

# A SPHINX FROM ALEXANDRIA'S ROYAL ISLAND



Excavations on the **ancient island of Antirhodos**, today submerged in the eastern harbour of Alexandria revealed two sphinxes at the end of a still existing stone-flagged way.

Together with the discovery of a [statue of a priest](#) holding an „Osiris-Canopus“ and architectural remains they indicate the existence of a **temple dedicated to Isis**.

## Sphinxes cut in Egyptian style

The two sphinxes date from the end of the Ptolemaic period and are cut from granite. Set up in front of the facades of religious or royal buildings, they displayed the sovereign's divine power.

One sphinx's entire surface has been corroded. The other sphinx is better preserved: Its pose is traditional, the front feet stretched out forwards, the powerful rear legs tucked up under the belly. The head is surmounted by the nemes, whose two sides fall down onto the sides of the chest. At the rear, on the back, rests the thick plait of the Pharaonic headdress.





The royal uraeus decorates the front of the nemes. The face is elongated, the chin pointed. The ears, which are barely detached, do not rest on the sides of the nemes. The nose is elongated and slender, the eyes large and edged with the twin folds of the eyelids. The hair seems to extend out from beneath the diadem.

## **Face with features of Hellenistic royal effigies**

The treatment of the face characterizes the royal effigies which blend the Pharaonic traditions with the Hellenistic portraiture style.



This **mixed style** of depicting the Alexandrian sovereigns is not manifested before Ptolemy VI.

Moreover, it would seem that the particular treatment of the hair is characteristic of the numismatic portraits of **Ptolemy XII** Auletes Neos Dionysos. The sphinx could therefore depict a royal statue of the **father of Cleopatra VII**.

**Object:** Granodiorite, H. 70 cm | L. 150 cm

National Museum of Alexandria (SCA 450)

**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

**Photos:** Christoph Gerigk © Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation