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What Did the Bust of Ankh-haf Originally Look Like?

Fig. 1. *The Bust of Ankh-haf*, frontal view. White limestone and plaster, painted. H. 50.6 cm (Museum Expedition; 27.442). [See also cover in color.]

THE magnificent bust of Ankh-haf,¹ a vizier of the Fourth Dynasty king Khafre (Chephren) (ca. 2590–2570 B.C.), is rightfully considered to be the finest portrait of the Egyptian Old Kingdom and one of the outstanding creations in all Egyptian art (fig. 1). This famous sculpture was discovered in 1925 by the Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Expedition under the directorship of George A. Reisner, during excavations of the man's tomb (numbered G 7510) in the Eastern Cemetery at Giza.² In recognition of the Expedition's contemporary discovery and successful clearing of the neighboring intact tomb of Queen Hetep-heres, mother of King Khufu (Cheops), and in restoring her gilded furniture for the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, the authorities of the Egyptian Antiquities Service presented the bust to the Museum of Fine Arts, where since its first public exhibition in 1927, it has won universal acclaim. However, despite its renown and rank as a masterpiece, it still remains an enigmatic monument, for in all previous publications, considerations of its aesthetic merit have entirely eclipsed any discussion of its original form or function.³

The bust of Ankh-haf is a life-size sculpted portrait in limestone, painted in a red ochre wash, representing a mature man with an intelligent gaze, aging features, bags under the eyes, and a receding hairline. The nose and ears are missing, having been hacked off presumably by vandals who visited the open tomb chapel in antiquity, but the damage hardly detracts from the power, sensitivity, and astonishing realism of the face. The head rises from a torso cut off sharply at mid-chest. The arms, too, are cut, but at a higher level, just beneath the shoulders, much in the manner of a Roman bust. Yet while Ankh-haf may remind us of busts created two and a half millennia later, there can never have been any formal or functional similarity between the two. Whereas Roman busts were decorative memorials to humans, living or deceased, and were deliberately carved with cut arms in order to emphasize the head and face, the bust of Ankh-haf would have been set up in his tomb and would have had a direct and immediate ritual function relating to his funerary cult. Because such statues by necessity had to appear lifelike, if not necessarily to bear a true likeness of the individual represented – the extreme naturalism of Ankh-haf is exceptional – the bust could never have been considered complete as it now is, and its original appearance would almost certainly have been quite different. The only way to explain its highly unusual form is to examine the original records of the excavations of Ankh-haf's tomb, which, curiously enough, have never been published in detail. In this article I shall review the archaeological context of the bust in order to suggest its purpose and original appearance, and its original position in the tomb.

While William Stevenson Smith, the famous American historian of Egyptian art and former Museum of Fine Arts curator, once observed of

DR. ANDREY BOLSHAKOV is *Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities* at the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad.

Ankh-haf that "no other sculpture of this exact form is known,"⁴ he also pointed out its clear similarities to two Sixth Dynasty works: the head-and-shoulders bust of Nefer-seshem-ptah (fig. 2), from his tomb at Saqqara dating to the reign of Teti (ca. 2345–2335 B.C.),⁵ and the half-statue of Idu (figs. 3, 4) from his tomb at Giza, numbered G 7102, dating to the reign of Pepi I (ca. 2300–2280 B.C.).⁶ No further elaboration of Smith's remarks have since appeared. Iconographically these three monuments stand rather close together, yet their differences are also striking. First of all, the busts of Nefer-seshem-ptah and Idu are not free-standing; they emerge from the niches of false doors. Although appearing to be carved in the round, these busts are merely high relief images carved from the stone in the false door niche. The former appears in a recess over the door niche in place of the more traditional relief panel, and the latter, in a niche cut through the lower part of the false door. Secondly, the arms of each are represented quite differently. Nefer-seshem-ptah has his arms cut similarly to Ankh-haf's, but his body is also cut at the same level as the arms. Idu, whose body is cut at the waist, has arms fully rendered, bent at the elbows and outstretched, palms upward, towards the offering stone which lies in front of the false door. From its context the armless bust of Ankh-haf seems to have had nothing to do with a false door.

The false door was thought to be a true entrance by which the imaginary immortal double of the deceased, an essence known as the *ka*, could come forth into the open tomb chapel in order to receive the offerings of food and drink left there by visitors to the tomb.⁷ One thus finds that statues or relief images of the deceased are very often placed in the door niche⁸ or directly beside it,⁹ to permit the *ka* of the tomb owner to come forth to partake of these ritual meals. Commonly the statues are of standing persons, like those on either side of the false door of Nefer-seshem-ptah. More unusual is his bust between these two statues, emerging from a recess above the false door niche. The form of the recess suggests a window,¹⁰ and the bust seems to give the illusion of the deceased suddenly appearing from deep within the tomb to gaze at the visitor who has brought offerings. The statue of Idu, on the other hand, actually depicts the *purpose* of coming forth: that is, to receive the food offerings and to eat. Well known from contemporary reliefs are scenes showing the master seated with his arms stretched out toward a table with food. Such a panel, in fact, actually appears over the false door of Idu, above the statue (fig. 3). These scenes duplicate real life, where people sit in chairs at table and eat. The bust of Idu, below, emulates these compositions in sculpture, but the nature of the medium presents problems of realization requiring a slightly different presentation. The sculptor has shown Idu as an old man emerging from the niche to waist height, with his hands extended on the floor to a stone offering table in the shape of the hieroglyph *htp* "offering" (fig. 4), as if the deceased were reaching for the food placed upon it by the donor. Due to the obvious fragility of stone statuary, the sculptors carved the figure from



Fig. 2. *The False Door of Nefer-seshem-ptah at Saqqara* (Photograph, Courtesy Egyptian Museum, Cairo).

Fig. 3. *The False Door and Statue of Idu, from Tomb G 7102 at Giza* (Museum Expedition photograph).



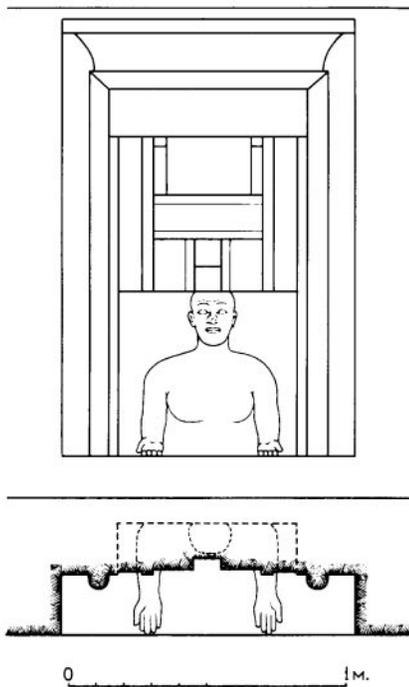


Fig. 4. Drawing of the False Door and Statue of Idu.

the stone matrix of the niche, giving it permanent back support, and carved its outstretched forearms from the floor itself.

Every tomb chapel had an offering stone, like Idu's, which was functionally equal to the table in the relief scene of the meal.¹¹ As the offering stone lies on the floor of the tomb, unlike an actual dining table, the arms and hands of Idu's statue had to rest on the floor. The statue, thus, is half-length, emerging from the floor, and because it has been carved from the niche itself, it had to be sunk in a yet deeper recess in the lower part of the false door. Such a recess would be absolutely senseless by itself, according to the typology of the false doors. Nevertheless, despite the awkwardness of Idu's statue, it perfectly demonstrates the ritual function and relationship of the false door and statuary in this period.

The busts of Ankh-haf, Nefer-seshem-ptah, and Idu share a certain similarity in that all of them belong to the same iconographic type of "non-idealizing" Old Kingdom sculpture named by Junker "Bildnis nach dem Leben."¹² There are no wigs on the heads, the faces reflect features of maturity, the shoulders are slanting, the breast is massive, and, in the case of Idu, the midriff is flabby. It is not important that Ankh-haf is the best portrait of the Old Kingdom (as far as the term "portrait" is applicable to Egyptian monuments at all), while those of Nefer-seshem-ptah and Idu are of much inferior quality; this is just a question of artistic skill and not of principle. It is the principle that was important for the Egyptians, and it may be wondered if Ankh-haf was the conscious prototype for the later busts. Idu's tiny tomb chapel in the eastern cemetery at Giza was, in fact, only a short walk from that of Ankh-haf, and there can be little doubt that his sculptors were intimately familiar with Ankh-haf's tomb as with all the others of the notables of the Fourth Dynasty that lay nearby.¹³

The tomb of Ankh-haf (G7510) is the largest in the eastern field at Giza, more than twice as large as any other (figs. 5, 6). Its mastaba core was a colossal 101 m long by 52.5 m (100 Egyptian cubits) wide, and its original height was probably about 10 m.¹⁴ The scale of the tomb was befitting one who bore such high titles as "Prince" and "Eldest Son of the King's Body."¹⁵ A small L-shaped chapel was built into the interior of the mastaba structure itself and was later expanded by the addition of a mud brick extension on the east wall of the superstructure (fig. 6).

The exterior chapel (figs. 6, 7), which was built against the south end of the mastaba's east wall, was an elaborate structure of six rooms (a through f on fig. 6), which led to an offering chamber built within the masonry of the mastaba itself (g). Behind this room lay a *serdab* or statue chamber (h), which was not accessible to the public but which contained images of the deceased, now lost, and a small aperture, which allowed the statues to look out. The bust, however, was not among these. It was found inside the innermost of the four rooms of the southern part of the exterior chapel (d).

As explained by Dunham, "The bust was found lying on its back . . .

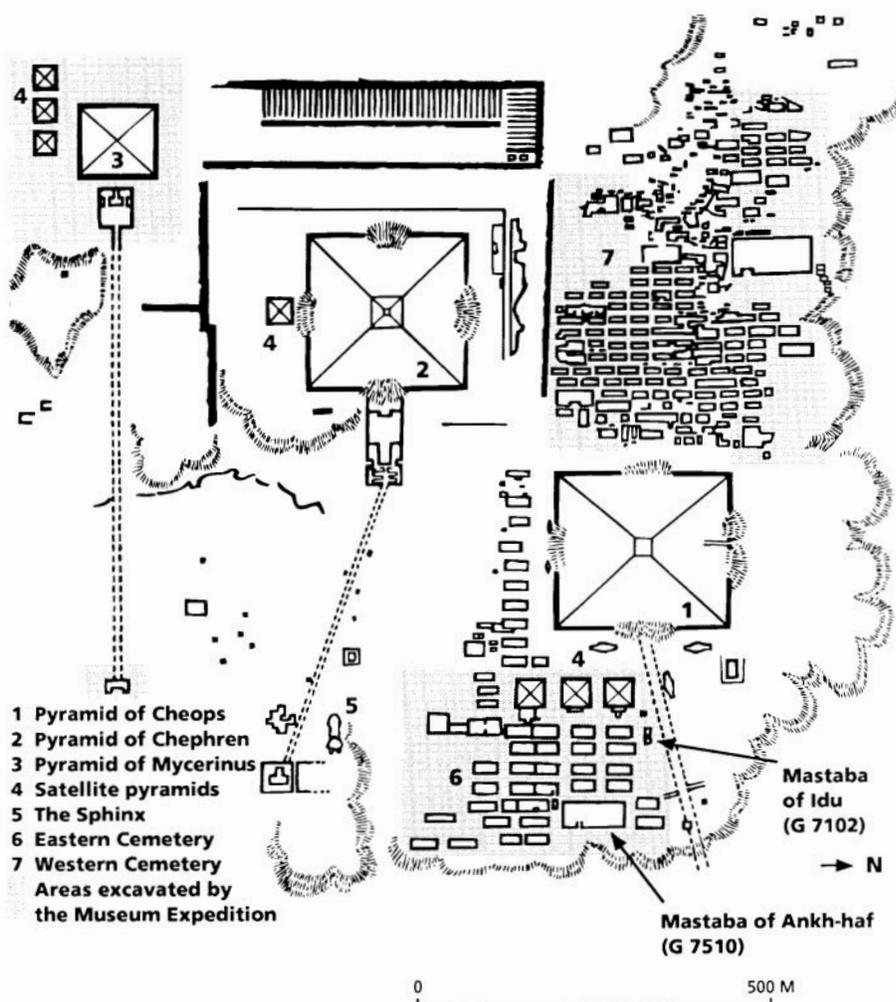
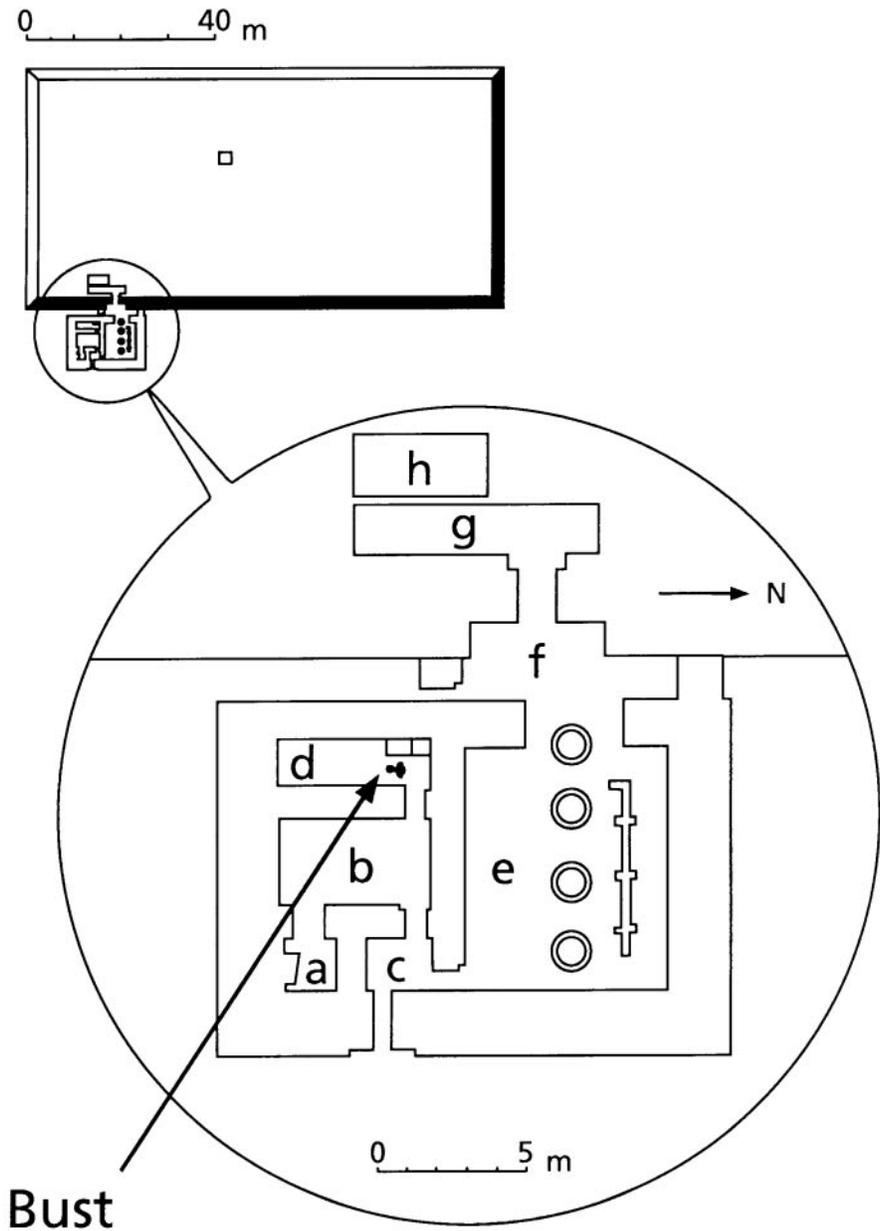


Fig. 5. The Eastern Cemetery at Giza with the Mastaba of Ankh-haf, Tomb G 7510. Indicated (Map: P. D. Manuelian).

immediately in front of a white plastered mud-brick pedestal on which it had probably stood facing east [i.e. toward the approaching visitor]. This pedestal was 82 cm in length by 55 cm in height and width, and on its northern end had a low extension of the same width reaching the north wall of the room. Under the bust were found ninety-four plaster models, including models of food offerings, and in the floor debris of the same room were other models and pottery, one piece being the lower part of a bowl stand."¹⁶ Reisner had speculated that the bust had stood on the pedestal facing out, and that the plaster models had been placed on the low bench north of it, and that one or two stands carrying bowls had stood on the floor before the bust.¹⁷ Continued Dunham, "This grouping of bust and objects constituted an unusual offering place in the western room of the exterior chapel. The bust was never part of a statue."¹⁸ This final

Fig. 6. *Plan of the Tomb Chapel of Ankh-haf, G 7510* (Map: P. D. Manuelian).



conclusion, which was held by both Reisner and Dunham and which seems to have been assumed correct by all subsequently, actually defies the simple logic of such tomb images and denies their essential function. The Egyptians were pragmatic in their beliefs and saw the image, the embodiment of the *ka*, as a duplicate of the deceased individual. To receive offerings, such a duplicate needed not only eyes to see, nose to smell, ears to hear, mouth to eat, but also hands with which to grasp the food and partake of it.



Fig. 7. *The Bust of Ankh-haf During Excavation, Looking North* (Museum Expedition photograph).



Fig. 8. *Room d in the Chapel of Ankh-haf Looking West, Showing the Bust beside the "Plinth"* (Museum Expedition photograph).

The peculiarity of the form of Ankh-haf's bust is explainable if we suppose that originally it had arms stretched out forward, like Idu's, but which had been made separately. The need for such separately constructed arms is explained by the fact that a free-standing bust carved with outstretched arms would have presented too many technical difficulties for a sculptor and besides, would have been very fragile and extremely vulnerable to damage. The facts support such a supposition.

As Dunham reports, and as the field photographs reveal (figs. 7, 8), the surface depth of the masonry base before which the bust was found lying was 55 cm. If the bust had been set upon this base with its back against the wall, as seems likely, the area is a little more than necessary to accommodate outstretched forearms and hands proportionate to the bust of Ankh-haf. The bust, in other words, could well have rested on the base, with its arms stretched out, like Idu's, toward its front edge. The hands of Idu just meet the front edge of the base of the false door, before which an offering table had been placed. Although no offering stone of the type found before Idu was found in the tomb of Ankh-haf, it is possible that in the case of the latter the offerings were placed directly on the base, on or between the hands.

It should be noted, in support of this theory, that the creator of the bust of Ankh-haf employed a technical method unusual in Egyptian stone sculpture. Having once carved the stone, he overlaid the surface with a thick coat of plaster in which he did his final modeling and then painted the image. Besides allowing the sculptor to attain a particular fineness of modeling, such an application of plaster also made it possible for him to conceal connecting joints. On the proper left side, both plaster and paint are absent on the torso in a vertical stripe directly below the projecting cut shoulder, precisely where an arm would have been, as can be seen in fig. 9. The layer of plaster on the front and back of the torso is interrupted on either side of this stripe by a ragged seam, suggesting how this arm had fitted to the bust and had later been wrenched apart. Obviously the plaster had been applied to the bust *after* it had been fitted to the arms. It is true that paint is also absent on the left shoulder, but this would seem to be merely a loss caused by long wear, either burial conditions or perhaps centuries of touching by visitors to the tomb. The left shoulder seems never to have been covered with plaster at all. On the right side beneath the cut arm no such bare stripe is to be seen nor is there any interruption of the plaster, but the paint here appears to be a modern restoration.¹⁹

In a normally built man the elbows are situated at waist level. The bust of Ankh-haf, however, is cut well above the waist, just below the level of the breast, so that if the bust did have attached arms, the elbows as well as the extended forearms would have been on a level lower than the bust itself.²⁰ It would appear then that the cut shoulders of the bust would have rested on a pair of carved upper arms, cut at the



Fig. 9. *The bust of Ankh-haf, Side View*
(Museum Expedition photograph).

top, and that the torso itself would have joined and fitted a base continuing the form of the midriff to the waist (fig. 10). It may be imagined that this hypothetical base was carved as a single piece, as a support for the bust, and that the two were plastered together and painted to look like one. Indeed, it will be seen that the plaster surface at the bottom edge of the torso is broken all the way around the body, just as one might expect had the piece been wrenched away from such a mount.

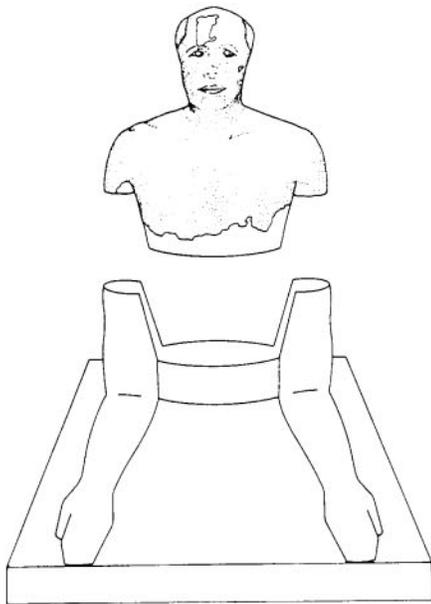


Fig. 10. *Reconstruction Drawing of the Bust of Ankh-haf with its Base* (Drawing: Yvonne Markowitz).

The fact that neither this base nor any fragments of it were ever discovered does not necessarily refute this reconstruction. The bust may have been pulled away from the mount and the base stolen, perhaps because it was of some desirable hard stone – or even wood.

Now we can imagine what the bust of Ankh-haf looked like standing in its place in the tomb. The height of the base before which it was found, about 55 cm, is not accidental – the face of the bust with its own height of 50 cm was approximately at the level of the eyes of the priest who was kneeling before it during the offering rituals. In the semi-darkness of the chapel the lively face of Ankh-haf just in front of the face of the visitor to the tomb, and the arms stretched out to receive the offerings from his hands, must have produced a very deep and sympathetic impression. To modern man these outstretched arms may seem slightly comical, spoiling the bust as a work of art, so for our aesthetic perception their disappearance is only for the best. For the ancient Egyptian, however, there was nothing more natural, for the statue's main purpose was to express readiness to receive a food offering and to be satiated with it.²¹

NOTES

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1. MFA 27.442, white limestone and plaster, painted, H: 50.6 cm, Museum Expedition.
2. For full bibliography, see Bertha Porter and Rosalind L. B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings III: Memphis, Part I. Abu Rawash to Abusir* (Oxford, 1974), p. 196.
3. For example, William Stevenson Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*, 2nd ed. (London, 1949), pp. 38–39; Jacques Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne III* (Paris, 1958), p. 53; Militsa E. Matthieu, *Iskusstvo drevnego Egipta / The Art of Ancient Egypt* (Leningrad-Moscow, 1961), pp. 91–92.
4. Smith, 1949, p. 38.
5. See Porter and Moss, *Topographical Bibliography . . . III: Memphis, Part 2. Saqqara to Dahshur* (Oxford, 1978), p. 516.

6. See Porter and Moss, *Topographical Bibliography . . . III: Memphis, Part 1*, p. 186; William Kelly Simpson, *Giza Mastabas II. The Mastabas of Qar and Idu* (Boston, 1976), pl. 29 a,b,c; S. D'Auria, P. Lacovara, C. H. Roehrig, eds., *Mummies & Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt* (Boston, 1988), frontispiece.

7. For the concept of the *ka*, see Andrey O. Bolshakov, "Predstavleniye o Dvoynike v Egipte Starogo Tsarstva [Le Rôle du double dans la religion égyptienne de l'Ancien Empire]," *Vestnik drevney istorii* (The *Journal of Ancient History*) 2 (1987), pp. 3–36.

8. See, for example, K. R. Lepsius, *Denkmaeler aus Aegypten und Aethiopiien* Abt. II (Berlin, 1849–56), Bt. 11; and A. Sanborn, "Recent Acquisitions from Egypt," *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 20, no. 118 (April, 1922), p. 27.

9. See, for example, *British Museum. Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae etc.* 1 2 (London, 1961) pl. iv.–1; Lepsius, *Denkmaeler* Abt. 11, Bt. 44; Porter and Moss, *Topographical Bibliography . . . III* 2, p. 598; L. Borchardt, *Denkmäeler des Alten Reiches (ausser den Statuen) im Museum von Kairo I* (Berlin, 1937), Bt. 33; and T. Kendall, "An Unusual Rock-cut Tomb at Giza," in W. K. Simpson and W. M. Davis, eds., *Studies in Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and the Sudan: Essays in Honor of Dows Dunham on the Occasion of His 90th Birthday, June 1, 1980* (Boston, 1981), pp. 104–114.

10. C. M. Firth and B. Gunn, *Teti Pyramid Cemeteries I* (Cairo, 1926), p. 179; H. Kees, *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Ägypter*, 2 (Berlin, 1956), p. 121.

11. In the mastaba of the dwarf Seneb this is stressed by the fact that the offering stone is of a shape that goes back to the one-legged table represented in the scene of a meal. See Hermann Junker, *Giza V* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1941), Pl. VII, b.

12. H. Junker, "Das lebenswahre Bildnis in der Rundplastik des Alten Reiches," *Anzeiger der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1950), pp. 403–404; idem, *Giza XI* (Vienna, 1953), pp. 224–225. See also C. Vandersleyen, "Porträt," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie IV* (Wiesbaden, 1982), pp. 1074 ff., and esp. note 5; D. Wildung, "Privatplastik," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie IV*, p. 1117; M. Eaton-Krauss, *The Representations of Statuary in Private Tombs of the Old Kingdom* (Wiesbaden, 1984), pp. 86–88; and D. Spang, *Through Ancient Eyes: Egyptian Portraiture* (Birmingham, Ala., 1988). My understanding of the portrait in Egyptian art was briefly stated in A. O. Bolshakov, "Staroegipetskiy portret i staroegipetskoye mirovozzreniye" ("Portrait and Ideology in the Old Kingdom Egypt"), *Pismenniy pamyatniki i problemy istorii kulturny narodov Vostoka* (Written Monuments and Problems of Cultural History of Peoples of the East) 21:1 (Moscow, 1987), pp. 67–70 and in detail in Andrey O. Bolshakov, "The Ideology of the Old Kingdom Portrait," *Göttinger Miszellen* 117–118 (1990), pp. 89–142.

13. It is possible that there had existed other similar busts in the tomb chapels of the Fourth Dynasty, which, because they were free standing and easily accessible to later visitors, may have completely disappeared. The use at Giza of Fourth-Dynasty statuary and tomb decoration to serve as the inspiration for a Sixth-Dynasty tomb owner has been noted by Kendall, 1981, p. 114.

14. G. A. Reisner, *A History of the Giza Necropolis*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1942), p. 46, fig. 8.

15. D. Dunham, "The Portrait Bust of Ankh-haf," *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* 37, no. 221 (June, 1939), pp. 41–46.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 43–44.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

19. The bust of Ankh-haf, when found, did not have the smooth overall red ochre hue that it does today. Its painted surface was quite mottled and weathered; the carved

plaster skin was scarred with minor chips and abrasions. The large plaster loss in the center of the forehead was far more conspicuous than today. At some point, presumably upon receipt at the Museum, a "restoration" was undertaken in which the bust was heavily retouched to reduce the troubling unevenness of color and the distracting white of the plaster losses. A discussion of the original condition of the bust and its subsequent in-painting is contemplated for the near future by Peter Lacovara and Andrey Bolshakov.

20. Since the bust of Ankh-haf is cut above the waist and since in a normally built man the elbows are situated at the level of the waist, it originally occurred to me that perhaps the attached arms had been shorter than the norm and had been bent at the level of the midriff. Deviations from anatomical reality do occur in Egyptian sculpture even of the highest quality. For example, the head of the calcite statue of Mycerinus in the Museum of Fine Arts (09.204) is much too small for the size of its body. The necks on several of the "reserve heads" are abnormally long. The legs of the "Louvre scribe" are much larger than natural, but seem to have been deliberately made this way so as to create a balanced pyramidal composition (see Smith, pls. 6, b; 9, e; 13, b; 18, a). The distorting of the arms of Ankh-haf to the degree required here, however, seems unthinkable.

21. Lastly, one peculiarity of the location of the bust in the tomb should be mentioned. It stood in a special chamber isolated from the passage into the inner chapel (fig. 6); therefore it had been the object of a special cult. At the same time it was situated (with slight deviations) on the axis of the main false door of the inner chapel that had the *serdab* (or statue chamber) behind it. There thus seems to exist a certain relationship between the most important cult objects—the bust, the false door, and the statues in the *serdab*. All this is not without interest for the reconstruction of the early Old Kingdom tomb cult which has not yet been sufficiently studied.

