

AN UNCOMMON OLD KINGDOM PAIR STATUE

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It is both a pleasure and an honour to participate in a Festschrift for my dear friend Emily Teeter. Emily and I share an on-going love of objects and museums and, therefore, I think that it is appropriate to offer a brief description, discussion, and illustrations of an important, but perhaps not well known, statue in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo.¹

DESCRIPTION OF THE SCULPTURE

According to the museum's records, the pair statue was found in the Muslim Cemetery at Nazlet el-Samman, Giza, and was registered into the museum's collection in 1951. The statue bears the museum registration number JE 89171 and was later also assigned the Special Register number SR 2 / 15836. It is a pair statue, carved in red (pink) granite, dates to the Old Kingdom, and shows the male owner seated on the ground in a scribal pose with his legs crossed beneath him. His female companion is also seated on the ground beside him with an arm extended in a gesture of support. Its height is 52.5 cm., and there is no trace of an inscription.²

Facing the sculpture, the male figure is on the viewer's left; the female figure to the viewer's right. On the whole, the statue displays a worn and weathered surface condition, and it may be that the statue rested on its back for some years, lessening the surface wear there.

* I would like to thank CIPEG for inviting me to participate in this Festschrift and giving me the opportunity to return to a long-postponed project in honour of a friend and colleague. I also extend my thanks to Egyptian Museum General Director Wafaa El Saddik and the then Museum Board for granting me permission to publish this object from their collection.

1 As to the statue's relatively unknown status, to the best of the author's knowledge, the sculpture has previously received a fairly brief and incomplete notice, but was not documented photographically until recently. See Hornemann 1957: V, pl. 1178; Amiet et al. 1981: 220, fig. 126; Scott 1989: I, 19–21; II, 12–13 (Cat. No. 5). In the first two publications, the statue is presented only as a line drawing; in the third, it is discussed, but had not been seen by the author at the time.

2 My thanks to Janice Kamrin and the ARCE Museum Registrars Training Project participants for confirming and providing this information. I am also most grateful to Gustavo Camps for the splendid photographs that accompany this article. All photographs © Gustavo Camps.

The male owner's face is damaged, possibly beyond mere wear, and his nose is now lacking. He has a short, shoulder-length wig, parted in the middle and striated. The collar bones, breasts, and navel are all indicated on the torso. He wears a short, knee-length kilt. His right hand, also damaged, is fisted and rests on the apron panel of his kilt at the right thigh. His left hand is placed flat, palm down, on the apron panel of his kilt at the left thigh. The fingertips of his left hand extend slightly over the apron panel of his kilt at the hem. The left leg crosses in front of the right and the muscles of the left calf are powerfully articulated. The musculature of the right calf was once similarly rendered, but is now worn.

The female owner's figure is approximately half the size of her companion's and her face is oval and also quite worn. She has a shoulder-length wig and she wears a long sheath dress. She is depicted seated on the ground beside



FIG. 1: Anonymous Pair Statue, Cairo, JE 8917, front view.

her male companion, her legs tucked under her in a pose found in other Old Kingdom statues of women.³ Her left hand is placed flat, palm down, on her left thigh; her right arm, unusually long and bent at the elbow, extends along her male companion's back, the forearm crossing upward along the shoulder blade. Her right hand, extended flat and palm down, rests on his left back shoulder.



FIG. 2: Anonymous Pair Statue, back view.

REMARKS ON THE SCULPTURE

There are a few aspects of this sculpture that make it more important than it might at first seem from its worn condition and the lack of an inscription.⁴ These have to do with its possible date, the probable station of the owners, and the unusual pose chosen for the composition. The first item of interest is the statue's reported findspot, 'The Muslim Cemetery, Nazlet el-Samman,

3 The female pose is mentioned in Smith 1978: 32; and discussed and illustrated in Fay 1998: 160–61 (nos 2-3).

4 The lack of an inscription on the statue itself may be because it was once placed in a separate base, probably of limestone, as is the case for the scribe statue of Setka (and others), see Arnold et al. 1999: 250–51.

Giza', as this is a locality associated with the Giza Pyramids and Fourth Dynasty King Khufu.⁵ When this is combined with the sculpture's material (red granite), the pose selected for the male owner, and the overall style of the sculpture, these elements strongly point to the statue's date being in the Fourth



FIG. 3: Anonymous Pair Statue, left profile view.



FIG. 4: Anonymous Pair Statue, right profile view.

Dynasty and the owners being members of Khufu's court, the male owner likely being a King's Eldest Son. The author observed several years ago in his doctoral dissertation that private statues in hard stone showing the owner seated on the ground in a scribal pose and dating to the Fourth Dynasty seem to be used exclusively by King's Eldest Sons.⁶ It is possible, then, that the male owner of this pair statue was a King's Eldest Son of Khufu.

The other interesting aspect of this sculpture is its uncommon pose for a pair statue. While both seated and standing pair and group statues are common in the vocabulary of ancient Egyptian statuary, those that show the male owner seated on the ground with his companion also seated on the ground next to him are not.⁷ As such, this is the earliest occurrence known to the author of the statue type. This is in keeping with the experimental development of ancient Egyptian art and architecture during the Fourth Dynasty, as exemplified by the

⁵ See Arnold, et al. 1999: 151.


⁶ Scott 1989 I: 21–23.

⁷ In this light, the fairly contemporary limestone group statue of Seneb JE 51280, showing the male owner seated in a cross-legged pose, but on a block seat with his female companion and two children may be noted. The statue is often illustrated and discussed, for example, Saleh and Sourouzian 1987, no. 39.

inlaid wall reliefs of Nefer-maat (including JE 43809 and Chicago, Oriental Institute Museum 9002), the reserve heads, and the bust of Ankh-haf (Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 27.442).⁸



FIG. 5: Anonymous Pair Statue, right three-quarter view.

The statue type never seems to have attained a widespread usage and later examples are rare, including a small-scale, hardstone statuette of Middle Kingdom date in the San Antonio Museum of Art (accession number 99.2; unpublished), in which only one of the figures is fully preserved (and may have originally shown two male figures), and a Late Period example in the Walters Art Museum (accession number 22.76) in which the male figure is shown in a ‘block statue’ pose as his female companion kneels on the ground beside him.⁹ Based on the probable date of the Egyptian Museum’s sculpture, the likely status of the statue’s owners, and the unusual choice of pose, it is hoped that this brief presentation will be of interest to Emily and our colleagues. 

⁸ Nefer-maat’s reliefs are illustrated and discussed in Saleh and Sourouzian 1987, nos 25 a–b and Teeter 2003: 14–15, Cat. No. 3. Several of the reserve heads are illustrated and discussed in Arnold et al. 1999: 72–81; 233–239; as is the bust of Ankh-haf: 61.

⁹ Steindorff 1946: 59, pl. XXXII, Cat. No. 171.

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