



MIROSLAV VERNER

VIS À VIS A YOUNG PHARAOH

ABSTRACT: In the devastated pyramid complex of the Fifth Dynasty pharaoh Raneferef in Abusir several small fragments of the king's mummy were discovered. Not less fortunate was the discovery of fragments of the king's statues including his six complete likenesses. These discoveries offered us an unique opportunity to compare the results of the anthropological examination of the remnants of the king's mummy with his best preserved likeness. The results of the iconographic analysis seem to correspond with some of the results of the anthropological examination.

KEY WORDS: Abusir - Raneferef - Mummy - Statues

Eugen Strouhal – a physician, archaeologist and anthropologist – was a scholar having a wide spectrum of interests and many of them were linked with Egypt. In Egypt he has been for a long time working with the team of the Czech (Czechoslovak) Institute of Egyptology, starting from the international campaign of UNESCO to save the monuments of Nubia threatened by the building of the High Dam at Aswan. From the very beginning of his career, he also took part in the Czech exploration of the pyramid field at Abusir.

Eugen's lifelong research has significantly contributed to our knowledge of the ancient Egyptians. For example, thanks to his profound knowledge in the field of anthropology and archaeology, and his dedicated work on the human remains in numerous sites in Egypt, we now better understand the fortunes of ancient Egyptians buried at Abusir, from the

common people up to the members of the Fifth Dynasty royal family. Undoubtedly, the most prominent member of this royal family whose remains were examined by Eugen Strouhal was King Raneferef (Strouhal, Němečková 2006). Unfortunately, from the king's mummy only few fragments survived (the occipital scale, left scapula, right fibula, skin with subcutaneous tissue from the forehead and an upper eyelid (?), the whole left clavicle, almost the whole left hand, etc.) in the badly damaged burial chamber of his pyramid complex at Abusir (*Figure 1*). Despite this meagre collection of remains from Raneferef's mummy, the results of Eugen's anthropological examination of them were able to tell us substantial information about the king – information the more interesting because the results could be confronted with six complete likenesses of the king as depicted in

Received 28 June 2017; accepted 25 September 2017.

© 2018 Moravian Museum, Anthropos Institute, Brno. All rights reserved.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.26720/anthro.17.09.25.1>



FIGURE 1: Left hand of Raneferef's mummy.

various types of statues that had been discovered at the site.

The statues represented Raneferef striding or seated on the throne and holding different symbols of the royal power. In Raneferef's pyramid complex the remains of at least a dozen of the king's statues, made in different materials and of different types, were discovered (for the Old Kingdom types of the statues of a king see Stadelmann 1998: 356–358). The most beautiful, and, from the artistic point of view, the most important of them is the statue in pink limestone which

represents Raneferef seated on the throne, his head protected by the supreme god Horus in the shape of a falcon (Verner 1985: 272; pls. XLV–XLVIII). Only fragments of the statue have survived, and they include the head with its neck, the trunk with the king's right arm and his left upper arm, the knees, with a part of his kilt, and a right corner from the base of the kilt. An engraved hieroglyphic inscription recording the king's name and royal title survived on the upper surface of the base. The surface of the sculpture was polished and painted in polychrome. The statue, originally about 35 cm high (for example, the head is 6.7 cm high; for dimensions of the remaining fragments of the statue see Benešová 2006: 388), is now exhibited in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 98171).

The fragments of the statue, once smashed to pieces in antiquity, were discovered either in the hypostyle hall and its close vicinity in the southern section of Raneferef's mortuary temple (*Figure 2*). The statue must have been destroyed, along with some other statues, during the relatively early looting of the temple, very probably in the First Intermediate Period.

The sculpture represents a young, about 20 years old king seated on the throne, wearing a pleated kilt and holding the *hedj*-mace in his right hand laid on the



FIGURE 2: View of Raneferef's pyramid complex from the top of Neferirkare's pyramid at Abusir.



FIGURE 3: Raneferef seated on the throne (Egyptian Museum in Cairo, JE 98171).

breast. The statue is turned slightly towards the right from the waist upward and this posture, giving the statue a certain dynamism, is quite unusual among royal sculptures of the Old Kingdom (*Figure 3*).

The physiognomy reveals some distinctive features of Raneferef. He has a broad, slightly smiling face with plump cheeks and softly modelled cheek-bones. The almond-shaped eyes have finely sculpted eyeballs. In their recessed corners traces of white paint have survived while the remains on black paint can be seen on the circular pupils. The short, deeply cut medial canthi have a slight downward slant. The upper eyelids are plastically moulded while the lower lids are only suggested by a deep cut. The remains of black painted cosmetic lines survived around the eyes and on the eyebrows. There is a minor difference between the two eyebrows: the right eyebrow is carved in a very fine relief up to its lateral pointed end whereas the lateral end of the left eyebrow is only painted. This may have been a minor omission of the artist, and subsequently hidden under the black paint.

The nose is straight and although its lower end is missing it is clear that it was bulbous. Subtle, finely modelled folds flanking the lower end of the nose emphasize the plumpness of the cheeks. The philtrum is shallow and finely modelled. The straight mouth with full lips is edged with a finely incised plastic line. The remains of a narrow, black painted moustache, survive in the shallow depression above the upper lip. A ritual beard was originally attached to the chin but on the left cheek we can still see traces of black paint from the straps that originally fixed the beard to the chin. From what remains of the extensively damaged ears it is apparent that they were small and closely adjacent to the head. The concentric bands with a finely incised, black painted fishbone pattern are stylized plastic imitations of short hair. The head of the king adorned the uraeus the hood and head of which, very probably made of fine gold, was originally set in a small hole opening on the forehead. The rest of the snake's body with four twists was carved in low relief on the top of the king's head (*Figure 4*).

The head of the king is embraced from behind by a falcon with its outstretched wings, symbol of the god Horus and carved in high relief. The right sections of the bird's head, back and wing are damaged. Perching on the king's shoulders, the falcon grasps in its claws the *shen*-ring, a symbol of the universal power of the god. The falcon's curved beak, gently touching the king's head, is painted black and the same paint was used to emphasize the bird's bulging eyes. The realistic appearance of the falcon's face is enhanced by two finely incised parallel lines in front and above its eyes. The feathers on the falcon's body were rendered with extreme care: every feather was originally indicated by a spot of dark grey paint outlined with a finely incised arched line filled with light grey paint. The feathers on the tail and end parts of the wings are elongated, and the feathers at the very end of the wings are stressed by deep lengthwise cuts. Unfortunately, most of the paint, except for a small part of the right wing, has disappeared (*Figure 5*).

The king's body has a finely modelled musculature that demonstrates the artist's knowledge of the human anatomy. The artist's feeling for realism is evident in the king's firm but not too broad, still somewhat boyish shoulders (a large part of the right shoulder and back is broken off). The slightly protruding collar-bones are clearly indicated as well as the softly modelled breast muscles with the small rounded nipples in black paint. Just faintly suggested is the median line ending in a little triangular depression with a small rounded



FIGURE 4: Close up of Raneferef's face (Egyptian Museum in Cairo, JE 98171).



FIGURE 5: Close up of the falcon protecting Raneferef's head (Egyptian Museum in Cairo, JE 98171).

navel. The shallow horizontal furrows flanking the navel and distinct plastic folds overhanging the belt of the kilt betray the king's slightly rounded belly. From the broad collar that once adorned the king's chest only four slightly plastic concentric circles have survived. Probably, the collar was originally covered with thin leaves of gold.

The muscles on the surviving right arm which holds the mace are finely and realistically modelled, especially on the forearm (the wrist is damaged), but the clenched fist is less carefully executed than the forearm. In the right hand, laid on his chest, the king grasps the *hedj*-mace, a symbol of power. The finely incised horizontal lines on the handle emphasize the king's firm grasp of the mace although unfortunately the pear-shaped bulb of the mace has been broken away. The left arm has been broken off at the elbow,

and only the upper section survived. On some places of the body, for example the shoulders and right arm, the remains of reddish ochre paint can be seen.

The king wears a special pleated kilt with a triangular front panel (the type of the king's kilt has been discussed in detail by Rzepka 2000) which was obviously favoured not only by Raneferef but by other kings of that time as is evident for example from the low relief depictions of Sahure (Borchardt 1913: Blatt 17, 32, 39 and 40) in his mortuary temple. The pleats of the kilt, of which only small fragments survive, are rendered by deep lengthwise cuts forming a pattern in which three narrow bands alternate with one broad band. The front piece of the kilt is a little raised and its rolled-up tip is stuck under the belt. The king's knees and upper part of his right shin has survived with the fragment of the front piece of the kilt. The muscles and

joints of the knees are very carefully and realistically modelled.

Nothing is left of the throne except the right corner of the base, with a part of the king's right foot. The toes (the front part of the big toe is broken off) are separate, and the nails and cuticles carefully indicated by finely incised lines. Next to the foot, on the upper side of the base, there is an inscription reading "King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Raneferef, may he live forever." The engraved hieroglyphic signs are filled with black paint. The bevelled lower edge of the base shows that the statue was originally set in a slab of stone (see, for example, the scribe statue of Radjedef's son Setka in Louvre, Inv. No. E 12631; Ziegler 1997: 64–67, Cal. No. 17).

This seated statue of Raneferef of pink limestone is one of Old-Kingdom sculptures representing the king with the falcon god Horus. The corpus of statues of this type is relatively small and includes two sculptures dating from the Fourth, two from the Fifth (both of them are Raneferef's) and one from the Sixth Dynasty. An alabaster head (of which unfortunately only a few fragments have survived), which was discovered east of the pyramid of Khufu and is now kept in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (no. 27.1466) (Smith 1946: 28, No. 4 and pl. 5a, Anonym 1999: 254, No. 57) is considered to be the earliest known example of this type. The most famous example is undoubtedly the seated statue of Khafre in orthogneiss exhibited now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (CG 14) (Borchardt 1911: Bl. 4, Bongioanni *et al.* 2001).

The representation of the supreme god Horus as a falcon embracing the king's head with its wings is undoubtedly a very powerful expression of the protection offered by the god to the king (Blumenthal 2003, Bolshakov 1999). No less meaningful are the *shen*-rings in the falcon's claws, which show the universal power that the god grants to the king. Furthermore, in accordance with the Ancient Egyptians' taste for syncretism, the sculpture demonstrates the dual nature of the Egyptian king – he is both human and divine, a person in whom supreme terrestrial and heavenly powers are united.

Whatever the probably multiple meanings of the representation of a king with falcon are, the statue of Raneferef in pink limestone ranks among the masterpieces of Ancient Egyptian art. The statue is not only important as a representative of the rare category of Old Kingdom royal sculptures representing the king with the falcon god Horus, it seems to be the most accurate depiction of Raneferef. It is also unique in the

specific posture of the seated king with his head slightly turned to the right. In realistic modelling of the king's body, and the detailed rendering of his distinctive characteristic features, the artist showed great craftsmanship and also a profound knowledge of the anatomy of a human body. He succeeded in creating a vivid portrait of a young ruler who is not only a noble but perhaps primarily a good-natured man. Indeed, he achieved even more than that: he gave the king's statue its "soul."

Some of the above described features of Raneferef seem to correspond to the results of the anthropological examination of the above cited remains of the king's mummy. The examination showed that Raneferef died at an age between 20–23 years (Strouhal, Němečková 2006: 518). It also found gracility of the bones, plenty of elastic fibres in the wall of blood vessels and absence of any pathological changes. Histological examination indicated that the hypodermic-adipose tissue contained many expanded fat cells. As might then be expected, the examination also suggested a lack of strenuous physical activities. Despite all these valuable data, the immediate cause of Raneferef's death remains unknown.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author wrote this article within the framework of the Charles University Progress Project Q11, "Complexity and Resilience: Ancient Egyptian Civilisation in Multidisciplinary and Multicultural Perspective."

REFERENCES

- ANONYMOUS EDITORS, 1999: *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York.
- BENEŠOVSKÁ H., 2006: Statues from the Pyramid Complex of the King Raneferef. In: M. Verner *et al.*: *Abusir IX. The Pyramid Complex of Raneferef. The Archaeology*. Pp. 386–391. Praha.
- BONGIOVANNI A., CROCE M. S., ACCAMAZZO L. (Eds.), 2001: *The Illustrated Guide to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo*. Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press.
- BORCHARDT L., 1913: *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Sahure. II. Die Wandbilder*, (WVDOG 26). Leipzig, Hinrichs Verlag.
- BLUMENTHAL E., 2003: Den Falken im Nacken, Statuentypen und göttliches Königtum zur Pyramidenzeit. *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 130: 1–30. doi: 10.1524/zaes.2003.130.1.1

- BOLSHAKOV A., 1999: Royal portraiture and "Horus Name". In: Ch. Ziegler (Ed.): *L'art de l'Ancien Empire égyptien*. Actes du colloque, Musée du Louvre 1998. Pp. 311–332. Paris.
- RZEPKA S., 2005: Reconstruction of the kilt represented on a statue of Ranefer. *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 86: 150–155.
- SMITH W. S., 1946: *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*. Published on behalf of The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A. London, Geoffrey Cumberlege.
- STROUHAL E., NĚMEČKOVÁ A., 2006: Identification of King Ranefer according to Human Remains Found in the Burial Chamber of the Unfinished Pyramid. In: M. Verner, M. Bárta *et al.* (Eds.): *Abusir IX. The Pyramid Complex of Ranefer. The Archaeology*. Pp. 513–518. Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. Academia, Praha.
- VERNER M., 1985: Les sculptures de Ranefer découvertes à Abousir. *BIFAO* 85: 272, pls. XLV–XLVIII.
- ZIEGLER CH., 1997: *Les statues égyptiennes de l'Ancien Empire*. Réunion des Musées Nationaux.

Miroslav Verner*
Czech Institute of Egyptology
FF UK
Praha
Czech Republic
E-mail: Miroslav.Verner@ff.cuni.cz

*Corresponding author.