

EGYPTIAN ART IN THE PYRAMIDS

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68. TRIAD OF KING MENKAURE

Fourth Dynasty, reign of Menkaure Graywacke H. 96 cm (37% in.) Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 46499

Discovered by George Reisner in 1908, this statue depicts King Menkaure flanked by two female figures. On his right stands the goddess Hathor, Lady of the Sycamore, identifiable by the cow's horns surrounding a sun disk that she wears on her head. On his left is the personification of the nome (province) of Diospolis Parva, with the emblem of the goddess Bat above her head. Bat is depicted as a woman with cow's horns, whose face is resting on an elaborate knot. The three figures stand against a back slab that joins the base of the statue. All three are standing with their arms at their sides, and Hathor holds the king's right hand in her left. An enigmatic object, identical to those held by the nome goddess, is visible in the sovereign's left hand. Menkaure's left leg is advanced, in the walking pose traditionally reserved for male figures. He is wearing the shendyt, or tripartite pleated royal kilt, and the white crown of Upper Egypt. No chin strap is visible. The treatment of the upper corners of the beard seems characteristic of the Fourth Dynasty. The two women are dressed in identical long, close-fitting sheaths, which partly reveal the details of their bodies beneath the sheer fabric. Each is wearing a tripartite wig with carefully incised locks. Despite their strong resemblance, a few differences are apparent: the left foot of the goddess Hathor is slightly advanced, and her face is turned to the side; the nome goddess faces straight ahead, her feet together and arms at her sides, and she is wearing a necklace. The artist has rendered the shapes and musculature, especially of the king's torso and legs, with a great deal of care and has paid particular attention to the harmony of the composition. Enhanced by the stone—a dark, perfectly polished graywacke—this triad is one of the masterpieces of Old Kingdom sculpture.

The group was found in the valley temple of Menkaure along with three other complete triads and one that is fragmentary. One complete triad and the fragmentary group (fig. 117) are housed in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; two other complete examples are in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.





Although very similar at first glance, the triads differ in a number of their details. The inside arms of the figures standing beside the king sometimes hang straight down but sometimes are wrapped around the king's torso, with the hand resting on his arm. The deities may hold either *shen* signs or enigmatic objects in their hands. In the complete triad in Boston the goddess Hathor is seated in the middle of the group, between the king and the nome personification.

Scholarly opinion about the number and purpose of these triads has changed since they were discovered. It was first thought that there must have been about forty triads—one group for each Egyptian nome. Now it is supposed there were eight triads in all, symbolizing the principal sites where the goddess Hathor was worshiped.

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PROVENANCE: Giza, valley temple of Menkaure, Reisner excavation, 1908

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Maspero 1915b, p. 72 [158]; Reisner 1931, pp. 109–10 [12], pls. 38[d], 44, 45, 46[a,b]; Pijoán 1945, fig. 141; Vandier 1958, pp. 22, 24, 26, 33, 77, 100, 105, 117, pl. 4-4; Hornemann 1951–69, vol. 5 (1966), pls. 1388, 1389; Michalowski 1968, fig. 204; Porter and Moss 1974, p. 28; Aldred 1978, p. 190; Saleh and Sourouzian 1987, no. 33 (for comparison with another triad)

69. HEAD OF MENKAURE

Fourth Dynasty, reign of Menkaure Graywacke H. 22 cm (8¼ in.) Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels E 3074 Paris only

The formal perfection of this head is only slightly compromised by its mutilation. This is very probably a portrait of Menkaure, depicted with the attributes of kingship: the white crown, symbolizing his power over Upper Egypt, and the false beard, traces of which are visible on the right side of the chin. The subtle modeling of the magnificently polished stone may well faithfully capture the features of the king. The impression of fatigue conveyed by the drooping lower lids and the heavy cheeks bordered by folds in the surface of the skin is belied by the firmness of the straight mouth. The eyes are treated naturalistically: there is no cosmetic line extending to the temples, no ribbon-shaped eyebrows, but simply an outline emphasizing the upper eyelids.

The material, dimensions, and style of the work led Gilbert to link this head to a fragmentary triad in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 117). It is now generally accepted that this triad depicted Menkaure