

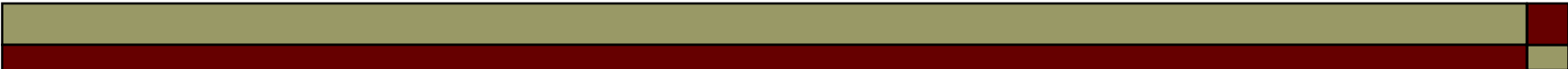
A1b: Week1, Tues

**Conventions of art AND
Iconographic descriptions of
artefacts**

HPAH5086/6086 - Art and Ancient Egypt 4000BC to the
2020ies: Exhibiting artistic representations

Dr. Katharina Zinn

Associate Professor in Egyptian Archaeology and
Heritage, UWTSD

- 
-
- ❑ Müller, Maya. 2014. Iconography and Symbolism. In: Hartwig, M. K. A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell. 78-97.

Art of ancient Egypt

- ❑ uniquely stylized and symbolic
- ❑ connected with hieroglyphs as visual language
- ❑ followed specific rules in order to be read and understood
- ❑ artists not concerned with creating highly realistic images but followed a system called the Canon of Proportions to represent an ideal and harmonious version of reality

Iconographic descriptions of artefacts

□ Iconography

- pictorial material relating to or illustrating a subject
- traditional or conventional images or symbols associated with a subject (religious, legendary)
 - **ICONOGRAPHY AS VISIBLE RELIGION in monumental art**
- imagery or symbolism of art

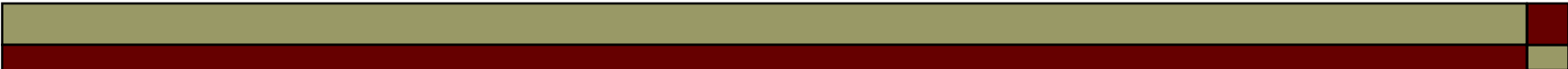
□ Description

- account – what do you see?
- Explanation – how do we have to understand this?
- Narrative – what are the cultural ideas behind that?

□ Artefact

Iconography as method in art historical research

- ❑ leading method of art historical research
- ❑ *iconography* summarises totality of images (entire corpus of fine / applied arts) preserved from AE
- ❑ Art history – *symbolism* – rarely used in Egyptology
- ❑ BUT: omnipresence of symbols in Egyptian art
- ❑ As method, iconography closely related to archaeology AND analysis of style
- ❑ Recent focus on iconography due to new techniques of documentation, data processing, and publishing – Sketchfab...
- ❑ E.g. <https://sketchfab.com/TheEgyptCentre>



Egyptian iconography

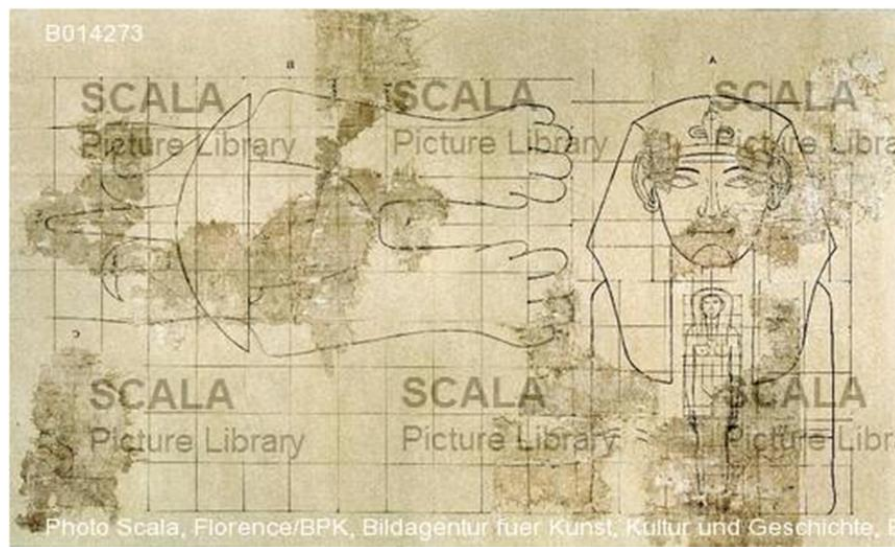
- ❑ principal iconographic sources for Egyptian religion
 - representations of scenes (both ritual and mythological) carved in relief or painted on the walls of Egyptian temples and tombs
 - numerous images and statues of gods and pharaohs
- ❑ objects of ritual or practical function decorated with carved or painted religious motifs
- ❑ hieroglyphic signs belonging to the Egyptian writing system are representations of gods, religious symbols, and ritual objects
- ❑ sources remain constant from the Old Kingdom to the Roman period

Depiction of Egyptian gods

- human beings
 - relate to their mythological functions and reveal narrative aspects of their relationships
- Animals
 - composite form combining a zoomorphic head with a human body → "metamorphoses" or symbols, emphasizing one particular feature or event
 - Animal or composite = "metamorphoses" or symbols, emphasizing one particular feature or event
 - one divinity could be represented by various animals or objects
 - Hathor: cow, lioness, snake, and sistrum (a musical instrument)
 - one animal could embody various gods
 - cobra on the forehead of pharaoh – could be identified with almost all goddesses

Canon of Proportions

- system used to depict an idealized version of reality
- applicable to only the figures within an artwork and not the artwork as a whole (this is following the principle of importance)
- Also called grid system



Code: B014273

Artist: Egyptian art

Title: Papyrus mit Sphinx-Vorzeichnung.
304-282 v. Chr.

Location: Aegyptisches Museum,
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

City: Berlin

Country: Germany

Period/Style: Not available

Genre: Not available

Note: Papyrus (Ptolemaios I. Sotér (Soter)
(304 - 282 v.Chr.)). Objektmaß 57,2 x 33,7
cm. Inventar-Nr.: P 11775/A-B

Credits: Photo Scala, Florence/BPK,
Bildagentur fuer Kunst, Kultur und
Geschichte, Berlin

B014274



Code: B014274

Artist: *****

Title: Bildhauermodell einer Sphinx. 664 - 332 v. Chr.

Location: Aegyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

City: Berlin

Country: Germany

Period/Style: Not available

Genre: Not available

Note: Kalkstein (Spätzeit). Objektmaß 26,7 x 19 cm. Inventar-Nr.: ÄM 22445. Foto: Margarete Büsing

Credits: Photo Scala, Florence/BPK, Bildagentur fuer Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin

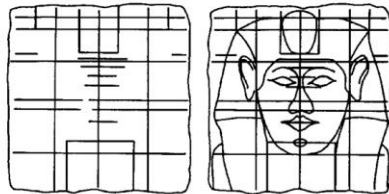


FIGURE 7.16

Front of block with sketch of front of statue imposed, Ptolemaic period, Berlin inv. no. 3/70.

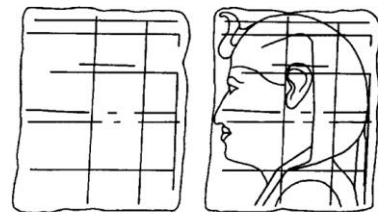


FIGURE 7.17

Side of block with sketch of side of statue imposed, Ptolemaic period, Berlin inv. no. 3/70.

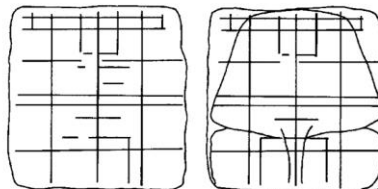


FIGURE 7.18

Back of block with sketch of back of statue imposed, Ptolemaic period, Berlin inv. no. 3/70.

Images available in Italy,
Great Britain, Spain,
Portugal, Netherlands,
Denmark, Finland,
Luxembourg, Norway,
Sweden, Switzerland
(Italian only) and Latin
America



Rights and restrictions

Proportional grid lines

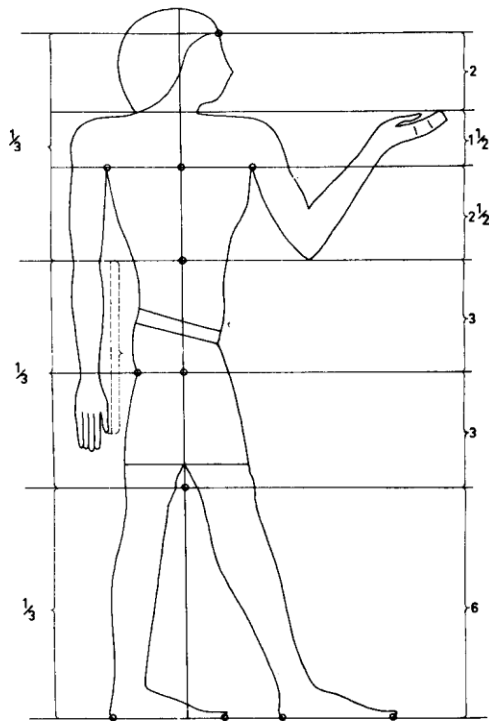


Abb. 16: Der Kanon des Alten Reiches

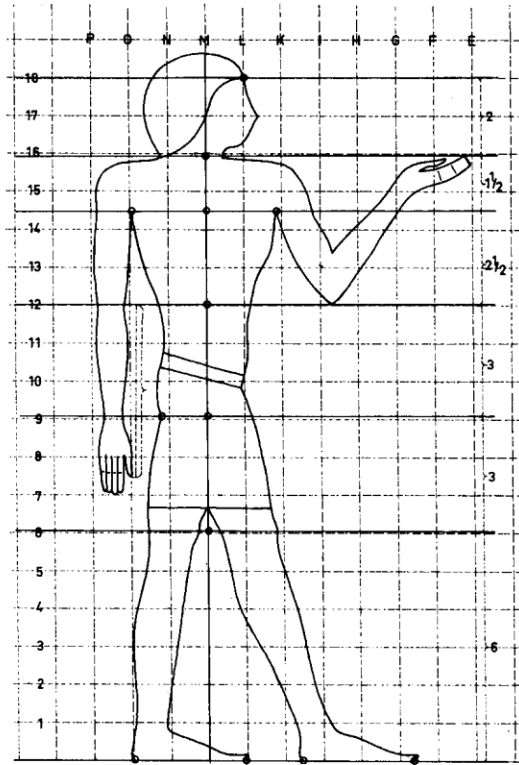


Abb. 17: Der Kanon des Mittleren Reiches, Standfigur

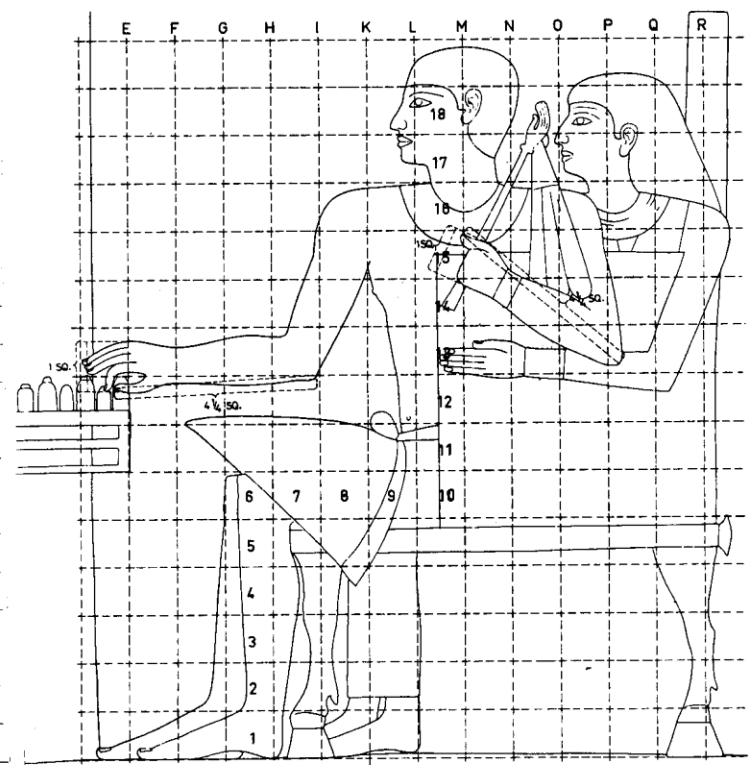


Abb. 18: Der Kanon des Mittleren Reiches, Sitzfigur

Canon of Proportions

- system used to depict an idealized version of reality
- applicable to only the figures within an artwork and not the artwork as a whole (this is following the principle of importance) → key features:
 - figure divided into 18 equal units starting at the soles of the feet to the hairline
 - 1 unit: from the sole of the foot to the ankle
 - navel rests at the 11th unit
 - 19th unit = area above hairline (mostly obscured by headdress)
 - The face and the legs are depicted in profile (side view) while the torso is depicted from the front view.

BM EA 579: Userwer



PLATE 1.1

Detail of unfinished scene in TT 92, eighteenth dynasty,
Mond photo 2122, reproduced by permission of the
Griffith Institute.

PLATE 1.2

Detail of stela of Userwer, twelfth dynasty, British Museum
EA 579, reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the
British Museum.

Artist's gridded sketch

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Hatshepsut, ca. 1479–1458 B.C.,
from western Thebes



Perspective and „aspective“ view of a box

**Box from the tomb of
Sennedjem, New Kingdom,
reign of Ramesses II, ca.
1279–1213 B.C.**



**Box containing a necklace,
tomb of Rekhmire (TT100)**

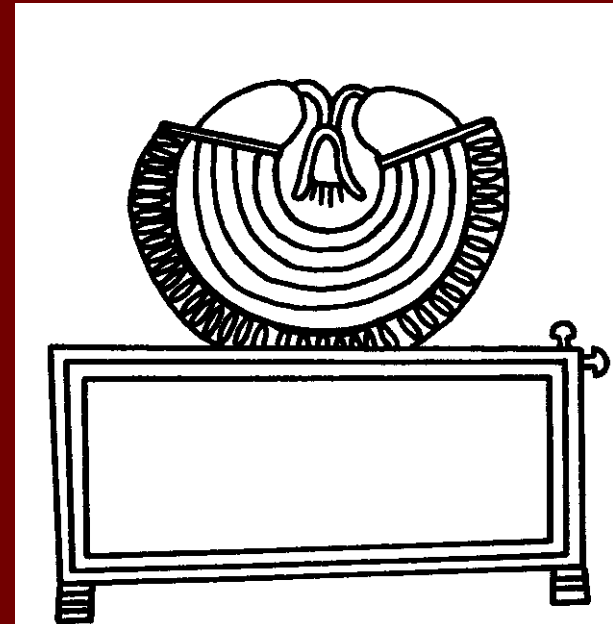


FIGURE 1.1
Representation of a box containing a necklace, TT 100,
eighteenth dynasty, after Davies 1943, Plate 90.

Conventions of Egyptian art:

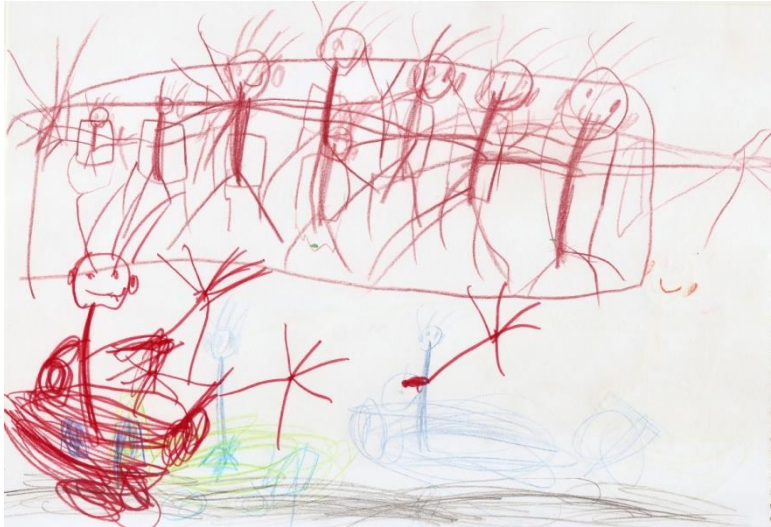
Perspective - aspective

- ❑ → combination of views = product of the Egyptian solution to the problem of reproducing a three-dimensional figure on a two-dimensional surface
- ❑ German Egyptologist Emma Brunner-Traut developed term to describe this phenomenon: ASPECTIVE
- ❑ = perceptual attitude (like perspective), based on same in the underlying thought (and while they are different in execution they are the)
- ❑ Be aware: lack of conventional perspective doesn't mean *without space*

Conventions of Egyptian art:

Perspective - aspective

- ❑ Egyptian art: non-perspective, spaceless, flat, not realistic → misconception on the nature of Egyptian art
- ❑ Not perspective (today considered a requirement for naturalistic pieces of art)
- ❑ to eye unused to conventions of Egyptian art: looks almost childish



Conventions of Egyptian art:

Perspective - aspective

- use of baseline upon which all figures stand
- divided into registers of (mostly) equal height and length
- figures are a amalgamation of different views of different body parts
 - a side view of head
 - front view of torso, etcetera
- → combination of views = product of the Egyptian solution to the problem of reproducing a three-dimensional figure on a two-dimensional surface

Egyptian style of statues and reliefs



- The artist who carved the three-dimensional statue on the right could show the human figure from all angles -- front, back, and sides.

Egyptian style of statues and reliefs

three-dimensional



two-dimensional

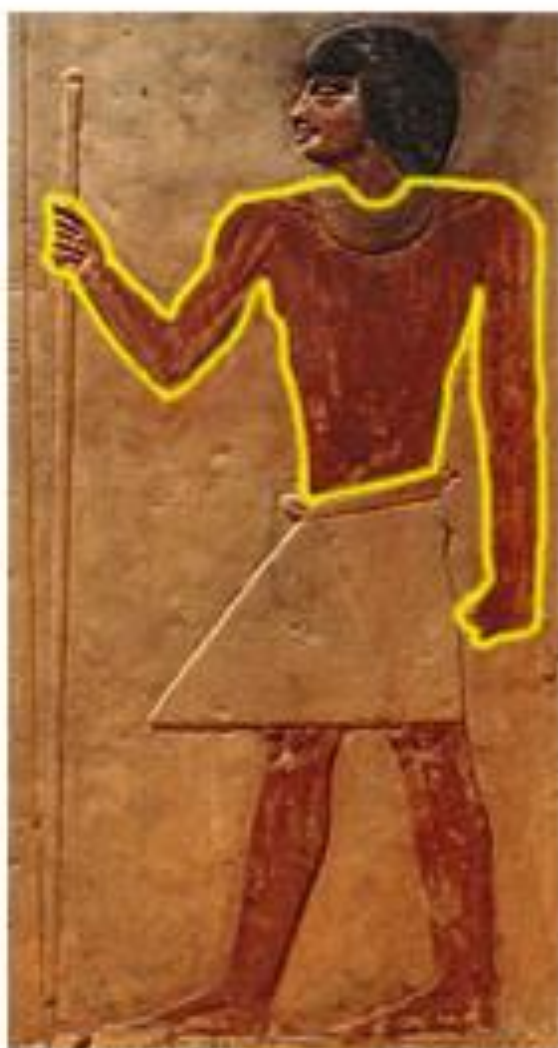


Egyptian style of statues and reliefs

two-dimensional

- But representing a figure on a flat surface, as in the wall relief at the left, is a more complicated problem.
- Legs in profile demonstrated movement. A head in profile outlined the features clearly.

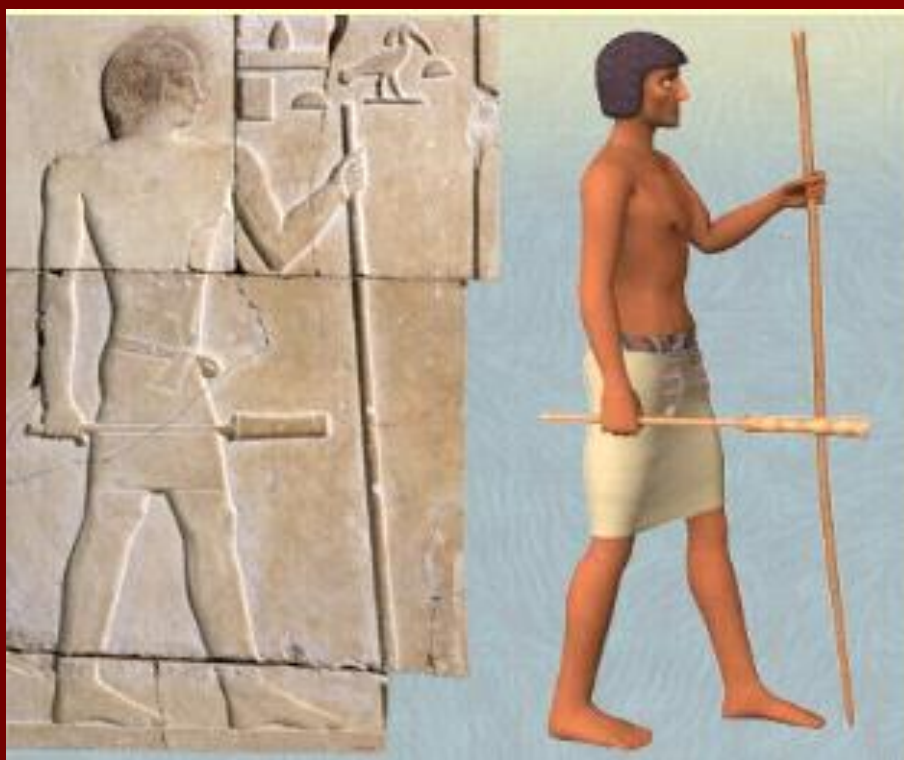




A frontal torso emphasized broad shoulders.

PS: Three-quarter view was not used at all





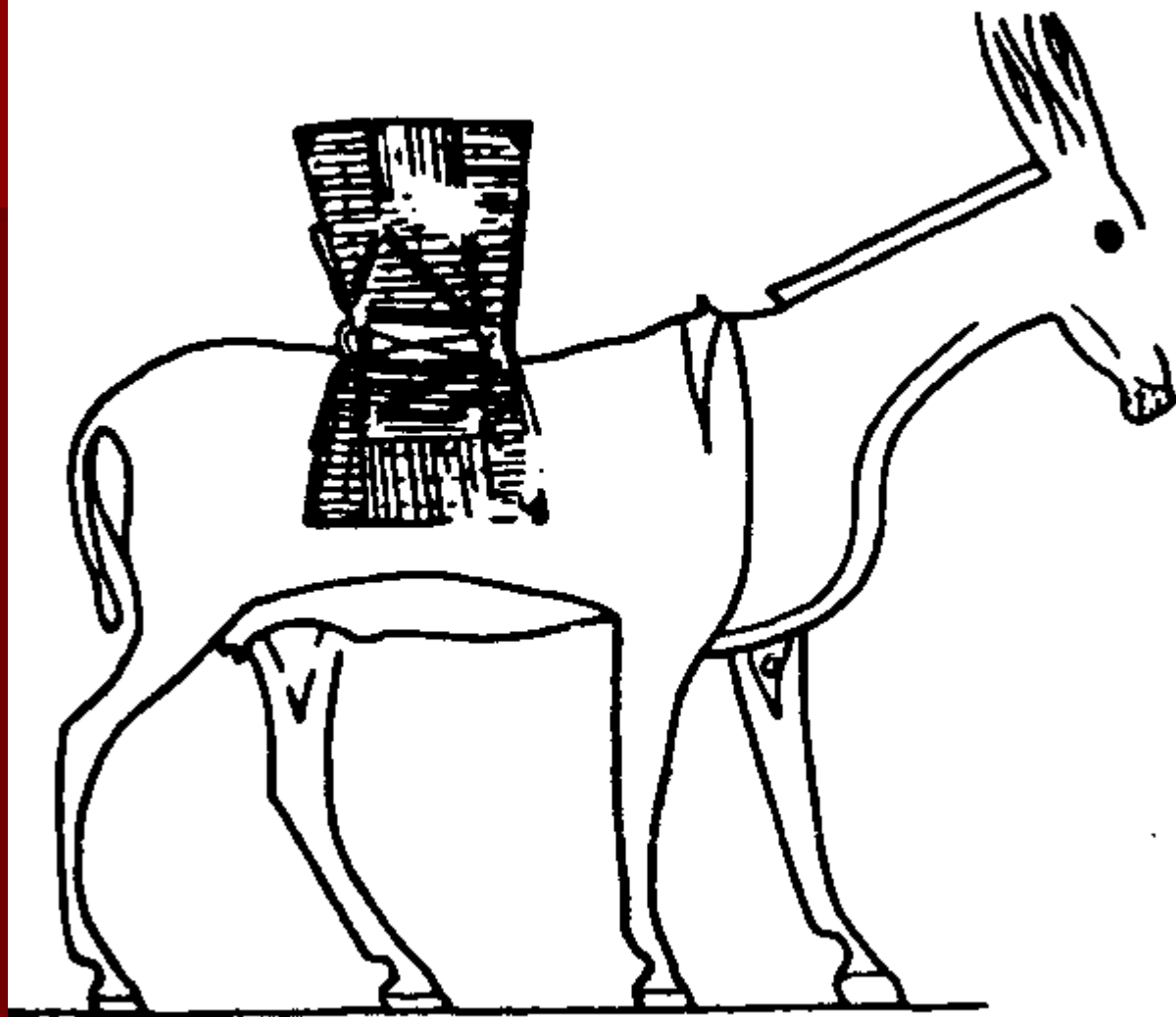
The artist drew Akhty-hotep's mouth and nose in profile, but showed his eye from the front.



Akhty-hotep's shoulders and arms are shown from the front, but one breast and nipple are shown from the side.

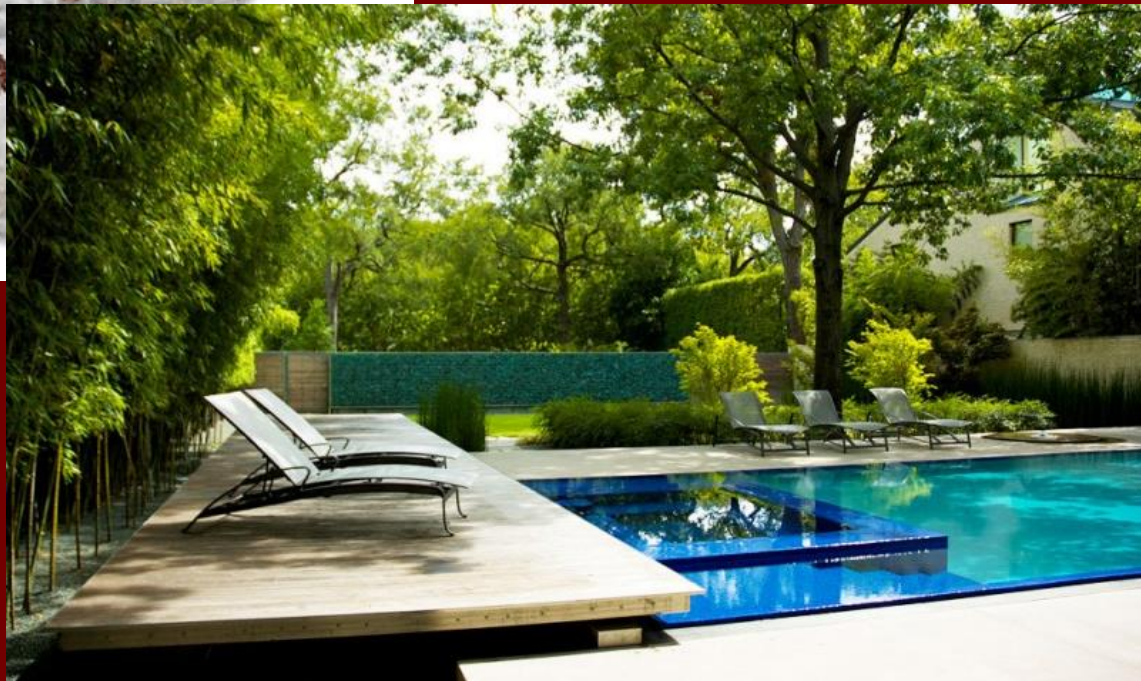


Akhty-hotep has two left feet. Egyptian artists depicted an object—such as a foot—by showing its essential elements. In this case, the big toes and arches of both of feet are visible, even though in reality only the far foot would appear this way.





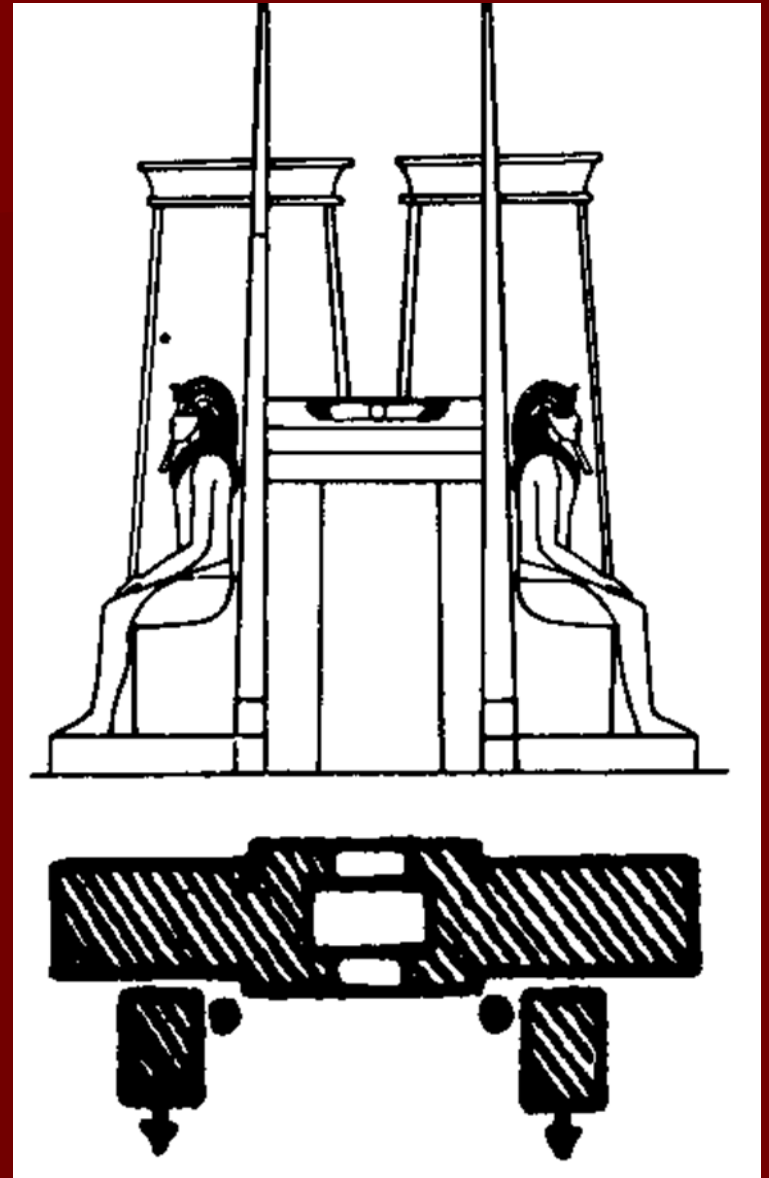
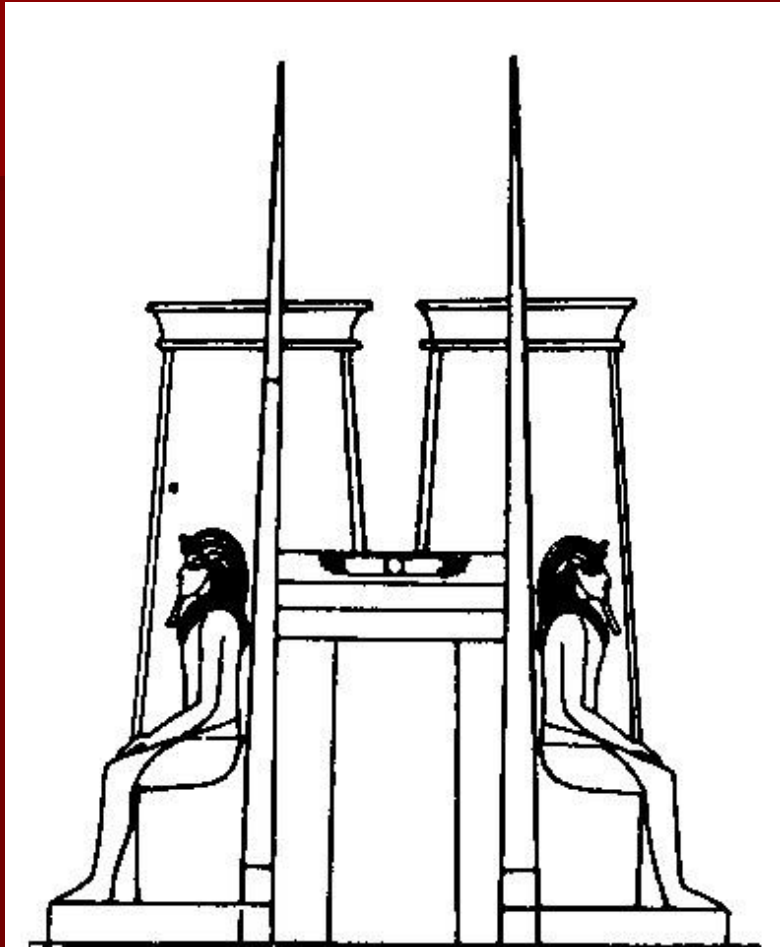
TT ?
Nebamun:
Garden pool

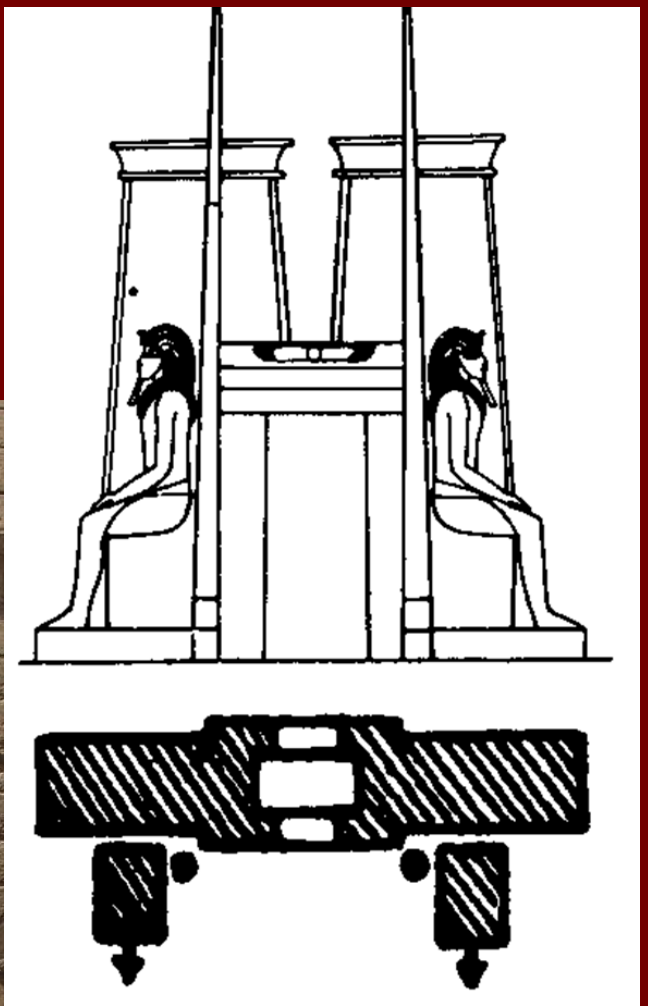


TT ? Nebamun: Garden pool (details)



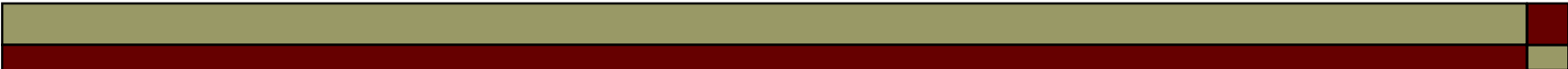






Perspective / aspective of Atef crown



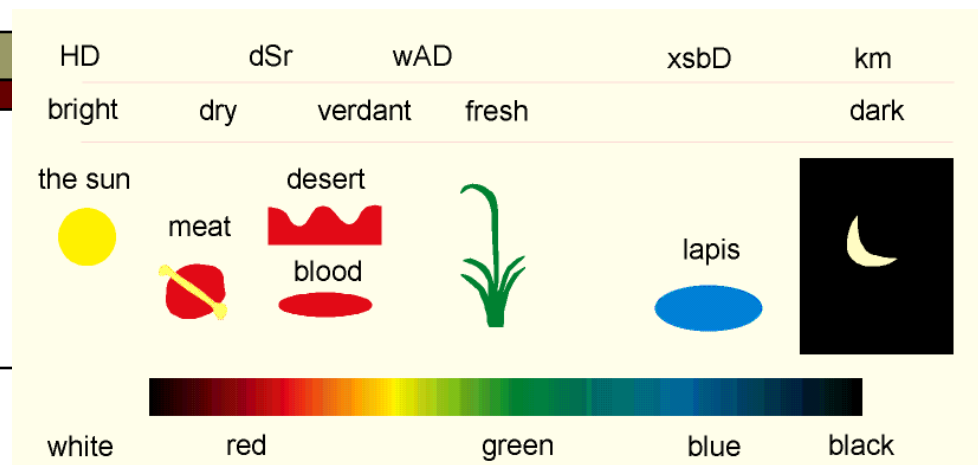


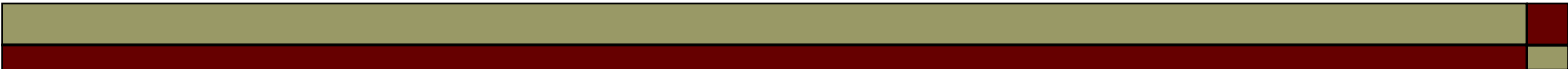
Other Artistic Rules

- ❑ **Scale:** The larger in scale a figure is, the more important. The proportions of children do not change; they are just shown smaller in scale. Children are depicted as having a finger in their mouth.
- ❑ **Colour:** Ancient Egyptians believed colours had meanings

Colour

- ❑ **Red** = Life and victory but also anger and fire
- ❑ **Yellow/Gold** = Gold is everlasting and indestructible, a protective colour
- ❑ **Blue** = The sky, water (Nile River) and primeval flood (creation); rebirth and fertility
- ❑ **Black** = Colour of the underworld and night; death but also rebirth (afterlife) like the fertile black soil that rejuvenated the land after the Nile overflowed annually
- ❑ **White** = Associated with omnipotence. The Upper Egypt crown was white
- ❑ **Green** = New growth, good health, life and rejuvenation





Other Artistic Rules

□ **Gender:**

- Women – lighter skin tone with both feet together
- Men – darker skin tone with left foot stepped forward

□ **Roles and Gestures:** Each figure = specific role

- role determined by what they were wearing, what they were doing, their position and posture, the other figures around them, and specific gestures
 - cross-legged seated figure is a scribe
 - person with an open hand in front of their face is in mourning.

Assessment Surgery:
*How on earth could I present
an artefact?*

Fitzwilliam E.1.2006



- Dimension: length 0.015 m, width 0.011 m, height 0.006 m
- Base: scarab-beetle with exaggerated wings: above beetle two winged uraei in protecting gesture, guarding two Maat-feathers; single line encircles the inscription
- Beetle, uraei and two feathers can be interpreted as equivalent for the sun disc – cryptographic writing for the god Amun(-Re)



MfA 04.1780

Statue of Wepwawetemhat

→ sculpture

Dimensions

Length x width x height:
71.1 x 23.1 x 112 cm (28 x
9 1/8 x 44 1/8 in.)

Medium

Wood



- This masterful wooden statue, made for the tomb of a minor official who lived at the end of the First Intermediate Period or early in the Middle Kingdom, represents the culmination of the style that emerged in the late Old Kingdom. A brief text on the base identifies the figure as "the venerated one, Wepwawetemhat," who is shown as a slender, idealized young man striding forward with his left foot - the traditional pose for a sculpture of an Egyptian dignitary. The head, torso, and legs were carved from a single piece of wood, while the arms and the base of the figure were made separately.



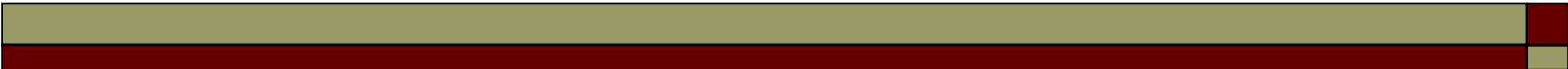
- The entire statue was then coated with gesso and brightly painted and the eyes were inlaid with black and white stones.

The features of the face, including the slightly arched eyebrows and well-preserved eyes, impart a youthful intensity and energy.

This statue is among the best-preserved wooden sculptures of its time. Its style retains certain features of the First Intermediate Period, including the wide, staring eyes, long limbs and fingers, and angular lines of the face and collarbone.

- The date of the unplundered rock-cut tomb in which this figure was discovered, however, remains uncertain. It was long thought to predate the reunification of Egypt in Dynasty 11, but a number of scholars now suggest that it and contemporary tombs may date from as late as Dynasty 12.





Questions to ask

- ❑ Who/what is shown in the work?
- ❑ How is it depicted/structured?
- ❑ What are the structural elements doing?
- ❑ Who is the main figure in the image? How can you tell?
- ❑ What are depicted person wearing?
- ❑ How would you describe the person's position and posture?
- ❑ How do the figures interact (with each other or other parts of the composition)?
- ❑ What do you think their role might be?
- ❑ What is the symbolic character?
- ❑ Why? (for all of the above)

Anubis Mask (HARGM10686)



■ <https://skfb.ly/oEUFL>



☺ WARNING ☺

We will describe
one object in each
class!!!