A question of authenticity and date: Roman copies and Ptolemaic originals

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In the 1960 catalogue for an exhibition entitled *Egyptian Sculpture of the Late Period* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art New York, Bothmer included an unusual figure of what he believed to be a representation of a kneeling king, on the basis of its forward-leaning posture and the absence of a back pillar.[1] The piece, which is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (**Fig. 1**), is distinctive in other respects, most notably in the chosen stone, which was described by Bothmer as marbled limestone. The statue was dated by its material, the disproportionately large *nemes* headdress, the poor stylistic quality of the uraeus and the lack of distinctive portrait features to around 100 BC; this date was later supported by Frel.[2] However, a comparison with images of the rulers at this time, Ptolemy IX Soter II and his brother Ptolemy X Alexander, offers little support for Bothmer's dating of the Metropolitan Museum statue. Ptolemaic royal representations from this period show a stylised version of the rulers' Greek portrait types or Egyptian versions of the so-called *Physcon* portraits. The features, as noted in the original catalogue entry for the piece, are reminiscent of early Ptolemaic royal portraits, particularly in respect to the nose, with its flared nostrils and slightly bulbous appearance, and the fleshy lips on the mouth, which are forced into an archaising smile (**Fig. 2**). The anomalies, however, mean that a third century BC date for the piece is highly unlikely, as noted by Bothmer.

It is not only, however, the date of the piece that is questionable, but its authenticity. In 1997 Josephson included the statue in an article, which reconsidered some of Bothmer's dating criteria and his conclusions regarding key pieces from the original exhibition.[3] He concluded that the piece was not ancient, giving several reasons to support his argument. Firstly the stone, which he dismisses as marbled limestone, suggesting that 'perhaps it is simply marble'. The author correctly draws attention to the unusual modelling of the uraeus and the nemes headdress, which he describes as 'flat and literally dug into the back of the figure'. The portrait features are brought into question, with respect to the sculpting of the eyes with their characteristically modelled eyelids, represented by a well-defined line. Frel also noted this feature on a Greek-style portrait of a Ptolemaic queen, which he dated to 100 BC.[4] Finally, the posture, which Josephson described as 'sharply inclined from the vertical, and the head unnaturally cocked'.[5] His conclusion is that the statue's authenticity as an ancient work is questionable.

Within the Ptolemaic Egyptian repertoire this observation is valid: the features of the statue suggest that the piece is either an anomaly or a copy of what is likely to be a third century Ptolemaic original representation of a ruler. Most distinctive are the modelled eye-lines and bulbous eyes, unexpected features alongside the naturalistic eyebrows. The mouth, which as noted is forced into a smile, is without

1 *ESLP* 160–61, no. 124; figure 1.
2 *AA* 1971, 214.
3 Josephson, *JARCE* 34 (1997) 1–20.
4 *AA* 1971, 212–13.
5 Josephson, *JARCE* 34 (1997), 16, n. 100.

the usual drill-holes that appear on early Ptolemaic portraits, and in profile the weak chin accentuates the upper lip, with the result that the face is disproportionate. The Metropolitan statue is not Ptolemaic in date, but that is not to say that it is not ancient.

The Department of Egyptian Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art has had the stone analysed in order to determine if it is of Egyptian origin, and the initial results appear to be promising in that the stone has been identified as limestone, of a type that is quarried near El-Minya. Early investigations suggest that the stone is a nummulitic limestone from Zawiet Sultan.[6] Inscriptions show that this quarry was active until the Late Antique Period (fourth to seventh centuries AD); whilst this is an important step in deciding if the statue is ancient, the stone may have been quarried or re-used more recently. However, comparing stones and indeed artistic traditions from Egypt may not answer the question of this particular object's status.

Terms such as authenticity, forgery, copy and fake need to be carefully considered before a conclusion is to be drawn, particularly when the Imperial Roman fashion of using Egyptian and Egyptianising sculptural representations is in question. The observation is valid, not only with regard to the question of the authenticity or status of individual pieces, but also in terms of dating many so-called 'Graeco-Roman' statues, a term that is itself problematic. In many respects the use of this term as a distinct chronological period is the origin of confusion regarding the differences between Ptolemaic and Roman sculpture. How then do we define authentic? Are we to conclude that the Egyptian features that were an integral part of the structures of sanctuaries for Egyptian deities such as that of Isis at Pompeii or Benevento cannot be categorised as 'authentic' because of their very Roman nature?

When we use the terms 'forgery' and 'fake' as ancient art historians or archaeologists, we are questioning whether an object is ancient rather than, in the case of the Roman copies, if an object is from a specific period or country. The terms 'fake' and 'forgery' imply deception, although the problems encountered by the modern scholar are really a reflection of our own ignorance rather than that the artists were deliberately trying to deceive their clients. There are two types of Roman product: those sculptures which closely attempt to copy an earlier work of art, and those which offer an interpretation of a tradition, such as the Egyptianising sculptures from Hadrian's villa at Tivoli. The former school, of copying Ptolemaic and earlier sculpture, is not restricted to Italy, but is also evident in Egypt itself during the mid-late first to second centuries AD, when emperors such as Vespasian, Domitian and Hadrian became interested in Egyptian cults and art. 'Copy' and 'interpretation' or 'version' are perhaps the more appropriate terms for objects which were produced in such circumstances.

Of the finds at the temple of Isis at Benevento, dating to the reign of Domitian (AD 81–96), an overwhelming majority were manufactured specifically for the purpose. These objects show an awareness of Egyptian traditions, in that on striding statues the back pillar is maintained, but they can be distinguished from the earlier, imported material by their distinctly 'Roman' appearance, as manifested in more naturalistic modelling, often presenting a lack of symmetry as illustrated by an Egyptian-style statue of Domitian.[7] However, these sculptures often betray an intimate knowledge of Ptolemaic originals. The statues of Domitian remain true to Egyptian canons, showing the emperor with a *nemes* headdress, uraeus and kilt but with the same portrait features as his Roman Imperial portrait type. This practice shows a continuation of the procedures associated with Ptolemaic royal representations, which effectively were 'bilingual', in that the appropriate features for recognising the subject of the represen-

6 As illustrated in Klemm and Klemm, *Steine und Steinbrüche im alten Ägypten*, 91–101, 441, pl. 3.3

7 Müller, *Il culto di Iside*, 47–105)

tation were present: the portrait for the Greeks and the pharaoh for the Egyptians, as illustrated by Ptolemaic examples of sphinxes carrying the portrait of the current ruler. One such is the *dromos* of Narmouthis (**Fig. 3**) and another the Alexandrian Sarapeion (**Fig. 2**) where, although stylised, the portraits resemble those on the striding Egyptian-style royal figures.

The Roman Imperial statues of the first century AD show a continuation of this tradition, whereas the Metropolitan Museum statue does not fall within this category. Other similar examples dating to the Thirtieth Dynasty or early Ptolemaic period from the Sarapeion at Memphis also illustrate this point.[8]

The continued use of the emperor's Roman portrait features on Egyptian-style representations continued until the time of Hadrian, when more general Egyptianising sculpture became more common, as seen in his villa at Tivoli, and also at the Alexandrian Sarapeion, where the temple was expanded. The style chosen for the building was not the expected Greek but Egyptian. Such programmes offer a means of understanding the Metropolitan statue, which is more likely to have originated in Egypt on account of its stone and also because it is recorded as having been bought in Cairo.

Stylistically the Metropolitan statue also fits comfortably within the Hadrianic repertoire, which included Egyptianising statues of Hadrian and Antinoos, such as the striding statue believed to represent the latter from the sanctuary of Isis at Marathon and now in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.[9] This particular sculpture has a provenance and is unquestionably ancient; however, if it were without a find-spot, its authenticity would no doubt have been questioned on account of its unusual and non-Egyptian features, one of the most striking of which is the modelling of the eyes, commonly found on statues of this type and proportion and clearly within the Romano-Egyptian tradition.

Such images, with a uraeus but lacking portrait features, have also been found in Egypt: the sphinx, inventory number 28138, of the Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria shows that these more general representations were commissioned in Egypt as well as abroad during the Roman period (**Fig. 4**). The same prominent eye-line and sickle-smile also appear on the questionable Metropolitan Museum of Art fragment, the former a feature that is, as noted by Josephson, outside of the Egyptian canons but may be defined as an interpretation of this tradition. These features can also be found on the Egyptian-style sphinxes and Egyptianising sculpture from Hadrian's villa at Tivoli.

The other unusual features found on the MMA fragment also have parallels in Roman copies of Egyptian sculpture, most notably in the proportions of the nemes, with its thin lappets and foreshortened head, both of which are features typical of the Roman period, as illustrated by **Fig. 4**. Furthermore, the modelling of the lips and mouth is also typical of that found on many of the sphinxes from Hadrian's villa and perhaps more interestingly on an Egyptianising sphinx from the Alexandrian Sarapeion (inv. 330), now unfortunately in the store rooms of Alexandria Museum, but illustrated by Tkaczow.[10] Could, then, the Metropolitan Museum's statue be a copy of an original Egyptian sculpture, but rather older than had been originally thought? The use of this particular limestone, with a marbled appearance, would support this idea since stones with a similar effect were commonly used for sculptures in Imperial Rome and Roman Egypt, particularly during the reign of Hadrian. The unusual posture can be found on kneeling statues, as originally suggested, but also on busts and standing statues that date to this period, such as the Marathon statue. Certainly by the time of Hadrian the back

[8] Rogge, *Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien*, ÄS 5756–5766.
[9] Tzachou, *The World of Egypt in the National Archaeological Museum*, 183.
[10] *Topography of Ancient Alexandria*, 189, 11A.

pillar was often excluded on Egyptianising statuary, although many of the stylistic features remained true to Egyptian canons.

The authenticity of the Metropolitan Museum's statue will, no doubt, continue to be debated, but the possible explanation that this and other pieces are Roman copies of Ptolemaic originals has wider implications than the understanding of a single statue. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's statue, therefore, if ancient, is more likely to date to the second century AD rather than BC as was originally suggested by Bothmer, who correctly noted its 'late' features. The sculptor of the MMA ruler seems to have had an intimate knowledge of the style that defines third century BC royal statuary, a fact revealed by the careful attention to the facial features on this piece. If the MMA ruler is compared to a breccia bust wearing a nemes headdress, originally in the Wellcome Collection but now housed in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology (**Fig. 5**), there is a striking difference between these two 'fakes'. The Petrie Museum card index suggests that this piece may be a forgery and the object's authenticity was also questioned in the recent exhibition 'Digging for Dreams', where the bust appeared with several modern forgeries. The features of the Petrie Museum bust are flat in profile; the mouth is unevenly carved and there has been no understanding of the drill-hole principle at the corners of the mouth, which features commonly in both the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The nose is flat and the nostrils are not carved; furthermore the head looks upwards rather than down, as is the usual Roman fashion, and finally the neck is long and angular. There are no parallels for these features on purely Egyptian-style statuary, and the Petrie Museum bust is likely to be a modern forgery of a general nature rather than a copy of a specific sculpture or a 'pastiche', as noted below. The poor quality of the features is testimony to the sculptor's struggle with the stone. The flatness of the Petrie Museum statue in profile is not the same as the rounded features of the Alexandrian sphinxes or the Metropolitan Museum's ruler. Tool marks, although helpful in recognising modern marks, can also be deceptive, particularly if a fragment of a statue has been deliberately chiselled to allow a flat plane for standing. Those on the Petrie example do, however, appear to be modern.

Are we then, to conclude that all of these statues are modern forgeries, or are they testimony to a developing trend in the Roman period for more general representations in an Egyptian style? The criteria for identifying a fake do not, however, often work within this principle. In the introductory essay for the 1973 exhibition *Fakes and Forgeries*, Johnson identified the copying of existing works or 'pastiches' as a common method of forgery and so criteria for identification of a modern work; in other words the sculptor borrows features from a number of known images. If, however, the Petrie Museum bust and a re-cut Late Period head in the Brooklyn Museum of Art are considered, a sculptor's inability to comprehend technical aspects of Egyptian sculpture would be a safer measure to use for identifying a modern fake, as illustrated by the re-cut head in the Brooklyn Museum of Art.[11]

The New York bust is a copy of an original which displays a knowledge of ancient carving techniques seldom found on modern copies and fits more comfortably within the framework of Egyptian sculptures dating to the reign of Hadrian. The accession file records in the Department of Egyptian Art note that the statue was purchased from a man named Kyticas, a dealer who was known to have worked predominantly in Egypt and who is also associated with identified and alleged fakes such as the copy of the wooden statue of Meryrehashtef in the British Museum.[12]

The authenticity of a British Museum statue (**Fig. 6**) has also been questioned. Budge states that the

[11] 71.10.2; Bothmer, *Miscellanea Wilbouriana* 1, 25–31 and Sachs, *Fakes and Forgeries*, cat. 28.
[12] J. Taylor in *Fake? The art of deception*, no. 166, 162–6.

statue was found in the lining of a sealed well in the Delta; it was initially identified by him as a representation of Ptolemy XII,[13] although the statue does not fit comfortably within the stylistic repertoire of this period and is closer to early Ptolemaic portraits than those of the first century BC. This fragment is unusual because of the partially striated *nemes* headdress, a feature that appears to copy an Old Kingdom tradition; such copies of features found in earlier Egyptian art are common in the Ptolemaic period. However, facial features, such as those on the British Museum statue, reveal a later date for these pieces; certain iconographic or stylistic features indicate that earlier sculptures inspired artists to experiment with the form of royal sculpture. The study of this was the subject of a paper by the present writer which was presented at *Encounters with Ancient Egypt*, a conference held at the Institute of Archaeology in December 2000 and which will be published as part of the proceedings. These very criteria are used to identify a modern forgery but are also valid for original Ptolemaic sculptures and Roman copies.

The British Museum fragment is not identical in style to other 'recognised portraits' of Ptolemy I, although these are extremely problematic in terms of dating, and yet the features are similar with regard to the nose, mouth and broad face; compare, for example, the Sarapeion sphinxes (**Fig. 2**). I have recently suggested that the statue should be dated to the third century BC, but following my recent research on Roman copies of Ptolemaic originals I would now suggest that the modelling on the face and indeed the exaggerated smile could also date to the early Roman period. It has been suggested that the image may be a re-worked pharaonic or Ptolemaic statue on account of the proportions of a small head on broad shoulders.[14] However, there is little evidence to suggest that the Ptolemaic Egyptian sculptors re-cut or a re-modelled statuary in this manner; normally only the cartouche is changed, if present. The peculiar proportions of a small head and broad shoulders are not typical of the Ptolemaic period, but are more commonly found later on Romano-Egyptian sculpture. The statue therefore represents a copy of a copy, further complicating the issue of date, identity and how we define a fake or forgery. Other statues, such as the Hadra dyad, which show an archaising representation of Cleopatra VII and a more contemporary image of her son Caesarion, illustrate how difficult it can be to date images such as the former, which is very similar to the representation of third century queens.[15]

Our desire as scholars to identify and individual sculptural representations and associate them with others does not allow for this more general type of copy or ancient interpretation of original types of image. The existence of Roman copies of earlier Egyptian sculpture and their development in Rome and Egypt raise serious questions concerning the present criteria used by scholars for dating and authenticating Egyptian-style representations of rulers and deities. This phenomenon in itself does not present a problem, since there are sufficient examples with a secure provenance and date to allow a chronological and stylistic sequence to be determined. The problem seems to result from the artificially narrow fields in which the modern scholar works.

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[13] Budge, *Egyptian Sculpture*, 23.
[14] Personal communication: Guy Weil Goudchaux in conversation with Susan Walker.
[15] Ashton, *Ptolemaic Royal Sculpture*, 102–103, no. 42.

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Fig. 1 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Department of Egyptian Art 10.176.44. Rogers Fund, 1910. Copyright of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This image may not be reproduced in any medium for any purpose whatever.

Fig. 2 Alexandria, Sarapeion sphinxes. Photograph by Sally-Ann Ashton, reproduced courtesy of the Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria.

Fig. 3 Representation of Ptolemy VIII, Narmouthis. Photograph by Sally-Ann Ashton.

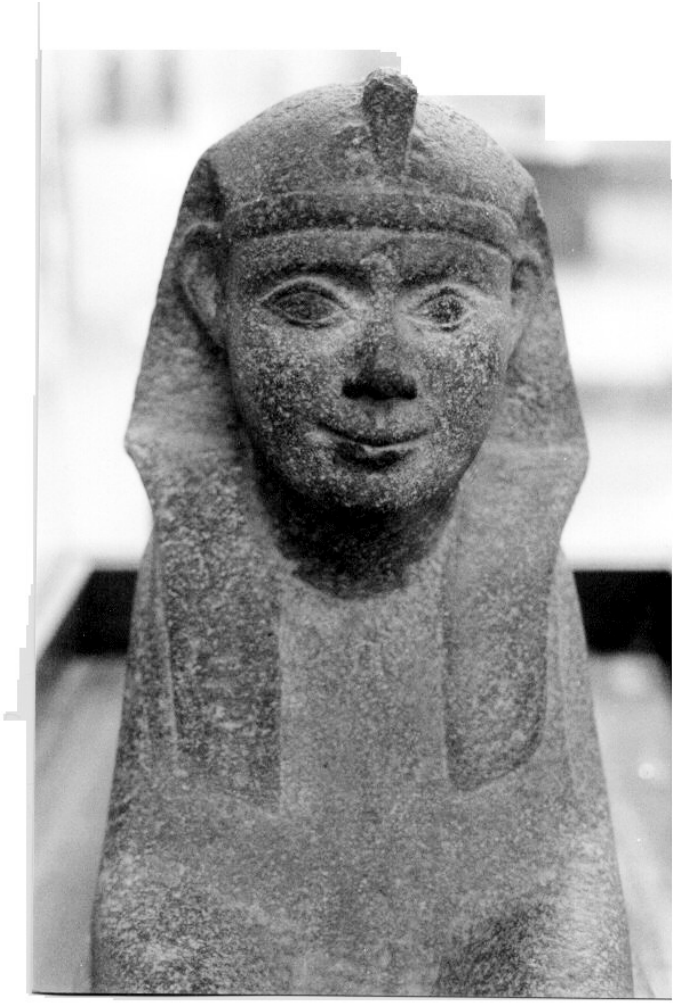

Fig. 4 Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria 28138. Photograph by Sally-Ann Ashton, reproduced courtesy of the Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria.

Fig. 5 Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology UC 8740. Copyright the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL

Fig. 6 The British Museum, Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan EA 1641. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum