

BEYOND THE NIL

EGYPT AND THE CLASSICAL WORLD



JEFFREY SPIER
TIMOTHY POTTS
SARA E. COLE
EDITORS

are no other similar images known.⁴ Lapis lazuli was a relatively rare material that was imported from Persia. Poseidippos wrote an epigram on one such engraved stone for the Ptolemaic court.⁵ JS

130 | A Ptolemaic queen as Isis

Ptolemaic. Probably ca. 173–127 BC

Chalcedony. 3.3 × 2.6 (1⁵/₁₆ × 1 in.)

Signed by the artist Lykomedes

Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Francis Bartlett

Donation of 1912, 27.711

Of exceptional workmanship, this deeply carved chalcedony portrays the goddess Isis with corkscrew locks and her typical head-dress of cow horns and a solar disc, as well as a royal diadem.⁶ The diadem, along with her facial features—large eyes, fleshy face, and Venus rings on the neck—indicate that she is a Ptolemaic queen in the guise of the deity. This manner of representation is not typical of the earlier queens Arsinoe II, Berenike II, or Arsinoe III, and she probably depicts a later ruler. The most likely queen is the formidable Cleopatra II (ca. 185–116 BC), daughter of Ptolemy V, who married in succession her brothers Ptolemy VI and, after his death in 145 BC, Ptolemy VIII. She ruled alone as queen from 131 to 127 BC after joining a rebellion against her husband. The gem may date from these years.

The signature of the artist, ΛΥΚΟΜΗΔΗΣ, Lykomedes, appears along the edge. He is not known from literary sources or other extant gems, but a number of celebrated gem engravers, several of whom are named in the epigrams of Poseidippos, worked for the Ptolemaic court. JS



130



131

131 | Cameo with a bearded god and a Ptolemaic king

Ptolemaic. 2nd century BC

Sardonyx. 2.8 × 3 × 0.8 cm (1¹/₈ × 1³/₁₆ × 5¹/₁₆ in.)

Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum, Bequest of Eli Djeddah,

83.AL.257.28

Carved from dark brown-and-white-banded agate and drilled top to bottom through the middle, this circular cameo depicts the jugate busts of two male figures facing left.⁷

The larger bust, carved entirely in the white layer of the stone in the background, has a full, curly beard and wavy hair with a small *anastole* (upward curl) over the forehead. He wears a laurel wreath, and the folds of a himation are visible at the base of his neck and shoulders. The bulging forehead, powerfully modeled brow, and flaring nostril find parallels in depictions of the gods Zeus-Ammon and Serapis on the coinage of Ptolemy IV Philopator (221–205 BC), where Serapis is always paired with Isis. On this cameo, the ram's horn above the ear that would conclusively identify the divinity as Zeus-Ammon is obscured by the bust in the foreground, but on the aforementioned coins, Zeus-Ammon often does wear a laurel wreath. The standard attribute of Serapis, the *atef* crown, meanwhile, is absent on this cameo, suggesting that the god is more likely Zeus-Ammon.⁸

The figure in the foreground, carved mostly in the upper dark layer of the stone, also has heavy features, including a prominent brow, large nose, eye with drilled pupil, and protruding chin. The hair is arranged in tight “Libyan” corkscrew curls. He is clad in a cuirass and military cloak and wears both a laurel wreath and a radiate diadem with fillets fluttering over his shoulder. On his forehead, carved in the white layer in front of the radiate crown, is the *Pschent*, the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, with two cones and a snake in low relief.

This profusion of attributes has no precise parallel, although the combination of multiple Greek and Egyptian features appears

in the posthumous gold coinage portraying Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221 BC) minted by his son Ptolemy IV, on which the king, clad in an aegis, wears a radiate crown and carries over his shoulder a trident ornamented with an *atef* crown on its central tine (cat. 121). Though full-faced, Ptolemy III on these coins lacks the corkscrew curls, diadem, laurel wreath, and *Pschent* depicted on the cameo. The bulging brow, large eye, broad cheek, round chin, and fleshy neck, along with the hairstyle, however, recall numismatic portraits in both gold and silver of Ptolemy IV, which were minted by his son, Ptolemy V Epiphanes (205-180 BC), who himself appears on coins wearing the radiate crown.⁹ The *atef* with snake and laurel wreath worn by Serapis on the silver coins mentioned above, as well as the strong stylistic similarity, provides an approximate date for this cameo.

Later Ptolemaic coins, such as the silver didrachm of Ptolemy VIII dated to 138/137 BC (cat. 125), also show a beardless king with radiate crown and diadem, while first-century BC Hellenistic impressions from Edfu in upper Egypt, Paphos on Cyprus, and Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in Mesopotamia also display jugate portraits. These seal impressions also depict individual Ptolemies wearing combinations of head ornaments, including the laurel wreath, diadem, *kausia*, radiate crown, *Pschent* or *atef* crown, sometimes along with an *anastole* and/or corkscrew curls, although not precisely in the combination seen here.¹⁰ The precise identities of those represented unfortunately remain uncertain. KL and RV

132 | Ring with Ptolemy VI wearing a diadem
Ptolemaic. Ca. 180-145 BC

Gold. Diam: 2.5 cm (1.0 in.)

Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines, Bj 1093

133 | Ring with Ptolemy VI wearing a broad collar and the Egyptian Double Crown
Ptolemaic. Ca. 180-145 BC

Gold. 3.4 × 2.5 cm (1¹/₁₆ × 1 in.)

Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines, Bj 1092

Identifiable thanks to portraits on coins (cat. 124), the king is surely Ptolemy VI.¹¹ On one ring he appears in the typical Greek manner, as on the coins, wearing a royal diadem with fillets. The other example, however, shows him as a pharaoh with the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, although the style of portrait and engraving is entirely Greek. Such a mixing of Greek and Egyptian characteristics is unusual on early Ptolemaic representations, although more common from around this time on. A small calcite head of Ptolemy V combines the wearing of a thin diadem with the Double Crown and side lock (cat. 109). Cameos and seal impressions from Paphos on Cyprus and Edfu in Egypt show Ptolemies of the later second and first centuries BC wearing the Double Crown.¹²

How such royal rings were distributed and what status they accorded are not known. Literary and epigraphic sources record rings as being worn by priests in Egypt and as gifts to foreign dignitaries.¹³

The circumstances of the discovery of these two extraordinary rings are unfortunately not known, but they were likely found together. JS



132



133



148 | Relief with snake-bodied Isis and Serapis
Romano-Egyptian. 1st century BC–1st century AD
Limestone. 42 × 38.4 × 13.6 cm (16⁹/₁₆ × 15¹/₈ × 5³/₈ in.)
London, The British Museum, EA1539

This Egyptian limestone stela, small and quadrangular in shape, presents an archaizing scene in bas-relief; originally painted, it depicts a pair of divine serpents with inflated upper bodies and human heads, standing on a draped base.¹ The hybrids face one another in three-quarter view, glancing at each other while their tails intertwine as a sign of union. Their hair is encircled with a ribbon (*taenia*) and pulled into a roll, from which long Libyan corkscrew curls escape. They are both crowned by a kalathos, which emphasizes their agrarian power and from the front of which rises an Egyptian crown: the crown of the bearded male appears to be a *hemhem* crown that is simplified, as it has no feathers or uraei, but is composed of three juxtaposed miters set on horizontal rams' horns; the crown of the female has a sun disc framed by lyriiform horns surmounted by two ostrich feathers, the characteristic shape of a *basileion*, also completed by two ears of wheat.

It is no easy task to determine the nature of the supernatural powers rooted in such composite images, which combine both Greek and Egyptian divine traits. Most commentators have seen them as Isis and Dionysos. The serpent-goddess with the *basileion* is indeed a form of Isis, related to Thermuthis, the Greek name for the ancestral protector of the harvest, Renenutet (*Rmn.t*). While she appears in the Ptolemaic period in the Fayyum alongside the crocodile-god Sobek, Isermuthis most often has as her consort another divine serpent known as Agathos Daimon, the "Good Demon," protector of Alexandria, equivalent to the Egyptian Shay, who was consort to Renenutet.² Thus paired with Isermuthis, Agathos Daimon sometimes has a hairy, bearded head and wears a kalathos, which is not that of Dionysos, but of Serapis, the tutelary deity of Alexandria.³ The serpent-

148

god figured on the London stela thus most probably represents characteristics of the nature of Agathos Daimon and Serapis. But it is not out of the question that the *hemhem* crown is the sign of a more complex identity.⁴ Such images referred to subtle realities, which modern labels struggle to interpret, and could be perceived in various ways depending on the circumstances.

Based on the archaizing style, the stela is generally attributed to the first century BC. It is possible, however, that it is from the imperial period,⁵ like other Egyptian stelai of similar size and format depicting Isermuthis paired with Agathos Daimon or even “Serapis-Agathos Daimon.”⁶ These monuments, often described as “votive,” may have been used in various contexts and served different functions. Therefore, it is not necessary to speculate about a funerary use for this stela of unknown provenance,⁷ which may have been an offering in a sanctuary or used in a lararium. RV

1 P. Higgs in Walker and Higgs 2000, 61–62, cat. 1.49; P. Higgs in Walker and Higgs 2001, 124–25, cat. 151; Bailey 2007, 267–68, fig. 2; J. Taylor in Gentili 2013, 115, 257, cat. 31.

2 Malaise 2005, 159–67.

3 Malaise 2005, 168–76.

4 Bailey (2007) published a juvenile anguiped Dionysos, crowned with a *hemhem*.

5 On archaizing trends in the imperial period, see Fullerton 1990, 194–95.

6 Dunand 1967. For a stela with two serpents with heads of Isis and Serapis, see Jomard 1822, plate 69, fig. 11.

7 *Contra* J. Taylor in Gentili 2013, 257, cat. 31, who wrongly attributed its provenance to Naukratis.



149

149 | Dancing Bes

Romano-Egyptian. 1st century BC–1st century AD
Limestone. 65 × 35 × 28 cm (25⁹/₁₆ × 13³/₄ × 11 in.)
Amsterdam, Allard Pierson Museum, 7967

Bes, the apotropaic guardian of Egypt, is shown dancing nude.¹ He holds his right arm elegantly at his side with his hand at the waist. His raised left arm, now missing, may have been lifted in ecstatic gesture (or perhaps once shook a tambourine, wielded a knife, or brandished a sword). The lower part of his raised right leg has broken off. Bes can be recognized by his characteristic facial features, which are at once humorous and frightening: his bushy brows arch scarily over his deep-set eyes; his mouth is open with his tongue sticking out; his hair and beard curl in spirals. Most of the original feather crown is now lost, but it was once attached with mortar in a square hole in the base above the head.

His stunted body is notable for its heavily muscular physique. The dynamic contortion of the dancing pose is derived from Hellenistic art, rather than pharaonic traditions. The head and chest are frontal, while the body twists at the hips. Most remarkable, however, is the disproportionately large, circumcised phallus with swollen veins. This phallic aspect, otherwise known in Graeco-Roman representations of types suffering from achondroplasia, was believed to ward off evil forces while simultaneously stressing virility. While Bes was especially concerned with female fertility, pregnancy, and early childhood, his sexuality is usually not emphasized. E. M. Moormann suggestively compares this Bes with the nude, bald dancing dwarves with large penises on a wall painting in the House of the Labyrinth at Pompeii.²

The very high, nearly sculptural relief is made of yellowish white, soft limestone, modernly cut on all sides. The background around the figure is fairly weathered, and at the bottom, chisel marks indicate it was left unfinished. It was probably coated with gypsum or lime wash before the figure was painted, but no traces of pigment remain. The downward glance reveals that the piece was intended to be seen from below. Indeed, as F. W. von Bissing pointed out long ago,³ four similar Bes figures appear, together with gorgoneia and bull protomes, above the door in the late Classical Heroon of Trysa in Lycia (present-day Gjölbasi in southwestern Turkey), now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.⁴ BVO

1 Ballod 1913, 81, n. 2, fig. 94; Ponger 1942, 44–45, no. 90, plate 21; Lunsingh Scheurleer 2009, 64–65, no. 19.

2 Moormann 2000, 113, no. 137, plate 60c.

3 Von Bissing 1925, 129.

4 Landskron 2015.



each corner of the mouth are characteristic of portraits of Dynasty 26 pharaohs (see cat. 77) and of Amasis in particular.³ The portrait style and the mention of the goddess Neith—who was worshipped in Sais—in the inscription both indicate a Saite origin.

The sculpture experienced a second life, however, when it was taken to Rome and used as an element of the Egyptian and Egyptianizing decoration of the Iseum Campense. A number of Egyptian sphinxes were brought to Rome and are now dispersed among several museums; it is possible that these lined the *dromos* in front of the temple to Isis in the same way that they would have originally stood along processional ways in Egypt.⁴ sec

¹ Hdt. 3.16. 1–7.

² Stuart Jones 1926, 357, cat. 3, plate 90; Bosticco 1952, 15–17, no. 8, plates I–II; Malaise 1972, 198, no. 364; Roulet 1972, 133, no. 279, plate CXCIX, fig. 291; Ensoli Vittozzi 1990, 28–31, no. 2, figs. 11–15; Lembke 1994, 225–26, no. 16, plate 34.2; Lollo Barberi, Parola, and Toti 1995, 162–63, no. 22; S. Ensoli in Arslan et al. 1997, 391, cat. V.8; La Rocca and Parisi Presicce 2010, 72–77, no. 1.

³ On portraiture of Amasis II, see Mysliwiec 1988, 60–65.

⁴ Roulet 1972, 29–30; Ensoli Vittozzi 1990, 31.

168 | Relief with Isiac ceremony (the Ariccia Relief)

Roman. Ca. AD 100

Marble. 50 × 112 × 10.5 cm (19¹¹/₁₆ × 44¹/₁₆ × 4¹/₈ in.)

Found in a tomb at Ariccia, Italy

Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano–Palazzo Altemps, 77255

A fragment of a white Luni marble slab, unearthed in the early twentieth century in Ariccia, near the church of Santa Maria della Stella, in a tomb excavated along the Appian Way, presents a bas-relief of an Isiac ceremony taking place within a sanctuary.¹ The main register depicts collective dances performed in a courtyard by three women draped in transparent dress and five men wearing loincloths, to the sound of the clacking of castanets and sticks and the clapping of hands. At right, a podium, decorated with rosettes and garlands, holds six figures of different sex and age also beating the measure. At the foot of this platform, in the foreground, six ibises go about various activities, savoring a snake or surrounding a crab. At

the far right, a colossal hieratic male statue, like the Osiris pillars, supports a higher register containing a gallery of divine statues, probably ringing the central courtyard. In the center of a large portico, on which six birds are perched, there is an enthroned goddess, generally identified as Isis, framed by two candelabra, and on either side a Bes and two baboons crouching on circular bases. At right, a rectangular base supports a statue of the Apis bull, a circular aedicula surrounded by palm trees holds an undetermined standing statue, and a sort of baldachin shelters a pillar topped with a bearded bust.

Such a composition evokes an interplay of sounds, sights, tactile sensations, and smells that is part of a specific sensory landscape. Many commentators have sought to link the ceremony it illustrates—in all likelihood a ritual drama—to one of the great Isiac festivals of the Roman calendar, the *Navigium Isidis* on March 5 or the *Inventio Osiridis* on November 3 (fig. 78). Music and dance, however, are components of stagecraft intended for communicating with the divine

and have been used in many circumstances.² It therefore seems more pertinent to view this as the generic evocation of an Isiac ceremony, depicting its most representative elements, to create a true model of beauty and performativity.

This slab was reused for funerary purposes, to cover the body of the deceased who may, however, have been a worshipper of Isis, as evidenced also by the tile decorated with sistra, discovered beside the corpse.³ This monument, which is broadly dated to the early second century AD, may well have originally been used within a sanctuary,⁴ where it would have been part of the ritual performances. RV

- 1 Paribeni 1919; Malaise 1972, 58–59, Ariccia 1, plate 2; Lembke 1994a, 174–76, no. 1, plate 3.1; Lembke 1994b; L. Sist in Arslan et al. 1997, 664, cat. XI.1; L. Sist Russo in De Angelis d'Ossat 2002, 266–67; M. Bommas in Beck, Bol, and Bückling 2005, 640–41, cat. 224. Before World War II, the Ägyptisches Museum of Berlin (inv. 16777) housed a possible fragment of this relief (the upper left corner); see Lembke 1994a, 176, no. 2, plate 3.1.
- 2 Regarding music and dance in an Isiac context, see Bricault and Veymiers 2018.
- 3 Bricault 2005, 502/0401.
- 4 Which some scholars (including Lembke 1994a, 176–78) identify—in all likelihood unnecessarily—as the Iseum Campense.



169 | Bes

Roman. Mid-second century AD

Marble. 59.7 × 21.6 × 22.9 cm (23½ × 8½ × 9 in.)

From Rome, formerly in the Palazzo Verospi

University of Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum,

GR.1.1818

Bes was an Egyptian god viewed primarily as a domestic protective deity, particularly for women in childbirth. He appeared as a grotesque figure with leonine features and

an oversize phallus. This Roman version in marble dating from the second century AD probably once ornamented a fountain in the garden of a private villa, with the lion head on the base serving as a spout.¹

Short and stocky, the god squats with his large hands on his knees. He has lost many of his original Egyptian features, likely because they were not understood by the Roman sculptor. His head is smaller than on Egyptian versions, and he no longer has