

ROYAL STATUES IN EGYPT 300 BC-AD 220

CONTEXT AND FUNCTION

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Cover image: East Sphinx and the Column of Diocletian at the Serapeum in Alexandria Photo: E Brophy

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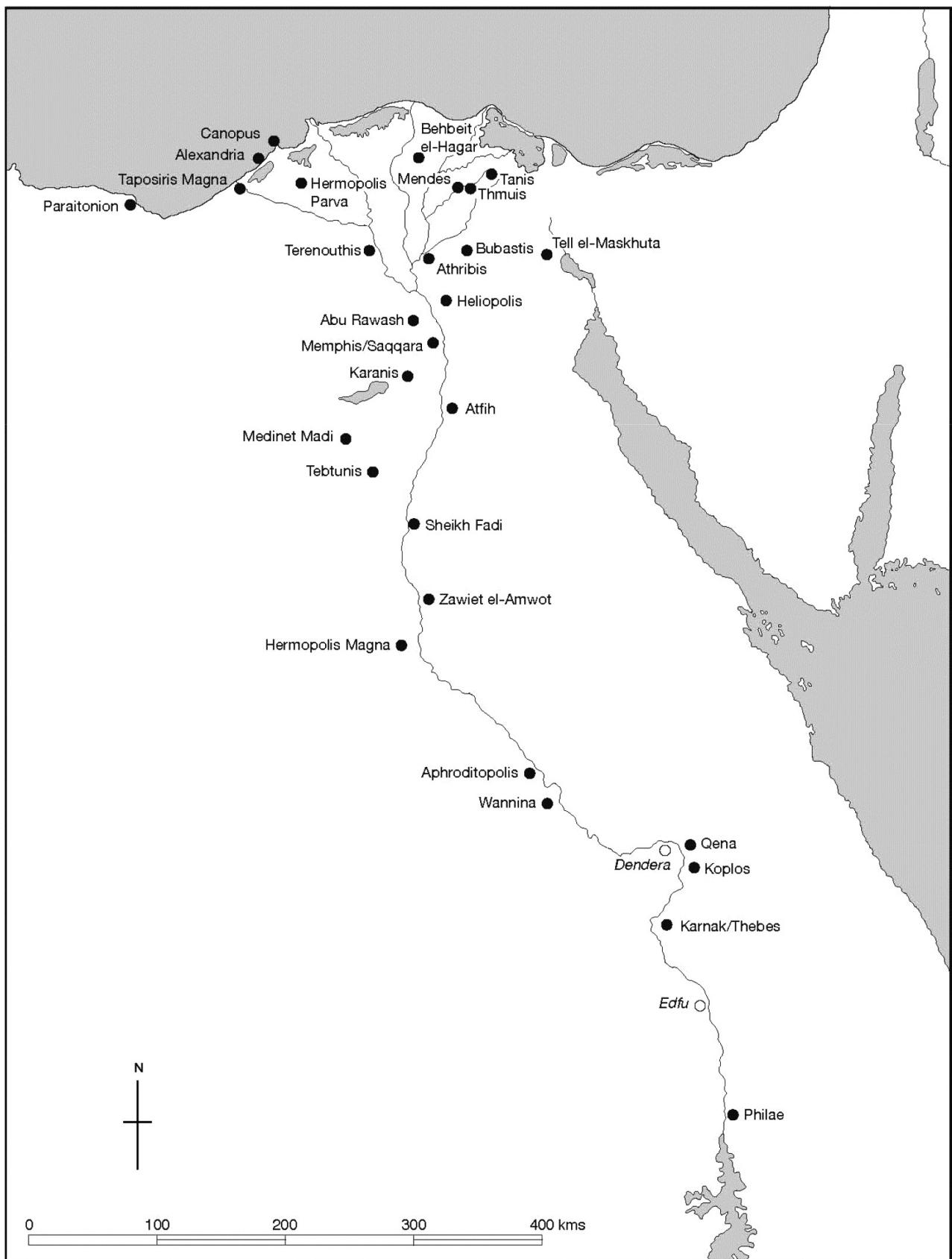
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MAP 1. EGYPT (ALL SITES LABELLED WITH BLACK DOTS PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF ROYAL SCULPTURE) (IMAGE: AUTHOR)

Chapter 1

Introduction

The primary aim of this book is to approach Ptolemaic and Imperial royal sculpture in Egypt from a contextual point of view. To treat the available sculptural material from an archaeological perspective, and to use this to consider their distribution, style, placement, and functions, so as to bring a new dimension to the wider understandings of these statues. To this end, the aim of this study is to focus on the sculptural material that is identifiably ‘royal’, dates between 300 BC and AD 220 (between the rules of Ptolemy I and Caracalla), and has an archaeological context; a secure find spot or recoverable provenance within Egypt. The sculptures themselves include full statues, fragmentary heads, and inscribed bases, and can be recognised as ‘large scale’ material, identified as statue heads no smaller than 15 cm. Due to this limit, smaller faience and terracotta heads or figurines will not be discussed, nor will the ‘small Alexander heads’ from Alexandria.¹ Sphinxes with human heads identified as being from the Ptolemaic and Imperial periods are included as they traditionally represent the king. Because of these restrictions the sculptural material available is limited, as many examples do not have a secure context or find spot. This criterion provides a group of 157 statuary items that are presented in 103 catalogue entries.

There are exceptions to every rule, and in this discussion there are two objects that do not fit the criteria but have been included for specific reasons. The first is a Ptolemaic head (41) from the site of Karanis in the Fayoum region which, though smaller than the identified size, has been included due to its unusual and well-documented find spot. The second is the head of Augustus (96) in the British Museum from the site of Meroe in the Sudan. This head is not from Egypt, but has been included because its original location was most likely in Upper Egypt, and it too has a well-documented and discussed provenance.

In analysing this material, I focus on a number of questions and themes. The principal questions I consider are: where were the statues placed? How did the statues fit into their contexts? What was the relationship between statue category and context? What, if any, changes can be identified over time, particularly between Ptolemaic and Imperial rule? And what does this show regarding the function and purpose of these statues in Egypt? Alongside these questions I also consider the commissioning of the statues and the role of audience.

Previous Scholarship

Previous research has taken a primarily stylistic approach to royal statues, focusing on identities and attributes,

and placing them within a socio-political and artistic context. They have also divided the material by cultural style, analysing Greek and Egyptian material separately, creating two distinct spheres of scholarship. The major area of discussion has been the extent to which influence between the two stylistic traditions can be identified.

Bernard Bothmer’s catalogue *Egyptian Sculpture of the Late Period 700-100 BC* (1969) was one of the first to bring together a collection of Ptolemaic sculpture, including royal material. Bothmer argued that Greek influence could be identified in Egyptian sculpture. In his study of Ptolemaic portraits, *Bildnisse der Ptolemäer* (1975), Helmut Kyrieleis analysed Ptolemaic Greek-style material, producing a comprehensive catalogue of statues, heads, and figurines. His emphasis was on portrait analysis, and continued the idea that there was a ‘mixed’ style in the material, combining Greek and Egyptian forms.

Robert Bianchi argued against this concept in *Cleopatra’s Egypt* (1988), claiming that what had been identified as Greek influence actually had its roots in more ‘realistic’ Dynastic sculpture, meaning material from the pre-Ptolemaic or ‘pharaonic’ eras of Egypt. In the same year, Bert Smith produced his *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* dedicating a significant proportion to the discussion of Ptolemaic Greek and hard stone Egyptian sculpture. In his analysis, Smith writes that the idea of a ‘mixed’ statuary group is misleading, as there is only evidence for the use of Greek features on Egyptian statues, confined to the head. Jack Josephson’s work, *Egyptian Royal Sculpture of the Late Period, 400-246 BC* (1997) returned to Bothmer’s earlier view (that Greek influence can be identified in Egyptian sculpture) and through focusing on fourth and third century BC sculpture provides a clearer picture of the relationship between 30th Dynasty and early Ptolemaic material. At the Fifth International Congress of Italian Egyptian Studies entitled *Faraoni come dei, Tolemei come Faraoni* (2005) edited by Anna Maria Donadoni Roveri, a range of Ptolemaic and early Imperial sculpture and associated themes were discussed alongside general questions concerning Ptolemaic Egypt

More recently, two works have focused specifically on Egyptian statues and the question of Greek interaction. Sally-Ann Ashton’s monograph, *Ptolemaic Royal Statues from Egypt: The Interaction between Greek and Egyptian Traditions* (2002) focused on the mixture of different styles and why this evolved. Paul Stanwick in *Portraits of the Ptolemies: Greek Kings as Egyptian Pharaohs* (2002), has provided the most up-to-date and comprehensive catalogue of Egyptian- style Ptolemaic royal statues. He also considered the role of placement and context in relation to

¹ Kyrieleis 1975; Laube 2012.

statue function, on both a geographic and general level. He noted several trends in the sculpture relating to differences in style, material, and quality throughout Egypt.

Imperial statues from Egypt have received less attention in scholarship. The earliest work, Paul Graindor's *Bustes et statues-portraits d'Égypte Romaine* (1937), provides a small catalogue of Roman era sculpture, including a group of Imperial portraits. The only major work focusing solely on Imperial statues in Egypt is Zsolt Kiss' *Etudes sur le portrait imperial romain en Egypte* (1984) in which he provides a comprehensive catalogue of Roman royal sculpture, though several identifications are questionable. Imperial imagery is found in other catalogues, such as Günter Grimm's *Kunst der Ptolemaer-und Romerzeit im Agyptischen Museum Kairo* (1975).

Approach

In order to analyse the evidence and answer my research questions, I approach the available material from both a thematic and geographical framework. The chapters of the book are thematic, each focusing on a different area, whilst the catalogue presents the material in a geographical format, culminating in Alexandria, mirroring that city's place as 'outside' Egypt, and its location as a chapter in itself. The chapters themselves are also divided, with the first two providing background to the creation, style, and historical and cultural environment of Ptolemaic and Imperial Egypt, and the following chapters focusing on the catalogue material, ending with Alexandria and the outside world. I provide a brief outline of each chapter below.

In Chapter Two: the Textual Sources I analyse the principal textual evidence (narratives, inscriptions, and letters) that provide descriptions of various royal statues and their contexts. These sources act as a gateway into understanding placement and function, providing insight into the amount of material that existed in Egypt, where it was located, and how and why it was created.

Chapter Three focuses on the Cult Statues, for which there is little sculptural evidence. Ruler cult and Imperial cult were popular forms of worship during this period, with three different traditions (Egyptian, Greek, Roman) present in Egypt. Statues related to them can be identified in texts and archaeological material. In looking at this material, the aim is to build up a picture of these various cults, and the statues position within them.

Chapter Four begins the focus on the material in the catalogue. Entitled Categories and Contexts, my aim here is to establish the different categories of statue and the principal locations for statue placement. Chapter Five is focused on the discussion of the surroundings or environment of the royal statues, and in identifying the relationship of this environment to the statues themselves. I also use this chapter as an opportunity to discuss the Egyptian Statues with Greek features, focusing on the collection that exist at the sites of Medinet Madi and

Tebtunis in the Fayoum. In Chapter Six, I analyse the relationship between context and function, identifying how style and placement is an intrinsic part of how the royal statue is expected to function. I also discuss some of the more unusual elements of the evidence, such as Roman classical structures and sculpture located next to Egyptian ones.

Chapter Seven focuses on Alexandria, and recent work by Jean-Yves Empereur, Franck Goddio, and Judith McKenzie has produced a clearer picture of its environment. I have purposely chosen to focus on Alexandria last due to its position as both a central yet liminal city in Egypt. I have also chosen to analyse the city separately because of its material; it provides a high proportion of the evidence and a range of different statuary categories (seen in Table 1). In analysing the material from Alexandria, I not only identify context, placement, and environment within the city, but also attempt to identify whether this fits into the patterns observed in the rest of Egypt.

I end by discussing the material found outside Egypt. This material reinforces several of the arguments and patterns concerning placement and style, demonstrating a cohesive picture of context throughout this study.