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Relief of an Aged Courtier

Edna Russmann: You're standing in front of a large case with a number of fragments of wall reliefs. The one that I will be talking about is the smallest. It's the second from the top on the left-hand side. It's carved in a technique that we call sunk relief, where the outline of the figure is carved but the background is not lowered.

It represents a man, and certainly a very important man, but it is not the tomb owner who's represented here. Why do I say he's not the tomb owner? Because that gesture with his hand in front of him, palm toward us, is a greeting to someone more important than he is, almost certainly the owner of this tomb.

This is a senior official. He has the wig of an important scribe, the kind of pointed section hanging down on one side of the face. He's also very nicely dressed. He's wearing some kind of tunic of fine linen with big floppy sleeves. The other way of showing his seniority, of course, is to show him as an aged man. And I don't know of any other example that does so in quite such detail.

Chester Higgins: This relief of an aged courtier captures what I call the nobility of aging—that in spite of his body showing time and the muscles beginning to sag, his mind is fully alert. And he stands with a sense of certainty about what he's doing.