Introduction

Of the four major spans of time into which the history of ancient Egypt has been divided for convenience' sake, the Late Period is the longest. Unlike the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, it is historically not a unit. During it, periods of foreign domination were interspersed with dynasties of native rule, and for three hundred years before our era a foreign house — that of the Ptolemies — made Egypt its own, to hold it until the land finally became a colony of all-conquering Rome. But archaeologically and artistically, the eight hundred years between around 700 B.C. and a.d. 100 constitute a well-defined entity. To treat them as a whole in tracing the development of sculpture is not as arbitrary as it may seem, for changes of dynasties, wars, and invasions had remarkably little effect on native cultural life. The stream of Egyptian civilization flowed on, gaining impetus as it went, and (in contrast with what seems to have happened during the unsettled periods of the third and second millennia B.C.) magnificently surviving the ill fortune that from time to time befell the country.

Ever since the remains of two standing figures in wood, of about two-thirds life size, were found in a grave dated to the end of Dynasty I (about 3000 B.C.), we have been aware that the noblest manifestation of ancient Egyptian art — sculpture in the round of human beings on a human scale — existed in the Nile Valley for nearly as long as the expression of ideas in written characters and the fitting of hewn stone into architectural units. These two statues were "... erect in a frontal pose . . . one leg advanced . . . the weight evenly distributed . . . the hands either clenched or, more rarely, laid flat against the thighs." It is in these words, used by Miss Richter (Kouroi, p. 3) in reference to the earliest Greek statues, fashioned some two thousand years later, that they are best described. There can be no doubt that these sculptures of the Old Kingdom — the first sizeable creations made by the Egyptians in their own image — mark the beginning of Western sculpture. As the modeling of the human figure in the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms has by now been well studied, the moment seems to have arrived for focusing attention on the statuary made during the final centuries of ancient Egyptian civilization, when Egypt was continuously in touch with both the Middle East and the rising West, when Phoenicians and Assyrians, Persians and Cypriotes, Greeks and Romans came to the Nile Valley and saw the living art of its people.

After a long twilight, which set in as early as the reign of the great Ramesses (some of whose statuary, not to mention that of his notables, shows an appalling deterioration), there occurred in Egypt about 700 b.c. one of those revivals of the art of sculpture, such as had taken place earlier, in Dynasties XI and XVIII, following periods of anarchy and invasion. This time, however, the revival did not come in the wake of national resurgence. On the contrary, it was stimulated by

conquering rulers from Kush, a land far to the south. These foreign kings and their courtiers commissioned the modeling of their likenesses in hard stone on a scale not known for centuries past; and just as early Middle Kingdom art harked back to the Old Kingdom and certain work of the sixteenth century took inspiration from Dynasties XII and XIII, so the statues made under Kushite rule in the beginning reflected the best of the sculpture of earlier periods.

This reawakening after three or four centuries of stagnation is one of the miracles that constantly astonish the student of the archaeology of the Late Period. From the time of the Kushite kings sculpture remained dominant in the art of Egypt. Relief work and architecture also reached new heights, but only sporadically; sculpture alone continued and developed to the very end of the existence of the ancient civilization. The function of statuary became more sharply defined. (In the beginning, images of human beings had been destined mainly for the tomb, where they were hidden from the sight of men.) From the Middle Kingdom on, private people occasionally set up their statues in the sanctuaries of their local gods, but in the Late Period all sculpture were destined for the temples and meant to be seen by those who came to worship. For this reason, attempts were made, time and again, to endow the face of a statue with something more than a benign and idealizing expression, to give it the features of a definite person, to imbue it with the character and inner life of the subject. To the influence of Egyptian realism thus developed, we owe some Hellenistic and many fine Roman portraits.

Having once been shaken out of their splendid introspective isolation, the Egyptians rose to the challenge of a modern world, in which neighboring peoples had to be reckoned with. Not to suffer in their pride, they became demonstrative and extroverted. Under the eyes of foreigners, they gave visible proof of their faith and tenacity of tradition by filling their temples with statues in hard stone in a profusion that belies the modern dismissal of the waning centuries of ancient Egyptian civilization as weak and decadent. Only with Roman rule, when the country was bled white and the proud aristocracy gradually decimated, did they cease to display their images in their sanctuaries, but hid them from the sight of the hard bureaucrats and armored cohorts who had come from beyond the seas to govern Egypt. It was in the first century a.d., precisely at the time when the Roman administration became firmly entrenched, that the sculpture of temple statues deteriorated and a new art — the painting of portraits on panels — arose for the privacy of the grave. Only then what was genuinely Egyptian came to an end. Though succeeding centuries saw the evolution of a new, more direct art form — the Coptic — it was one that drew for the most part on popular versions of Greco-Roman tradition.

Egyptian statues differ from those of all other countries of the ancient world in incorporating a member called the back pillar, a post or pillar which rises from the base in the rear to shoulder, neck, or head level. The figure does not lean against this pillar; it follows the contour of the body as if it intruded into or grew out of the person represented. Its rear plane is flat and rectangular and frequently covered by one or more columns of text. Various explanations — none satisfactory — have been offered to explain the use of the back pillar. Some think that the Egyptian sought for an upright, a pillar like the engaged columns of early temple architecture, against which to lean his statue, and that once this member had been devised it was clung to for tradition's sake. Others, more practicalminded, have argued that the back pillar was created to protect the statue from breakage; against this theory speaks the fact that in many early examples the back pillar does not extend above shoulder level and thus leaves the neck unprotected. A further suggestion — based on the protective hawk that stands on the back pillar in certain royal sculptures of the Old Kingdom — is that the shaft is the seat of the vital force, the Ka, the divine essence thought to endow the person represented with divine power.

The shape of the back pillar is often a valuable aid in attributing a sculpture to a definite period. Throughout the entire Late Period it frequently terminates in a squared-off top. A new version appears with Dynasty XXVII, when the top is sometimes shaped like a trapezoid, and from the latter part of the fourth century B.C. occasionally it ends in a point, first as an isosceles and later, in the Ptolemaic Period, as an equilateral triangle. In principle the back pillar rises perpendicular to the base, but there are exceptions, as for instance in No. 3 9 of this Catalogue, in which the back pillar slants toward the rear of the sculpture.

In the Late Period, the Egyptians were less addicted to a mechanical construction of sculpture than at any previous time; figures were modeled more freely. Though they conformed to a few simple rules, long since established by faith and tradition, when one measures and tests them with level and plumb line one invariably finds that they do not follow a rigid canon. It is true that Egyptian sculpture is "frontal" — until the last decades of the Ptolemaic Period an obvious movement or turn of the head does not occur in a statue. On the other hand the sole intention seems to have been to make a figure appear to conform to the law of frontality. On closer inspection one nearly always finds that the conformity is only illusionary; that a gentle turn of the head by a fraction of an inch, the lowering of one shoulder against the other, a slight shifting of the body's weight are all incorporated in what seem to be formally and symmetrically executed statues. Since the degrees of asymmetry employed in the sculptures of the earlier periods have not yet been extensively studied, no precise comparison with those of the Late Period can be offered. It seems, however, as if Late

sculptors were far more addicted to loosening a rigid code than their forebears had been. This is also evident in variations in detail occurring in a single statue. For instance, the hands may be highly stylized and the feet modeled naturalistically, or the hands are left crude and undeveloped, and other parts of the body are modeled with great attention to detail. All these deviations serve to enliven a piece of sculpture, though the observer may register them only subconsciously.

In the course of the period under discussion the modeling of the male torso, from sternal notch to navel, undergoes a number of changes, the most important of which is that from bipartition to tripartition. The Egyptians of the Kushite Period, in reviving an ideal handed down in the sculpture of Dynasty XII, stressed as the most prominent feature of a man's body the median line, vertically bisecting the torso into two distinctly separate halves. This sculptural form, called bipartition, is very pronounced until the time of King Psamtik II (595-589 b.c), and still occurs occasionally under his successors. Then a new basic principle of modeling evolves, which we call tripartition. In this the median line is hardly noticeable or entirely absent, even under strong raking light, and the three main portions of the torso — chest, rib cage, and abdominal region — are modeled almost as separate entities, markedly set off against each other. This style achieves its fullest development in the reign of King Amasis (570-526 b.c), well anticipating a similar stylistic change in Greek sculpture.

We are poorly informed about the modeling of the male body in Dynasties XXVII-XXIX, but with King Nectanebo I (378-360 b.c.) of Dynasty XXX, the body is again often shown in the nude from neck to loins, and though the king himself employed sculptors who modeled him in a fashion which can only be described as a mixture of bipartition and restrained tripartition, the private statuary of his time and of the following period displays, for the most part, pure tripartition. The Ptolemaic Period goes its own way, mostly along the lines of tripartition; pure bipartition is never revived.

The principal statue forms represented in sculpture of the Late Period are the following: Standing statue, the classical attitude of male or female figures cited in the second paragraph of this Introduction. Whether "standing" or "striding" — the terms can be used interchangeably — the figure is in repose, not walking. The left foot is advanced, and the stride is longer in the male statue than in the female. All standing sculptures in stone have a back pillar, except some sculptors' models and, possibly, a few royal figures of late Ptolemaic times.

Seated statue, the position of a person resting erect on a block of approximately cubic shape which serves as a seat. Neither foot is advanced. With and without back pillar, this form of sculpture was made occasionally for single figures until the time of Psamtik I, and for groups until the reign of

Necho II (with two possible exceptions, Cairo J.E. 36576 and Paris, Louvre E. 9333). The single seated figure was revived in Roman times, after 30 B.C., and there is at least one royal example of a seated group in the Ptolemaic Period (Alexandria 11261).

Kneeling statues, showing a person kneeling and resting on his heels. These were made throughout the Late Period, and one specimen seems even to date from Roman times (Alexandria 22986). All private examples have a back pillar, sometimes lacking in royal figures.

Block statues, first fashioned in the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. This is a typically Egyptian form not found anywhere else in the ancient world. It shows a man squatting on the ground or on a very low cushion, the arms crossed on the knees, which are drawn up to shoulder level. It is the most frequently employed type of the Late Period, increasing considerably in post-Persian times and not going out of fashion until the beginning of the first century b.c. Up to the time of Psamtik I, block statues were on occasion made without back pillar; after his reign they always have one.

Asymmetric squatting statues, representing the subject, always a man, as sitting on the ground, the left leg drawn up as in a block statue, and the right leg folded under, so that the sole of the right foot appears under the left thigh, back of the left foot. In one instance (Hanover 1935.200.515) the subject folds the right leg straight back from the knee so that he actually sits on the right foot. Asymmetric squatting statues occur mainly in Dynasty XXV; a few are dated to Psamtik I of Dynasty XXVI, but none are found under his successors. They usually have a back pillar; only two exceptions are known (Cairo C.G. 653 and J.E. 36711).

Squatting statues, also referred to as scribe statues, showing the subject seated on the ground cross-legged, the knees spread widely apart. In most cases the right leg is crossed over the left. All dated sculptures of this type are from the reign of King Psamtik I; only very few, if any, may have been made for men who lived under his successor, Necho II. The majority come from Memphis, and arc without back pillars. Those found at Thebes were made sometimes with or sometimes without back pillar.

By far the largest number of statues created during the Late Period represent men, thus widely changing the ratio which prevailed in earlier times. In Dynasty XXV no stone sculpture of a queen or a private woman was ever made; the only females represented in durable material were the princesses who served as divine consorts of the god Amun. In the beginning of Dynasty XXVI we find a few private female figures in stone, and women still appear in group statues under Necho II. Then none were so honored for centuries to come, until the time of Alexander the Great or of his

immediate successors, to whose reign we have attributed No. 92. In the Ptolemaic Period, statues of women are not uncommon, constituting about one-fourth of all sculptures made.

The reason for this strange ban against temple sculptures of women is not known. It becomes even more puzzling in view of the fact that the renaissance which took place under Psamtik I included the restoration of the woman's position in the arts. It almost seems as if the Egyptians, on account of increasingly frequent contacts with foreign nations, had come to deem inappropriate the presence of a female sculpture in a temple. Only a few statuettes in wood show that there may have been a traditional undercurrent among the populace, to bridge the two and a half centuries during which stone statues of women were apparently never fashioned.

It was not only in Dynasty XXV, when the great revival of sculpture-making took place, that statuary was frequently inspired by the splendid examples of bygone times. Sculpture of the time of the Sake ruler, Psamtik I, also shows many classicistic tendencies, which we call archaizing. One of them, for instance, is the revival of the scribe — or squatting — type of figure, which harks back to the great Memphite examples of the Old Kingdom. This trend toward the distant past should be well distinguished from a style of Dynasty XXX,-termed archaistic, which attempts to revive the glories of Dynasty XXVI and, more specifically, of its early decades, when Psamtik I was ruling. By careful analysis of undated examples of such classicism, these two periods, the archaizing and the archaistic, can be better understood. That one of them is more derivative than the other is of no importance; to distinguish them is far more vital, for otherwise a critical appraisal of the achievements of the two dynasties or of a given span of time cannot be made. Part of the lack of serious interest in the Late Period has always been due to misconceptions arising from the bewildering multitude of stylistic features which seem to exist side by side. It is true that there are many currents in the art of these times, but they cease to be bewildering when they are studied on the basis of dated and datable sculptures of each period. Such study is very rewarding in its revelation of the inner richness and sense of direction that never failed the Egyptian sculptor until the beginning of the Roman rule.

One of the many fascinating aspects that lend to Late Period sculpture a mark of distinction is the treatment of the human face. As in all previous periods of Egyptian art, there is a fair share of idealization, arising from the desire to create for posterity a harmonious, contented, eternally youthful countenance. From the middle of the seventh century on, we find the outspoken "smile," which — together with the rigid frontality and stance of the Egyptian statue.— was soon to be taken over by the Greeks, but at the same time a new conception of the human face made itself felt. At the close of Dynasty XXV and during the reign of Psamtik I at the beginning of Dynasty XXVI,

there set in a trend of almost brutal realism. It would be claiming too much if one hailed the sculptured heads in this style as portraits. A portrait embodies the individual traits of a definite human being. Since there is some evidence that these heads were created after a common formula used for denoting the maturity of age, as distinguished from the immaturity of eternal youth, we prefer to call the sum-total of these more or less stereotype features a likeness. After the half-century of the reign of Psamtik I, this realism is discontinued, only to crop up again under Persian rule. Although Dynasty XXVII is archaeologically but little explored, we have enough evidence to claim that^ after 525 B.C. there begins a development that quickly ripens to true portraiture in the Western sense, revealing the outer as well as the inner characteristics of a human being in the lineaments of his face. From then on the search for man's soul in the shape and expression of his countenance was never to cease until the end of ancient Egyptian civilization; and Greece and eventually Rome soon joined in the quest. Splendid examples of this native Egyptian portrait style abound; we find in them the full range of human emotion, and through them we sense the vigor and vitality of an artistic force which, though far from the lofty ideals of the centuries of isolation, was able to hold its own in a changing world.

In the last millennium the technical process involved in making hard-stone sculpture remained essentially the same as it had always been. By pounding and hammering and bruising, the stone was worn away; the cutting was done with stone tools and the polishing with quartz sand. Unfinished statues display tool marks exactly the same as those of never completed hard-stone statues of Dynasty IV. The use of hard-tipped metal tools by foreign sculptors of their time, does not prove that the tradition-minded Egyptian craftsmen borrowed these tools and employed them successfully. Just as the peasant of a Near Eastern village, employing a team of oxen and a crude wooden plough, never so much as turns his head when a tractor crosses his path, so the Egyptian craftsman clung to his established XXXVlll perfect technique in the face of scientific developments of other countries. What he had was good enough. To fashion a diorite head such as No. 132 without leaving a mark or trace on the polished face would be impossible even with the most modern steel tool. The very walls of the temple of Dendcra, the roofing slabs of the temple of Edfu, all point to the justifiable persistence of Egyptian artisans in the employment of their own time-tested methods.

There lay their strength, in imperturbably following their own way, adapting, even borrowing, but always creating what was essentially Egyptian. Our present task is to isolate and to arrange in a sensible order the elements which form the sum-total of their achievement in the field of sculpture. One cannot begin this task by choosing pieces here and there and comparing them without form

analysis with the finest sculptures of earlier times. A period has to be judged on its own merits; only then can one weigh the evidence and measure the degree to which it surpasses or falls short of another epoch. But little is gained by such comparison. Though of the same stock and of the same faith as their forefathers, the Egyptians of the Late Period faced different problems and coped with a world foreign to their tradition. That they maintained an even higher standard of durability in their work than did their predecessors is greatly to their credit. How great was their artistic achievement, how fine their sculptures, determined by any standards, must be judged for himself by each who sees the Exhibition and goes through the pages of this Catalogue.