

EGYPTIAN ART IN THE PYRAMIDS

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117. Fragmentary Triad of King Menkaure. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 11.3147

between two figures, probably a goddess and the male personification of a province, or nome, of Egypt. The Boston fragment, which is carved in a remarkable style, comes from the valley temple of Menkaure. It belongs to an extraordinary series of statues representing the pharaoh in the company of the goddess Hathor and a male or female nome deity, recognizable by the emblem worn on the head. This theme was repeated in statues of other Old Kingdom sovereigns.

Four admirable triads with Menkaure have been found intact at Giza: three of them, in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, depict the king standing with Hathor on his right and on his left, respectively, the nomes of Thebes (JE 40678), Cynopolis (JE 40679), and Diospolis Parva (JE 46499; cat. no. 68);² the fourth triad, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (09.200), is dominated by a representation of Hathor seated between two standing figures, the king on her left and the goddess of the Hare nome on her right. This series of triads is notable for the high slab against which the figures stand. Several fragments of similar groups were discovered in Menkaure's valley temple. We do not know how many there once were: perhaps more than thirty, each corresponding to a different nome, or, according to current opinion, perhaps as few as eight, one in each of the chapels in the foretemple, to represent the principal cities where Hathor was worshiped.

The group to which this head belongs is distinguished by the splendid modeling of the goddess's body; she is standing to the right of the king and holding his hand. The king is also depicted standing, dressed in a *shendyt* kilt with fine pleats. The third figure has his arm around the king's shoulders. The subtle treatment of this male figure's bones and musculature, like the treatment of Menkaure's head, attests to the sense for sculptural form attributed to the workshop of Sculptor B (see introduction to cat. nos. 56–63).

- 1. Tefnin 1988, p. 19.
- 2. See Stadelmann 1998a, p. 376.

PROVENANCE: Giza, valley temple of Menkaure; gift of Baron Édouard Louis Joseph Empain 1910

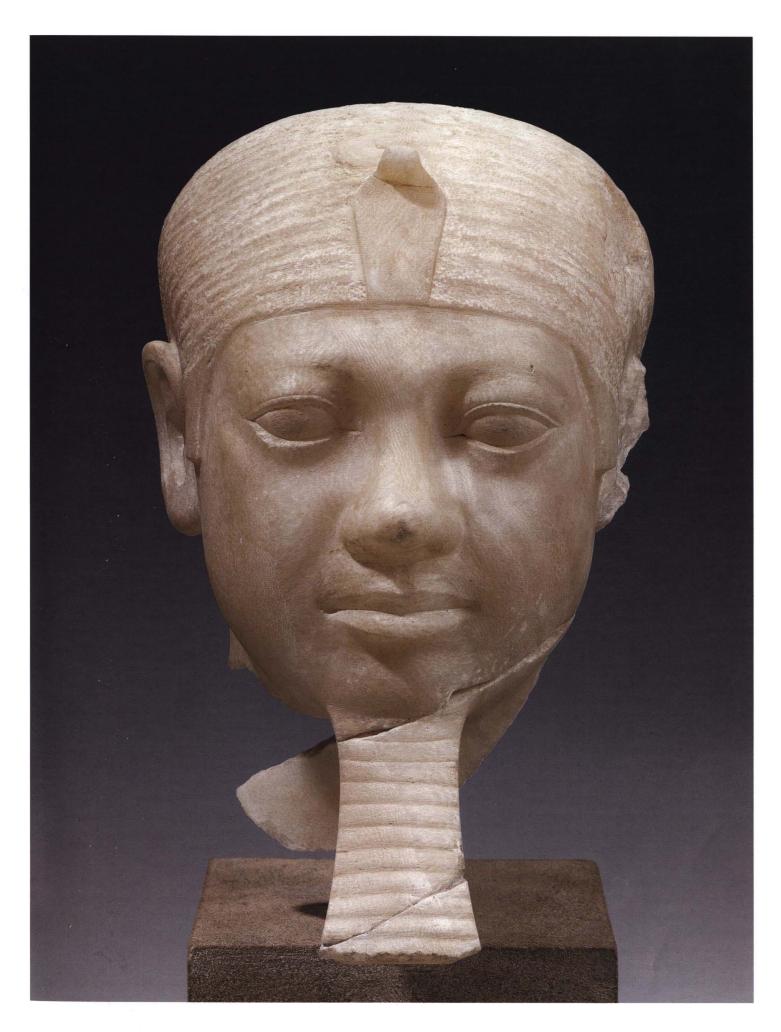
BIBLIOGRAPHY: Reisner 1931, p. 110 (13), pl. 46f (on the body); Gilbert 1961, pp. 49–52, figs. 2, 3 (on the relationship between the body and this head); Porter and Moss 1974, pp. 28–29; Tefnin 1988, p. 19, no. 2 (on this head)

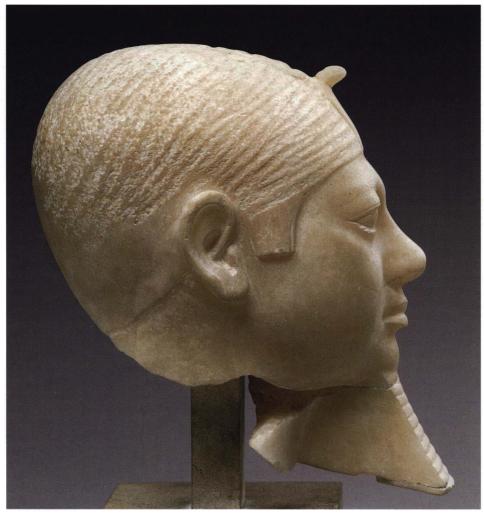
70. Head of King Menkaure as a Young Man

Fourth Dynasty, reign of Menkaure Egyptian alabaster H. 28.5 cm (11½ in.); w. 16 cm (6½ in.) Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Harvard University— Museum of Fine Arts Expedition 09.203

In July 1908 this head and two others (in which the king is shown wearing a nemes headcloth) were uncovered during George Reisner's excavations in the valley temple of Menkaure's pyramid complex at Giza. Other statue fragments, including four bases inscribed for the king, were also discovered. Only one figure could be fully reconstructed, but the similarities of stone and scale suggest that this head belonged to one of at least four lifesize seated statues of Menkaure that were set up in the offering hall of the temple.2 Although the three heads were carved in slightly varying styles, they clearly represent the same person. The knobbed chin, well-formed mouth, full cheeks, and prominent eyes are seen in other representations of Menkaure, such as that in the pair statue in this catalogue (cat. no. 67). The profile, with its prominent browridge, rounded nose, and deeply undercut lower lip, is especially recognizable as belonging to this king.³

Menkaure wears the ceremonial royal beard and has a uraeus at his forehead. The cobra's head, which has been reattached, juts out from the surface of the stone, but its open hood is carved almost flat against the king's hair, without any delineation of the reptile's body down the center of the hood.4 Behind the hood, extending across the top of the king's head almost to its crown, the serpent's thick body forms six compressed curves.⁵ The piece is unusual because it represents Menkaure with shortcropped hair instead of a crown or nemes headcloth. The hair is indicated by irregular striations that do not extend to the sideburns and have not been completed at the back of the skull. This way of representing short hair is occasionally seen in nonroyal sculpture, as, for example, in the wood statue known as the Sheikh el-Beled (fig. 34). By contrast, the hairstyle when shown in royal statuary is usually indicated in a more formal fashion, using a series of concentric bands, as in a fragmentary royal head in the Petrie Museum, London (cat. no. 101). However, the more irregular





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pattern can be found in some royal reliefs, such as the hunting scene of King Sahure (cat. no. 112).

Most of the face and the right side of the head are in excellent condition, but the left ear has been damaged, and a large section of the lower left side of the head is missing. The short-cropped hair and the shape of a break at the back of the king's head encourage a comparison between this piece and the fragmentary statuette of King Neferefre discovered in his funerary complex at Abusir (Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 98171). The statuette depicts Neferefre seated, with a falcon behind his head. In a better-known example of this pose, a lifesize gneiss statue of King Khafre (fig. 28), the falcon stands on the high back of the throne and actually peers over the king's head, but in the Neferefre example the bird perches on the king's shoulders and its eyes are level with the middle of the pharaoh's head. It is at least possible that the present

head came from a similar statue. Since three fragments of a lifesize Egyptian alabaster statue showing a falcon at the back of a royal head adorned with a *nemes* headcloth (cat. no. 57) were found just east of the pyramid temple of Khufu,⁷ and since the well-known Khafre statue was discovered in that king's valley temple, it is likely that Menkaure would have had a similar type of statue in his mortuary complex at Giza.⁸

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- The bases were lined up within the western portico of the offering hall; their exact locations are noted in Reisner 1931, plan 9.
- Reisner (ibid., p. 112) suggested that the head might belong to statue 21, although he felt that it was too small. Considering the relatively small size of the head that was rejoined to statue 18 (ibid., pl. 48, now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo), this objection seems unfounded.
- 3. After tentatively describing the head as a youthful portrait of Menkaure, Reisner (ibid., p. 112) suggests that it may have belonged to a statue of King Shepseskaf, one fragment of which was found in Menkaure's temple. However,

- the similarity of the features to other representations of Menkaure makes the connection with Shepseskaf unlikely.
- 4. This piece is discussed in Johnson 1990, p. 108, figs. 195–97. It is the only known example of a uraeus with a complete head in Old Kingdom statuary; it is also the earliest instance in which the uraeus appears on a royal head that is not adorned with a *nemes* headcloth.
- I would describe these curves as compressed rather than semicompressed, as does Johnson (ibid.).
- 6. Verner 1985a, pls. 45–47; Verner 1994a, pp. 143–45, ills. For another fragmentary statue of the same type, see Verner 1985a, pl. 44.
- 7. Found in debris above mastaba G 7102. See Smith 1946, p. 20, pl. 5a.
- 8. For another opinion about this head, see Lacovara 1995, p. 126, where the author proposes that it has been recarved.

PROVENANCE: Giza, valley temple of Menkaure, Reisner excavation, 1909

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Reisner 1931, p. 112, pls. 52, 53; Smith 1960, pp. 46, 51, fig. 27; Godron 1964, pp. 59–61; Lacovara 1995, pp. 126–27, ills.