

RELIEF FRAGMENT

Egyptian, New Kingdom (ca. 1539-1069 B.C.)

Limestone

Height: 45 cm Length: 70 cm

Reference: 17478



This fragment of limestone relief depicts a figure wearing the traditional leopard skin garment and side-lock of a sempriest. He stands before a menu of funerary offerings that were presented for the benefit of a deceased individual in the afterlife. Such lists typically include food, drink, and portable cultic goods (incense, libation oil, etc.) and are arranged into squares containing the names of the various offerings and the quantity desired. Sometimes mentioning more than ninety individual items, they were inscribed in tomb chapels and temples, where they were read aloud in order to magically activate the items for use. Offering lists occur in both royal and private contexts through virtually all phases of ancient Egyptian history.

This example includes the last eight items from a list that would have been compiled for an unknown private individual (the complete text would have included the name and titles of the deceased, who often appears seated at a table heaped with offerings). The quantities of seven additional items, now lost, appear at top. The lines separating them are light blue, while the hieroglyphs themselves are predominantly reddish-brown. The tops of plants, as well as rope and fiber signs, are a faded greenish gray. The lower parts of plants and the bottom halves of vessels have been colored light blue, while signs depicting water and mammals appear as a darker blue or black. Traces of spotted plumage are still visible on two owl hieroglyphs, and a number of other bird signs retain portions of their original blue and orange coloration.

The preserved portion of the offering list reads: tcherep-goose, one bird; ser-goose, one bird; setch-goose, one bird; pigeon, one bird; gazelle, one animal; ibex and oryx, two animals; cool water, one jar; incense, one unit (the order of this inventory does not conform to any of Winfried Barta's five major types of offering list). Two columns of text to the left of the menu preserve part of a prayer proclaiming the offering meal, which reads, [Proclamation] of the offering meal,

consisting of bread and beer; one thousand consisting of beef and fowl one thousand consisting of incense; one thousand consisting of oil. One thousand .

The priest's leopard skin garment has retained virtually all of its distinctive black and yellow coloration; his reddishbrown skin has been equally well preserved. The figure's proportions appear to be consistent with those of other standing figures from the later New Kingdom: the relative height of the small of the back and the lower border of the buttocks suggest for this relief a date no earlier than the reign of Thutmose III, while the length of the lower leg is typical of the 19th or 20th Dynasty.

He stands with his right arm extended across the chest, holding out his hand in a gesture of recitation, which frequently accompanies the presentation of offerings and other ritual activities. The left arm is held downward, hand grasping a paw of the leopard skin garment. A border of green, yellow, blue, and brownish red squares survives on the left side of the piece, while the painted decoration at the bottom edge has mostly faded away, possibly as a result of the modern fire that blackened its lower edge.

CONDITION

Thin, almost rectangular plaque, upper right-hand corner is chipped; perfectly preserved painting, barely faded, blue, reddish brown, black and yellowish beige colors. Burn marks on the lower edge and on the priest's head.

A small handwritten label attached to the upper right-hand corner of the piece reads N° 2783 Saqqarar .

PROVENANCE

Ex-Feuardent Collection, late 19th century, France.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In general on priests and their gesture, see:

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FEHLIG A., Das sogenannte Taschentuch in den ägyptischen Darstellungen des Alten Reiches in Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur, 13, 1986, pp. 81-85 (for the significance of the grasped paw or tail).

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SHAFER B., Temples, Priests, and Rituals: An Overview in Temples of Ancient Egypt, Ithaca, 1997, p. 12.

On funerary offerings:

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On proportions in Egyptian Art:

ROBINS G., Proportion and Style in Ancient Egyptian Art, Austin (Texas), 1994, p. 87.