

Male Figure

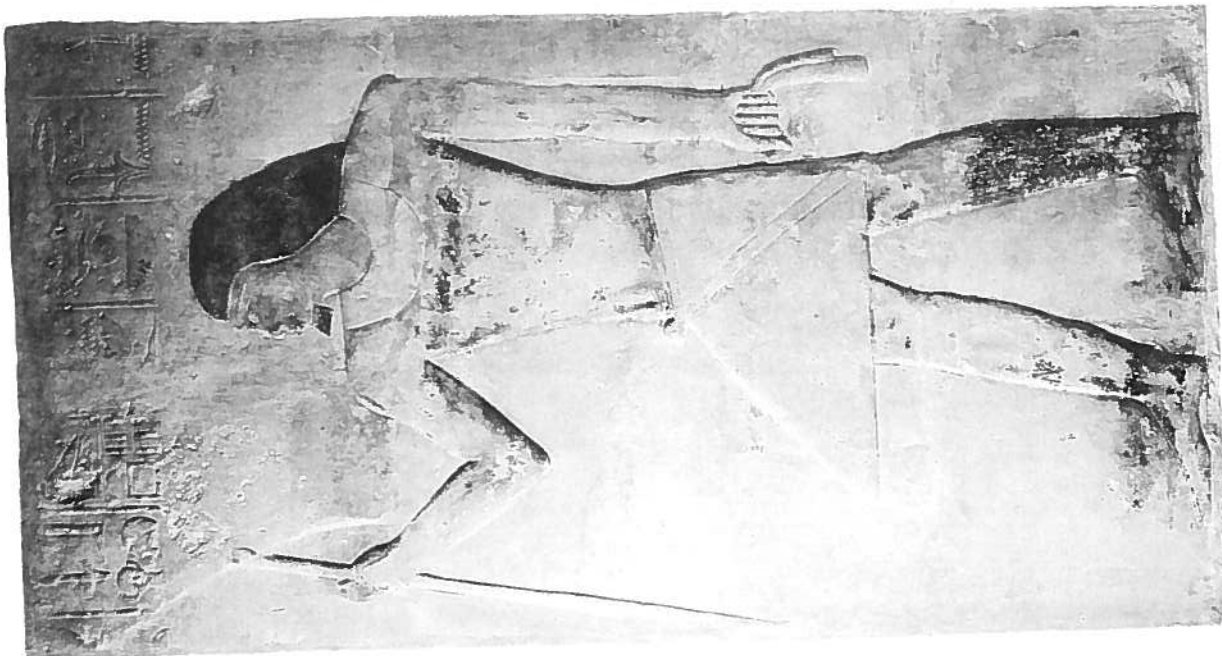
Egypt, c. 2350–2170 B.C.

Saqqara, Old Kingdom, Dynasty 6

Limestone with traces of polychrome

Purchase, 1930 (2896)

This work is believed to be one of over thirty reliefs to have come from the tomb chapel of Ni'ankhnesut at Saqqara. Known from inscriptions as the count or overlord of Nekheb, Ni'ankhnesut lived during the reign of Pharaoh Teti (2323-2291 B.C.) in the Sixth Dynasty. The hieroglyphic inscription above the figure contains part of Ni'ankhnesut's name, suggesting that this figure may be a depiction of him. The figure's anatomical structure joins frontal and profile perspective and reflects the ancient Egyptian conventions of composite representation. The head and neck are in profile, but the eye, shoulders, and torso have a frontal orientation. From the hips down, the figure is seen once again in profile. The pigment that remains on the surface is a reminder that this figure was once fully painted.



Male Figure

Egyptian, ca. 2300 B.C.

Limestone with traces of polychrome

Gift of Anna Rice Cooke, 1930 (2896)

This work is believed to be one of over thirty reliefs to have come from the tomb chapel of Ni'ankhnesut at Sakkara. Ni'ankhnesut, known from inscriptions as the count or overlord of Nekheb, lived during the reign of Pharaoh Teti (2323 -- 2291 B.C.) in the Sixth Dynasty. The hieroglyphic inscription above the figure contains part of Ni'ankhnesut's name, suggesting that this figure may be a depiction of him. The pigment which remains on the surface suggests that this figure was once fully painted. The image of the male figure executed in low relief appears boldly outlined against the plain background. Notice how the elements of this figure, which join frontal and profile perspectives, stay within ancient Egyptian conventions of composite representation. The head and neck are in profile, but the eye, shoulders, and torso seem to have a frontal orientation. From the hips down, the figure is seen once again in profile. This relief is an abstract and idealized work of art where the essential elements of the human figure are represented in a stylized manner.

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Male Figure (#2896)
Gift of Anna Rice Cooke. 1930
Limestone, traces of polychrome

Egyptian
ca. 2300 BC

ARTIST: Unknown

SUBJECT: Standing figure of a male, one of twenty reliefs forming the entire antechamber in a tomb at Sakkara, an excavation site a few miles south of the three Great Pyramids.

MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUE: Limestone wall relief, which was originally painted. The frame is modern. An account of the manner in which the Egyptian artist worked says he used guide lines to met the proper proportions of the figure, which were determined by traditional canons. He would sketch the figure in, make an incision along the lines of the sketch with a chisel and cut away the background, leaving the figure in very low relief. Any modeling that was done was by the contour line in the preliminary sketch and by the chisel. If the stone was too uneven, it was covered with a thin coating of fine plaster. Then the figure was painted in flat colors, partly naturalistic and partly for decorative effect.

STYLE: Conventional method of treating the human figure, a formula used in both reliefs and painting, lasted throughout the entire history of Egyptian art. Different parts of the body are portrayed as if seen from different points of view. One might say the artist believed in actual, rather than visual truth. He knew a man had two arms so he showed both of them, even if he was in profile. The portrayal is not of a man but of a symbol of a man. The head is carved in profile but the eye is superimposed as if seen full face. Shoulders and upper torso are also full view, but legs are facing left.

The figure holds a staff and a was, symbols of royal authority, and has a royal ceremonial beard tied to his chin. The figure is rigid but seems to have a noble bearing. His garment, an above-the-knee shirt, does not seem to be of cloth in that it flares out to a point in an angular line. The expression on his face is one of serenity, an emotionless, calm quality. One can see splotches of red on the body, all that is left of the once-painted relief.

The hieroglyphics form a band at the top of the panel and at the extreme right and have been deciphered to read "The King Lives for Me."