

A bronze portrait of a slave child from a presumed villa near Medellín (Lusitania)

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The discovery

A bronze portrait of a child (figs. 1-4) belonging to the category of “small format” portraits¹ is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Badajoz (inv. no. 4471). It was found in 1970 in excavations conducted by J. M. Peralta y Sosa on a farm in the Vega del Ortega, an area east of Medellín in the territory between that town and Don Benito (Lusitania), some 35 km from Mérida (*Augusta Emerita*).² In the excavated area of 40 m² (fig. 5) were two cisterns and a rectangular well, at the bottom of which was the bronze portrait. The N cistern measured 3.8 x 1.25 m. Attached to its E side was a rectangular (80 x 60 cm) well. A channel in the centre of the S wall of the well was connected to a square (3.45 x 2.9 m) cistern. From its W wall a drain leads into a channel towards the Ortega river, which flows by some 50 m away. On the E side of the excavation area were two identical column bases which could have belonged to a peristyle. One is a square (90 x 80 cm) block preserving traces of a column shaft 65 cm in diameter, while the other, 3 m to the north, retains the



Figs. 1-2. Bronze portrait of a child or slave (author; © Archaeological Museum of Badajoz).

1 See K. Dahmen, *Untersuchungen zu Form und Funktion kleinformatiger Porträts der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Paderborn 2001) 2-5.

2 On the excavations, see M. del Amo, “Estudio preliminar sobre la romanización en el término de Medellín (Badajoz). La necrópolis de El Pradillo y otras villas romanas,” *Noticario Arqueológico Hispánico. Arqueología* 2 (1973) 89-92.