Two objects recently added to the Egyptian collection through the generosity of Mrs. William H. Moore serve similar purposes and may well be considered together, although they represent two utterly different methods of portraiture.

One is an artist’s sketch or study in relief found by Sir Flinders Petrie during his excavation of the site of Akh-en-Aten’s capital at el ‘Amārneh (ill. p. 189). It represents the king and can be dated, within a decade, about 1360 B.C. As for the date of the other, a sculptor’s model (ill. p. 191), only a rough guess can be made, for it represents not a particular king but the king in general, so to speak. If, on the basis of style and workmanship, we date it from 500 to 100 B.C., we shall be neither very wrong nor very accurate.

The study for the portrait of Akh-en-Aten is on a small rectangular slab of the rather gritty limestone local to el ‘Amārneh. The upper part of one side is occupied by the portrait of the king, a head which is carried out only as far as the base of the neck. Barely visible are the remains of the original ink sketch, where the sculptor’s chisel has not touched the stone. They indicate the uraeus on the king’s brow and the point of attachment to the headcloth. The rest of the head, with the exception of the ear, is fully carved, although the surface has not received the final smoothing, if indeed the artist ever intended to give it such a finish. It would be too much to say that this particular sketch was taken from life. It is much more likely that it was a practice piece of one of the royal sculptors, an exercise to “get his hand in” before attacking the king’s figure in a larger scene in tomb or temple. One may assume that he was not quite satisfied with his treatment of the mouth, for in one of the lower corners of the stone he has carved a pair of rather fuller lips, perhaps at the suggestion of the master sculptor under whom he was working.

On the other side of the stone is the commencement of a similar study of the king’s face (ill. p. 190). Here more of the original ink sketch is visible, as the carving has just been begun. One suspects that in this case less practiced hands wielded the mallet and chisel, for the work was “botched” and apparently abandoned. It is interesting to note, nevertheless, the thin groove marking the profile with which the sculptor started before beginning his modeling of the face.

In these sketches we see an attitude toward portraiture, both on the artist’s part and on the part of his royal subject, which is diametrically opposed to tradition. A reminder of the historical background of this remarkable piece will add greatly to its interest.
The purpose of most portraits of Egyptian kings was dynastic, in the sense that temples were always decorated in a manner which would show unmistakably the inclusion of the pharaoh in the company of the gods and his kinship with the supreme god of the pantheon. It is not surprising, therefore, that the king is usually represented as a fine figure of a man in the prime of life, differing in no respect from the gods except for the crown he wears.

Only twice in the long history of Egypt was this convention not observed. A number of statues of the pharaohs who ruled Egypt during the Twelfth Dynasty reveal individual human traits which were never thought of by Egyptian sculptors as characteristic of the gods. The other divergence occurred in a single reign, that of Akh-en-Aten, whose personality broke the even continuity of Egyptian religion and art as neither civil war nor foreign invasion had ever done, or ever did again.

Succeeding to the throne in the midst of a period of great wealth that resulted from the conquests of his predecessors of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Akh-en-Aten found himself in conflict with the Theban priesthood, whose power had
been enormously increased by foreign tribute accruing to the temples of Amun Re, the chief god. As he was unwilling to be hampered in his conduct of the affairs of state by priests who would not take literally his primacy as the son of Amun Re, he proscribed this particular sun god and declared another form of Re, the Aten, or Disk of the Sun, as the supreme god of Egypt. Moving his capital from Thebes to el 'Amârneh, he devoted himself to the worship of this god and to the propagation of the idea that he alone was the intermediary between the Aten and ordinary mortals.

With the abandonment of the traditional gods all the classical subject matter and conventions of religious art were cast aside. The Aten was never represented in human form, but only as a disk from which spread the rays that brought life to the king and queen, to
artists in the king’s employ, and there can be no question that he wished to have himself represented as he really was.

The artists favored by Akh-en-Aten worked under the most unusual conditions. Their royal patron, ready to accept any innovation in the decoration of temple and tomb, welcomed new subject matter and originality of treatment alike. What the course of Egyptian art would have been had Akh-en-Aten’s purposes prevailed beyond his time, it is hard to say. But even after the counter-revolution, which completely suppressed the Aten and restored the old gods and the ancient form of worship, the influence of these artists was felt. The stupendous battle scenes of the Nineteenth Dynasty would not have been possible without that Amârneh experience, which the craft of the sculptor and painter had not quite forgotten, nor would “modern dress,” with its elegant flowing lines, have clothed the images of king and courtier. Through the influence of Akh-en-Aten’s venture current life came forth from the palaces and made itself at home in temple and tomb.

The second of Mrs. Moore’s two gifts, of a date long after Akh-en-Aten’s revolution, is accurately described as a sculptor’s model. It is a head in the round intended to be followed as a model by sculptors, whether apprentices or masters, when making a statue of the king. This is evident enough from even a cursory examination. The head is not complete, being merely a face projecting from a thin rectangular piece of stone. On the back of this slab lines are drawn to form a grid five squares high and four squares wide. Additional short lines cross the median vertical of the grid and indicate the position of eyebrow and eye, mouth, and chin. Similar marks on what remains of the plane surfaces of the bottom and sides of the original perfectly rectangular block from which the “exercise” started indicate the position of other features. Thus the sculptor, using these marks for reference, could carve the head without error, much as the modern sculptor uses a
pointing machine to work from his clay figure.

Other models of this type show the same marking, and in some an intermediate stage in the sculptural process is indicated—the actual curved planes prescribed as the proper method for turning a block of stone into the head of a statue (ill. p. 190). The shoulders of our new model are in this stage of the process, but otherwise the carving has been completed. the round there are many others in relief: fig. Besides the numerous models of sculpture in ures of gods, kings and queens, heads of animals, and hieroglyphs, all done in the greatest detail.

These models are intensely interesting not only because they are beautiful in themselves but because they are part of a revival of art deliberately fostered by the kings of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. This family rose to power in the delta city Sais in 663 B.C., at the end of the long period of decline, civil strife, and foreign invasion which had followed the decay of the empire created by the pharaohs of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties. The Saite rulers seem to have understood the propaganda value of temple art, in which the pharaoh's historic claim of being himself a god was substantiated as much as it could be by representing him with the other gods on temple walls.

After an interval of more than four centuries with little art worthy of the name, a new beginning was necessary. The artists working for the Saite kings drew their inspiration chiefly from the temples and tombs of the Old Kingdom and had copies made of reliefs and statues for the guidance of the apprentices in the royal studios. The result of these activities was the formulation of an official style of art. The models which we have been discussing demonstrated its canons. They have been found in various parts of Egypt, and their similarity has led us to suppose that they were prepared at a central point and distributed wherever temples were being erected by the royal house.

The school of sculptors that produced what is called the Saite revival survived the fall of the dynasty in 525 B.C. and also two centuries of rule by Persian kings and short-lived native dynasties. And when Egypt was conquered by Alexander in 332 B.C., he and his successors, the Ptolemaic Dynasty, gave it a new lease on life. In the decoration of the many temples they erected throughout Egypt the same style of art, which had been formulated in the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, may be observed.

Our small model with its characteristically soft treatment of the features is a good example of the style favored by sculptors of this school. The faces are always well filled, almost plump, without any apparent bony structure below the surface. The mouth is particularly noticeable, being invariably pursed into a smile which is almost a smirk.

I have spoken of this model as an unfinished product, and yet in a sense it is one of the most highly finished pieces of sculpture in the Egyptian collection. The material is limestone of very fine grain, and the surface is smoothed to a point which approaches a polish. The absolute symmetry of the features, the delicacy of their treatment, and the smoothness of their contours make one feel that the artist has become enamored of his subject. But his subject is not the king, or any other person. Indeed, in this style of sculpture, practiced for so long with such excess of refinement, one feels that the subject has lost its validity, and the portrait has become nothing more than a supreme example of the statuary's technique.

That the Saite-Ptolemaic style of royal sculpture should have lasted for six centuries without essential change is most astonishing. It is equally remarkable that these are just the six centuries which saw the beginnings of Greek sculpture, its flowering, and its extinction. During the latter half of this period Alexandria was one of the principal centers of culture of the Hellenistic world. Yet Greek ideas in art, as in religion, left no marked impress on Egypt even in the declining years of her age-long pharaonic existence.