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Fig. 1. Bronze Disc

William F. Warden Fund

Assyrian, Ninth Century, B. C.

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

SUBSCRIPTION ONE DOLLAR

The incense burner belongs to a group of which very few pieces are known. Of these, only two have inlaid decoration: the incense burner of the Museum collection, and that formerly in the possession of H. R. d'Allemagne, Paris.¹ The others, numbering a half dozen, have engraved decoration only.²

The group is closely related to, or rather forms a variant of, the type with cylindrical body and hinged, domed cover, likewise resting on three feet, but provided with a long, protruding handle.³ This particular type was originated within eastern Christian ecclesiastic art and later introduced into the Islamic provinces bordering Byzance from where it was carried on the one hand to Iran and on the other to Egypt. But, judging from known examples, the group represented by the Boston piece seems to be an Iranian specialty. So far no specimen of North Mesopotamian, Syrian, or Egyptian manufacture has come to light.

Exactly when the variant was devised is difficult to determine. Some of the preserved examples are from not earlier than the beginning of the twelfth and the others not later than the first quarter of the following century. With one exception, all known pieces are more or less devoid of artistic merit and were manufactured, one may say, for bazaar traffic. The Boston piece is this exception. In the first place, it is one of the very few Seljuq bronzes of Iranian origin belonging to the early thirteenth century which has been decorated with gold inlay. Then again, it bears the name of an artist whose existence up to now has remained forgotten behind the mists of the past. But, above all, it exhibits the mature style of an artistic development for which Iran was distinguished throughout the mediaeval centuries.

M. AGA-ÖGLU.

other examples from Iran, see G. Wiet, *L'Exposition persane de 1931*, Cairo, 1933, pp. 29, No. 24; 32, No. 29, and 47, No. 51.

Mr. W. J. Young, Head of the Research Laboratory of the Museum of Fine Arts, who subjected the incense burner to a microscopic examination, kindly informs me that "most of the gold and some of the silver is of later origin," and that "there is also definite evidence that sections of the gold and silver still existing are contemporary with the piece." Therefore it is not impossible that these mistakes are due to the carelessness of the repairer.

¹ Reproduced in his *Du Khorassan au pays des Bakhtiariis*, Paris, 1911, III, p. 98.

² Four of these have been reproduced by R. Harari, "Metalwork of Later Islamic Periods," in *A Survey of Persian Art*, ed. A. U. Pope, London-New York, 1939, IV, Pl. 1299 A-D.

³ See my "About a Type of Islamic Incense Burner," in *The Art Bulletin*, XXVII, 1945, pp. 28-45.

Notes on the Mycerinus Triad

TIME and again we find that the re-examination of a well-known and well-published work of sculpture from the ancient Near East results in a new appreciation of its quality and reveals features heretofore disregarded or unexplained. This may be true of many fields of ancient art, but it is valid especially for the study of Egyptian

statuary which only in the last few decades has come to be recognized as a subject to be taken up on its own merits and no longer to be regarded as a mere forerunner of Classical sculpture. The extent to which the archaic style of the Greeks was derived from Egyptian artistic conventions should not be overlooked, and this is perhaps the only point on which a comparative examination should be based. For an understanding of the great periods of Egyptian art from Dynasty III (ca. 2780 B.C.) to the end of the New Kingdom (ca. 1085 B.C.) criticism formed in the study of Classical and Christian art is of little help, and a purely aesthetic approach fails to take into account the multitude of statements expressed by attitude, posture, costume, and attributes of Egyptian statues which alone provide the basic explanations so necessary for the full enjoyment of a work of art.¹

Two thousand years before the sculptors of Attica created the perfect synthesis of god and man, and god in man, which has never been surpassed in Western art, the artists of Egypt had already achieved a mastery of form and expression which is related to that of Greece in scope and spirit though very different in the final result. Egyptian statuary was conditioned by several forces; most important among them are religious belief, the so-called "law of frontality,"² and the universal desire to endow the statue with life, that is to render it a human likeness. These three forces are interdependent, and in the analysis of a work of Egyptian sculpture we find frequently that many of its elements were motivated by more than one of them.

All Egyptian sculpture, in one way or another, had its origin in funereal customs and was meant to serve a practical purpose: the perpetuation of man, be he king or commoner, for life after death. This, however, did not pertain to his person alone, but also to his personality and social standing. The last two concepts may be found in the work of sculpture proper in the form of attributes and inscriptions, or they may have been relegated to the reliefs and paintings of the funeral chapel, as in the case of the "Red Bust" of Prince Ankh-haf³ who is represented devoid of all emblems and texts, the ultimate conception of a human being in its own right.

In trying to evaluate the magnitude of achievement in the sculpture of Dynasty IV, we must keep in mind that the Egyptian artist of that period did not have a great civilization of the past to draw on for inspiration as did the Greeks, nor

¹ The same holds true for the study of the arts of India, China, and Japan; no real understanding can be possible without at least some knowledge of the Veda, of Yang and Yin, of Buddhism.

² G. Steindorff, in *Catalogue of the Egyptian Sculpture in the Walters Art Gallery* (Baltimore, 1946), pp. 4-5.

³ M.F.A. 27.442; *Bulletin M.F.A.*, vol. XXXVII, no. 221, June 1939, pp. 41-46; W. S. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom* (Boston, 1946), pp. 38-39, pls. 14-15.



Fig. 1. The Mycerinus Triad: Wenut, Hathor, and the King
Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, 1908

Dynasty IV

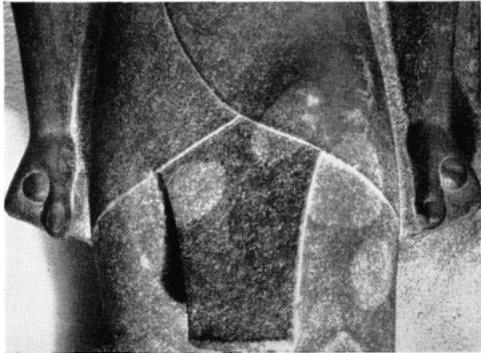


Fig. 2. Hands of Mycerinus, from the Pair Statue



Fig. 3. Hands of Mycerinus, from the Alabaster Statue



Fig. 4. Hands of Mycerinus, from the Triad

was his work the result of a competition between neighboring countries. To be sure, there had been hard stone sculpture of human and colossal size in Egypt since Dynasty I (ca. 3200 B.C.), but not till the time of Zoser, first king of Dynasty III, did the statuary become a life-like image of the living and attain to truly human proportions in its aspect and the plastic feeling which it conveys. Nowhere else in the ancient Near East was the progress of Egyptian artistic ingenuity matched during that period;¹ the Egyptian sculptor had nothing but the traditions of his own country and his own imagination and ability to guide him. Viewed in this light our respect for the achievements of the artists of the Old Kingdom may well be enhanced. Thousands of years before Greek times they already had acquired a comprehensive knowledge of the shape and proportions of the human body and were the first to succeed in the sensitive rendition of living forms in stone. The tightness of the skin over a flexed muscle, the smooth roundness of a well-formed limb in repose were reproduced true to nature for the first time by the sculptors of Dynasty IV (ca. 2680-2560 B.C.) Their ability to carve from hard material, only with the aid of crude stone and copper tools, a plastic likeness of the human body was without precedent and in the perfection of their newly developed proficiency they reached the peak in the creation of the first great portraits in the history of mankind: the granite head of an unknown king,² the limestone statue of the vizir Hem-yunu,³ the Reserve Heads of the courtiers of Cheops,⁴ and the painted bust of Prince Ankh-haf.⁵

In the course of the development of Old Kingdom art the Egyptian sculptor was not merely concerned with the representation of the single human figure; he also attempted to find a solution for another sculptural problem which ever since has occupied the minds and tried the powers of the great artists of all times and nations: the grouping of two or more persons in one piece.

¹ W. S. Smith, *l. c.*, Introduction, pp. xiv-xv.

² Brooklyn Museum 46.167; John D. Cooney, in *The Brooklyn Museum Bulletin*, vol. IX, no. 3, Spring 1948, pp. 1-12.

³ Hildesheim, Pelizaeus-Museum No. 1962; H. Junker, *Giza I.* (Wien, 1929), pp. 153-157, pls. XVIII-XXIII; W. S. Smith, *l. c.*, pp. 22-23, pl. 6d.

⁴ W. S. Smith, *l. c.*, pp. 23-30, pls. 6-9.

⁵ M. F. A. 27.442, See note 3, p. 10 right.



Fig. 5. The Nemes Instrument, from the Triad



Fig. 6. The Heads of the Triad

The varying results of these efforts have been discussed recently;¹ here I shall venture only to name a few noteworthy aspects of a great masterpiece of this type: the Mycerinus Triad in the Museum of Fine Arts (Fig. 1), excavated by the Harvard University — Museum of Fine Arts Expedition under the late George Andrew Reisner at Giza in July, 1908.²

This group statue, as it may be called to distinguish its class from that of statues representing but a single person, was found in the southern magazine corridor of the Valley Temple of King Mycerinus which lies at the foot of the long causeway leading from the valley to the Pyramid Temple in front of the tomb monument of the king, the Third Pyramid of Giza. In the Valley Temple, four intact triads of King Mycerinus (ca. 2580 B.C.) were found, together with fragments of several others. In each of them the king is represented in close association with the Goddess Hathor, while the third figure, personification of a nome or province of Upper Egypt, is different in each case. The Boston Triad is the only one in which Hathor is seated; in the others

she as well as the king and the nome deity are shown standing.

When these triads were first discovered, large portions of the original polychromy were still extant (Fig. 7); today only faint traces of the colors remain, and the work conveys an impression of the uniformity which it had when the sculptor made it, but which may have been partly obscured by the applications of paint after completion.

In our triad the figure to the right of Hathor represents the Goddess Wenut, the deity of the Hare Nome (Hermopolis) whose standard is carved in high relief against the back slab above her head. She stands with her left foot advanced, the beautiful figure of a fully developed girl, her lithe body clothed in a tight dress which opens between her breasts and reveals the broad collar necklace formerly painted in brilliant colors. She, as well as the king, has been modeled with an amazing attention to anatomical detail so that even the course of the sternum line ending in the navel is noticeable despite the garment which discloses as much as it masks the shape of her youthful figure. The right arm is held by her side with outstretched hand; the left grasps the *Ankh* hieroglyph, the sign of life, cut boldly from the side of Hathor's throne. Both wrists are adorned by wide bracelets. The highest embodiment of artistic skill, the rendering of flesh and blood in true proportions, can be observed in the modeling of this deity with her intensely human aspect.

¹ A. Scharff, in *Scritti in onore di Ippolito Rosellini*, vol. I, (Pisa, 1949), pp. 303-321.

² M. F. A. 09.200; dark green schist (commonly called slate): measurements: total height 84 cm., width of back slab at base 39.4 cm., width of back slab at top 38.5 cm., average thickness of back slab 6.5 cm., height of base 8.3 cm., width of base at ankles of Hathor 39 cm., total height of king to tip of crown 70.5 cm., depth from nose of king to back of back slab 20.9 cm., same depth of nome goddess 17.2 cm., greatest width at shoulder level 44.5 cm.; G. A. Reisner, *Mycerinus* (Cambridge, 1931), p. 109, pls. 36-40; *Bulletin M. F. A.*, vol. IX, no. 50, April 1911, pp. 16-18, and vol. XLI, no. 246, December 1943, p. 70 fig. 7; W. S. Smith, *l. c.*, pp. 35 and 38, pl. 13c.

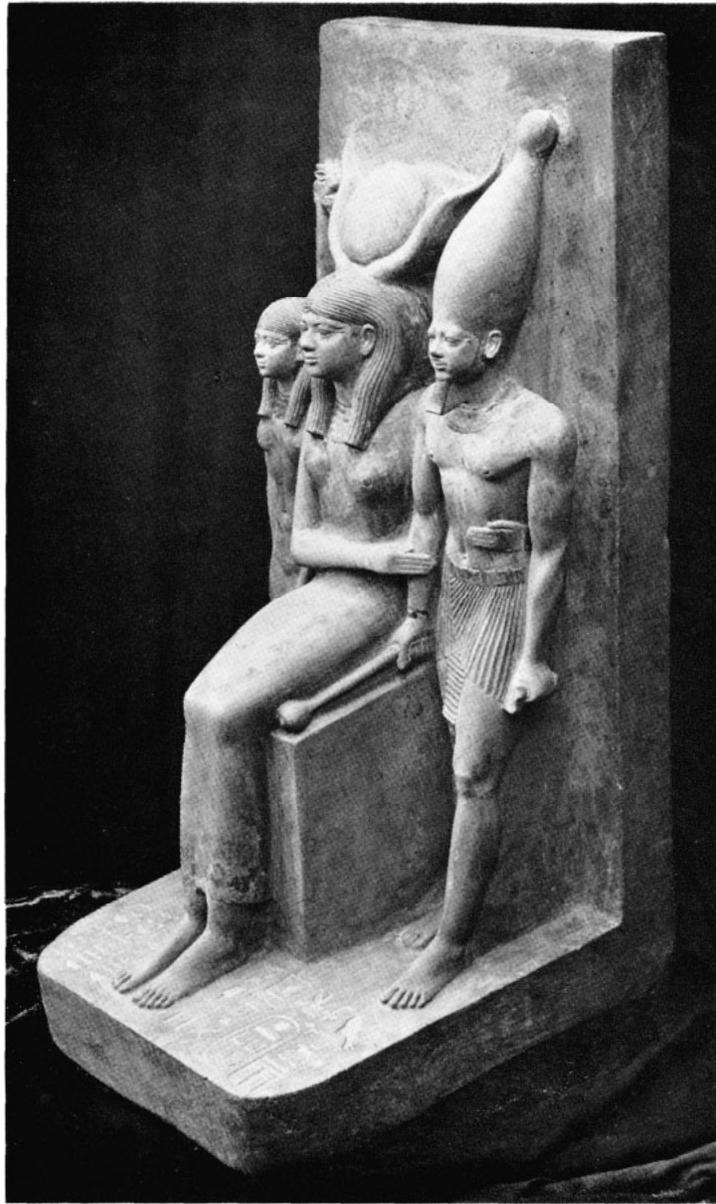


Fig. 7. The Mycerinus Triad in 1908

The center of the group is occupied by the Goddess Hathor, characterized by cow horns and sun disc on her head and mentioned by name in the short formal inscription on the base.¹ Her position between Wenut and Mycerinus makes her the dominant person in the group, and this impression is enhanced still further by her size. Though she is seated, her eye level is only slightly lower than that of the standing king; she is the largest of the three figures. Her dress and wig are the same as those of the Hare Nome Goddess, but while Wenut is represented by herself, Hathor

and Mycerinus are closely linked. The left arm of the goddess is placed around the body of the king, as her right hand — its wrist bearing a bracelet — rests lightly on Mycerinus' arm. This gesture, commonly used in the Old Kingdom to indicate the relationship between wife and husband and between parent and child, is unusual at this time as far as goddess and king are concerned, and while it stresses the divine station of the latter it also signifies to what extent the sculptor was able to conceive the human aspect of the former.

The presence of Hathor in all known triads of Mycerinus is exceptional. No other representa-

¹ G. A. Reisner, *l. c.*, pl. 46c and p. 109 (no. 9).

tions of her in the round, dated to the Old Kingdom, have come to light. She is the great mother goddess of that period and was originally the mother of Horus whose incarnation is the king.¹ As such she has become the mother of the living king, and her epithet, *Mistress of the Sycamore Sanctuary*, reminds us that she had an ancient cult site near Memphis, the capital and burial ground of Dynasties III-VI. Thus she may have been regarded as protectress of the ruler, which lends further weight to her motherly gesture. Except for the head, her figure is less detailed in modeling than that of the deity at her right, adding further to the impressiveness of her dominant position.

King Mycerinus, his left foot advanced, stands next to, and slightly in front of, Hathor, in an attitude similar to that of Wenut. He wears the tall white crown of Upper Egypt and is clothed in the royal kilt with many pleats. The ceremonial beard adorns his chin; beard strap, moustache, broad collar necklace, name plate on the belt, and bracelets had been applied in color, but have now mostly disappeared. The powerful body of the king is outstanding in its contrast to the more supple forms of the goddesses. The breast is sharply defined in its robust outline, and the grip of his strong hands is reflected in the arm muscles whose structure can be traced in detail all the way up to the shoulders; again a high tribute to the anatomical knowledge and technical ability of the gifted artist.

The emblems held by the king are especially noteworthy as they are worked out in full and are not merely indicated by the *emblematic staves* often found in the hands of Egyptian statues (Fig. 2).² In the past many theories have been advanced regarding the meaning of these objects whose rounded ends protrude from the fists, and the various terms applied to them have been most confusing, in English as well as in other languages. In the discussion of the wooden statue of Methethy of Dynasty VI the designation "emblematic staves" was first proposed.³ It implies that these two objects were meant to represent staves, scepters, or other attributes which kings, noblemen, and functionaries carried in real life. Indeed, these insignia are almost always shown on reliefs and in wooden sculpture during Dynasties IV and V, while two early stone statues of the transition period from Dynasty III to Dynasty IV show them carved in relief on the body of the bearer.⁴ This, however, implied an awkward position of the hands, and fear of breakage prevented the sculptor from fashioning the attributes in the

round in their full length since they would have extended from the body without adequate protection and support. Thus the emblematic staves were introduced in Dynasty IV, and beginning with the second half of Dynasty V wooden statues, too, were sometimes adorned with them, especially in small scale sculpture when staff or scepter necessarily would have been quite thin.

Another emblem of kings and dignitaries, mostly found in one hand of seated statues and often shown in relief, is the so-called *handkerchief* (Fig. 3),¹ probably a rolled and folded piece of cloth whose uneven ends are hanging down while the rounded fold slightly protrudes from the other side of the fist.² This insignia does not occur in any of the triads of Mycerinus, although several figures in the three triads now in the Cairo Museum carry one or two emblematic staves.

The Boston Triad is unique in the emblems held by the king (Fig. 4). His right hand grasps the royal mace, a mark of the king's might on many monuments since the beginning of Dynasty I. Here we have the only example in stone sculpture where this insignia of pharaoh's power is shown in its full length three quarters in the round, and in a horizontal position, since the seat of Hathor's throne provides a convenient support. But the object in Mycerinus' left hand is not so easy to recognize and even less easy to interpret. It is *not* the well-known emblematic staff, but a somewhat longer article whose ends curve inward (Fig. 5; from a drawing by Miss Suzanne E. Chapman). It appears to be oval in section and gives the impression of being compressed by the grip of the king's hand. It is never represented elsewhere in Egyptian sculpture in the round, and its sole occurrence in the Boston Triad is not made any less puzzling by the fact that it is shown frequently in relief, carried by the king in his raised left hand during a ceremony of the *Sed* festival, a kind of royal jubilee celebration which was held in Egypt since the beginning of kingship.³ But in those representations pharaoh is invariably shown running, and his other hand holds the ancient flail, not the mace. The object is also known from the inventory lists painted on Middle Kingdom coffins⁴ where it is placed side by side with other royal regalia, e.g. scepter, wand, and mace, and where its name is given as *Nemes*.⁵ There is some indication in Egyptian texts a thousand and more years after Mycerinus' time that it was meant to be the container for a document establishing divine confirmation of the

¹ M. F. A. 09.204; G. A. Reisner, *l. c.*, p. 108, pl. 12.

² A. H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (Oxford, 1927), p. 494, S29.

³ H. Kees, *Der Opferanzug* (Leipzig and München, 1912), pp. 142-146.

⁴ G. Jéquier, *Les Frises d'obélisques* (Le Caire, 1921), pp. 281-282.

⁵ Only in texts from Dynasty XVIII on is this object called *Mekes*: cf. Spiegelberg, in *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache* 53 (1917), pp. 101-104, probably through confusion with the odd-shaped *Mekes* scepter (Jéquier, *l. c.*, pp. 173-176).

¹ H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 172, 173, 175.

² M. F. A. 11.1738; Pair Statue of Mycerinus and Khamer-neyty; G. A. Reisner, *l. c.*, p. 110, pls. 54-60.

³ *Bulletin M. F. A.*, vol. XLVI, no. 264, June 1948, p. 34.

⁴ W. S. Smith, *l. c.*, pp. 17-18, pl. 4c.

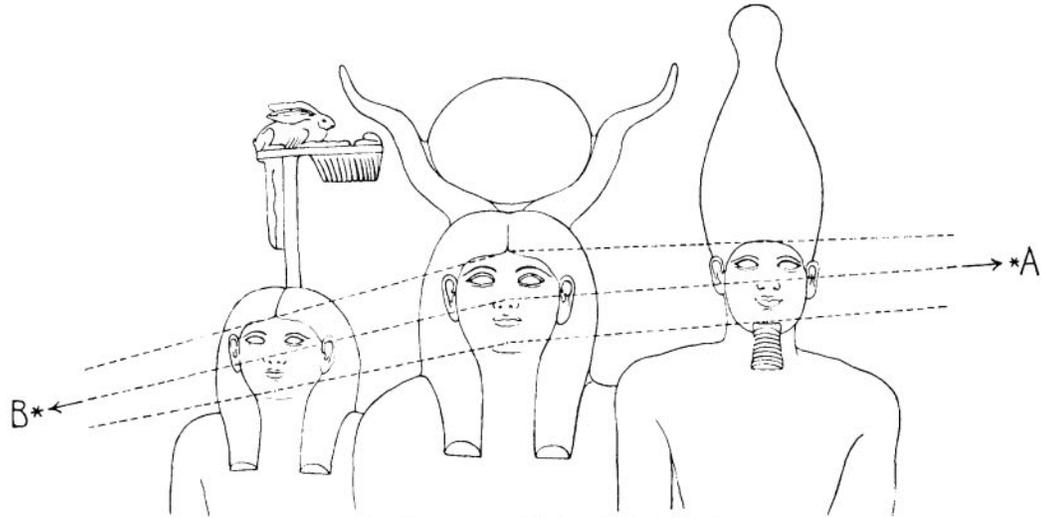


Fig. 8. Proportions of the Heads of the Triad

king's rulership whereby he possesses the land, some of which he in turn may dedicate to the gods for their temples.¹

Since this is the only triad which shows Hathor enthroned and Mycerinus equipped with mace and *Nemes*, an interrelation of attitude and attributes seems to be indicated, but its full meaning has not yet become clear. The mace hints at the slaying of enemies, presumably Hathor's, the *Nemes* conveys the idea of established kingship, and the affectionate gesture of the goddess stresses the divine grace which has been bestowed on the king. We must also consider the *Life* sign which Wenut holds in her left, the hand on Mycerinus' side. All this leads to the conclusion that the king is really the central figure of the triad, if not actually, at least in spirit. There is an interplay of forces between the three figures which finds its strongest expression in the unusual design of the sculpture as a whole. Its composition is outstanding and certainly the finest solution of the three-figure problem ever executed in Egyptian sculpture. The grouping of more than two figures in one unit appears first at Saqqara in Dynasty III,² but since only the base and feet of that sculpture have been found we know nothing of the pose and attitude of the individual figures. Thus a tradition may have existed for almost two hundred years, but there is not a single work of sculpture known before the Boston Triad which shows in any way an advance beyond the mere placing of two or more persons side by side with hardly any relation to one another.

It may be well to pause for a moment and to consider a number of individual facts which, at a glance, seem to be incompatible with the impression of perfect composition gained from the study

of the triad as a whole. First, the three figures are of different size, and their headdresses do not even approximately rise to the same level. Second, Hathor is not placed in the exact center of the group; her right shoulder disappears behind the king while the other one partly overlaps the figure of the nome goddess. The back slab is of completely irregular shape, none of its edges is straight; it does not rise vertically but slants backward. When seen from the side, the faces of the three figures lie in three different vertical planes; the foremost is that of Hathor, then comes that of the king, and the third is that of the nome goddess. All this tends to prove that no mechanical-mathematical solution was ever attempted. The final form developed freely through the genius of the sculptor and leaves us with an impression of magnificent unity.

In this connection another point may be made. When one examines the illustrations of the four undamaged triads in Dr. Reisner's publication¹ and, in addition, the numerous photographs taken by him in 1908 at the time of the discovery, which are now on file at the Department together with all the records of the Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, one cannot help noticing the variations in the likeness of the king throughout the triads. To be sure, their style is substantially the same, but the features of Mycerinus vary a great deal so that none of his figures provides a portrait in the strict sense. On the other hand, within each group statue there is a surprising resemblance between the facial expressions of the king and of the goddesses (Figs. 6 and 7). Gaston Maspero already recognized this soon after the triads had been found when he wrote: "Selon un usage déjà constant à cette époque les divinités ont été représentées à l'image du sou-

¹ A. M. Blackman, in *Analecta Orientalia* 17 (1938), p. 5; H. Frankfort, *J. c.*, pp. 85-86, p. 369 note 23.

² C. M. Firth and J. E. Quibell, *The Step Pyramid*, vol. II (Le Caire, 1935), pl. 63.

¹ G. A. Reisner, *J. c.*, pls. 36-45.

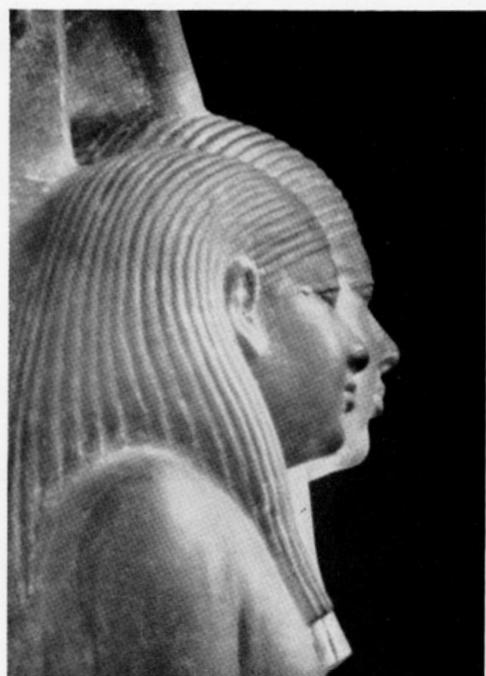


Fig. 9. Profiles of Wenut and Hathor



Fig. 10. Profiles of Mycerinus and Hathor

verain."¹ This resemblance is most striking on the Boston Triad in the three-quarter and profile views. When seen from the front, the beard and the somewhat sharper features of the king distract the eye at first, but after a while the expressions of the three faces appear more and more alike to the observer. Yet it is in profile (Figs. 9 and 10) that their similarity becomes identity, and in the schematic drawing by Miss Suzanne E. Chapman (Fig. 8) an attempt has been made to illustrate this phenomenon. The faces of Mycerinus and Wenut are smaller than that of Hathor and lie in vertical planes set back from hers. Therefore all imaginary straight lines originating in Hathor's face and crossing the corresponding points on the faces of the king and of the nome goddess respectively, will eventually converge, and they happen to converge in one point on either side of the triad and slightly behind Mycerinus and Wenut. The eye of the observer can easily find these two points A and B,² and as seen from these points each pair of profiles matches to a hair's breadth so that it appears as one. Every modulation of the outline of Hathor's face is matched precisely by a corresponding variation in the profiles of the king and deity, a fact so obvious that it cannot be regarded as mere coincidence. To photograph these views from points A and B is impractical since each two profiles would look like a single one, but by placing the camera lens about one inch to the side of points A and B, and throwing a

strong light on the head of Hathor for contrast, the pictures for Figs. 9 and 10, which illustrate the striking resemblance of the three faces, were obtained. The significance of such deliberate assimilation cannot be misunderstood; it is implied in the meaning of the triad as a whole as well as in that of every one of its aspects. It states the identity of man with god, the presence of the deity in man, and the divine sanction of Egyptian kingship.

BERNARD V. BOTHMER.

Photographs of Colonial Portraits

THE late Waldron Phoenix Belknap, Jr., who was deeply interested in every phase of American art, and especially in its earlier history, over the last two years had generously given a sum of money annually to the Department of Paintings for the purchase of photographs of Colonial portraits and to help in organizing them for the purpose of study and research. His desire was that this collection of photographs be mounted, with data sheets, and be kept in the Department for the use of scholars and students interested in the attribution, location, and identity of American portraits of the pre-Revolutionary period; and he proposed to make annual contributions for the purpose until the collection was substantially complete. The project was well under way, though only in the earliest stages, when Mr. Belknap's sudden and premature death occurred on December 14, 1949.

The Department of Paintings hopes to carry on

¹ *Guide du visiteur au Musée du Caire* (Le Caire, 1912), p. 73.

² Distance from the tip of the king's nose to Point A: 31.4 cm.; distance from the tip of the nome goddess' nose to Point B: 56.9 cm.