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Kunst des Alten Reiches

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INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

		Tafel	Seite
VORWORT			VII
NICOLE ALEXANIAN	Die Mastaba II/1 in Dahschur-Mitte	1	1–18
HARTWIG ALTENMÜLLER	Fragen zur Ikonographie des Grabherrn in der 5. Dynastie des Alten Reiches		19–32
NADINE CHERPION	Sentiment Conjugal et Figuration à l'Ancien Empire	2–8	33–47
GÜNTER DREYER	Die Datierung der Min-Statuen aus Koptos	9–13	49–56
MARIANNE EATON-KRAUSS	Pseudo-Groups	14–19	57–74
BIRI FAY	The Louvre Sphinx, A 23	20–26	75–79
HENRY G. FISCHER	The Protodynastic Period and Old Kingdom in The Metropolitan Museum of Art	27–28	81–90
ZAHİ HAWASS	A Group of Unique Statues Discovered at Giza I. Statues of the Overseers of the Pyramid Builders	29–32	91–95
ZAHİ HAWASS	A Group of Unique Statues Discovered at Giza II. An Unfinished Reserve Head and a Statuette of an Overseer	33–35	97–101
FRIEDRICH JUNGE	Hem-iunu, Anch-ha-ef und die sog. «Ersatz- köpfe»	36–41	103–109
EDNA R. RUSSMANN	Two Heads of the Early Fourth Dynasty	42–43	111–118
REGINE SCHULZ	Überlegungen zu einigen Kunstwerken des Alten Reiches im Pelizaeus-Museum, Hildesheim	44–49	119–131
HOURIG SOUROUZIAN	L'iconographie du roi dans la statuaire des trois premières dynasties	50–56	133–154
RAINER STADELMANN	Der Strenge Stil der frühen Vierten Dynastie	57–62	155–166
CHRISTIANE ZIEGLER	L'Ancien Empire au Musée du Louvre: Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Art	63–68	167–173

A Group of Unique Statues Discovered at Giza

II. An Unfinished Reserve Head and a Statuette of an Overseer

By ZAHÍ HAWASS

(Plates 33–35)

1. The unfinished reserve head (Pl. 34 a–c):

This unfinished limestone head was discovered in the cemetery of the workers and their overseers above one of the poor graves west of the tomb no. 1901 (see Fig. 1, in my preceding article).¹ It was found discarded between the tombs and was not associated with any artifacts or even a burial. The head may have been made by an artist buried in the cemetery.

The head represents a man with close-cropped hair. The style is similar to the reserve heads of Merytyetes and Sneferu-Seneb of Dynasty 4.² The hairline is marked by a straight line along the forehead, typical of Dynasty 4 statues and wall reliefs, as in the reliefs of Khufu-Khaf.³ As shown in Pl. 34 b, the profile of the head is identical to those of Dynasty 4. The straight nose was broken when found. The eyes were carefully finished but are damaged. The ears are slightly chipped. The cheek-bones are high. The mouth is beautifully rendered with a slight smile reminiscent of that of Sneferu-Seneb.⁴ The neck is short and broken. A hole up the middle may indicate an unsuccessful attempt to repair the head, which was then discarded between the tombs.

Material: fine white limestone

Dimensions:

Height of head:	12 cm
Height of face:	7.5 cm
Height of each ear:	3.5 cm
Height of the neck:	4 cm
Diameter of the neck, below:	8 cm
Diameter of the hole in the neck:	1 cm

In all, 37 reserve heads are known.⁵ All except a few have broken ears. On this example, the ears are largely intact with some chipping. The absence of ears on reserve heads has led some scholars to claim that they were deliberately removed; others believe that the damage to the ears is due to the rough handling of the heads by robbers. It seems that the first reason is more likely than the second one.

¹ For more details see Z. HAWASS, *The Workmen's Community at Giza* (forthcoming in: M. BIETAK (Hg.), *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Archäologie und deren Nachbargebiete*).

² W. S. SMITH, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*, revised by W. K. SIMPSON, Harmondsworth 1981, figs. 103–104.

³ *Ibid.*, fig. 106.

⁴ *Ibid.*, fig. 104.

⁵ This number includes 5 heads in private collections and the head which is the subject of this paper.

These heads were supposedly placed at the entrance of the burial chamber.⁶ They were presumably used as substitutes for the mummy or the statue of the deceased,⁷ representing him after mummification in the realistic style of the Old Kingdom.⁸

This head bears a strong resemblance to the wall-relief portraits of Dynasty 4, its face being modeled without any unnecessary features. It is similar in its realism to all the known reserve heads with deeply-cut eyes, eyebrows rendered in low relief, a straight nose and a slightly smiling mouth. However, this example has complete ears and a hole in the neck, neither of which are usual features of reserve heads. But its style is characteristic of reserve heads, and it seems to have been unfinished and left over from the workshop; if it had been used, then the ears would have been deliberately broken.

Date:

There are several reasons for dating this head to the reign of Khufu. The closely cropped hair is similar to that of the seated statue of Hemunu of Dynasty 4 and also of the reserve head of Merytyetes, as well as the wall relief of Khufu-Khaf.⁹ The modeling of the nose, eyes and eyebrows is typical of the style of the reign of Khufu and the school of the first part of Dynasty 4. The modeling of the lips and the smile is also similar to that of the head of Sneferu-Seneb of Dynasty 4.¹⁰

All the tombs in this cemetery date to the period between the reign of Khufu and the end of Dynasty 5. This head was not found in a tomb, so we cannot use artifacts or the tomb style as evidence of dating. However, the artistic style of the reserve heads and the portraits on the wall reliefs of Khufu's reign are good evidence to date this head to Dynasty 4 and in particular to the reign of Khufu. The artist modeled this head for one of the officials of Khufu, using the fine, white limestone characteristic of reserve heads. However, he made many mistakes which he could not correct, and so he or others disposed of the head in the cemetery.

2. A beautiful statuette of an overseer (Pl. 35 a–d):

This statuette was found in front of a false-door niche in tomb no. G.S.E. 1914 in the cemetery of the workmen and their overseers. The statuette was found exactly as shown in the photograph (Fig. 1 and Pl. 35 a).

The tomb is located on the northwest side of the site and to the west of the tombs nos. 1902–1904. It was built mainly of mudbricks, except for the eastern wall which was constructed of chunks of limestone, basalt and granite. The outer surface of the tomb wall was completely covered with white plaster, remains of which are still visible.

The tomb is not connected with any other tombs in the cemetery. It contains two main burial shafts. Other shafts were added on the east and west sides, perhaps for the deceased's relatives; they were numbered A–H. On the west side of the tomb, a rectangular building lay in the middle of an open court. It may represent the primeval mound, surrounded by walls, similar in style to the tombs of Dynasties 1 and 2.¹¹ This shape also occurs in tomb no. 1906 in this cemetery.

⁶ W. S. SMITH, *HESPOK*, pp. 23–29.

⁷ M. SALEH and H. SOUROUZIAN, Official Catalogue, *The Egyptian Museum Cairo*, Mainz 1987, No. 22; for more details, see for comparison, REISNER, *Giza* 1, pls. 22, 34–56; C. VANDERSLEYEN, «Ersatzkopf», in: *LÄ* II, pp. 11–14; A. KELLEY, «Reserve heads», a review of the evidence for their placement and function in the Old Kingdom, *NSSEA* 5.1, 1974, pp. 6–12; N. B. MILLET, in *Essays in Honor of DOWS DUNHAM*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 1981, pp. 129–131.

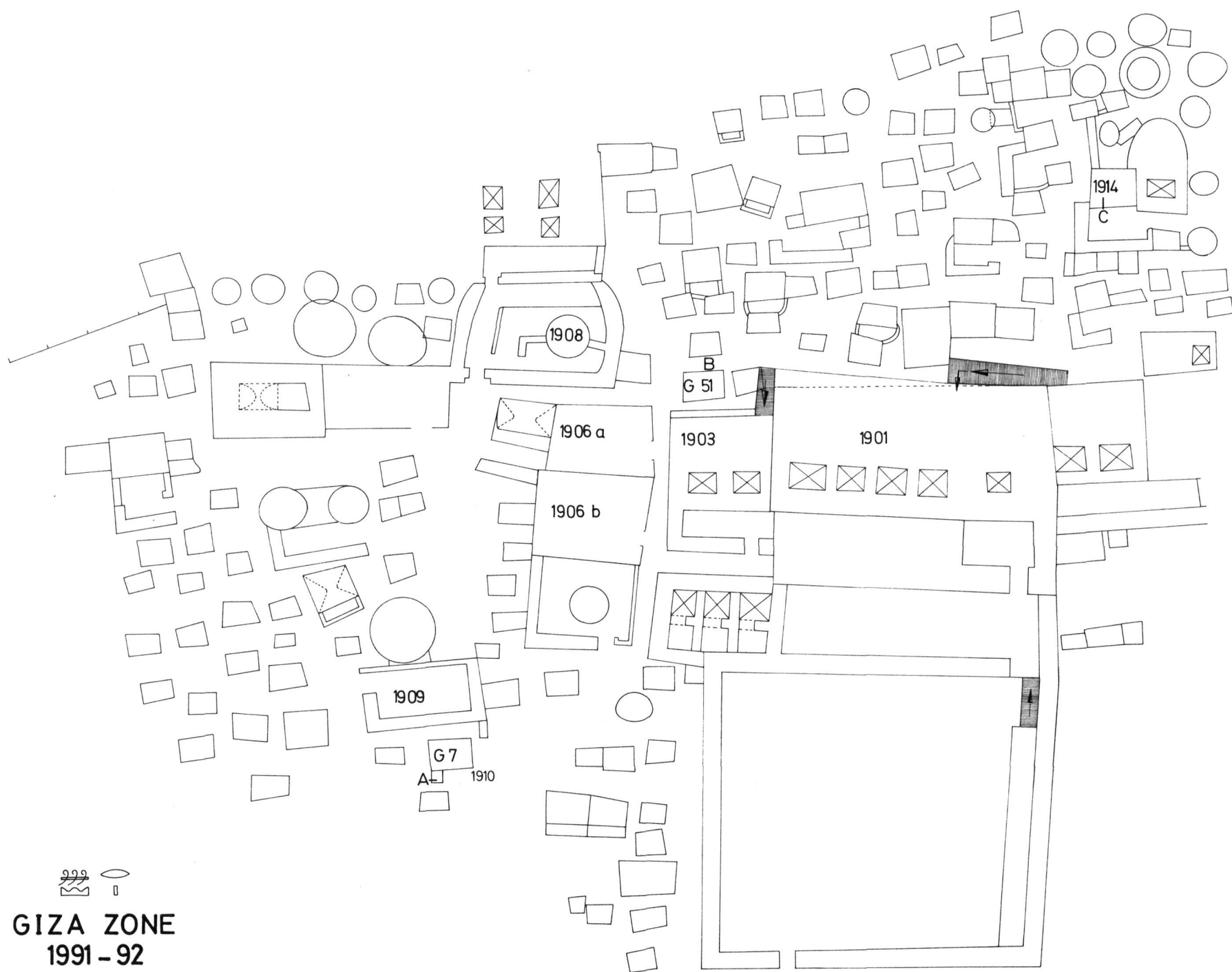
⁸ M. SALEH and H. SOUROUZIAN, Catalogue, No. 32; Z.

HAWASS, *A burial with an unusual plaster mask in the Western Cemetery of Khufu's Pyramid*, in: *Followers of Horus, Studies dedicated to M. A. HOFFMAN*, 1992, pp. 327–336.

⁹ SMITH, *Art and Architecture*, figs. 101, 103, 106.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, fig. 104.

¹¹ cf. W. B. EMERY, *Great Tombs of the First Dynasty*, I, II, III, Cairo, London, 1949, 1954, 1958; W. M. F. PETRIE, *The Royal Tombs of the First Dynasties* I, London 1900.




GIZA ZONE
1991 - 92

by ZAGHLOUL I. MOHAMED

0 5 10m

Fig. 1

The entrance of the tomb is located on the north side and opens into a short passage, about 60 cm wide, leading to an open court. The eastern wall of the passage was built of chunks of limestone and granite with mud mortar. To the left of the entrance, a shaft was found containing pottery, including whole jars as well as sherds. The passage leads to a court on the west side of which were found false-door niches with remains of white plaster on them. The statuette was found beside the third niche from the south with the face looking towards the east (Pl. 35 a).

The statuette wears a flaring wig, which shows traces of black colour. A central parting divides the wig which is short at the sides and longer in the back, reaching the back of the neck (Pl. 35 b). The colour is best preserved on the right side. The facial features are clear with a wide forehead and overhanging brow. Both the upper and lower lids of the eyes are carefully carved and the iris of the eye is coloured black on the outer part and brown inside. The right eye is wider than the left one. The left cheek bone is flatter and smaller than the right one, perhaps a mistake made by the artist due to the presence of the wig.¹² The nose is straight. The statuette has a thin straight moustache. The mouth is wide and the upper lip is thicker than the lower one with the vermilion lines sharply defined.

The shoulders are wide, with the left shoulder smaller than the right one. The hands are holding either a rolled object or a piece of linen or leopard skin. The hands are not modeled, but the nails are indicated. The left shoulder and the arm are not well defined. The artist did not show the line that separates the arm and the body. The left arm has traces of black and yellow paint.

The statuette wears a *wsh* collar around its short neck. Although the *wsh* is supposed to be colored white, yellow and black to represent its precious stones, only two black lines are shown here, and the collar is not depicted around the back of the neck (Pl. 35 b). A pendant, probably an *ib* sign, or, less likely, a pottery vessel or a scarab, also hangs around the neck, reaching almost to the breast. All the colour on this part except black has been lost.

The chest and the stomach were carefully modeled, showing all the anatomical features of these areas. The short kilt is held up by a belt which ties in front. The skirt becomes wider at the lower part to give the legs more freedom of movement. The left leg, which is advanced, is longer and thinner than the right leg, a realistic attempt to depict a standing position. The space between the two legs was colored black. The fine toes on the feet are clearly shown.

The base of the statuette is black and is damaged on the left side. A back pillar reaching almost to the shoulder and also painted black supports the statuette (Pl. 35 c–d).

Most of the statuette was colored black. There are also traces of dark red and yellow paint.

Material: white fine limestone

Dimensions:

Total height of the statuette:	20.6 cm
Length of the back pillar:	15.9 cm
Length of the wig at the back:	3.9 cm
Length of the left arm:	8.3 cm
Length of the right arm:	8.5 cm
Width of the <i>wsh</i> :	2.9 cm
Length of the left leg:	6 cm
Length of the right leg:	5.6 cm
Length of the base:	8.4 cm

¹² This statuette was stolen during an important visit to the site on January 19, 1993. In January 1994 the security police of the airport announced that the statuette

was taken out of the country to Germany. The statuette has not yet been returned to Egypt.

This statuette is a superb example of Old Kingdom sculpture. The realistic details of the modeling of the body present an idealized image of an overseer. The high quality of carving and the realism in a statuette of this size make it unique. Most Old Kingdom statues are large, and we have very few statuettes, the best known of which are the ivory statuette of Khufu and that of Menkaura.¹³ This one is unique in that it does not belong to an official or to royalty.

The realistic details on a sculpture of this size are impressive and so well preserved, it is as though they had been carved yesterday. The facial features, especially the careful modeling around the eyes and the natural smile, show a freshness which is unique for this period. The face is depicted as old, rather than as the usual youthful ideal. The depiction of a moustache is rare in the Old Kingdom.¹⁴ All the statues found in this cemetery have moustaches although the only prince who sported one was Rahotep.¹⁵

The artist demonstrated his skill in portraying the action of walking. In the model the left leg shows the bones and muscles in a realistic way.

Date:

The most important evidence for dating this statuette is the *wsh* collar and the pendant. The polychrome collar is known from Dynasty 4, as in the statue of Nofret and others.¹⁶ The word for this necklace, *wsh*, is known only from the Middle Kingdom and means simply «broad» or «wide».¹⁷ During the Old Kingdom, the *wsh* had two functions. It could be used as an ornament for daily use by the royalty as well as by commoners, or it could be used as a funerary ornament, and was connected to one of the rituals associated with the Opening of the Mouth ceremony.¹⁸

There is an example where it was used both as an ornament and also as a funerary object on a mummy.¹⁹ It is also included in the Offering List and the sacred oils.²⁰ In the Pyramid Texts, the *wsh* represents the universal god Atum, who stands at the top of the primeval mound and gives the dead his soul and life.²¹ This shows that the *wsh* may serve to give life to the deceased and also protect him from any evil.²²

The pendant at the end of the necklace is more likely to be an *ib* sign than anything else. The function of the *ib* sign is more clearly defined in the New Kingdom than at any other period. When the heart is used as a pendant, it means that the deceased is innocent and he can enter the nether world as Osiris; he becomes *m3^c hrw*.²³ In chapter 30 of the Book of the Dead, the use of the *ib* means that it gives the deceased a true heart allowing him to live forever. So the heart-pendant here replaces the original heart; it is a tool to help the deceased to live in the afterlife and for declare his innocence. Also the use of the *ib* sign may suggest a reward from the king to the deceased. Sometimes there were two *ib* signs represented together, one made of gold and the other from silver.²⁴

The *ib* sign on this statuette could be an early representation of a gift from the king to the overseer of the workmen for some outstanding job. It also functions as a replacement for the true heart.

The *ib* pendant in the Old Kingdom dates to Dynasty 4 as the slabs from the tomb of Iry at

¹³ Z. HAWASS, *The Khufu Statuette. Is it an Old Kingdom Sculpture?*, in: *Mélanges GAMAL ED-DIN MOKHTAR, BIFAO I*, 1985, pp. 379–394.

¹⁴ M. SALEH and H. SOUROUZIAN, Catalogue, No. 27, 48, 51, 54.

¹⁵ We can compare this with Egypt today where it is usually only the farmers and workmen who choose to have moustaches.

¹⁶ M. SALEH and H. SOUROUZIAN, Catalogue, No. 27.

¹⁷ *Wb I*, 364–6.

¹⁸ T. HANDOUSSA, *Le collier ousekh*, in: *SAK* 9, 1981, p. 144.

¹⁹ HASSAN, *Giza III*, pl. 14.

²⁰ SIMPSON, *Qar and Idu*, p. 11, fig. 7.

²¹ HANDOUSSA, *op. cit.*, pp. 143–150.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ M. NALAISE, *La signification des pendentifs cordiformes dans l'art égyptien*, in: *CdE* 50, 1975, pp. 105–135.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, for different shapes of the *wsh* and *ib* see: *MÄS*, 8, 1966, 100–113, see especially fig. 47 and 48.

Giza demonstrate.²⁵ The sign there is similar to the one on this statuette. Another example of a statue similar to this one dates to Dynasty 4 but although the *ib* sign has the same shape as our example, the necklace is short and there is no *wsh*.²⁶ There is one example similar to our statuette where the statue wears both the *wsh* and above it, a necklace with a pendant; it is dated to Dynasty 5.²⁷ A similar statue, made of wood, of the chief of the royal farmers, Methethy, came from Saqqara and is dated to late Dynasty 5.²⁸ However, in this case, the *wsh* collar is more colorful and the pendant is different.

Therefore, I suggest that the statuette is dated to Dynasty 5 based on the Saqqara statue published by BORCHARDT mentioned above.²⁹ In support of this date, the tomb in which the statuette was found can be dated to Dynasty 5 by the pottery found there.

²⁵ T. G. JAMES, *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae* Part I, 1961, No. 1168.

²⁶ L. BORCHARDT, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten* I, p. 3–5, pl. I.

²⁷ *Ibid.* I, p. 66, pl. 19.

²⁸ The statue at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, 50.77.

²⁹ L. BORCHARDT, *Statuen und Statuetten* I, p. 66, pl. 19.

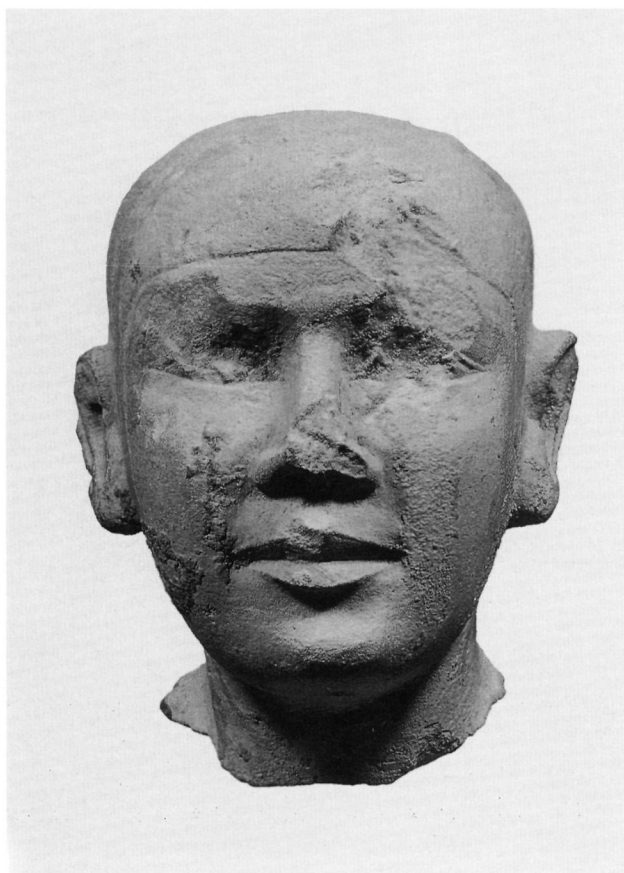


a)

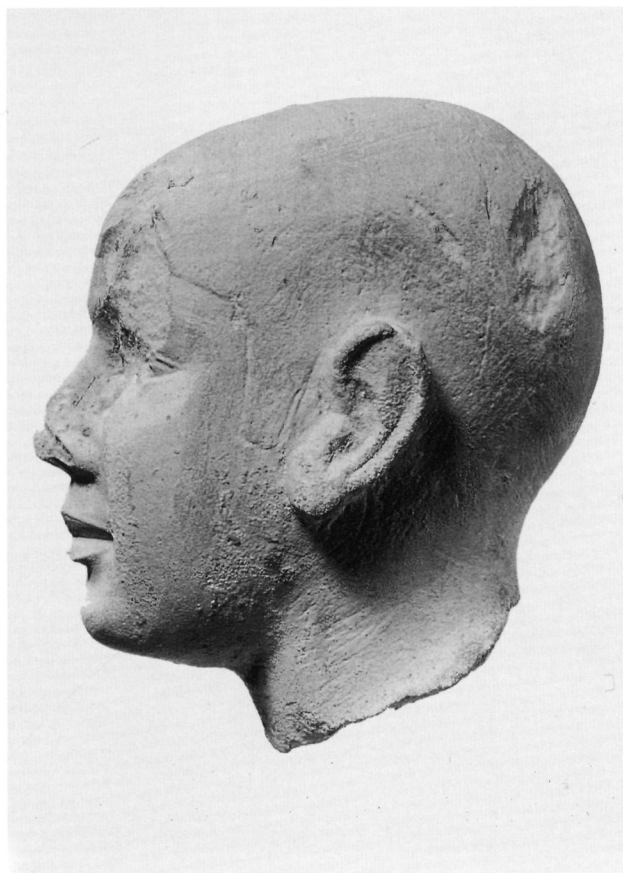


b)

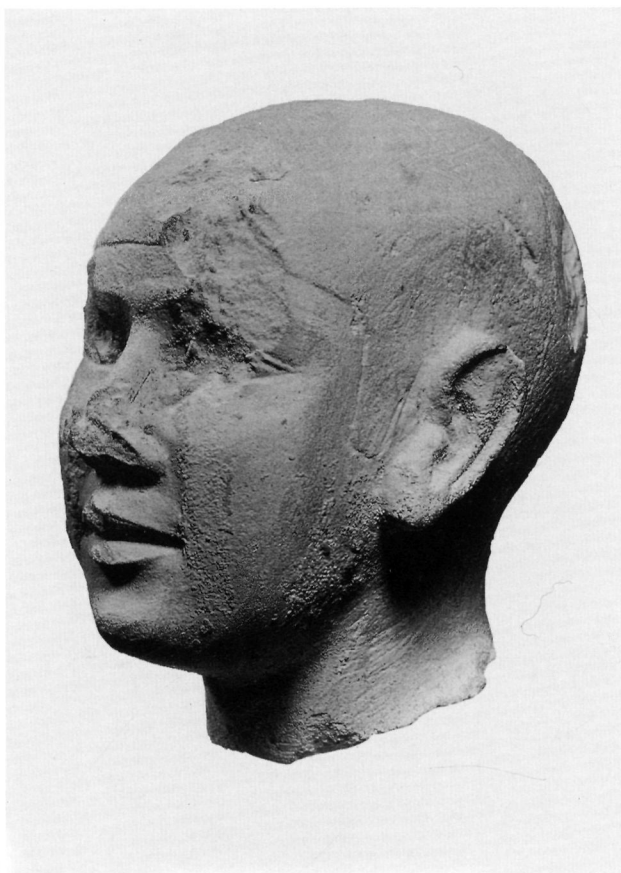
a-b) The cemetery of the workmen of the pyramids (northern section).



a)

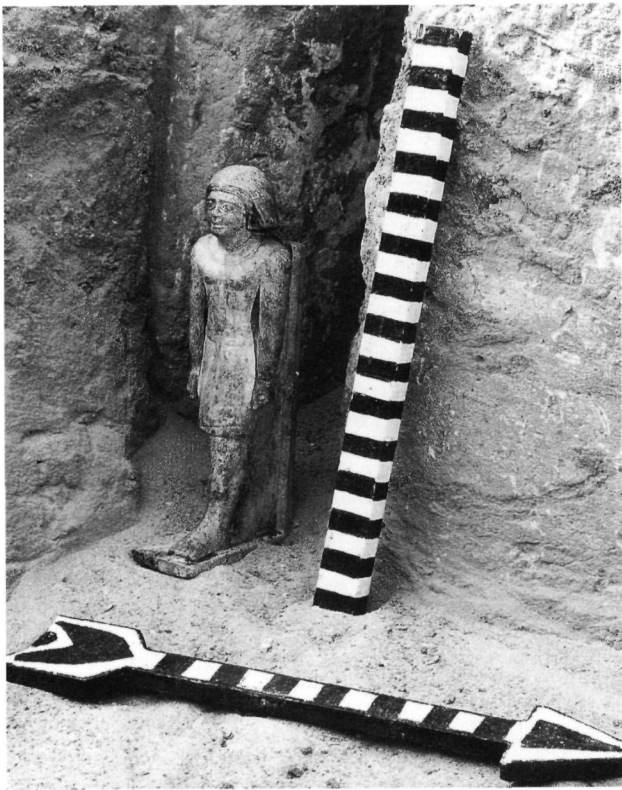


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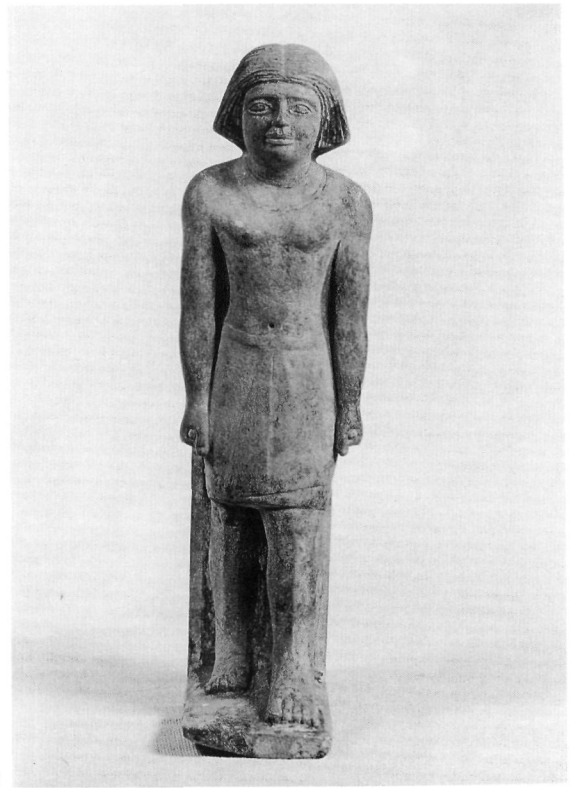


c)

a-c) Unfinished reserve head.



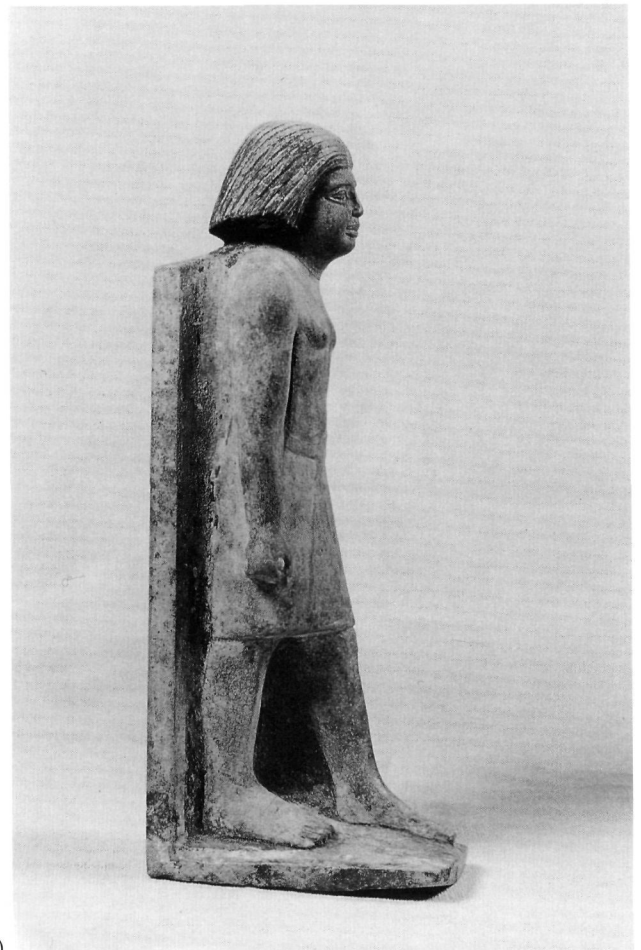
a)



b)



c)



d)

a-d) Statue of an overseer found in situ (Tomb 1914).