

Hellenistic Heads of Queen Cleopatra VII

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Abstract

Though her wide fame, the story of queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt is preserved, unfortunately, mostly in words only. Most of the archaeological evidence of her reign disappeared as well as the Ptolemaic Alexandria, either under the water of the Mediterranean or buried under modern buildings. In addition, the images of Cleopatra VII are very rare. After the defeat of Cleopatra and Anthony by Octavian, and their legendary suicide, Octavian destroyed many of the images of the last queen of Egypt. Until a man named Archibios paid 2,000 donations to the Roman Emperor to preserve the remaining statues of Cleopatra. It is possible that some of the ancient Egyptian-style Cleopatra representations came to us from the collection that survived after the intervention of Archibios.

Besides, we find that pieces depicting Cleopatra have a lot of ambiguity around her, as a result of the many events that Cleopatra went through during her life in addition to her political inclinations and her constant endeavor to consolidate her position with the Egyptians and Romans at the same time. As a result, the way she was portrayed was always changing due to the political changes and situations .

In the case of Cleopatra, it is very difficult to know what she looked like in reality, or to find a clear and explicit source to classify her pictures, so this study will focus on presenting what is supposed to be her Hellenistic presentation to show the true image of Cleopatra, especially since other studies and research focus mostly on the historical side of her life.

Introduction

Queen Cleopatra VII, is the last queen of the Ptolemaic family, who ruled Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, until 30 BC when Egypt became a Roman province (Aston, 2014). Cleopatra was the daughter of King Ptolemy XII. She succeeded him as queen in 51 BC, sharing the throne with her younger brother Ptolemy XIII. She used to be described as a beautiful and a charming queen but as Plutarch noted “not in itself” (Plutarch, Antony, 86). Whether she was as beautiful or not, she was a highly intelligent woman. Two great leaders, Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony, have fallen in her love, they were captivated by her strong personality and wisdom (Reynoldson & Taylor, 1997).

Her story ended dramatically, as after Octavian defeated her and Mark Antony in the battle of Actium 31 B.C., she legendary suicide. During those days Cleopatra was perceived as enemy number one of Rome, therefore, the victorious rival Octavian ordered that all of Cleopatra's images be destroyed. But in Egypt, Cleopatra's images were cult images which were connected with the worship of the goddess Isis as well as with Cleopatra's own personal cult, this order caused great offence. Plutarch tells us that a number of her Egyptian statues were saved, after her death in 30 BC, by the priest Archibios, who, acting either as Cleopatra's friend or as a representative of the native priesthood, offered the emperor an irresistible two thousand talents to preserve them from being down (Plutarch, Antony, 86). Her two-dimensional images and reliefs carved high on the temple walls were difficult to be destroyed and as a result remained, but the majority of her movable statues and portraits were indeed lost .

Those images that do survive could also be divided into two very different groups which may, if considered out of context, give Cleopatra the illusion of a severely multiple personality. There are representations composed within the classical or Hellenistic style which show Cleopatra dressed as a prestigious Hellenistic woman, and others composed within the Egyptian style which present her as a standard Egyptian queen bearing the time-honored regalia designed to precise religious and political power (Tyldesley, 2010). When presented side by side, the two types convey a noticeable mixed message. According to the western eyes the Hellenistic Cleopatra looks natural and more relaxed, while the Egyptian Cleopatra seems firm and artificial. There are therefore a great wishful thinking and temptations to interpret the Hellenistic Cleopatras as real representations (Ashton, 2009). Classic portraiture was intended to reflect an idealized, identifiable and often heroic representation of the subject (Walker & Higgs 2001). As for the Ptolemies, artists often added features or attributes intended to reflect the subject's divinity, so it became difficult to distinguish between a fragmentary queen and a fragmentary goddess. In the case of Hellenistic images of Cleopatra, they might therefore be expected to look alike as they were the official royal image of the queen. However, it does not necessarily follow that they appear mostly just like the real flesh-and-blood queen (Walker & Higgs 2001).

Hellenistic Heads:

For over two thousand years nonexperts have regularly identified several classical-style statues of a woman holding a snake, or wearing a snake bracelet, or standing next to a snake, as 'Cleopatra'. This immediately turned the bland Aphrodites into striking and far more valuable Cleopatras (Tyldesley, 2010). It is only within the past decades that historians became able to discard the fake and introduced the identification of Hellenistic Cleopatra real statuary based on the grounds of date and style. The identification of the actual Cleopatras is, surely, a matter of individual conviction parallel to scientific proof, and a room full of expert art historians would obviously produce different opinions about different pieces (Tyldesley, 2010).



Figure 1: Coins of Cleopatra VII minted outside Egypt:

A silver tetradrachm minted at Ashkelon, Palestine.

Production date: 50 B.C- 49 B.C

London, British Museum: 1875,1102.3

Source: British Museum



Figure 2: Coin of Cleopatra VII minted in Alexandria: a coin of silver tetradrachm, on the obverse is a portrait of Cleopatra wearing a diadem, and on the reverse an inscription reading "ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑΣ" with an eagle standing on a thunderbolt.

Production date: 47 B.C – 46 B.C

London, British Museum: 1857,0822.46

Source: British Museum

Smith stated that Cleopatra had two main portrait images. The first portrait type is her well known image on coins (figs. 1, 2) and in two or three marble heads*, (figs. 4,5, and 6) which present her in the ideal and youthful manner of the third century queens (Smith, 1991). The second image type reflects her political identity as the partner and client of Roman triumvir Antony. She is represented here as an older, thin-necked, hooked-nose and unflattering portrait in the style of her Roman patron. This Romanized Cleopatra is seen primarily on coins minted outside Egypt and was evidently for external consumption (Fantham, et al, 1994). Unfortunately, there is no sculptured version of this portrait. It seems that this type was meant to express two different roles: one a traditional Macedonian queen at Alexandria, the other a Roman client-ruler in the new territories abroad she had acquired from Mark Antony (Smith, 1991).

However, there's a comparative image appears on an engraved glass gem within the collections of the British Museum (fig. 3).



Figure 3: Blue glass intaglios with a portrait of Cleopatra VII

First century BC

Provenance unknown

Length 1.3 cm

London, British Museum: 1923,0401.676

Source: (Ashton, 1999, fig.1.24).

Walker suggests that this could have been used as a seal, indicating allegiance to Cleopatra on the part of an official or a loyal individual (Walker & Higgs 2001). Whatever the medium in all of these portraits, Cleopatra presented herself as a Hellenistic Greek queen. Except in the case of the gem, which is remarkable in combining a Greek image with the Egyptian royal crown of the three uraei (cobras), set atop the queen's head (Walker & Higgs 2001). The evidence of the sculptures shows that Cleopatra was seen in Greek style at Rome, where indeed the marble heads could have been the work of artists from Greece or Alexandria. The Vatican and Berlin heads are likely to have come from the sites of Roman villas located south of Rome. They might even have been occasioned by Cleopatra's extended stay in Rome as Caesar's guest from 46 to 44 B.C (Walker & Higgs 2001).

* A head in Rome, the Vatican Museums, no 38511, the second one in Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, no 1976.10, and the third one uncertainly identified as Cleopatra VII in Cherchel, Archaeological Museum, no S66(31).

In her portraits, Cleopatra puts forward an original combination. In the coin portraits, she presented herself bareheaded in profile (figs. 1,2), a representation which shows her as the heir of Arsinoe III, whose wavy hair on the sides of her forehead are coiffed in the style of Arsinoe II. Cleopatra combines here two traditions: the bareheaded of Arsinoe III and that melon hairstyle with a low bun of Arsinoe II (Palagia, 2019). The three Greek-Style marble heads can be associated with Cleopatra VII by comparison to the previously mentioned coin portraits. All wear the diadem and have the melon hairstyle with a center-parted layer of hair at the front (Stanwick, 2002), one of them is more or less universally accepted as an authentic Cleopatra.

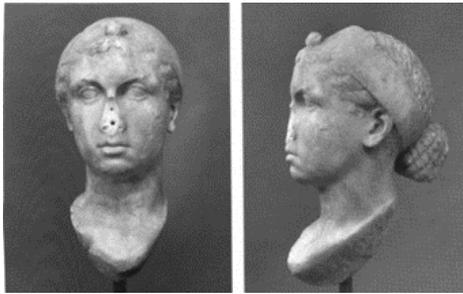


Figure 3: Marble portrait of Cleopatra VII Rome, Vatican Museums, 40—30 B.C.

Museum: Museo Gregoriano Profano, Vatican Museums 38511, Vatican.

Found at the Villa of the Quintilii on the Via Appia in 1784.

Material: Parian Marble.

Height: 39 cm.

Source: (Stanwick, 2002, figs. 277-278)

The admitted sculptural portrait that resembles Cleopatra's representation on her coins is a marble head found in Rome, late first century B.C, from the Villa of the Quintilii along the Via Appia in the late eighteenth century and since and since then it has been kept and displayed in the Vatican Museums.

This head, in Parian marble which is prestigious material, is generally well preserved. The hair is damaged at the front, and the protrusion projecting from above the center of the brow is broken. The nose had been restored in the late eighteenth century, but this has now been removed (Stanwick, 2002, Palagia, 2019).

This striking pretrial was first displayed in the Vatican Museums on a body to which it did not belong (Bianchi, 1988), which had been discovered in the Villa of the Quintilii at the same time as the head. It was identified by Visconti as a 'not very pretty' portrait of a priestess of Ceres (Visconti, 1820), because of the diadem that he misinterpreted as a band.

It was Ludwig Curtius who in 1933 first identified this portrait as Cleopatra. Curtius realized that the reattached nose was modern thus most characteristic feature of Cleopatra was missing and claimed that the body did not belong to it (Curtius, 1933). The head closely resembles portraits of the queen on coins and, like the Berlin example, follows the portrait type found on coins from Ascalon and Alexandria (Curtius, 1933).

In the Vatican head the queen is shown with the melon coiffure, wearing a wide diadem, characteristically an insignia of the later Ptolemies (Ashton, 2009). The large, widely opened eyes and short mouth resemble earlier Ptolemaic portraits. According to Walker, both the general appearance and the technique of the sculpture do not correspond with products of the Alexandrian workshops (Walker & Higgs 2001). The lump of marble on the crown of the head may be the remnants of an attribute such as a lotus crown or uraeus, or even the remains of a nodus (knotted lock of hair) (Ashton, 2009). Curtius stated that the head comes from a copy of the famous gold statue of Cleopatra set up by Julius Caesar in the Temple of Venus Genetrix in his forum in Rome (Curtius, 1933). On the other hand, Kyrieleis later in 1975 suggested that the head is a copy of a bronze original one (Kyrieleis, 1975).

A close look to this portrait reflects a small raised and uneven residual remains of marble can still be discerned on the Vatican portrait's left cheek just below the left eye and just below

the left corner of the mouth, right where the Caesarion's hand would presumably have rested (Kleiner, 2005). Ludwig Curtius explained this overflow marble as traces of a depiction of "little Caesar". Later on, Peter Higgs saw that it is just a small weathered lump of marble protruding from the left cheek (Walker & Higgs 2001). Diana Kleiner confirmed that Curtius theory would appear to be born out not only by the marble residue but also by evidence for such a mother-and-child statuary type reflected in existed Hellenistic terracotta statuettes from Rome and elsewhere. In her opinion extra support is provided by the likelihood that the cult statue of Venus Genetrix also depicted the goddess with her son Cupid on her shoulder. If both mothers were portrayed with their sons in the forum temple of Caesar, it would be a highly significant and adds to the probability that Caesar was the commissioner (Kleiner, 2005).

She moreover inquires if Caesarion was indeed depicted with his mother in this venerated temple, in a location not far from portraits of Caesar himself, this would have been exceedingly essential in its day so remarkable that it once more raises the question of why there is no mention of the boy's representation in surviving sources, and why, if it was there, Octavian let it stand after the death of Cleopatra. Kleiner added that one should likely never know the answer to either questions. However, she thinks it is fair to say that the historical and literary records are so spotty as to be inclusive. According to her theory, with regard to the portrait of Caesarion, two possible explanations come to mind. The representation of Caesarion may have been extracted from the original gilded statue before it was described in the surviving sources, which would recommend that Octavian was happy to let Cleopatra's statue stand within the sanctuary as an adjunct to Venus but that an image of Caesarion was unsatisfactory to him. Or, the figure may have been generic enough to be interpreted as Cupid or in various ways and thus it is not harmful or offensive (Kleiner, 2005).



Figure 4: Marble portrait of Cleopatra VII, Berlin

Museum: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung 1976.10, Berlin.

Material: Marble, 30-40 B.C.

Provenance: unknown, but acquired for the Despuig collection in the late eighteenth century, so likely to be from Italy. It may have come from the region of Ariccia or Genzano, south of Rome.

Height: 27 cm.

Source: (Stanwick, 2002, fig.279)

Fortunately, the other two surviving portraits in the round-marble heads presented now in Berlin and Chercell-are more delicate versions of their subject. The well-known marble portrait of Cleopatra within the Antikensammlung in the Staatliche Museum in Berlin (fig. 5) captures Cleopatra's charm, intelligence and character (Smith & Hall, 1984). Smith & Hall considered this portrait as an extraordinarily flattering and beautiful image of Cleopatra VII (Smith & Hall, 1984). It is in fine condition, except for one or small scratch. The bun, although broken and reattached, is ancient. The rear left part of the head, including the ear, and the tip of the right ear had been restored, but these restorations have been removed. The head had been placed on a modern bust of variegated marble, now also removed (Walker & Higgs 2001).

This portrait, also, follows the type found on the coins of Alexandria and Ascalon (Bianchi, 1988). It is a slightly more flattering portrayal of the queen than the Vatican and Chercell

portraits, but, as Walker & Higgs suggest, some of the softness and delicacy of the features may have been exaggerated by modern treatment with an abrasive chemical, which has blurred the sharpness of the original carving (Walker & Higgs 2001).

Cleopatra is shown in the usual melon hair style and broad diadem. Unlike the Vatican example the diadem is set a little further back on the head, and runs underneath her bun (Bianchi, 1988), rather than merging with it. A series of small coiled curls have escaped from the formal melon arrangement of the hair and frame the brow. These curls have been almost obliterated on the Vatican portrait but do occur on the diademed Cleopatra in Cherchel. The Berlin head's nose has a slightly downturned tip, with curving nostrils that compare favorably with the portraits of Cleopatra VII on coins and clay sealings. The mouth is downturned at the corners, the lower lip somewhat fleshier than the upper. The head originally tilted slightly to the right and turned on the neck in the same direction. This reconstructed pose is based on the asymmetrical carving of the eyes and the mouth (Nardo, 2005).

Higgs has revealed that the Berlin head was part of the Despuig collection, which was assembled at the end of the eighteenth century, in Majorca. It appears as no. 53 of Joaquin Maria Bover's, *Noticia historico-artística de los Museos del Cardinal Despuig*, 1846, where it is listed under the name of Lucilla, daughter of Marcus Aurelius and wife of Lucius Verus (Walker & Higgs 2001). Not all scholars have accepted it as ancient such as Flemming Johansen who admits in 2003 in the *Cleopatra Reassessed* conference, that he still —23 years after he first saw it— considers the portrait neither belongs to Cleopatra nor ancient (Walker & Ashton, 2003). He regards the Berlin head as a creation of the eighteenth century and it is his impression that it could be a work of either Maini (1690—1752), Filippo della Valle (1696—1770), Pietro Bracci (1700—1775) or Antonio Canova (1757—1822). Despuig acquired objects from Ariccia, but not all his collection came from one source (Walker & Ashton, 2003).

His main objection is the diadem; it should not be drawn below the bun at the neck but behind it - as seen on all Cleopatra coins and also on the Vatican head. The diadem should rest on top of the hair and not cut into the hair. The Berlin head offers a unique presentation of a diadem. The small hair-locks over the forehead are clumsy and the hair between these locks and the diadem has no connection with the hair behind the headband. He also inquires if these objections do not make the portrait a fake one, what makes it genuine. Is it an ancient portrait extensively altered in the eighteenth century, with new form of eyes, a recut mouth, eighteenth century lips, and a recut face, the left side cut down? (Walker & Higgs 2001).

However, despite the vagueness, the head remains the most extant presentation of the queen in Hellenistic-Roman Art (Roller, 2011); it is also considered the image of Cleopatra to achieve the widest circulation in any period (Hamer, 1993). The Germans put it on a stamp (fig. 6). Mary Hamer sees that on the German stamp Cleopatra no longer has reference to a woman who lived in a palace and time remote in history, now on the stamp her image is the sign not of herself and her own political and cultural context but of Germany, whose economic power has allowed the purchase of this treasure of undisclosed value and whose cultural authority brings Cleopatra to the German people of the west, offering her guaranteed image for their consumption and use (Hamer, 1993). Although the physiognomy is generally that of Cleopatra VII as found both in coin portraits and the Vatican example, this portrait has closer stylistic affinities with Cherchel head. As a result, some scholars, proposed that the Berlin head is a

posthumous portrait of Cleopatra VII erected in Mauretania by her daughter Cleopatra Selene, during the time of the later marriage to Juba (Bianchi, 1988).



Figure 5: The German Stamp of Cleopatra

German Stamp depicting the image of Cleopatra VI, issued on 12 January 1984. The image used for the stamp was the photo of the marble head of Cleopatra VI from the Altes Museum Berlin (Berliner Museumsinsel).

Source: (Stamp: Queen Cleopatra VII (Museum of Antiquities) (Berlin) (Art treasures in Berlin museums)

The third marble portrait head probably of Cleopatra (fig.7) was found in the harbor area of Cherchell, modern Algeria, which was part of the kingdom of Mauretania in Cleopatra's time. It is now in the Cherchell Museum, Algeria. It shares the same cast, hairstyle, and diadem as the Vatican and Berlin heads and must be based on the same Alexandrian prototype (Stanwick, 2002).



Figure 6: Marble portrait of Cleopatra VII's or perhaps of her daughter, Cleopatra Selene

Museum: Archaeological Museum, Cherchell. S.66 (31)

Found in: Cherchell, Algeria, perhaps in 1856

Height: Total 31 cm, head 27 cm, face 20 cm

Source: (About Cleopatra: Last active pharaoh of Ptolemaic Egypt (0069 - 0030): Biography, Facts)

The work represents a mature woman, her leaning to the left and slightly upturned, position, indicated by the oblique axis of the reveals that the figure was probably shown moving. Alike the Berlin head, it has a flat diadem against the head which leaves the ears free. What is unique in this portrait is the hairstyle: it is sectioned behind the diadem and arranged in corkscrew curls across the forehead of the queen in a distinctive manner. It is noticeable that there is a break over the center of the forehead within the marble hair. Kleiner proposed that this is possibly the uraeus like that of the Vatican head, or alternatively a topknot (Kleiner, 2005) .

Other features reflect the realism of the face and its execution with extraordinary care. It looks that the artist has insisted on some details that have been rendered with accuracy, increasing the individuality of the subject as: the nearly round eyes, the straight and delicate nose, the flat cheeks and the well delineated mouth .

Actually, the identification of this portrait is very doubtful. Fittschen (Fittschen, 1983) followed by Smith (Smith, 1988) proposed attributions to Cleopatra VII. Kleiner, Ashton, Cleopatra VII also suggested that Cleopatra VII remains the more likely candidate (Kleiner, 2005, Aston, 2014). On the other hand, other scholars associated the Cherchell head with Cleopatra Selene, the daughter of Cleopatra VII by Marc Antony. Mafoud Ferroukhi in the publication of the British museum (Walker and Higgs, 2001, cat. no. 197) argues that this head represents Cleopatra Selene rather than Cleopatra VII. However, as Stanwick confirmed even if this identification could be absolutely proven, the portrait is nonetheless profoundly dependent on Cleopatra VII's type (Stanwick, 2002).

Conclusions:

The historical Cleopatra did not only daze and disorient her lovers but she has also dazed and disoriented archeologists, Egyptologists, historians, artists, writers and filmmakers. Each age and each culture seem to project its own Cleopatra, visualizing her in a new way, looking at the history of Cleopatra's representations, consequently, is richly informative about how her image has been screened through different grids and discourse. The fact that diverse movements have passionately blend Cleopatra suggest not only the historical Queen's incredible impact on history, but also the various ways in which history itself is refereed and allegorized through the preset concerns of its redress writes. While it is important to search into the actual historical record concerning Cleopatra, it is also vital to trace the way in which she and her world have been represent and configured over time.

It is well known that a little of Cleopatra's portraiture has survived as Augustus for political and perhaps personal reasons destroyed her imagery.

It is significantly unsettling to realize that much of what we think we actually know is a myth, and that Queen Cleopatra's physical being can be drawn only through a few and incomplete number of antiques' remains. However, this study has shown, the three different pieces of portrait heads of the last Ptolemaic Queen are surprisingly revelatory and, in the end, provide us with a balanced picture of a special woman that was once a Ptolemaic princess, Egyptian queen, and Roman consort.

The three discussed portrait heads proved that while an Egyptian appearance would suit the locals, there was a parallel international audience probably called for a more cosmopolitan appearance that was performed by the universality of the worldly Hellenistic style. The three heads revived the same style adopted by the early Ptolemaic queens. The Vatican Cleopatra is a pale, even frigid, reflection of the original cult statue in the Temple of Venus Genetrix, which must have been shimmering and full of life, perhaps with a playful Caesarion on the shoulder. The other two surviving portraits presented here, Berlin and Chersell marble heads, are more sensitive renditions of their subject and help provide additional clues to the appearance and personality of Cleopatra, especially the smaller and the more softly modulated Berlin head which reflects Cleopatra's character, intelligence, and charm .

Finally, it is very clear that the royal Hellenistic representation of Cleopatra was not only a style long associated with the Ptolemies and their queens but also represents an approach to the portraiture of women that had already become the accepted custom around the Greek-Roman world.

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