

Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin

Free to All Visitors to the Museum or by Mail to Any Address

Published Bi-Monthly by the Museum of Fine Arts, Copley Square, Boston, Mass.

Entered July 2, 1903, at Boston, Mass., as Second Class Matter, under Act of Congress of July 16, 1894

VOL. V

BOSTON, JUNE, 1907

No. 26

11.11672



B 58

*Perforated Iron Tsuba in Heianjo Style Late 17th Century
Monkeys and Pine Tree*

Exhibition of Tsuba in the Japanese Cabinet.

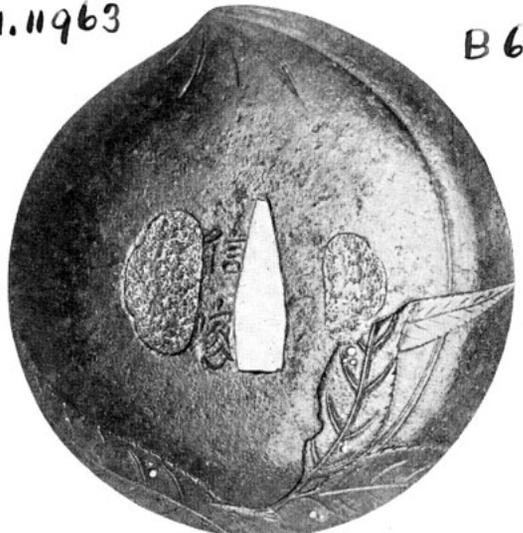
OF all those adjuncts of a sword, through the refined ornamentation of which the Japanese samurai or knight loved to pay homage to the sacred emblem of his order, not one was so intimately associated with the blade itself as the tsuba, or guard, for without the guard a sword loses much of its efficiency. For this reason the great masters of metal work ever turned to the tsuba as a vehicle for the expression of their highest effort, while the most noted painters gloried in supplying them with designs for its embellishment.

In judging the excellence of a tsuba two main considerations are to be borne in mind: first, its practical adaptability as a part of the weapon, and, second, its intrinsic beauty as an expression of artistic endeavor. The practical requirements, governed of course by the size, shape, weight, etc., of the blade, are: appropriate shape for the protection of the hand, strength to withstand impact, and sufficient lightness to preserve the proper balance of the sword. On the artistic side we have to consider: beauty of material, including color and surface texture, beauty and appropriateness of design, and quality of execution. Among those tsuba which in the

highest degree combine the above requirements, and hence deserve to be placed in the first rank, we find perhaps more examples of Ashikaga (1338-1583) workmanship than of that of any other period. Happily in the present exhibition there are a number of excellent specimens of the work of this time.

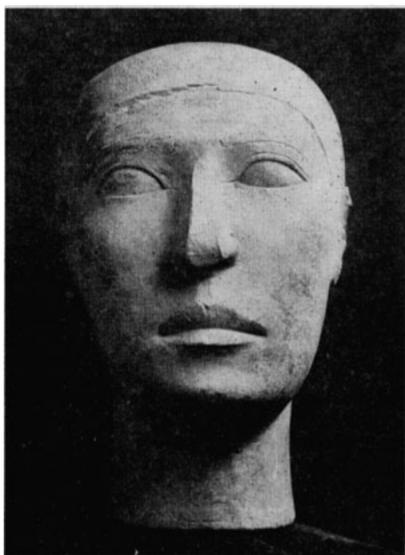
Ashikaga tsuba are generally made of well-tempered iron more or less perforated in various designs, the metal itself being often purposely so affected by the super-imposition and hammering together of different layers varying in hardness, as to present, after treatment with acids, a surface resembling that of grained or knotted wood. Inlay with gold or other metals was sometimes sparingly used, but as a rule the artists depended for effect upon the surface texture and rich brown color of the iron itself. The earlier tsuba artists confined themselves as a rule to the more or less conventional treatment of familiar designs, but as time passed on and technical skill increased, they gradually broadened their field of subjects until it included, not only those manifestations of nature which exhibited beauty of form and movement, but episodes from heroic legend and history, and parables of

11.11963



B 63

*Tsuba by Nobuiye, Miochin School Late 17th Century
Design in the Form of a Peach, with Leaves partly in Relief
and partly Brass Inlay*



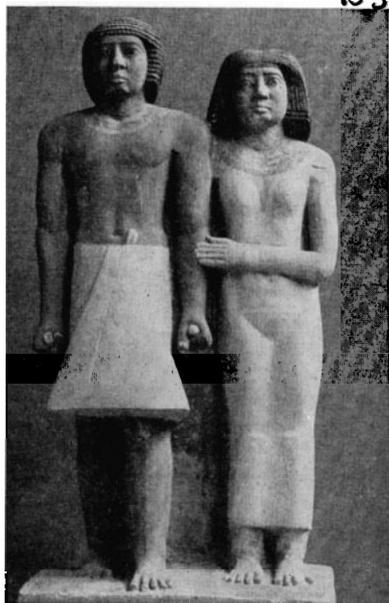
Limestone Portrait Head *Dynasty IV*

Sculptures from the Excavations at Gizeh, 1905-1906.

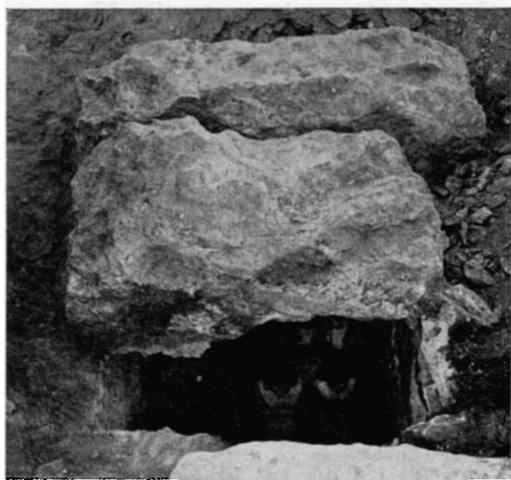
ALTHOUGH briefly summarized in the last Annual Report, the results of the excavations of the Museum and of Harvard University at Gizeh in 1905-1906 are of enough importance to deserve some special notice in the Bulletin. The success of field work is so largely a matter of chance that the Museum has been most fortunate in securing such striking specimens of Old Empire art.

The most important piece unearthed and acquired is the Dynasty IV portrait head in limestone, now installed in the New Egyptian Room. The period

93178



Statuette of Ptah-Khenuwi and his Wife *Dynasty V*



Statuette Chamber Partially Unroofed

to which it belongs was one of severe and intense energy, born of the newly-sprung national consciousness. The power in this piece of sculpture is a reflection of the power of the age which produced it. The head is noble and strongly earnest. Extrinsicly, the piece is of the greatest interest as belonging to a class so small that at the time of its discovery only four like it were known to be in existence. Rarity, however, is not needed to lend interest to a work like this: its artistic merits give it a high place among Old Empire remains. The head is quite obviously that of a man of rank. The face is strong, haughty, and intelligent. The lips, while full, are more delicate and sensitive than in the ordinary types of the period, and the skull is finely shaped. The whole piece presents a combination of character and vigor, refinement and force, which are strongly in contrast with the usual bullet-headed and rather plebeian type of the period.

The upper lip has been filled out in plaster by the sculptor, who perhaps, by a *lapsus scalpri*, broke the stone as he was carving it. The nose has been shaved down in a manner which suggests that, like the mouth, it also was at one time finished out in plaster. The same is perhaps true of the ears.

Two works of great interest have been assigned from last year's finds to the Otis Norcross Fund. Both came from Dynasty V, which was the great religious period of the Old Empire—the epoch which produced the best-known mortuary monuments in the world: the so-called first, second, and third pyramids of Gizeh. One piece, shown in the second cut, a standing pair representing a man and his wife, is not only remarkable for the plastic skill with which it is executed, but for the good preservation of the coloring as well. The Khedival government only allowed the Expedition to send this piece home to the Museum on the surrender of another statuette of a similar sort. At the time of its discovery the head of the woman was separated from the body and was lying in the sand under the right hand of the man.



Ikuw and his Wife *Dynasty V*



Three Boys *Dynasty V*

The second piece, which has been assigned to the Norcross Fund, represents the owners of the tomb, Ikuw and his wife, seated together. Like the preceding statuette, it is of painted limestone, but was found in the same tomb as the curious group of three boys and a small statuette of a child. It may be observed in passing that the attitude of the wife, who has one arm about the husband, is common both to this seated and to the standing pair: the pose, in fact, is typical of Dynasty V. In regard to the group representing the three boys, one detail is especially noteworthy: the maker has striven for variety by differentiating the wigs of the boys. The figure on the right wears a close head covering; the one in the middle and the one on the left have full wigs, which, however, are not alike.

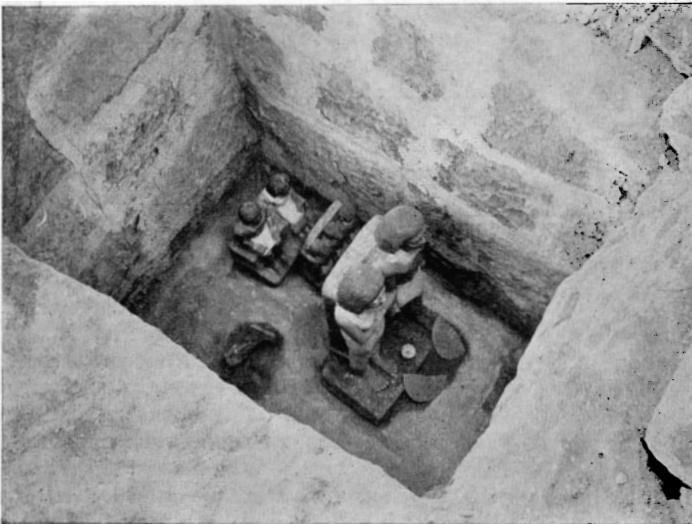
Two of the cuts picture the statue chamber of the tomb in which the seated pair, the triple group, and the child statuette were found. One of them shows the chamber partially unroofed, with the

figures dimly seen below. The other shows the chamber completely unroofed and cleared. The standing pair seen in this last photograph went to the Khedival government in exchange for the standing pair assigned to the Norcross Fund.

The Expedition of 1905-1906 secured two other specimens of Old Empire sculpture besides those described, and the interest attaching to them is very considerable. All friends of the Museum, therefore, may justly feel well satisfied with these almost phenomenal results. The past winter of 1906-1907 has also been profitable, and it is safe to predict that any further work on the concession will result in the acquisition of objects which, like the above, are not to be had for money in any market, and which, year by year and day by day, are becoming more and more difficult to obtain. O. B.

The Annual Subscriptions.

The annual subscriptions for current expenses of the Museum received in response to the circular issued in March, already amount to \$16,737, within about \$1,000 of the exceptional sum contributed last year. The number of subscribers exceeds that of last year, but is still far from reflecting the growth of the city since the subscription began. The appeal is here renewed for such an increase in the subscription as will forestall this year the use of Museum capital in its maintenance — in 1905 about \$20,000, and in 1906 nearly \$5,000, under unusual conditions of economy. The support of this institution by private generosity alone, is the surprise of those who visit it from abroad, and should be a source of pride to every Bostonian.



Statuette Chamber Unroofed and Cleared