ECYPTIAN ART IN THE AGE OF THE PYRAMIDS

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

EGYPTIAN ART IN THE AGE OF THE PYRAMIDS

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ROYAL RELIEFS

DOROTHEA ARNOLD

y the beginning of the Middle Kingdom the royal temples of the Pyramid Age had already started to fall into decay.¹ What remained was often dismantled under the Ramesside kings of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties (about 1295-1070 B.C.E.), who sent demolition parties to obtain stone material for vast new building projects.² As a result, modern excavations have brought to light few standing Old Kingdom temple walls. Typically only the foundations and lower wall courses are extant, while thousands of larger and smaller fragments from the original relief decoration cover these remains and the surrounding area.³ It is therefore not surprising that this publication and the exhibition it accompanies are in the main concerned with fragments from the once-large-scale royal reliefs of the Old Kingdom.

Examining fragments has special advantages: the viewer is induced to focus on details of iconography and artistic execution that may be overlooked in a scrutiny of full-scale, relatively undamaged compositions. However, true appreciation of 'details must be based on some knowledge of a fragment's original context. Since Egyptian artists repeated a rather circumscribed set of iconographic configurations from temple to temple and from wall to wall, Egyptologists have been able to reconstruct, at least on paper, the overall compositions of a fair number of Old Kingdom royal reliefs.⁴

BEGINNINGS

Much Old Kingdom relief iconography was codified by the start of the Third Dynasty. The system had been developed during later Predynastic times and the Archaic Period on objects of minor, or decorative, arts (vessels, combs, cosmetic palettes, and the like, often having ceremonial or funerary significance)⁵ and possibly in paintings on now-vanished mud-plastered brick walls.⁶ Rare remains of late Second Dynasty architectural relief decoration⁷

testify to a pre-Third Dynasty emergence of large-scale stone reliefs, if only in specific parts of monuments otherwise built of mud brick. From the Third Dynasty onward many sacred buildings were erected entirely of stone and over time provided increasingly larger wall spaces on which established iconographic configurations could be developed and refined. The result was one of the world's most coherent illustrative systems, a complex pictorial language for the visual propagation of ideas on kingship and its religious connotations.

BASIC FIGURAL SCHEMES

The Old Kingdom relief language is based on a strikingly small number of fundamental figural schemes.⁸ The possibilities of combination were, however, unlimited, allowing this vocabulary to meet an infinite variety of pictorial needs and to be adapted to various forms of architecture. The basic figural element of Egyptian pictorial art is the single human figure (male or female), either standing (the male almost always with legs apart as if walking), seated, or in action.9 In royal reliefs the most conspicuous single figure in action is a man running or striding with legs wide apart and knees bent. Two nonactive standing figures of approximately equal rank often form a unit in which the figures face each other or embrace.¹⁰ The classic group of two figures of unequal rank shows the powerful pharaoh in a striding position: his raised right arm swings a weapon, and an enemy cowers at his feet (cat. no. 8).

From early on, single and double figures appeared on relief slabs set into niches (cat. no. 9)¹¹ and on pillars in temple courtyards.¹² Occasionally two single figures might flank important architectural elements such as the statue niches in the temple of Snefru at Dahshur;¹³ on the whole, however, single figures were not used in royal monuments to emphasize such architectural features as niches, false doors, or doorways.¹⁴ Even the important Fig. 48. Plan of statue-cult temple of Snefru, Dahshur. Drawing by Dieter Arnold from D. Arnold 1997, p. 45, fig. 11



central niched doorways in the valley and pyramid temples were not flanked by large single images of the king or a god but rather by groups of two or more large interacting figures (cat. no. 118). The most important role of the prominent single figure in Old Kingdom royal relief was to serve as the focal point and unifying element in large-scale relief compositions, and it was as part of such compositions that large figures of the king dominated walls and rooms.

Repetition of identical or similar single figures creates a row of figures that may be depicted along the walls of a room or a set of rooms, emphasizing the movement from one architectural space to the next. This scheme was employed to great advantage in the statue-cult temple of Snefru at Dahshur,¹⁵ the earliest royal building from which a relief decoration is preserved to a substantial extent.¹⁶ Situated roughly halfway between agricultural land and the king's Bent Pyramid, the temple was entered through an area containing five parallel rooms of elongated shape, the central one of which led into the temple courtyard (fig. 48).¹⁷ On both long walls of this corridorlike central room, rows of exquisitely adorned women were represented in the bottom register, all facing toward the temple interior (figs. 49, 50).¹⁸ The women (cat. no. 22) represented royal estates dedicated to providing sustenance in perpetuity for the ritual performances in the temple. Although the figures in Snefru's temple stand in the fashion customary for femaleswith feet side by side-their repeated appearance, one behind the other, creates the image of a long cortege of offering bearers moving into the building. In later representations most female estate personifications and fertility figures are shown in striding poses like those of their male counterparts.¹⁹

In Snefru's Dahshur temple reliefs the registers above the estate personifications consisted mainly of largefigure compositions showing the king enacting rituals of the Heb Sed, the renewal festival of kingship, or conversing with gods and goddesses. One especially poignant scene depicted Snefru embraced by a lion goddess.²⁰ The combining of large compositions of two or three stationary figures in upper registers with rows of uniform smaller figures below was a major design achievement that was realized in the very first stages of Egyptian royal relief art.

In addition to the units of stationary single and double figures and the progressions of rows of figures, Egyptian relief art had another principal scheme: the group-action tableau.²¹ Considerably more intricate in composition than single- and double-figure configurations, groupaction tableaux show a multiplicity of figures in a wide range of poses, handling a variety of objects and interacting with one another in numerous ways. Although much has been written about the absence of truly narrative art in ancient Egypt (that is, art depicting specific historical events),²² there can be no doubt that group-action tableaux are of a narrative character, because they all tell a story in one way or another.²³ Most nonroyal reliefs



Fig. 49. Isometric reconstruction of entrance corridor, statue-cult temple of Snefru, Dahshur. Drawing by Dieter Arnold after Fakhry 1961b, p. 45, fig. 18



Fig. 50. Estate personifications, west wall of statue-cult temple of Snefru, Dahshur, shortly after excavation

decorating tombs of Old Kingdom high officials depict scenes in which objects and provisions are produced for the funeral cult in workshops and through agriculture, animal husbandry, and so on.²⁴ In royal reliefs, scenes that show the making of things are less important, while representations of ritual performances and of the king acting as guarantor of state and cosmic order predominate.²⁵

The composition of group-action tableaux²⁶ relies largely on the requirements of the subject matter, but it is characteristic of Egyptian art that even multifaceted narrative scenes were structured to fit into a general compositional scheme. Important organizational means were the arrangement of figures on common baselines (the typical register of Egyptian art), the placing of figures in groups in which everyone performs the same action, and the juxtaposition and repetition of gestures and poses.

Informative examples of royal group-action tableaux are the ritual scenes from the king's Heb Sed, seen here in an example from the Fourth Dynasty (cat. no. 23) and in a version on two blocks from the Fifth Dynasty sun temple of King Niuserre (fig. 51; cat. no. 121). Both works show a high degree of structural organization. With the exception of the standard-bearer in the Fourth Dynasty piece (cat. no. 23), all figures act on common baselines and thus inside a firm system of registers. In the earlier relief the close-knit group of officials on the right



Fig. 51. Two blocks representing Heb Sed (thirty-year jubilee) rituals, sun temple of Niuserre, Abu Ghurab. From Bissing and Kees 1923 (pl. 11)

clarifies the compositional structure. In the Fifth Dynasty version the somewhat larger figure of the enthroned king, impressively isolated in his double pavilion, serves as a focus and resting point in the narrative. A similar figure of the pharaoh must have appeared to the right of the preserved scene, and it is toward this missing royal person that most activities in the extant section are directed.

Comparison of the two uppermost registers on the Niuserre blocks gives further insights into group-action tableaux. In the register at the very top an evenly spaced row of standard-bearers advances toward the king on the right. A highly charged encounter takes place in the register below: two groups of officials and priests confront each other across three prostrate figures identified in the inscription as "great ones" (that is, leaders) in the center, with the first priest on the right crying, "Back!" at the "great ones." The narrative burden is conveyed by the expressive gestures of the opposed figures, the detailed depiction of various religious objects, and the written words.²⁷ Group-action tableaux often appear consecutively, with each scene depicting a separate episode of a single narrative. While rows of stationary figures achieve progression in space, sequences of group-action tableaux convey progression in time. Sequential group-action tableaux are often divided by vertical lines, such as those in the lower left corner of the Niuserre blocks and in the lower register of the blocks depicting the seasons (cat. nos. 119, 120). Such lines seem analogous to those used in the transcriptions of ritual instructions (or other texts) on papyrus rolls.²⁸ This correspondence is especially noticeable in the Niuserre Heb Sed scenes, which lacked the unifying elements of wall-high figures of the king or a god.

The Niuserre reliefs depicted the Heb Sed in more or less the same set of scenes at least five times, not only inside the chapel but also outside to the left and right of the doorway from the main courtyard.²⁹ Such repetition of a set of ritual images, reminiscent of litany incantations, reveals the intensity with which ancient Egyptian relief decoration attempted to magically evoke a meaningful other reality beyond everyday life.



Fig. 52. Wall relief, pyramid temple of Pepi II, Saqqara: the king with gods and officials of Upper Egypt. From Jéquier 1938 (pl. 50). For position within the temple, see fig. 59.

THE COMBINATION OF FIGURAL SCHEMES AND ORGANIZATION OF LARGE WALL SPACES

The rather uniform assemblage of register upon register of ritual group-action tableaux in the Heb Sed antechamber room of Niuserre is unusual (fig. 51). Generally, Egyptian royal reliefs are part of an overall compositional system whose primary structural element is a very large, often wall-high figure of the king, a deity, or both.³⁰ In the most common type of composition, a large figure of the pharaoh is combined with several registers of smaller, nonroyal personages, arranged in simple rows or participating in group actions. A classic example of such a composition, which comes from the pyramid temple of King Pepi II at Saqqara (fig. 52),³¹ shows three rows of gods meeting the king in the upper registers, while in the bottom register state officials, likewise arranged in a neat row, bow before him. Between gods and officials the remains of another register present a groupaction tableau of the butchering of offering animals.

It is possible to follow the evolution of the compositional principle of combining a large focal figure with rows of smaller ones from its rudimentary beginnings in



Fig 53. Relief on mace head of King Scorpion, late Predynastic (ca. 3100 B.C.E.). Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Drawing by Richard Parkinson after Marion Cox after Spencer 1993

the late Predynastic and Archaic Periods to the end of the Old Kingdom. While the principle of arranging figures in horizontal registers was firmly in place by late Predynastic times,³² that of combining a single large figure with several registers of smaller figures developed much more slowly. On the front of the famous Narmer palette from the beginning of the First Dynasty,33 the king's figure is considerably larger than those of his followers, but only the beheaded enemies are shown in several rows, one above the other. On the reverse of the palette a falcon figure, leading an emblematically depicted enemy by the nose, appears in front of the shoulders and head of the king; however, there is no clear indication that this falcon-on-enemy group occupies a register of its own above the larger and fully human enemy who kneels before the king.³⁴ A much clearer juxtaposition between a large royal figure and nonroyal images in registers is found on the King Scorpion mace head (fig. 53),³⁵ although even here a distinction is made between nonroyal figures of medium size, which interact with the king in a landscape of astonishingly free composition, and the rows of small figures that precede and follow the pharaoh on several register levels.

The combination of a large focal figure with several registers of smaller figures was not fully established at the end of the Archaic Period, as is demonstrated by a group of royal reliefs from the reign of Khasekhemui, the last king of the Second Dynasty.³⁶ On a granite door-frame found at the important Upper Egyptian town of Hierakonopolis, a number of small figures in four registers, one above the other, are inserted rather clumsily between two of the large principal figures, seemingly as



Fig. 54. Wall relief, pyramid temple of King Sahure, Abusir: the king hunting desert animals. Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 21783. From Borchardt 1913 (pl. 17). For position in the corridor south of the central courtyard, see fig. 57. See also cat. no. 110.

an afterthought. None of the fragments from another architectural granite relief from the so-called fort at Hierakonopolis provides evidence for more advanced compositions. But on a piece that may date to the early Third Dynasty, a relief from the temple of Hathor at the Upper Egyptian site of Gebelein, the combination of registers of smaller individuals behind the large figure of the king is handled with a marked increase in assurance and structural clarity. This relief does, however, still show a follower's figure of intermediate size standing on the same baseline as the king, a type of arrangement seen on the earlier King Scorpion mace head.³⁷

From at least the early Fourth Dynasty onward the combination of a large figure with several registers of smaller figures is handled by artists with ever greater proficiency. In the statue temple of Snefru at Dahshur only a few of the more than fifteen hundred preserved relief fragments employ this format.³⁸ The majority of

scenes above the rows of estates (fig. 50) in that temple consisted of large single figures or groups of two or three large figures. Large figures and rows of smaller ones were skillfully combined, however, in reliefs from the later years of Snefru's reign and the reign of Khufu, which followed. For instance, in the Heb Sed scene dating late in Snefru's reign (cat. no. 23) the large figure of the pharaoh, which originally followed the standard-bearer on the left, was surely at least as tall as two of the registers that are partially preserved on the fragments.³⁹ The presence of the same kind of arrangement can be deduced from the fan bearer's position in a relief fragment (cat. no. 39) from the pyramid temple of Khufu: the man's placement close to the top makes sense only if he was part of at least two registers of attending figures located behind or in front of a large figure of the pharaoh.⁴⁰

During the early part of the Fifth Dynasty, under Kings Userkaf⁴¹ and Sahure (cat. no. 113), the practice of linking





a large focal figure with rows of smaller figures reached its highest development, with artists achieving great variety and remarkable subtlety in the figure correlations. A magnificent example is the depiction of the desert hunt of King Sahure (cat. no. 112). This masterpiece of royal relief art (fig. 54)⁴² had its original place in the corridor south of the pyramid temple's central courtyard (see cat. no. 110). The simple figural lineup in front of a large image of the king has been transformed in this relief into a densely packed mass of terribly wounded and frightened animals inside a netted stockade. The animals are shown in a multiplicity of postures and groupings with figures facing in diverse directions and overlapping

Fig. 55. Wall relief from pyramid temple of Niuserre, Abusir. Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 16100. From Borchardt 1907, pl. 16



Fig. 56. Wall relief, pyramid temple of Pepi II, Saqqara: at left, the king slaying enemies, enemies supplicating, booty, and the goddess Seshat writing; at right, the king with the goddesses Buto and Nekhbet. From Jéquier 1938 (pl. 36). For position within the temple, see fig. 59.

in a variety of ways. The irregular assemblage contrasts with the dignified uniformity of the officials who march sedately behind Sahure and at the bottom of the scene. This is an example of the age-old Egyptian juxtaposition of order and chaos, but Sahure's artists have given unusual drama to the basic scheme and have depicted each of the animals with unequaled care and compassion.

The poor state of reliefs from the funeral monuments of the kings who followed Sahure makes it difficult to generalize about scene composition during their reigns. Fragments from the pyramid precinct of King Niuserre present many instances of rather uniform rows of officials and offering bearers.43 Niuserre's designers appear to have lacked the compositional inventiveness of Sahure's relief artists, but this judgment may be unfair given the much smaller number of preserved blocks from this reign. It should also be noted that in Niuserre's sun temple artists used the traditional register system in a very innovative manner to describe the various natural events of the akhet (inundation) and shemu (harvest) seasons. The skill with which the register system was adapted to narrative requirements in these reliefs is evident in a block (cat. no. 119) where the height of the right scene spans two registers and a bush is used to mask the transition between it and the smaller one at the left.⁴⁴

The most impressive relief remains from Niuserre's pyramid precinct, however, are large-figure compositions, for example, the seven royal sphinxes with enemies' bodies under their paws, that adorned the causeway⁴⁵ and the magnificent throne scene (fig. 55). Such scenes appear to indicate that large-figure compositions gained renewed importance in the late Fifth Dynasty and the Sixth Dynasty, a hypothesis that is not contradicted by the few published blocks from the pyramid temples of Kings Djedkare-Isesi and Unis⁴⁶ and is supported by the reliefs in Pepi II's pyramid temple, the last monument of its kind built in the Old Kingdom. Enough relief fragments were preserved from Pepi II's important precinct to have allowed the excavator, Gustave Jéquier, to reconstruct a great number of scenes in their entirety. The reconstructions reveal that by the late Sixth Dynasty royal relief design had undergone a striking change. In the pyramid temple of Pepi II compositions such as that showing the king with gods and officials (fig. 52) are found only on the walls of the causeway,⁴⁷ in the square



Fig. 57. Plan of pyramid temple and valley temple of Sahure, Abusir. Drawing by Peter Der Manuelian after Porter and Moss 1974, pl. 38

antechamber,⁴⁸ and in the mortuary cult sanctuary—the last one with a figure of the king seated instead of standing.⁴⁹ None of these reliefs are very inspired compositions, and in all the other rooms of the temple a variant scheme prevails. In this variant, large—often almost wallhigh—figures of the king and various deities take up the greatest amount of space, while rows of small figures are not present⁵⁰ or are reduced to rudimentary groups that occupy little space in relation to that of the large figures (fig. 56).⁵¹

The large-figure scenes in room after room of Pepi II's temple must have been awe-inspiring, and it is possible that a development toward large-figure temple reliefs that began here influenced much later relief decoration in temples of the Middle and New Kingdoms.⁵² In the framework of the history of Old Kingdom relief composition, however, these large-figure scenes are strongly reminiscent of early Fourth Dynasty compositions (fig. 50) and appear to indicate archaistic tendencies in royal relief art at the end of the Old Kingdom.⁵³ The scheme of a large focal figure with rows of smaller ones having lost its appeal, artists must have looked back to the earlier type of composition, undoubtedly because it was more appropriate for changed views of the function of the pyramid temple and its reliefs.

ENSEMBLES OF ROYAL RELIEFS IN THEIR Architectural Settings

Any speculation about the function and significance of pyramid temple reliefs is, of course, closely linked to general questions concerning the function of the temples and their various rooms. In the 1940s and 1950s Ricke and Schott maintained that the buildings of Old Kingdom pyramid complexes were predominantly stages and sets for royal funerals,⁵⁴ but wall reliefs of the buildings provide no support for such an interpretation. Beginning in the 1970s scholars therefore reconsidered the function of pyramid complexes, paying more attention to the content of the reliefs.55 It is now argued that the royal funeral-a single event whose renewal in perpetuity would have little significance-had at best only an indirect impact on a temple's architecture and reliefs. Our present understanding is that most scenes either perpetuated the rituals and offerings that ensured the king's eternal life or evoked and magically strengthened the power of kingship and its victory over chaos.

It is important to note how differently designers treated these ideas in each complex. A brief description of a walk through a pyramid complex with relatively well-preserved reliefs will convey the general sense of one such design. Like most of its kind, the pyramid complex of King Sahure at Abusir (figs. 57, 58; cat. no. 110) consisted of a valley temple, causeway, pyramid temple, pyramid, and secondary (smaller) pyramid. At the valley temple, which could be understood as a quayside reception place, reliefs depicted marshlands (the environment of the valley temple and a traditional Egyptian symbol of rebirth)⁵⁶ and the arrival of a large royal ship accompanied by running troops (cat. no. 114).⁵⁷ Other reliefs appear to have served as a preparation for what would be shown in greater detail in the pyramid temple itself. Among these preparatory representations are depictions of the king in the presence of major deities and scenes from the Heb Sed;⁵⁸ one impressive relief shows the young pharaoh suckled by a goddess.⁵⁹ (The last scene is documented in the exhibition by a similar block from the valley temple of King Niuserre [cat. no. 118].)

On the north wall of the valley temple's two-columned hall, in front of the niched doorway, large griffins, the mythical embodiments of kingship, trampled on enemies⁶⁰ while deities led bound prisoners toward them. The scenes of bound prisoners were repeated on the causeway walls just behind the valley temple,⁶¹ emphasizing movement from valley temple to causeway and farther on to the pyramid temple.⁶² Recently excavated reliefs from the upper part of Sahure's causeway depict men bearing offerings, butchers slaughtering animals, and a building crew bringing the gilded capstone to the pyramid amid festivities connected with the event. Also represented are emaciated desert people, a possible reference to the mountainous area from which the pyramid capstone came (for a later example, see cat. no. 122).⁶³ Scenes referring to the construction of the pyramid complex⁶⁴ may be regarded as elaborations of earlier reliefs in which the temple foundation was depicted in connection with the Heb Sed.65

From the causeway one entered the first room of the pyramid temple, a long vaulted hall, called the *per-weru* (House of the Great Ones) in ancient Egyptian. This room is thought to have been a copy of a hall in the living king's residence where he received notables and performed certain rituals.⁶⁶ The position and shape of the *per-weru* in Fifth and Sixth Dynasty pyramid temples are strikingly like those of the entrance corridor in the temple of Snefru in which rows of estate personifications appeared in the bottom registers of wall reliefs. Fragments of similar reliefs were found in Sahure's *per-weru*, but it is not known what ritual scenes, if any, made up the rest of the decoration.⁶⁷

The *per-weru* opens into the columned courtyard that is the central feature of the outer part of the pyramid temple. Sahure's courtyard, surrounded by corridors on all four sides, is different from those of other pyramid temples. The courtyard, its porticoes, and its outer walls have the character of a closed architectural block. Representations of ships were carved on the west walls of the eastern corridor⁶⁸ and on the east walls of the western corridor,⁶⁹ indicating that the courtyard block



Fig. 58. View of pyramid temple of Sahure, from top of his pyramid, Abusir

should be understood as an island surrounded by water. In Egyptian mythology the creation of the world began with the emergence of an island from the primeval water, and thus the courtyard island of Sahure becomes analogous to the first created land. The palm capitals of the portico columns allude to the plants on the primeval island.⁷⁰

Inside the corridors on the north and south faces of the courtyard block, ritual scenes were depicted; they showed dancing, music making, and the bringing of offering animals into the presence of large figures of the king and certain deities.⁷¹ Scenes from the Heb Sed may also have been included.⁷² All these ritualistic images underline the sacred nature of the island. The corridor walls opposite the island block were carved with magnificent relief compositions showing the king hunting in the desert (cat. no. 113) and in the marshes.⁷³ Such royal occupations traditionally symbolized the king's struggle against the forces of chaos and the triumph of life over death.74 Their depiction served to avert evil from the primeval island and all that happened there. The events that were believed to occur in a symbolic way on the island were shown in the portico reliefs facing the open court. On the southern and northern portico walls the king was depicted subjugating enemies on Egypt's western (Libyan)75 and eastern (Asiatic)76 borders and taking large numbers of their cattle and other domestic animals. On the western portico walls more scenes from the Heb Sed were depicted.⁷⁷ The paramount theme of Egyptian kingship was expressed in reliefs decorating the alabaster altar in the courtyard center, which depicted the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt accompanied by fertility figures.⁷⁸ Thus through its relief decoration the primeval Fig. 59. Plan of pyramid temple and valley temple of Pepi II, Saqqara. Drawing by Peter Der Manuelian after Porter and Moss 1978, pl. 44



island at the center of Sahure's pyramid temple became a stage for the king's enactment of his quintessential role as guarantor of order and prosperity. Through repeated emphasis on this role's cosmic significance, the king's deeds were interpreted as the fulfillment of creation.⁷⁹

At this point it may be telling to compare the courtyard of the temple of Pepi II (fig. 59) with that in the temple of Sahure. In Pepi's courtyard no reliefs adorned the portico walls, and scenes found in and around the courtyard block in Sahure's temple appear in other rooms of Pepi II's temple.80 Without doubt these differences in relief position express a changed concept of kingship and the religious ideas surrounding it. Sahure was regarded as a hero who performed deeds to ensure stability and abundance, while in the large-figure reliefs of his pyramid temple Pepi II is primarily a performer of rituals and a companion of the gods. In Sahure's temple an impressive desert hunt is depicted, but in Pepi II's temple the triumph over evil is represented by a scene of the ritual killing of a single antelope.⁸¹ Evidently the designers of the Pepi II complex no longer regarded the pyramid temple courtyard as a place where kingship triumphant was made manifest. They decorated the pillars of the courtyard porticoes with double-figure groups showing Pepi embraced by gods⁸² and left the rest of the walls undecorated.

A central doorway in the corridor west of Sahure's courtyard led into a hall with five statue chambers. The statues of the king in these five chambers received a daily cult and were thus a primary ritual focus, as they were in all pyramid temples (see "Old Kingdom Statues in Their Architectural Setting" by Dieter Arnold in this catalogue). The hall of statue chambers and all rooms that opened from it-including the sanctuary for the mortuary cult-were situated at a higher level than the rest of the temple, a fact that emphasized their greater importance.⁸³ Two massive walls flanked the central entrance into the statue hall, creating a deep recess for the doorway and transforming it into the typical niched doorway that Ricke called the "door of [the goddess] Nut."84 An important secondary entrance south of the center courtyard led directly from the open desert into rooms that connected with the secondary pyramid of the king to the south and with the western courtyard corridor to the north. An impressive relief that flanked this entrance (cat. no. 113) depicted deities and beneficial spirits endowing the king with prosperity, stability, and eternal rule.

Reliefs in the rooms behind the side entrance showed the king worshiping the lion-headed goddess Bastet.⁸⁵ Allusions to this goddess may also be found in a monumental statue of a lion or lioness that stood in the pyramid temple of King Niuserre in a small recess beside the niched central doorway, or "door of Nut."⁸⁶ Female deities (Nekhbet and Bastet or Sakhmet) played an important role in the relief decoration of all niched central doorways in Old Kingdom pyramid temples. In the temple of Sahure a large human-headed goddess suckling the young king must have been depicted on the walls flanking the doorway, as well as in the similarly shaped entrance from the valley temple into the causeway.⁸⁷ The parallel image from the valley temple of Niuserre (cat. no. 118) showed the goddess with a lion head.

The impressive images of the king being nurtured by a goddess can be regarded as a proclamation of the king's eternal rebirth. For the statues inside the five chambers behind the central courtyard, the niched doorway functioned as a kind of birth canal, through which the kingafter being revived by the statue cult-stepped down into the courtyard to perform his heroic deeds.⁸⁸ Papyri tell us that in Neferirkare's pyramid temple the central statue of five represented the king as Osiris, the foremost Egyptian resurrection deity, while the two outermost ones depicted him as king of Upper and Lower Egypt.⁸⁹ The most important record of the appearance of statues in pyramid temple statue chambers is found in a relief from the temple of King Niuserre (fig. 55), which shows the enthroned king being presented with ankhs by Anubis, the necropolis god. Small disks at the bottom of the throne may depict rollers on which the statue was moved from its niche during ritual performances.9° The presence of both Osiris and Anubis is a reminder that, despite the great emphasis on kingship in general, a pyramid temple is always dedicated to a deceased king.

Storerooms were located on both sides of the fivechambered hall. These contained the implements and provisions necessary for ritual performances. Reliefs in the corridors leading to these rooms depicted how such objects were packed and handled: "sealing a box containing incense" is written above one scene⁹¹ and the "presentation of gold" to officials is shown in the corridor leading to storerooms in the north.92 An area of solid stone separated⁹³ the mortuary cult sanctuary from these storerooms, the statue chambers, and the rest of the temple.94 Although a mortuary cult chamber was not part of Fourth Dynasty pyramid temples, and may have been introduced into royal funerary architecture95 only under influences from tombs of nonroval persons,⁹⁶ by the time of King Sahure the room was certainly a place of important ritual performances that ensured the king's eternal life.97 The reliefs in this room were more standardized than any others in the temple and did not differ essentially from reliefs in the mortuary cult chambers of nonroyal persons. A long list of offerings was usually shown in front of the seated king on both long walls of the chamber; rows of offering bearers moved toward the pharaoh, and there were depictions of a rich display of goods piled on tables (compare cat. no. 194). On the back wall a false door-the traditional place of communication between the living and the dead-was surrounded by fertility figures and deities.⁹⁸

Sahure's pyramid temple had relief decoration on almost four hundred running meters of wall space, constituting the largest program of its kind. Calculations involving monuments from Snefru's statue-cult temple to the pyramid temple of Pepi II show that the amount of wall space suitable for relief decoration in pyramid temples gradually increased until it reached this peak and then decreased, as the following table indicates.⁹⁹

	RUNNING METERS OF WALL SPACE SUITABLE FOR RELIEF IN PYRAMID TEMPLES	
King		
Snefru	64	
Khufu	100	
Userkaf	120	
Sahure	370	
Pepi II	200	

These necessarily very rough calculations not only underline the singular richness of the Sahure relief decoration¹⁰⁰ but also show the close link between the development of relief decoration and of architecture during the Pyramid Age. Each increase in available wall space must have spurred the relief designers to create yet more elaborate scenes, and each new pictorial elaboration must have been a challenge to the architects to provide more space.

- This fact can be deduced (particularly for the valley temples) from the finds of Old Kingdom royal relief blocks in the pyramid of Amenemhat I, first king of the Twelfth Dynasty; see Goedicke 1971. The following royal names are attested on these blocks: Khufu, Khafre, Userkaf (see cat. nos. 38, 41, 65, 103), Unis, and Pepi II. See also Labrousse and Moussa 1996, p. 67, for Middle Kingdom repairs made on the valley temple of Unis.
- 2. Borchardt 1907, pp. 160–61. For the longer life of the pyramid temple of Sahure, see Borchardt 1910, pp. 106–7; contradicted by Baines 1973, pp. 9–14.
- 3. See, for instance, Borchardt 1907, pp. 51, 53, 58, figs. 32, 34, 38; and Borchardt 1910, pp. 6, 7, figs. 2, 3.
- 4. Especially Borchardt 1913; Jéquier 1938; and Jéquier 1940.
- 5. See Vandier 1952a, pp. 533-60, 570-605; Vandier 1952b pp. 724-30, 793-863; and Spencer 1993, pp. 52-71, 87-91, figs. 32-37, 42-46, 67.
- 6. Vandier 1952a, pp. 561-70; Spencer 1993, pp. 36-39, fig. 20.
- 7. Engelbach 1934, pp. 183–84, pl. 24; Alexanian 1998, pp. 5, 9–10, 11, 12, pl. 7b.
- 8. The following necessarily very cursory attempt at a grammar of Old Kingdom royal relief owes much to the thoughtful study by Yvonne Harpur (1987). See also Smith 1965, pp. 137-54.
- 9. Smith 1946, pp. 273-304; Harpur 1987, pp. 49-58.

- 10. Smith 1946, pp. 297-301.
- 11. The left margin of the Qahedjet slab (cat. no. 9) is considerably wider than the right, suggesting that the slab was set into the right side of a niche decorated on three sides with reliefs.
- 12. For slabs, see Firth and Quibell 1935, pls. 15–17, 40–42, 44.
 For pillars, see Jéquier 1940, pl. 45; and Fakhry 1961b, pp. 59–110, esp. figs. 35, 43, 48, 63, 84, 91.
- 13. Fakhry 1961b, pp. 111–23, figs. 119–27.
- 14. Compare multifigured relief compositions around doorways in royal temples—such as those shown in Jéquier 1938, pls. 36, 54; and Borchardt 1910, p. 62, fig. 79-with the large single figures frequently used to flank doorways of private tombs (fig. 18 in this catalogue; Harpur 1987, pp. 43-58). This fundamental difference in the way single figures were used in royal and private monuments is difficult to explain. It might be argued that in private tombs the mortuary cult is of primary importance, while in royal pyramid temples it is important only in the back of the building. Even in the royal mortuary cult rooms, however, no large single figures of the king appear to have flanked the false door: see Borchardt 1913, pp. 39-40, fig. 6, pl. 23. More common in royal monuments are large inscriptions with the king's name at the sides of doors; see Labrousse, Lauer, and Leclant 1977, pp. 16, 42, 44, figs. 5, 26, 29.
- 15. This building has usually been called a valley temple since Fakhry (1961b, passim) identified it as such. However, Stadelmann (1991, p. 98) has correctly described it as a structure combining elements of the later valley temples and the outer pyramid temples.
- 16. No relief decoration (beyond a king's figure and large inscriptions on stelae) is known from the buildings at the east side of Snefru's pyramid at Meidum and the Bent Pyramid at Dahshur. Stadelmann (1991, pp. 87, 98) holds that the simple form of the places designated for worship at these pyramids developed because these pyramids were cenotaphs and the structures in front were not funerary temples but royal cult installations. Relief fragments were found at the small pyramid temple east of the Red Pyramid at Dahshur, arguably Snefru's final burial place: Stadelmann 1983, pp. 233–34, fig. 5, pl. 73. The fragments show that scenes from the Heb Sed were depicted in the building.
- 17. Fakhry 1961b, pp. 2, 11, figs. 1, 4 B4.
- 18. Ibid., pp. 17-58; Jacquet-Gordon 1962.
- 19. Harpur 1987, p. 138. See, for instance, Borchardt 1913, pl. 27.
- 20. Fakhry 1961b, pp. 20-23, 35-45, 53, 57, figs. 9, 10, 16-18, 25, 31, 32. For the lion-goddess fragment, see ibid., frontis.
- 21. This pictorial configuration is called a "scene" or a "basic scene type" by Harpur (1987, pp. 175–221). Smith (1965, p. 140) writes of "rectangular units containing conceptually related subject matter."
- 22. The three classic studies are Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951 (1987 ed.), esp. pp. 23, 85–87; Kantor 1957, pp. 44–54; and Gaballa 1976, esp. pp. 21–25 (Old Kingdom royal reliefs). Gaballa points out the numerous New Kingdom depictions of specific historic events (ibid., pp. 6, 94–129).
- 23. David O'Connor, in a fall 1995 seminar for graduate students at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, argued strongly for a less restricted view of narration in Egyptian art. He bases this view on recent studies in the history of Greek and Roman art that have been collected in Holliday 1993. I thank Professor O'Connor for allowing me to read his introductory paper to the seminar.

- 24. For an overview of scenes in nonroyal Old Kingdom tombs, see Porter and Moss 1974, pp. 355–58; Porter and Moss 1981, pp. 903–7; and Harpur 1987, pp. 81–85, 110–15, 139–73, 176–220.
- 25. For an overview of scenes in royal temples, see Porter and Moss 1974, pp. 314–40; and Porter and Moss 1978, pp. 417–32. For the pyramid precinct of Unis, see Labrousse and Moussa 1996; and Labrousse, Lauer, and Leclant 1977. Representations depicting the making of things appear in the reliefs in pyramid causeways; see Hassan 1938, pp. 519–20, pls. 96, 97. Among the scenes depicted are metal workshops and fish markets; all the subjects and iconography derive from the tombs of nonroyal persons
- 26. Smith 1946, pp. 333-50; Harpur 1987, pp. 175-221.
- 27. See Fischer 1986, esp. pp. 24-46.
- 28. On the written tradition of ritual texts and their illustrations, see Altenmüller 1972; and Altenmüller 1975, cols. 1132–40.
- 29. Bissing and Kees 1923, pp. 8–15; Kaiser 1971, pp. 87–105, esp. p. 93.
- 30. Smith 1946, pp. 333-34.
- 31. Jéquier 1938, pls. 50 (west wall of the square antechamber), 51-53.
- 32. The most obvious examples are the ivories, palettes, and mace heads from the late Predynastic Period: Vandier 1952a, pp. 533-60, 579-605, figs. 358-74, and esp. figs. 388, 392-94. The close relation of the register system and writing is demonstrated in ivory plaques from Archaic times: ibid., pp. 827-55, esp. figs. 556, 560, 562, 565, 570.
- 33. For the most recent depiction, see Schulz and Seidel 1998, p. 29, figs. 38, 39.
- 34. Indeed, the falcon leading an enemy by the nose has the character of a rebus or an inscription.
- 35. Vandier 1952a, p. 601, fig. 393.
- 36. Alexanian 1998.
- 37. Donadoni Roveri 1988, p. 65, no. 75. See especially Smith 1946, pp. 137–38; and most recently Donadoni Roveri and Tiradritti 1998, p. 257, no. 236, with earlier bibliography. See also Seidelmayer 1998, p. 39, fig. 61. This relief and its companion in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo (Alexanian 1998, p. 13, n. 57) are not dated by inscription. Judging from the advanced clarity of design and the indications of musculature in the legs of the king, a date in the Third Dynasty seems most appropriate. The lengthened proportions of the main figure can be understood as regional style. For the style of Second Dynasty reliefs, see Alexanian 1998, pp. 17–21.
- 38. On one block (Fakhry 1961b, p. 20, fig. 9) the feet of a large figure (the king?) are confronted by a smaller foot. It is therefore possible that smaller figures in several rows were depicted marching toward the king. Relief fragments found in the temple of the northern pyramid, or Red Pyramid, of Snefru showed large figures of the king. But not enough is preserved to allow a definite statement about the compositions of the scenes.
- 39. In the nonroyal sphere the use of the scheme in its early Fourth Dynasty stage is well attested in the tomb of Metjen (Harpur 1987, plan 2) and the Meidum mastabas (Petrie 1892, pls. 9, 10, 19, 25, 27; Harpur 1987, plan 1); see cat. nos. 22, 23.
- 40. For another relevant example of the combination of a large figure and several registers of smaller ones conceivably of the time of Khufu, see Goedicke 1971, pp. 33–35, nos. 14, 15. For nonroyal tombs of the mid-Fourth Dynasty and their adept, if still somewhat stiff, use of the scheme, see especially Simpson 1978, pl. 33; see also Smith 1965, pp. 139–41.

- 41. See also Smith 1981, p. 129, fig. 122.
- 42. Borchardt 1913, pp. 30-35, pl. 17.
- 43. Borchardt 1907, pp. 70–96, figs. 48–75. See, however, the fine quality of fragments of a marsh scene from the valley temple (ibid., pp. 37–38, figs. 15, 16).
- 44. For other instances of skillful variations in the heights of adjoining registers, see Edel and Wenig 1974, pls. 10, 11.
- 45. Borchardt 1907, pp. 46-49, figs. 29, 31, pls. 8-12.
- 46. Large-figure compositions: Goyon 1969, pl. 39 (Djedkare-Isesi's pyramid precinct); Labrousse, Lauer, and Leclant 1977, pp. 78–83, figs. 44–46, 51–53, pp. 94–97, figs. 72, 73, pls. 28–30, 33, 34 (Unis).
- 47. For reconstructions, see Jéquier 1940, pls. 12, 19, 24, with disproportionately long rows of small figures.
- 48. For reconstructions, see Jéquier 1938, pls. 46, 50, 54, 58.
 For the mythological function of the square antechamber, see D. Arnold 1977, pp. 10–11; and D. Arnold 1997, pp. 35, 67–70.
- 49. For reconstructions, see Jéquier 1938, pls. 61, 62, 81, 82, 97.
- 50. For reconstructions, see ibid., pls. 18 (transverse corridor), 41 (vestibule before square antechamber), 30, 32 (niched central doorway).
- 51. For reconstructions, see Jéquier 1938, pls. 8, 12 (transverse corridor), 36 (vestibule to the square antechamber). These scenes are not well preserved, and it is impossible to say how much space was given to rows of small figures in the compositions of the king hunting the hippopotamus and carrying a bow and slaying the enemies in the hall known as the *perweru* (Jéquier 1940, pls. 30, 32, 36).
- 52. Smith (1946, p. 203) writes of ties between the decorated pillars of Pepi II's temple (Jéquier 1940, pp. 22–24, pls. 44, 45) and later architecture. Smith (1946, p. 204) also mentions how strongly the reliefs in the mortuary cult chapel of Pepi II resemble those in the sanctuary of Queen Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri.
- 53. Here we cannot discuss the intricate question of archaism in the Sixth Dynasty, the extent of which Cherpion (1989, pp. 83–109) has minimized.
- 54. Ricke 1944; Ricke 1950, pp. 1–128; S. Schott 1950, pp. 135–224.
- 55. D. Arnold 1977, pp. 1–14; Brinks 1979; Stadelmann 1991, pp. 205–14; Rochholz 1994a, pp. 255–80. Most recently O'Connor has stressed the cosmic aspects of pyramid temples (O'Connor 1998, pp. 135–44). For cosmic aspects of the underground chambers of pyramids as revealed in the Pyramid Texts, see Allen 1994, pp. 5–28.
- 56. Borchardt 1913, pl. 15; Harpur 1987, pp. 185–86. For the interpretation of marsh scenes, see Martin 1986, cols. 1051–54.
- 57. Borchardt 1913, pl. 9 and p. 22, fig. 4 (the reconstruction).
- 58. Ibid., pl. 19.
- 59. Ibid., pl. 18; placed by Borchardt (ibid., p. 35, and 1910, pp. 20, 54) in the niched doorway of the pyramid temple. But considering that the Niuserre block showing the same scene was also found in the ruins of the valley temple, it seems more likely that this relief also would have been located in a niched doorway of the valley temple, anticipating similar scenes in the pyramid temple.
- 60. Borchardt 1913, pl. 8.
- 61. Ibid., pls. 5–7. The griffin is reconstructed as the focus of these rows of gods and prisoners by Borchardt (ibid., p. 18) on the basis of scenes in Niuserre's causeway (Borchardt 1907, pp. 46–49, pls. 8–12).

- 62. Similar scenes were depicted at the beginning of Unis's cause-way (Labrousse and Moussa 1996, pp. 95–97, 99, figs. 97, 98, 101). The appearance of booty animals in the Unis reliefs underlines the function of valley temple reliefs as a preparation for what appears in the main temple. The animal group is very close to the Libyan booty shown in Sahure's courtyard relief (Borchardt 1913, pl. 1).
- 63. Hawass 1996c, pp. 177-86, pls. 54-56.
- 64. Portrayals of ships transporting columns and other building blocks in reliefs of the causeway of Unis belong to the same genre of scenes (Hassan 1955, pp. 137–38, fig. 1).
- 65. Bissing and Kees 1923, pls. 1, 2; Fakhry 1961b, pp. 94–98, figs. 91–95.
- 66. D. Arnold 1977, pp. 6-7.
- 67. In the entrance corridor of Snefru's temple, remains of the upper registers indicate that the king was shown visiting the gods in their chapels and running in the Heb Sed; see Fakhry 1961b, p. 41, fig. 17, p. 53, fig. 25.
- 68. Borchardt 1913, pl. 14.
- 69. Ibid., pls. 11-13.
- 70. Ricke (1950, pp. 22, 73) interpreted the palm capital columns as depictions of a mythical burial at Buto in the Delta. For O'Connor (1998) the central courtyard is the place of the rising of the sun from the primeval ocean.
- 71. Borchardt 1913, pls. 32-34, 54, 56.
- 72. Ibid., pl. 65.
- 73. Ibid., pl. 16.
- 74. For the hunt in the desert, see Altenmüller 1980a, cols. 224–30.For the hunt in the marshes, see note 56 above.
- 75. Borchardt 1913, pls. 1, 2.
- 76. Ibid., pls. 3, 4. The theme of the subjugation of foreign lands was carried over into the ship representations on the east wall of the western corridor, where seagoing ships were depicted leaving Egypt for the Levant and returning with foreign peoples whom the Egyptian mariners teach to revere Pharaoh (ibid., pls. 11–13). These scenes were interpreted by Bietak (1988, pp. 35–40) as indicating the employment of foreign mariners by Egypt.
- 77. Borchardt 1913, p. 69, pl. 67 (the position of the reliefs).
- 78. Borchardt 1910, pp. 48–51, figs. 51–56. For the function of this altar, see "The Tombs of Officials" by Peter Jánosi in this catalogue, pp. 33, 39, n. 83.
- 79. It may be significant that in the pyramid temple of Khafre (Ricke 1950, pp. 48-52, figs. 16-19, pl. 2) statues of the king stood around the courtyard, and in the courtyard of the pyramid temple of Userkaf a monumental statue of the king was erected (Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 52501; Firth 1929, p. 65, pl. 1). See "Old Kingdom Statues in Their Architectural Setting" by Dieter Arnold in this catalogue.
- 80. The fowling scene, for instance, in Sahure's temple in the northern corridor of the courtyard, is probably depicted in the *per-weru* of Pepi II (Jéquier 1940, pls. 41, 43); the king slaying enemies (in Sahure's temple in the courtyard portico) appears in the temple of Pepi II in the transverse corridor (Jéquier 1938, pl. 8) and in the vestibule to the square ante-chamber (ibid., pl. 36).
- 81. Jéquier 1938, pls. 41-43.
- 82. Jéquier 1940, pl. 45.
- 83. According to Borchardt (1910, p. 54), steps or a small ramp must have connected the lower level of the outer temple around the courtyard with the level of the statue chamber,

which was eighty to ninety centimeters higher. For steps preserved in the temple of Teti, see Lauer and Leclant 1972, pp. 24, 27, pl. 13; and D. Arnold 1997, p. 68, fig. 28.

- 84. Ricke 1950, pp. 60-62.
- 85. Borchardt 1913, pls. 35, 36. See also Borchardt 1907, p. 94, fig. 72.
- 86. Borchardt 1907, pp. 16-17, 69-70, figs. 7, 47.
- 87. Borchardt 1913, pl. 18. See also Labrousse, Lauer, and Leclant 1977, p. 84, pl. 29.
- 88. Another reference to birth is represented by the alabaster statuette of Pepi II as a child that was found in the square antechamber of that king's pyramid temple and which, according to the excavator, may originally have been placed in the serdab behind the statue room (Jéquier 1940, pp. 30–31, pl. 49).
- 89. Posener-Kriéger 1976, vol. 2, pp. 502, 544–45; Rochholz 1994b, p. 262.
- 90. Borchardt 1907, pp. 88–90, pl. 16. The relief is now in the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin, 16100. Borchardt (1910, p. 54) mentions having found the fragment of a similar relief close to Sahure's recessed doorway, but the fragment is not identified in Borchardt 1913. A parallel scene was depicted in the pyramid temple of King Djedkare-Isesi (Goyon 1969, p. 156, n. 2, pl. 29). A standing statue appears to have been placed in the center chapel of Pepi II's pyramid temple (Jéquier 1938, p. 25). Papyri from the pyramid temple of Neferirkare tell us something about the rituals (Opening of the Mouth, anointing, and presentation of cloth) performed with the statues; see Posener-Kriéger 1976, vol. 2, pp. 537–38.
- 91. Borchardt 1913, pl. 59, with pp. 66–67 (on the original place of the reliefs), pls. 60, 61.
- 92. Ibid., pls. 52-54.
- 93. Borchardt 1910, p. 57.
- 94. The presence of this solid stone mass is explained by Stadelmann (1991, p. 207) as a way to simulate the situating of the statue chambers in caves, since one of the chapels was called "the cave" in the papyri (Posener-Kriéger 1976, vol. 2, p. 503, n. 1; Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache, vol. 5 [1931], pp. 364–66).
- 95. D. Arnold 1997, pp. 59-61, 71-72.
- 96. For the opposing theory—that false doors and offering places for the mortuary cult were already provided in Fourth Dynasty pyramid temples—see Stadelmann 1983, pp. 237-41, with earlier bibliography on the question.
- 97. Posener-Kriéger 1976, vol. 2, pp. 539–40. For the elaborate installations for the cleaning of cult vessels, see Borchardt 1910, pp. 76–83.
- 98. Borchardt 1913, pl. 23, with p. 40, fig. 6. For remains of the false door, see Borchardt 1910, pp. 57–58, fig. 68. The best-preserved offering chamber reliefs are in the temple of Pepi II; see Jéquier 1938, pls. 61–104. For the very similar reliefs in the chapels that were erected over the northern entrances into the pyramids, from Djedkare-Isesi onward, see Lauer and Leclant 1972, pp. 43–44; and D. Arnold 1988, pp. 78–83, pls. 49–56.
- 99. I want to thank Dieter Arnold for undertaking these calculations. We confined ourselves to calculating running meters, because the heights of pyramid temple walls are uncertain. Storerooms and other spaces believed to have been without decoration were not included in our investigation. Nor did we

consider valley temples and causeways, which would have introduced further uncertainties.

100. The impressive body of surviving reliefs is in striking contrast to the almost total lack of preserved statuary in Sahure's temple (see, however, cat. no. 109 and Borchardt 1910, pp. 48, 51, fig. 57 [fragments from a base of an alabaster statue]), which may not be due to accidents of preservation alone. There are indications that pyramid

precincts of the Fourth Dynasty achieved with a rich statuary program what in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasty precincts was expressed in reliefs. In this context Stadelmann (1991, pp. 210–11) writes of a "Verdichtung" (compression) of three-dimensional architectural elements into reliefs. It might also be appropriate to call Fifth and Sixth Dynasty reliefs an elaboration of Fourth Dynasty royal statuary.