

# COLOSSAL HEAD OF CAESARION



This fragment of a colossal statue found in the **eastern harbour of Alexandria** is an example of a specific group of Ptolemaic royal representations with both Greek and Egyptian features. It is broken at the shoulders; only the head and part of the headdress are preserved. The face is naturalistic in appearance, thus suggesting a Greek rather than Egyptian model.

The inclusion of hair is not Egyptian, but is a feature that appears on many of the Ptolemaic statues with Greek features. The headcloth, or nemes, was worn by male rulers and some youthful gods, such as Horus, and is usual of Egyptian representations of the king.

## Youthful features

The portrait features are distinctively youthful. They are not a true likeness of the subject but follow a naturalistic Greek model that would have been developed as the acceptable image of an individual ruler.





The face is broad and flat with a prominent brow, rounded eyebrows and clearly defined lines around the eyes. The lips are full and the mouth is turned down, almost sullen in appearance, and is typical of Ptolemaic representations dating to the 1st century BC.

On the fringe is a worn uraeus. The presence of this particular feature is of great importance in identifying the subject, as its absence had led some scholars to suggest that the statue dated to the Roman Period. Others suggested that the style of hair was typical of that of Emperor Augustus.



## Parallel to statue of Cleopatra VII

The closest parallel to the Alexandrian ruler is an unprovenanced statue now in the Egyptian Museum, Turin (1385), which has been identified as a possible representation of Cleopatra VII. There are a number of statues of male rulers with similar youthful features, often referred to as images of 1st century BC princes, wearing either the traditional nemes headcloth or a diadem; some have a uraeus, others are without it.

As already mentioned, some scholars have suggested that images of rulers without the cobra are indicative of a Roman rather than Ptolemaic date.

However, many of the changes that we find in Roman Egypt have their origins towards the end of the Ptolemaic Period.





In practice the style and 'portrait' features are probably a better indicator of date and identity.

## **Caesarion, son of Cleopatra VII**

The similarity of this particular statue with others that are recognised as late Ptolemaic suggests that the subject is a late king of this period. The youthful appearance and comparable features with the (possible) representation of Cleopatra VII in Turin offer further clues to the identity of the subject.

Cleopatra VII ruled with five different men. The first two were her brothers, Ptolemy XIII and XIV, another two were her lovers Julius Caesar and Marcus Antonius, although it should be stressed that neither of the Romans was declared king of Egypt nor are they generally accepted to have been presented as such.

The last person with whom Cleopatra ruled was her son Ptolemy XV, who was named Caesarion (little Caesar) by the Alexandrians.

She had a further two sons and a daughter by Marcus Antonius, but it was Caesarion who was proclaimed co-ruler and with whom Cleopatra is represented on the south wall of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera. Since the subject of the Alexandrian statue is shown as king of Egypt, one possibility is that it represents Cleopatra's eldest son; if so, it is likely that there was once an accompanying representation of the queen herself. The closest parallel for this piece is a colossal dyad found in the eastern district of the city, where Cleopatra appears as Isis and her son the ruler of Egypt.

**Object:** 1st c. BC. Granodiorite. H. 80 cm | W. 60 cm | D. 50 cm  
Great Library of Alexandria (SCA 88)

**Source:** Original description by Sally-Ann Ashton 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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