

SANCTUARY KHONSU-THOTH



The IEASM's research in Thonis-Heracleion brought to light a small shrine of Khonsu-Thoth at the entrance to the Nile on the North-East channel of the city.

Khonsu-Thoth was revered in the port-city at least from the reign of pharaoh Amasis (570–526 BC) and it is likely that this shrine was deliberately placed

in this location to ritually protect the city and its ports through Khonsu in his guise as a protector against evil and Thoth for justice, making Khonsu-Thoth a particularly apt keeper of gates and entranceway, 'letting through the righteous and warding off the nefarious'.

13 animal sarcophagi

Although the sanctuary was looted in antiquity, thirteen [limestone sarcophagi](#) (lengths between 43 to 48 cm) were discovered on site. The emptied sarcophagi and their lids were



found scattered down the slope of the islet. Their dimensions suggest that they may have contained animal remains the size of large birds, such as ibis or hawks. It is therefore possible that an ibis cemetery was also connected with the sanctuary of Khonsu-Thoth.

Temple's short life time

Analyses of the local and imported pottery indicate continual occupation of this area from the end of the seventh to the third quarter of the sixth century BC. The sanctuary's demolition and abandonment occurred at the latest just before the last quarter of the sixth century BC.

Its life, which corresponds to the twenty-sixth dynasty (Saïte Period), was short in comparison to the normal span of temples in Egypt, where most sanctuaries remained active over centuries, or even millennia.

Like other heavy temples and buildings

constructed upon the unstable clays of Thonis-Heracleion, the sanctuary may well have been destroyed by some catastrophic event.

Important theological defensive bastion

The scarcity of blocks excavated as well as of remaining objects shows that after destruction, the temple was recycled and the cult material probably transferred to other sanctuaries.

Although its period of activity was short, this temple played an important role during the Saïte Period. Its strategic position at the very entrance of the Canopic Gate, i.e. at the northern entry into Egypt, explains its principal function: to act as a theological defensive bastion alongside the military barriers that the Egyptian's habitually erected at the country's entrances.



Objects: Limestone blocks, location: North-east channel of Thonis-Heracleion, sarcophagi: limestone, Maritime Museum, Alexandria (SCA 1513, 1514, 1517).

Sources: Original description by Franck Goddio in 'Thonis-Heracleion in Context, Part 1.1: The Sacred Topography of Thonis-Heracleion' and by Sophie von Bomhard in 'Theological Defences at the Canopic Gate in the Saite Period', both Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology (OCMA), 2015 and 2017, University of Oxford.

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