



Seated scribe, from Saqqara, Egypt, c. 2620-2500 B.C.E., painted limestone

1) Source: <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/seated-scribe>

The scribe is portrayed at work, which is unusual in Egyptian statuary. Although no king was ever portrayed in this pose, it seems that it was originally used for members of the royal family, such as the king's sons or grandsons, as was the case for the sons of Didufri (4th Dynasty), who were represented in this position.

Honour, Hugh and John Fleming. *The Visual Arts: A History*, 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2007. p. 59

Such illusionism was not, of course, intended as a display of technical virtuosity – it was simply the means of embodying the human spirit in stone or wood. Accuracy of portrayal was necessary if the statues were to fulfill their immortalizing function and many are inscribed as “carved from the life.”

2) Stokstad, Marilyn and Michael W. Cothren. *Art History*, 5th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2014. p. 60

As an ancient Egyptian inscription advises – “Become a scribe so that your limbs remain smooth and your hands soft and you can wear white and walk like a man of standing whom (even) courtiers will greet”. This scribe sits holding a papyrus scroll partially unrolled on his lap, his right hand clasping a now-lost reed brush used in writing. The alert expression on his face reveals more than a lively intelligence. Because the pupils are slightly off-center in the irises, the eyes give the illusion of being in motion, as if they were seeking contact, and the reflective quality of the polished crystal inlay reproduces with eerie fidelity the contrast between the moist surface of eyes and the surrounding soft flesh in a living human face.

3) Source: <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/seated-scribe>

Access to the terrace of the royal palaces was from the Gate of Nations, an imposing structure built by Xerxes and consisting of a huge square hall, whose ceiling was held up by four columns with elaborate animal-headed capitals. The three great entrances opening to the west, east and south, were decorated by enormous figures of bulls, some human-headed, taken from traditional Assyrian imagery. The “throat” that crowned the crossbeams of each portal were typical Egyptian. This mix indicates the way in which Persian architecture combined a large number of different influences.

4) Source: <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/seated-scribe>

The semicircular base on which the figure sits must have originally fit into a larger base that carried his name and titles, such as the base for the statue of Prince Setka, exhibited in room 22 of the Louvre. This base is missing, and the context of the discovery does not provide any additional information. According to the archaeologist Auguste Mariette, who found the work, the statue of the scribe was apparently discovered in Saqqara on 19 November 1850, to the north of the Serapeum's line of sphinxes. But the precise location is not known; unfortunately, the documents concerning these excavations were published posthumously, the excavation journals had been lost, and the archives were scattered between France and Egypt. Furthermore, the site had been pillaged and ransacked, and no information concerning the figure's identity could be provided.

5) Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, 15th ed. Boston: Cengage, 2016. pp. 65-6

In the history of art, especially portraiture, it is almost a rule that as a person's importance decreases, formality is relaxed and realism increases. It is telling that the sculptor reproduced the scribe's sagging chest muscles and protruding belly. These signs of age would have been disrespectful and wholly inappropriate in a depiction of an Egyptian god-king or members of his family. But the statue of the scribe is not a true portrait either. Rather, it is a composite of conventional types. Obesity, for example, characterizes many nonroyal Old Kingdom male portraits, perhaps because it attested to the comfortable life of the person represented and his relatively high position in society.
