

Minneapolis Institute of Art

Egypt's Sunken Cities

Teacher Guide

Presented by



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Mia

An Introduction for Teachers

This teacher guide, comprising content, projectible images, and discussion prompts, will help you prepare for a visit to “Egypt’s Sunken Cities.” Whether you come for a free self-guided experience or take a guided tour, you can also use it to navigate in-gallery learning and to facilitate conversation between chaperones and students.

Schedule a class tour today:

Simply complete the tour request [here](#).

We look forward to seeing you at Mia soon!

Egypt's Sunken Cities

Presented by:



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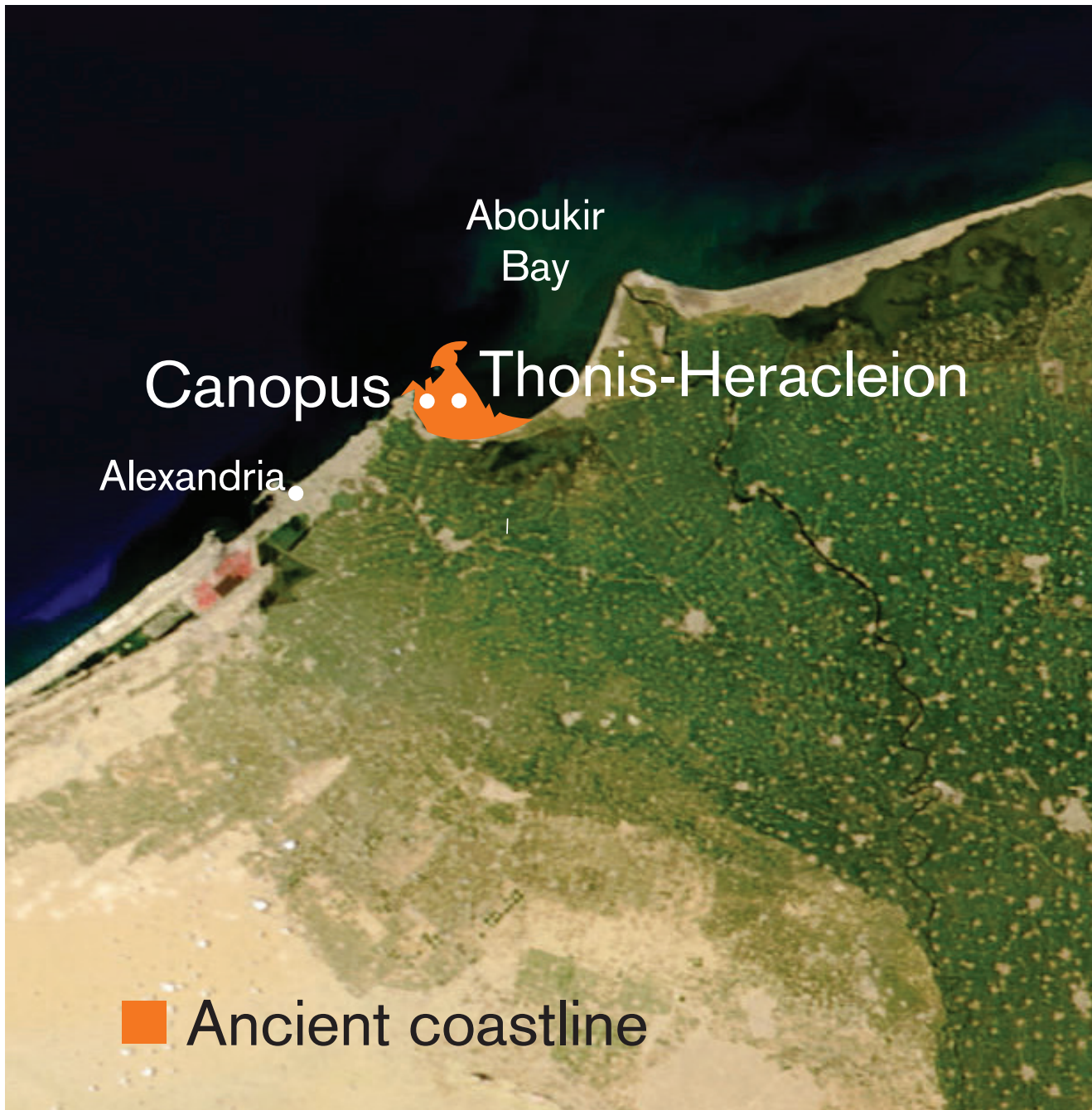
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‘Egypt’s Sunken Cities’ Excavation Site





Egypt's Sunken Cities

More than 1,200 years ago, two ancient cities were lost to natural disasters and the rising tides of the Mediterranean Sea. Two decades ago, underwater archaeologist Franck Goddio and his team discovered those cities, revealing monumental statues, religious images carved in stone, exquisite jewelry, and delicate ceramics. Taken together, this discovery has provided a better understanding of life during the age of the pharaohs. This is your chance to dive down and explore Egypt's "sunken cities."

Where are the cities?

In Egypt's northwestern Nile Delta, under the Canopic region, lies a sunken landscape of lakes and marshes scattered with islands and sandbanks in Aboukir Bay. This region, named after the town of Canopus, was well known in the ancient world because of its role as a place where traveling Greeks came into contact with Egyptian civilization. In 1996, the European Institute for Underwater Archaeology (IEASM) began exploration of Aboukir Bay under Goddio's direction. The rediscovery aimed to uncover three lost cities: Canopus, Thonis, and Heracleion. The cities of Canopus and Heracleion were known from Greek and Roman texts. The name of Thonis was known from carvings. The carvings discovery informed scholars that Thonis and Heracleion were Egyptian and Greek names for one and the same city!

Why are the cities underwater?

The team has suggested various reasons, such as flooding, tsunamis, earthquakes, variation in sea level, or geological collapse. Whether both cities were lost at the same or different times is a question for future research. There is evidence that both were totally submerged by the end of the 700s CE. As a result, the explorers faced archaeological challenges, among them poor visibility and the enormity of the search area.

What did the team find?

Thonis-Heracleion was Egypt's main trading center with the Greek world in the 4th and 5th century BCE. Evidence of this hub are the 750 ancient anchors and 69 ships found on the harbor floor. Thonis-Heracleion housed a temple where new pharaohs—as ancient Egyptian kings were called—came to receive the title of their power as universal sovereign by the god Amun. Amun was the supreme god of ancient Egyptians. The nearby city of Canopus held the region's largest temple, which acted as an important shrine.

What about the recovered objects?

This exhibition presents more than 200 objects from the excavations. Those artifacts reflect the range of human experience in this ancient land. Examples include colossal statuary, humble votive offerings, beautiful jewelry and ornaments, imported goods, and relics.

What's next?

Though the excavations are ongoing, the rediscovery of the lost cities uncovers a further understanding of the cultures, faiths, and history of the Egyptian coastal region. There are still unknowns: What treasures still lie beneath the sea? What new discoveries will surface? And what do we have yet to learn?

Crossroads of Trade Goods and Sacred Beliefs

In 700 BCE, Thonis-Heracleion was positioned at the westernmost branch of the Nile River, where it flourished as a trade harbor.

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At the time, trade between Egypt and the Mediterranean, especially Greece, was booming. Close relations between the two great civilizations were forged by Psamtik I (664–610 BCE), the founder of Egypt's Saite dynasty. Greek soldiers joined his army to defend the country's borders. As a result, goods of both nations were exchanged.

Goods traded

In the 5th century BCE, the trade through Thonis-Heracleion and Naukratis, a nearby port, on Greek and Phoenician ships included a variety of supplies: copper, tin, iron, wine, oil, wool, and wood. Silver was the basis of economic exchange and taxation. Egypt, lacking in metal resources, imported precious metals mostly from Greece. Egyptian exports to Greece included grain, papyrus, perfume, charms, and natural resources such as alum and natron, used for dyeing fabric.

A religious seat

Foreign influence on Thonis-Heracleion went beyond trade to the most personal of activities: religious faith. The city became a busy place for cross-cultural religious devotion. Religious spaces played a major role for Egyptians and Greeks. Egyptians viewed faith as a way to retain their own identity and culture. Greeks sought divine protection at trading ports for sea journeys.

A royal site

Throughout much of Egyptian history, new pharaohs came to the city to receive the inventory of their territory from Amun-Gereb, another representation of the god Amun. Three colossal statues guarded the massive temple complex dedicated to Amun-Gereb. Only priests could enter the holiest sites within the temple, but everyone else regularly entered the complex to perform their devotions. Near the temple of Amun-Gereb stood a temple dedicated to his son, Khonsu. The Greeks adopted Khonsu, who became their demi-god Herakles. As a result, they knew the city as Heracleion. Scattered across the harbor were many other sanctuaries, each devoted to a specific Greek god.

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The Decree of Sais on the Thonis-Heracleion



The Decree of Sais on the Thonis-Heracleion

380 BCE, Thonis-Heracleion

Black granodiorite, H. 1.99 m, W. 88cm, D. 33 cm

National Museum of Alexandria, Alexandria

© Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation

This object is a written announcement concerning monetary donations to the gods. In the first year of the reign of pharaoh Nectanebo (380–362 BCE), he issued a royal decree regarding the taxation of trade goods passing through Thonis-Heracleion and Naukratis. The ruling dictated that each item be taxed, and that the proceeds be sent to the royal treasury, which would allocate a portion to the goddess protecting Lower Egypt (goddess Neith).

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The image at the top left illustrates the king making offerings to a goddess. He wears a crown made of two ostrich feathers set on a sun disc framed by horizontal ram horns. On the right, the king appears with the *deshret* (red crown) and carries a tray of ritual cases and bread loaves. The red crown symbolizes his power over Lower Egypt (the Delta). Though not actually red on this piece, the crown is recognizable by its bowl shape with an extended curlicue. Its red color symbolized the dry desert land.

Hieroglyphics is the ancient Egyptian writing system using pictures, signs, and symbols to represent objects, actions, sounds, and ideas.

The text beneath it is organized into 14 columns, full of hieroglyphs. Hieroglyphics describes the ancient Egyptian writing system using pictures, signs, and symbols to represent objects, actions, sounds, and ideas. The most important part of this decree refers to special taxes charged on imports and exports. Wood and silver were top imports for Egypt. The quality and difficulty of the design on this decree highlight the skill and talent of its maker.

Questions

1. Hieroglyphics is the ancient Egyptian writing system that used picture symbols to represent ideas and objects. Look at the hieroglyphs on the decree. What images do you recognize? What do you think some of them mean? What kinds of picture symbols do people around the world use today to communicate with each other?
2. At the top, look at the king on the right holding the tray and wearing the red crown. How does the crown depict or suggest power to you?
3. Ancient Egyptians didn't have everything they needed. This made trade important—as it is today. Where do you and your family go to get items you need? Where are some of the products you use made? Think about how they made their way here from other countries.

Statue of Horus Protecting Pharaoh



Statue of Horus Protecting Pharaoh

c. 350 BCE, Egypt

Limestone and glass, H. 55 cm

Egyptian Museum, Cairo

© Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation

This statue illustrates the strong relationship between the god Horus and Egypt's rulers. It portrays two important people: Horus and probably Nectanebo II. Horus is represented here as the divine falcon. Falcons are powerful birds of prey. Ancient Egyptians believed that a falcon's right eye represented the sun and its left eye represented the moon. The falcon's belly, covered in speckled feathers, represented the stars. The feet are so precise, you can see individual toes and nails emerging from the large claws.

Ancient Egyptians believed that a falcon's right eye represented the sun and its left eye represented the moon.

Though many Egyptian gods are represented as falcons or seen wearing falcon heads, Horus is the most important one. He protected Egypt's rulers, and he is also one of the earliest known Egyptian gods.

Standing between Horus's legs is probably Nectanebo II, the last native pharaoh of Egypt (reign 360–342 BCE).

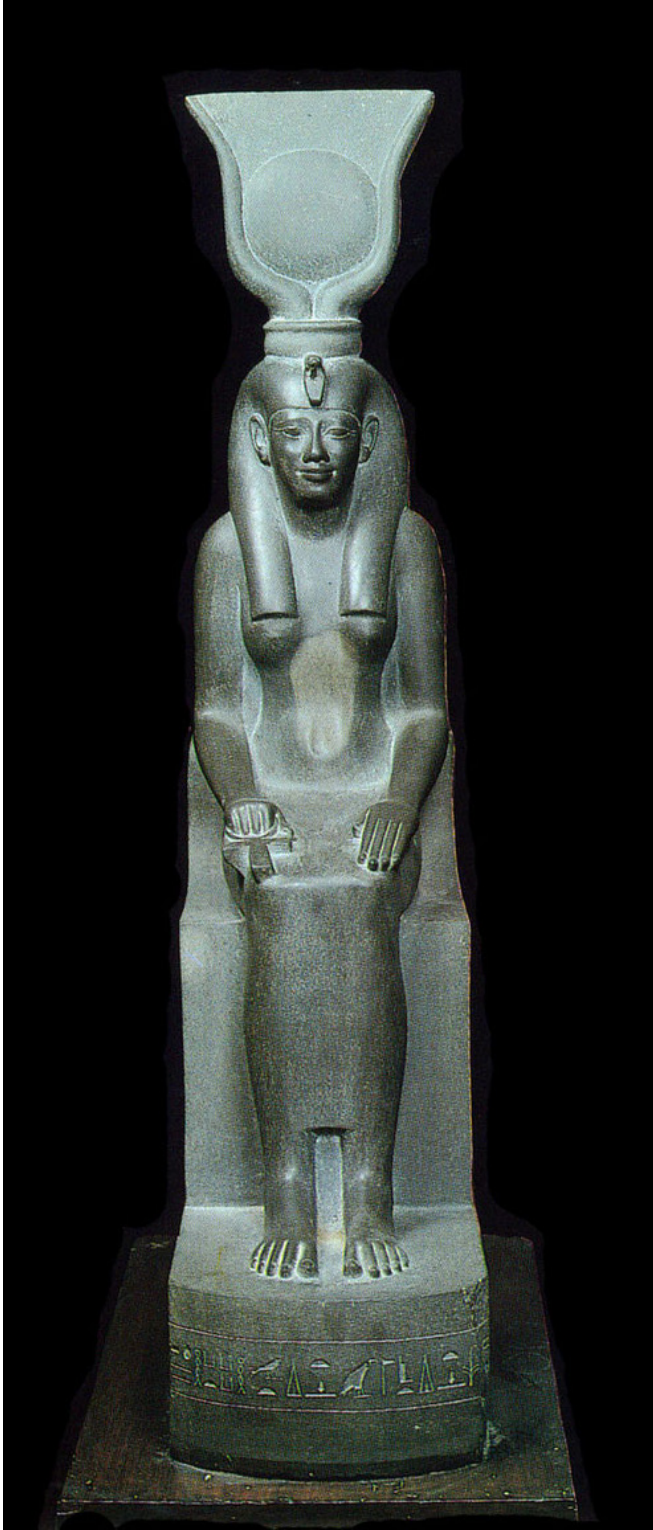
His legs and feet are pressed together and his hands rest open on his thighs. This position is the typical way to represent the act of prayer.

Many pharaohs are shown standing like this while praying before a god. During the time of the pharaohs, every king was considered to be a reincarnation of Horus on Earth.

Questions

1. Horus is shown protecting the pharaoh. How has the artist emphasized this protective act? Consider the use of scale, composition, and materials.
2. Horus was known for taking care of people. Who in your family, community, or school takes care of you? How do they show it? Whom do you take care of?
3. When you think of animals, which seem strong? What about them makes you say that?
4. Think about images of falcons or similar birds in flight. Why do you think Egyptians believed the eyes of the falcon represent the moon and the sun and the feathers represent the stars? Why might those have been important or special to ancient Egyptians?

Osiris and Isis Seated



Osiris and Isis Seated

570–526 BCE (reign of Amasis, 26th dynasty), Saqqara
Greywacke, satin polish, H. 89 cm and 90 cm
Egyptian Museum, Cairo
© Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation

This pair of statues is of Osiris and Isis—husband and wife, god and goddess. Incredibly important to the Egyptians, both are associated with many mythological stories and events. The sculptures were found in a burial tomb, and they were believed to protect the dead. Both are rich in significant imagery that tells us about the gods.

Osiris wears the *atef*, a feathered white crown flanked by two ostrich feathers.

Osiris's right hand holds a flail (a handle with hanging straps or ropes), and his left hand holds a *heqa*, which is a crook. A shepherd's accessories, they also represent power and authority. On his head he wears the *atef*, a feathered white crown flanked by two ostrich feathers. A sacred rearing cobra (*uraeus*) appears in the center of his forehead. As in typical Osiris depictions, he also wears a braided, false beard.

Isis represented two types of love: of wife and mother. Her crown is a set of cow horns flanking a smooth solar disc. These are the symbols of the goddess Hathor, who is represented as either a cow or as a woman with a cow head. Isis holds an *ankh*, the sign of life, in her right hand.

Isis holds an *ankh*, the sign of life, in her right hand.

Questions

1. Look closely at these two statues. They were made to protect an important tomb. What about them makes them look like guardians to you? Where do you see strength and power in them?
2. Both of these statues were believed to protect the dead. Which god would you pick to protect you? Why?
3. The accessories held by Osiris are shepherd's tools: a crook and flail. Why would those be useful for protecting a tomb?
4. Isis holds the sign of life in her right hand. Why would that be important for protecting a tomb?

Pectoral



Pectoral

943–922 BCE (reign of Sheshonq I, 22nd dynasty), Tanis
Gold, lapis lazuli, glass paste, H. 37.5 cm, W. 19 cm, Th. 1.2 cm
Egyptian Museum, Cairo
© Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation

A pectoral is a piece of jewelry, like a pendant, worn on the chest. This pectoral is full of important gods and goddesses, telling the story of the sun god and fellow deities.

Ancient Egyptians believed that gods traveled through the night sky on boats.

Ancient Egyptians believed that gods traveled through the night sky on boats, so it was common for sacred festivals to include long processions where divine statues were carried on a sacred boat, called a *barque*. This procession represented a sacred journey.

This procession represented a sacred journey.

The pectoral is topped with two falcons wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. Inside the circular medallion is the god Amun-Ra-Horakhty, seated at left. He represents the sun. Amun-Ra holds two important objects: in his right hand is an *ankh* sign, which means life; in his left hand is a *was* scepter, which represents power. In front of the sun is Ma'at, the goddess of truth and justice. Ma'at loosely translates to "truth." Representing order, she was responsible for keeping the world in harmony. Amun-Ra and Ma'at are the pendant's focal point, as they ride the ship across the nighttime waters.

Questions

1. Likely an heirloom, this pendant was made for a person of very high status. An heirloom is something of value that gets passed down in families. Does your family or community have an object they share with one another? Why is it important?
2. Look closely at the pendant. There is a lot to look at. What is your favorite part of the story being told? Why?
3. Ancient Egyptians believed that gods traveled through the night sky on boats. What about the night sky might have made them think this? What does the night sky look like where boats might be needed?

Colossal Statue of the Apis Bull



Colossal Statue of the Apis Bull

CE 117–38 (reign of Hadrian), Alexandria

Black diorite, H. 1.9 m, L. 2.05 m

Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria

© Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation

This colossal statue illustrates the importance of the Apis bull to ancient Egyptians. The Apis bull represents many godly relationships and holds special powers, but it existed on earth for devotees, or followers, to worship. Only one Apis bull existed at a time, and it was identified by the presence of special physical characteristics.

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The entire country mourned when the Apis bull died, and communities paid for the expensive burial. Bulls, symbols of fertility and strength, were embalmed and mummified.

This life-sized sculpture shows the importance of the animal and the great artistic skill it took to create it.

This life-sized sculpture shows the importance of the animal and the great artistic skill it took to create it. Its shoulders are muscular and curve down a lengthened torso. Sitting underneath the belly is a thick pillar. Carved into the sides is an inscription in Greek. Striding forward with its right foot, the bull is shown walking—a common representation. A large crown rests atop its head. This sun disc is balanced between horns, and a cobra emerges headfirst. The tail ends with the two separated strands of hair—an indicator of the Apis bull.

Questions

1. Because of its strength, the bull is a very powerful animal to ancient Egyptians. What animals are important in your community or culture? Why?
2. What types of animals do you think of when you hear the words “strong” and “powerful”? What about those animals made you choose them?
3. Notice the sun disc between the bullhorns. Where else in this guide or in the exhibition have you seen the sun disc? Who or what was it on? What does that tell you about the sun disc?

Pair of Sphinxes



Pair of Sphinxes

1st century BCE, Alexandria

Granodiorite, H. 75 cm, L. 1.4 m and H. 70 cm, L. 1.5 m

National Museum of Alexandria, Alexandria

© Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation

When people think of Egypt, the image of a sphinx often comes to mind. Traditionally, a sphinx is constructed with a human head atop a feline body. Its front feet extend forward and its back legs bend underneath its rear. Usually the tail curves along its thigh. The human head often represents an actual ruler. Sphinxes even wore a *nemes*, the head cloth worn by pharaohs. On both sculptures the *nemes* is visible. The head cloth drapes down the back of the head and is tucked behind the protruding ears. Phenomenal works of art, sphinxes also appear in mythical stories and were commonly used to line a walkway for processions into temples.

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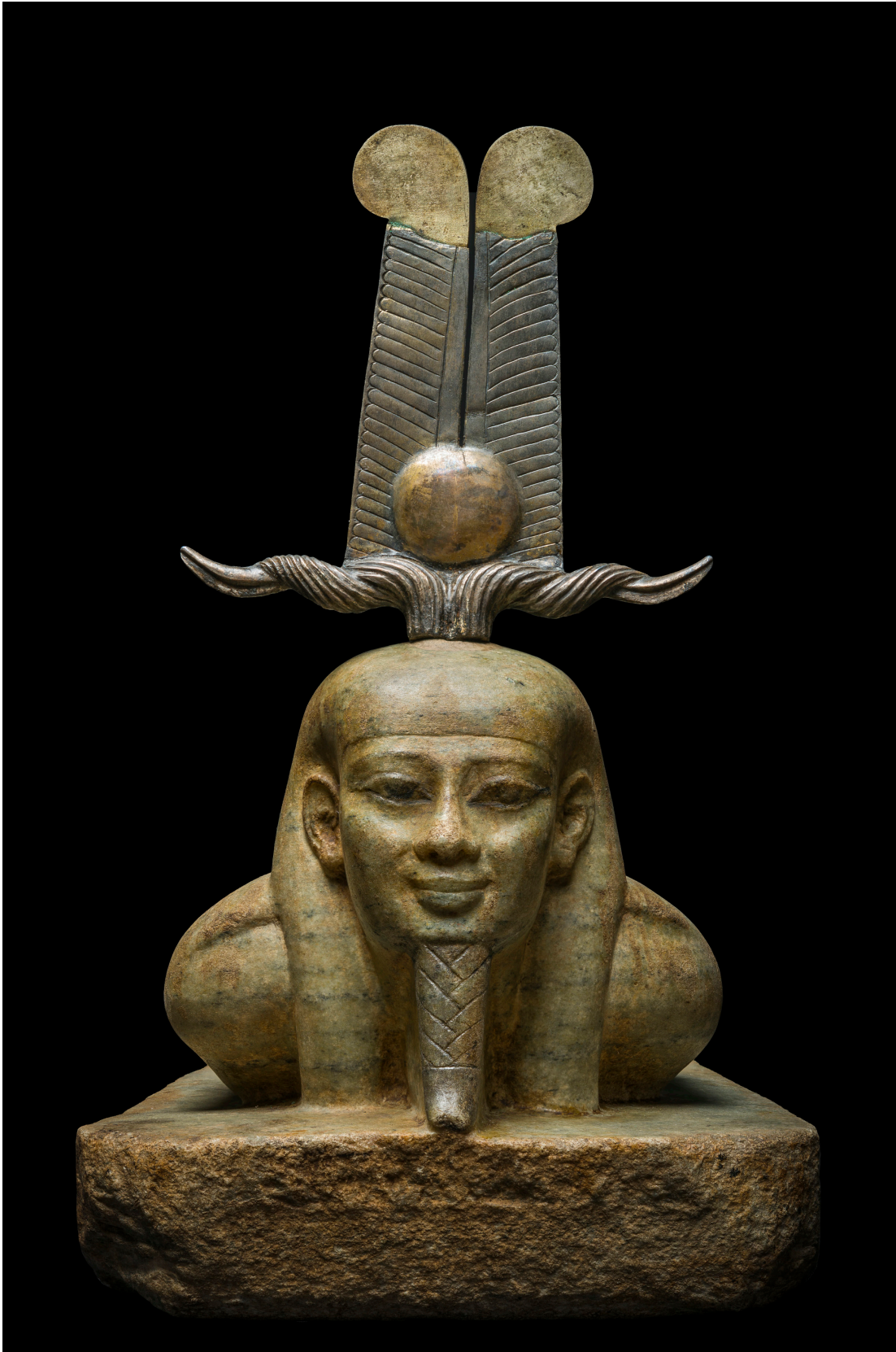
We are fortunate to know so much about this particular pair. Thanks to other works of art and historical records, scholars believe one sphinx portrays the pharaoh Ptolemy XII Auletes. The royal *uraeus*, or rearing cobra, is centered on the forehead. On the second sphinx, the cobra's shape is visible as are its facial features (eyes, nose, mouth, ears), but they are eroded from time spent underwater, making further identification impossible. This pair were found at a small temple, likely a devotional to Isis, on the sunken island of Antirrhodos.

This pair were found at a small temple, likely a devotional to Isis, on the sunken island of Antirrhodos.

Questions

1. Felines were important symbols to ancient Egyptians. What characteristic do felines have that possibly inspired Egyptians to admire them? If you were a pharaoh, what animal would you want to be linked with? Why did you pick that animal?
2. The sphinx was a prominent symbol in ancient Egypt. What symbols are important in your state and country? What about in your family and culture?

Statue of Osiris Awakened



Statue of Osiris Awakened

664–525 BCE 26th dynasty (perhaps reign of Apries 580–570 BCE), Horbeit (Chedenou/Pharbitos)

Gneiss, gold/electrum, bronze, L. 55.5 cm

Egyptian Museum, Cairo

© Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation

This statue portrays the newly awakened Osiris. Osiris was one of the most important gods in all of Egypt. His younger brother, Seth, was jealous of his power and popularity. Seth wanted to be pharaoh but needed to kill his brother to take the throne. So Seth trapped Osiris in a decorated chest and threw it into the Nile. Isis, Osiris's wife, was devastated. Determined to find her husband's body, she searched along the Nile and eventually found where the casket had washed ashore. She brought it home, but Seth attacked again and retook it. This time, Seth cut his brother's body in 14 parts and scattered them all over Egypt. After a long and difficult search, Isis found all of the pieces. With the help of fellow gods, she reassembled the body and brought Osiris back to life. In doing so, she invented mummification.

Isis brought the casket home and, with the help of her fellow gods, brought Osiris back to life.

Thus, Osiris became the god of the underworld. The god is stretched out on his stomach covered in a garment. His smiling head with a beard—a symbol of divine power—lifts up in his awakening. He wears the *tcheni* crown, the symbol of the reborn Osiris. The crown displays ostrich feathers and twisted ram horns with a sun disc. This image of Osiris appears in temples, shrines, tombs, and coffins. This unique object would have occupied a sacred space.

This image of Osiris appears in temples, shrines, tombs, and coffins.

Questions

1. What does it mean to be awakened? How does Osiris look awakened? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. This object would have been in a sacred place. What does sacred mean? How does this statue fit into the look and feel of the sacred? What does a sacred place look and feel like to you?

Statue of a Fertility Figure (Hapy)



Statue of a Fertility Figure (Hapy)

4th or 3rd century BCE, Thonis-Heracleion

Red granite, H. 5.4 m, W. 1.05 m, D. 90 cm, Wt. 6 t

Maritime Museum, Alexandria

© Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation

This statue shows a male holding up an offering table with a central lip for a waterway. The table rests on his forearms and the palms of his hands. He wears a wig, normally shown on male deities. Above it rises a stand of papyrus, representing the plant of Lower Egypt and a symbol of the god Hapy.

Associated with the annual flooding of the Nile, Hapy was known as the provider of food in the afterlife.

Associated with the annual flooding of the Nile, Hapy was known as the provider of food in the afterlife. This enormous statue is a fertility figure, representing the fruitful parts of nature and land. Its purpose was to bring offerings to the temple for the king, as expressed by the statue's one foot forward, as if walking. The king would then present the offerings to the gods. These figures were often grouped in pairs, only at a much smaller size. This statue is the biggest deity statue known to this day in Egypt. Usually only pharaohs were represented as colossal statues.

This statue is the biggest deity statue known to this day in Egypt. Usually only pharaohs were represented as colossal statues.

Questions

1. What on the statue suggests the Nile River and nature? This statue presents the importance of water and papyrus. What are some important crops for you? What do those crops need to grow? How might you show these elements in a picture or statue about your favorite crop?
2. Why do you think the Nile River was so important to ancient Egyptians?
3. Describe the plant on the statue's head. Papyrus was used for several things in ancient Egypt, including as paper. What kinds of things made from plants do you regularly use?