

PRIEST WITH OSIRIS-CANOPUS



Excavations by the IEASM on the ancient island of Antirhodos, today submerged in the eastern harbour of **Alexandria**, confirmed the existence of an important **architectural complex** built with limestone blocks, with faced walls, mosaics and friezes.

Two sphinxes and the statue of a priest were among the finds on the site.

Two sphinxes from the ancient Royal Quarters

Prior to the Roman conquest, Antirhodos was private property of the Lagid kings and belonged to the Royal Quarters, which ran from Cape Lochias (today Cape Silsileh) to the eastern end of the Great Port where the ships of the royal navy anchored.

Two sphinxes were found at the end of a still existing stone-flagged way, dating from the end of the Ptolemaic Period (first century BC), and cut from granite in the Egyptian style.



The faces, however, show the features of Hellenistic royal effigies. One was attributed to Ptolemy XII Auletes Neos Dionysus, **Cleopatra VII's father**. Set up in front of the façades of religious or royal buildings, they displayed the sovereign's divine power.

Temple dedicated to Isis

In addition to the sphinxes, the statue of a priest holding an “Osiris-Canopus” was found at the level of the building's collapse, indicating the existence of a temple, probably dedicated to Isis, and still active in the early Roman occupation.



Almost complete, the image of this **servant of his god** expresses a deep feeling of piety and tenderness towards the dead and reborn god.

To avoid desecration, the young man uses a section of his coat to delicately hold the divine image supposed to contain the water of the Nile flood mingled with the “humours” of the body of Osiris.



Priest heading Osiris procession

Although the motif is well-known in Egypt and elsewhere, particularly on **Egyptian-style monuments** in Italy – such as the priest holding an Osiris hydreios in veiled hands on a relief on the Iseum of the Field of Mars in Rome – this Alexandrine figure is of outstanding sculptural quality.

It shows the priest sculpted in the round, heading a procession of Osiris which took place in the great Hellenistic metropolis as **Clement of Alexandria** describes it:

“At last the prophet comes out holding the hydreios ostentatiously to his chest, and followed by those who carry offerings which they name. As the head of the temple, he knows all of the two books that are called hieratic and commands all knowledge of the laws and the gods and all of the priestly science”.



Object: Granodiorite. H. 122 cm. End of first century BC – beginning of first century AD. Alexandria East Harbour.

National Museum Alexandria (SCA 449)

Source: Original description in exhibition catalogue „Osiris - Egypt’s Sunken Mysteries“, p 142, Paris, 2015, re-ed 2018, exh. Egypt’s Sunken Cities, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, 4 November 2018 - 14 April 2019

Photos: Christoph Gerigk © Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation