

# AN EIGHTEENTH-DYNASTY LADY

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In the long history of Egypt there is a period of a hundred years or so which is of absorbing interest, not especially because of the fine quality of the works of art produced, but because in much of the work the artists seem to have freed themselves to some extent from the fixed conventions of centuries of tradition. This was no great evolution to our eyes, knowing as we do what great changes have happened in a much shorter space of time in many different civilizations. But ancient Egypt has always seemed unaffected, in so far as its art is concerned, either by external influences of trade and invasion or by the internal shock of political revolution. The constancy of these traditions is, of course, due to the slowness of development of the Egyptian religion, but our impression of the conservatism of Egyptian art is exaggerated because the vast majority of art objects that have survived were made for religious purposes.

When, in the Old Kingdom, the tomb statue was first invented to supplement the mummy as a home for the soul of the deceased, a norm was established that endured a thousand years. The garments then worn by gentlemen and ladies continued to be worn by the statues of their successors throughout the Middle Kingdom and well into the New Kingdom. To judge by the temple statues, the dress of the pharaoh Thut-mose III of the Eighteenth

Dynasty was in no essential different from that of Kha<sup>c</sup>-ef-Rē<sup>c</sup> of the Fourth.

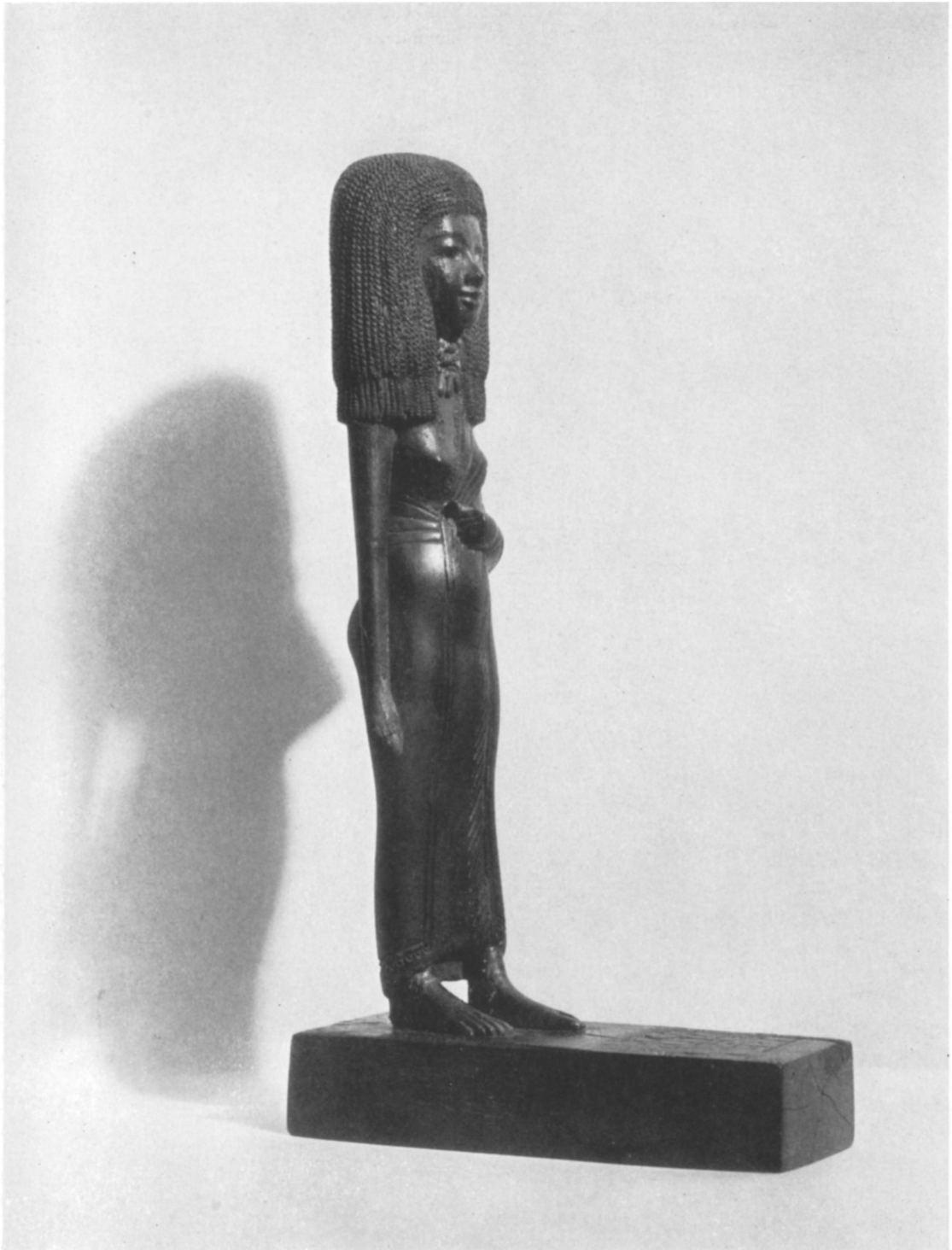
It would, however, be the greatest mistake to assume from this evidence that for a thousand years there was no change of fashion in dress: all that we can legitimately deduce is that during this period there was no essential change in the fashion of tomb and temple statues. The complete destruction, in our own times, of everything except stone and metal would not justify future archaeologists in the conclusion that the statesmen of nineteenth-century Washington and first-century Rome wore identical costumes when addressing their respective senates.

This is not the place to inquire into the reasons for the sharp break

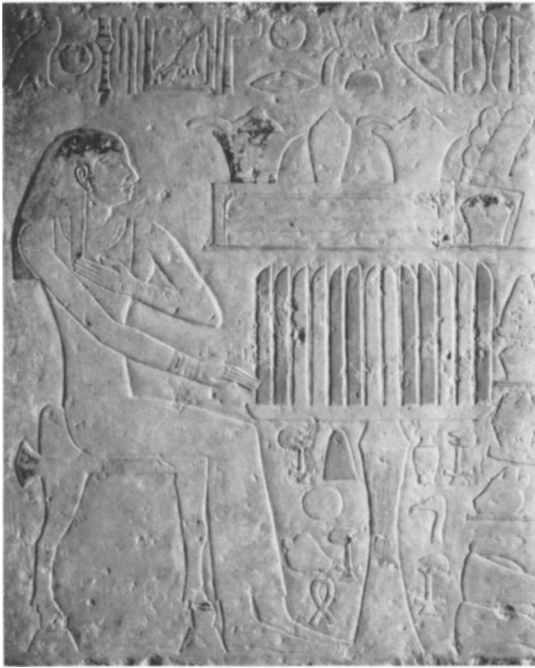
during the Eighteenth Dynasty in the severe tradition of religious art, nor can we discuss the various classes of objects in which the new fashions appear. The trend, however, is most strikingly exemplified in a statuette of an Egyptian lady recently acquired by the Museum. Let us therefore consider the changes in convention illustrated by this charming little sculpture.

When a lady of the Old Kingdom had her picture "taken" she always stood or sat perfectly upright (ill. on p. 268). If the "picture" was a statue she kept her feet together; if a wall painting, one foot was advanced before the





*Statuette of the lady Teye. Egyptian, late XVIII Dynasty (about 1385 B.C.)*



*A lady of the V Dynasty (about 2500 B.C.)*

other, but only enough to show that she really had two feet. Her dress was a simply cut “slip” with broad shoulder straps that covered her breasts. The material was almost invariably plain white linen, and the garment was rarely wide enough to show any folds. Her wig was heavy and came down in two tabs over the front of her shoulders with a single wider piece behind. For ornament she always wore a semicircular “broad collar” of closely strung beads of different colors and bracelets and anklets of the same kind of beadwork. On her wig she occasionally set a fillet to which floral ornaments were fastened.

Such was the dress of ladies of the Old Kingdom when their portraits were made, and it undoubtedly is typical of the costumes worn by them in that period. From the Middle Kingdom not nearly so many representations of ladies have come down to us, but those which have survived show identical costumes. It could be assumed that no change of fashion occurred in the intervening five centuries, but fortunately, even though practically no garments have been preserved, some evidence exists that proves that the people of this time

did not ape their revered ancestors quite so slavishly.

Hundreds of “broad collars” have been found in tombs of the Middle Kingdom. Like the pictured collars, they duplicate those of the Old Kingdom. All this jewelry is funerary; that is to say, it was made for the sole purpose of providing the mummy of the deceased with the prescribed furnishings. Most of it is sham in the sense that the material is faience instead of real stone and that the gold is thin leaf, which would not stand being worn. But besides this purely funerary jewelry there have been preserved, by good fortune, three sets of ornaments actually worn by royal ladies of the Twelfth Dynasty. One of them, belonging to Sit Ḥat-Ḥor Yūnet, is familiar to readers of the *Bulletin*. No single item of this jewelry, with the possible exception of the wide bracelets, bears the slightest resemblance to the ornaments placed on the mummy or shown worn on contemporary statues or by figures in wall paintings. Necklaces with pendants, girdles,



*Head of an early XVIII Dynasty lady (about 1500 B.C.)*

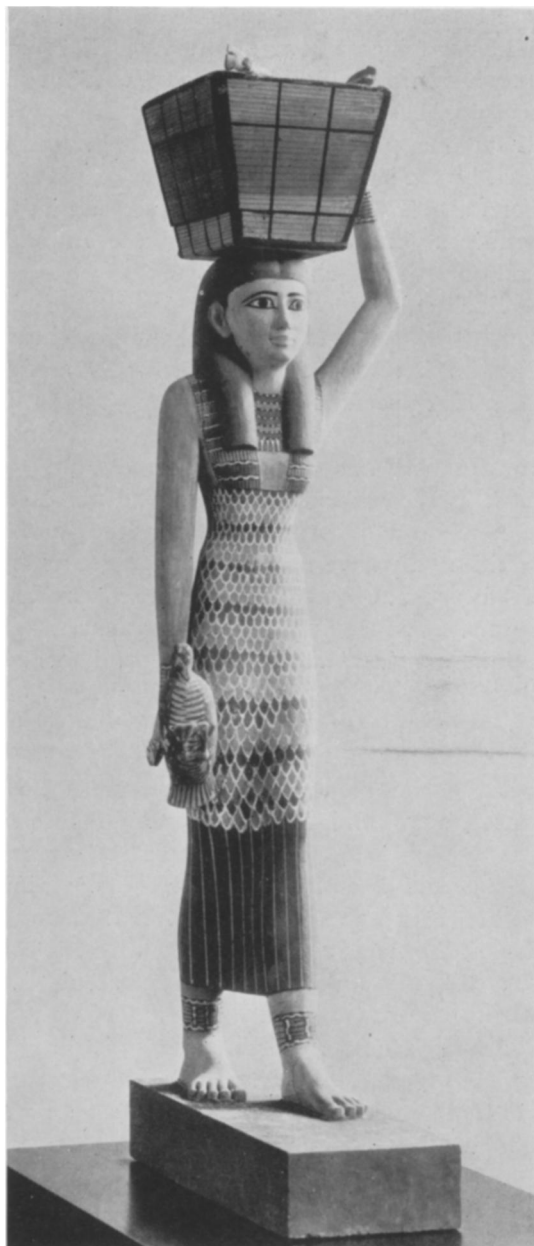
and rings never appear in these representations, yet there can be no shadow of doubt that elegant ladies of the Twelfth Dynasty wore such ornaments. The conclusion is inevitable: funerary representations of ladies and gentlemen of the Middle Kingdom, however artistic they may be or however naturalistic they may seem, do not represent the fashion of the time but follow the traditions of the earlier age.

What the actual fashions of the day were we do not know, except as significant details such as the above emerge from the desert tombs. That clothing could not have continued to follow the simple lines we see in temples and tombs may be deduced from the dress of female offering bearers found in Middle Kingdom tombs (ill. at right). Here we have representations, not of ladies, but of servants. The figures stride, for they are bringing food to the tombs. It is the work they are doing that is the reason for their depiction. Their garments, although cut like those of their mistresses, are elaborately ornamented. They are not portraits, so they need not conform to the traditional conventions that govern tomb portraits, and for this reason they are much more likely to reflect a contemporary style of dress than are the representations of the formally attired ladies, which perpetuate the Old Kingdom style.

Nor are the funerary portraits of the early part of the Eighteenth Dynasty more trustworthy documents of prevailing fashions. The same "slip," wig, and "broad collar" remain the standard dress in both wall paintings and statues (see ill. on p. 268), and it is not until the latter part of the dynasty that we begin to find changes.

How little our late Eighteenth Dynasty lady resembles her counterpart of the Fourth, or even her ancestress of her own dynasty. The wig, which covers her shoulders completely, is much more elaborate than the earlier style. It even has triple pigtails hanging down the back.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the statuette is the flowing garment. The sculptor has used as a model, not the costume of the



*Offering bearer from the tomb of Meket-Rē.  
XI Dynasty (about 2000 B.C.)*

traditional statues in his studio, but the dresses of the wealthy patronesses who came to his shop with their husbands to order just such figures. The garment is quite plainly one of those lengths of sheer linen material that are so familiar to us from the contents of the household linen chests found at Thebes, with

a closely woven fringe along one selvedge and a longer fringe at one of the ends. The lady may have worn a fitted undergarment, but the sculptor has not indicated it, preferring to allow one pointed breast to remain uncovered by the shawl which she holds in place at her waist. The folds and pleats are admirably rendered, but do not obscure the rounded contours of the charming figure.

The sculptor exaggerated the size of the head, perhaps because the wig seemed heavy and he felt that more support was needed than that provided by a face in proportion to the figure. The result was to add liveliness to the pert features looking out from the closely crimped locks of hair. The necklaces, too, are out of proportion, but the jeweler could hardly have made them to scale, for the beads are real beads of gold and semiprecious stones, not merely painted imitations.

The statuette was one of five said to have been discovered together in the Fayyūm about 1900. Among other objects reputed to have been part of the same find were toilet boxes bearing the names of Amen-hotpe III, his queen Teye, and Amen-hotpe IV (before he changed his name to Akh-en-Aten). The group is thus dated with some degree of certainty to the coregency of these kings, that is, shortly before the Atenist revolution, and this is confirmed by the style of the statuettes. The reading of the name Teye in the inscription on the base is not too certain, for it is possible that it might be Suye. The title indicates that the lady was chief lady of the *harīm* or in charge of it. If our reading of the name is

correct it may have been given her in honor of the ruling queen.

Although the inscription indicates that the statuette was part of the lady Teye's funerary equipment, as we look at it we can hardly believe that it was destined for the tomb. She is so much alive that one cannot escape the conclusion that the sculptor must have had the same feeling. He, like many of his fellow craftsmen of about 1400 B.C., seems not to have been merely a skilled artisan repeating the work of his predecessors. His models were living people, not the representations of those long since dead. This sculptor did not belie the name of his profession: *se'ankh*, "one who makes alive." We can be quite sure that while he was working on this small monument he felt that he was making, not a funerary figure, but the portrait of the lady Teye dressed in her best and stepping out to a party.

*The whole find was published by Chassinat in the Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, vol. 1 (1901), pp. 226-234 and pls. 1-III.*

*The jewelry of Sit Ḥat-Ḥor Yūnet was published by Winlock in The Treasure of el Lāhūn (New York, 1934) and by Lythgoe in the Bulletin of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. XIV (1919), Dec., part II.*

*The Museum's new statuette, acc. no. 41.2.10, is 24 cm. (9-1/2 in.) high; the Old Kingdom relief from the tomb of Sekhem Ḥat-Ḥor has the acc. no. 08.201.2 B; the Middle Kingdom offering bearer, acc. no. 20.3.7; and the early XVIII Dynasty head, acc. no. 13.182.1.*