

**Festschrift Arne Eggebrecht**

zum 65. Geburtstag  
am 12. März 2000

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# HILDESHEIMER ÄGYPTOLOGISCHE BEITRÄGE

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# 48

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON BETTINA SCHMITZ

GEGRÜNDET VON ARNE EGGBRECHT

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## Grammar of Egyptian Statuary: The Old Kingdom

William Kelly Simpson

Among the major advances in the study of Egyptian, one of the most discussed has been the grammatical analysis of emphasis, whether by the verbal forms designated as emphasizing or the cleft sentence. The present brief study is a kind of analogy to “emphasis” or, otherwise stated, “relative prominence,” in the area of statuary of the Old Kingdom, mainly in pair and multiple statues in terms of placement of the figures. For gender oriented scholars the term “dominance” is frequently used.

The subject has indeed received attention in Vandier’s *Manuel* (1958) and in articles by Ursula Rößler-Köhler (1985) and Regine Schulz (1995) cited below. Specialized studies have been devoted to the “pseudo-groups,” to use Vandier’s terminology, by Marianne Eaton-Krauss (1995) and to embracing pairs by Sylvia Falke (1987). There is also a related study by Edward Brovarski (1997). Yet it seems worthwhile to discuss the subject more specifically in this Festschrift for Arne Eggebrecht, the brilliant director of the Pelizaeus-Museum.

Egyptian statuary, unlike some elements of modern and Western statuary, serves several functions at the same time: mainly as a substitute for the individual or deity represented, as a participant in ritual (for example, the opening of the mouth ceremony), and as commemorative in various situations: an ex-voto in temple contexts, as the recipient of offerings in funerary contexts, and as substitutes for after-life support systems: the servant statues and statues of offering bearers.

Emphasis or prominence can be conveyed in a multiplicity of ways, in part by size, costliness of material, and the elusive matter of relative artistic merit. As indicated, a useful starting point is the subject of the “pair statue,” usually that of a husband and wife, whether royal or non-royal. In the following discussion the term wife is generally used for the female statue, although at times the relationship is not thus specified.

### A: Standing pairs

#### *Aa: Normative Placement in Pair Statues*

Aa 1. The “normative” placement is typified by the pair statue of Mycerinus and a queen, perhaps his mother, from Giza. Boston, MFA 11.1738. Vandier, *La Statuaire*, 73, pl. V, 3. See *pl. 23, 1*. The king (husband or son) is shown on the viewer’s left with his wife or mother (the queen) on his left, the viewer’s right. Stated otherwise, he is shown on the proper right of the other figure, which I take to be the position of prominence, a relative position, as frequently remarked, illustrated in many cultures. He is also depicted as the taller of the figures, represented wearing the royal nemes, and with his kilt crossed in the royal fashion, proper left over right (Simpson 1988; Fischer 1978, 84). The queen is emphasized to a lesser extent by the placement of her left foot forward, a stance almost always restricted to male statues, although exceptions occur for female statues (see Leipzig 3684 = Arnold 1999, 292–293, Krauspe 1997, Cat. 97, 47–48, pl. 37; Louvre



E 6854, A 120 = Ziegler 1997, Cat. 28, 100–104; Berlin 12547, now considered a forgery = Fischer 1978, pl. 2; Cairo CCG 125 = Borchardt, pl. 28, with left foot of woman slightly advanced; other examples, cited by Fischer 1978, 84, n. 12 (include Junker, Giza II, pl. 13, Giza V, pl. 13, Hassan, Giza II, pls. 65, 66). In this last case there were four standing statues, uninscribed, of a woman considered to be Mersyankh, the wife of the tomb owner. Her title is king's daughter. Two of the statues show the left foot advanced, while the other two show the feet together. Perhaps her prominence as a "king's daughter" explains the advanced foot, which Hassan rightly notes as unusual for female statues. Although there are exceptions to this placement, male on viewer's left and woman on viewer's right (see below), I would argue that this is the "normative" system.

Aa 2. Man on viewer's left with "wife" shorter on his left, viewer's right. Statue of Memy-Sabu, or Memy and wife Sabu. MMA 48.111. Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XXVI, 1; Fischer 1995, 84–85, pl. 27a; Arnold 1999, 73, fig. 62.

Aa 3. An unusual example with the same emphasis is the group of Hetepheres II with her daughter Mersyankh III. See *pl. 23, 2; fig. 1*. Both standing, mother on viewer's left with daughter to her left, viewer's right. The mother is taller and placed in the traditional position of emphasis: viewer's left. Boston MFA 30.1456. Dunham and Simpson 1974, pl. XVII, a–b; Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XIII, 2; Falke, 1987, 1.

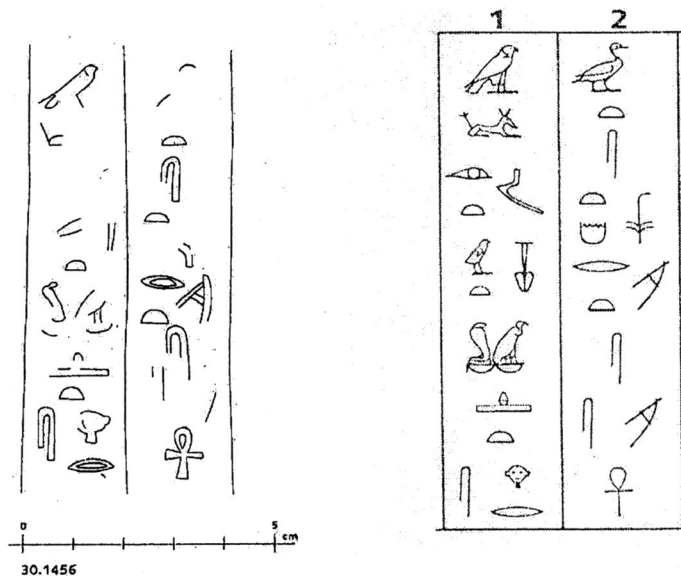


Fig. 1:  
Inscription on base of statue of Hetepheres and Mersyankh.  
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 30.1456.  
Drawing and Restored Text, Courtesy Peter Der Manuelian.

Aa 4. Man on viewer's left, wife on his left, viewer's right.  
Large pair standing statue of Ka-nefer and wife. Louvre E 6854, A 120. Ziegler 1997, Cat. 28, 100–104.

Aa 5. Man on viewer's left, wife on his left, viewer's right.  
Cairo CCG 151. Borchardt, pl. 34; Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XXVII, 2.

So also Cairo CCG 6 = Borchardt, pl. 2; Cairo CCG 22 = Borchardt, pl. 6; Cairo CCG 158 = Borchardt, pl. 35; Louvre A 120, personal observation; Louvre E 15592, personal observation; Vienna 7444 = Arnold 1999, 98–99, fig. 87; Leipzig 3155 = Krauspe 1997, Cat. 105, 56–57, pl. 46; Leipzig 3684 = Krauspe 1997, Cat. 97, 47–48, pl. 36, 37; Louvre E 15592, E 22769 = Ziegler 1997, Cat. 34, 123–127.

*Ab: Non-normative placement in standing pair statues*

In these cases, the placement I regard as “normative” is reversed, with the man on the viewer’s right and his wife on the viewer’s left. Although there are a number of examples of this position, they are considerably fewer than the designated normative scheme. In most cases the man is shown taller than his wife, and the wife is shown somewhat to the rear of her husband, again giving the man prominence.

Ab 1. Standing pair, man on viewer’s right with wife on his right, viewer’s left, with female child on viewer’s left, next to the wife. Cairo CCG 125. Borchardt, pl. 28; Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XXVII, 1.

Ab 2. Standing pair, man on viewer’s right, shorter wife on his right, viewer’s left. Hildesheim 2972. Martin-Pardey, *CAA Hildesheim, Lieferung 4*, 61.

Ab 3. Standing pair, man on viewer’s right, shorter wife on his right, viewer’s left. Hildesheim 3186. Martin-Pardey, *CAA Hildesheim, Lieferung 4*, 122.

Ab 4. Standing pair, man on viewer’s right, shorter wife on his right, viewer’s left. Cairo CCG 89. Borchardt, pl. 20; Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XXIV, 4.

Ab 5. Standing pair, large, wood, man on viewer’s right, shorter wife on viewer’s left. Louvre N 2293. Ziegler 1997, Cat. 45, 164–167; Harvey 2001, Cat. B 10, 87, 390–391.

So also Cairo JdE 38670, personal observation; Leipzig 2559 = Krauspe 1997, Cat. 102, 53–54, pl. 42.

**B: Seated pairs**

*Ba: Normative Placement in Seated Pairs*

Here again, prominence/emphasis is accorded to the man by his placement on viewer’s left.

Ba 1. Seated pair. Khaemhesit and family. Man seated on viewer’s left, wife seated on his left, viewer’s right, on smaller scale. Small figure of son (?), male figure in between. Cairo JdE 44173. Assmann 1996, 66, fig. 16.

Ba 2. Seated pair with children. Man seated on viewer’s left with wife on his left, viewer’s right. The celebrated statue of the dwarf Seneb and wife. Two children are shown in front of Seneb in the place where one would expect the owner’s legs. Significantly, his son is shown on the viewer’s left and his daughter on the viewer’s right, echoing the

placement of husband and wife. Cairo JdE 51281. Junker, Giza V, 107–116, fig. 29, pl. IX; Vandier, *La Statuaire*, 80, pl. XLVIII, 5; Tiradritti (ed.) 1999, 75; Terrace and Fischer 1970, 65–68.

Ba 3. Seated pair, man on viewer's left, wife on his left, viewer's right. Vienna 8019. Jaroš-Deckert and Rogge, CAA Wien, *Lieferung* 15, 112–116; Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XXVII, 3.

Ba 4. Seated pair, man on viewer's left, wife on his left, viewer's right. Male child on extreme left, next to man, female child on extreme right, next to wife echoing placement of main male/female figures. Giza 48. Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XXVIII, 4.

Ba 5. Seated pair, man on viewer's left, wife on his left, viewer's right. Male child between pair. Curiously the head of the wife is considerably larger than that of her husband. Louvre N 45, A 44. Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XVIII, 3; Ziegler 1997, Cat. 44, 160–163.

Ba 6. Seated pair, man on viewer's left, wife on his left, viewer's right. Although carved on different blocks, the original placement is carried out as exhibited. The famous statues of Rahotep and Nofret from Medum. Cairo CCG 3, 4. Tiradritti (ed.) 1999, 63.

Additional: Louvre E 14399 = Ziegler 1997, Cat. 27, 96–99; Louvre E 25368 = Ziegler 1997, Cat. 23, 82–86.

*Bb: Non-normative placement in seated pairs*

Bb 1. Man on viewer's right, wife on his right, viewer's left. BM 14 [1181]. Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XXVII, 4; Arnold 1999, No. 63, 74–75 with color photograph.

Bb 2. Man on viewer's right, wife on his right, viewer's left. Wife shorter and slightly to rear of man. Cairo CCG 100. Borchardt, pl. 22; Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XXVIII, 2.

**C: Pair statues, male seated, wife standing**

In this category, the male is emphasized by his being seated while the wife is shown standing on either his left or right. Even though seated, the man is “taller” than his wife.

Ca 1. Man seated on viewer's left, wife standing on his left, viewer's right. Demedj and wife Henutsen. MMA 51.37. Assmann 1996, 66, fig. 15; Arnold 1999, 100, fig. 88.

Ca 2. Man seated on viewer's left, wife standing on his left, viewer's right, with smaller son (his son) between the pair in front of father's seat, wife slightly shorter. Shepsi. Cairo CCG 22. Rößler-Köhler 1989, pl. 33b.

Ca 3. Man seated on viewer's left, wife standing on his left, viewer's right. She is appreciably taller, as befits her standing position. Cairo CCG 123. Borchardt, pl. 27; Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XIX, 5.

Ca 4. Man seated on viewer's left, wife standing on his left, viewer's right. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Inventaire 53, no. 11. Illustrated in Ziegler 1997, 133.

Cb 1. Man seated on viewer's right, wife standing on his right, viewer's left. She is shorter, although standing, and, although seated, the man's head is higher than that of the wife. Louvre N 46, A 45. Ziegler 1997, Cat. 43, 155–159.

Cb 2. Man seated on viewer's right, wife, shorter, standing on his right, viewer's left. Hildesheim 1. Schulz 1995, pl. 48 a, b; Vandier, *La Statuaire*, pl. XXIX, 3.

Cb 3. Man seated on viewer's right, wife, shorter, standing on his right, viewer's left, male children on either side. Cairo CCG 55. Borchardt, pl. 14.

Cb 4. Man seated on viewer's right, wife, shorter, standing on his right, viewer's left. Cairo CCG 376. Borchardt, pl. 59.

Exception 1: Seated wife on viewer's right, standing husband on viewer's left. Cairo CCG 95. Borchardt, pl. 21.

Exception 2: Seated wife on viewer's right, standing husband on viewer's left. Cairo CCG 107. Borchardt, pl. 23.

### Miscellaneous Observations on Relative Prominence

Triad of Mersuankh and two daughters. Mersuankh stands in the center with his daughters embracing him on either side. His prominence is stressed by his height and central position. His older daughter receives prominence over her younger sibling by standing on her father's right, viewer's left. She is also taller than her sister, who stands on her father's left, viewer's right. Cairo JdE 66617. Giza, Hassan Excavations. Tiradritti (ed.) 1999, 54 top.

Seated statue of Nikare, wife, and a daughter. MMA 52.19. Arnold 1999, 103, fig. 91. Nikare is seated in the center. On his left, viewer's right, is a smaller figure of his wife seated (squatting) on the ground with her legs to the side, and a daughter standing on his right, viewer's left, with her head just above the seat. The wife is larger than the daughter, but it seems curious that she is represented neither seated nor standing beside her husband, her prominence diminished by placing her at his feet on a much smaller scale. This treatment of the wife as a smaller figure seated (squatting) on the ground is represented in a number of statues, represented early as a possible prototype in the royal fragment of Dedefre: Louvre E 12627. Ziegler 1997, Cat. 3, 47–49. His wife is shown next to the king's left leg, thus significantly on the traditional viewer's right. Compare the similar placement of smaller figures on either side of the feet of a seated male with the standing son on viewer's left and standing wife, same size as son, on viewer's right: Louvre N 116, A 102, E 3026. Ziegler 1997, Cat. 37, 134–138.

Triad of Nikare, wife, and son. Brooklyn Museum 49.215. Arnold 1999, 104, fig. 92; Arnold and Ziegler (ed.) 1999, 370, No. 127. See *pl.* 23, 3. Nikare seated in the center,



his wife standing on his left, viewer's right, at the same scale, and the son standing, also on the same scale, on his right, viewer's left. Here the wife is no longer in the squatting position seen in the previous triad, while the son receives more than usual prominence through his size and probably his position on his father's right. Cf. standing statue of the same family, Nikare standing in center, wife squatting on his left, viewer's right, smaller son standing on father's right, viewer's left. Brooklyn 37.17E. Arnold and Ziegler 1999, 368–369, No. 126. See *pl.* 23, 4. Here the wife is again “reduced” to a smaller figure in the familiar squatting position.

Triad of seated pair with adult son. Cairo CCG 101. Arnold 1999, 106, 107, fig. 94. The wife is in the center with her husband on her left, viewer's right, the son standing on her right, viewer's left. This seems an exceptional placement.

### Excursus: The Mycerinus Triads

In the context of this article it is appropriate to discuss briefly the Mycerinus triads, which have been the subject of an article about their possible original placement by Wendy Wood (1974), a hypothesis generally not followed, and a more complete study with excellent photographs by Matthias Seidel (1996).

The Theban Nome (U.E. 4). Seidel Doc. 5, Cairo JdE 40678. Standing king in center, taller than standing Hathor on his right, viewer's left, with standing male nome figure on his left, viewer's right, shorter than the two other figures. Comment: Hathor as goddess receives emphasis by standing on right of king and by having her left foot advanced, as do the two males. King wears the kilt in the royal fold, proper left over right, while nome figure shows the opposite folding. Seidel 1996, 25–26, pl. 5.

The Jackal Nome (U.E. 17). Seidel Doc. 6, Cairo JdE 40679. King standing in center, tallest figure, same royal kilt fold. Hathor standing on his right, viewer's left, left foot similarly advanced. Female nome figure standing on king's left, viewer's right, with feet together, as in most standing female figures. Seidel 1996, 27–28, pl. 6.

The Bat Nome (U.E. 7). Seidel Doc. 7, Cairo JdE 46499. King standing in center, tallest, Hathor standing on his right, viewer's left, her left foot similarly advanced. Female nome figure on king's left, viewer's right, feet together. Seidel 1996, 29–30, pl. 7.

The Hare Nome (U.E. 15). Seidel Doc. 8, Boston MFA 09.200. Hathor seated in center, standing king on her left, viewer's right, but the tallest of the three figures, standing female nome figure on Hathor's right, viewer's left, with her left foot advanced (!). Here Hathor is emphasized both as the central figure and as seated in contrast to the standing king and standing nome figure. Seidel 1996, 31–32, pls. 8–9.

Damaged Triad. Seidel Doc. 9, Boston MFA 11.3147. Standing king in center, thus emphasized, with royal fold of kilt. Hathor (?) on his right, viewer's left; Hathor appears to have left foot advanced, although the feet of all three figures are missing. Male nome (?) figure on king's left, viewer's right, with non-royal fold of kilt. Seidel 1996, 33–34, pl. 12 a-c.

Fragment of Triad. Seidel Doc. 10, Boston MFA 12.1514. Only preserved is the right leg and foot of a standing male figure, left foot presumably advanced, on the viewer's left. Seidel regards this as a male nome figure with the central position held by a seated Hathor and on the viewer's right the king, a composition essentially corresponding to the Boston Hare Nome Triad except for the replacement of a male for a female nome figure.

Seidel assigns 16 additional fragments excavated by Reisner and now in Boston MFA (Seidel Docs. 12–27) to these triads and a head of the king acquired by Brussels (Seidel Doc. 11).

Aesthetic comments (cf. Seidel 1996, 43–44). The following is necessarily subjective. The finest workmanship is represented by the Jackal Nome Triad (U.E. 17) and the Hare Nome Triad (U.E. 15) and the least successful the Theban Nome Triad (U.E. 4). Compare Seidel's details of the Jackal and Theban Nome royal heads and Hathor heads in his pls. 10, a–b and 11, a–b and similarly the royal and Hathor heads in the Bat Nome Triad (U.E. 7) and the Hare Nome Triad (U.E. 15) in his pls. 10, c–d and 11, c–d. All four of the well preserved triads seem to come from the hand of different sculptors or sculpture schools.

In the context of the present essay, the central figure in these triads is always given relative prominence by this central position, in three of the four cases the king and in the fourth Hathor. All three standing figures of Hathor also have the distinction of the advanced left foot, as in the queen in the pair statue of Mycerinus. The three standing figures of Hathor are all on the king's right, viewer's left, again an indication of prominence. Two of the three female nome figures have feet together (the Jackal and Bat nomes), while the remaining female nome figure has the left foot advanced (the Hare Nome). The Theban Nome figure and the other male nome figure in the fragmentary triad exhibit the non-royal fold of the kilt.

### General Considerations

There is naturally a close connection between 2- and 3-dimensional representation. In relief and painting prominence is usually given to the figure(s) on the viewer's left, as noted in some detail by Robins: "dominance of the right-facing figure and consequently the left half of the scene" (Robins 1994, 33). An example is the scene on the false door with husband and wife before separate or the same offering table(s): the husband is shown on extreme left facing right toward a table and the wife on the extreme right facing left toward the same or an additional offering table.

The normative position argued above becomes relatively standard for later periods with many exceptions, but with a somewhat extraordinary development, namely in the Amarna period. Here there seems to be a frequently deliberate attempt to deny the traditional placement. A classic example is the naos of the chief sculptor Bak and his wife, Taheri (Berlin 31009). Not only is the position reversed, with Bak on viewer's right and Taheri on viewer's left, but both figures are of the same height! Similarly, in the post-Amarna period in the famous seated pair statue from Saqqara of May and Meryt in Leiden

(AST 3), Maya is seated on the viewer's right and his wife on the viewer's left, she almost as tall as her husband.

The matter of symmetry is also significant in terms of pairs of statues or multiple statues on either side of an entrance or processional path. An instance is the tradition of placing the tail of the sphinx or lion on the proper right side of the animal, usually explained in terms of the normative right orientation of a hieroglyph translated into 3-dimensions. When a sphinx sculpture has the tail on the left, it can probably be assumed that it derives from the right side of an entrance or processional way. Similarly, it may be worthwhile to examine instances of statuary conserved in pairs or multiples, or considered potentially to be such, to determine if the relative placement of the figures is possibly dictated by symmetry.

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Pl. 23, 1: Pair statue of King Mycerinus and Queen. MFA 11.1738. Giza. Harvard University/Museum of Fine Arts Expedition. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts Boston.



Pl. 23, 2: Pair statue of Hetepheres and Mersyankh. MFA 30.1456. Giza. Harvard University/Museum of Fine Arts Expedition. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts Boston.



Pl. 23, 3: Triad of Nikare, his wife, and son. Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund 49.215. Courtesy Dr. Richard Fazzini, Brooklyn Museum of Art.



Pl. 23, 4: Statue of Nikare, his wife, and son. Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund 37.17E. Courtesy Dr. Richard Fazzini, Brooklyn Museum of Art.