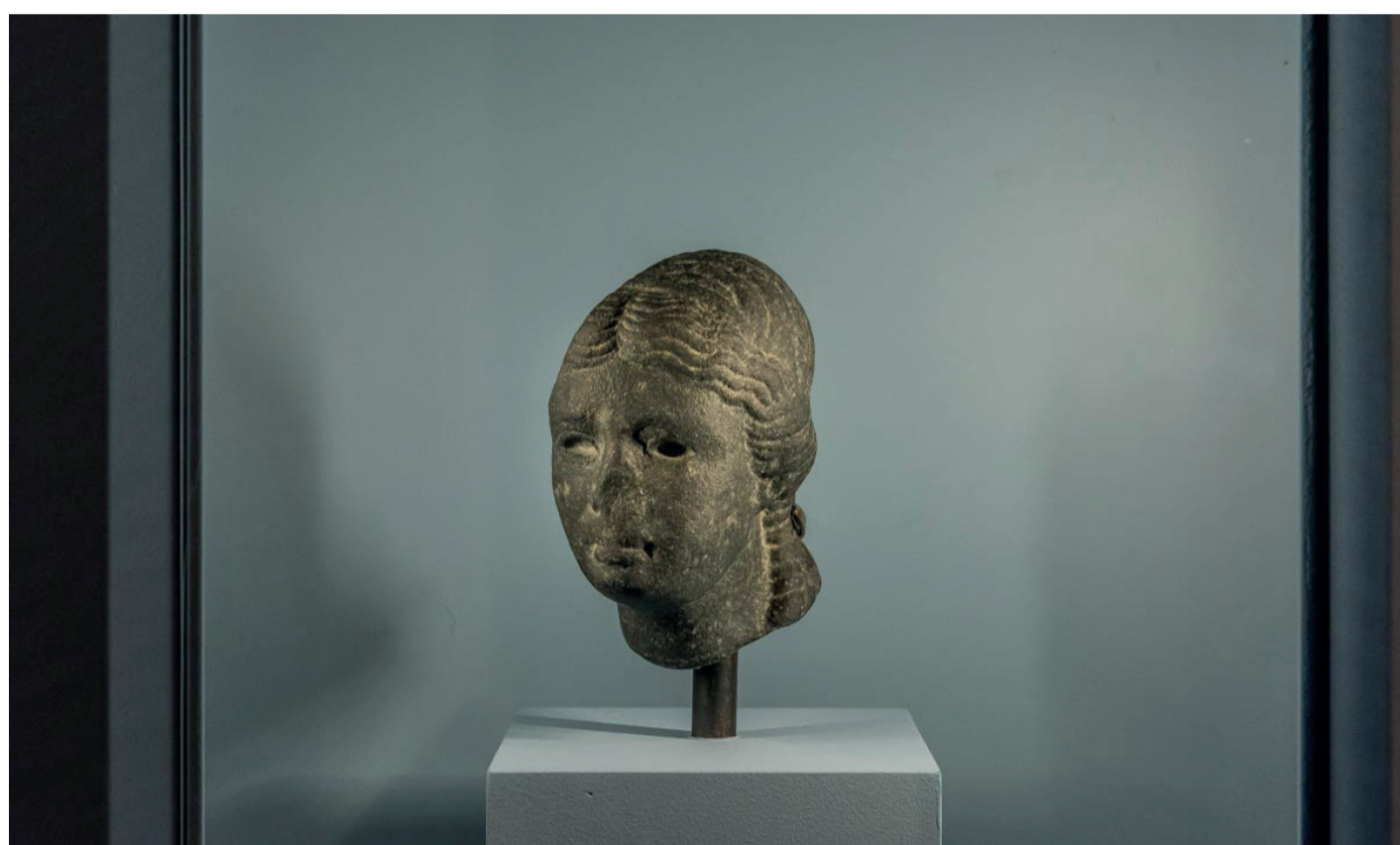


BERENIKE II

SMALL DIORITE HEAD



A feminine head in diorite, of small size (H. 13.7 cm), found at the site of Canopus. The right side of the head is broken; similarly, the back of the head and the nape of the neck have disappeared. The tip of the nose is broken. The surface of the sculpture is slightly worn.

New stylistic trend

The work is characterized by a new stylistic trend: sculpted in a hard Egyptian stone, the head is modelled according to Hellenistic iconographic principles. The hollow eyes, formerly inlaid, do not belong to the canon of classical sculpture, in contrast to the treatment of the face, which is oval, plump and has a full chin.

The top of the neck bears a horizontal wrinkle. The carefully-drawn mouth displays a lower lip which juts slightly forward. The eyes are surmounted by the thin, arched band of the upper eyelid.



The forehead is bare. The ears are half-way covered by the hair, which is made up of finely engraved long, wavy locks. Above, the flat diadem is visible.

Look of hair and face lead to representation of Berenike II

This sculpture displays stylistic peculiarities close to the images of Queens Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III, but the look of the hair, modelled in waves above the forehead, and the relatively fluid modelling of the face brings it closer to the images of Berenike II, mother of Ptolemy IV.

He founded a cult in her honour in 211–210 BC. One can, for example, see the splendid portrait in marble from Thmuis, preserved in the Cairo Museum. The court astronomer named a new constellation after the lock Berenike II sacrificed.

Berenike II, the death of her daughter and the Osiris ceremonies

The famous **Decree of Canopus** (a stele of 238 BC) was written by priests from sanctuaries from all over Egypt who met in synod at Canopus in the ninth year of the reign of Ptolemy III (238 BC). The Decree's resolutions aimed at increasing the honours already bestowed on Ptolemy and his sister-wife Berenike, the reigning monarchs, who from then on would be designated in the Decree as 'Benefactors', Euergetes.

The synod was still sitting when the daughter of the monarchs, who was also called Berenike, died. Arrangements were then made in her favour, and the details of the honours rendered to the now deified princess were so numerous and described with such thoroughness that almost half of the measures outlined in the Decree concern her.

It mentions that the young Berenike was ‘... to lie beside Osiris in the temple of Canopus ...’ and, on the occasion of ‘... Osiris’ journey from his temple in Thonis-Heracleion to this temple (Canopus) every year on the 29th of Khoiak ...’. Thus a statue of the deified princess, attended to with great care before the navigation, with a special hairstyle, was to share the offerings and ceremonies dedicated to the God of the West on his nautical procession.

The annual celebration of the **“Mysteries of Osiris”** was one of the great religious ceremonies of ancient Egypt. According to the Decree of Canopus in the Canopic region this ceremony culminated in an annual water procession along the canals between Thonis-Heracleion and the city of Canopus.



Object: 3rd c. BC. Diorite. H. 13.7 cm | W. 11.4 cm | D. 9 cm,
Great Library of Alexandria (SCA 204)

Source: Original description by Franck Goddio, “The sacred topography of Thonis-Heracleion” in “Thonis-Heracleion in Context“, Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology Monographs, 2015, and by Zsolt Kiss in exhibition catalogue Egypt’s Sunken Treasures, Berlin, 2006, exh. Egypt’s Sunken Treasures, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, May - September 2006

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