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A Late Period Relief and Its Prototypes

Arnold Lehman: Look at the relief at left-center.

Edna Russmann: I think you can see the feet of two girls in the upper part of this relief. They're sitting, probably on basket shapes or maybe just piles of straw, because these are harvest scenes. The one on the right has both feet on the ground and seems to be leaning forward, although she is not preserved. The other one is clearly leaning back and supporting herself with one hand on the ground, because her other foot is in the air. She is holding it up so that her friend can pull a thorn that she's got in her foot.

The scene below is much more complete. This woman is sitting at her leisure on quite an elegant little stool in the shade of two trees, holding a child whom she carries in a sling. Supposedly it's an infant, although his arms and legs seem really very long. He is reaching up very nicely to touch her hair. And she is reaching for a piece of fruit, which has been placed in a bowl on a stand beside her.

It is usually assumed that the woman is a young mother nursing her baby. In fact, most of the women who are shown carrying babies in slings of this kind appear to be babysitters—young girls, perhaps older sisters, who are assigned to look after the little darling while mother is off doing something more important.

Arnold Lehman: This relief was modeled upon a tomb painting from almost seven hundred years earlier.

Edna Russmann: Ancient Egypt is known as a very conservative society. They didn't want things to change.

When they thought things were perhaps moving too fast, they would often go back to their own earlier monuments, to their own earlier writings, and would copy the writings, or in the case of the monuments, would copy the art. And most of the tomb reliefs in the case you're looking at are examples of this emulating the past that is known as archaism.

For more information about these objects, be sure to visit www.brooklynmuseum.org