

STUDIA HELLENISTICA

51

MORE THAN MEN,
LESS THAN GODS

STUDIES ON ROYAL CULT AND IMPERIAL WORSHIP

PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
COLLOQUIUM ORGANIZED BY THE
BELGIAN SCHOOL AT ATHENS
(NOVEMBER 1-2, 2007)

edited by

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PEETERS
LEUVEN - PARIS - WALPOLE, MA
2011

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THE ICONOGRAPHY OF ASSIMILATION:
ISIS AND ROYAL IMAGERY ON PTOLEMAIC
SEAL IMPRESSIONS

Dimitris PLANTZOS*

(Plates 408-415)

Isis and the Ptolemaic queen

Already in the third century Ptolemaic queens were associated with female members of the Greek or Graeco-Egyptian pantheon and were worshipped as such, posthumously or already in their lifetimes.

Next to Sarapis, Isis was the most successful concept for a Graeco-Egyptian deity although, unlike Sarapis, she was not a Greek invention. Isis was worshipped in relative obscurity in Egypt throughout the pharaonic period. She was reinvented as consort to Sarapis, who only then, in the later fourth century, was given the prime position in the Graeco-Egyptian pantheon (even though Zeus remained the leading divinity); needless to say, such a divine couple was meant for Greek rather than Egyptian consumption¹. Consequently, Isis was the obvious candidate for assimilating a Ptolemaic queen: as the archetypal Egyptian wife and mother, the goddess was ideal as the divine persona of the ruling queen or (deceased) queen-mother in a dynasty obsessed with the appearance of dynastic continuity and familial loyalty.

* This paper is part of a wider project leading to the publication of the entire Edfu Hoard as a single find. A British Academy Post-doctoral Fellowship (1993-1996) enabled me to initiate research on the Edfu Hoard; the Academy also funded my study visits to Toronto and Amsterdam. Part of the photographic expenses was covered with a grant by the Scouloudi Foundation (Institute of Historical Research, University of London). I wish to thank: John Boardman, Helmut Kyrieleis and Herwig Maehler for encouragement and advice; Robert L. Wilkins and Alison Coveley for assistance with the photography; Alison Easson and E.A. Knox (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto); R.A. Lunsingh Scheurleer and Ron Leenheer (Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam). All dates in this paper are B.C.

¹ On Isis under Ptolemaic patronage, see Fraser 1972, 246-76.

Following the pharaonic example, Ptolemaic queens were mostly venerated as regents to their reigning sons and as go-betweens to them on behalf of their people. Religious developments during the Amarna period (14th century) increased the importance of the role of royal women, a phenomenon paralleled in the Ptolemaic period. It has been noted that Nefertiti and Tauseret, the two prominent queens of Dynasties XVIII and XIX, may have provided an iconographic model for the Arsinoes and the Kleopatras ruling Alexandria in the third, second, and first centuries². In particular, Queen Nefertiti may have served as an ancient, though compelling, precedent for the posthumous deification of Arsinoe II by her brother and consort, Ptolemy Philadelphos. The strong emphasis placed by royal cult on the female members of the Ptolemaic household led to an unprecedented interest in the individual portrayal of the female form in the art of the Ptolemaic period, both Greek (or Hellenized) and Egyptian (or Egyptianizing). Especially in sculpture, but also in other media including sphragistics, Ptolemaic royal imagery employed a standardized vocabulary in order to promote an ideological program encompassing both the old pharaonic ideas of kingship and the more recent Greek-Hellenistic ones, propagated after Alexander on the model of the Persian court and pharaonic Egypt itself³. Royal and divine attributes play a crucial role in denoting the specific qualities of the king or queen portrayed, qualities that served to legitimize their rule and to structure their royal cult.

In the Hellenistic period, therefore, Isis came to prominence on the basis of her association with the ruling queen, or, quite often, the dead queen. Arsinoe Philadelphos, who died in 270 or soon after, was first associated with the goddess during her lifetime. In Alexandrian art they appear as two separate divinities (accompanied by a third, *Agathe Tyche*) sharing a common cult; they are *synnaoi* (sharing a temple) or *symbo-moi* (sharing an altar). This is attested, for example, by a series of oinochoai made of faience which show a Ptolemaic queen pouring a libation over an altar. The class was studied by Dorothy Burr Thompson, who interpreted them as cult vessels used in some ritual related to the dynastic cult in Ptolemaic Alexandria. Several examples show Arsinoe Philadelphos next to an altar inscribed with the names of the three dei-

² Ashton 2001, 37.

³ Stanwick 2002, 11-2.

ties (*Agathe Tyche*, Arsinoe Philadelphos, Isis) as the joint recipients of the cult⁴. Arsinoe's association with Isis might have resulted from her partial assimilation to Aphrodite, the Greek equivalent of Isis-Hathor. After her death, Arsinoe was further assimilated to several Egyptian deities, including Isis. It is only then, and always in the Egyptian context, that Arsinoe is portrayed fully costumed as Isis. The earliest surviving example is the so-called Pithom stele of 264/3 (Fig. 14)⁵. On this, and on other pharaonic-type stelai and temple reliefs, the deified Arsinoe II is shown wearing a composite crown peculiar to her, consisting of a horns-and-disc crown atop a set of ram's horns, above a Lower Egyptian (Red) crown⁶. (Some notable exceptions will be discussed below). The Pithom stele is also the first, though poorly preserved, occurrence of Arsinoe dressed in the peculiar fringed, knotted garment traditionally associated with Isis (Fig. 14, after Naville's 1885 drawing, fails to show the fringed mantle, which was omitted by the draftsman, perhaps because of its poor state of preservation). The Tanis stele (Fig. 15), showing a Ptolemaic king and queen before a divine triad consisting of the gods Min and Horus and the goddess Wadjyt, is another good example portraying a deified queen in the same garment. Although once dated to the time of Ptolemy II and his sister-wife Arsinoe II, the stele is now attributed to the reign of Ptolemy IV (222–204), thus making the queen Arsinoe III⁷.

The same iconographical type has long been recognized in free-standing statues both of the Greek-Hellenistic and native Egyptian traditions, and also in reliefs, vases, coinage, gems and seal impressions. It consists of a wig-like hairstyle with curly, "corkscrew" locks, the fringed mantle tied in a knot over the breast⁸ and, most usually, the horns-and-disc crown. The last was borrowed from the pharaonic tradition, where it was used for other goddesses besides Isis, most notably Hathor. A cornucopia — the only element in this assemblage of attributes clearly and exclusively recognized as Greek — is added to this as well as other statuary types portraying Isis. In the case of Arsinoe Philadelphos, this

⁴ Thompson 1973, 57-9; see Fraser 1972, 242-3.

⁵ Kamal 1904-1905, no. 22183 with pl. 57; Naville 1885, 16-20, pl. 8-10; Ashton 2001, 46; Hölbl 2001, 81-2, fig. 3.1.

⁶ Quaegebeur 1971, 191-2; 1978, 249-55; 1985.

⁷ Walker and Higgs 2001, no. 56 [Andrews and Ashton]; Ashton 2001, 45-6.

⁸ See Walters 1988, 4-7 for a detailed description of this garment and its arrangement.

becomes the *dikeras*, the double cornucopia, a symbol of beneficence posthumously associating the queen with *Agathe Tyche*, devised, we are told, by her grieving consort, Ptolemy Philadelphos himself (though some queens of the late Ptolemaic period may have also used the same attribute)⁹. More recently, however, the direct association of this particular iconographical type with Isis — and with Ptolemaic queens assimilated to her — has been challenged based on a variety of new approaches, taking into account the evidence from native Egyptian art. It will be useful to review this discussion below.

Undoing the “Isis knot”

In a paper published in 1980, Robert Bianchi maintained that the tripartite knotted garment previously associated with Isis was not peculiar to her¹⁰. He was right to point out that this specific form of drapery had a long history in pre-Ptolemaic Egyptian art, and that the knot in particular was part of an established Egyptian tradition long before it was adopted by Greek artists to serve in the portrayal of Ptolemaic queens. Furthermore, he maintained that this iconographic type fulfilled a specific role in royal iconography and was not meant to portray the Ptolemaic queens in the guise of Isis, or to represent Isis herself. This conviction of his has been shared by others¹¹. In 1988, E. Walters argued that this type of dress was associated with Isis only in the Roman period, and then only as a consequence of the assimilation of Kleopatra VII to the goddess¹².

As noted above, the earliest representation of a queen wearing the knotted garment is on the Pithom stele of 264/3 (Fig. 14). On the monument, Arsinoe is explicitly identified as the “image of Isis and Hathor,” a titlature that to Peter Marshall Fraser and Thompson was a clear indication for the association of the costume with Isis¹³. Others maintain that the double assimilation to Isis and Hathor on the stele suggests that the dress was not peculiar to either of the two goddesses¹⁴. This view,

⁹ Plantzos 1993, 124-6; Stanwick 2002, 36-7. See also Ashton 2001, 41-3.

¹⁰ Bianchi 1980.

¹¹ Ashton 2001, 50-1.

¹² Walters 1988, 8-11.

¹³ Fraser 1972, 236; Thompson 1973, 58-9.

¹⁴ Walters 1988, 10 n. 38; Ashton 2001, 50 n. 271.

however, neglects the repeated borrowing of Hathor's attributes by Isis in the Ptolemaic period, when the latter was given more prominence in Egyptianizing, as well as Greek, royal art. The horns-and-disc crown with vertical falcon tail feathers worn by Isis in Egyptian and Egyptianizing art is a direct borrowing from Hathor, with whom Isis shared an association with Horus and the role of the divine mother to the reigning king¹⁵. A fresh look at the Pithom stele would suffice to suggest the duality of royal and divine nature in pharaonic art. Arsinoe is depicted *twice* on the stele, her two identical images back-to-back in the center of the scene, and always behind Isis¹⁶. On the stele Arsinoe is explicitly associated with Isis and her imagery, and we may be certain that her fringed costume and new composite crown are meant to depict her as Isis/Hathor, as attested by the inscription on the stele. To the eyes of a Greek, an image of Hathor would read pretty much like an image of Isis, whose Hellenized identity and appearance made her more familiar to her non-Egyptian devotees. Apart from royal depictions, in the Hellenistic period Isis is commonly shown in the knotted garment, sometimes nursing Horus¹⁷, thus suggesting that the allusions of the type may have been firmer than strict iconographic protocol might suggest.

A number of statues and statuettes show Ptolemaic queens in the same dress and the same wig with corkscrew locks. One, a limestone statuette in New York, approximately 38 cm in height, is a certain, though posthumous, representation of Arsinoe II from the mid-second century (Fig. 16)¹⁸. It shows the deified queen in her divine guise, inscribed on the back pillar (provided we can make out the badly damaged text) as "King's [daughter], King's [sister], King's [wife], daughter of [Amu]n, mistress of the Two Lands, Arsinoe, the divine, brother-loving, who lives forever." Her headgear is missing; however one assumes it would have consisted of a horns-and-disc crown, perhaps complete with vertical falcon feathers according to the Isis/Hathor prototype. Arsinoe is most certainly the "sitter" of a fragmentary basalt statue in

¹⁵ See Quirke 1992, 126-30.

¹⁶ Ptolemy II is shown on the right making offerings to Atum, Osiris, Horus, Isis and Arsinoe II; centre left: Ptolemy II is facing Atum, Isis and Arsinoe II; and finally on the extreme left: Ptolemy II is making offerings to his father Ptolemy I.

¹⁷ Walker and Higgs 2001, no. 128 [Higgs].

¹⁸ Today in New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. no. 20.2.21): Walker and Higgs 2001, no. 166 [Ashton]; Ashton 2001, no. 54; Stanwick 2002, no. C28.

Cambridge, preserving the double cornucopia, the knotted garment and the corkscrew locks, but not any details of the head or an inscription¹⁹.

A second limestone statuette (preserved height: 61.8 cm), also in New York, offers a similar representation of a Ptolemaic queen, though with a single cornucopia (Fig. 17)²⁰. The headgear is once again missing and a cartouche naming the queen as Kleopatra, improbably cut on the statue's right bicep, has been rightly exposed as a modern forgery. Given the stylistic qualities of the piece and the youthful aspect of the queen portrayed, an advanced date in the first century has been proposed and an attribution to Kleopatra VII has often been put forward. More recently, the statue was included as a certain representation of Kleopatra VII in the British Museum exhibition devoted to the last of the Ptolemies, where, incidentally, such an identification was often forced onto certain pieces in an obvious attempt to boost the number of *bona fide* Kleopatras among the exhibits. Sally-Ann Ashton, who was responsible for many of these attributions, based most of them on the triple *uraeus* the queens are shown wearing above their foreheads²¹. A double *uraeus* was included in the crown of Arsinoe Philadelphos, just as the double cornucopia was her distinctive attribute; however, it seems that the triple *uraeus* was also used in the later Ptolemaic period. Given that the double *uraeus* is most commonly associated with the queen's rule over the two lands of Egypt, tripling the *uraei* causes some grave logistical problems. A certain "triple rule" could be implied, and one might be wise to leave it at that. Ptolemaic queens and kings often had to share — even nominally — their rule over the realm and the specific attribute might not have been associated with a single ruler. Naturally, for some it *had* to be an attribute created for and sported by Kleopatra VII, regardless of the inconsisten-

¹⁹ Walker and Higgs 2001, no. 169 [Ashton].

²⁰ New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. no. 89.2.660): Walker and Higgs 2001, no. 164 (mislabelled as a marble statue [Ashton]); Ashton 2001, no. 65; Stanwick 2002, no. E14.

²¹ Walker and Higgs 2001, 154-5 [Ashton]). Based on the attribution of the triple *uraeus* to Kleopatra VII, Ashton proceeded to claim that statues such as the St. Petersburg basalt statue of a striding queen holding the *dikeras* should also portray the last of the Ptolemies, even though physical likeness and the *dikeras* itself should still allude to a posthumous commemoration of Arsinoe Philadelphos: Walker and Higgs, no. 160 [Ashton]; Ashton 2001, 48-9. Admittedly, the *dikeras* was assumed by Kleopatra VII on her coinage (see Walker and Higgs 2001, no. 186 [Meadows and Ashton]), though in obvious allusion to Arsinoe II.

cies created by such an attribution. Ashton considers a number of implausible alternatives (Kleopatra, Kaesarion and Julius Caesar; Kleopatra, Kaisarion and Mark Antony; or Ptolemy Auletes, etc.). The evidence at hand, however, does not allow such overconfidence in associating the triple *uraeus* with Kleopatra VII as her exclusive attribute.

A few oinochoe fragments and medallions seem also to portray a queen in the Hellenized Isis costume (Figs. 12–13)²². The hair is done in the heavy corkscrew locks presumably borrowed from heads of Libya as they appear in the coinage of Kyrene (often termed the “Libyan locks”)²³. Based on the earlier example of Arsinoes II and III and Berenike II on the oinochoai of the series, Thompson argued that the Isis figures on the oinochoai are also Ptolemaic queens associated with the goddess, especially Kleopatra I²⁴. (However Thompson dated the *origin* of the type, based mainly on stylistic evaluation of the drapery folds, at the time of Berenike II, c. 260–220)²⁵. She also associated a number of Isis heads in other media with Kleopatra I, as for example a limestone head at the Benaki Museum in Athens (Fig. 11)²⁶. Similar heads, based on the Libya prototype, are often featured in Ptolemaic bronze coinage of the period, including a series dated to the regency of Kleopatra I (180–176)²⁷. The latter have been used by several art historians as evidence for the assimilation of Kleopatra I with Isis, and for the attribution of several anonymous Isis heads to Kleopatra I, and to other Ptolemaic queens²⁸. But in fact there is no further, i.e. textual or historical, evidence for such an association. As far as we can tell, it is only with Kleopatra III that a full identification with Isis occurred. In 131/0, in the midst of the civil war between Physkon and Kleopatra II, Kleopatra III established a new priesthood of the “Sacred Foal of Isis, Great Mother of the Gods.”²⁹ Only in that context do we find a direct identification of the queen with the deity, in the process of which the actual name of the queen

²² Thompson 1973, nos. 122-4, 274-6. On the development and significance of the Isis costume, see Thompson 1973, 30-1; Walters 1988, 5-18.

²³ *BMC Cyrenaica*, pl. 31.1-15, 32.1-12.

²⁴ Thompson 1973, 92-3.

²⁵ Thompson 1973, 165-6, no. 122, attributed to Berenike II.

²⁶ Thompson 1973, 92-3; Damaskos 2004, 29.

²⁷ *BMC Ptolemies*, pl. 18.4-7, 9.

²⁸ See Thompson 1973, 92; Fraser 1972, 243-4.

²⁹ Fraser 1972, 221 n. 249.

(Kleopatra) is omitted from the titulature. The ultimate stage in this process is reached with Auletes and Kleopatra VII who styled themselves as “the new/young” Dionysos and Isis, respectively, although the extent to which these titles meant a true and complete identification with the chosen deities is not quite clear³⁰.

Ptolemaic queens appealed to a wide audience, chiefly Graeco-Macedonian, but also local Egyptian, and their imagery had to be designed according to different sensitivities, tastes and traditions, often quite conflicting ones. Syncretism allowed for more stylistic and iconographical freedom than might be understood by modern scholarship, and Roman reception of Graeco-Egyptian art created an even more misconstrued amalgam. It is therefore pertinent to maintain the associations of this iconographical type with Isis, especially in its shorthand versions occurring on gems or seal impressions and even more so the impressions from Edfu, to be discussed below, where an overrepresentation of Isis is to be expected. Rather than identifying these images unequivocally with Ptolemaic queens, as is sometimes done, I would recognize such representations as Isis first, then try to see whether an association with some Ptolemaic queen might be appropriate. The association of the corkscrew locks and knotted garment with Isis is further confirmed by a very rare Late Ptolemaic gold ring, where, on its twin bezels, two heads of the goddess are cut facing one another: one, in horns-and-disc crown atop a vulture headdress (on which more below), the other with a disc and ears of wheat (?) over the wig with corkscrew locks, wearing a clearly knotted garment and holding a *sistrum* (Fig. 3)³¹.

Isis in Edfu

The most sizeable body of Isiac representations dating from the Ptolemaic period are the seal impressions from the so-called Edfu hoard³². A great number among them represent a common type of Isis

³⁰ Fraser (1972, 244-5 with n. 441) crucially points out that no documents survive in which Kleopatra VII is mentioned as the *Nea Isis*; her appropriation of the title is only recorded by Plutarch (*Ant.* 54.6).

³¹ Plantzos 1996b, 57; Symes 1999, no. 31.

³² A cache of about 700 clay seal impressions was found the winter of 1905 “in a large pot at Edfu.” One half of those were purchased the following year by C.T. Currelly, at

bust (see Fig. 1a-l)³³: she is wearing the Libyan locks under a diadem crowned with the elaborate horns-and-disc crown that is an attribute of Hathor in Egyptian art. Specifically Hathor's crown consisted of two vertical cow horns with the sun disc in the middle and two vertical falcon tail feathers on top; a slightly modified version, from which the falcon feathers were omitted, was worn by Isis in some of her depictions, like the Philai reliefs (see Fig. 14)³⁴. Both versions of the crown were worn over a vulture headdress by goddesses on reliefs and stelai, but the vulture headdress was omitted when the horns-and-disc crown was worn by (living) queens. This of course was Egyptian canon, and the Greeks need not have followed it faithfully. Indeed, the curious combination of traditional Egyptian imagery with the corkscrew hairstyle borrowed from Libya, a Greek divinity, betrays some departure from pharaonic iconography; traditionally, Hathor and Isis wore their distinctive crowns over the typical long-pleated wig normally worn by goddesses and queens. More often than not, the falcon feathers are omitted from the horns-and-disc crown on the sealings, though there are a few exceptions. This is also the case with a sizeable group of gem intaglios reproducing the type³⁵.

the time building the collection which was later to become the basis for the Royal Ontario Museum (hereafter: ROM) in Toronto. Soon after, M.A. Murray published those impressions from the Canadian half with hieroglyphic texts and devices (Murray 1907) and J.G. Milne the "Greek" part of the hoard (Milne 1916). In the meantime, the rest of the sealings, bought by F.W. von Bissing, had been taken to Holland, where he was teaching Egyptology at the University of Rotterdam. By the time of his death, in 1956, von Bissing had followed the advice of his fellow Egyptologist C.W. Lunsingh Scheurleer to bequeath the impressions to the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam (hereafter APM). There, they were kept in obscurity until R.A. Lunsingh Scheurleer, the Museum's Senior Curator and C.W. Scheurleer's grandson, realised that they were the "other half" of the Toronto seals and publicized their existence in 1978. See also Plantzos 1996a, 2002; Connelly and Plantzos 2006.

³³ Fig. 1a: APM 8177-17; b: ROM 906.12.182; c: ROM 906.12.183; d: ROM 906.12.51; e: ROM 906.12.185; f: ROM 906.12.184; g: APM 8177-73; h: APM 8177-60; i: ROM 906.12.48; j: ROM 906.12.52; k: APM 8177-249; l: ROM 906.12.47.

³⁴ Vassilika 1989, 94-5 (types FMD; FMF).

³⁵ Plantzos 1999, 52-4. Fig. 5a: Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 27. 711 (Plantzos 1999, no. 48); b: Collection Unknown (once Harari, Plantzos 1999, no. 53); c: Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum 28855 (Plantzos 1999, no. 51); d: Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1892. 1572 (Plantzos 1999, no. 52); e: Paris, Cabinet des Médailles 92 (Plantzos 1999, no. 65); f: Paris, Cabinet des Médailles 91 (Plantzos 1999, no. 66).

From these, a chalcedony in Boston (Fig. 5a) stands out because of its exceptional workmanship and the fact that it is signed by its author, Lykomedes (alternatively, though less likely, the inscription may refer to the gem's owner). The type is slightly different from the rest, in that it employs a more elaborate hairstyle, similar to that seen on a limestone head in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore³⁶. Elsewhere, the same hairstyle, which is not quite the wig with Libyan locks as we see it on coins, may be found in miniature works like the bone ring from Cyprus today in the Museum of Nicosia in Cyprus (Fig. 10)³⁷.

The best parallels to the type depicted on the sealings are provided by the rest of the extant intaglios, especially an example from Alexandria (Fig. 5c), a gem once in the Harari collection (Fig. 5b) and a few more examples, today in Oxford (Fig. 5d), Paris (Fig. 5e-f), Munich and elsewhere. None of these include the upright feathers on top of the horns-and-disc crown, although this feature is regularly included in gems and metal rings depicting Isis next to Sarapis (on which see below). On the other hand, a gold ring depicting an Isis bust very close to the type seen on the sealings features the complete version of the crown³⁸. An additional attribute on the sealings, one or two ears of grain along with the horns-and-disc crown, seems to have been a Greek invention, perhaps a confused rendering of the long and twisted ram horns often added to the crown in Egyptian iconography. Ears of grain are also worn by the Isis heads on the bronze coins issued by Ptolemies V and VI already mentioned, otherwise characterized solely by the woman's corkscrew-locks hairdo. As noted above, their earlier association with Kleopatra I lacks any solid justification³⁹. Isis busts with ears of grain are also found in sealings from outside the Edfu hoard⁴⁰. Grain wreaths are worn by Isis in several of the intaglios mentioned above (see Fig. 5c-f). In rings and gems alike the horns-and-disc crown has been reduced to a minute accessory on top of the figure's head, rather decorative and flower-like. As a matter of fact, modern scholars often confuse it with a lotus bud⁴¹.

³⁶ Reeder 1988, no. 29.

³⁷ Marangou 1971, no. 8.

³⁸ The ring has appeared at auction: Sotheby's, New York, November 28, 1990, lot 114.

³⁹ See also Plantzos 1999, 53.

⁴⁰ Maddoli 1963-1964, no. 483; one example from the L. Benaki collection: Athens, National Museum 2443 (Boussac 1989, 326, fig. 2).

⁴¹ See Reeder 1988, 246; see the Sarapis and Isis busts below.

Only one or two of the sealings were certainly produced by convex gems, the rest being the products of flat all-metal rings. It seems, however, that both the gems and the rings that produced the sealings refer to the same image of Hellenized Isis, probably created under Ptolemaic patronage. The diffusion of the type was wide, and indeed some of the intaglios were probably cut outside of Egypt⁴². The occurrence of the type at Edfu, however, suggests its significance for all Egyptians, whether of native or of Greek origin.

As to the Edfu type, can we be certain that it was used to represent the current queen, however vaguely, as it has been the working assumption in scholarship so far⁴³? The three Kleopatras (I-III) have received most attributions, on the basis of iconographical evidence whose importance and reliability seem to have been overstressed. As mentioned above, we have no textual evidence to suggest that Kleopatras I or II were ever identified with Isis or received cult in her name; such developments occurred with Kleopatras III and VII.

The case for any association of Kleopatra I and Isis rests solely on art historical evidence of rather vague significance. It is, first, reasonable to exclude any sculpture from our discussion, as no inscribed portraits of Kleopatra I survive, in any guise, and all attributions have been based on comparisons with miniature works like the Edfu sealings, which are also uninscribed, and often with other works of sculpture previously ascribed to the queen. There is also coinage, but the only certain depiction of the queen, on the British Museum oktadrachm (Fig. 6), is a strictly secular one, perhaps associating the queen with Arsinoe Philadelphos but significantly omitting the latter's horn of Ammon. It is, therefore, the queen's dynastic role that is being emphasized here rather than her personal deification⁴⁴. It is also significant that on her two most certain representations from the hoard, on her own (Fig. 7) and alongside Epiphanes (Fig. 8), the queen is portrayed without any obvious attributes of divinity⁴⁵. The Isis

⁴² Plantzos 1999, 52-4.

⁴³ Kyrieleis 1975, 114-5; Boardman and Vollenweider 1978, 82; Spier 1989, 31; Vollenweider 1995, 103-6.

⁴⁴ As consort to Epiphanes, Kleopatra I received *dynastic* cult, along with her husband, as the *Theoi Epiphaneis*; whether Kleopatra received any additional cult on her own merit, before or after her death, and especially in association with Isis is unattested and, in consequence, doubtful (Fraser 1972, 243-4).

⁴⁵ See Plantzos 1996a, 308-10. Fig. 7: APM 8177-42; fig. 8: APM 8177-267.

heads on the bronze coins of Epiphanes and Kleopatra herself mentioned above, despite the confidence of earlier scholars, show only a vaguely youthful female head and may not be used as evidence for Kleopatra's association with the goddess.

Excluding the secular portraits of Kleopatra I and the doubtful Isis heads from coinage and sculpture, we are left with two images, a faience fragment which formed the basis of Thompson's discussion (Fig. 13), as well as a small number of associated medallions (see Fig. 12) and a seal impression which appeared more recently (Fig. 9)⁴⁶. The oinochoe fragment preserves no inscription and its identification with Kleopatra I is speculative, based on the dubious secondary evidence available to Thompson (mainly the Isis coin series and a few sculpture fragments). Thompson's identification might still stand, and for the medallion in figure 12, as well, mainly because the figure *has* to be a queen, on the basis of her appearance on a vessel associated with dynastic cult of some sort, and because the portrait on the oinochoe does not clash severely with the portrait of Kleopatra as we know it from the gold oktadrachm (Fig. 6). The woman on the oinochoe is seen in the costume peculiar to Isis *and her priestesses*, as Thompson herself acknowledges, and, significantly, she does not wear any of the headgear (horns-and-disc crown and so on) we would expect from a full Isis representation⁴⁷. In that, this representation differs from those in sculpture considered above (Figs. 16-17), where royal/divine insignia are more prominent. It is possible then that Kleopatra's association with Isis on the oinochoai is under the capacity of priestess — although not necessarily a formally recognized one. This would be compatible with all the representations of queens on the oinochoai of this type, shown pouring a libation over an altar belonging to them and their fellow altar-sharing (*symbomoi*) goddesses⁴⁸.

The seal impression, provided that it does in fact portray Kleopatra I next to her son as suggested by Marie-Françoise Boussac, would offer a serious indication for the queen's deification — before or after her death⁴⁹. Boussac convincingly compared the impression with the regency okta-

⁴⁶ From the L. Benaki collection, Athens, National Museum 2447; Boussac 1989, 327-32; Stanwick 2002, fig. 230.

⁴⁷ Thompson 1973, 30.

⁴⁸ See Thompson 1973, nos. 1 and 29 for fully preserved examples.

⁴⁹ Boussac 1989, 327-32.

drachm. The sealing shows a female figure in veil, *stephane*, vulture headdress, horns-and-disc crown resting on a pair of horizontal horns and a small ram horn round her ear in the fashion of Arsinoe Philadelphos on her posthumous coinage. Next to her, a king is shown wearing the *pschent*, the Egyptian double crown. This certainly is a deified queen, most likely a dead one. Although there are other suitable candidates for this joint depiction — any of the later Kleopatras with their brother- or son-consorts — Boussac argued that the case for Kleopatra I and Philometor is the strongest.

The Hathor crown the queen is shown wearing on the seal impression — complete with vertical falcon tail feathers — was a crown associated with queens in Egyptian iconography, as they nurtured the next king, who was seen as an incarnation of Horus⁵⁰. This is not necessarily incompatible with a depiction of Kleopatra in this guise during her lifetime (although this was a rather big step for a regent queen who chose not to portray herself under a divine guise on her coinage). According to a practice followed by most Ptolemies, Epiphanes and Kleopatra I were depicted receiving cult by their successors, in scenes commissioned by both their sons: by Philometor on the wall of the hypostyle hall at Karnak and Physkon on several scenes at Edfu⁵¹. In those scenes Kleopatra is shown wearing the Hathor crown (horns-and-disc with vertical falcon tail feathers) over a vulture headdress. The latter is exclusive to goddesses and deified queens in Egyptian iconography⁵² and must suggest that the figure on the seal impression is *not* a living queen, contrary to Boussac's conviction that the ring which produced the sealing dates from Kleopatra's regency. Serious iconographical problems are posed, however, by the mixture of attributes borne by the queen on the seal impression. Her Hathor crown rests on top of a pair of horizontal horns. This combination was peculiar to Arsinoe Philadelphos, and was worn exclusively by her, over a Lower Egyptian (Red) crown⁵³, with two significant exceptions: Kleopatra II or III and Kleopatra VII⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Vassilika 1989, 95.

⁵¹ Quaegebeur 1978, 255 n. 63-4.

⁵² Vassilika 1989, 93-5.

⁵³ Quaegebeur 1971, 191-2; 1978, 249-55; 1985.

⁵⁴ In two separate scenes from Karnak Ptolemy VIII is accompanied by one of his wives (Kleopatra II or III): Quaegebeur 1983, 112-3 n. 18-20. Kleopatra VII is shown with this distinctive crown in several examples, including a stele in Turin and scenes from the temple at Dendara: Quaegebeur 1971, 216, no. 48; 1983, 111-2 n. 13-4.

The seal impression omits the Lower Egyptian crown, but the remaining attributes seem to point to an association with Arsinoe Philadelphos (although the figure on the sealing may not be Arsinoe herself, as she would not be a suitable candidate for a representation where the queen is given precedence over the king). This is confirmed by the presence of the horn over the queen's ear, hitherto confined to the commemorative coinage of Arsinoe Philadelphos. In fact this horn seems to have been the Greek "translation" of the horizontal ram horns borne by the queen in her Egyptian representations. But can we be sure that this image is a portrait, even a posthumous one, of Kleopatra I, who was only deified as a member of the dynasty and was never shown under such an elaborate guise in Egyptian art? Other possibilities are suggested by the representations of Kleopatras II or III and VII with a similar crown, mentioned above.

The Isis busts from Edfu have to be treated as mere depictions of the goddess, at least at a first stage in our study of them. Their preference for a horns-and-disc crown without falcon feathers is compatible with the way Isis was shown on the Philai reliefs⁵⁵. Indeed, they include all the iconographical elements we would expect from a Hellenized image of the goddess. This is also confirmed by those depictions of an Isis bust next to Sarapis, in Edfu as well as on surviving Ptolemaic rings. A gold ring now in London (Fig. 4), presumably dating from the second century, is a very good example of such a jugate depiction of the two divine busts. Intriguingly, the features of Isis show a good deal of individualization, thus encouraging speculation as to whether the bust is actually a portrait of a late Ptolemaic Kleopatra next to her divine consort. Similarly, the type is also present at Edfu (see Fig. 2b-c)⁵⁶ where a generic Sarapis takes precedence over a portrait-like head of Isis. Admittedly, these heads resemble some of the Edfu queens (see Fig. 2d-e), but I would argue that it is Isis who is influenced by the queens rather than the other way round: looking for a face to put on Isis, (Greek?) cutters naturally looked at their queens for inspiration, not actually implying that the person portrayed was the queen herself in the guise of the goddess. This may be confirmed by the absence of any similar depictions of *kings*, such as a jugate depiction of a Ptolemy (like those in Fig. 2d-f)⁵⁷ next to a generic Isis.

⁵⁵ Vassilika 1989, 94.

⁵⁶ Fig. 2b: APM 8177-19; c: APM 8177-185.

⁵⁷ Fig. 2d: ROM 906.12.194; e: ROM 906.12. 193; f: ROM 906.12.196.

On the other hand, some of the queens on the Edfu sealings, depicted next to their kings (Fig. 2d-f), bear the complete Hathor crown (horns-and-disc crown with twin falcon tail feathers on top). The Hathor crown was worn by goddesses (over a vulture headdress) and queens (over the standard issue long tripartite wig), but hardly ever by Isis in Egyptian imagery of the Ptolemaic period⁵⁸. It is perhaps pointless to expect rings and such objects produced away from the old centers of pharaonic tradition to conform entirely to its rules; it seems, however, that the seal impressions in figure 1a-1 place more emphasis on the attributes of Isis rather than those of Hathor. The latter were, perhaps understandably, more prominent in some of the jugate depictions of royal couples, where queens were associated with Hathor following the pharaonic tradition. Some of the Isis busts among the sealings shown in figure 1 do, tantalizingly, resemble portraits of queens from the hoard and elsewhere (for example figure 1a, which may be compared to the portrait of Kleopatra I on the regency oktadrachm, while many of the sealings in figure 1a-1 recall the features of the statuette in figure 17). Kleopatra I, however, ought to be excluded from this discussion as there is no textual or other hard historical evidence for her direct deification or her veneration as other than one of the *Theoi Epiphaneis*. The only certain representations in the hoard of queens in the guise of Hathor/Isis are those where the queens are shown wearing the appropriate symbols next to their consort (see Fig. 2d-f), and none of them seems to represent Kleopatra I.

Queens in vulture headdress?

A number of Edfu sealings (Fig. 1m-p; Fig. 2a)⁵⁹ reproduce an impressive type of female bust in vulture headdress over a long wig, crowned by horns-and-disc on a *modius*. On the more detailed examples (e.g., Fig. 2a) the *modius* is of the type formed by several *uraei* placed one next to the other. The vulture headdress type is shared by Hathor and Isis in

⁵⁸ Horns-and-disc crown: Vassilika 1989, 94-5 types FMD 1-7; horns-and-disc with falcon feathers crown over a vulture headdress (goddesses): types FMF 1-10; horns-and-disc with falcon feathers crown over a long wig (queens): types Qu 1-16.

⁵⁹ Fig. 1m: ROM 906.12.179; n: ROM 906.12.180; o: ROM 906.12.164; p: APM 8177-217. Fig. 2a: ROM 906.12.161.

traditional Egyptian iconography⁶⁰. Although the Edfu busts, and similar representations on gems⁶¹, have been freely associated with Ptolemaic queens, the evidence of the architectural iconography from the Ptolemaic period suggests that this image was exclusive to goddesses. Deified queens were allowed to wear the vulture headdress only after their death, and then they were given the Hathor crown rather than the simpler Isis one featured in these sealings⁶². The vulture headdress type of the sealings is the one favored for Isis at Philai, the administrative centre from which many of the documents in the Edfu archive seem to have originated. It seems therefore preferable not to be hasty in recognizing royal portraits in the sealings, especially since our knowledge for the deification of most Ptolemaic queens is either contradictory to a direct identification with Isis or inconclusive.

Although the sealing in figure 2a has been recently, and quite implausibly, recognized as Kleopatra VII⁶³, this cannot be so, as the image would have to be a *posthumous* representation of a deified queen in view of the vulture headdress she is wearing. That would be impossible for Kleopatra VII, as for most other Kleopatras, since — to be frank — most of them were not quite missed by those left behind. Indeed, Kleopatra III, who completely identified herself with Isis (see above), might have been a better candidate for some of these seals. The seal impression in figure 2a, in particular, has features which might be called individual and bears a significant resemblance to the types of queens of the jugate busts in the Edfu hoard (see Fig. 2f). Kleopatra III is usually recognized as a woman with heavy, harsh facial features in sculpture, though no inscribed statuary of hers survives⁶⁴. At Philai, Kleopatra III is depicted in the traditional Hathor costume for the ruling queen⁶⁵. This scene, however, was commissioned by Ptolemy VIII Physkon and shows *both* his wives, Kleopatras II and III, alongside one another. As the establishment of the cult of Kleopatra III as Isis took place in the midst of the dynastic wars between Physkon

⁶⁰ Isis: Vassilika 1989, pl. XX.A–B, XXI.D (Philai, Isis temple); Quaegebeur 1978, fig. E (Edfu, Horus temple, Isis is shown second in the group facing Ptolemy IV).

⁶¹ See Plantzos 1996b, 54–8.

⁶² Quaegebeur 1978, 247–55.

⁶³ Walker and Higgs 2001, no. 174 [Ashton].

⁶⁴ See Stanwick 2002, 59–60.

⁶⁵ Vassilika 1989, pl. XXXII.D.

and Kleopatra II, it is arguable that the direct association of Kleopatra III with Isis was not suitable for this particular context. Typologically, the only objection against a bust like that in figure 2a being a seal portraying Kleopatra III must be that this was a type traditionally reserved for goddesses and dead (and deified) queens. The seal could well have been designed posthumously, although one might find it difficult to explain why (and for whom) such a seal was needed in the years after Kleopatra's murder in the hands of her successor — and son — Ptolemy Alexandros.

To conclude: Isis acquired a renewed importance in the Hellenistic period, as she was associated with Ptolemaic dynastic cult. A new, Hellenized iconographic type was devised, based on traditional Egyptian imagery. Some seals (Fig. 1a-l) and gems (Fig. 5) reproduce this new type of a Graeco-Egyptian goddess, while others (Fig. 1m-p; Fig. 2a) remain faithful to older types, still employed in the monumental architectural reliefs commissioned by the Ptolemies in the great centers of the pharaonic tradition like Edfu and Philai. The Ptolemies, following pharaonic practices, had, with just a few exceptions (most notably that of Arsinoe Philadelphos and Kleopatra VII)⁶⁶, their queens shown with the crown peculiar to Hathor (horns-and-disc, with vertical falcon tail feathers). The busts depicted on the seals represented in Edfu, as well as those on the gems discussed above, present too general an image of Isis to be specifically associated with a queen, be she a ruling or a deceased one. In particular, most seal impressions seem to reproduce a specific Isiac model, as opposed to the Hathor associations evident in the queens' images from the architectural reliefs of Philai and Edfu, and on those sealings from the hoard where they are seen next to a king (see Fig. 2d-f). It is possible that single images of Isis like these on the sealings bore a loose connection to some Ptolemaic queens (especially those who directly associated themselves with the goddess); they cannot be used to suggest, however, in the lack of other corroboratory evidence, the patterns of association of specific Ptolemaic queens with Isis.

⁶⁶ On Arsinoe Philadelphos, see above; Kleopatra VII was once shown as a pharaoh, wearing the double crown: Quaegebeur 1978, 256; Berenike I is shown in the guise of Isis in the decree stele from Kôm el Hîşin, dating from the time of Ptolemy III (Quaegebeur 1978, 247 fig. C).

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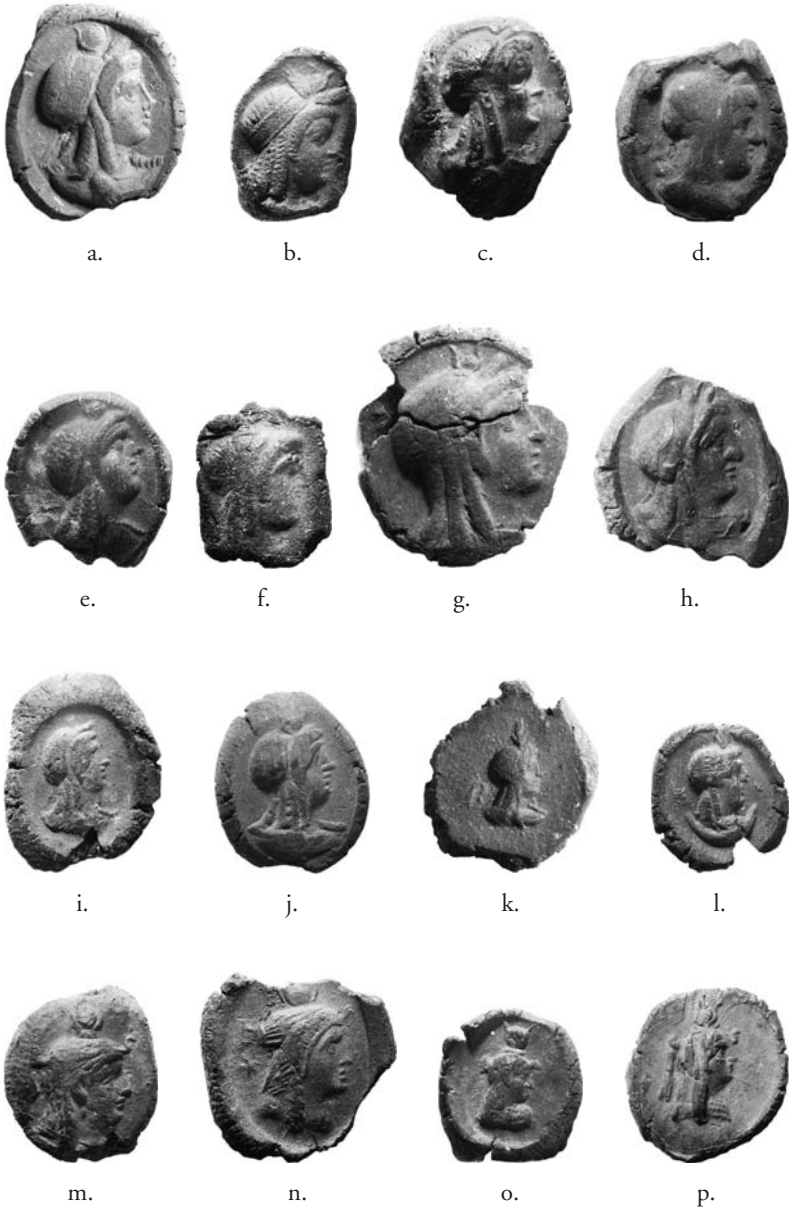


Fig. 1. Ptolemaic seal impressions from the Edfu hoard. Isis busts.
Late second–first century. (Author).



Fig. 2. Ptolemaic seal impressions from the Edfu hoard. a: Isis; b-c: Sarapis and Isis; d-f: Ptolemaic couples. Late second–first century. (Author).



Fig. 3. Gold double-bezeled ring. First century. (Private collection).

Fig. 4. Gold ring. Sarapis and Isis. Second century. London, British Museum GR 1865.7-12.55. (Robert L. Wilkins).



Fig. 5. Engraved gems featuring busts of Isis. Second–first century.



Fig. 6. Gold oktadrachm (rev.). Kleopatra I. c. 180-176. London, British Museum CM 1978-10-21-1 (© British Museum).



Fig. 7. Ptolemaic seal-impression from Edfu. Kleopatra I.
Second c. B.C. (Author).



Fig. 8. Ptolemaic seal impression from Edfu. Ptolemy V Epiphanes and
Kleopatra I. Second century. (Author).



Fig. 9. Ptolemaic seal impression. Ptolemaic couple. Second–first century.
Athens, National Archaeological Museum MN 2447.
(© National Archaeological Museum).



Fig. 10. Bone ring. Head of a Ptolemaic queen(?). Second–first century. Nicosia, Cyprus Museum J 745. (© Cyprus Museum).



Fig. 11. Limestone head of a Ptolemaic queen(?). Second–first century. Athens, Benaki Museum 8223. (© Benaki Museum).



Fig. 12. Faience medallion. Ptolemaic queen(?). Second–first century. Athens, National Archaeological Museum Mπ 1334. (© National Archaeological Museum).



Fig. 13. Faience oinochoe fragment. Ptolemaic queen. Second century. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1909.347. (©Ashmolean Museum).

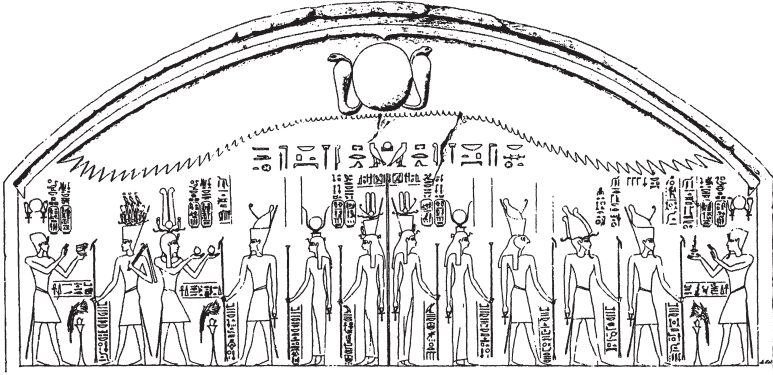


Fig. 14. Pithom stele (upper register). Ptolemy II making offerings to a number of deities: (Atum, Osiris, Horus, Isis) and his deceased wife Arsinoe II, who is shown twice in the center behind Isis. 264/3. (E. Naville).

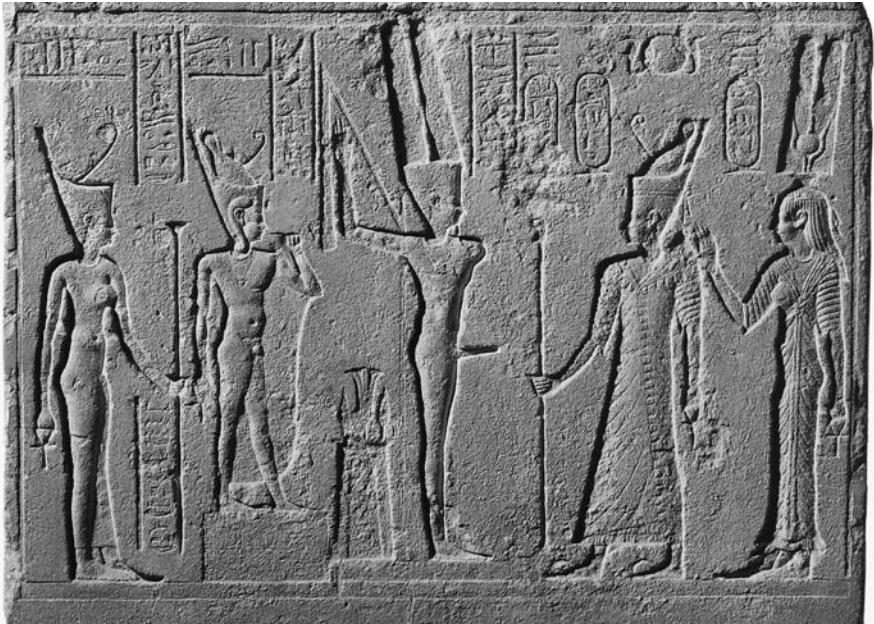


Fig. 15. Tanis stele (central register). Ptolemy IV and Arsinoe III before the gods Min and Horus and the goddess Wadjet. 222-204. London, British Museum EA 1054. (© British Museum).



Fig. 16. Limestone statuette of Arsinoe II Philadelphos (inscribed). Mid-second century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1920; 20.2.21. (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art).



Fig. 17. Limestone statuette of a Ptolemaic queen. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Joseph W. Drexel, 1889; 89.2.660. (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art).