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PORTRAIT VERSUS IDEAL IMAGE  
فن تصوير الوجه (البورتريه)

*Dimitri Laboury*

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## PORTRAIT VERSUS IDEAL IMAGE

### فن تصوير الوجه (البورتريه)

Dimitri Laboury

Porträt versus Idealbildnis  
Portrait ou image idéal(isé)e

*Ancient Egyptian art's concern with individualized human representation has generated much debate among Egyptologists about the very existence of portraiture in Pharaonic society. The issue has often—if not always—been thought of in terms of opposition between portrait and ideal image, being a major topic in the broader question of realism and formal relation to reality in ancient Egyptian art. After a brief analysis of the problem from a theoretical point of view, the article deals with the Egyptological reception of the subject and considers the concepts involved in the notion of portrait within the context of ancient Egyptian thought. A few significant cases selected from the corpus of royal statuary are then investigated in order to elucidate the motives and modalities of the interaction between portrait and ideal image in ancient Egyptian individualized representations.*

إن إهتمام الفن المصري القديم بتصوير الإنسان بطريقة فردية مصدر لكثير من الجدل ما بين علماء المصريات حول وجود فن تصوير الوجه (البورتريه) بالمجتمع الفرعوني. فهذا الأمر غالباً إن لم يكن دائماً ينظر إليه من حيث المعارضة ما بين الصورة الواقعية (البورتريه) والصورة المثالية، وهذه القضية تقع ضمن السؤال الأكبر عن الواقعية والرسمية وعلاقتهم مع الواقع بالفن المصري القديم. بعد تحليل مختصر للمشكلة من منظور نظري، تتناول المقالة إستقبال علماء المصريات لهذا الموضوع وتتناول المفاهيم المرتبطة بفكرة التصوير الواقعي (البورتريه) بسياق الفكر المصري القديم. بعد ذلك يتم فحص بعض أمثلة تماثيل ملكية لتوضيح دوافع وقيود التفاعل بين التصوير الواقعي (البورتريه) والصورة المثالية بالتصويرات المصرية القديمة للأفراد.

**T**he opposition of portrait versus ideal image comprises many important and problematic issues of ancient Egyptian art history and of the history of the discipline.

“Portrait” means a depiction, in any kind of medium, of a specific individual, i.e., an individualized representation of a recognizable person. As opposed to “ideal (or type) image,” portrait implies a pictorial individualization and relates to the notion of realism as an accurate and faithful rendering

of objective reality, which stands in contrast to idealization. Even if it is traditionally accepted and used as a fundamental concept in art history as a whole, this key-opposition between realism and idealization (or idealism) is far from being unproblematic from a theoretical point of view.

First, both notions are rooted in non-consensual philosophical concepts since they refer to reality, which is a metaphysical matter—and a much debated one through human history. And in this respect, the

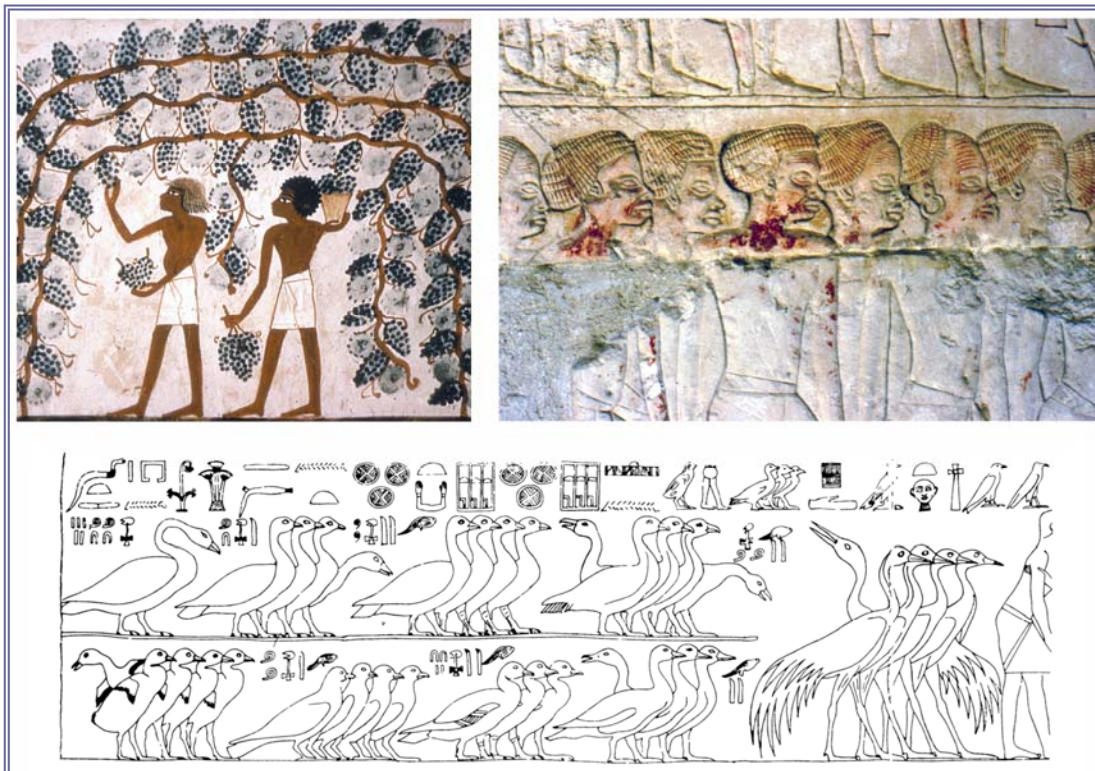


Figure 1. Top: Reality effects for dissimilation purposes in the tomb of Nakht, TT 52 (left) and in the tomb of Horemheb at Saqqara (right). Below: Illustration of the dissimilation principle with non-human figures.

ancient Egyptian conception of reality was indubitably different from our modern western ones.

Second, on a strictly formal level, the precise conditions of the opposition and the dividing line between the two concepts are difficult to define. For instance, in ancient Egyptian art, subsidiary or grouped anonymous figures are often subject to reality effects, a seeming individualization that might be suggestive of a portrait but actually derives from a well-attested (graphic and/or chromatic) dissimilation principle (fig. 1; Fischer 1986: 30 - 34). Can such cases be considered portraits of a social category or type portraits, i.e., notions that would blur the distinction between the two theoretical concepts of portrait and ideal image? Reversely, any ancient Egyptian representation of a specified individual is characterized (and often identifiable or datable) by the style of its time and by the current generic or ideal conception of the human being (notably Assmann 1996;

Junge 1995). In this sense, ancient Egyptian art illustrates perfectly the facts that artistic imitation of reality is always inevitably selective and that every portrait is at least “contaminated” by an ideal image. So instead of a real dichotomy, the theoretical concepts of portrait and ideal image appear to form a vectorial combination—or the conjunction of two diverging vectors—in which both dimensions are always present, in varying proportions.

And, last but not least, if the conceptual opposition between portrait and ideal image, or realism and idealization, has become an established and (more or less) useful notion in modern occidental art history, one has to wonder about its relevance in the ancient Egyptian context, in a civilization that constantly and consistently aimed to bridge reality and ideality (notably Tefnin 1991: 69 - 73).

*The Egyptological Reception of the Subject*

In this complex and often ill-defined and confusing theoretical context, the very existence of portraiture in ancient Egypt has been much debated throughout the history of Egyptology.

In the nineteenth—and even the beginning of the twentieth—century, the emerging discipline of ancient Egyptian art history, deeply influenced by contemporary western art-theoreticians and by the then current appraisal of classical art, started to evaluate ancient Egyptian human representations from a very realistic perspective. The usual confusion between formal individualization and portrait has often strengthened the belief that portraiture existed in ancient Egypt, based on the well established desire of the ancient Egyptians to preserve their identity beyond death and on the simple argument that specific persons can be recognized through their artistically rendered physiognomic characteristics. Moreover, in a few cases, the iconography of some pharaohs seems to compare rather favorably with their preserved mummified heads (fig. 11-2; Spanel 1988: 2 - 3). The semiotic and idealizing or generic propensities of ancient Egyptian art have nevertheless sometimes induced skepticism and extreme focus on the formulaic aspects of individualized depictions, despite some subtle and nuanced comments on the subject (cf. Ashton and Spanel 2001; Assmann 1996; Junge 1990: 4 - 6, 1995; Laboury 1998a: 647 - 655; Spanel 1988; Tefnin 1991: 69 - 73).

This situation has often led to contradictory conclusions. For instance, Amarna art, and especially its most famous offspring, the Berlin bust of Nefertiti (fig. 13-5), is commonly considered the “most lifelike of Egyptian art” (to quote the title of an article by Rolf Krauss that challenged this assumption, cf. Krauss 1991a), whereas Jan Assmann, in his fundamental study *Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture*, used it to define idealization (Assmann 1996: 68 - 71).

As Donald Spanel perfectly summed up the dispute, “The issue of portraiture in ancient Egypt should not be posed in terms of absolutes—either that it existed or that it did not. The insistence upon the reproduction of an individual’s external features is primarily a western innovation. What the Egyptians sought in their funerary art was different. Consequently, we must seek through ancient eyes what they wanted” (Spanel 1988: 3).

*The Ancient Egyptian Point of View*

The entire monumental culture of ancient Egypt manifests a profound desire to preserve individual identity, especially from a funerary perspective, and thus exhibits a rather strong self-awareness. In this sense, “Portraiture is by far the most important and productive genre of Egyptian art, just as biography is the most ancient and productive genre of Egyptian literature” (Assmann 1996: 55). But, even with this fundamental principle of self-thematization—as Assmann proposes to characterize it—in order to validate the use of the notion of portrait, the two concepts that theoretically define it, i.e., individual identity and recognizability, have to be assessed in the context of ancient Egyptian art and thought.

As in many other civilizations, the word for image in the ancient Egyptian language, *twt*, implies the notion of likeness since it is related to a verbal root that means “resembling to, being like or in accord (with)” (cf. notably Assmann 1991: 141; a nuanced opinion in Eaton-Krauss 1984: §93; Schulz 1992: 701). Thus, the image is clearly conceived as a resembling pictorial transposition of its model. But the numerous usurpations of statues performed merely by the re-carving of the name and without any facial reshaping, the variability in the portraitures of a specific person (either royal or private), and the genealogies of some portraits, in which an individual iconographically and physiognomically associated himself or herself with a predecessor, demonstrate that the ancient Egyptian concept of resemblance was less constraining than in modern western cultures.



Assmann suggests defining this concept as a principle of non-confusability (*Unverwechselbarkeit*, see Assmann 1991: 141), i.e., a recognizability that could be fulfilled on multiple levels or just by the sole presence of the name of the depicted person. Furthermore, one cannot underestimate the metaphysical dimension of the concept of resembling image: what is it supposed to resemble? The physical and external—or phenomenological—appearance of its model or his or her actual reality, which could lie beyond appearances? Not to mention the close connection—and so perhaps some sort of permeability—that ancient Egyptian thought established between these two—very western—theoretical concepts of external appearance and inner reality, as is suggested by the customary complementarity between *kd* (“shape” or “external form”) and *hnw* (“inside” or “interior”) and expressions that define inner or moral qualities by an outer description of the face, such as *nfr-hr*, *spd-hr*, etc.

Just like “being Egyptian” was not primarily a question of ethnicity but of Egyptian-like or non-Egyptian-like behavior (Kemp 2006: 19 - 59; Loprieno 1988), the ancient Egyptian notion of individual identity appears to be fundamentally conceived as a personal behavioral or functional integration into the societal order. This is substantiated by the importance and persistence of comportment clichés in almost any kind of biographical texts. So, in other words, the individuality of a person with his or her own name, genealogy, and specific fate (šꜣy) is always defined within the social framework of ancient Egypt, i.e., according to social types or ideals, which shape and often overshadow or absorb the expression of uniqueness and singularity.

In such a cultural context, the traditional pseudo-opposition or the dialectic portrait versus ideal image needs to be viewed and used as a vectorial combination (as suggested above) or as a tension, which structured and generated different forms of self-thematization, in representational arts as well as in literature.

### *A Few Significant Cases*

The motives and modalities of the interaction between the tendencies of portrait and ideal image in ancient Egyptian iconographic self-thematization can be illustrated and investigated further through the analysis of a few significant cases. Those presented here were all selected from the corpus of royal statuary for the converging following reasons: as Sally-Ann Ashton and Donald Spanel have noted, portraiture in ancient Egyptian art “was limited almost exclusively to sculpture” (Ashton and Spanel 2001: 55); three-dimensional portraits allow more detailed and subtle rendering, and this is probably why they appear to have influenced two-dimensional representations, and not the reverse (Laboury 1998b: 633); in quantity, as well as in quality, royal iconography is much better documented than private portraiture and often impacted the latter; and finally, as the portrait of an individual and at the same time of an institution—the very central one in ancient Egyptian civilization—pharaoh’s depictions raise more complex and, thus, more interesting problems that need to be examined from this perspective.

1. Menkaura. The portraits of Menkaura are very consistent since his physiognomy can easily be recognized throughout his various statues and because, at the same time, they display a face clearly different and distinguishable from the one given to his father, Khafra, or the one of his uncle, Radjedef, his two immediate predecessors. This indicates without any doubt an intended and coherent individualization, even if the rendering of the eyes, the ears, the mouth, etc., that is, the stylistic vocabulary of his physiognomy is definitely characteristic of the artistic standards of Dynasty 4 (on this, see Junge 1995).

The famous triads of the king, from his mortuary temple at Giza, are especially interesting because they were part of a series and each of them displayed three faces: the face of Menkaura, of the goddess Hathor, and of the depicted nome, the latter two precisely replicating the features of the royal visage. As



Figure 2. Comparison of the three faces on Menkaura's triads, Cairo JE 46499 (top) and 40678 (bottom).



Figure 3. Comparison between facial characteristics of (from left to right) Menkaura (Cairo JE 46499), Userkaf (Cairo JE 52501), and Pepy I (Cairo JE 33034).

their discoverer noticed, every preserved triad is characterized by slight stylistic variations, which allow differentiating each of them, but are also perfectly consistent on the three faces of the same sculpture (fig. 2), denoting a single individual hand (or sculptor) behind each piece. The nature and distribution of these stylistic differences and, at the same time, the strong coherence of the royal physiognomy point to a very well controlled facial model of the king, which was dispatched among the workshops and faithfully copied, in spite of a few inevitable faint alterations caused by the technical and human circumstances of such artistic productions (Laboury 2000: 325 - 326). So in addition to the research of physiognomic consistency, this unavoidable variability has to be taken into account in any portrait analysis of ancient Egyptian art.

Menkaura's portraiture is also of particular interest because, with its specific nose and facial proportions, it has deeply influenced the official depiction of later kings, like Userkaf, first king of Dynasty 5, or Pepy I, second king of Dynasty 6, who reigned almost two centuries later (fig. 3).

2. Senusret III and Amenemhat III. The statuary of Senusret III and his son and direct successor Amenemhat III is one of the most central issues in the debate about portraiture in ancient Egyptian art. Since the nineteenth century, the extraordinary individualization that seems to characterize their statues impressed beholders and induced the well-established conviction that the ancient Egyptian sculptors of the late 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty intended to portray these two kings in a hyperrealistic manner. This interpretation legitimated psychological readings of these effigies, which were thought to express the royal lassitude after a long wearying reign or even kingly sorrow. According to this widely accepted hypothesis, the stylistic variability attested in Senusret III's and Amenemhat III's portraits—as in the iconography of any other pharaoh—could be explained by the ageing of the kings, translated step by step into sculptures, and by the local traditions of sculptor's workshops, which again is a long-lived assumption in ancient Egyptian art history that has never been convincingly demonstrated.

This traditional interpretation is highly questionable. Even without mentioning its striking incompatibility with what we know about the historical personalities of Senusret III and Amenemhat III, probably two of the strongest kings who ever ruled Egypt, such a culturally induced reasoning can be invalidated by pure art historical evidence. As Roland Tefnin underlined (Tefnin 1992: 151), the unmistakable contrast between a supposedly old face and a perfectly firm, young, and powerful body is difficult to explain, especially for a hyperrealistic representation. In her thorough analysis of the entire corpus of the statuary of Senusret III and his son, Felicitas Polz was able to



Figure 4. Three late statues of Amenemhat III (from left to right): Cairo CG 385 from Hawara, Cairo JE 66322 and Milan RAN 0.9.40001 from Medinet Madi.



Figure 5. Variations among statues of Senusret III from the same series (from left to right): Cairo RT 18/4/22/4, London BM EA 686, 685, and 684 from the temple of Mentuhotep II at Deir el-Bahri.

demonstrate that the latest datable statues of Amenemhat III—namely those from his mortuary complex at Hawara (for instance, Cairo CG 385; cf. fig. 4a) and from the small

temple at Medinet Madi (Cairo JE 66322 and Milan RAN 0.9.40001; cf. fig. 4b-c), which was completed by his successor—show the least aged physiognomy, as if the king were



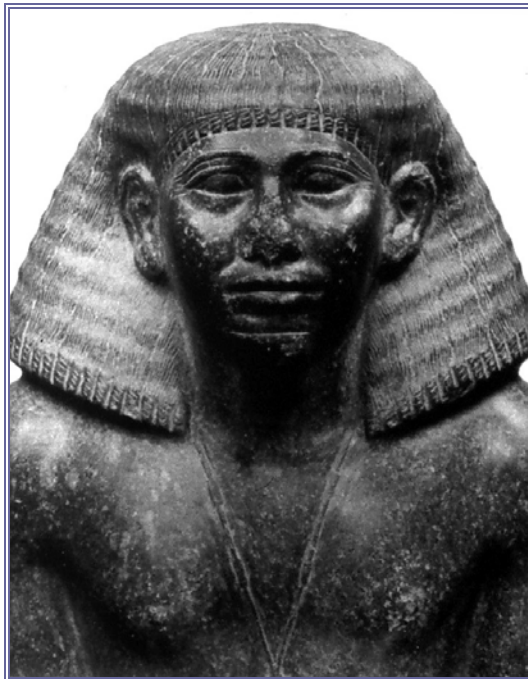


Figure 6. Statue of Sarenput II from Elephantine. Reign of Amenemhat II.

getting younger with the passing of time (Polz 1995). Although not a single typological or physiognomic peculiarity can be exclusively linked to a specific site or region, both kings' statues from one and the same series (fig. 5) display stylistic variations in the reproduction of the king's facial model (Polz 1995: 235), just like Menkaura's triads. Furthermore, the emancipation from the traditional hieroglyphic abstraction and the very marked physiognomy that truly characterize Senusret III's and Amenemhat III's portraiture actually appeared one generation earlier in private statuary (fig. 6; Junge 1985), which, at least this time, influenced royal art.

Even if one acknowledges Junge's idea of a "borrowed personality" (Junge 1985: 122)—a concept that, once again, blurs the theoretical opposition between portrait and ideal image—the effigies of Senusret III and Amenemhat III cannot be considered the expression of "a love of realism," which, to quote J. Vandier, would have justified "that new official portraits were executed every time the king physically changed, in a sense that could only be unpleasant for the ruler's

self-esteem" (Vandier 1958: 194). They obviously convey a message about the nature of kingship as it was conceived at that time—in keeping with an important contemporary textual production on the same subject (cf. the royal hymns on both royal and private monuments and the corpus of literature studied by G. Posener in his famous book "Littérature et politique")—notably through the use of some reality effects, which were able to suggest special qualities relating to the mouth, eyes, and ears, but have nothing to do with the modern western concept of hyperrealism. In this context, without the mummies of these two kings, it is impossible to evaluate the plausible resemblance between pharaoh's real face and his sculptured portraits. However, a physiognomic convergence seems rather likely—simply because the same stylistic formula was actualized differently for Senusret and for Amenemhat.

3. Hatshepsut. The evolution of Hatshepsut's official image is probably the best illustration of how ancient Egyptian portraiture could deviate from the model's actual appearance.

As Tefnin has demonstrated (Tefnin 1979), it occurred in three phases. When the regent queen Hatshepsut assumed full kingship, she was depicted with royal titulary as well as traditional regalia, but still as a woman with female dress and anatomy. Her face was a feminine version (painted in yellow) of the official physiognomy of her three direct predecessors (fig. 7; Laboury 1998a: 604), which was itself inspired by the iconography of Senusret I (Laboury 1998a: 478 - 481), who had reigned five centuries earlier. Shortly into her reign, this genealogical mask started to change into a previously unattested and very personalized triangular face, with more elongated feline eyes under curved eyebrows, a small mouth, which was narrow at the corners, and an ostensibly hooked nose (fig. 8). At the same time, the queen emphasized her royal insignia, wearing a broader *nemes*-headgear and exchanging her female dress for the *shendyt*-loincloth of male pharaohs (fig. 9),



Figure 7. Osiride colossi A of Hatshepsut from Deir el-Bahri (MMA 31.3.154 and 31.3.155 on the left) in comparison with the heads of (from left to right) Thutmose I (Cairo CG 42051), Thutmose II (JE 52364), and Thutmose III, regency period (RT 14/6/24/11).



Figure 8. Left and center: Close-up of seated statue of Hatshepsut (MMA 29.3.2). Right: Head of Osiride colossi B (MMA 31.3.164).

while her anatomy was only allusively feminine, with orange-painted skin—a tone halfway between the yellow of women and the red of men (fig. 8). As Tefnin stressed, this second stage in the evolution of Hatshepsut's iconography clearly expresses the queen's desire to assert her own personality as a king. Nevertheless, the metamorphosis resumed rather quickly and ended in a definitely male royal image, for which Hatshepsut completely waived her femininity. Even if a few epithets or pronouns relating to the queen sporadically remained feminine in the inscriptions from her reign, her images are absolutely masculine from that phase on. They exhibit an explicitly virile musculature, red skin, and a physiognomy that appears as a synthesis of her two first official faces (fig. 10), i.e., a compromise between her very individualized previous portrait, plausibly inspired by her own facial appearance, and the iconography common to her three male predecessors,

including young king Thutmose III with whom she decided to share the throne.

This evolution, indubitably motivated by Hatshepsut's will and need for legitimation, is of course a very extreme case, due to very exceptional political circumstances. However, it demonstrates that even the sexual identity could be remodeled in ancient Egyptian portraiture according to an ideal image, here the one of the traditional legitimate king. Hatshepsut was the only reigning queen in ancient Egypt who felt the need for such iconographic fiction, i.e., to depict herself as a male pharaoh (for an explanation of this singularity, see Laboury 1998a: 628; compare also Staehelin 1989). In regard to the rendering of the physiognomy, the reigning queen offered a very good case if not of a borrowed personality, at least of a partly borrowed identity. As the heir of specific predecessors, she integrated into her own official visage some of their recognized facial



Figure 9. Seated statues of Hatshepsut from Deir el-Bahri, in chronological order (from left to right): MMA 30.3.3, MMA 29.3.3, MMA 29.3.2, and MMA 27.3.163.



Figure 10. Hatshepsut's Osiride colossi from Deir el-Bahri. Colossi A, MMA 31.3.155 and 31.3.154 (left top and bottom); colossus B, MMA 31.3.164 (middle top and bottom); and colossi C, Cairo JE 56259A and 56262.



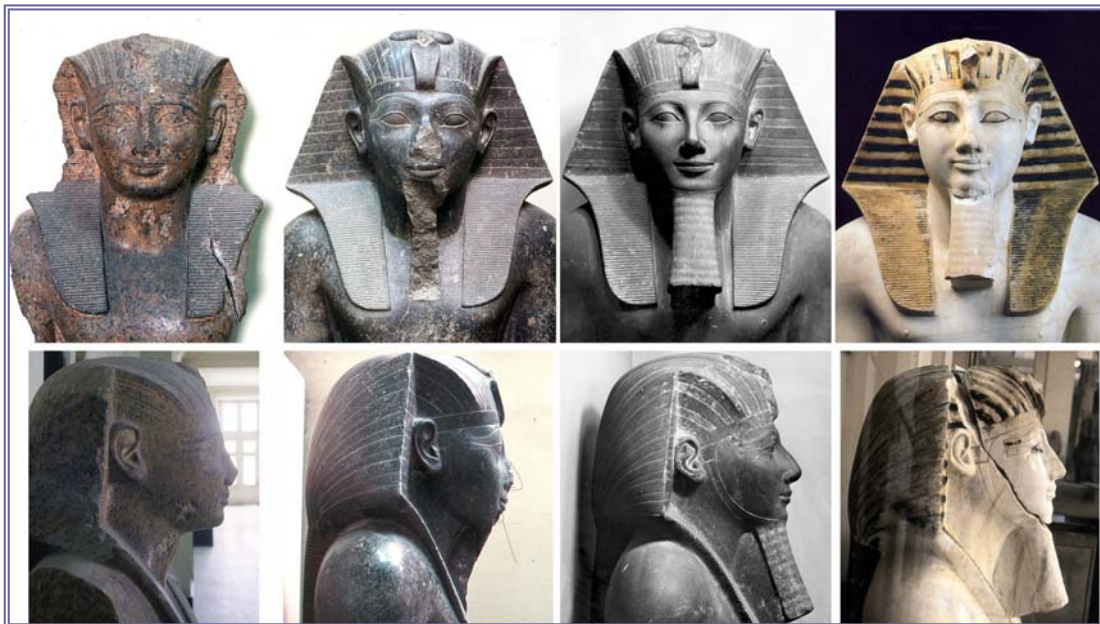


Figure 11. Main physiognomic types in the evolution of Thutmose III's statuary.

features to emphasize her legitimacy—like a physiognomic signature accentuating her lineage.

A similar phenomenon seems to have linked royal portraiture and portrayals of the elite or high officials, which often imitated the former closely. Good examples of this kind of allegiance portraits from the time of Hatshepsut are the numerous statues of Senenmut—most of them, if not all, made in royal workshops—which followed the evolution of the queen's physiognomy, whereas a few two-dimensional sketches provide a much more individualized face of the same person (compare the pictures in Roehrig et al. 2005: 112 - 129).

4. Thutmose III. The issue of Thutmose III's portraiture is very similar and parallel to the one of Hatshepsut, involving different successive phases induced by political claims and reorientations (Laboury 1998a; English summary in Laboury 2006). But Thutmose's mummy is well preserved and allows comparison between the actual face of the king and his sculpted portraits.

On the one hand, despite a rather important evolution through different chronological types (fig. 11), the iconography of Thutmose

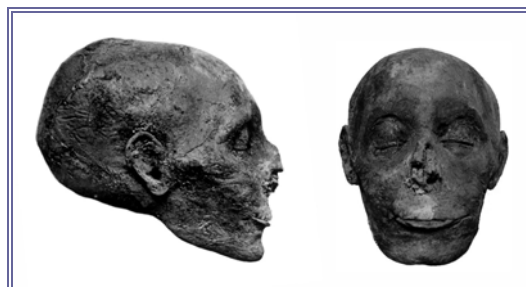


Figure 12. Mummified head of Thutmose III (Cairo CG 61068).

III is characterized by a few absolutely constant physiognomic features, i.e., an S-shaped chin when seen in profile, a significant squared maxillary, and low, protruding cheekbones that create a horizontal depression under the eyes. These are the same features that distinguish his mummy's face (fig. 12), denoting an undeniable inspiration from the actual appearance of the king. However, on the other hand, other physiognomic details varied a lot, sometimes being in obvious contradiction to the mummy: for instance, at the end of his reign, during the proscription of Hatshepsut, Thutmose III decided to straighten his nose—ostensibly hooked on his mummy—in order to look like his father and grandfather, his true and then unique legitimating

























	Akhenaten	Nefertiti	Neferneferuaten	Tiy	Private persons				
Sculpted busts	 Berlin 21.360 (P.47.2/19; hgt 57)	 Louvre E 11076 (?; hgt 58)	 Berlin 21.300 (P.47.2/19; hgt 50)	 Berlin 21.352 (P.47.2/19; hgt 29)	 Berlin 20.496 (P.49.6; hgt 20)				
Plaster heads	 Berlin 21.351 (P.47.2/19; hgt 26)	 Berlin 21.349 (P.47.2/19; hgt 25,6)	 Berlin 21.353 (P.47.2/19; hgt 11,2)		Kiyya ?				
Plaster faccs	 Berlin 21.348 (P.47.2/19; hgt 30)	 CG 753 (Amarna, Petrie; hgt 26)	 JE 59288 (Amarna, Pendelbury; hgt 25)	 Berlin 21.340 (P.47.2/19; hgt 20,4)	 Berlin 21.354 (P.47.2/19; hgt 20)	 Berlin 21.355 (P.47.2/19; hgt 21)	 Berlin 21.262 (P.47.2/19; hgt 26,7)	 Berlin 21.228 (P.47.2/19; hgt 24)	 Berlin 21.239 (P.47.2/19; hgt 24)
Plaster masks	 Berlin 21.343 (P.47.2/19; hgt 14)	 JE 59289 (Amarna, Pendelbury; hgt 17)				 Berlin 21.280 (P.47.2/19; hgt 26,5)	 Berlin 21.356 (P.47.2/19; hgt 18)	 Berlin 21.341 (P.47.2/19; hgt 26,5)	

Figure 13. Table with plaster studies and busts (at the same scale) from Thutmose’s workshop at Amarna and similar material from the site, sorted by typology and physiognomy.

ancestors (Laboury 1998a: 457 - 512, 638 - 641, 648 - 651). This variability and the revival of his predecessors’ iconography show that the evolution of the king’s statuary cannot be explained solely by aesthetic orientations toward portrait or ideal image, or toward realism or idealization. There is a clear and conscious departure from the model’s outer appearance that allows the introduction of meaning and physiognomically signifies the ideological identity of the depicted person. The same is true for private portraiture.

Just like his aunt Hatshepsut, Thutmose III instigated modifications and thus evolution in his portraits because his identity, his political self-definition as the legitimate king of Egypt, changed throughout his reign (Laboury 1998a). Obviously, in the eyes of the ancient Egyptians, portraiture was more than a simple artistic transposition of the physical appearances; it was a pictorial definition of an individual and recognizable identity, beyond appearances and even despite them, if needed.

5. Amarna royal portraits at Thutmose’s workshop. The excavation of the sculpture workshop in the estate of “the favorite of the perfect god, the chief artist and sculptor Thutmose” at Akhetaten/Amarna provides an exceptional opportunity to understand the practical modalities of conceiving a royal portrait.

The world-famous bust of Nefertiti (Berlin 21.300) was unearthed there among plaster studies of heads and faces that actually materialize the successive stages through which the official image of a royal (and also of a private) individual was established (fig. 13; Laboury 2005). These plaster pieces present material evidence of casting as well as of modeling, indicating that they resulted from a work made of malleable material—most probably clay—from which a mold was created to make a plaster reproduction. This process and the fact that most of them were reworked or bear signs of paint for reworking or completion show that these steps were

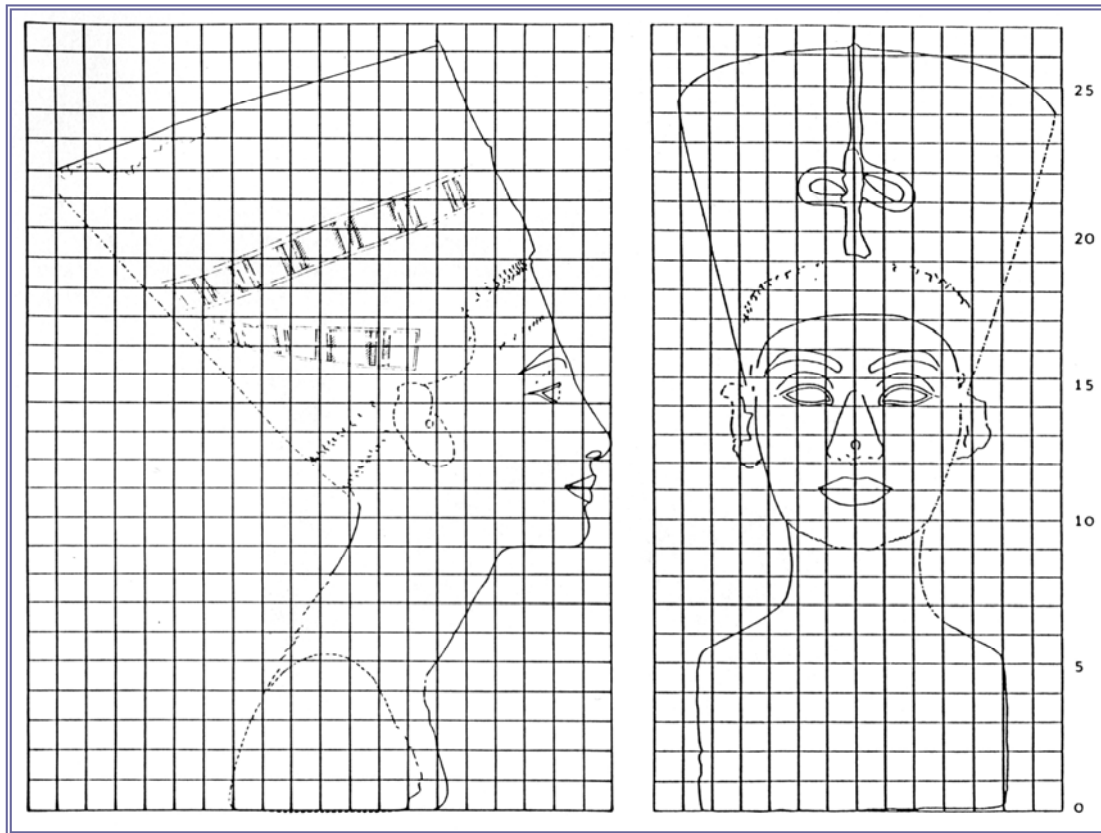


Figure 14. Projection of a grid graduated in ancient Egyptian fingers (1.875 cm) on a 3D recording of Nefertiti's Berlin bust (Ägyptisches Museum 21.300).

induced by the necessity for control, almost certainly performed by—or at least in agreement with—the self-thematized patron who ordered the statue(s). These operations of modeling, casting, and correction were surely executed by Thutmose himself or his closest collaborators, since the plaster studio was installed not in the actual sculpture workshop area, opened to day workers, but next to the chief sculptor's private house and was only accessible from the latter (cf. Laboury 2005: 296; Phillips 1991). While only two stages are attested for private persons, the official effigies of members of the royal family were produced in four phases, with at least three control steps before finishing the final model, sculpted in stone and adorned with plaster completions, subtle paintings (cf. the Berlin bust of Nefertiti), precious inlays (cf. Akhenaten's busts Louvre E 11076 and Berlin 21.360), and even gildings (cf. Berlin 21.360). These valuable model-busts could then be

copied and dispatched to the various workshops throughout the empire, in order to ensure consistency in the reproduction of the king's or the queen's official image.

Investigating the perfect beauty of Nefertiti's Berlin bust, Rolf Krauss recreated its original design as seen through the sculptor's eyes, when the artist prepared his work on the parallelepiped limestone block, by projecting a grid graduated in ancient Egyptian measuring units (1 finger = 1.875 cm) on a 3D recording of the queen's effigy. He thus showed that every important facial feature is positioned on a line or at the intersection of two lines (fig. 14; Krauss 1991a, 1991b). This demonstrates how much the so-called "most lifelike of Egyptian art" was artificially constructed. Moreover, Krauss also showed that the upper part of the face of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, from the bottom of the nose to the beginning of the crown on the

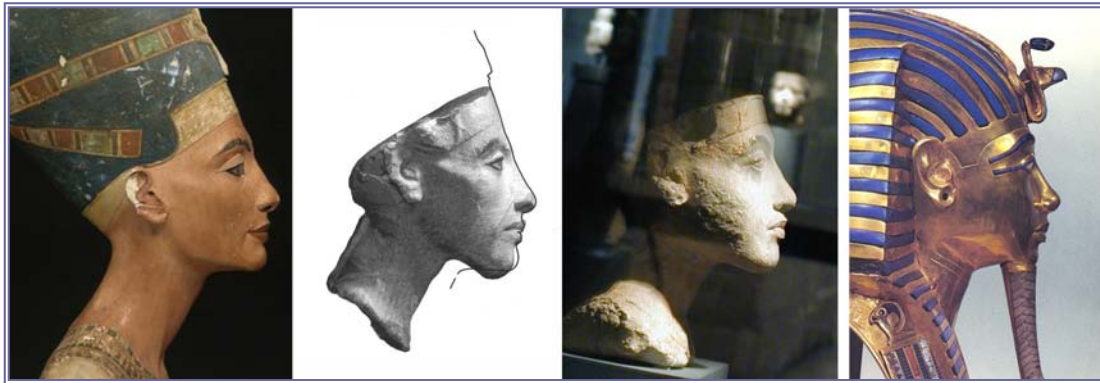


Figure 15. Comparison between (from left to right) the profile of Nefertiti's Berlin bust, its profile line on a 3D recording of the plaster head of Akhenaten (Berlin 21.351), the model bust of Neferneferuaten (Berlin 20.496), and Tutankhamen's funerary mask (Cairo JE 60672).

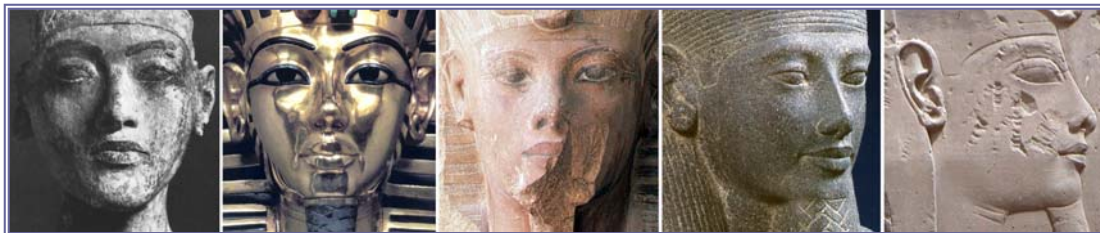


Figure 16. Comparison between (from left to right) the model bust of Neferneferuaten (Berlin 20.496), Tutankhamen's funerary mask (Cairo JE 60672), Aye's standing colossus from Medinet Habu (Cairo JE 59869), head of Atum from the dyad of Horemheb (Luxor Museum J 837), and a raised relief of Ramesses I from the north wall of the passageway of pylon II at Karnak.

forehead, is exactly identical in size as well as in shape (fig. 15 a-b; Krauss 2005). So, even if it is tantalizing to imagine some sort of a physiognomic convergence between Akhenaten's or Nefertiti's actual face and their apparently very individualized sculpted portraits, this reveals, without any possible doubt, that their official images idealized them.

Seen from this perspective, and in the political context of the end of Dynasty 18, it is interesting to note that the effigies of Akhenaten's two direct successors, Neferneferuaten (Laboury 2002) and Tutankhamen, probably two children of the Atenist royal couple (Gabolde, M. 1998; Krauss 2007), appear to combine the facial features recognized as those of Akhenaten and of Nefertiti (fig. 15). Are these effigies faithful portraits showing a family

resemblance or idealized images with ideological meaning? In the case of Tutankhamen, the rather good preservation of his mummy allows to demonstrate that the king's sculpted portrayals are not exact copies of his actual face but nevertheless provide a physiognomy consistent with it, as well as with his young age. Besides, this youthful face of a teenager was later on reused as a kind of mask for the next three kings of Egypt, Aye, Horemheb, and Ramesses I (fig. 16), who all ascended the throne after a very long civil career.

### Conclusion

Based on the above quoted examples, portraiture in ancient Egyptian art can be defined as a vectorial combination, a tension, or a dialectic between an analogical reference to visual perception of outer or

phenomenological reality and a consciously managed departure from this perceptual reality, in order to create meaning or extra-meaning, beyond the simple reproduction of visual appearances and sometimes, if

necessary, despite them. As such, portraiture is nothing but the application of the very essence of the ancient Egyptian image system (Laboury 1998b) to the individualized human representation.

### *Bibliographic Notes*

For good summaries and bibliographies about the existence of portraiture in ancient Egypt, see Vandersleyen (1982) and Spanel (1988). For the non-necessary relationship—and thus the needed distinction—between formal individualization and portrait, in the context of ancient Egyptian art, see Tefnin (1991: 69 - 73). As has been stressed by Assmann (1996: 65 - 71), ideal and type images are not exactly equivalent, since the first term refers to an “ideal” and the second one to an “idea.” The French language expresses this distinction with the adjectives *idéel*, “ideal,” and *idéel*, “relating to ideas” or “conceptual.” However, as opposed to portrait or realism, ideal and type images have in common their emancipation from perceptual reality towards a generalization. As Johnson (1998) has shown, an iconographic rejuvenating process similar to that apparent in the statuary of Amenemhat III occurred in the time of Amenhotep III (with his so-called *heb-sed* deification style), a king who seems to have taken inspiration from the statuary program developed by Amenemhat III at Hawara (Johnson 1996: 68, no. 16). As Polz (1995: 250 - 251) has noted, stylistic variations in the reproduction of Senusret III’s and Amenemhat III’s facial model are not surprising since many ancient Egyptian texts refer to the mobility of artistic works as well as of artists, for example, the biography of Sarenput I, who, under Senusret I, caused one hundred artists of the royal residence to come to Elephantine (Habachi 1985: 38). In regard to stylistic variations, Spanel (1988: 16 and 18) showed examples of the same kind of physiognomic variability—within the style of the period—in private portrayals, sometimes even intensified by a lesser quality of execution (compared to royal production), for example, the different statues of Metjetji dating to the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (illustrated in Spanel 1988: 16). In a few instances, this facial diversity in private portraits seems intentional, as might be the case with two statues of Mentuemhat (25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty): Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum 17271, inspired by Middle Kingdom prototypes, and Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History 31723, which obviously imitated statuary from the reign of Amenhotep III. Besides the marked physiognomy formula, Freed (2002) has shown that other elements in Amenemhat III’s iconography were also inspired by private sculpture. For a fuller discussion of the subject of reality effects used in the statuary of Senusret III and Amenemhat III, cf. Laboury (2003), which includes references to the analysis of Wildung (1984), Tefnin (1992), Polz (1995), and Assmann (1996: 71 - 79). For a complete reassessment of Tefnin’s demonstration of the evolution of Hatshepsut’s official image, after the critical reviews of Letellier (1981: 305 - 308) and Dorman (1988: 41, 112), see Laboury (1998a: 592 - 608). On the iconographic and political relationship between Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, see Laboury (1998a). Maspero (1897: 289) expressed his disappointment when he discovered Thutmose III’s mummified face. The comparison of his opinion with that of Spanel (1988: 2 - 3) exemplifies very well the importance of the beholder’s subjectivity and expectations, according to his or her preconceived ideas about the concept of portrait. For a detailed reassessment of Thutmose III’s mummified face, see Laboury (1998a: 647 - 655).



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- Figure 1. Top: Reality effects for dissimulation purposes in the tomb of Nakht, TT 52 (left) and in the tomb of Horemheb at Saqqara (right). Photographs by the author. Below: Illustration of the dissimulation principle with non-human figures. (After Fischer 1986: 32, fig. 4.)
- Figure 2. Comparison of the three faces on Menkaura's triads, Cairo JE 46499 (top) and 40678 (bottom). Photographs by the author.
- Figure 3. Comparison between facial characteristics of (from left to right) Menkaura (Cairo JE 46499), Userkaf (Cairo JE 52501), and Pepy I (Cairo JE 33034). Photographs by the author.
- Figure 4. Three late statues of Amenemhat III (from left to right): Cairo CG 385 from Hawara (Wildung 1984: 207), Cairo JE 66322 and Milan RAN 0.9.40001 from Medinet Madi (Polz 1995: pl. 52c-d).

- Figure 5. Variations among statues of Senusret III from the same series (from left to right): Cairo RT 18/4/22/4 (Saleh and Sourouzian 1987: no. 98), London BM EA 686 and 685 (photographs by the author; detail of the bust of London BM EA 686, Polz 1995: pl. 48a), and 684 (Russmann 2001: 103; detail of the bust, Polz 1995: pl. 48b) from the temple of Mentuhotep II at Deir el-Bahri.
- Figure 6. Statue of Sarenput II from Elephantine. Reign of Amenemhat II. (Habachi 1985: pl. 33.)
- Figure 7. Osiride colossi A of Hatshepsut from Deir el-Bahri (MMA 31.3.154 and 31.3.155 on the left) in comparison with the heads of (from left to right) Thutmose I, Cairo CG 42051, Thutmose II, JE 52364 (Gabolde, L. 2000: pl. 23a), and Thutmose III, regency period, RT 14/6/24/11. Except where noted, all photographs by the author.
- Figure 8. Left and center: Close-up of seated statue of Hatshepsut (MMA 29.3.2). Photograph by the author. Right: Head of Osiride colossi B (MMA 31.3.164). (Roehrig et al. 2005: 140.)
- Figure 9. Seated statues of Hatshepsut from Deir el-Bahri, in chronological order (from left to right): MMA 30.3.3, MMA 29.3.3, MMA 29.3.2, and MMA 27.3.163. Photographs by the author.
- Figure 10. Hatshepsut's Osiride colossi from Deir el-Bahri. Colossi A, MMA 31.3.155 and 31.3.154 (left top and bottom); colossus B, MMA 31.3.164 (middle top and bottom); and colossi C, Cairo JE 56259A and 56262 (Saleh and Sourouzian 1987: no. 129). Except where noted, all photographs by the author.
- Figure 11. Main physiognomic types in the evolution of Thutmose III's statuary. (Laboury 1998a: 641.)
- Figure 12. Mummified head of Thutmose III (Cairo CG 61068). (Laboury 1998a: 649.)
- Figure 13. Table with plaster studies and busts (at the same scale) from Thutmose's workshop at Amarna and similar material from the site, sorted by typology and physiognomy. (Laboury 2005: 294 - 295.)
- Figure 14. Projection of a grid graduated in ancient Egyptian fingers (1.875 cm) on a 3D recording of Nefertiti's Berlin bust (Ägyptisches Museum 21.300). (Krauss 1991b: 148 - 149.)
- Figure 15. Comparison between (from left to right) the profile of Nefertiti's Berlin bust; its profile line on a 3D recording of the plaster head of Akhenaten, Berlin 21.351 (Krauss 2005: 142); the model bust of Neferneferuaten, Berlin 20.496 (photograph by the author); and Tutankhamen's funerary mask, Cairo JE 60672 (Seton-Williams 1980: 81).
- Figure 16. Comparison between (from left to right) the model bust of Neferneferuaten, Berlin 20.496 (Lange 1951: pl. 46); Tutankhamen's funerary mask, Cairo JE 60672 (photograph by the author); Aye's standing colossus from Medinet Habu, Cairo JE 59869 (photograph by the author); head of Atum from the dyad of Horemheb, Luxor Museum J 837 (el Saghir 1992: 35); and a raised relief of Ramesses I from the north wall of the passageway of pylon II at Karnak (photograph by the author).