

The 'Rockefeller' Relief

Egypt

New Kingdom 1550 - 1077 B.C.

Limestone, polychrome

H: 31.1cm

The New Kingdom period in Egypt is considered the third great era of Egyptian culture and was characterised by 500 years of political stability and economic prosperity. Military campaigns carried out by the Egyptian rulers extended Egypt's influence in the Near East, and they Pharaohs amassed unimaginable wealth, much of which they lavished on their gods. Although the administrative capital was established in the Delta, Thebes remained a cultural and religious centre. Here the pharaohs built their mortuary temples and were buried in massive rock-cut tombs decorated with finely executed paintings or painted reliefs. "The subject is probably a lady in a banqueting scene with an attendant serving the lady. The fragment includes the head and left shoulder of a the lady, her right hand (shown as a left hand) extended, and the smaller right hand and upper right arm of a second figure facing her. This somewhat confusing group of hands represents the interaction of two figures, the lady and a smaller secondary figure. The finely delineated profile of the lady with the well-carved eye is set off by an elaborate headdress. On the top of her head is an ointment cone from which two lotus buds fall to the front. These cones were worn at banquets and gradually melted to suffuse. An earspool of a type usually postdating the Amarna period (1350-1314 B.C.) covers part of the check, and there is a wide upper headband and a narrower lower hairband placed unusually high near the eye level. Part of this area appears to have been reworked. For the lady's headress, a fairly close parallel, depicted in the opposite direction, exists in a scene from the tomb of Nefer-hotep, during the reign of Ay, the successor to Tutankhamen (see N. de Garis Davies, The Tomb of Neferhotep at Thebes, New York, 1933, Vol. I, pl. III). Scenes of banqueting with the serving girls on a smaller scale are frequently represented in Egyptian art (see Davies, The Tomb of Nakht at Thebes, New York, 1917, pl. XV, and Davies, Private Tombs at Thebes, Oxford, 1957, vol. IV, pl. 6). In front of the lady's face is the hieroglyphic group mwt, the word for mother or the Goddess Mut, and in the upper right the remains of a text reading either "the good God" or "the good day [holiday]". Although the interpretation of this scene as a banqueting lady with a serving girl seems likely, an alternative interpretation would be to regard the scene as a lady with a child on her lap, as in the wall painting showing Ken-Amun's mother as a nurse with the royal child

Amenhotep II (Davies, The Tomb of Ken-Amun at Thebes, New York, 1930, vol. I, pl. IX)." - William Kelly Simpson, 1993

Literature:

R. Ellsworth et al., The David and Peggy Rockefeller Collection: Arts of Asia and Neighboring Cultures, New York, 1993, vol III, pp. 368-369, no. 274.

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