

# PTOLEMAIC QUEEN



One of the IEASM's most beautiful finds in Thonis-Heracleion is this Greco-Egyptian-style statue from the Ptolemaic Period. The **queen in dark stone** is clad in the traditional gown identifying female rulers with Isis. The hair, its plaited strands modelled with exceptional care, is encircled by a diadem adorned with the uraeus of kings. The eye inlays, which personalized the face, have disappeared.

## Pharaonic style with different artistic influence

The effigy, which is larger than life-sized, depicts a female figure standing, with arms down by her sides and the left foot slightly forward. This position respects the traditional Pharaonic style, but the modelling of the surface and of the physiognomy bears witness to a different artistic influence. In her left hand the queen is holding the ankh sign (the sign of life) and on her chest her garment bears the 'Isis knot'. She is dressed in a fine chemise with a scooped neckline.





## Determined look of a middle-aged woman

The ovoid face grows more slender towards the chin. The mouth, with its carefully modelled lips, is thin and tight, giving the individual a stern, determined look. The large, almond-shaped eyes are hollow. The creases at the neck emphasize that the woman is middle-aged.



The hair, arranged into long, rolled-up curls, falls down the back and sides. Above the forehead, the locks are shorter, leaving an open triangle on the forehead above the nose. The hair is encircled by a broad, flat diadem. In the middle of the forehead is a uraeus, rearing-up.

## Hairstyle leads to possible identification

Elsewhere, the uraeus and the broad, flat diadem are the **royal attributes of the Hellenistic sovereigns**, as are the Isis locks. We should recall that the first Cleopatra, wife of Ptolemy V, appears on coinage as Isis, endowed with this precise hairstyle. Arsinoe II (316–270 BC), sisterwife of Ptolemy II, has the same coiffure on the statue in New York, traditionally dated to the 3rd century BC. Berenice II (273–221 BC), the wife of Ptolemy III and mother of Ptolemy IV, wore long corkscrew locks, but with wavy hair above her forehead, as on the portrait in marble from

Thmuis in the Cairo Museum. A different version of the hairstyle with the long corkscrew locks is worn by Cleopatra II (185/180–116/115 BC), daughter of Ptolemy V and sisterwife of Ptolemy VI, then by her daughter, Cleopatra I. This is indeed how we see the first Cleopatra depicted on coinage, in the same way as another daughter of Ptolemy VI, Cleopatra Thea, who in 146 BC married Demetrius II, King of Syria. This time, the long curls at the back and on the sides are accompanied by shorter corkscrew locks at the front, as in the Heracleion statue.



# Which Ptolemaic queen does it represent?

The portrait is more precisely attributed by R. R. R. Smith to **Cleopatra II or III**, while R. Fleischer saw it as an image of Cleopatra Thea. The stiff, formal style of the Heracleion statue enables it to be compared to a sculpture in basalt in New Haven, dressed in a clinging garment with an Isis-knot. It seems possible to identify it with Cleopatra III, as suggested by S.-A. Ashton and P. E. Stanwick.

All these factors dispose one to see the Heracleion statue as a **depiction of Cleopatra III** (possibly her mother), assimilated into Isis. The assimilation into Isis is strengthened by the presence of the ankh sign.

**Object:** Black granodiorite. H. 220 cm, 2nd cent. BC.

National Museum of Alexandria (SCA 283)

**Source:** Original description 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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