

# THE NAOS OF AMUN-GEREB



The naos is a monumental pink granite chapel with a pyramidal roof, 174 cm high, 93 cm wide and 100 cm deep. It was found in the temenos of the temple on the Central Island of Thonis-Heracleion. The monolithic shrine contains the image of the principal god venerated in the sanctuary: Amun-Gereb.

The name of the god was also recorded on the Decree of Canopus, which confirmed the name of the town where it stood: Heracleion.

## The god Amun-Gereb

Amun-Gereb was a particular form of the most important god of the Egyptian pantheon who bequeathed to the new Pharaoh the inventory of his earthly and celestial kingdom. This god's shrine was thus a place for celebrating the rites **establishing the new Pharaoh's power** over the created universe, thereby assuring dynastic continuity.





The Ptolemaic kings, who claimed to be descendants “on the paternal side of Herakles, son of Zeus, and on the maternal side of Dionysus, son of Zeus,” showered this temple with gifts.

The shrine certainly had a special importance for these kings of foreign origin who had become Pharaohs.

## **Mastery of stonemason**

The measurements of the exterior and interior of this chapel showcase the mastery of its stonemason regardless of the apparent simplicity of its execution.



A corner torus on the facade surrounds the outer part of the door jamb and the top of the lintel. On the sides, the torus outlines a trapezoidal shaped frame due to the tapered widening of the walls and these two side frames are offset forward, leaving a large free section to its rear.

Above the lintel, the cornice supports a pyramidal roof with a sharp downward slope. The facade and the lateral sides are polished, as is the interior of the chapel, while the outer rear wall is left untreated. Only the lintel and two jambs framing the opening were engraved. The chapel had double doors as evidenced by the pivot holes. At the junction of the inner posterior wall and the base, a hole drilled from the inside to the outside shows evidence of its later reuse as a drinking trough.

## **Heavy corrosion and missing engravings**

The stone is heavily corroded, especially in the upper part of the



monument. This corrosion combined with various knocks have detached a layer of granite in various places, removing the engravings including their background. The torus has largely disappeared, especially on the edge of the right-hand jamb. While its style is inspired by naoi from the period of Nectanebo, which often show a high base and corner toruses, none of the monoliths published by Roeder present a torus on the side faces in such an asymmetrical manner.

## The naos' inscriptions

The texts inscribed on the lintel and jambs are practically illegible on the



stone itself, but the few words recognised on the imprint produced when the monument was discovered allowed Prof. Yoyotte to attribute the naos to the master of the temple, Amun-Gereb.

The photographic technique known as RTI (Reflectance Transformation Imaging), associated with a new study of the imprint, helped to identify a few hieroglyphs or a few additional words, but not a continuous text, nor the identification of the dedicating sovereign. The author of the text does not seem to use Ptolemaic writing, but the signs and classical script of an 'ideal ancient language'.

The writings on the monolithic naos explain how Amun-Gereb had the role of conveying the treasures of the universe to a new king, thus giving him the right to sovereignty over the world. Three epithets of the god are inscribed on the naos: 'He who presides over the mekes', 'The august god who presides over the



House of Rejoicing' and one of a divinity providing goods from the Two Lands.

## **Destruction and importance of the temple**

Invested with the name Gereb, as well as with several epithets exalting its dynastic charge, the Amun of the Canopic Branch played a prominent role at least since the thirtieth dynasty and during the Ptolemaic period until the middle of the second century BC.



Although the temple was destroyed around this date, and its remains were exposed to extensive dismantling and looting for over eight centuries, the number and quality of artefacts found at the site testify to the Lagids' generosity in favour of the Heracleion, the sanctuary of Amun and his son Khonsu. Close to Alexandria, the Temple of the Masters of the Gereb certainly fulfilled its mission as a 'great jubilee machine' and 'instrument of royal propaganda' to support the Greek sovereigns.

**Object:** Pink granite, H. 174 cm. Ptolemaic Period, Maritime Museum, Alexandria (SCA 457)

**Source:** Constructing, Remaking, and Dismantling Sacred Landscapes in Lower Egypt, Late Dynastic — Early Medieval Period, edited by Damian Robinson and Franck Goddio, Chapter 7: Amun-Gereb and Osiris in Thonis-Heracleion: the great naos of the temple, author: Sophie von Bomhard, Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology: Monograph 11, School of Archaeology, University of Oxford 2021

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