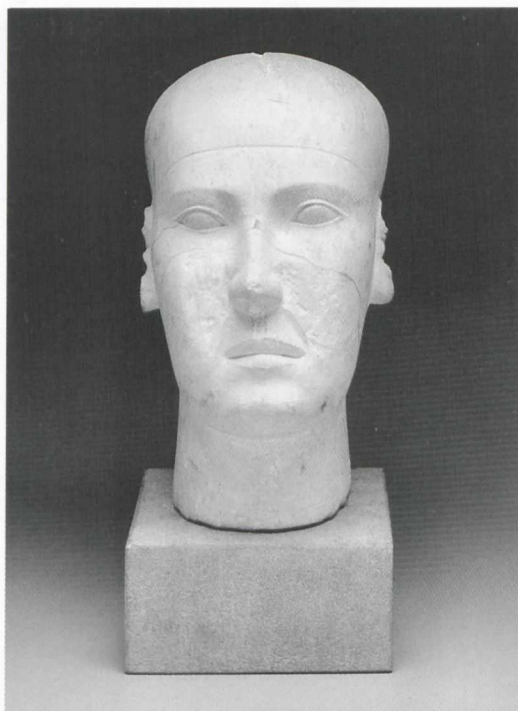
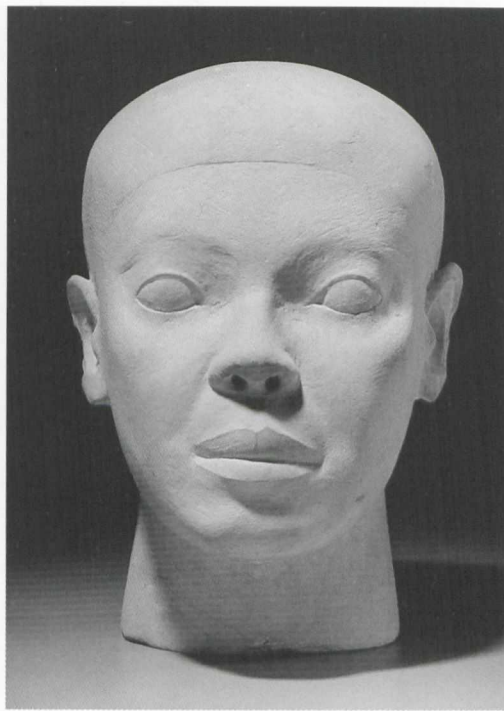Fig. 3. Male reserve head from Giza G 4440, MFA 14.718; courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

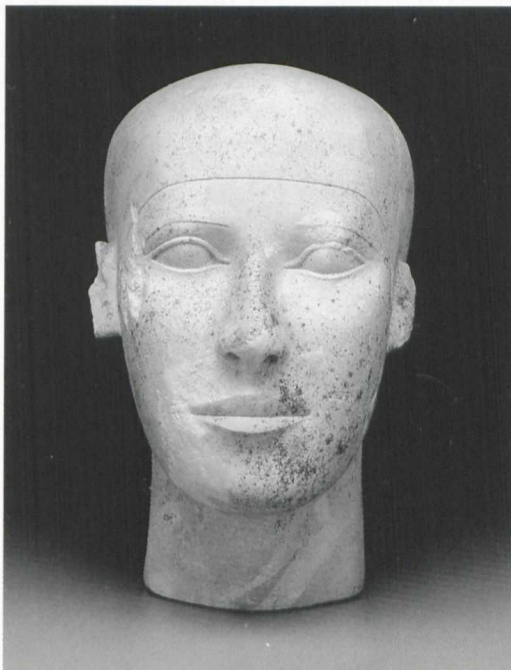Fig. 4. Female reserve head from Giza G 4440, MFA 14.719; courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig. 5. Male reserve head from Giza G 4140, MFA 14.717; courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
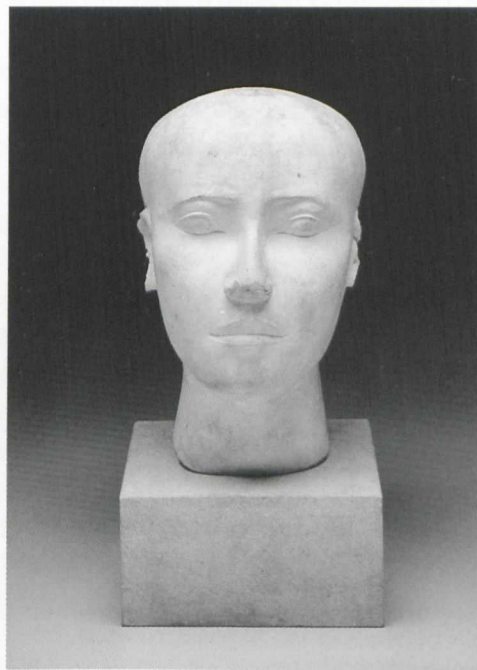
Fig. 6. Female reserve head from Giza G 4540, MFA 21.328; courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
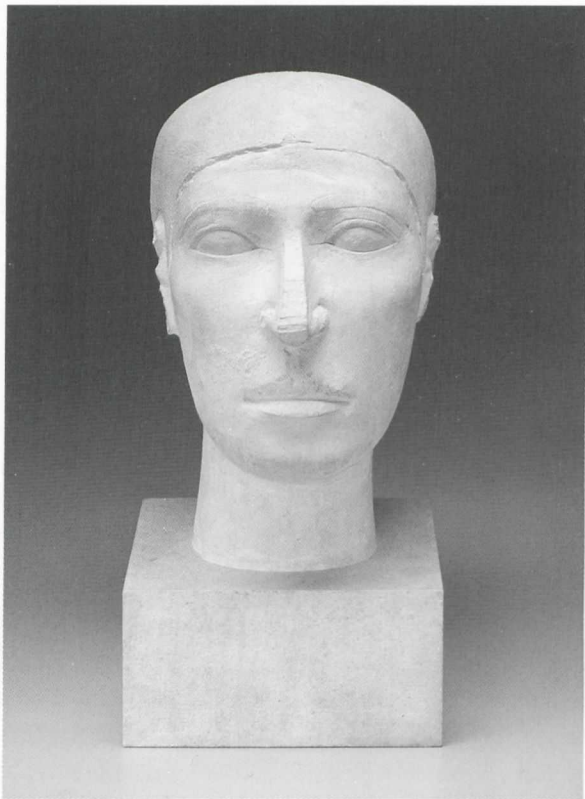
Fig. 7. Reserve head of Nefer, from Giza G 2110 A, MFA 06.1886; courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
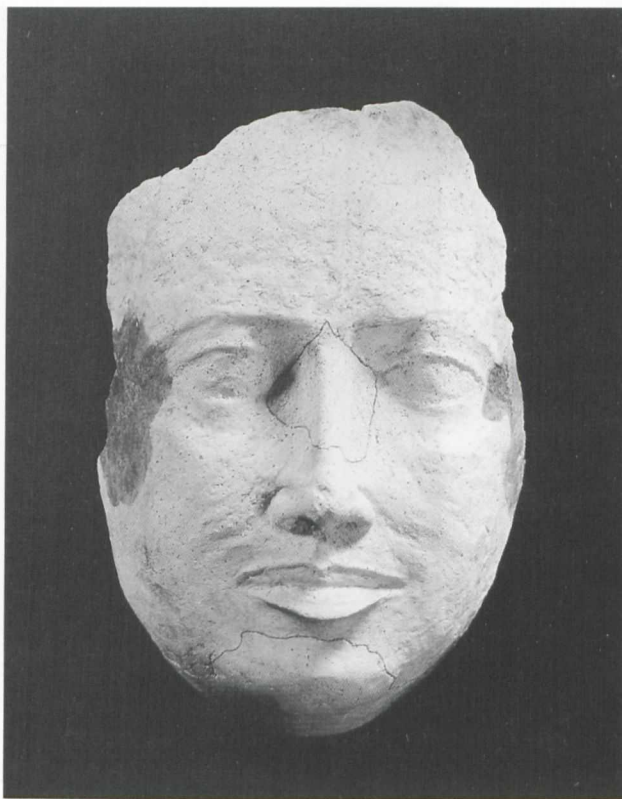
Fig. 8. Plaster mask from Giza G 2037b X, MFA 39.828; courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

portrait head. Such individual features seem to have been of great importance to the men and women who had themselves represented in this way.

What is the nature of the concept of "self" and of the interest in "self-thematization" that possibly underlie these portrait heads? Obviously, the concept of "self" seems to have been very closely identified with the face and its individual appearance. What seems to me very significant in this context is the fact that the first attempts at mummification fall within the same period. There are even direct links between mummification and portraiture.[9] Plaster masks like that shown in fig. 8 have been found in connection with rudimentarily mummified corpses. The "reserve heads" seem to be functionally equivalent to these plaster

[9] The early mummification technique is in fact a remodelling of the body by means of wrapping and resin, cf. D. Spanel, *Through Ancient Eyes: Egyptian Portraiture*, exhibition catalogue (Birmingham, Alabama, 1988), pp. 19, n. 44 and 35, n. 104. For the relationship between mummification and sculpture, cf. Smith, *HESPOK*, pp. 22–30 and Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture. Four Lectures on its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* (New York, 1964), pp. 9–22.

masks. Even if they cannot be considered death masks in the strict sense, because they are not casts made from the face of the deceased,[10] but modelled on the face over a thin layer of linen,[11] it is highly probable that casts did exist as a transitory stage in the fabrication of the Ankh-haf bust and some of the more detailed reserve heads.

Self-thematization, as seen in the reserve heads and mummy masks, must be interpreted as self-preservation. The portrait has no apparent communicative and commemorative meaning. It is not meant as a "sign" but as a "body," to make a somewhat illegitimate use of the Platonic pun on *soma* (body) and *sema* (sign). "Body" and "sign," *soma* and *sema*, can also be regarded as the two foci on which the tomb as a "bifocal" structure is centered. This applies by definition to all tombs, not only to the Egyptian ones. Every tomb fulfils the double and even antagonistic function of hiding the body (the corpse) and of showing a sign of the deceased within the world of the living. In the Egyptian monumental tomb, both these aspects or foci are widely extended. The body focus is expanded into the techniques of mummification and the expenditures of funerary equipment. The sign focus is expanded into monumental architecture and lavish wall decoration. The question arises as to which focus statuary belongs, and the answer can—with regard to the private sculpture of the Old Kingdom—obviously point only to the "body" focus. It is the body, and not the sign, which is extended by this type of tomb sculpture.

Indeed, the total absence of the "semiotic" dimension seems to me of prime importance to the problem of realism. There is a gulf between what may be called "somatic" and "semiotic" realism, one being a technique, the other a language of art. The question is not whether or not an artist is able to render the individual traits of a given physiognomy, but whether or not he chooses to use the individual physiognomy to create a message of general import. In the frame of our investigation, which focuses not on the artist but on the owner patron, the question arises whether or not an individual chooses to convey information about his distinctive traits and qualities in his iconic self-thematization. In Egypt, at this early stage, we are clearly in the realm of "somatic" realism, realism not as a language but as a technique serving functions similar to those of mummification. In the Pyramid Texts, the deceased is occasionally asked "to put on his body" (*wnḫ.k ḏt.k*) the idea obviously being

[10] But even those existed, cf. J.E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1907/8)*, SAE (Cairo, 1909), pl.55, pp. 20, 112–23; Smith, *HESPOK*, p. 27.

[11] Cf. Smith, *HESPOK*, pp. 27–28. For a very remarkable plaster coating of the whole body, cf. Sue D'Auria et al., eds., *Mummies and Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt*, exhibition catalogue (Boston, 1988), cat. no. 23, p. 91f.

that the body may temporarily be re-animated by the returning spirit, the Ka of the dead person.[12] The reserve heads may have served to attract and direct the indwelling Ka by preserving the physiognomy and assuring the recognizability of the subject.

There does not seem to be any functional difference between reserve heads, busts and entire statues. The three forms never occur together and are therefore in complementary distribution, which is indicative of functional equivalence. The statues also belong to the sphere of self-preservation and not self-presentation; this means that they are hermetically blocked and protected against profanation much like the mummified corpse itself.[13] But they are also meant in a way to participate in the mortuary cult. These dual and antagonistic functions of seclusion and participation were realized by a hidden chamber or "serdab" within the mastaba block, communicating with the cult chamber through one or more small slots, thus enabling the statue to smell the incense but to remain unseen and inaccessible.[14]

The statues reveal the same realism as do the reserve heads. Function and style are both identical. Only the treatment of the surface is different, and much of the even more striking realism of the statues (and of the Ankh-haf bust) is due to that treatment. Without the painting, the heads of Rahotep and Nofret,[15] for example, look exactly like the reserve heads. Another famous case is provided by the extraordinary statue in Hildesheim of Prince Hemyunu (fig. 9),[16] the architect of the Great Pyramid, where the realism extends to the bodily features. Here too, the stylistic resemblance to the reserve heads is complete. The statue of Prince Kai, the famous Louvre scribe, dates from the early Fifth Dynasty and comes not from Giza, but from a Saqqara mastaba (fig. 10).[17] His head could not pass for a reserve head, even without the color. The difference affects the sub-structure and is especially noticeable in the expressive rendering of the mouth. The expression of concentrated attention must probably be attributed to the type of the scribe statue and
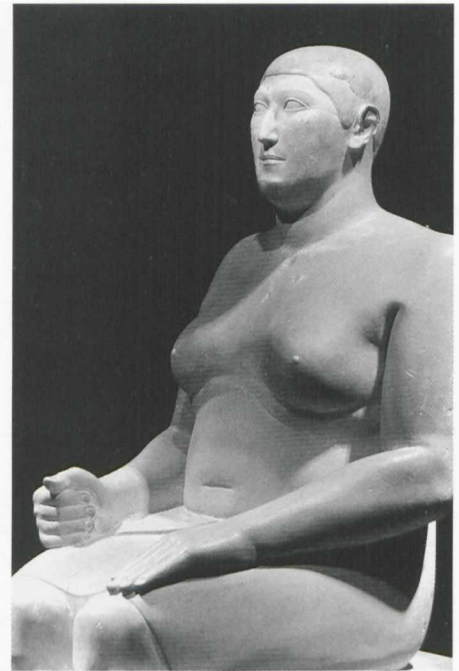

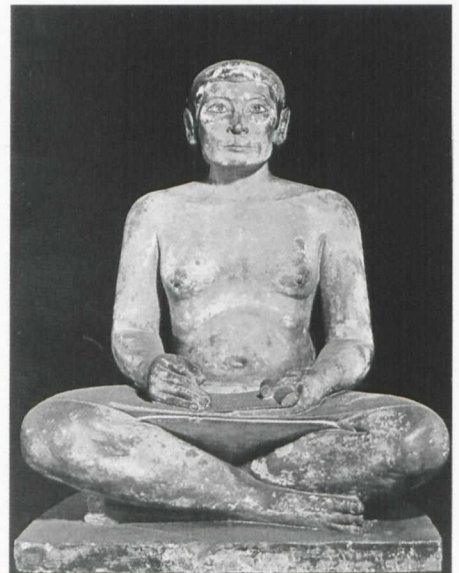Fig. 9. Statue of Hemyunu from Giza G 4000, Hildesheim 1962; courtesy Pelizaeus-Museum, Hildesheim.

Fig. 10. Statue of Prince Kai from Saqqara; Paris, Louvre.

[12] Pyr. 221c; 224d; 1300b/c.

[13] But cf. H. Junker, *Giza* 12 (Vienna, 1955), pp. 124–26. A notable exception of the rule of inaccessibility is shown in *Mummies and Magic*, cat. no.14, fig. 47, pp. 83–87 (statue installed in cult chamber).

[14] E. Brovarski, "Serdab," in *LÄ* 5 (1984), cols. 874–79; *Mummies and Magic*, p. 88.

[15] Cf. Smith, *HESPOK*, pp. 23–27 and recently M. Saleh and H. Sourouzian, *Die Hauptwerke im Ägyptischen Museum in Kairo (Offizieller Katalog)* (Mainz, 1986), cat. 27 (with bibliography).

[16] Junker, *Giza* 1, pp. 153–57; Smith, *HESPOK*, p. 22f.; B. Porter, and R.L.B. Moss,*Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings* III.1, *Memphis*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1975), p. 123.
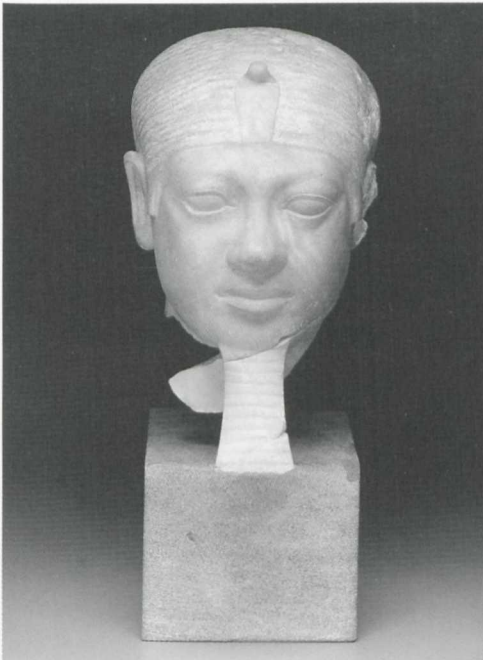
[17] *PM* III.2, p. 458f.

Fig. 11. Head of Mycerinus from Giza, MFA 09.203; courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
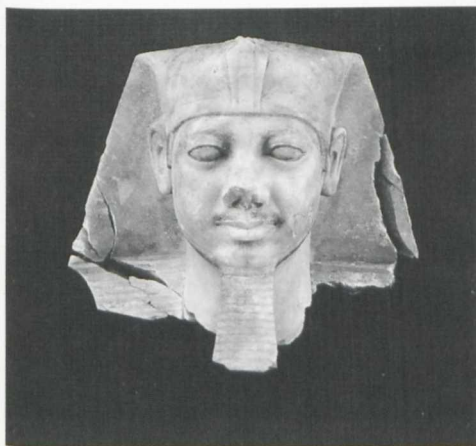

Fig. 12. Head from colossal statue of Mycerinus from Giza, MFA 09.204; courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

the attitude of listening rather than to the individual physiognomy of prince Kai.[18] But the same observation applies to other examples as well, where the tradition of realistic portraiture persists exceptionally in the later part of the Old Kingdom. Generally, the realism now becomes more a matter of depth structure than of surface treatment and can be appreciated much better when the color is gone.[19]

4. ROYAL STATUARY: FROM "SOMATIC" SELF-PRESERVATION TO "SEMIOTIC" SELF-REPRESENTATION

Turning to royal portraiture, we find pieces which seem close enough to the "somatic" or "magic" realism of private portraiture like the heads in Boston of King Mycerinus (figs. 11–12).[20] Although the facial type with its fleshy roundness is different and the insignia of kingship create a difference, the realism seems quite the same here as in the private sculpture. The piece most striking in its realism is perhaps the colossal statue in Boston of Mycerinus, where the much-too-small head, the protruding eyes, the painted moustache (now to be seen only on excavation photographs, cf. fig. 12), and the strangely shaped mouth with its thin upper and heavy lower lip are rendered with unmitigated frankness. But these examples appear to be exceptions that confirm a rule which points in quite a different direction. The individual features of King Mycerinus do not recur on his other sculptures, at least not with such unmitigated directness. The cheekbone, for example, the absence of which gives such a striking expression in conjunction with the protruding eyes on the colossus, is decidedly present on the triads or the group statue in Boston with queen Khamerernebty II, where the mouth, which has such a unique shape on the colossus, is also rendered in quite a conventional way (fig. 13). The face, circular on the colossus, is elongated in the group statue. What could these mitigations mean?[21]

The famous cycle of statues in Cairo of Chephren, which come from the valley temple of his pyramid in Giza,[22] shows a shift in emphasis: it

[18] Cf. B.V. Bothmer, "On Realism in Egyptian Funerary Sculpture of the Old Kingdom," *Expedition* 24 (1982), pp. 27–39, esp. p. 34f. where he confronts, as examples of "realism in mature persons," Rahotep of Medum, the reserve head of Nefer, the bust of Ankh-haf, and the scribe statue of Kai.

[19] Cf. D. Spanel, *Through Ancient Eyes: Egyptian Portraiture*, p. 21, n. 49, with regard to the wooden statue of Senedjemib Mehi in Boston (MFA 13.3466).

[20] Smith, *HESPOK*, pl. 12a: Boston MFA 21.351 (Chephren).

[21] Reisner, as is well known, attributed the difference between unmitigated and mitigated realism to two different schools of art. The unmitigated realism is characteristic of his "Sculptor B," who is essentially a realist, striving for exact portraiture, and the more generalized rendering of the face is characteristic of "Sculptor A," who is "not so much an idealist as the creator of the formula of a type of face which influenced all his work;" cf. Smith, *HESPOK*, p. 35.
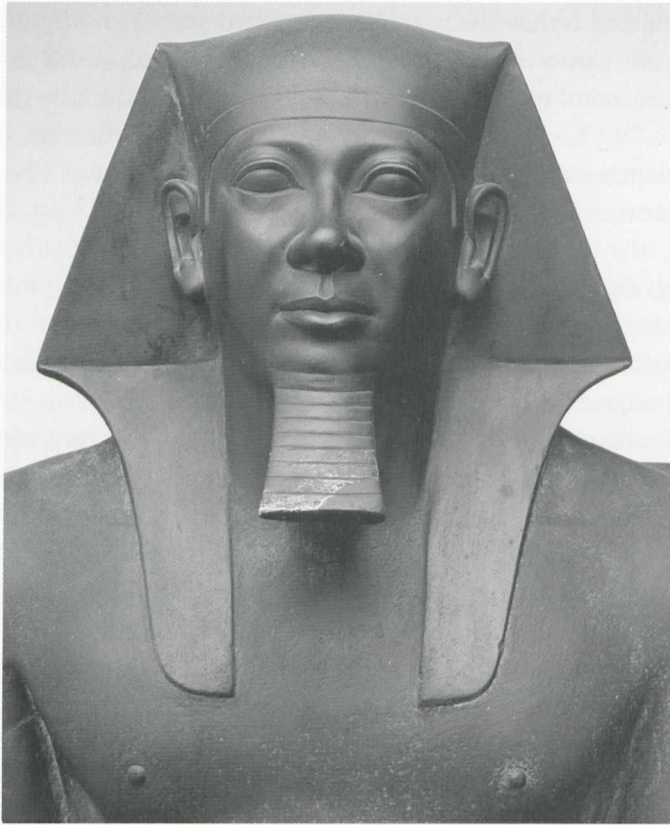
Fig. 13. Detail of pair statue of Mycerinus and Khamerernebty II from Giza, MFA 11.1738; Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
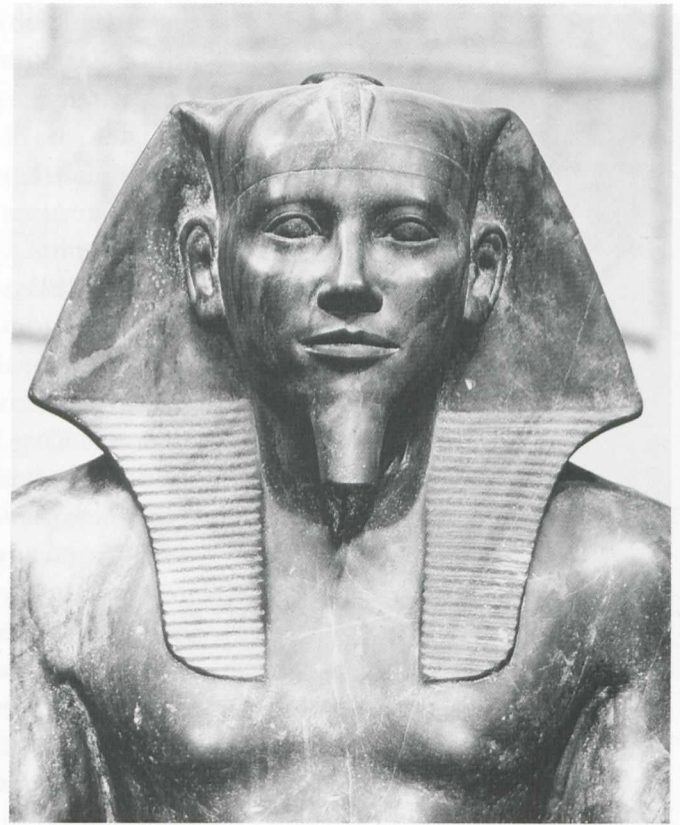
Fig. 14. Detail of statue of Chephren from Giza, Cairo JE 10062; courtesy H.W. Müller.

is now not so much the recognizability of the bodily features that matters, but the expression, the "radiance" of the whole royal appearance (fig. 14). The insignia and symbols of kingship, the nemes headdress, the beard, the falcon, and the throne contribute greatly to this general expression. The material, the very hard diorite, polished to a shine of supernatural radiance, seems to be equally important. The emphasis is shifted towards expressiveness, and what is to be expressed pertains more to the divine institution of kingship than to the individual person of the king: dignity, majesty, divinity, superhuman power. With these statues we are obviously leaving the realm of mere somatic self-preservation and are entering the realm of "semiotic" self-representation. These statues "communicate," conveying an evident message.

These stylistic observations are in conformity with the functions and the architectural installation of the royal statues, which differ

[22] For a possible cultic context cf. D. Arnold, "Rituale und Pyramidentempel," *MDAIK* 33 (1977), pp. 1–14.

widely from private statuary. These statues were not installed in a her-metically closed serdab, but in the temple courtyard, thus exposed to daylight and human view. They belong to the general appearance of the architectural structure, thus functioning in the context of a superordi-nate "text." What we have called the shift from bodily self-preservation to semiotic self-representation corresponds to the shift from closed to open installation. The portrait is here not an extension of the body—*soma*—but of the funerary monument—*sema*, thus functioning within the sphere of the semiotic rather than in the sphere of the somatic.

5. CONVENTIONALISM AND HIEROGLYPHIC GENERALIZATION: PRIVATE PORTRAITURE IN THE FIFTH AND SIXTH DYNASTIES

In private portraiture, however, there is a very substantial change to be observed in the course of the Fifth Dynasty. The realism prevailing in private statuary from the late Third until the early Fifth Dynasty gives way to conformity and conventionalism. The statues of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties look very much alike. The face is rendered in a very summary and generalized way, which is commonly considered "ideal-ized."[23] According to the conventional wisdom, the faces and figures resemble one another so very closely because they all represent a com-mon ideal of beauty.[24] However, the following chapter will demonstrate that such a concept of "idealization" does not apply in this context. We are dealing with something else and should find a different term. In an attempt to characterize more closely what this something else might be, there are three points to be made, all of them very closely related.

1) "Industrialization:" the production of non-royal statuary increases during the course of the Fifth Dynasty by some five to ten thousand percent. What was very high privilege, restricted to members of the royal family during the Fourth Dynasty, now becomes extended to the entire upper class. This increase in production in itself leads to routinization and standardization. Wherever there is industrialization, there is a tendency towards reproduction or serial production, copying the same models over and over again, resulting in *Kunst vom Fließband* (art from the assembly line) as the German Egyptologist D. Wildung aptly but somewhat unkindly called this tradition.[25] Industrial-ized serial production places the emphasis on the reproducibility of the model, thus on its perfection. This leads to a Platonist view of the world, splitting

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[23] This interpretation is too general to need bibliographical references. For a recent exam-ple, cf. Spanel, *Through Ancient Eyes*, who speaks in passing of idealization, the ideal being Maat, but also "beauty" which seems to be quite the same (e.g., on p. 5: "eternally beautiful" and "the model of a sinless life").

[24] Cf. H. Sourouzian, "Schönheitsideal," in *LÄ* 5 (1984), cols. 674–76.

[25] D. Wildung, in H. Altenmüller, and W. Hornbostel, eds., *Das Menschenbild im Alten Ägypten*, exhibition catalogue (Hamburg, 1982), pp. 8–10.

Fig. 15. Pair statue of Demedj and his wife, Henutsen, New York, MMA 51.37; courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.
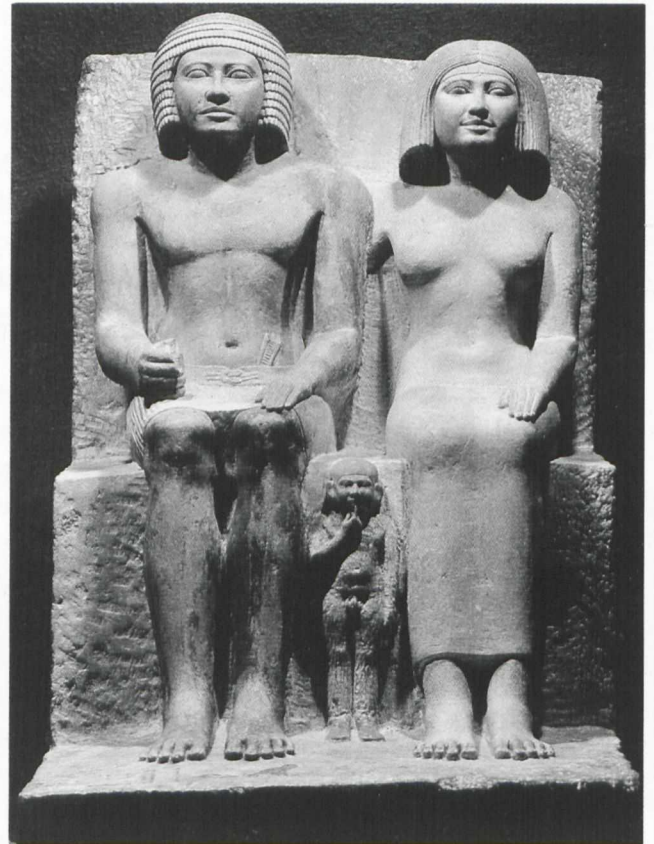
Fig. 16. Pair statue of Kaemheset and family; Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

reality into "types," and "tokens," models and copies, the general and the particular.

2) "Inscription:" it is obvious and perhaps trivial to point out that virtually all Egyptian portrait sculpture bears an inscription giving the name and the titles of its owner, the only exception being the busts and reserve heads of the Fourth Dynasty. There, the great concern for individual facial features seems to ensure identification without an identifying inscription. But the statues, which do bear inscriptions, show the same physiognomic realism, so that the presence or absence of inscriptional identification does not seem to make any difference with regard to style. In the Fifth Dynasty, on the other hand, the inscription tends to be regarded as a sufficient means of individuation and thus makes physiognomic individuation dispensable. Image and inscription cooperate in conveying the same message, but "on different wavelengths: [as] two types of supporting communication," to quote W.K. Simpson.

3) "Hieroglyphicity:" the third point has to do not with just the presence, but with the nature of hieroglyphic writing. The inscriptions which generally accompany Egyptian statues do not simply make resemblance dispensable as a means of identification. They also transform the image itself. They are not external to the image, belonging to a different medium as cuneiform or Greek

characters would, but internal in the sense that they are images themselves, exactly as the image itself functions as a hieroglyph. There is no clear-cut line of demarcation between hieroglyphic writing and representational art.[26] The images function in the context of hieroglyphic writing as "determinatives." This intimate interrelation between art and writing has been amply and convincingly demonstrated by Henry G. Fischer in many of his writings.[27]

As images, hieroglyphs refer not only to language, as every script does, but also to things. They are understood to be the "models" of these things, whether natural or artificial. Thus, "industrialization" and "hieroglyphicity" point towards the same platonic view of reality. In the context of Egyptian thought, this platonic world view finds its clearest expression in the figure and the theology of the Memphite god Ptah, who is the creator of the world and at the same time the patron of artisans and craftsmen. He is believed to have created the world, not with his hands, but with his "heart," that is, by planning, designing, and conceptualizing.[28] He conceived the models or the "generative grammar" generating all the "well-formed" elements that constitute reality. These may be compared to "ideas" in the platonic sense, but not to "ideals." A hieroglyph is a generalized formula, referring to a norm. Ideals never refer to norms, but to goals which on earth are only approximately attainable.[29] The term "idealization" is understood to refer not to "ideas," though, but to "ideals." This difference, which to me seems rather important, tends to be constantly blurred by our terminology. Thus I propose to use the term "generalization" for what we observe as a tendency in Old Kingdom private portraiture and to reserve the term "idealization" for artistic traditions, which are in fact oriented by ideals.

[26] This principle has been explained in Assmann, "Hierotaxis. Textkonstitution und Bildkomposition in der altägyptischen Kunst und Literatur," in J. Osing, and G. Dreyer, eds., *Form und Mass: Beiträge zur Literatur, Sprache und Kunst* (Wiesbaden, 1987), pp. 18–41. The concept of "hierotaxis" which I attempt to introduce in that article is related to what here is called "hieroglyphicity" and tries to explain certain characteristics of Egyptian art that are commonly (within the theory of "aspective") held to be unconscious cognitive preconditions as elements of a very consciously achieved "language of art."

[27] Cf. especially H.G. Fischer, *L'écriture et l'art de l'égypte ancienne. Quatre leçons sur la paléographie et l'épigraphie pharaoniques*, Collège de France, Essais et Conférences (Paris, 1986).

[28] Cf. J.P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt. The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, Yale Egyptological Studies 2 (New Haven, 1988).

[29] The Kantian distinction between *Normalidee* and *Vernunftidee* is relevant here. The representation of the *Normalidee* is perfect, if only it does not contradict any condition of beauty. The *Normalidee* is the quintessence of correctness, not of beauty. Cf. H.G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen, 1960), p. 44f.

6. Idealization: art and beauty in the late Eighteenth Dynasty

A brief chapter on what I take to be such an "idealizing" style in Egyptian art may make this more clear. This brings us back to queen Nefertiti, whose statuary marks the very apex of this stylistic moment. The statues of Nefertiti may be regarded as love-poems in stone. Their most conspicuous features, the long neck, the slim waist, the broad hips and heavy thighs, recur in the love-poems of the age; they recur also in other statues and evidently pertain to the ideal of beauty of that time rather than to the individual appearance of Nefertiti.[30]

There is a very refined sensuousness and an almost erotic grace and radiance in the art of this period, an expression of "luxe, calme et volupté," which is totally absent from the sober, dry and clear-cut features from the Old Kingdom that are characteristic of Egyptian art in general. This artistic sensuousness, pointing to an ideal of tenderness, grace and beauty, starts in the time of Amenophis III and—though at first violently opposed by the almost expressionist and caricaturistic outbursts of the revolutionary style—dominates the whole of Amarna and post-Amarna art well into the reign of Haremhab. It is during this short period that Egyptian art comes closest to Greek art, as seen, for example, in the head of an unknown official in Cairo, shown in fig. 17. The common element of these two traditions is the tendency to idealize, which in Greek art is characteristic especially of the late archaic period. In the context of Egyptian art, it is to be regarded as a quite exceptional episode, a temporary emancipation from and the very opposite of the hieroglyphic formula.

But is Amarna really "idealized" rather than "realistic"? How is one to account for the many plaster casts, masks and models which have been found in the workshop of the sculptor Thutmose?[31] All this testifies to a keen interest in the accidental traits of a living face, in "nature." This goes well with a realistic or "naturalistic" art, but not with an "idealized" one. Even the royal heads seem close to the physical form. Nevertheless this is not inconsistent with what I understand by idealization. The sketches found in the house of the sculptor Thutmose prove beyond a doubt that in Amarna the living face in its individual form is the object of plastic representation, and not a super-individual

Fig. 17. Head of an unknown official; Egyptian Museum, Cairo CG 849.

Fig. 18. The wife of Nakhtmin; Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 31629; courtesy Eva Hofmann.

[30] In my article "Ikonographie der Schönheit im alten Ägypten," in Th. Stemmler, ed., *Schöne Frauen, schöne Männer. Literarische Schönheitsbeschreibungen,* 2. Kolloquium der Forschungsstelle für europäische Literatur des Mittelalters (Mannheim, 1988), pp. 13–32, I elaborated on this comparison between plastic arts and love poetry in the New Kingdom in greater detail.

[31] Cf. G. Roeder, "Lebensgroße Tonmodelle aus einer altägyptischen Bildhauerwerkstatt," *Jahrbuch der Preußischen Kunstsammlungen* (1941) pp. 145–70.

ideal of beauty. We must not forget, however, that these finds illustrate the starting point and intermediate stages, and not the final product of the artistic process. They show that this process starts from "nature" and not from preconceived ideas and point to the well known "perceptual" rather than "conceptual" character of Amarna art. It is this perceptual character that makes this artistic movement so exceptional in the context of Egyptian art, which is generally a conceptual art par excellence. But perception is exactly what "beauty" means. Beauty is something to be perceived and not conceived. It is a sensual quality in that it addresses the senses. Thus, idealization—understood as an ideal of beauty to be aimed for—is a stylistic tendency which is well in keeping with a perceptually oriented art.

But there is still another point to be made concerning beauty. Beauty, as an ideal of iconic self-representation, is not only to be distinguished from "hieroglyphic normality" but also from the concept of "perfection," of a spotless outward appearance that distinguishes the literate upper class, the "literatocracy," from the hard-working lower classes. In 1970, Kent Weeks clearly showed how, in wall decoration of private tombs, especially in the Old Kingdom, certain deviations from the normal type of physical appearance serve as indicators of social rank and professional occupation.[32] They are *déformations professionelles*. In order to stress the typical character of these features, Weeks coined the term "personification" as opposed to "individuation." In all these seemingly individualizing portrayals of bodily anomalies, we are dealing in fact with personification, because these features are indicative of class and thus of the social, not of the individual, self. Thus body hair, beards, stubble, baldness, paunchiness, etc., seem to be associated with people, "who were forced by their work to stay away from home for a while," i.e., herdsmen, fishermen, field hands and, less frequently, boatmen, bakers, and netters of birds. Incidentally, the same sense of humor with regard to the physical imperfections of the lower classes is displayed in the famous "Satire of the trades," a Middle Kingdom classic which, apart from being a favorite text itself, has stimulated a great many imitations.[33] Beauty, in the sense of spotless outward perfection, is—and has always been—a prerogative of the leisure class.

The representations of craftsmen, peasants, shepherds, and so forth in the tombs of all periods do not belong to "portraiture" in the sense of

[32] Kent Weeks, *The Anatomical Knowledge of the Ancient Egyptians and the Representation of the Human Figure in Egyptian Art*, Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1970.
[33] Cf. P. Seibert, *Die Charakteristik. Untersuchungen zu einer altägyptischen Sprechsitte und ihren Ausprägungen in Folklore und Literatur*, Äg. Abh. 17 (Wiesbaden, 1967).

our definition, because they are no self-thematizations. Had these people been in a position to have themselves represented in a statue or stela or tomb wall of their own, they would no doubt have chosen different attire. This speculation is not altogether theoretical; there are plenty of stelae and even tombs of craftsmen and artisans preserved in Egypt, the best known being the tombs of Deir el Medinah. Everywhere, the owner appears in the attire and makeup of the literate official, the scribe with clean hands and white garments, who—in the satirical texts mentioned above—looks down with considerable disdain and derision on the working classes of which the tomb owner is himself a member.

The opposite of these bodily imperfections is not beauty, however, but perfection. Beauty and perfection are of course closely related, but not synonymous. There is a difference, which might not be irrelevant in the context of this discussion. Perfection is the *degré zero* in the representation of the human figure. It is merely the absence of any distinguishing abnormalities like baldness, paunchiness, etc. Even beauty may appear as a deviation from the norm. This is quite frequently the case with, for example, the representations of female musicians and dancers in New Kingdom tombs. The bodily features of these girls deviate from the overslim female norm. In self-thematization, this alluring rendering of breasts, waist, hips, and thighs would be impossible. But it is exactly this characterization of beauty that becomes the norm in Amarna art.[34]

In representational art, bodily perfection may be just the absence of any distinguishing peculiarities, impressed upon the body by hard labor and/or extended absence from home. But in life, it is much more than just a *degré zero*: it is a state which is difficult to achieve and which signifies something. The maintenance of a perfect outward appearance must have been a very exacting task which only the members of the upper classes could fulfill, disposing of their time so as to meet the requirements which the extensive devices of Egyptian cosmetics imposed on a person, whether male or female. It is common in dealing with ancient Egyptian portraiture to complain of the uniformity of appearance and the absence of individuality, to the extent of denying these statues the character of portraiture altogether. It is highly probable, however, that this uniformity was a fact of life, and not only of art. Cosmetics as practised in ancient Egypt was an art in itself, applied to the body and giving it the uniformity of perfection. Epilation, hair dressing, the wearing of wigs, eye makeup, dress and other demanding operations collaborated in

[34] Cf. also J.R. Harris, "The Cult of Feminine Beauty in Ancient Egypt," *Apollo* 77 (July, 1962), pp. 355–59.

transforming the individual appearance of a person into something super-individual and uniform to a degree where people closely resembled each other, and even the sexes may have been hard to distinguish. Cosmetics, to use Kent Weeks' term, is a device of "personification." Many of the tendencies and characteristics typical of Egyptian art—and especially of portraiture—pertain to the sphere of what Erving Goffman called "the presentation of self in everyday life." In this sphere, personification, and not individuation, is the norm.

Beauty is something more than perfection. It transcends the standard, however high, of physical spotlessness which the cosmetic devices of personification can attain. It is an enhancement of perfection in the direction of a specific ideal. It is also again a matter of emphasis: idealization emphasizes certain features, placing them in the foreground, whereas perfection is a state of perfect balance. While the general concept of perfection, apart from some changes of fashion, remains constant throughout the phases of Egyptian art and history, beauty as a form of sculptural self-thematization appears only during a short period.

With these distinctions in mind, we are now in a position better to evaluate the achievement of late Old Kingdom portraiture. It has now become evident that the uniform character of private statuary from the latter parts of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties has nothing to do with an ideal of beauty that became generally de rigueur during those centuries. We have also seen that, besides the conformist and uniformist tendencies of industrialization and "hieroglyphization" prevailing in art, there is a third tendency of equally uniformist influence, prevailing not in art, but in life, namely, cosmetics. This tendency cannot be dismissed in dealing with portraiture. The face we show to our neighbors even in everyday life is already a form of self-thematization, of personification, a "social mask."[35] Beautiful princess Nofret may have painted her face every morning exactly as the painter did in painting her Meidum statue.

7. Expressive Realism: Middle Kingdom portraiture

With the end of the Old Kingdom, tomb sculpture disappears. When it reappears some two hundred years later in the Middle Kingdom, it looks at first—at least in the north—very much as it did in the late Sixth Dynasty. This may be illustrated by comparing the Sixth Dynasty statue in Boston of Tjeteti[36] with the Twelfth Dynasty statue in New York of Sesostrisankh (figs. 19–20).[37] Towards the end of the Old Kingdom,

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[35] Cf. E.H. Gombrich, "The Mask and the Face," in E.H. Gombrich, J. Hochberg, and M. Black, *Art, Perception, Reality* (Baltimore, 1972), pp. 1–46.
[36] *PM* III.2, p. 566.

portraits acquire a certain expressiveness, concentrated in the over-sized eyes. This concentration of emphasis destroys the tradition of Old Kingdom sculpture. Due to the extreme traditionalism typical of the Lower Egyptian schools, the same traits reappear in the early Middle Kingdom. But a very different style developed in the south, one which soon prevailed all over Egypt: The statues which Sarenput II, nomarch of Elephantine, had set up in the sanctuary of Heqaib, a deified predecessor in the function of nomarch, are only a generation later than the statue of Sesostrisankh. One shows his father Khema (fig. 21), the other himself (fig. 22).[38] In the strict sense of our definition, only Sarenput's own statues can be considered as "self-thematization." The statue of his father is ordered by someone else (the son) and made from memory. This may account for the very remarkable difference between the two.[39] The statue of Khema is very close to a "hieroglyphic" representation in its very general and summarized features. The statue of Sarenput II is the complete opposite in its richness of detail, its realism, and its expression of power, wealth and dignity. Both are much closer to royal traditions of portraiture in the Old Kingdom than to private statuary. This is partly due to iconography,—they wear the royal kilt—partly to the material, dark and polished hard stone, and partly to style, the expression of dignity and power. In a sense, these characteristics apply to all Middle Kingdom portraiture. The sharp line of demarcation which in the Old Kingdom separates royal from private portraiture seems blurred in the Middle Kingdom. The use of polished hard stone such as diorite, granite, schist, and quartzite becomes the rule with private statuary. The most striking innovation is the creation of new types of private statuary, which in a most felicitous way combine the organic and the geometric elements of Egyptian sculpture: the coat statue and the block statue.[40]

These very fundamental stylistic changes are closely correlated to correspondent changes in function and architectural setting. With the end of the Old Kingdom, the serdab disappears. Private portraiture now emerges from the hermetically concealed sphere of the "body" and enters the sphere of the "sign," the monument. It no longer serves as a device for preservation, but rather for presentation of self. Instead of
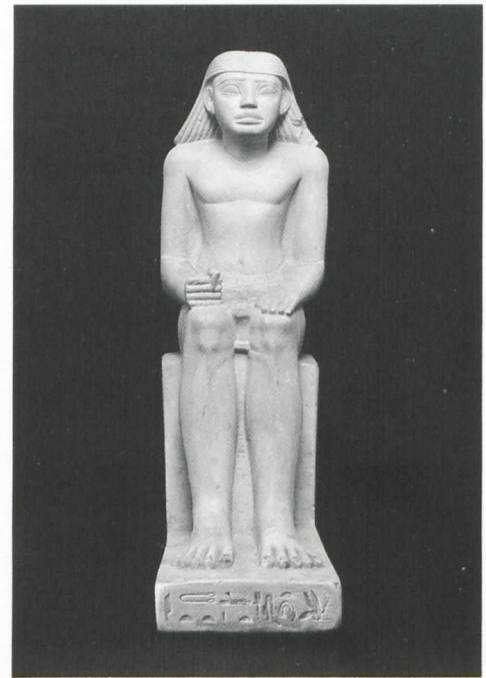

Fig. 19. Statue of Tjeteti, MFA 24.605; courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig. 20. Detail of statue of Sesostrisankh, MMA 33.1.2; courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.

[37] W.C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt* I (New York, 1953), p. 207, fig. 124.

[38] F. Junge, "Die Provinzialkunst des Mittleren Reiches in Elephantine," in L. Habachi, *The Sanctuary of Heqaib*, Elephantine IV, AV 33 (Mainz, 1985), pp. 117–39.

[39] Ibid.

[40] In my article "Die Gestalt der Zeit in der ägyptischen Kunst," in J. Assmann, and G. Burkard, eds., *5000 Jahre Ägypten. Genese und Permanenz pharaonischer Kunst* (Nussloch bei Heidelberg, 1983), pp. 3–32, I dealt with the distinction between the iconic and the aniconic components of Egyptian images.
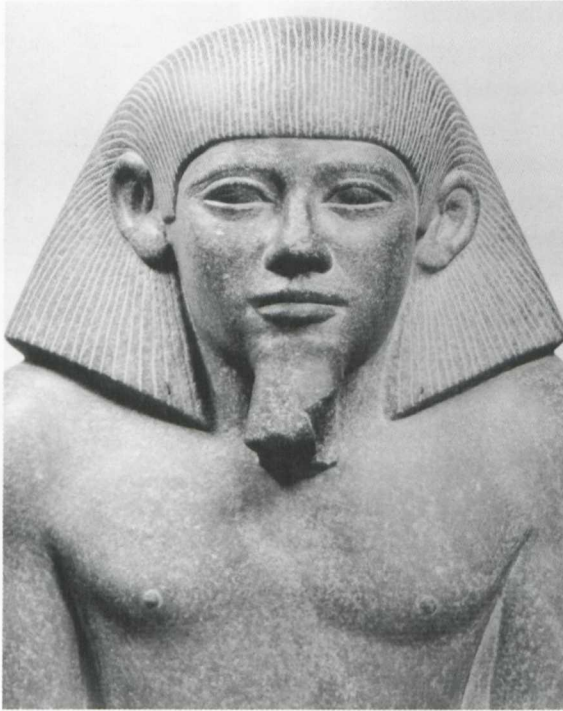
Fig. 21. Detail of statue of Khema from Aswan, no. 15; from L. Habachi, *The Sanctuary of Heqaib* (Mainz, 1985), pl. 42.
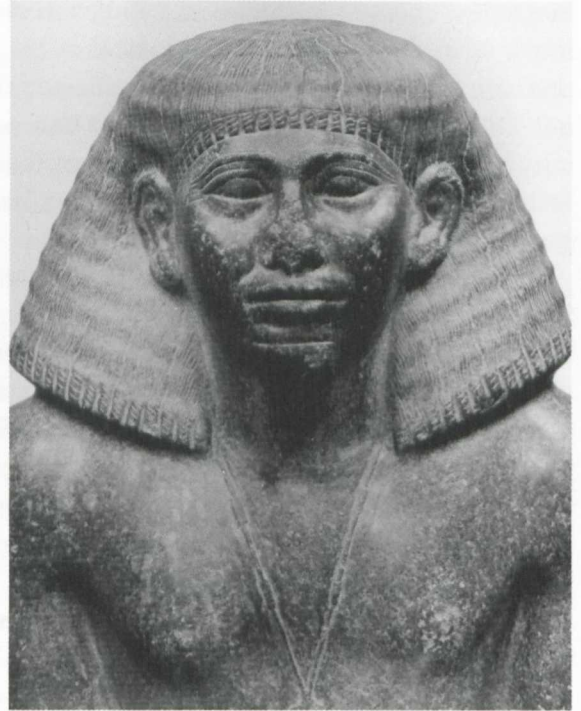
Fig. 22. Detail of statue of Sarenput II from Aswan, no. 13; from L. Habachi, *The Sanctuary of Heqaib* (Mainz, 1985), pl. 33.

providing a hidden serdab for the statue, the tomb now leads through a sequence of axially arranged rooms to a chapel where the statue occupies a place and fulfills a function comparable to cult images in temples. From the Middle Kingdom onwards, the temple also becomes a setting for private statuary.[41] The invention of the cube statue seems closely to correspond to this new function. These are new contents of self-thematization which are reflected in stylistic developments.

Yet the most decisive factor accounting for these changes in the forms and contexts of sculptural self-thematization is, in my opinion, that during this period the very concept of "self" underwent its most fundamental transformation in the creation—or the discovery—of "inner man," of the interior sphere of personality. This makes its appearance in the texts of the period in quite a new vocabulary with concepts like "character," "virtue," "nature," "knowledge," "insight," "silence," "self-control," etc., and above all, the "heart" as the seat of virtue and character.[42] Since the inscriptional genre of self-thematization, the

[41] H. Kayser, *Die Tempelstatuen ägyptischer Privatleute im Mittleren und Neuen Reich* (Heidelberg, 1936); cf. W.K. Simpson, *JEA* 68 (1982), pp. 266–271, esp. p. 267 for further references.

biography, changes in the Middle Kingdom almost beyond recognition, it would have been most paradoxical if the sculptural genre of self-thematization, the portraiture, had remained the same. Obviously, it did not. On the contrary, it is precisely this new notion of an "inner personality" which in my opinion best explains the evolution to be observed in Middle Kingdom portraiture. This may best be illustrated by some royal portraits of the period.

The statue in Cairo of Sesostris II is contemporary with the statue of Sarenput II (fig. 22), nomarch of Elephantine, and shows precisely the same serene energy and richness of detailed and "realistic" characterization. But this characterization does not necessarily point in the direction of what we have called "inner personality." There is nothing peculiarly psychological in this kind of realism. One generation later, however, with his son Sesostris III, an evolution begins towards psychological expressiveness, one which has always and rightly been regarded as the absolute apex of Egyptian portraiture.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the portraits of Sesostris III (and about one hundred of them are attested) is the rendering of the eyes, which appear to be actually looking (figs. 23–24). In Egyptian sculpture generally, the eyes almost never show a specific expression. It would be quite inadequate to read into them someting like an "empty gaze" or "stare towards eternity," for example. They are simply not looking or gazing or staring at all, but indeterminate. They are not indicative of any eye contact with an object or a person, let alone an implied spectator. An analogous and simpler case is provided by posture. As a general rule, Egyptian statuary never renders specific postures as they might be assumed in normal life. The way sculpted figures stand or sit or squat cannot be characterized as "relaxed" or "strained" or "erect," for example. This kind of specification is quite simply not intended in the framework of Egyptian art and must not be read into it. Instead of concrete specification, we get abstraction. Postures abstract from specific attitudes, eyes abstract from specific looks (e.g., glance, gaze).[43] Precisely this rule was broken in the portraiture of Sesostris III. Here, a specific look was quite unmistakably intended, a look as it normally occurs in life when there is eye contact. These eyes do establish contact. "Jamais," writes J. Vandier, "semble-t-il, un sculpteur égyptien n'a rendu les yeux et le regard d'un homme avec autant de vérité et de naturel."[44] The

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[42] Cf. Assmann, "Individuum und Person. Zur Geschichte des Herzens im Alten Ägypten," in G. Boehm and E. Rudolph, eds., *Individuum: Probleme der Individualität in Kunst, Philosophie und Wissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1994), pp. 185–220.
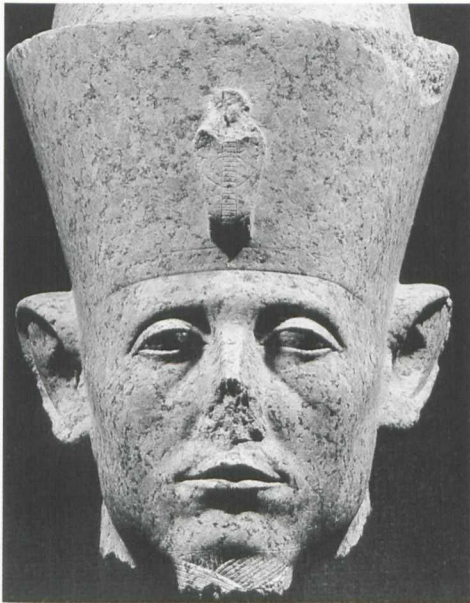
[43] Cf. Assmann, *Hierotaxis*.
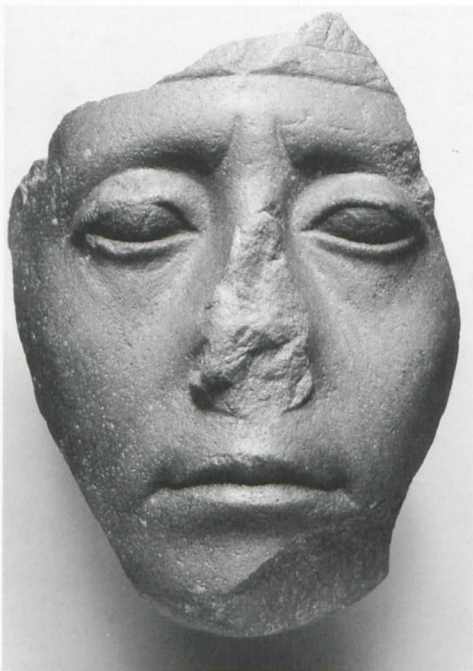
Fig. 23. Head of Sesostris III; Luxor J 34.

Fig. 24. Face of Sesostris III, MMA 26.7.1394; courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.

decisive features to achieve this fidelity to nature are the rendering of the eyelids, the modelling of the cheekbones and, perhaps most of all, the absence of any of the cosmetic treatment that was usually administered to the eyes and eyebrows. Again we are reminded of the fact that the suppression of individuality applies to life itself and not only to art. Similar remarks could be made concerning the mouth. Here, too, hieroglyphic abstraction of any specific expression is abandoned in favour of a very naturalistic rendering of that play of muscles which gives a mouth expression and attitude.

Expression changes with genre. The head shown in fig. 23, found in Karnak and on exhibit in the Luxor Museum, belongs to a colossal statue. In keeping with these far larger-than-life dimensions, the face expresses strength, power, energy, resolve, and enterprise. Even more than with genre and dimension, expression changes and intensifies with time. Not only eyes and mouth, but in fact the whole physiognomy grows more and more expressive. These faces obviously carry a certain message, although one has to be very careful in deciphering it in order not to read too much into it. There are certain notions, though, that reappear in almost every description. This is how Janine Bourriau, in her catalogue of the Cambridge exhibition on the Middle Kingdom, describes and "reads" the facial form: "These faces show a deepening expression of sorrow and disdain. We can study the physiognomy of these kings, assured that we are looking at individual men, not an idealized image of kingship. We can see the family resemblance and observe the burden of being pharaoh etching its way into their faces."[45] This almost unanimous response[46] to the portraiture of Sesostris III must be interpreted as a part of its *Wirkungsgeschichte* in the sense of H.G. Gadamer:[47] it tells us something about the semantic potentialities of a

[44] J. Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne* III (Paris, 1958), p. 184.

[45] J. Bourriau, *Pharaohs and Mortals. Egyptian Art in the Middle Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 37.

[46] The only exception seems to be D. Wildung, *Sesostris und Amenemhet. Ägypten im Mittleren Reich* (Munich, 1984), p. 203, who prefers to relate the portraits of Sesostris III not to wisdom literature, but to the cycle of hymns redacted in the name of that king and preserved on a papyrus from Kahun. He rejects accordingly all associations of "alleged tragedy and melancholy" and reads in these faces only "power politics, resoluteness and untroubled self-assurance." But this polarity is artificial. No one sees Hamlet in Sesostris III. The expression of sorrow and care is not meant as a symptom of melancholy, but as a sign of political responsibility, cf. i.a., Simpson, *JEA* 68 (1982), p. 270, who links the "aging, concerned and caring features" of the portraits with the literary image of the "Good Shepherd."

[47] H.G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*; the term appears in the English translation (*Truth and Method*) as "effective history," which seems somewhat awkward in comparison to the perfectly lucid German term.

text (here an iconic text) which discloses its meaning only in the historical process of reading.

This evolution reaches its apex with the Metropolitan Museum fragment (fig. 24). Here, the power and strength, resolve and energy characteristic of the earlier portraits has turned into bitterness, disillusionment, sorrow and solitude. Again, we seem to be looking at the face of timeless man and experience the same feeling of affinity as we did with the face of prince Ankh-haf at the outset of this investigation. The difference, however, is crucial. It is the specific expressiveness of the one, and the unexpressive "neutrality," the zero expression of the other, that makes all the difference. Both display realism. The early realism we had called a "magic realism," born from concern for the preservation of the bodily surface-structure. The later realism might be termed "expressive realism" born from concern for the visualization of inward personality or depth structure. Expressiveness, with regard to the facial features of Sesostris III as they are displayed in the Louvre fragment, can only refer to inward qualities and attitudes, to an inner personality.

It is customary to compare these heads to a well-known piece of literature, in fact one of the great classics in ancient Egypt. the "Instructions of King Amenemhet I," where bitterness, disillusionment and solitude are communicated verbally:

> Trust not a brother, know not a friend,
> make no intimates, it is worthless.
> When you lie down, guard your heart yourself,
> for no man has adherents on the day of woe.
> I gave to the beggar, I raised the orphan,
> I gave success to the poor as to the wealthy;
> but he who ate my food raised opposition;
> he to whom I gave my trust used it to plot.[48]

As is generally assumed, King Amenemhet I fell victim to a harem conspiracy, but the extreme case of a murdered king cannot account for a general attitude which finds its expression not only on hundreds of royal portraits, but also, as will be shown below, on the faces of their contemporaries as well. The specific wisdom of Amenemhet, stressing distrust, is just one element in a general wave of pessimism and skepticism characteristic of the literature of this age.

At the bottom of this pessimism, which appears to be the very hallmark of the Middle Kingdom, is the conviction that man is innately unreliable. This unreliability consists in what the Vedic tradition calls

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[48] Translation: M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* I (Berkeley, 1973), p. 136; cf. E. Blumenthal, "Die Lehre des Königs Amenemhet" (first part), *ZÄS* 111 (1984), pp. 85–107; (second part), *ZÄS* 112 (1985), pp. 104–15. This passage: *ZÄS* 111 (1984), p. 94.

"the law of the fishes," under which the smaller ones are invariably eaten by the bigger ones. "When three men travel on the road," we read in an Egyptian text, "only two are found. For the greater number kills the lesser."[49] Thomas Hobbes took this to be the natural state (*status naturalis*) of man: man as man's wolf (*homo homini lupus*) living in an incessant and indiscriminate war (*bellum omnia contra omnes*). As is well known, Hobbes exposes his pessimistic anthropology as a plea for strong and authoritarian government, laying the theoretical foundations for absolutism.[50] There might be a general correlation of absolutism and pessimistic anthropology which also applies to the Middle Kingdom. The concept of kingship at this time, the image of the Good Shepherd, is based on the conviction that the wolfish nature of man requires a strong and resolute government in order to protect the weak and to establish and maintain justice.

Expressive realism subsides into the reign of Amenemhet III, in whose portraits the rendering of the mouth is especially remarkable. Even more importantly, it extends to private sculpture, too. The statue shown in fig. 26 is from the sanctuary of Heqaib in Elephantine and was made in the reign of Sesostris III. The resemblance to the royal portrait (fig. 25) is so striking that Friedrich Junge went as far as to speak of a "borrowed personality."[51] This, however, seems rather paradoxical. We have become acquainted with the Egyptian ways of suppressing individuality, both in life and in art, applied to outward appearance. It is inner personality, however, that is usually identified with "individuality." Yet this is somewhat hasty; there are no compelling reasons why inner personality should not be as socially shaped and determined as outward appearance. On the contrary: virtues, values and axioms which shape an inner personality are usually group-specific; they are shared by all members of a class or community. An expressive realism, which strives at visually revealing and communicating inward personality, tends to uniformity in the same measure as this inner personality is socially shaped. Features expressive of inner qualities or attitudes like frowning, half-closed eyelids, sunken eyes, lowered lips, etc., soon become fixed formulas or clichés—"pathos formulas" in the sense of Aby Warburg[52]—in the language of sculptural self-thematization which remained in use into

[49] *Admonitions.* I cannot quite understand how Miriam Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies,* OBO 120 (Fribourg, 1992), p. 46f., can be certain that "the thoroughly negative view that "die Großen fressen die Kleinen" did not exist in ancient Egypt."

[50] Cf. e.g., L. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: Its Basis and its Genesis* (Chicago, 1952).

[51] Junge, "Die Provinzialkunst des Mittleren Reiches," p. 122.

Fig. 25. Head of Sesostris III, Berlin; after K. Lange, *Sesostris* (Munich, 1954), fig. 23.
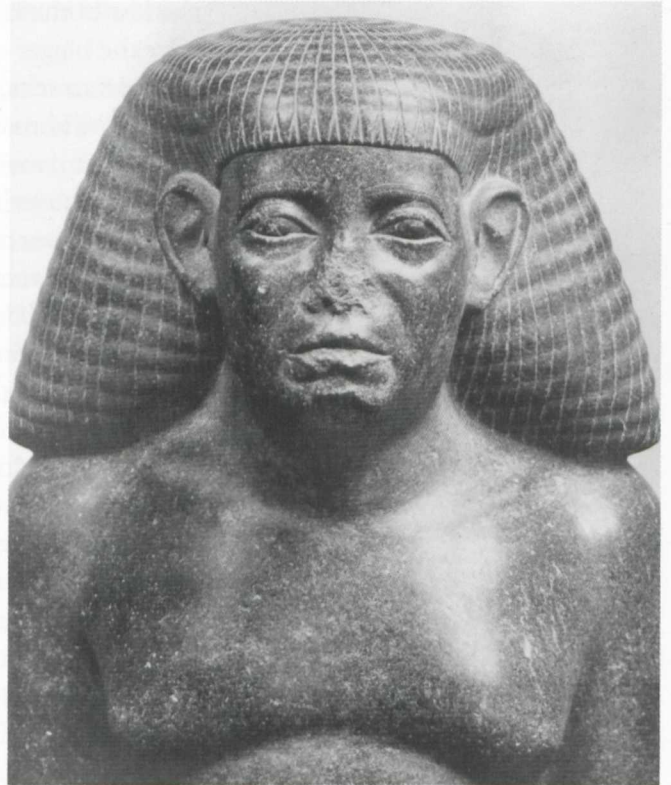
Fig. 26. Detail of statue of Heqaib from Aswan, no. 17; from L. Habachi, *The Sanctuary of Heqaib* (Mainz, 1985), pl. 53.

the following Dynasty. We are dealing here with the first phase of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of royal portraiture.

What is perhaps more astonishing is that this sculptural language fell into complete disuse with the emergence of the New Kingdom. Given the notorious traditionalism of the Egyptian civilization, it is quite incredible that this tradition of artistic self-thematization should have been so completely lost and forgotten as it indeed must have been. For in the Eighteenth Dynasty, even the scribe statues of wise men look young and beautiful, just as in the late Middle Kingdom every one looked wise and sorrowful. In one of his well known Cairo statues, Amenophis, son of Hapu, wanted himself to be represented as a "sage;" he, therefore, had to have recourse to a model of the late Twelfth Dynasty, feeling more ready to identify himself with this quotation from another epoch than with the language of contemporary art.[53] The reuse

[52] Cf. L. Giuliani, *Bildnis und Botschaft: Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Bildniskunst der römischen Republik*, who uses this term in his "hermeneutic reading" of Roman portraiture, which comes very close to what is here understood by "expressive realism."

of Middle Kingdom sculpture soon became the great fashion of the Ramesside kings. Nevertheless, its style could not be imitated,[54] any more than in literature, where the Middle Kingdom classics were copied but not imitated. Both the verbal language and the language of art of the Middle Kingdom became dead languages.

There was, however, a revival. In the Late Period, one thousand years after the end of the Middle Kingdom, its artistic language became revitalized. The formulas expressive of inner life, the modelling of eyes and mouth in particular, again became a living language, coinciding with a flourishing of biographical literature.[55] The Late Period may therefore be regarded as the heyday of Egyptian verbal and sculptural self-thematization.

8. INDIVIDUATION AND IMMORTALITY

We started with the observation that Egyptian art is in the highest degree "self thematizing." This concern that the "self" be preserved and/or presented in inscriptional and sculptural forms determines not

[53] Sylvia Schoske "Historisches Bewußtsein in der ägyptischen Kunst," *MJbK* 38 (1987), pp. 7–26, goes so far as to assume that Amenophis in fact usurped a statue of the late Middle Kingdom. This observation does not meet with universal approval, though, and the possibility that the statue is in fact a work of the Eighteenth Dynasty has to be seriously considered, cf. Edna R. Russmann, *Egyptian Sculpture. Cairo and Luxor* (Austin, 1989), pp. 106–107 (cat. 51). In any event, whether by usurpation or by imitation, the statue testifies recourse to the late Middle Kingdom. Decisive is the fact that it is always this period that reappears in later art and literature when the ideal to be expressed is "wisdom."

[54] Cf. Assmann, "Die Entdeckung der Vergangenheit. Innovation und Restauration in der ägyptischen Literaturgeschichte," in H.U. Gumbrecht, and U. Link-Heer, eds., *Epochenschwellen und Epochenbewußtsein im Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachhistorie* (Frankfurt, 1985), pp. 484–99.

[55] Cf. E. Otto, *Die biographischen Inschriften der ägyptischen Spätzeit* (Leiden, 1954). Most remarkably, the image of the Good Shepherd, in connection with elements of "negative anthropology," returns in the Late Period, too. In an unpublished wisdom text in the Brooklyn Museum, the political philosophy of the Middle Kingdom reappears in the same way, as its style revives the plastic arts. This is what G. Posener and J. Sainte Fare Garnot meant in "Sur une sagesse égyptienne de basse époque (Papyrus Brooklyn No. 47.218.135)," in *Les sagesses du Proche Orient ancien*, Bibl. des centres d'études supérieures spécialisées, colloque de Strasbourg 1962 (Paris, 1963), pp. 153–57, esp. p. 154, concerning the relevant passages on 'page C:' "Toutefois le thème favori de l'auteur est l'apologie du chef. Celui-ci est nécessaire; il faut vivre dans son entourage, afin de n'être pas 'un chien qui n'a pas de maître' (page A). Au reste 'des millions de soldats sont battus, qui n'ont pas un vaillant capitaine(?);' 'une armée est médiocre qui n'a pas avec elle son maître' (page C). Le rôle du chef est de conduire et de dominer; il lui arrive de punir, mais c'est chose naturelle: 'est-ce que les taureaux ruent, qui ont un berger qui les mate?' (page C). Mais il doit exercer aussi sa fonction avec douceur et solicitude et l'on retrouve, dans la même page C, le théme classique du 'bon berger.' Le chef est le 'pasteur' de 'ceux que Rê a crées.' Il retribue chacun selon ses mérites et, par voie de réciprocité, le superieur 'donne en retour de ce qu'on a fait pour lui.' C'est pourquoi la sagesse est d'adorer le maître, de lui être fidèle et même de 'donner chaque jour en plus' de ce qu'on lui doit, en sorte qu'il étende vers le donateur bénévole 'sa main qui porte la vie'."

only the functional contexts of Egyptian art, but also its artistic languages and values. The concepts of "realism" and "individualism" are not anachronistic with regard to ancient Egypt, but are rather at the very center or artistic function and intention. Underlying these tendencies is the firm belief in a post-mortem existence, not as an anonymous shadow, but in complete preservation of personal identity as it has developed during the lifetime of an individual. This belief, which so strikingly contradicts the views held by neighboring civilizations (Mesopotamia, Israel, Greece) about such matters,[56] makes all the difference and may be regarded as the basic Egyptian conviction. Yet this conviction is based upon two different ideas of equal longevity and binding force, which to our understanding seem rather contradictory. One envisions endurance upon earth in social memory, and the other an eternal life in another world after having passed the examination of posthumous judgment and the transfiguration into a "luminous spirit" (*akh*).[57] Both ideas stress the individual. It is because of his individual achievement that a person may aspire to an enduring place in social memory, and it is his individual life for which he is held accountable in the examination of the "Psychostasia." Neither before the one nor the other instance can he rely on collectivistic distinctions like noble descent, group membership, etc. Only personal achievements count.

Consequently, Egyptian anthropology is determined by a variety of concepts and ideas that belong to its views concerning death and an afterlife, such as *ka, ba, akh,* etc. We cannot go into these details here, but in conclusion and by way of illustrating the enormous importance of individuating principles in thought about man, his nature and his destiny, I shall briefly enumerate some concepts which are related to birth and death:

1) To shape the individual form and character on a potter's wheel is the function of the god Khnumu. According to Egyptian belief, every man has his own Khnumu as a symbol of his genetic individuality.[58]

2) The aspect of an individual's fate, the sum of favorable and calamitous events which determine his personal career, is represented by the goddess Meskhenet, the personification of the birth stool or brick, who appears as "his (individual) Meskhenet" at the birth of a person and prophecies his career.[59]

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[56] S.G.F. Brandon, *The Judgment of the Dead: An Historical and Comparative Study of the Idea of a Post-Mortem Judgment in the Major Religions* (London, 1967), and J.Gw. Griffiths, *The Divine Verdict* (Leiden, 1991), offer a useful survey of these different beliefs concerning death and afterlife.

[57] See the studies by Brandon and Griffiths cited in the note above.

[58] Cf. J. Quaegebeur, *Le dieu égyptien Shai*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 2 (Leuven, 1975), p. 88ff.

[59] Ibid., p. 92ff.

3) To foster individual development in its physical, material and spiritual aspects is the function of the goddess Renenet ("breeding" and "harvest").[60]

4) The individually apportioned life span and form of death are personified by the god Shai (destiny).[61]

The deities Khnumu and Meskhenet appear on the stage before and during the birth of an individual; the deities Meskhenet (again), Renenet and Shai appear on the occasion of the posthumous judgment. Their charge in this context is to represent the individual factors of life—its particular chances and handicaps—vis à vis the super-individual norm of the goddess Maat (truth-justice-order). The central role in the judicial examination is played by the heart. which is weighed on the balance against an image of Maat. The heart mediates the spheres of individuation and socialization.

Especially important in the context of portraiture is the role of the "face" (Egyptian *ḥr*) in Egyptian anthroplogy. The *ba*, the form in which the transfigured dead survives outside the body in another world, is represented as a bird with a human head. The body represents the celestial nature of this being, the head its personal identity as a human being with names and titles and, above all, with a past on earth during which its specific personality evolved. In a hymn to the creator god we even read:

thou hast built all that exists with the labor of thy hands;
it is thou who createst their shapes,
every singular face of them being distinguished from its fellow.[62]

Of the two focal points which determine and organize Egyptian mortuary beliefs, endurance in social memory and posthumous judgment, it is the concept of social memory to which portraiture is more closely related. Portraiture is visualized memory. Portraiture, as well as its inscriptional counterpart, biography, is meant to keep alive the remembrance of the individual appearance, achievement and character of the deceased and to bestow permanence to the singular and unmistakably individual final shape that s/he has developed during her/his time upon earth.

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[60] J. Broekhuis, *De godin Renenwetet* (Leiden, 1971).

[61] Cf. Quaegebeur, *Le dieu égyptien Shai*.

[62] J. Assmann, *Sonnenhymnen in thebanischen Gräbern*, THEBEN I (Mainz, 1983), pp. 203–209, especially p. 206 (p); cf. also H. Brunner, "Textliches zur Frage des Porträts in Ägypten," *SAK* 11 (1984), pp. 277–79.