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The Porticello Bronzes Once Again

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Citation

Ridgway, Brunilde S. 2010. "The Porticello Bronzes Once Again." *American Journal of Archaeology* 114.2: 331-342.

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Source: *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 114, No. 2 (April 2010), pp. 331-342

Published by: Archaeological Institute of America

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25684278>

Accessed: 09-10-2019 17:40 UTC

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The Porticello Bronzes Once Again

BRUNILDE S. RIDGWAY

Abstract

Approximately 20 fragments of bronze statuary were recovered in the 1970s from a wreck off the coast of Calabria near the village of Porticello, but only one of these pieces, the long-bearded head of an elderly man (P1), has attracted scholarly attention because of its pronounced realism. A second male head (P2) was smuggled abroad almost immediately upon recovery. It had remained unknown until it was returned to Italy from Basel, Switzerland, in 1993; but after the first announcements, it received scant official mention, and doubts have even been expressed about its connection with the other bronzes from the Porticello wreck. It is here argued that such connection can be proved on the basis of stylistic and technical evidence, which should place both heads ca. 430–420 B.C.E. In addition, the idealized features of the head from Basel (P2) confirm that even the previously known “philosopher” from Porticello (P1) does not portray a known personage, but rather a fictional character such as a mythological being or an epic hero. The bronzes from the wreck, which include some athletic nude males, should be examined together before a proper assessment is attempted.*

INTRODUCTION

“Inaspettata e inasperata,”¹ the 1993 restitution to Italy of a short-bearded bronze head that had been in Switzerland for approximately 25 years was hailed

as a major event that created a flurry of newspaper accounts,² as indeed it should have. The sculpture is an original Greek work, a rare occurrence; it allegedly comes from a dated, albeit secondary, context with a definite terminus ante quem of ca. 400–380 B.C.E., and it belongs with a group of other bronze fragments that include the famous long-bearded head of a so-called philosopher—referred to here as P(orticello) 1 (fig. 1). These circumstances led to the reasonable expectation that a lengthy and detailed account would have promptly appeared in scholarly journals. Yet only a few general works have so far mentioned the “Basel Head,” so named after its Swiss sojourn (fig. 2). Two technical reports on its possible method of manufacture have instead been published and, although called provisional, agree on important if controversial points. More unsettling is that this short-bearded head is only tentatively, even doubtfully, cited as coming from the Porticello wreck, and the issue is said to be in need of further study. My direct acquaintance with the bronze material from the ship that sunk off the coast of Calabria and my brief inspection of the returned piece in the Reggio Calabria Museum in July 1998 prompt me to write this note, in hope of offering some clarification on the issue.³

* This article is dedicated to the memory of a great expert, Claude Rolley. I wish to thank George F. Bass and Carol C. Mattusch for their help and advice, although neither should be considered responsible for my opinions. I gratefully acknowledge the help of Del Ramers, image specialist at Bryn Mawr College, who digitalized for me the slides of the Porticello fragments from the beautiful photographs by Donald A. Frey (Institute of Nautical Archaeology at Texas A&M University) and the help of James P. Delgado (president and CEO, Institute of Nautical Archaeology at Texas A&M University), who readily gave permission for their publication. A special note of thanks to Rino Labate (Messina University), who on my behalf tried in vain to obtain photographs of the Basel head from the Reggio Calabria Museum but could secure an excellent image from the archives of Roberto Laruffa, who graciously allowed its publication. Pamela Webb read the first draft of this article and provided helpful comments. Three anonymous reviewers for the *AJA* made me strengthen my arguments and supplied useful references. Editor-in-Chief Naomi J. Norman deserves special acknowledgment for her

careful editing, help, and patience in dealing with a computer-challenged author. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

¹ “Unexpected and un hoped for” (Lattanzi 1996a, 727, pl. 54). In announcing (in a single paragraph) the return of the head, Lattanzi (1996a, 727) adds: “by now without doubt from the same Porticello sea that in 1969 returned to us the cargo of a ship with the famous, very beautiful head of the so-called Philosopher” (emphasis added). The title of a second paper by Lattanzi (1993; cited by Paoletti 1993 n. 8) seems more confident about a Porticello provenance; cf. *infra* n. 28.

² “At least 15 national and regional newspapers commemorated the [return] ceremony” on 8 February 1993, according to Paoletti (1993, 5 nn. 2–4), who lists several titles.

³ For my analysis of the bronzes, which constitutes the official American publication, see Ridgway 1986, 2004a (reprint of 1968 and update), 1987 (full publication of all fragments with catalogue and discussion). For the official Italian publication, which, by stipulation, had to precede the American, see Paribeni 1984.

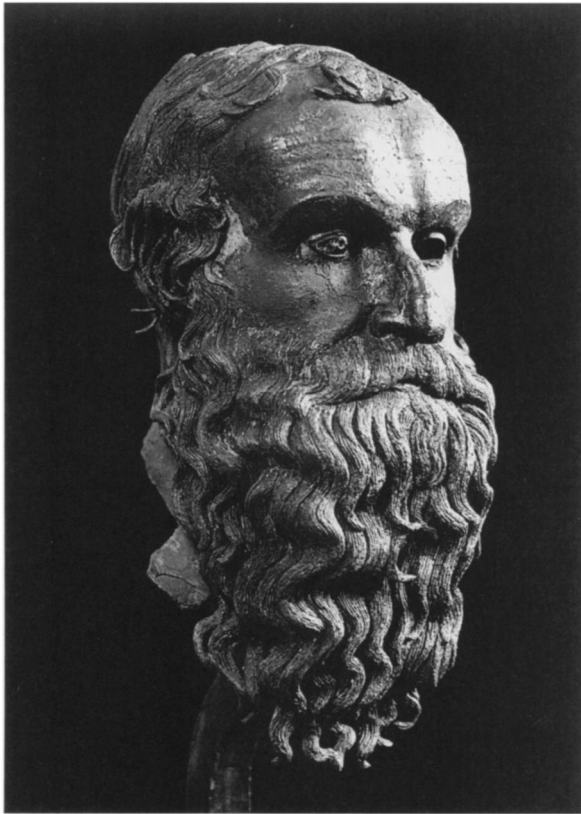


Fig. 1. Head P1 from the Porticello wreck (D. Frey; courtesy Institute of Nautical Archaeology, Texas A&M University).

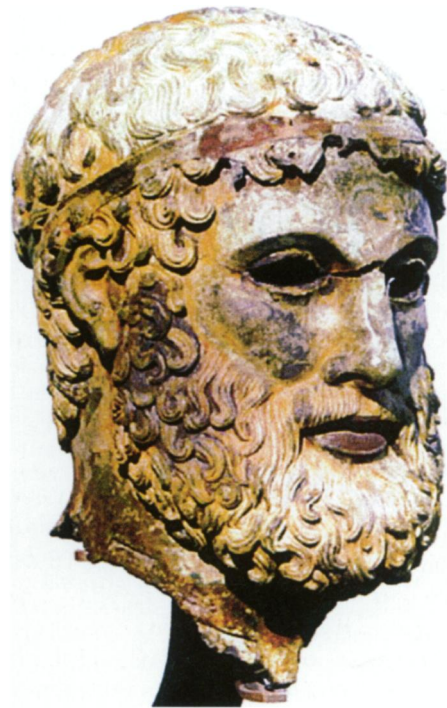


Fig. 2. Head P2. Reggio Calabria Museum (© Archivio Laruffa Editore, Reggio Calabria).

THE WRECK

As is well known, the Porticello wreck (so named after the nearest Calabrian landmark) was first discovered in 1969 by illicit divers who, before being detected, brought to the surface a great number of amphoras and several lead fittings for anchors, which they promptly sold as antiquities and scrap metal. They also recovered almost all the bronze statuary fragments from the ship cargo and managed to smuggle abroad one of them, a short-bearded male head, before the local Italian authorities could intervene. In 1970, the Archaeological Soprintendenza in Reggio Calabria assigned the task of conducting a scientific excavation of the wreck to a team from the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. In

collaboration with the diving unit of the carabinieri from nearby Messina, the American investigators were able to recover a quantity of objects from the ship cargo as well as one more bronze fragment that joined a larger piece of drapery the Italian police had seized from the looters.⁴ These finds proved essential in establishing a fairly precise date for the time of the wreck (ca. 415–385 B.C.E.) as well as verifying that the confiscated sculptures indeed came from it. This second evidence is crucial in that, at first, the long-bearded head of the “philosopher” (P1) found by the illicit diggers, on the basis of its realism, had been dated to the Hellenistic period—a chronology that found some adherents even after the official publication of the wreck appeared.⁵

⁴ A full account of the discovery and excavation of the wreck is given by Eiseman (Eiseman and Ridgway 1987, 3–8, plans 1–4). For a more succinct account, see Sabbione 2007, 183–87. He gives the possible number of amphoras sold by the looters as “forse un centinaio,” perhaps about 100 (Sabbione 2007, 183).

⁵ Although slight modifications to the range originally sug-

gested have been proposed, a date of ca. 400 B.C.E. for the wreck seems now universally accepted on the basis of objects recovered from the ship’s galley and the types of amphoras in the cargo. For a later dating of the “philosopher” (my P1) in recent times, see, e.g., Giuliano 1998, not seen, but cited as an “impossibly low date” by Schultz and von den Hoff (2007, 6 n. 36) and as “3rd century B.C.E.” by Sabbione 2007, 187.

The missing second head became known through a composite drawing, an identikit created by the Italian police on the basis of information provided by the looters and distributed to various newspapers (fig. 3). A significant detail was the break at the root of the nose, extending across to the right eye. During its two decades of absence from Italy, several other items had been proposed as candidates for this smuggled Porticello piece, but all proved invalid. Immediate recognition and acceptance, however, followed Basel's gesture in returning the head in its possession, which had remained unpublished and unexhibited since its acquisition in 1969. It is here therefore cited as P(orticello)2.⁶

TECHNICAL ISSUES

Despite this initial enthusiasm, technical analyses of P2 carried out in Italy have introduced elements of doubt, which are reflected in the official publications dealing with it. The first scientific report, in 1996, suggested that the question of the head's connection with the Porticello wreck "remains open." It added that "although the composition of the alloy in many ways matches that of a nude fragment from Porticello," many technical difficulties remain.⁷ The second account, in 2003, accompanied by excellent detailed color photographs, basically repeats that statement: tested against an anatomical piece "surely" from the wreck, the alloys appear "substantially identical," but, because of considerable technical differences, no incontrovertible proof exists except for the testimony of the robbers.⁸

The two scientific studies also agree on the manufacturing process of the head: it was cast in a bivalve mold, right and left, with join running from the center of the face to the center of the nape of the neck, thus

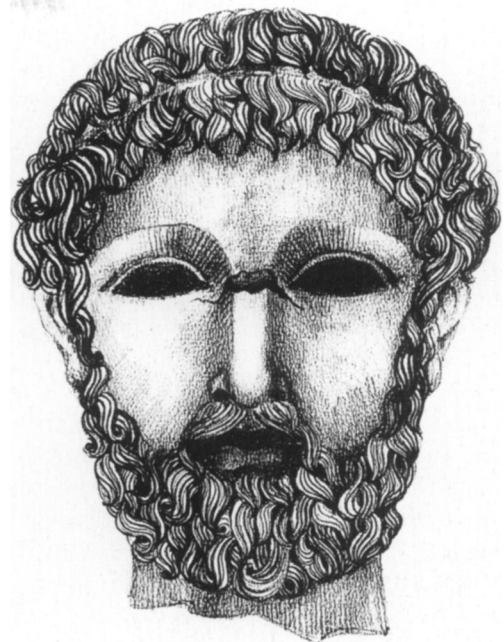


Fig. 3. Identikit drawing released by Italian police to newspapers in 1978.

dividing the head down the middle—a most unusual procedure.⁹ The studies note also the internal addition of a separate element, applied over the joining point of the two molds with their wax coating, to secure the safety of the cast; yet the descriptions in these publications are ambiguous and may lead to different interpretations. Specifically, the later text does not mention the material of the added *cordolo*, a word I take to mean here "border" or "strip," as visible in two

⁶ For a drawing of the identikit, see Paoletti 1993, 6 (see also fig. 3 herein); other attempted (but erroneous) identifications are mentioned (Paoletti 1993, 7). For a more recent illustration of the identikit, see Prisco and Fiorentino 2003, 96, fig. 70. Lattanzi (2007, 188) still refers to the second head (my P2) as "Testa di Basilea."

⁷ Prisco 1996. An Italian edition of this publication exists (Pugliese Carratelli 1996), but I only have access to its English version.

⁸ For the first technical analysis, see Prisco 1996. For the second analysis, see Prisco and Fiorentino (2003, 95–6), which reads, in part: "Manca dunque una prova inoppugnabile—come potrebbe essere un attacco fra i pezzi—che renda certa la presenza della testa di Basilea a bordo dell'imbarcazione naufragata nello stretto di Messina; l'ipotesi rimane così per ora affidata alla sola testimonianza delle persone all'epoca coinvolte nel furto." An English summary (Prisco and Fiorentino 2003, 96) states that the head's "pertinence to the original

load [of the Porticello wreck] should be evaluated with great care." Lattanzi (2003), discussing the installation of various objects within the Reggio Museum, reports that "a non-simple problem, needing further study, concerns the location of the so-called Basel Head next to that of the so-called Philosopher" (trans. from Italian). She advocates future seminars and congresses, perhaps in collaboration with the Kassel Museum, and studies by bronze specialists, but, to my knowledge, none has as yet taken place.

⁹ I wish to thank Carol Mattusch for sharing my doubts on the bivalve mold. Prisco (1996 n. 6) mentions (trans. from Italian) "the sole possible parallel known" to him is a group of masks from Sabratha, especially the head of a satyr, "which has been established as deriving from a marble original." But masks would have required an open casting, which is different from the single casting of a complete head, as in the case of P2.

photographs.¹⁰ Finally, both reports tentatively suggest that the molds were taken from a sculpted prototype, perhaps of marble, which would therefore represent the true terminus post quem for P2; the date of the wreck (end of the fifth/beginning of the fourth century B.C.E.) would give only a terminus ante quem for the sculpture.¹¹

Rolley was able to examine P2 in Reggio, together with Sabbione and a restorer. He mentioned his own observations in his annual review of Greek and Roman bronzes, in which he also summarized the 2003 Italian report as superseding the previous publication.¹² The use of a bivalve mold seemed to him highly improbable, since such procedure could (should?) have left traces on the outside of the head, whereas none is visible. He interpreted the appearance of the interior to the fact that the wax coated the inside of the (single) mold in a thin layer and was then reinforced on the vertical axis in order to protect it before filling the interior with the clay core. The latter was then applied by hand, in three successive layers, to judge from the parallel course of the hairs contained in what was recovered of the core.¹³

My own analysis of the head was conducted under less favorable circumstances and therefore should not presume to supplant more thorough examinations. P2 was enclosed in a glass case that permitted a limited viewing marred by glare. Only by squatting on the floor, moreover, was I able to see part of the interior surface.

Nonetheless, I could formulate some conjectures based solely on my own acquaintance with P1 and the other bronze fragments, and I communicated them to Lattanzi in a letter dated 4 August 1998. I summarize them here, together with other points drawn from the two technical reports.¹⁴

In my opinion, no doubt should exist that P1 and P2 derive from the same context, probably the same workshop, and perhaps even the same sculptor. In both, particularly distinctive, to my mind, is the unnaturally flat treatment of the orbital cavities with their abrupt separation from the eyelids with which they form a sharp angle. This rendering is so peculiar and unusual as to amount to a virtual artistic signature. The finely engraved eyebrows of P1 are more arched over eyes that seem smaller; those of P2, equally engraved, are less stylized, and the eyes appear larger in proportion to the face; but this impression may be heightened by the loss of the inserted eyeballs.¹⁵ Another point of similarity is the way in which the nape forms almost a right angle with the rest of the neck, despite the different length of the hair in the two heads. These very traits had induced me to suggest a fifth-century date for P1 even before the wreck was thoroughly excavated.¹⁶

Unable to see the interior of the head calotte (i.e., the rounded top of the skull), I wondered whether P2, like P1, might have had a separate top, corresponding to the line of the outer fillet and joined to the bottom part before casting. Since, by all accounts, locks of

¹⁰ Prisco (1996) states that “a flat bronze furrow [*sic*] was applied by hand and cast with the rest of the head.” Since “furrow” implies a depression, I wonder whether Prisco’s Italian text was mistranslated in the English edition. For that reason, I quote in full the original statement, that the casting mold, taken from a model—or an original—was “realizzata mediante due impronte, riproducenti ciascuna una metà della testa. Al loro interno è stata poi stesa la cera. In corrispondenza della sutura tra i bordi delle due valve—che corre longitudinalmente, lungo l’asse costituito dal dorso del naso—è stato sovrapposto un piatto cordolo, applicato a mano, con l’evidente scopo di rinforzare il punto debole costituito dalla giunzione delle due cere; il cordolo è stato quindi fuso insieme con la testa (Figg. 51–52)” (Prisco and Fiorentino 2003, 85). One discrepancy may be noted. Prisco (1996) describes the metal as “a binary alloy with very slight traces of other elements, chiefly lead,” but his concluding paragraph (Prisco 1996) states: “As for an absolute chronology, the main clue lies in the composition of the alloy, and the fact that it contains *no lead whatsoever* undoubtedly places the piece in or near the orbit of the Porticello bronzes” (emphasis added). Prisco and Fiorentino (2003, 95) give the following ratios for the alloy: 88% copper, 12% tin, as well as minimal traces of other elements, especially lead.

¹¹ Prisco (1996) adds, “a hypothesis to be confirmed with caution”; see also Prisco and Fiorentino 2003, 85, 96. To me, this supposition appears totally improbable, since I believe there is sufficient evidence to advocate a partially modeled

(clay) prototype (infra n. 21).

¹² Rolley 2003, 338.

¹³ Rolley (2003, 338) uses the Italian catalogue of the Venice exhibition (Pugliese Carratelli 1996) but greatly prefers Prisco and Fiorentino’s (2003) analysis (which “annule la précédente”), although offering his own interpretation based on his personal observations (cf. Rolley 2003 n. 12). He regrets the lack of a good photograph of the head’s interior (“très accessible”) but repeats the official description: “dans tout le plan axial, un large ruban [ribbon] en relief [material unspecified]: la cire avait été appliquée dans la moule en deux moitiés, droite et gauche,” to ensure that, during casting, no small fissures or gaps would appear on the axis of the face, which would have been particularly “malencontreuses.” Yet Rolley believes that “le montage du moule en deux valve est très improbable.” Note, however, that he mentions P2 only in passing, since his main concern is the discussion of the Riace bronzes, which form the main topic of the three-volume publication.

¹⁴ Prisco 1996; Prisco and Fiorentino 2003.

¹⁵ Prisco and Fiorentino (2003, figs. 66, 67) believe that the break across the root of the nose was caused by attempts to detach the head from the body, but I wonder whether it occurred during the forcible removal of the inserted eyes.

¹⁶ Ridgway 1987, 101: “the neck form[s] virtual corners in turning from the back to the sides.” Ridgway (1987 n. 39) refers to my letter of 2 April 1970 to David Owen (University of Pennsylvania). For further comments on stylistic chronology, see also infra nn. 24, 34.

beard and hair were *impressi direttamente nella cera*, the original separation would have been easily disguised and might explain why the curls below the ribbon are much more lively and voluminous than those covering the rounded cranium, which is smooth in general outline.¹⁷ While the two pieces were still separate, however, the interior of the head would have been easily accessible and would have allowed the insertion of two wax slabs, joining on the axis of the face and leading to the supposition that a bivalve mold was used. If the head, conversely, was cast as a single unit, two separate slabs of wax could still have been inserted, and their joining point would have created that ridge that has given rise to the theory of an applied strip. This interpretation would explain why the supposed *cordolo*—a truly odd feature—runs also on the rear of the head (corresponding to cranium, nape, and neck), whereas that area, without individual details, would not have involved modeling and therefore the stretching and weakening of the wax.

To be sure, wax, in a partially closed mold, could have been applied in a liquid state and swirled around to be made to adhere to all interior surfaces. But it could also have been pressed in place by hand, with all fingerprints smoothed over (since none has been reported), or by means of a flat tool. Both technical accounts, in fact, note that the thickness of the bronze

(corresponding to the thickness of the original wax) is rather irregular.¹⁸ What makes my technical reconstruction plausible is that the procedure of applying wax slabs to the interior of a mold is well attested among other bronze fragments from the Porticello wreck: see, for instance, two pieces of anatomy, which I read as parts of two male buttocks (fig. 4). Although no traces appear on the outside, the inner surfaces reveal several seams that create steps in the bronze and should “represent the limits of slabs of wax from the lining of the negative mold, rather than joins.”¹⁹

Another point of similarity between the Porticello bronzes and P2 is the use of square or rectangular pins—probably chaplets—to prevent the slippage of the inner core once the wax had been melted. In some cases, the pin itself is lost, but its place of insertion is clearly visible (see figs. 4 [right], 5 [bottom]).²⁰ Finally, the basic approach to the casting of both heads seems similar, since the interior surfaces show no depression for features other than the nose, the latter partially filled by the hypothetical *cordolo* in P2. The ears, on both heads, were modeled separately and applied from the exterior—a procedure that, to my mind, further undermines the theory of molds taken from a marble original, whose ears would have been carved as essential parts of the whole.²¹ In this respect, note that the ears of P1 seem to have been attached to the

¹⁷For the separate casting of the cranial top of P1, see Ridgway 1987, 63–5, figs. 5.3, 5.6, 5.7 (reconstruction drawing). My theory of a separate calotte for P2 is probably to be abandoned, since neither of the technical reports mentions an inner join. The fillet itself, however, is somewhat peculiar. Prisco and Fiorentino (2003, 90, figs. 55, 56) describe in it a strange gap above the left ear that shows no traces of a mechanical or chemical addition. They therefore surmise that the groove horizontally bisecting the fillet in its course was for the insertion of an element in a different material, which would have terminated in correspondence with the above-mentioned cavity. The latter—it is suggested—was probably meant to receive the ends of the knotted band falling down on the neck behind the ear. To my knowledge, such manner of tying a fillet (i.e., laterally) is highly unusual. The possible addition of a separately cast lock, now lost, was mentioned in Prisco (1996), but it is discounted in the later report.

¹⁸Curls impressed directly on the wax, and irregular thickness of the bronze (Prisco 1996; see also Prisco and Fiorentino 2003, 85). In P1, the locks of beard and nape hair were likewise created solely in wax (with wire armature) and applied to the initial clay model, since, in the bronze itself, neither chin nor jawline are marked in the interior (Ridgway 1987, 66). Rolley (1990, 408–10), in discussing both Eiseman and Ridgway (1987) and the technical report by Fiorentino et al. (1984) (see also infra n. 23), finds the latter’s explanation of two or even three separate castings (for hair and beard, and for part of the beard) *stupéfiant* and contradicted by the very photographs published.

¹⁹Ridgway 1987, 85; the buttocks are Ridgway 1987, cat. no. S11, figs. 5.66, 5.67 (FN M36, no. 1708; Paribeni 1984,

no. 12; cf. fig. 4 herein) and Ridgway 1987, cat. no. S12, figs. 5.70, 5.71 (uncatalogued, 17089; Paribeni 1984, no. 3; cf. fig. 4 herein). For further discussion of the waxing process, see Ridgway 1987, 97. Note that, in my opinion, Paribeni (1984) illustrates S12 (his no. 3) upside down; he therefore sees as part of the epigastric arch of a male torso what I believe to be the hollow of the trochanteric depression in a male buttock, broken off just below the iliac crest and above the thigh. A third, complete left buttock with thigh is also preserved (Ridgway 1987, cat. no. S10, figs. 5.55–5.65 [FN M25, no. 17088; Paribeni 1984, no. 13]).

²⁰In P2, the “square distancing pins” are mentioned by Prisco (1996) and by Prisco and Fiorentino (2003, 90; figs. 58, 59 [with excellent color details]; cf. fig. 60 for the hole left by a fallen chaplet). Cf., in the Porticello bronzes, chaplets still in situ: Ridgway 1987, cat. no. S2B (drapery fragment), fig. 5.16 (cf. fig. 5 herein); cat. no. S4 (arm[?]) and drapery fragment), fig. 5.29; square hole for lost chaplet: Ridgway 1987, cat. no. S11, figs. 5.66, 5.67, 5.69; cf. fig. 4 herein. Both P2 and P1, as well as other bronze fragments from the wreck, show several patches to repair imperfections in the casting, so that the technical level seems comparable throughout.

²¹P2: Prisco and Fiorentino 2003, 85. P1: Ridgway 1987, 65–6: “The interior of the head is smooth, except for the cavity corresponding to the nose; all other details of the upper surface, including the mouth, have no corresponding trace in the interior. Even the ears were modeled on the outside, since no trace of a join can be felt in the interior of the head, except perhaps for a slight bulge in correspondence of the left ear.” I cannot be sure, but even the treatment of the mouth may therefore be comparable in both heads.

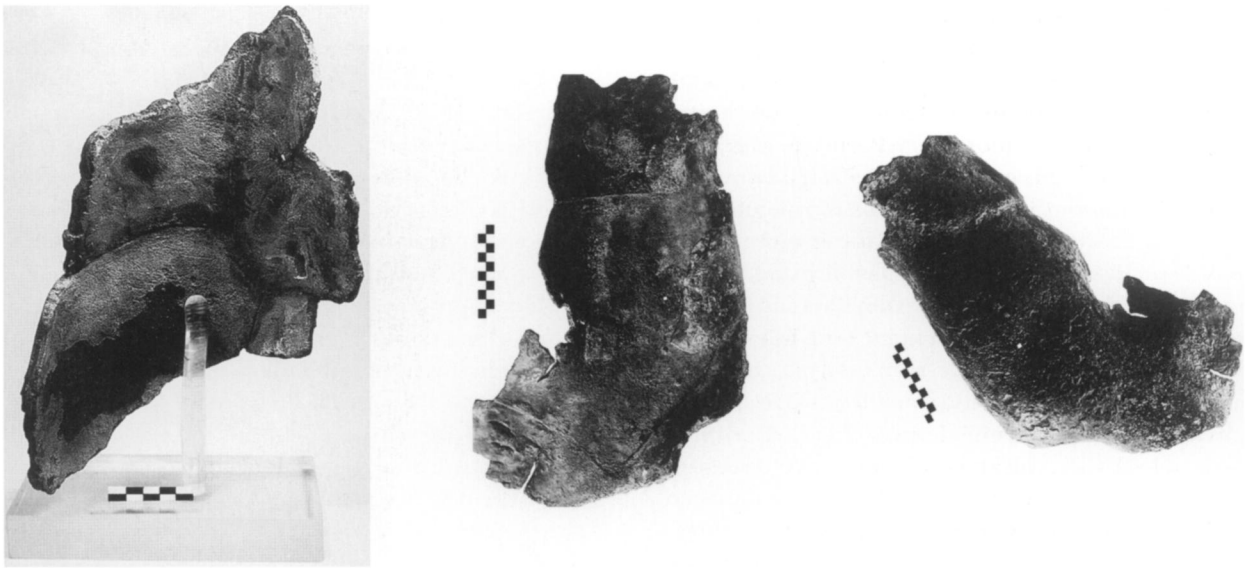


Fig. 4. *Left*, male buttock S12, from the Porticello wreck, interior; *center*, male buttock S11, from the Porticello wreck, interior; *right*, male buttock S11, from the Porticello wreck, exterior (D. Frey; courtesy Institute of Nautical Archaeology, Texas A&M University).

head at slightly different levels and distances from the back of the skull; those of P2 are also asymmetrically placed, with the left one projecting outward more than the right. This is just one of several alterations to the strict geometry of its facial features, which could only partially be attributed to alleged blows meant to detach the head from the body. Specifically, the eyes tilt slightly toward proper left (as contrasted with those of P1, which slant toward proper right), but the narrower right cheek, the nose curving in the same direction, the mouth slightly inclined to proper left, together with the curls in the beard, seem to repeat the pattern of P1 and may suggest that both heads, in their original position, turned toward the viewer's left.²²

THE OTHER BRONZE FRAGMENTS

In 1970, the Calabrian Soprintendenza in Reggio stipulated with the University of Pennsylvania researchers that an Italian publication of the bronzes precede the appearance of their book on the wreck.

²² The asymmetries of P2 are based on my own observations; add that the patch of beard merging with the sideburns (in front of the ears) is narrower on the proper left than on the right cheek. For an otherwise detailed description of the head, see Lattanzi 1996b; 2007, 188. For P1, see Ridgway 1987, 63–8, esp. 66–8.

²³ For my position vis-à-vis the Italian publication (Paribeni 1984), see Ridgway 1986, 59 (with asterisked note); see also Ridgway 2004a, esp. 350, 759–60 (reprint of 1986 and update). My statements are repeated in Ridgway 1987, 62. Technical analysis: Fiorentino et al. 1984. Rolley (1990, 409 n. 3)

This requirement, delayed by the premature death of Giuseppe Foti, was eventually fulfilled in 1984 by Enrico Paribeni. Although informed of the chronological evidence available, the Italian scholar was so impressed by the realistic appearance of the long-bearded head (P1) that he identified it as the portrait of a Cynic philosopher, which in turn required a date as late as the turn from the fourth into the third century B.C.E. To solve the apparent dating discrepancy with the rest of the cargo, the possibility was advanced that another, later, wreck had become superimposed on the Porticello ship, thus eliminating the earlier terminus post quem. Yet this theory failed to acknowledge that the technical report on all the bronze fragments (including P1) had revealed the same alloy, thus suggesting contemporary manufacture and perhaps even identical workshop.²³ Moreover, a substantial portion of a draped leg (see fig. 5), recovered with additional sections of nude anatomy, showed folds stylistically so close to mid fifth-century

seems to doubt that enough elements of the alloy were tested to support the claim that all Porticello fragments came from the same workshop, but Prisco (1996) and Prisco and Fiorentino (2003, 95) place the alloy of P2 “in the same orbit as that of the Porticello fragments,” thus confirming the validity of the earlier tests; cf. supra n. 10. These apparently noninvasive (X-ray fluorescence [XRF]) analyses should ideally be now followed by invasive procedures in order to determine whether indeed a single casting process could have produced all recovered bronzes.

renderings as to demand the same date for all the Porticello sculptural finds.²⁴

The 2007 expanded edition of the catalogue of the Reggio Calabria Museum substantially repeats Paribeni's interpretation of most of the Porticello fragments and their possible integration into a single figure: an old, long-bearded man wearing a short mantle that leaves his knees uncovered, supporting his weight mostly on the right leg, with the left leg slightly bent forward (as suggested by both extant feet and ankles), right elbow flexed, and left hand ("exhibiting the dry and thin fingers of the elders") once holding a now lost attribute.²⁵ Yet the extant draped leg (cf. fig. 5, top) has a prominent knee muscle and a sharp tendon that make it look youthful; and would the feet of a very old man have been rendered unshod?²⁶

Though suggesting that the "philosopher" identification should be considered purely "conventional" (the personage could be a literary person or thinker), the Reggio catalogue entry affirms that its individualizing traits are sufficient to confirm that P1 is a portrait. What, then, of the chronological evidence? It is accepted there that "even the most up-to-date research on the material—especially the black-glaze pottery—from the Porticello ship validates its end-of-the-fifth-century date."²⁷ Therefore, either two successive wrecks should be postulated, or the origin of Greek portraiture should be placed much earlier than previously considered. Within the same section on underwater archaeology is the separate entry for the "Testa di Basilea" (P2). It gives no dimensions, and leaves it uncertain, perhaps significantly, whether it depicts a deity or a mortal because of its breaks and deformations. It is dated around the middle of the fifth century, with traces of lingering Late Severe Style, on the basis of comparison with Roman copies of works under Attic and Peloponnesian influence.²⁸



Fig. 5. *Top*, draped leg S2A-B, from the Porticello wreck, front view; *bottom*, drapery S2B, from the Porticello wreck, detail of interior (D. Frey; courtesy Institute of Nautical Archaeology, Texas A&M University).

²⁴For stylistic comments and parallels with figures on three sides of the Parthenon frieze, see Ridgway 1987, 100 (cat. no. S2A-C, figs. 5.13–5.19 [the draped leg]); see also *infra* n. 26.

²⁵Sabbione 2007, 184.

²⁶Sabbione 2007, 183–87 (in Italian). Paribeni (1984) divided all legible fragments between only two figures, one draped and elderly, the other youthful and naked, but acknowledged that some extant pieces remained unattributed. Sabbione, although repeating Paribeni's reconstruction of the mature personage, seems also to accept part of my own interpretation (Ridgway 1987, 106), since he mentions fragments of two additional nude males, probably athletes, all life-sized. Paribeni's reconstruction of the old man (with P1) offers the most economical assemblage of the recovered bronze pieces, yet it should not be overlooked that no true connection exists among them. Ridgway 1987, 103: "Neither feet nor single hand are veined enough to suggest that they belong to an elderly person, but it is impossible to determine now whether

this is an iconographic or a chronological distinction"; see also Ridgway (1987 n. 51) for pertinent parallels drawn from the Parthenon frieze and a metope (S31).

²⁷"Come confermano le più aggiornate ricerche in proposito" (Sabbione 2007, 187). No specific reference is given to support the most up-to-date chronology of the black-glazed pottery, but Sabbione (2007, 183) states that it is Attic and datable ca. 420–410 B.C.E. The same range, extended to 390–380, had already been proposed by Eiseman (Eiseman and Ridgway 1987, 28).

²⁸Lattanzi 2007, 188–89 (with illustration). On visual inspection, P2 appears to be life-sized. All accounts confirm that the head shows marine accretions and that therefore it spent a considerable amount of time underwater, but it is here said only that it is "proveniente dallo stesso sito subacqueo" (Lattanzi 2007, 188–89); cf. *supra* n. 1. Deformations to the facial features seem to me minor and not to be confused with intentional asymmetries; cf. *supra* n. 22.

THE ISSUE OF PORTRAITURE

Could this reluctance to accept P2 as part of the same cargo be due, consciously or subconsciously, to the fact that it does not seem to be a portrait? The realistic features of P1 had led to expectations that the second head would be equally distinctive, yet this proved not to be the case.²⁹ To my mind, the “anonymity” or idealized appearance of P2 positively confirmed my sense that its mate was also a generic depiction of a mythological personage, and I tried to point this out in a few publications that seem to have escaped attention.³⁰ Favoring the doubts still harbored by some scholars about the true chronology of the “philosopher” (P1), this subtle distancing of the “Basel Head” (P2) from the wreck would seem to leave the way open to further conjectures and future interpretations. By contrast, recent publications continue to call the long-bearded head a portrait and even to lower its chronology to ca. 400. I here try to clarify my position by focusing on subsequent statements, especially on the papers of a colloquium held in Athens in 2002 and published, with additions, in 2007, that shed light on a possible history of the inception of portraiture.³¹

In introducing the topic, Schultz and von den Hoff provide a list of evidence needed to qualify an ancient head as a portrait: it has to be attested by an inscribed name or by a visible attempt to convey an individual’s unique personality or by an effort to capture the physical likeness of a “sitter.”³² Any one of these criteria, or combinations of the three, implies a deliberate intent at identification on the part of the sculptor or his patron. To be sure, a now-missing base, either lost or not included in the ship cargo, might have provided information about P1, thus satisfying the first requirement.³³ Yet the extremely hirsute appearance of the head, especially the overly long beard that vir-

tually engulfs the mouth, seems to me inappropriate for the depiction of a true human being, even a very venerable one. The only—remote—parallel I could find in Greek sculpture is the so-called Dionysos Sardanapalos, a deity. Additional features of P1 that may suggest individuality, such as the aquiline nose and the incipient baldness, can also be read as coded traits that imply similarity with centaurs and other mythological creatures.³⁴

The two remaining requirements could be countered by the fact that imaginary pseudo-portraits were indeed created by later generations without the benefit or the request of a sitter. But portraits of Homer, perhaps even of Aisopos, Solon, or Pindar, although not true likenesses, nonetheless depicted individuals who had truly lived and left their traces through poetry and writings. P1 remains anonymous. Yet Schultz and von den Hoff include it among the important discoveries in the field of portraiture of the past 50 years, together with the images of Poseidippos, Chrysippos, Antiphon, and others, and refer specifically to figure 100 in their volume,³⁵ which shows P1 and is labeled “Portrait from a wreck off Porticello, ca. 450–420 B.C.E.,” within an article on realism by Stewart.³⁶ Furthermore, a discussion of images on fourth-century Attic grave reliefs, by Bergemann, cites the Socrates Type A and P1 (“not later than 380”) as examples of realistic portraiture, although admitting that comparable features were used in the previous century to depict mythological and “non-specific figures, like centaurs and pedagogues in tragedy.”³⁷ But would a pedagogue have found a place among other bronze, freestanding, life-sized figures as early as the second half of the fifth century? The situation seems even more ambivalent for women’s likenesses: Dillon convincingly argues that Early Hellenistic inscriptions and epigrams attest to the

²⁹ A distinguished American archaeologist, in fact, confessed to me that he had been “disappointed” in seeing P2. The apparent neglect of this piece in the scholarly literature after its return to Italy may be an index of the same malaise.

³⁰ Ridgway 1993, 2004b (English trans. and update); see also Ridgway 2006, 44–6.

³¹ Schultz and von den Hoff 2007.

³² Schultz and von den Hoff 2007, 3.

³³ This possibility is indeed tentatively envisioned in Ridgway (1987, 99) because the forepart of a right foot (S8) was found filled with lead, as for attachment to a stone base, and retains tool marks that may suggest mechanical removal; cf. Ridgway 1987, 78–9, fig. 5.50; fig. 5.51 shows forepart S8 joined to rear part S7 to form a complete foot. Note again (supra n. 26), however, that no definite connection can be made between the foot and P1, despite compatible (life-sized) scale.

³⁴ Dionysos Sardanapalos: *LIMC* 3, s.v. “Dionysos,” no. 89, pl. 303; s.v. “Dionysos/Bacchus,” no. 37, pl. 430 (the name

piece). I have discussed my position, with additional parallels and at greater length, in Ridgway 1987, 104–5. My tentative identification of P1 as the centaur Cheiron admittedly finds no support among the recovered fragments because no equine elements have been identified.

³⁵ Schultz and von den Hoff 2007, fig. 100.

³⁶ Schultz and von den Hoff (2007, 6) list P1 among the recent discoveries. Stewart (2007, 127), by contrast, does not specifically refer to P1 except indirectly, as a possible example “that each foray from a formalized naturalism into hard-boiled realism (cf. fig. 100) provoked a backlash of some kind.”

³⁷ Bergemann 2007, 37 n. 24 (for cautionary comments), 39 (for quotation and both heads cited as examples that “the same motifs on gravestones appear much later than in portraiture”), 45 (repeating that “portraits preceded and influenced grave reliefs in the development of realistic [but not individualized] physiognomy”).

existence of (realistic) portraits but that such claims are accompanied only by idealized and nonspecific sculptural features.³⁸

The implicit connection with philosophers continues to hover in the background: Wrede, for instance, believes that the overly long beard and the fillet once allegedly worn by P1 are proper attributes for a Sophist, and he lowers the chronology of the head to ca. 400; but again this dating takes no account of the stylistic parallels for the drapery (to whichever figure it belonged) and for P1 itself, let alone the additional chronological confirmation provided by P2.³⁹ Even Himmelmann, who discards the philosophical connection, is seduced by the possibility of an “imaginary portrait” of a human being, perhaps Aisopos.⁴⁰ Pasquier places “philosopher” in quotation marks but takes P1 (dated 460–440 B.C.E.) as validating the portrait intent of Themistokles’ herm from Ostia, albeit known only through a Roman copy.⁴¹ Finally, Sabbione, although refraining from a specific identification, states that the asymmetries and irregularities typical of any individual physiognomy make of P1 “un vero e proprio ritratto.”⁴²

It seems as if decades of established dogma have conditioned us to read certain iconographic traits as indelibly connected with “real” personages, especially

thinkers and poets, whereas literary, epigraphic, and historical evidence force us to date such renderings no earlier than the fourth century B.C.E. or later. Rolley, in reviewing Paribeni’s article, was so struck by the latter’s refusal to take context into account that he quoted at length from the Italian text, which he saw as purely a “position de principe.”⁴³ In a recent survey of a catalogue of artifacts from Bulgaria, Rolley adds, in fact, that an impressive bearded bronze head—had it not been connected with a specific ruler—would certainly have been identified as a Cynic philosopher.⁴⁴ Indeed, another bronze with comparable “attributes” (mature age, beard, inserted eyes) amidst the abundant sculptural material recovered from Brindisi harbor, is labeled as “a type of Late-Classical philosopher” and considered one of the earliest datable items (second half of the fourth century B.C.E.) among the finds.⁴⁵ By contrast, and despite the many hypotheses formulated on the subject, no “human/contemporary” identification has, to my knowledge, been suggested so far for the Riace warriors, except as heroic/mythological beings.⁴⁶

No true parallel for P1 has been quoted among extant portraits; even those of the elder Sophokles and Lysias, besides being known only through Roman copies, are not fully comparable.⁴⁷ P2 has been said to

³⁸ Dillon 2007, 63–83, esp. 80: “a close visual correspondence between a portrait and its subject was [not] a primary concern or aim of female portraiture,” which was based on a “single ideal of female beauty and sexual attractiveness.” She also points out the discrepancy between modern perception (which sees these images as generic and idealized) and ancient understanding that accepted them “as accurate representations of particular individuals”; see also *infra* n. 41.

³⁹ Wrede 2005, 56. For fillet appropriate for Sophists, see Aristophanes *Clouds* 255. I could detect no traces of a fillet in P1, except for the indentation on the nape possibly caused by the attachment of the separate calotte (Ridgway 1987, 67), but I admit that such an attribute could have run above the ears and at the very top of the forehead, as suggested by von den Hoff 1994, 27 n. 56. Von den Hoff (1994, 124 n. 56), however, excludes P1 from his depictions of philosophers and, attributing to it the short garment uncovering the knees, connects it with artisans, peasants, and pedagogues.

⁴⁰ Himmelmann (1994, 74–9) agrees with a “Parthenonian” date, suggests Aisopos only tentatively, and mentions the possibility of a “philosopher *ante litteram*.”

⁴¹ Pasquier (1996, 65) mentions “the explicit desire of certain artists of the period to represent the individual’s personal features, while keeping within the bounds of aesthetics essentially based on idealized beauty.”

⁴² Sabbione (2007, 187) continues: “that is, a type of representation that remained for a long time alien to the figural conceptions of Greek art” (trans. from Italian). Two anonymous reviewers for the *AJA* refer me to Jaeggi (2008) and summarize its theories. I was unable to view the book, but I derive the fol-

lowing quotations from its review by Moormann (2009). Jaeggi maintains that “looking for character in representations of sitters . . . is a modern concept, influenced by psychology and even Christian theology (man as *effigies* of God)” (emphasis original). Jaeggi’s ch. 6 “focuses on the genre of *Philosophenporträts*” (Moormann 2009). His ch. 7, on portraits of women, seems basically to agree with Dillon’s point of view. As one more cautionary point, Moormann (2009) gives Jaeggi’s conclusions that “portraits are defined by signs and . . . these signs are not connected with specific moments . . . Therefore . . . [they] are often of little help in establishing chronology.” As one of the reviewers for the *AJA* states in paraphrasing Jaeggi, our criteria on portraiture cannot be applied to disembodied and decontextualized heads such as P1 and P2.

⁴³ Reviewing Paribeni (1984) and his appeal to the sense of the human spirit, Rolley (1990, 410) states that the shape of the hair strands “ne touche pas aux mouvements de l’esprit, pas plus que la toison pubienne, que E.P. juge typiquement hellénistique.”

⁴⁴ See Rolley (2006, 300), in which he surveys Del Buono (2006), the catalogue of an exhibition at the Quirinale in Rome. The head is identified as a portrait of Seuthes III, from the second half or third quarter of the fourth century B.C.E.

⁴⁵ De Palma and Fiorentino 2003, 108–9, figs. 76–82 (Head 368). An analysis of its core yields a date of 333–220 B.C.E. +/- 10%.

⁴⁶ On the Riace warriors, albeit primarily technical, see Melucco Vaccaro and De Palma 2003.

⁴⁷ Cf. Bergemann 2007, 37, 39.

share a general similarity with the so-called Capaneus on a Neo-Attic relief in the Villa Albani and the so-called Anakreon, but again no precise comparison has been proposed.⁴⁸ Moreover, as long as P1 and P2 are considered in isolation, no proper conclusion can be drawn, whereas their identity and significance would be illuminated by their pairing and by taking into account other likely companions from the wreck—at least the two nude athletic figures—despite our ignorance of their original context.

Because of their distinctive renderings (eye area, nape treatment), it can be taken for granted that P1 and P2 belong together. There is, however, no assurance that all the individual statues attested by the bronze fragments were originally part of a single group. Yet a few considerations point to that conclusion. Not only are the alloys stated (perhaps on limited evidence) to be identical; the very length (ca. 16–17 m) and capacity (ca. 30 tons) of the Porticello ship, although based on approximate estimates, may seem too small for a vessel—whose main cargo consisted of more than 100 amphoras filled with wine and grains—to have been engaged in transporting scrap metal. Its contents were found scattered among large boulders, but the wooden hull had been almost entirely washed away by the swift and ever-changing currents of the Straits of Messina—at a location, after all, that corresponds fairly closely to that of dangerous *Skylla* and *Charybdis* of Homeric fame. These conditions explain in part why no entire statue was recovered: their fragmentation was not due, I suspect, to intentional dismantling but to the “process of wreck formation” through centuries of underwater residence.⁴⁹ If, moreover, the sculptures originally formed a mythological group, they probably would have stood within a sanctuary, like the epic monument of the Homeric heroes dedicated by the Achaians at

Olympia, for which the Riace warriors, perhaps not coincidentally, have recently been cited as providing an idea of the lost figures, their material, and scale. In that case, the Porticello group would either have been looted in its entirety, as war booty, or, if damaged on the spot, its metal would have been melted down and refashioned as part of sanctuary property.⁵⁰

CONCLUSIONS

If mid fifth-century statuary groups responded to the same unspoken principles that obtained in Attic gravestones of the following century, I could accept that the advanced age of P1 was overstressed because of its intended juxtaposition to the relatively younger character depicted by P2; his would therefore be a “narrative” rather than a “representational” aging.⁵¹ I could also consider the possibility that the entire sculptural group (hence also P1 and P2) was created as late as ca. 420 B.C.E., if made in Magna Graecia, because both Sicily and South Italy continued to favor elements of the Severe Style even when the sculpture of the Greek mainland, under Athenian leadership, had evolved into the Classical style.⁵²

I reiterate here my personal opinion that, in the Porticello figures, we are dealing with mythological or epic personages, but I shall not venture other identifications or attributions, which would remain pure speculation. Yet about the following I feel sure: the low, curving cranial calotte with smooth contour and hugging, comma-shaped curls; the absence of modeling in the wide forehead (no muscle contraction, no wrinkles); the linear curve of the eyebrows merging into the bridge of the nose (visible despite the break); the barely defined cheekbones; the pronounced groove on either side of the nostrils that outlines the mustache, whose remarkably long ends flow into the beard;⁵³

⁴⁸ Lattanzi 2007, 189.

⁴⁹ Ridgway 2004b, 576–78 (English trans. of Ridgway 1993). On the approximate dimensions of the Porticello ship, see Eiseman (Eiseman and Ridgway 1987, 13, 108). The introductory pages (3–8) well describe the difficult conditions of the straits and their currents that made diving impossible at peak times. Sabbione (2007, 183) gives the length of the vessel as about 20 m and considers the transport amphoras its main cargo. Eiseman (Eiseman and Ridgway 1987, 3–4) states that, because the completeness and accuracy of the smugglers’ report is uncertain, their information was not taken into account in establishing contents and loads. She catalogues only the scientifically excavated 33 amphoras, of four different types, as well as four anchors, lead ingots, and ink wells. George Bass, who has unparalleled knowledge of ancient shipwrecks, tells me (pers. comm. 2009) that he would have no problem with either the size of the ship and its cargo or its date in accepting that it also carried scrap metal; see also *infra* n. 50.

⁵⁰ For the Riace warrior and Achaian dedication, see Ajoatian 2007, 122. For booty or scrap metal, see Ridgway (2004b, 768; English trans. of Ridgway 1993), citing Paoletti’s (1991–1992) suggestion that the Porticello ship carried scrap metal from the Carthaginian sacks of 409–406 B.C.E. Could the bronze group, rather, have been a commission by a city of the North African coast? The so-called Motya Charioteer offers a possible parallel for a Greek/Magna Graecian work in a Punic context and in lingering Severe Style; see also *infra* n. 52.

⁵¹ On male age renderings on gravestones, see Meyer 1989, 57, 71–2; cf. Ridgway 1997, 165, 169 (with additional references), 186 n. 31.

⁵² For the “lingering Severe” issue, see Ridgway 1995, 2004c (English trans. of 1995 and update).

⁵³ A comparable groove occurs in P1, where, however, it seems produced by the sagging cheeks; contrast the much shorter ends of its mustache, despite the general hairiness of the face.

the straight line of the completely closed mouth with full lower lip—all these are stylized traits of an iconographic code that prevents P2 from being considered a “true” portrait. Hence, neither should its companion: P1, the so-called philosopher.

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