



# THE FEMALE PORTRAIT STATUE IN THE GREEK WORLD

SHEILA DILLON

书馆

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*The*  
*Female Portrait Statue*  
*in the Greek World*

SHEILA DILLON

*Duke University*



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## THE FEMALE PORTRAIT STATUE IN THE GREEK WORLD

In this book, Sheila Dillon offers the first detailed analysis of the full range of evidence for female portrait statues in Greek art. A major component of Greek sculptural production, particularly in the Hellenistic period, female portrait statues are mostly missing from our histories of Greek portraiture. Whereas male portraits tend to stress their subject's distinctiveness through physiognomic individuality, portraits of women are more visually homogeneous. In defining their subjects according to normative ideals of beauty rather than notions of corporeal individuality, Dillon argues that Greek portraits of women work differently than those of men and must be approached with different expectations. She examines the historical phenomenon of the commemoration of women in portrait statues from the fourth century to the first century BCE and traces the continued use of the idealizing, "not portrait" style into the Roman period at a select number of sites.

Sheila Dillon is associate professor of Greek and Roman art in the Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies at Duke University. A recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Academy in Rome, and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, she is the author of *Ancient Greek Portrait Sculpture: Contexts, Subjects, and Styles*, which was awarded the James R. Wiseman Book Award by the Archaeological Institute of America in 2008.

Do you think that Greek art ever tells us what the Greek people were like? Do you believe that the Athenian women were like the stately dignified figures of the Parthenon frieze, or like those marvelous goddesses who sat in the triangular pediments of the same building? If you judge from the art, they certainly were so. But read an authority, like Aristophanes, for instance. You will find that the Athenian ladies laced tightly, wore high-heeled shoes, dyed their hair yellow, painted and rouged their faces, and were exactly like any silly fashionable or fallen creature of our own day. The fact is that we look back on the ages entirely through the medium of art, and art, very fortunately, has never once told us the truth.

(Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying*)

The people of Croton, once upon a time . . . desired to enrich with distinguished paintings the temple of Juno. They therefore paid a large fee to Zeuxis of Herakleia, who was considered at that time to excel all other painters. He said that he wished to paint a picture of Helen so that the portrait though silent and lifeless might embody the surpassing beauty of womanhood. This delighted the people of Croton, who had often heard that he surpassed all others in the portrayal of women. . . . Zeuxis immediately asked them what girls they had of surpassing beauty. They took him directly to a palaestra and showed him many very handsome young men. . . . As he was greatly admiring the handsome bodies, they said, "There are in our city the sisters of these men; you may get an idea of their beauty from these youths." "Please send me then the most beautiful of these girls, while I am painting the picture that I have promised, so that the true beauty may be transferred from the living model to the mute likeness." Then the citizens of Croton by a public decree assembled the girls in one place and allowed the painter to choose whom he wished. . . . He chose five because he did not think all the qualities which he sought to combine in a portrayal of beauty could be found in one person.

(Cicero, *De Inventione*, 2.1.1-3, trans. H. M. Hubbell, 1976, Loeb Classical Library)

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Various portions of this project have been presented in public lectures between 2003 and 2009 at the Archaeological Institute of America's annual meeting in New Orleans, the University of Michigan, the Center for the Ancient Mediterranean at Columbia University, Wofford College in South Carolina, the College Art Association meetings in Boston, and Hollins University in Virginia. I thank the audiences for their comments, criticisms, and encouragement. Part of Chapter 2 appeared in a much earlier draft as "Portraits of Women in the Early Hellenistic Period" in the volume *Early Hellenistic*

*Portraiture: Image, Style, Context*, edited by Peter Schultz and Ralf von den Hoff.

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This book is dedicated to the many mothers, daughters, and sisters in my family, but especially to my sister-in-law Kalli; like the women commemorated in these portrait statues, she is *pros hypodeigma aretēs*.

Carrboro, North Carolina  
September 2009

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations of journals and standard works follow the format set out in *American Journal of Archaeology* 104 (2000) 10–24. Abbreviations specific to this work follow.

Bergemann, *Demos und Thanatos* = Bergemann, J. *Demos und Thanatos: Untersuchungen zum Wertsystem der Polis im Spiegel der attischen Grabreliefs des 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. und zur Funktion der gleichzeitigen Grabbauten* (Munich: Biering and Brinkmann, 1997).

CAT = Clairmont, C. *Classical Attic Tombstones* (Kilchberg, Switzerland: Akanthus, 1993–1995).

Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess* = Connelly, J. B. *Portrait of a Priestess. Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Eule, *Hellenistische Bürgerinnen* = Eule, J. C. *Hellenistische Bürgerinnen aus Kleinasien. Weibliche Gewandstatuen in ihrem antiken Kontext* (Istanbul: Task Vakfi, 2001).

Kabus-Preisshofen, *Kos* = Kabus-Preisshofen, R. *Die hellenistische Plastik der Insel Kos. AM-BH 14* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1989).

Kaltsas, *Sculpture* = Kaltsas, N. *Sculpture in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens*. Translated by David Hardy (Los Angeles: J.P. Getty Museum, 2002).

Linfert, *Kunstzentren* = Linfert, A. *Kunstzentren hellenistischer Zeit: Studien an weiblichen Gewandstatuen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976).

Löhr, *Familienweihungen* = Löhr, C. *Griechische Familienweihungen: Untersuchungen einer Repräsentationsform von ihren Anfängen bis zum Ende des 4. Jhs. v. Chr.* (Rahden/Westf.: Leidorf, 2000).



- Marcadé, *Délos* = Marcadé, J. *Au Musée de Délos. Étude sur la Sculpture Hellénistique en ronde bosse découverte dans l'île*. BÉFAR 215 (Paris: Boccard, 1969).
- Mendel = Mendel, G. *Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines et Byzantines* (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1966 reprint of original edition, Istanbul: Musees Impériaux Ottomans, 1912).
- Pfuhl and Möbius = Pfuhl, E. and Möbius, H. *Die ostgriechische Grabreliefs I* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1977).
- Schmidt, *Statuenbasen* = Schmidt, I. *Hellenistische Statuenbasen*. (1994 Ph.D. Diss., University of Mainz, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995).
- Schultz and von den Hoff = Schultz, P. and von den Hoff, R., eds. *Early Hellenistic Portraiture: Image, Style, Context* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- Smith et al., *Roman Portrait Statuary* = Smith, R. R. R., Dillon, S., Hallett, C. H., Lenaghan, J., and van Voorhis, J. *Roman Portrait Statuary from Aphrodisias. Aphrodisias II* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2006).
- Stewart, *Attika* = Stewart, A. F. *Attika. Studies in Athenian Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*. Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, Supplementary Paper no. 14. London, 1979.
- Tanagra* = Musée du Louvre, *Tanagra. Mythe et archéologie* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2003).
- van Bremen, *Limits of Participation* = van Bremen, R. *The Limits of Participation: Women and Civic Life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1996).

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## Finding the Female Portrait in Greek Art

When the famous Greek artist Zeuxis was commissioned by the people of Croton to paint a portrait of the great beauty Helen of Troy, the painter looked about for a suitable model. Not finding in any one woman alone the physical perfection he was seeking, Zeuxis blended the features of five women to produce his portrait of ideal female beauty. This fragmented strategy of artistic production, in which various elements from observable reality are combined, generalized, and improved upon to produce a more satisfying result, is one that pervades the discussion of image making in Greek art.<sup>1</sup> Images of women in particular seem to have been constructed in this way, perhaps because of the specific difficulties associated with the representation of feminine beauty, the defining feature of female identity. Indeed, the female portraits studied here clearly show that the individuality and personal characterization of the portrait subject was much less important than the representation of virtue and desirability that beauty was thought to portray. As Elizabeth Cropper has observed for the female portrait in Italian Renaissance painting, “the differences between the representation of beauty and the beauty represented are often elided, and, as a result, peculiar problems of identity and efficacy are attached to the interpretation of female portraiture.”<sup>2</sup> So it is with the female portrait in Greek art.

This book is an attempt to reframe the history of Greek portraiture by moving away from its exclusive interest in male portraits and such questions as the development of physiognomic realism to focus on the portraits of women. Although female portrait statues were a major component of Greek sculptural production, particularly in the Hellenistic period, they are mostly missing from our histories of Greek portraiture. The life-size marble portrait statue of the priestess Aristonoe, for example, is arguably one of the most



fully documented portrait statues in Greek art (Figure 1, Chapter 1).<sup>3</sup> We know where and roughly when the statue was set up, and we know who dedicated it and why; and the three crucial components of any portrait statue monument – the head, the body, and the inscribed statue base – are in this case all preserved. The extent of our information about this portrait statue is in fact extraordinary, yet this monument plays no role in our histories of Greek portraiture, probably because Aristonoe's beautiful face differs little from the faces of countless other women – both mortal and divine – in Greek art. In defining their subjects according to normative ideals of beauty rather than notions of corporeal individuality, portraits of women work differently than portraits of men and must be approached with different expectations. Rather than excluding these images of women from the history of Greek portraiture, it is our conception of the portrait that needs to be critically engaged.<sup>4</sup>

It must be admitted at the outset, however, that the portrait statue of Aristonoe represents the exception rather than the rule for most of the material included in this book; that is, very few of the portraits presented here are preserved as a complete ensemble of base, body, and head. Indeed, given the real difficulty of identifying detached female heads as portraits based on their appearance alone, I have organized the material in a way that is different from most studies of Greek male portraiture, which tend to focus first and sometimes exclusively on the portrait heads. I begin instead with the epigraphic evidence, because the inscribed statue bases provide unequivocal evidence for the existence of portraits of women, particularly in the fourth century from which very little sculptural evidence is preserved. In fact, if we were to rely on the extant statues alone, we might conclude that female portraiture was a phenomenon only of the later Hellenistic period. The draped statues, which are indeed mainly Hellenistic or later in date, are dealt with next. A core number of these statues are securely identified as portraits based on a variety of factors, including context, scale, costume, and posture. Although some undocumented figures might be goddesses given the fact that the portrait statues of some women – in particular priestesses – could wear costumes that were similar to those worn by the goddesses they served, many of the draped figures are recognizable as mortal women by their scale and the real contemporary dress they wear. The portrait heads are presented last. Those heads that are still attached to draped bodies that are themselves widely accepted as portrait statues constitute the core examples; these include the statue of Aristonoe from Rhamnous, the portrait of Baebia from Magnesia, and a group of unidentified female portraits from Kos. Because these examples are all Hellenistic (or later) in date, it was necessary to organize the material in this chapter in reverse chronological order; the better-preserved and documented Hellenistic portraits are presented before the more exiguous evidence for the portraits of the late Classical period. Adhering to a more traditional chronological arrangement of