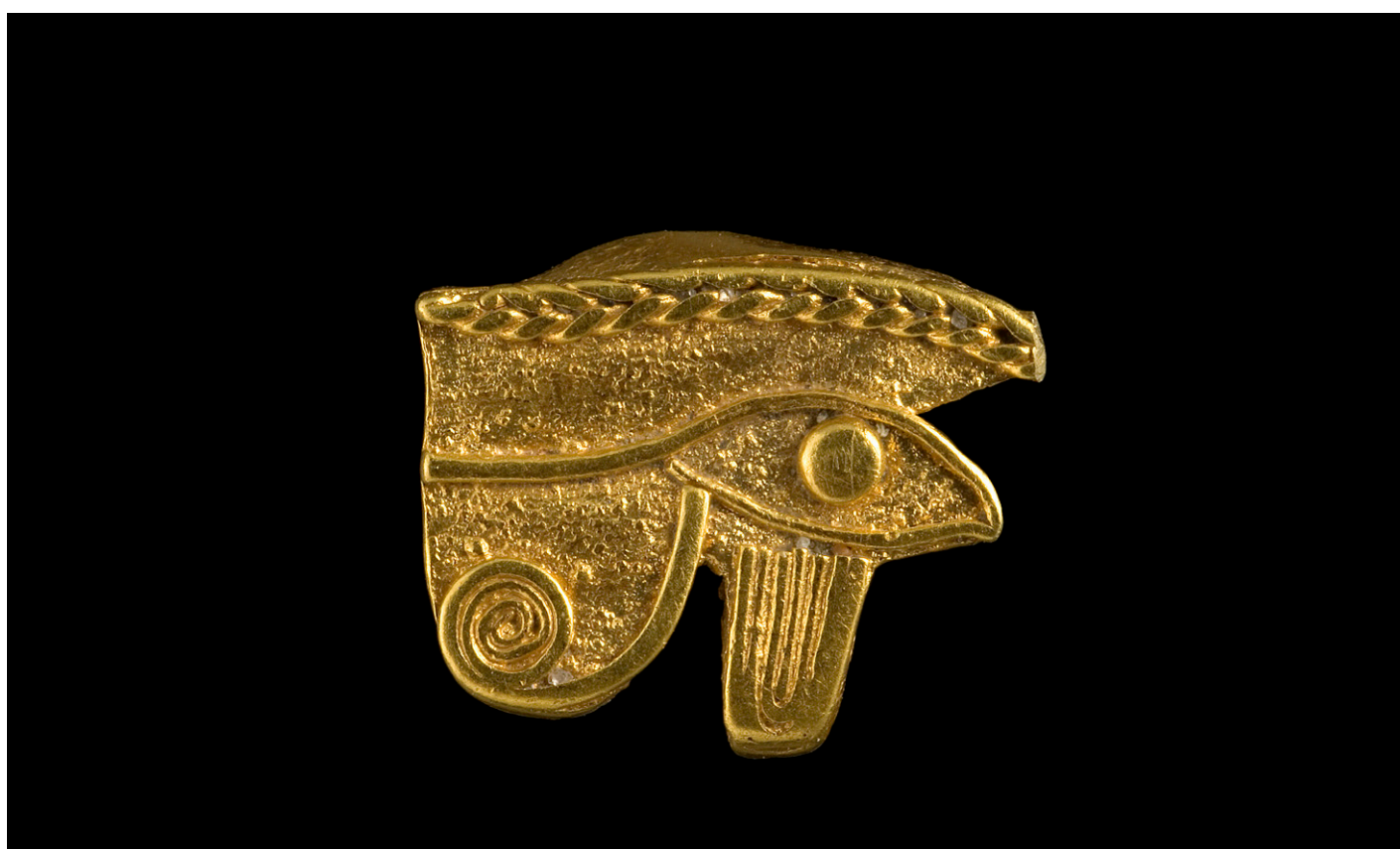


JEWELLERY, GOLD AND FAITH



The gold objects found at Thonis-Heracleion and Canopus show that they were both **religious centres**.

Two pieces of jewellery from Thonis-Heracleion are unquestionably symbolic: the gold bead in the shape of the Eye of Horus or **wedjat** and a Byzantine **pendant cross** made of lead.

Wedding ring

Not just the meaning, but also the form of some Byzantine symbols or images can be traced back to older prototypes: One example is the wedding ring from Canopus. Its iconography is based on a Roman wedding ceremony, the joining of the two right hands. When this ceremony is depicted, usually Juno or Concordia appear between the couple. In the Late Antique Period the rite was Christianized and the iconography adapted accordingly: Christ takes the place of the Roman goddesses.



High amount of gold objects

At both sites, Thonis-Heracleion and Canopus, an unusually high number of gold objects was found. The gold jewellery from Canopus was not found concentrated, but dispersed throughout the entire area. This is also true of the coins and seals, which date from the Roman and Umayyad Periods.

The majority of coins and seals, however, belong from the 6th to early 8th centuries. The youngest coin found was minted between 729 and 730 AD. All **gold jewellery** found therefore have been **made by the beginning of the 8th century**. More precise dates can only be assigned after comparison with other gold jewellery from within and outside the Byzantine Empire.



Possible explanation for the finds

Usually, excavations only unearth individual pieces or, more rarely, an entire hoard, which was concealed when enemies or thieves were expected. For two reasons this would not have been the case in either of the locations. First of all, the gold is not concentrated in one place but dispersed throughout the sites. Secondly, there is no known historical reason why valuables would have been buried in 8th century Egypt. There must be another explanation for the finds.

Votive offerings

In Thonis-Heracleion the majority of the gold works were found in and around the **Amun-Gereb temple** and in the Great Canal. As in many other ancient temples, offerings of jewellery would have been brought here. The same could be true of the Great Canal, from which other potential votive objects come, among them miniature anchors and barques.

In Canopus a pendant in the shape of a **tabula ansata** may also have been a votive offering: small gold plates in the same shape and with inscriptions were traditionally offered to various gods in the Roman Period. Other gold works show signs of wear and could therefore also have been votive offerings.



Goldsmith workshop?

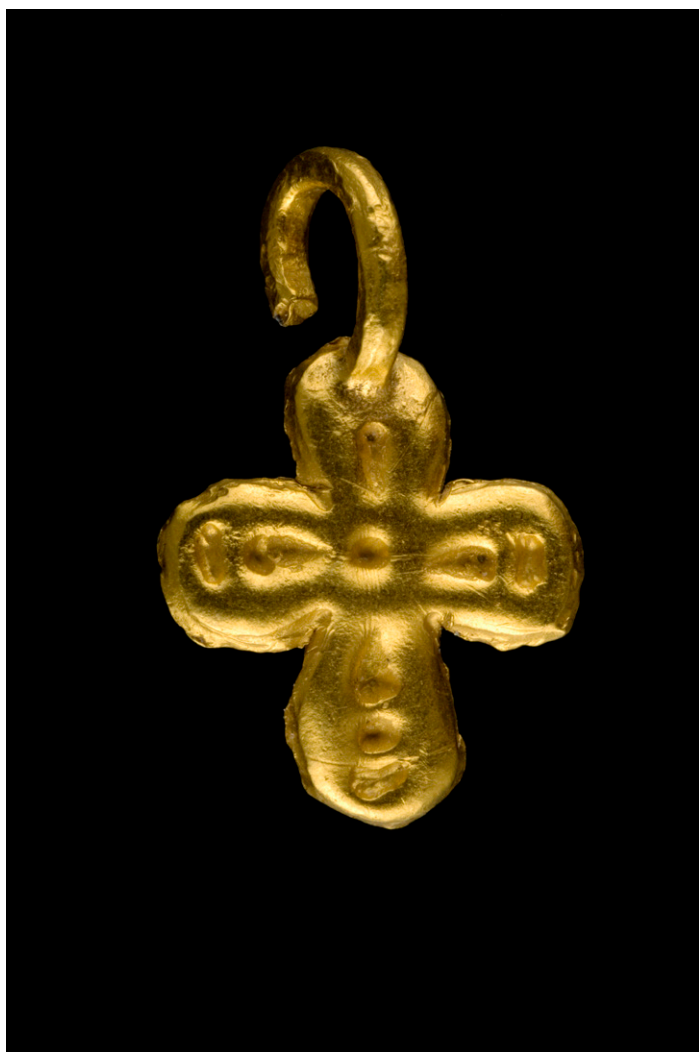
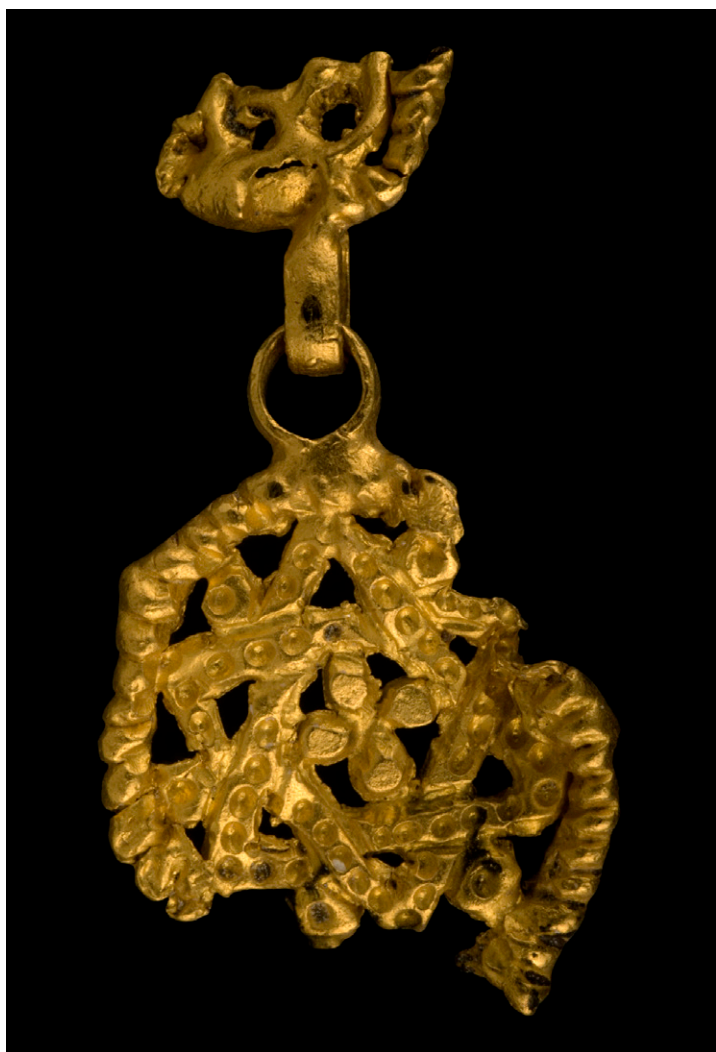
Alternatively or additionally, the gold objects found could indicate the existence of workshops or warehouses, as both sites yielded small ingots and nuggets, short wire pieces cut on both ends and tiny fragments of gold sheet.

The jewellery from Canopus can be divided into **two groups** – the first belongs to an **interregional fashion** that apparently originated in Constantinople, the second uses shapes, motifs and techniques that are not to be found in the first.

The majority of gold jewellery from Canopus belong to the first group. They could have been produced anywhere in the Byzantine Empire and even beyond. The **second group** is represented by the fragment of a necklace with hemispherical links, the fragment of a necklace with circular links as well as a pendant cross.



Similarities to certain details of these pieces are only to be found in Egyptian jewellery. For this reason they may have been produced in Egypt, possibly even at the site itself, where a goldsmith's workshop could very well have been located.



Objects: Gold, SCA 120, 131, 190, 189, 125, 187, 103, 192, 188, 1123
Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria

Source: Original description by Yvonne Stolz in exhibition catalogue
Egypt's Sunken Treasures, Berlin 2006, exh. Egypt's Sunken Treasures,
Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, May - September 2006

Photos: Christoph Gerigk © Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation