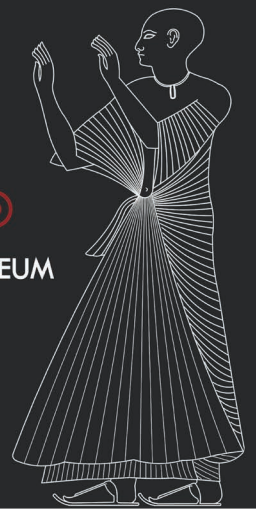




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A MASTERPIECE FROM THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM
OF FLORENCE RECOUNTED BY THE VATICAN MUSEUMS



RELIEF FROM THE TOMB OF PTAHMOSE

PAINTED LIMESTONE

NEW KINGDOM, 19TH DYNASTY, REIGNS OF SETY I AND RAMESSES II (13TH CENT. B.C.)

SAQQARA, TOMB OF PTAHMOSE

This fragment of relief comes from the tomb of a high official called Ptahmose who had begun his career at the court of the pharaoh Sety I and continued it under that pharaoh's son, Ramesses II (XIII cent. B.C.). His 32 honorific titles identify him as a very important person in the administration of the city of Memphis, which was at that time the administrative centre of the country, and also of the temple of Ptah, the most important temple of the town and one of the most prestigious in Egypt. Amongst his offices were those of "Mayor of Memphis" and "Chief Steward in the Temple of Ptah", "Overseer of the Troops", "Overseer of the Treasury" and "Royal Scribe".

The tomb of Ptahmose, around 70 m long, had already been recorded at the beginning of the 19th century, when it was, however, sacked. Many of its architectural elements, statues and stelae, as well as objects from the burial equipment, ended up on the antiquaries market and can be seen today scattered in public and private collections worldwide. The tomb itself then fell into oblivion, buried under the sand, and was newly identified by the excavations carried out by Auguste Mariette in 1859. It was 'rediscovered' in 2010 thanks to the excavations of the University of Cairo, which has allowed a scientific and systematic study of the tomb and its decoration.

The relief, in the lower register, shows Ptahmose holding in his hand the sekhem sceptre and a handkerchief, both symbols of high lineage, sitting at an offering table alongside his wife, Inehyt (of whom we see only her legs on the left-hand side of the relief) in the act of receiving the funerary offerings of their seven children, six girls and a single son. The woman seated at the top right is the nurse of the youngest child. The relatives of the deceased, and this usually means the children, are carrying out the role of funerary priests, carrying to the tomb the offerings, which will establish that magical contact with the Hereafter which will guarantee eternal life.

The funerary offering is consecrated, therefore, as a powerful icon, which celebrates the survival of the deceased in the Hereafter, a magical act, which perpetuated and sublimated human existence.