

BULLETIN OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

VOLUME XXVI

BOSTON, AUGUST, 1928

NUMBER 156



MEDALLION PORTRAIT OF SAINT NICHOLAS

Byzantine Cloisonné Enamel

PUBLISHED BI-MONTHLY

SUBSCRIPTION 50 CENTS

An Egyptian Portrait Head of the XII Dynasty

IN January, 1928, Dr. Denman W. Ross presented to the Museum the Egyptian head illustrated on page 63 (Figs. 5 to 8).¹ The fragment is of brown quartzite, 14.3 cm. in height, and once formed part of a statuette. The greater part of the face and the fore part of the headdress approximately to its highest point are preserved. The hair is concealed by a linen head-cloth. This is not the royal *klaft* with its sharply defined folds and angles. There is no *uraeus*, and the edging band across the forehead, usual with the royal headdress, is absent. The cloth ends in a clearly defined single line low down on the forehead. The brow, partly covered by the headdress, is broad and nearly vertical, and the bridge of the nose prolongs the same plane downward between the eyes. The eyebrows are long and slightly arched, and are not indicated in relief as is so frequently the case. The rendering of the eyes is striking: of moderate size, with naturalistically modelled lids, tear ducts clearly indicated, and no *kohl* stripe, they are remarkable for the way in which they bulge from their rather deep sockets. Anatomically this physical peculiarity is admirably reproduced, and the swelling of the eyeball behind the lids is very evident. The nose is largely broken away, but was broad and fleshy at the base, with prominent nostrils. The mouth is straight and thin-lipped and the chin firm but slightly receding. Mouth and chin are bruised, but their forms are still evident. The workmanship of this fragment is of the highest order. The surfaces are well finished, but not highly polished, and the modelling is extremely sensitive. Especially noteworthy is the skill with which the sculptor has been able to indicate the bony structure of the skull behind the rather tight-skinned face: the forehead is broad and smooth and the bridge of the nose wide; the cheek bones are prominent, but not high; the bone above the upper teeth is rather projecting, indicated by a certain convexity of the surfaces over the upper lip; and the mass of the skull behind the lower part of the nose is deep set. We see here a man of mature years whose gaunt face has no superfluous flesh, and yet it is a face unlined by age, showing a dignified serenity and strength with, at the same time, a certain sensitive intelligence, especially about the mouth.

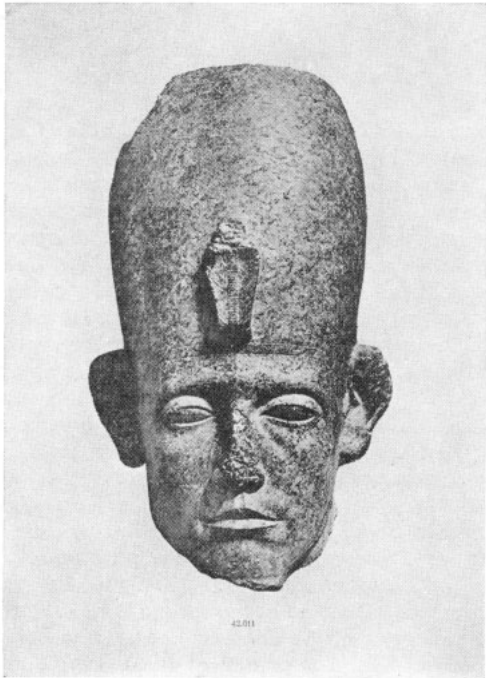
The origin of this beautiful example of Egyptian sculpture is unknown to me. The material of which it is made is one frequently used in the Middle and New Kingdoms, and was an especial favorite with the sculptors at Tell el Amarna in the time of Akhnaton. For this reason, doubtless, the head was said by the dealer through whose hands it passed to have come from Amarna. Stylistically I consider the head to be earlier, and the facial type appears to me very like that of certain kings

of the twelfth dynasty. The well-known portraits of Sesostri III and Amenemhat III show physical peculiarities which appear also in our head.

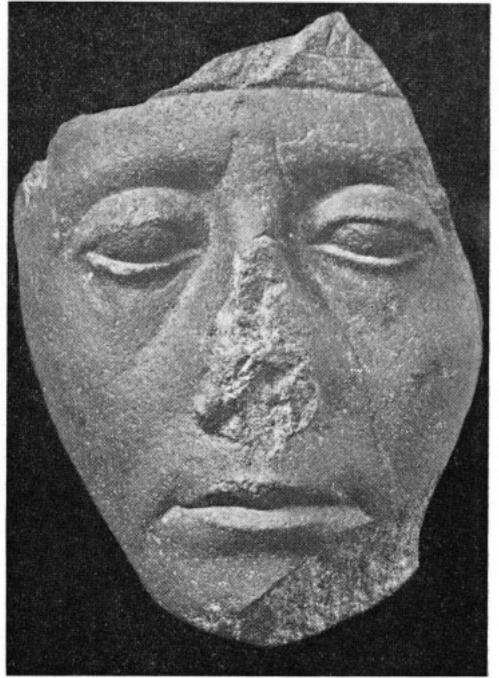
The colossal red granite head from Karnak representing Sesostri III,¹ now in the Cairo Museum (Fig. 1), has the same type of forehead and brow, though the hair of the eyebrows is here indicated by incised lines. The eyes in both cases are strikingly similar; the bulge of the eyeball behind the lids is less pronounced in the Cairo example, but is still clearly evident; and the shape of the eye in each case is practically identical, as also the drooping of the upper lid over the eyeball and the clear definition of the orbital ridge above. In both cases the nose is badly battered, but enough remains to show that it was perceptibly broader in the Boston head. In this Museum's example the mouth is imperfect, but its size and position, as well as the forms of the flesh above and around it, are similar to those in the Cairo head. The chin of our head, however, is markedly less prominent than that of the colossal portrait. With the exception of this last feature the bony structure of both heads, as indicated in the modelling, seems well-nigh identical. Another portrait of the monarch, and one very like the Cairo example, is the red granite head found by Petrie at Abydos in 1902, and reproduced in *Abydos I*, Pl. LV, 6 and 7. The stone is severely weathered, but the features are clearly those of the king seen in the Cairo head. The protuberance of the eyes, as also the depth of cutting below the orbital ridges, is more marked in the Petrie head, and the base of the nose appears to be somewhat broader, while the mouth droops slightly at the corners. In other respects the two are very like. A third portrait of Sesostri III is one of a group found by Naville and Hall at Deir el Bahari, in 1904-1905, now in the Cairo Museum, and figured in *Deir el Bahari, XI Dynasty*, Pt. I, Pl. XIX G. The face is that of a much older man than either the Cairo portrait or the Petrie head. Here the eyes have again the marked characteristics seen in the Boston head, and the mouth has a more pronounced droop than that of the Abydos portrait. Finally, I would cite the magnificent quartzite fragment in the Carnarvon Collection, recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in New York, through whose courtesy I am able to give the illustration (Fig. 2). The resemblance to our head is so striking that it is sufficient to let the illustrations speak for themselves. I would only observe that the Carnarvon head represents Sesostri III as an elderly man with the

¹It should be noted that the question of the attribution of the sculptures referred to in this article is still under debate. Such a well-known authority as Professor Jean Capart of Brussels, for example, inclines to the view that the Karnak Sesostri, Petrie's Abydos head, the Deir el Bahari group, and the Carnarvon fragment are really Old Kingdom sculptures usurped by Sesostri III. On the other hand, the Hawara Amenemhat III he would attribute to the eighteenth dynasty, for the reason that the two creases represented on the neck are a characteristic of work of this period and are not known earlier. He considers this figure to be a cult statue made in the eighteenth dynasty for the mortuary temple of Amenemhat, the service of which was still being kept up.

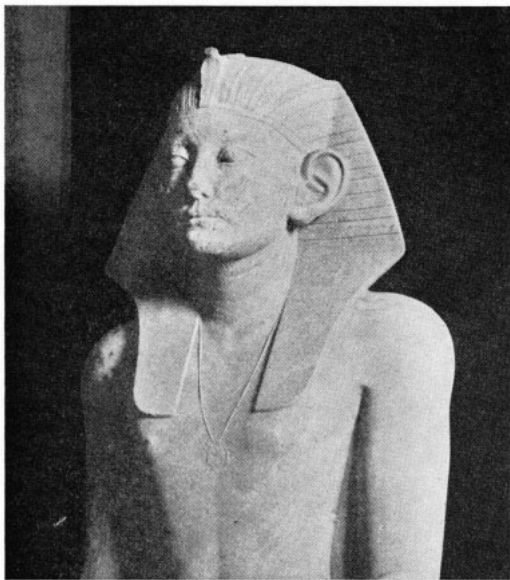
¹Reg. No. 28.1.



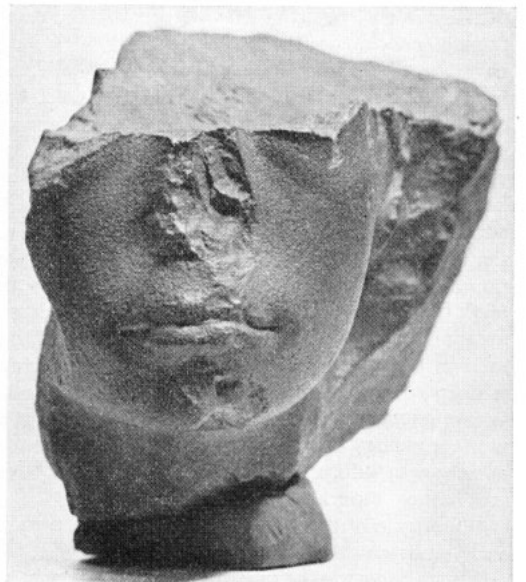
Sesostrius III *Karnak (Granite)*
Cairo Museum
1



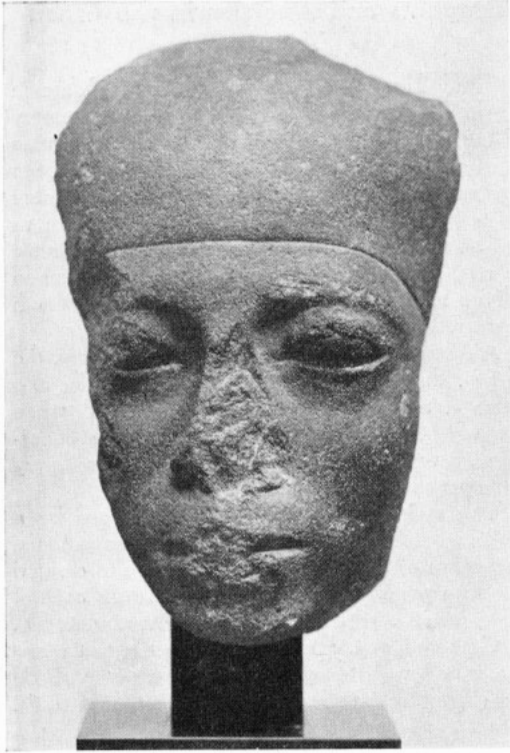
Sesostrius III *Carnarvon Collection*
Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum
2



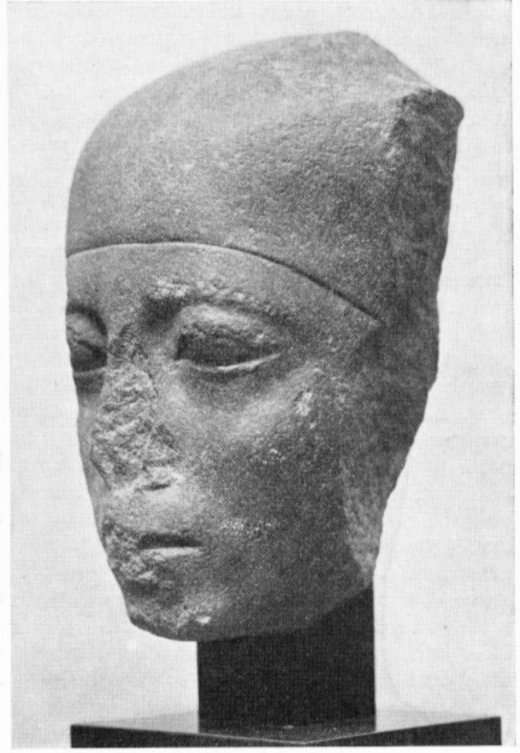
Amenemhat III *Hawara (Limestone)*
Cairo Museum
3



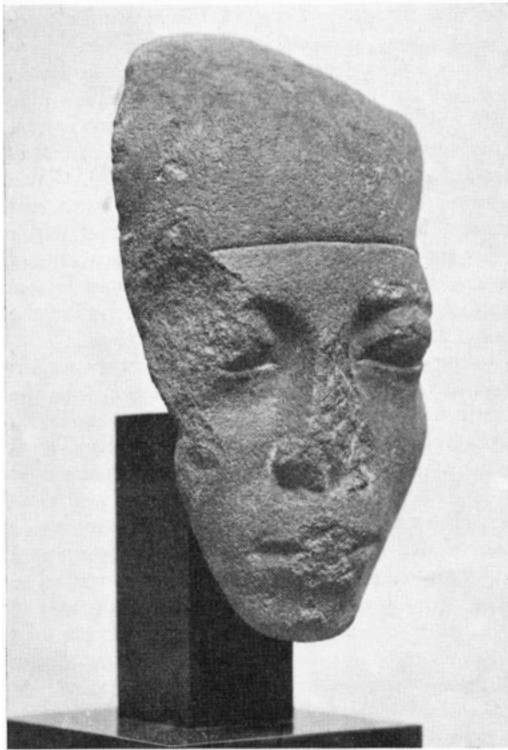
Amenemhat III *Kerma (Slate)*
Museum of Fine Arts
4



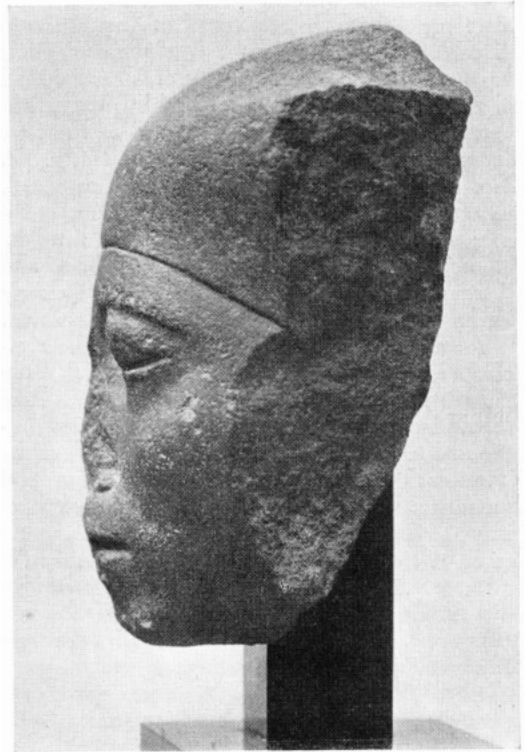
5



6



7



8

Brown Quartzite Head

Ross Collection

Dynasty XII

resultant deepening of lines and loosening of the flesh, while the Boston head shows a person of mature but not advanced years. In these four portraits, as also in the example under consideration, the structure of the skull and the general forms of its flesh covering seem to me to be the same, excepting only the somewhat receding chin of the Boston head, and even this feature appears, from the photographs available to me, to be found in the Deir el Bahari statue and in the Carnarvon fragment.

Turning to representations of Amenemhat III, the best known is the seated limestone statue in almost perfect preservation, which was found in his pyramid temple at Hawara, and is now in the Cairo Museum (Fig. 3). The face of this statue is one of the great examples of sensitive modelling in Egyptian portraiture, and again we find the same structural peculiarities, but less harshly and prominently displayed. This is the work of a different school from that of the figures we have been examining. They come from Thebes and Abydos in the south; this statue was found on the outskirts of the Fayum in northern Egypt, and seems to be the product of an older and more sophisticated art, descended from the great Memphite traditions of the Old Kingdom. Again we see the same protuberant eyeball, the same vertical forehead, and the same prominent cheek bones. The mouth is thin-lipped and straight and of moderate size, in character very similar to that of the Boston head. The nose and chin are like those of the Cairo Sesostri III, and not like those of our example. Finally the Museum possesses a fragment of the head of a statuette of Amenemhat III in slate¹ (Fig. 4) which was found by our Expedition at Kerma in 1913, and published by Professor Reisner in his *Excavations at Kerma, IV*, p. 32, No. 12, Pl. 34, 2 and 3. The top of the head, including both eyes, is missing, as also is most of the nose, and the chin is somewhat damaged. It will be at once noted that the form of the cheek bones and the general modelling of the lower face are closely similar to what we see in the head under discussion.

As a result of the comparisons I have here indicated, I would put forward the opinion that the portrait head given to the Museum by Dr. Ross should be grouped with the sculptures generally attributed to Sesostri III and Amenemhat III of the Twelfth Dynasty, more especially with the figures of the former king. In the Pyramid Age portraits of kings sometimes occur without the *uraeus*, but I recall only one instance in the Middle Kingdom of a statue with neither royal headdress nor *uraeus*, that of the *ka* statue of King Hor, which is in a class apart. It is only this absence of all insignia of royalty which causes hesitation in attributing our head to Sesostri, but at least we can say that it represents, if not the king himself, a person closely related to him—a prince of the blood royal.

D. D.

¹Reg. No. 20.1213.

Prophets and Apostles in the Creed Tapestry

THE Flemish tapestry given to the Museum in 1908 by Mrs. John H. Wright, in memory of her son, Eben Wright, and her father, Lyman Nichols, has, through the intervening years, been studied and enjoyed by many, not only on account of its beauty of color and the fine dignity of its design, but also because it is a splendid example of religious iconography of the culminating period of the middle ages, the last years of the fifteenth century.

Although crowded with richly clad figures, the design, through its qualities of serene order and balance, avoids all sense of confusion, and, when the underlying thought of the designer is understood, reveals a fine logic in the apparently arbitrary arrangement of its scenes.

The main field of the tapestry, enclosed by a narrow border of fruit and leaves set in a frame suggestive of architectural stone carving, is divided into four panels by jewelled columns. In each of these panels a scene from the Bible is represented.

Gathered in the background of the first scene are angels with many-colored wings, which shade from pink and yellow through green and blue. They are witnesses of the creation of Eve. On the left stands God the Father in rich robes with crown and sceptre. On the right Adam lies sleeping on the ground, while from his side rises the pale and shadowy figure of Eve. In the foreground, facing each other, are seated the figures of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Apostle Peter, identified by their names on scrolls. The blue scroll held by Jeremiah also bears the inscription, "*Patrem invocabimus qui terran[m] fecit et condidit c[o]elos*" (cf. Jeremiah 32: 17), "We call upon the Father who made the earth and founded the heavens." On a pink scroll which curls over the knee of St. Peter are these words of the creed, "*Credo in deum patrem omnipote[n]tem creatorem c[o]eli et terrae*," "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth."

In the center of the second scene Christ stands in the waters of the Jordan. On the left is John the Baptist, whose rich brocaded robe has slipped down so that the traditional "raiment of camel's hair" is revealed beneath it (Matthew 3:4). On the right an angel holds Christ's mantle. This, as well as all the other costumes which appear in the tapestry, is made of richly patterned fabric skillfully woven with silk and wool to give the effect of gold brocaded on color, and of the shimmering of light and shadow on its long smooth folds. That real gold was not used in the weaving is to-day a matter for congratulation. The gold would have tarnished and darkened, and the original relation of color values been lost. As it is, the tapestry seems lighted from within by a pale harmonizing gleam of gold. In the upper part of the panel God the Father rises from a band of pink and blue clouds, in an aureole of light. Along the rays