



A PTOLEMAIC ROYAL PORTRAIT IN THE ARIZONA STATE MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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ABSTRACT

A small limestone Ptolemaic royal portrait bust in the collection of the Arizona State Museum (ASM) of the University of Arizona in Tucson is published here for the first time, having been purchased in Cairo and donated to ASM in 1924 by Lily S. Place. The portrait is in Egyptian style, i.e., in the mode of an Egyptian pharaoh wearing the nemes with uraeus, and can probably be dated to the late fourth or third centuries BCE. A lack of inscriptions and solid archaeological contexts for the majority of small Ptolemaic portraits has made assessing their function difficult. The hypotheses regarding the uses of this category of images in the ideological program of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt are briefly examined, and the suggestion is made that they may have been manufactured as patronage gifts for elite members of Egyptian society, including the priestly class and other temple officials, from whom loyal support was critical to the ruling Ptolemies.

Portraiture of the Greco-Macedonian rulers of Egypt is a subject that has been abundantly studied, including sculpted portraits in Greek and Egyptian styles, as well as images on Ptolemaic coins, faience vessels, gems, and seals.¹ There are still questions, however, about the function of one category of Ptolemaic royal images—small (H. ca. 0.08–0.30 m) heads or busts in Egyptian style, i.e., in the image of an Egyptian pharaoh with Egyptian headdress and uraeus, made of limestone or plaster.² In the unknown Egyptian collection of the Arizona State Museum (ASM) at the University of Arizona is a small buff-white limestone Ptolemaic royal portrait bust (no. 13202) that is published here for the first time, providing an opportunity to re-examine some of the hypotheses regarding the use of such images in the ideological program of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt.³ (Figures 1–4)

Because the vast majority of these small portraits lacks specific provenience (and some have been identified as forgeries using models from Edgar's 1906 catalogue of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo), it is problematic to form definitive conclusions about how they functioned within the political, religious or social context of Ptolemaic Egypt.⁴ Unfortunately, this head also lacks archaeological context. It was purchased in Cairo in the early 1920s by Lily S. Place (1857[?]-1929), a Minneapolis native who kept an apartment in Cairo and bought antiquities as well as ethnographic items in bazaars and shops in Egypt. She donated some 195 ancient Egyptian objects to ASM in 1922 and 1924—bronze statuettes, faience amulets, terracotta and bronze lamps,

mummy cartonnage, coffin fragments, and miscellaneous objects ranging in date from the Old Kingdom to the Islamic period.⁵

This limestone head is preserved in a single fragment broken off at the neck and along the right and left edges; is in good condition, missing only small chips. There are some black lichens or other organic substances from deposition, especially on the left side and back. The head measures as follows: P.H. 0.115 m; H. face 0.064 m; Max.W. 0.10 m; P.Th. 0.177 m.

It is probably from a bust with a flat lower surface or, less likely, with a rounded lower surface for setting into a torso.⁶ A frontal male head is depicted wearing the *nemes* pulled tight across the forehead, over the rounded top of head, and folded behind the ears in peaks. In the center of the headdress is a uraeus in low relief, rising in a double loop from the flat band at the lower edge of the headdress across the middle of the forehead; the thin tail of the uraeus continues to the back edge of the head. The face is long and oval with high, rounded cheekbones, rounded chin, and fleshy neck. The eyebrows are slightly raised in relief and describe a single gentle arch; the almond-shaped eyes have thin, sharp creases for lids and protruding eyeballs; the nose is long and straight with deeply drilled, flaring nostrils; the lips are thick and pursed in a slight smile with drilled indentations at the corners. The ears are long and thin, protruding with carefully carved inner channels.

The back of the bust is flat with a rough surface and two finely incised lines: a 0.03 m-long horizontal line at the back right edge, ca. 0.022 m from the bottom broken edge; and a vertical line, 0.012

m-long, at the middle of the top edge behind the end of the cobra's tail. Neither of these incisions extends the length or width of the back.

These small Ptolemaic busts in Egyptian mode are remarkably difficult to date because they lack identifying inscriptions and their physiognomic features barely differentiate one Ptolemaic king from another. A date in the late fourth or third century BCE is probable for this one (and for most known examples of this category), for, as Stanwick has shown, more consistently Egyptian-style images of the early Ptolemaic period give way to eclectic or hybridized Hellenized-Egyptian representations during the reigns of Ptolemy V or VI (206–186 BCE).⁷ The closest parallel for this small bust is a plaster example in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge University that also lacks provenience, bought in Cairo in 1915 (E.GA.4360.1943).⁸ The facial features of ASM's bust are also similar to those of the large-scale standing red granite statue inscribed for Ptolemy II, found in the first century BCE Gardens of Sallust in Rome, possibly originally from Heliopolis.⁹

Royal Ptolemaic portraits in the mode of Egyptian pharaohs are generally interpreted as powerful visual symbols that reify the legitimacy of Hellenic rule in Egypt and reinforce the identity of Greek rulers as the rightful heirs in the lineage of Egyptian kingship. One can understand how the controlled production and distribution of large-scale or colossal statues or relief images on inscribed stelae erected at key Egyptian temple sites and towns¹⁰ or statues in Greek sanctuaries or cities under Ptolemaic influence¹¹ served to advance Ptolemaic political aspirations. Yet, how would small Egyptian-style images such as this one have functioned in the ideology of the ruler cult in Egypt?

Mostly these small portraits have been interpreted in two ways: first, as votive objects for household shrines or temple chapels dedicated to Egyptian deities where small images of the ruler could have served as attendants to the main deity; and, secondly, as models for sculptors to replicate images, perhaps larger ones in other materials, with grid lines on the back, bottom or sides of some, including on unfinished examples, serving as guides for sculptors in proper proportions and placement of features of the portrait head. The two theories are not mutually exclusive, and it is possible that votive busts of the Ptolemaic kings were produced in workshops near temple sites, for use in household shrines and temples.¹² The example in ASM is finished, and though there are

traces of two barely visible incisions on the back, these are not completely convincing as grid lines for copying.

We can understand the efficacy of coinage bearing images of the Ptolemies in spreading the message of the new regime and its promise to bring prosperity and stability to Egypt. None of these numismatic portraits, however, are of Ptolemies as Egyptian pharaohs, and we might presume that idealized Hellenistic ruler images on coins were not aimed at local Egyptian populations so much as at Greeks living in Egypt¹³ or at Greeks and others interacting with the Ptolemaic empire in the commercial and political sphere.¹⁴ Yet, who is the audience for these small, sculpted royal portraits? Perhaps these were made specifically for the well-to-do Egyptian priestly class and temple officials who wielded considerable influence in the Ptolemaic period as the keepers of critical religious and social functions in temple precincts of the Egyptian gods.¹⁵ The role of Egyptian priests in controlling royal images and facilitating their spread through priestly decrees is clear.¹⁶ It was especially with this class of Egyptians that the Ptolemaic kings needed to cultivate good relations if their politically astute policy of support for traditional Egyptian religious practices alongside Greek cult practices and the worship of some new Greco-Egyptian gods was to be accepted by the Egyptian populace. It was for this elite priestly class, not coincidentally, that most private sculpture and funerary stelae was made in this period.¹⁷

Although archaeological context or epigraphical evidence would be vital to prove that these small Ptolemaic portraits were manufactured as patronage gifts,¹⁸ granted by Ptolemaic rulers to Egyptian priests and other temple officials, we can at least add it to the list of possible functions for them. The Ptolemies effectively used royal benefactions in their program of cultural diplomacy in mainland Greece and understood the importance of gift-giving to underpin their broader political aims and bolster their precarious position in the power politics of the Hellenistic world.¹⁹ On a local level, these small busts of Ptolemaic kings as Egyptian pharaohs would be ideal royal gifts for individuals in key positions at strategic temple sites with whom the central administration needed to ensure loyalty and maintain positive relationships. The images would very likely have been dedicated to Egyptian gods by these priests or other temple officials.



Figure 1: Ptolemaic Royal Portrait, ASM 13202. Photograph by Jannelle Weakly. Courtesy of the Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona.

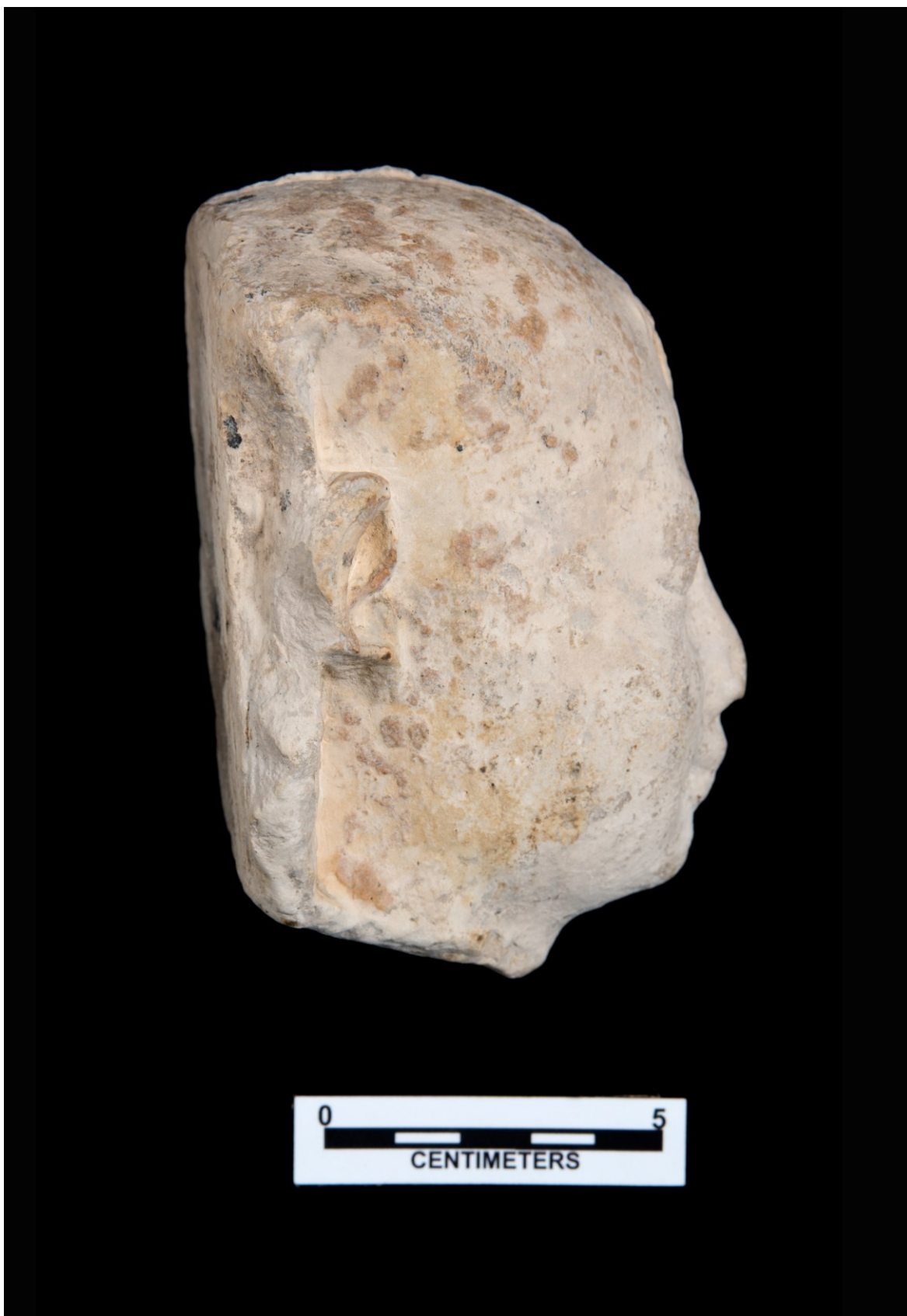


Figure 2: Ptolemaic Royal Portrait, ASM 13202. Photograph by Jannelle Weakly. Courtesy of the Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona.



Figure 3: Ptolemaic Royal Portrait, ASM 13202. Photograph by Jannelle Weakly. Courtesy of the Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona.



Figure 4: Ptolemaic Royal Portrait, ASM 13202. Photograph by Jannelle Weakly. Courtesy of the Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona.

NOTES

- ¹ H. Kyrieleis, *Bildnisse der Ptolemäer* (Berlin: Mann, 1975); R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); R. R. R. Smith, "Ptolemaic Portraits: Alexandrian Types, Egyptian Versions," in M. True and K. Hamma (eds.), *Alexandria and Alexandrianism* (Malibu, CA: Getty Museum, 1996), 203–213; S.-A. Ashton, *Ptolemaic Royal Sculpture from Egypt: The Interaction between Greek and Egyptian Traditions*, BAR International Series 923 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2001); P. E. Stanwick, *Portraits of the Ptolemies: Greek Kings as Egyptian Pharaohs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); J. H. Kroll, "The Emergence of Ruler Portraiture on Early Hellenistic Coins: The Importance of Being Divine," in P. Schultz and R. von den Hoff (eds.), *Early Hellenistic Portraiture: Image, Style, Content* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 113–122; D. Plantzos, *Hellenistic Engraved Gems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); H. Kyrieleis, "Ägyptische Bildelemente auf Siegelabdrücken aus Nea Paphos," *Städte-Jahrbuch* 19 (2004): 109–116; D. B. Thompson, *Ptolemaic Oinochoai and Portraits in Faience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).
- ² Ashton 2001, 19; Stanwick, 11, 34 and Appendix A: 90–93, ft. 1 for earlier bibliography; N. S. Tomoum, *The Sculptors' Models of the Late and Ptolemaic Periods: A Study of the Type and Function of a Group of Ancient Egyptian Artifacts* (Cairo: National Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage and the Supreme Council of Antiquities, 2005): esp. cat. nos. 1–51; S.-A. Ashton, "Limestone and Plaster Royal Sculpture of the Late and Ptolemaic Periods in the Fitzwilliam Museum," in A. M. Dodson, J. J. Johnston, and W. Monkhouse (eds.), *A Good Scribe and an Exceedingly Wise Man: Studies in Honour of W. J. Tait* (London: Golden House Publications, 2014), 7–23.
- ³ I am grateful to Hussein Bassir for his interest in ASM's Egyptian collection and his encouragement to publish this portrait head, and to Archaeological Collections Curator Mike Jacobs for his unfailing enthusiasm and assistance in studying ASM's ancient Mediterranean collections.
- ⁴ C. C. Edgar, *Sculptors' Studios* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1906); Ashton 2014, 9–10; Tomoum, 20–22.
- ⁵ D. Lizarraga, "Lilly S. Place—International Woman of Mystery," September 28, 2014, http://www.statemuseum.arizona.edu/research/place-lily_s.shtml. We know little about Lily S. Place other than what is recorded in her obituary (*Bulletin of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts* Vol. XVIII, no. 20 [May 18, 1929]: 1). During her lifetime and in her will she also donated objects to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (218 items are found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: The Collections Online: <http://metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search?ft=Lily+S.+Place>; accessed September 28, 2014) and to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (*Bulletin of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts* Vol. XIX, no. 4 [October 4, 1930]; personal communication Reanna Phillips, MIA, December 9, 2013). Others are now scattered: W. Benson Harer, Jr. "The Drexel Collection: From Egypt to the Diaspora," in S. D'Auria (ed.), *Servant of Mut: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Fazzini* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 115–116.
- ⁶ E.g., Stanwick, busts: A22 (with flat back), A24; for rounded bottom: A21 (in plaster).
- ⁷ Stanwick, 61–62, 65–69, 85–90; Ashton 2014, 11.
- ⁸ Ashton 2014, 21–22, fig. 20.
- ⁹ Stanwick, A3, 98, 157, figs. 2–3.
- ¹⁰ Stanwick, 15–32.
- ¹¹ In Athens or Olympia, e.g., see Pausanias 1.5.5; 1.8.6; 6.16.3; 6.17.3; 10.10.2; O. Palagia, "Aspects of the Diffusion of Ptolemaic Portraiture Overseas," in K. Buraselis, M. Stefanou, and D. J. Thompson (eds.), *The Ptolemies, the Sea and the Nile: Studies in Waterborne Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 143–159.
- ¹² Stanwick, 11, 90–93.
- ¹³ L. Koenen, "The Ptolemaic King as a Religious Figure," in A. W. Bulloch, E. S. Gruen, A. A. Long, and A. Stewart (eds.), *Images and Ideologies: Self-definition in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 31–36; W. Peremans, "Étrangers et Égyptiens en Égypte sous le règne de Ptolémée 1," *Ancient Society* 11–12 (1980–1981): 213–226.
- ¹⁴ For the viewpoint that Ptolemaic coins with Hellenized images bore messages for the Egyptian population, see A. Fulinska, "Iconography of the Ptolemaic Queens on Coins: Greek Style, Egyptian Ideas?" *Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization* 14 (2010): 73–92.
- ¹⁵ J. Quaegebeur, "Documents égyptiens et rôle économique du clergé en Égypte hellénistique," in E. Lipinski (ed.), *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 6 (Louvain: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1979), 707–729; J. H. Johnson, "The Role of the Egyptian Priesthood in Ptolemaic Egypt," in L. H. Lesko (ed.), *Egyptological Studies in Honor of R. A. Parker* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986), 70–84.
- ¹⁶ Stanwick, 2, 6–14, 17, 26, 49–50.
- ¹⁷ Johnson, 72, ft. 9.
- ¹⁸ Johnson, 82, ft. 41–42.
- ¹⁹ Palagia.