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**Beyond Portraiture: Toward an Art History of Queenly Faces in the Seleukid World**

**Abstract**

In Art History, portraits are typically understood as representations of historical persons—likenesses that are recognizable by identifiable features, the inscription of a name, and/or the inclusion of specific iconographies or attributes that convey certain qualities, chart familial or divine lineages, and even recall specific events that are related to that individual. Portraits, and portrayals of faces more broadly, possess important political, social, and cultural implications, and thus have the capacity to broaden our knowledge on issues about gender, power, memory, and perceptions of difference in the ancient world.

By the Hellenistic period, the ruler portrait became an important political tool that dynasts used to assert their power and continuity across the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia. In the Seleukid realm, the material, physical presence of queenly faces and of specific royal women (e.g. Laodike III, Kleopatra Thea) was important to the articulation of Seleukid imperial and dynastic identity. Yet the Seleukid dynasty is unique in that the representation of a queenly face did not always make a portrait. Furthermore, the physical presence of Seleukid royal women could be evoked in ephemeral modes, which are unique in our extant records of representational practices in the ancient world. This talk considers various methodological and theoretical approaches to the queenly face to discuss the innovative means by which the Seleukids and their advisors evoked the memory and presence of their royal women. The evidence for the Seleukid queenly face and faces of queens can nuance the study of the ‘portrait’ in ancient art history. And in this sense, the Seleukids encourage us to challenge our own expectations of and encounters with faces in visual culture.