

Granite head of a bald man



From Egypt
Ptolemaic period, 1st century BC

Realistic bone structure and facial features

This head is probably from a kneeling statue: it has the remains of a back pillar behind the head and the man is looking up rather than ahead. The statue perhaps showed the owner offering a shrine or the figure of a deity.

The face is not idealized as was typical of earlier statues, for example the limestone statue of a husband and wife from around 1300 BC. Instead, the man is shown with realistic features and a solemn expression. A bald head usually signifies membership of the priesthood in Egyptian art. Here it is used to indicate middle age and the heavy jowls also suggest that the man is past his youth.

It was once thought that this realistic representation showed the actual appearance of the statue's owner. In fact, it is as stylized as the earlier, idealized statues, but in a different way. The modelling of realistic bone structure and facial features was perhaps influenced by contact with the artistic traditions of the Mediterranean world. However, this type of representation does have some precedents in Egyptian art: several kings of the Middle Kingdom (2040-1750 BC), such as Senwosret I, are shown with a melancholy expression, as if weighed by the cares of rule.

E.R. Russmann, *Eternal Egypt: masterworks of* (University of California Press, 2001)