

A PORTRAIT OF A PTOLEMAIC PRINCE FROM KOM EL-LOULI

By

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ABSTRACT

[AR]

صورة شخصية لأمير بطلي من كوم اللولي

صورة شخصية من المرمر لصبي صغير غير منشورة، عُثر عليها بحفائر البعثة المصرية بمنطقة كوم اللولي الأثرية بتونا الجبل، الرأس بالحجم الصغير ويوجد بها تدمير بالجزء الايمن للوجه، ويُعتقد أنها تخص أحد الأمراء في نهاية العصر البطلي خلال القرن الأول ق.م، نظرا لأسلوب تصفيف الشعر والعصابة المربوطة أعلى الجبهة والاجزاء المتبقية من ملامح الوجه. ويحاول الباحثان تحديد الفترة الزمنية التي تنتهي إليها هذه الصورة الشخصية، وأيضاً محاولة تحديد هوية صاحبها بناءً على مقارنة الملامح الشخصية والخصائص الفنية مع الأمثلة المشابهة له.

[EN] The current paper proposes hypotheses the dating and identity of an unpublished alabaster portrait found in Kom el-Louli. Based on similar fragments, comparisons with the portraits of Ptolemy V and Caesareion are established. Although it impossible to make definite conclusions given the poor state of preservation of the fragment, it seems safe to assume that it was used in the private chapel, where it was found, to honor a royal prince of the Ptolemaic family.

KEYWORDS: Alabaster, caesarion, head, Kom al-Louli, prince, Ptolemaic, Ptolemy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kom El-Louli¹ is located on the eastern edge of Tuna el-Gebel desert² at the main entrance of the temple of Osiris-Baboon and the subterranean galleries. Because the great Tuna temple of Thoth to the south eventually became gradually a Greek Serapeum, the name of this site bore the Greek name «*Serapeum Kome*»³.

The settlement of Kom el-Louli was the place where the priests and workmen of the animal cemetery dwelled. The priests and the craftsmen of this community were the owners of the Ptolemaic and Roman tombs located between the animal cemetery and the house of the priests along the dromos⁴.

According to the Egyptian-German joint mission, the main construction phase of the settlement was carried out during the reigns of Ptolemy I and Ptolemy VI, i.e., between 3rd B.C to mid-2nd BC⁵.

However, according to the pottery discovered by the Egyptian mission of the Ministry of Antiquities, the settlement rather dates as early as the 26th Dynasty. Thus, based on archaeological evidence at this site, Kom El-Louli included tower houses, cultic houses, and shaft tombs from the Late Period until the end of the Ptolemaic period. A small alabaster head was found at this site. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the

¹By the beginning of the 20th century (1903), Mohammed Chabân discovered a stone naos within a mud structure that bears cartouches of Nectanebo I ; this is now preserved in the Egyptian Museum of Cairo (CG 70014, JE 39508). Unfortunately, where this discovery was made is unknown, but it could have been a building nearby or at Kom El-Louli. On 17th of June 1910, Tewfik Boulos discovered the cemetery opposite the village, Derwa to the north and close to the western mountain (Kom El-Louli now). Furthermore, he discovered three burial shafts, one of them which was rediscovered by the Egyptian Expedition. In January 1913, W. Honroth continued excavations at the site with cooperation of the German Orient Society (DOG) in Tuna el-Gebel. In 2013, a magnetic and geophysical survey had been carried out by the joint mission of Cairo University and University of Munich in order to discover the processional way of the great celebrations at this site. By 2017, the Egyptian mission of the Ministry of Antiquities headed by Sayed Abdelmaik carried out excavations in Kom El-Louli. The mission divided the site into three sections: the first section comprises group of burial shaft tombs, the second section houses tombs cut in the ground, and the third section contains many houses of different styles; For further details, see: FLOSSMANN-SCHUTZE 2014: 198; LEMBKE 2015: 3-6. & FLOSSMANN-SCHÜTZE 2015: 20.

²Tuna el-Gebel necropolis is the main necropolis of Hermopolis Magna (el-Ashmunein) of the New Kingdom and the Late Period. It is situated in Mallawi Province, now in El-Minia Governorate, in Middle Egypt, on the edge of the western desert approximately 300 km south of Cairo. The existence of Tuna el-Gebel was attested during the Saite Period and lasted until Roman times. This remarkable archaeological site extends over for more than 7 km along the cultivated land. LEMBKE & PRELL 2015: 2.

³KESSLER 1990: 183-189; KESSLER & NUR EL-DIN 2005: 131-137; KESSLER 2007: 131-152.

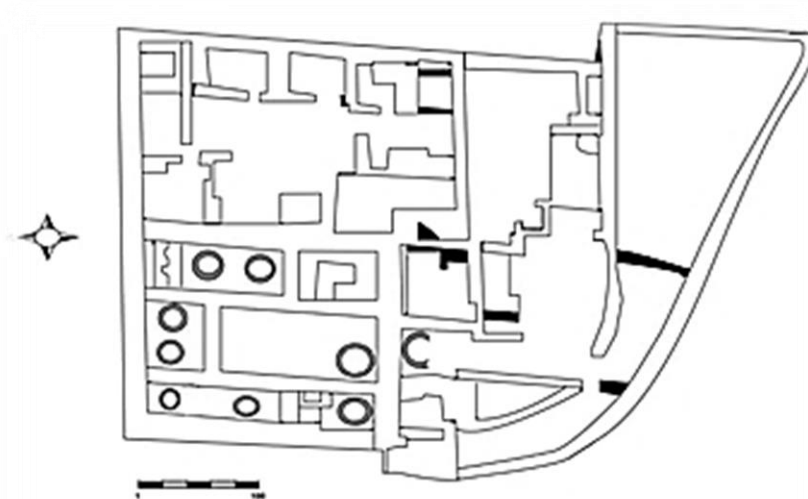
⁴Since 1930, Sami Gabra discovered the catacombs until 1952 on behalf of the Faculty of Arts of Cairo's Fuad el-Awwal University. From 1953 to 1955, The Egyptian Antiquities Service (EAO) continued the work. Extensive surface and underground areas in the necropolis had been excavated at the so-called Great Temple. The excavation team included the architect Alexandre Badawy, the draftsman Jousouf Shoukry, the photographer Ismail Shehab and the excavation assistants. From 1936, Naguib Michail, professor of Egyptology at the University of Cairo, excavated this site. Abd el-Hakam el-Alim did excavation work at the site earlier. For the Demotic inscriptions of Girgis Mattha, see: KESSLER 2011: ff 2.

⁵FLOSSMANN-SCHUTZE 2014: ff 198.

features of this object and to place it in its original archaeological context to determine a probable dating for it.

II. CULTIC HOUSES

These houses are considered cultic due to the presence of a small chapel at the end of the house, which may have been dedicated to ancestors and local deities in some cases. The Egyptian mission headed by Sayed 'Abdel Malek excavated about three houses its roof is currently destroyed opening to the east. The excavated houses are similar in plan and architectural design. The most important one is House N^o.1 [FIGURE 1].



[FIGURE 1]: A plan Illustrator of House N^o 1 in Kom El-Louli© Done by the researchers

This is a rectangular building with a width of 10.75 m from north to south, and a length of 12.20 m from east to west. The house has an entrance located in the middle of the southern wall, which is about 1m in height and 110cm in width from inside a limestone entrance. The entrance leads to a narrow corridor, which opens from the eastern side to a small room. A narrow corridor leads to a large hall in the center of the house (dimensions 6.90 cm X 3.50 cm), where a large quantity of pottery shards has been discovered.

III. THE SMALL CHAPEL

Attached to the central hall on the west side, there is a small rectangular room functioning apparently as a small cultic chapel [FIGURE 2]. There was a small offering table made of limestone as well as two steps of a small mudbrick staircase facing the entrance of this chapel on the north side. The dimensions of this room are 3.50 cm from north to south and 1.45 cm from east to west. The entrance of this room is in the middle of the eastern wall. The walls were once covered with a layer of plaster and drawings representing red and black lines, similar to the colors that are in the chapels inside the catacombs of the god Thoth. A small alabaster head (ca. 5 cm height), which is the topic in question, was discovered inside this chapel [FIGURE 2].



[FIGURE 2]: The small chapel inside of House N^o.1 in Kom El-Louli© Taken by the researchers

IV. DESCRIPTION OF DISCOVERED HEAD

1- Face

This head is made of Egyptian alabaster, probably extracted from the Hatnub quarry, near Tuna El-Gebel⁶. This small head represents facial features of a young boy or child. There is an obvious diagonal destruction of the right side of the face as well as the right eye, the right ear, and the lower part of the face, including the nose, and the mouth.

The left eye is in good state of preservation, despite the small irregular shaped hole in the eye. The left eyebrow is almost unrecognizable due to the rough surface of the face, apparently caused by a hard object [FIGURE 3].



[FIGURE 3]: The small head from Kom El-Louli© Taken by the researchers

The left side of the face is in relatively good condition [FIGURE 4], with the left ear heavily damaged by a hard object. The head bears a small narrow forehead. The side fringes of hair appear above the ear, in addition to the part of the left eye and the forehead.

⁶Hatnub Quarry: It was the most famous quarry of alabaster in the Eastern Desert, about 65 km southeast of El-Amarna. The pottery, hieroglyph inscriptions and hieratic graffiti at the site show that it was in use from the reign of Khufu until the Roman period (c. 2589 BC–AD 300). See: SHAW 1986: 189-212.



[FIGURE 4]: The left side of the face© Taken by the researchers

As for the right side, only the upper part of the right ear and part of the tied diadem are visible [FIGURE 5]. It is worth noticing that the right side of the head is damaged in a way that suggests that this destruction was intentional. In other words, the facial features of the head were destroyed on purpose in order to eliminate the identity of the owner.



[FIGURE 5]: The right side of the face© Taken by the researchers

2-Hair and Diadem

The head is tied with a diadem, a ribbon or headband, that is knotted at the back of the head and its streamers hang in the shape of an inverted V [FIGURE 6]. The short hair of the head is sculptured at the middle of the scalp, is stylized on the front, and hangs below the diadem in the form of scattered fringes on the forehead [FIGURE 7].



[FIGURE 6]: The knotted diadem at the back of the head © Taken by the researchers



[FIGURE 7]: The diadem and hairstyle ©Taken by the researchers

The hair consists of fringes that hang over the forehead, which is also a style that appears in large sculptures⁷. However, the appearance of short fringes of hair under the headdress appeared as early as the second century BC, especially in Egyptianizing portraits. During this era, portraits of Ptolemaic kings such as Ptolemy V and Ptolemy VI bore similar hairstyles accompanied by the Egyptian royal *Nemes* headdress⁸. In official portraits, the headdress was a significant symbol to convey the idea of supreme power enjoyed by a single individual, as it is a symbol of royal status.

With Alexander and his successors, the clearest mark for identifying a member of the royal family was the diadem. It was an unequivocal sign of royalty, thanks to which

⁷For more information about Julio-Claudian dynasty portraits, see: KLEINER 1992: 123-141; BOSCHUNG 1993: 39-79.

⁸RIGGS 2005: 125.

we can come closer to identifying many effigies of the Hellenistic period. Although a Greek symbol that was used by Alexander as a symbol of royalty, the diadem was not adopted by his successors until, at the earliest, 306 BC, when Antigonos was the first to style himself as a king. In due time all the other generals imitated him, including Ptolemy I, who is depicted wearing the diadem in the coinage minted during his reign⁹.

The representation of the diadem with streamers might be taken as evidence of a Ptolemaic dating for this head. The diadem is considered one of the Greek features signifying authority and ruler-ship since the time of Philip II, or the 4th century BC. Under the reign of the Ptolemies, the diadem appeared in many royal portraits. It was executed in the Hellenistic style and developed to have more than one form, most notably the twisted diadem and the ribbon type¹⁰.

Furthermore, the title «*Lord of Diadems*» is attested in some Egyptian temples accompanied by the names of Alexander the Great, his brother Philip Arrhidaeus as well as Ptolemaic kings¹¹.

V. STYLE

The aforementioned head shows a face with obvious childish features, whereas the diadem headband indicates that the head might represent a prince. The most famous childhood Ptolemaic prince portraits belong to Ptolemy V. Despite the fact there is no sculpture of this king in his childhood, as most of them were crafted after he became a king¹², coin portraiture represent him as a child¹³. Examples of coins of Ptolemy V depicting him as a young prince show a headband, a large rounded head, a thin neck, and short hair on his narrow forehead¹⁴ [FIGURE 8]¹⁵. Some of these coins might have been minted in the first years of his reign, when the king was still a child and under guardianship¹⁶.

⁹BOSWORTH & BAYNHAM 2002: 246.

¹⁰STANWICK 2002: 35.

¹¹*Lord of Diadems title*: was attested being associated with name of Alexander the Great in many inscriptions. For instance, there is an inscription over the door of a sanctuary built during his time in the festival temple of Tuthmosis III at Karnak. Another Inscription belongs to the sanctuary in the temple of Amenhotep III at Luxor. A third text is the king's dedicatory inscription of Philip Arrhidaeus at Hermopolis Magna, and another inscription relating to the sanctuary built in his reign at Karnak. SETHE 1904: 6-9; LLOYD 2010: 88-90.

¹²KYRIELEIS 1975: 54.

¹³There are some heads of Ptolemy V as a youth. KYRIELEIS 1975: 173, PL.44[3-4].

¹⁴Coin of Ptolemy V as a child in BMC Ptolemy V 62 164/12 1. 13.

¹⁵KYRIELEIS 1975: 52, Taf.40[1].

¹⁶KYRIELEIS 1975: 52.



[FIGURE 8]: Portrait of Ptolemy V.

The slicked-forward hairstyle and the twisted diadem are two remarkable features that were strongly attested through other Ptolemaic royal portraits by the mid of 1st century BC. Such examples appeared as small heads, which have been discovered in large numbers in Alexandria and the Nile Delta and appeared to have been part of the cultic worship of the Ptolemaic royal ancestors¹⁷. It is possible that they were placed in shrines as votive offerings by private individuals or as figures in household altars¹⁸.

In addition to the assumption that this head might belong to Ptolemy V, it should also be noted that the head discussed in this paper might represent another later Ptolemaic king, namely Ptolemy XV Caesarion (47-30) BC. All sculptures of Caesarion are in Greek-style or Greek-Egyptian style with stylized faces. However, the young man is sometimes shown with a Greek diadem rather than a *nemes* headdress¹⁹.

It should be noted that there are not any multiple examples of the Greek style in the portraits of the late Ptolemies, especially from Ptolemy XIII to XV. Sally-Ann Ashton mentions a few examples that might be dated based on the style of the first century BC²⁰.

A Greek-style portrait for Caesarion made of steatite provides close example [FIGURE 9]²¹. This portrait is also a miniature (5.3 cm in size) and shows carefully sculptured facial features of a young man. The head shows an image of a boy, wearing a twisted diadem over short straight hair from a central spot on the crown of the head and combed forward to form a fringe. The oval shaped head is inclined slightly to the right and is marked with a squared chin. The mouth is straight and the nose has slightly flared nostrils. The eyelids are prominent, and the brows follow the curve of the upper eye-lid, onto a flat forehead²².

¹⁷ ASHTON 1999: ff 145.

¹⁸ ASHTON & GRAJETZKI 2002: 569.

¹⁹ ASHTON 1999: 114.

²⁰ ASHTON 1999: 152.

²¹ ASHTON & GRAJETZKI 2002, 568, FIG.8.

²² The head of Ptolemy XV kept in Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London. UC 49930. ASHTON & GRAJETZKI 2002: 568, FIG.8.



[FIGURE 9]: Greek-style portrait for prince Caesarion made of steatite.

The short hairstyle, as well as the twisted diadem, is also found in a black granite head in Bologna Museum [FIGURE 10]. This piece, dating from the 1st century BC, is also thought to represent Caesarion. Aside from minor damages of the diadem, the features are carefully stylized. His eyes are well carved, and the Egyptian uraeus is visible in front of the diadem. The hairstyle is similar to the head found in Kom el-Louli²³.



[FIGURE 10]: Portrait of Ptolemy XV Caesarion Greek-Egyptian, Inv.N^o.KS 1803© Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico in Italy

Another example is a black basalt portrait of Caesarion [FIGURE 11], which includes the remains of a back pillar. In this example, the prince is depicted wearing a headband and has a straight fringe with less carefully rendered hair at the top of the head. He has a small, slightly down-turned mouth with wide eyes and a prominent chin²⁴.

²³The head H: 10 cm, and preserved at Inv.N^o.KS 1803; Janos Kminek-Szedlo 1895.

²⁴MICHALOWSKI 1955: 138.



[FIGURE 11]: Portrait of Ptolemy XV Caesarion Greek-Egyptian.

VI. CONCLUSION

This head was found in a chapel inside the house, and based its archaeological context and artistic comparisons with similar examples it is possible that this portrait is part of a successful ruler-cult. A ruler-cult a form of state religion in which a king or a dynasty of rulers is deified as demigods or full deities. The official deification of princes had been gaining popularity ever since the death of Alexander as a Ptolemaic imitation. Later the ruler-cult included those who were deified in their lives and kept their divinity after death: the other Ptolemaic kings, their queens, and princes²⁵. Private citizens have kept the statuettes and portraits of royals in the Ptolemaic period²⁶. This hypothesis could be confirmed that this head is a cultic head. The head found in Kom el-Louli represents a Ptolemaic prince, its hair conforming to the late Hellenistic style and therefore very close to the known portraits of Caesareion.

This statue may have been originally used in a private chapel to provide support for the ruler cult, a practice that is frequently observed in the Ptolemaic period²⁷. The identification of this fragment as a head of Caesarion would easily explain the intentional destruction of the right side of the head, which may have occurred after the death of Caesarion. This is consistent with the opinion of Ashton, who thought that the images of Cleopatra and Caesarion were destroyed by or on behalf of Augustus following his conquest of Egypt²⁸.

²⁵ZAKI & AHMED 2021: 2-3.

²⁶THOMPSON 1973: 119-20.

²⁷THOMPSON 1973: 119-20.

²⁸ASHTON 1999: 55.

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