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Relief with a Harpist

Circa 1550-1069 B.C., 18th Dynasty, New Kingdom, Egypt

Limestone

H: 40.0 cm, W: 39.5 cm

A scene from the limestone wall of a New Kingdom tomb, carved in low relief and painted in polychrome. The relief depicts the tomb owner, standing on the right and wearing a short kilt with a longer overskirt of fine, almost translucent linen (an indication of his wealth). At two registers tall, his head and shoulders are cut off at the top of the fragment. The upper register visible depicts offerings of food, while the middle register represents two musicians. A female harpist kneels behind the tomb owner, with a percussionist kneeling behind her. Of the lowest register, the head and shoulder of two short-haired men smelling lotus flowers are visible, cut off by the bottom edge.

Banqueting scenes, such as this one, are represented in almost all 18th Dynasty Theban tombs, as part of the decorative schema portraying moments from 'Daily Life'. These scenes were richly detailed, with an emphasis on the sensual elements of the banquet, representing the plethora of food, music, and scents on offer. Lotus flowers are frequently being sniffed by the guests, which scholars previously believed would have had a narcotic effect, but have a recent analysis suggests that it would have served as an aphrodisia. As all of the participants in the banquets are of procreative age, it is possible that these scenes were intended to represent the tomb-owner's continuing virility and fertility in the afterlife.

Exhibitions

Schätze Alt Ägyptischer Kunst, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, 27 June-13 September 1953, no 148.

Literature:

Schätze Alt Ägyptischer Kunst, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, 27 June-13 September 1953, no 148, p. 57.

