Head of Amenemmēs III in Obsidian: From the Collection of the Rev. W. MacGregor, Tamworth

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HEAD OF AMENEMMĒS III IN OBSIDIAN

FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE REV. W. MACGREGOR, TAMWORTH

BY CHARLES RICKETTS

IT is a common tendency among students of Egyptian Art to praise the superb creations of the Memphite epoch to the detriment of all that came afterwards and to view the huge space of succeeding centuries as a period of artistic immobility or decline. If the first six Dynasties are illustrated by many works which, in their kind, have remained unsurpassed, the craftsmen of the Twelfth Dynasty carved portraits of a yet more introspective or imaginative cast than heretofore; with the Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian art made new experiments, both in aim and in modes of expression, each of these subsequent phases being marked by technical developments needed by the aim to be achieved; for centuries Egyptian architecture was to develop in magnificence, resource and even in invention to the very sunset of its time, while in the Saitic revivals—possibly in the old Theban workshops—a series of realistic portraits (such as the Mentemhēt, Taracos and Nesptah) were destined to rival in power of characterization and intense inner life the finest works of the past. It is doubtless the rugged force shown in these works dating from the Twenty-fifth Dynasty which has led Hedwig Fechheimer (*Die Plastik der Aegypter*, p. 46) to place the superb obsidian head from the fine collection of the Rev. W. MacGregor at Tamworth among these later masterpieces of Egyptian sculpture, instead of classing it in the singularly fine series of portraits which have come down to us of the great Pharaoh Amenemmēs III of the Twelfth Dynasty, among which it is one of the best both in artistic merit and iconographic interest.

Contrary to the impression conveyed by the reproduction, this admirable work is not life-size but 130 millimetres from top of head to chin; a few breakages have affected both ears, thereby lessening what seems to have been a characteristic of the Twelfth Dynasty Pharaohs, namely ears of huge size, placed high and very projecting. One of the elements of interest in this relic of one of the finest epochs of Egyptian art lies in the fact that the king is represented as an older man than in all but one other monument—that from the Karnak *cache* now at Cairo; the expression is more pensive or less energetic than usual in his portraits; and the general resemblance to his father Sesostris III is so marked as to give rise to some hesitation in identifying it, though this hesitation is dispelled on closer examination, the nose and jaw being fuller or more massive than in the three granite statues of Sesostris III in the British Museum and the magnificent portrait from Karnak now at Cairo.

HEAD OF A KING. IN OBSIDIAN

BELONGING TO THE REV. WM. MACGREGOR

Emery Walker ph.sc.

A severe and brooding expression marks all the portraits of Amenemmēs III, who was a ruler, warrior and builder in a family which had numbered warriors, rulers and thinkers before him. To his reign belongs the yet extant wall of El Kab; he was, in legend at least, the maker of the great Lake Moëris and the Labyrinth, and reigned for some forty-eight years powerful and prosperous. Yet on all his energetic effigies is cast a shadow as of one who had lived to see the extinction of some great hope, or the dawn of some great threat; it is doubtless a mere idle flight of romantic fancy to believe that he noted the first mutterings of the storm before the downward rush of the Hyksos invasion which, some years after his death, was to overwhelm his kingdom and whose forgotten princes were to carve their obscure names upon his very statues and royal sphinxes. Even in the studied simplicity and austerity of his seated effigy at Cairo, where he is represented in the flower of youth and with a sweeter cast of face than is his wont, he seems to brood upon some bitter thought of his ancestor Amenemmēs I, upon the illusions of kingship and the loyalty of men: "*Know not a friend nor make for thyself intimates, wherein there is no end.*"

In the small statue at Petrograd and three other portraits at Cairo his expression is leonine and ardent; he is more grave and austere in the admirable granite statue in Berlin. In the superb "Hyksos-Sphinxes" his glance is thrown upwards and is more tense; the best preserved of these sphinxes ranks in the successful rendering of superhuman power and majesty with the great Khephren, and is unsurpassed in the art of Egypt or any other country¹.

A head, in schist, preserved in Berlin, represents the king grown thinner and older, the general aspect being more marked and more sparse and very like his father. The resemblance of the profile of this important fragment to the Tamworth head is very great, yet in this last I believe the king is older still, the eyebrows project and are insisted on by the sculptor, the glance has become more sedate; it is, however, without the heavy furrows and a sort of sullenness of the least artistic of his monuments, namely the walking figure from the Karnak *cache* now at Cairo, which probably represents him as a yet older man.

The British Museum owns a superb Colossus in grey granite which has been tentatively described as Amenemmēs III. This, like the fine fragments in the same material from Bubastis (now at Cairo), would seem to represent some other king of the Twelfth Dynasty. There is undoubtedly a great resemblance to him in the

¹ *Hyksos Sphinxes*. The interesting suggestion has been made that the sphinxes of Amenemmēs III generally known as the Hyksos-Sphinxes do not represent him but are, in fact, masterpieces of the Old Kingdom. Even during the Twelfth Dynasty research was made into the past for the form of the gods, and some such "archaizing" aim may have been deliberately adopted for the mythical shape of these composite creations in which realism and formality are in such perfect balance. Against all ascription to an earlier epoch counts their great resemblance to Amenemmēs III, and more significant still is the fact that the facial modelling shows the conscious study of the inner structure and renders bone, cartilage etc. This is new in Egyptian Art, for the startling realism of earlier masterpieces is based upon outward appearance only; even the face surfaces of the Khephren, Mycerinus and Ranofar are of one substance throughout: there is, in fact, between works of the old Empire and the finest portraits of the Twelfth Dynasty that difference which exists between the finest or most realistic French Gothic statues and any head by Donatello or Verrocchio; the character of the realism is different and the sense of plane unlike.

construction of the head, but something less noble and less energetic in expression and implied character. Is this his son Amenemmēs IV or some later prince? A marked resemblance to Amenemmēs III is shown, also, in the older of the two princes in the striking group at Cairo known as "Les Deux Statues Jumelles"; these figures have been tentatively described as Neferhotep I and Sebkhotep III, who may after all have usurped an earlier work representing Amenemmēs III and one of his sons. We are here in the field of pure conjecture.