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Head of an Egyptian Official

Edna Russmann: We're looking at the head of a statue that showed its subject very much larger than life. We don't know who he was. He was not a royal person, because he does not have a uraeus or a crown of any kind. This statue was made toward the end of the reign of the Ptolemaic dynasty. The Ptolemies were a family of Greek origin who kept up their Greek traditions in their capital, Alexandria, on the Mediterranean coast. And although they claimed to be legitimate Egyptian pharaohs and worshipped the Egyptian gods, much of the art produced, especially for their personal use and for temples of Greek gods, was made in Greek style.

During the three centuries of Ptolemaic rule, we begin to find examples like this one, where elements of Greek and Egyptian tradition have been combined. This very striking face has made this head one of the most famous Egyptian statues in the Brooklyn Museum, and it is often referred to as the Brooklyn Black Head. You see those large, round, deep-set eyes. They are originally derived from the large round eyes of the official likeness of Alexander the Great. This artist, who is a very fine artist, I believe, has taken such Greek features as, for example, the shape of the mouth and the chin, and stylized them to an Egyptian form. We have here in a very real sense a kind of fusion art. And this is probably the last development in Egyptian art that we can call distinctively ancient Egypt. And interestingly enough, it's a hybrid.