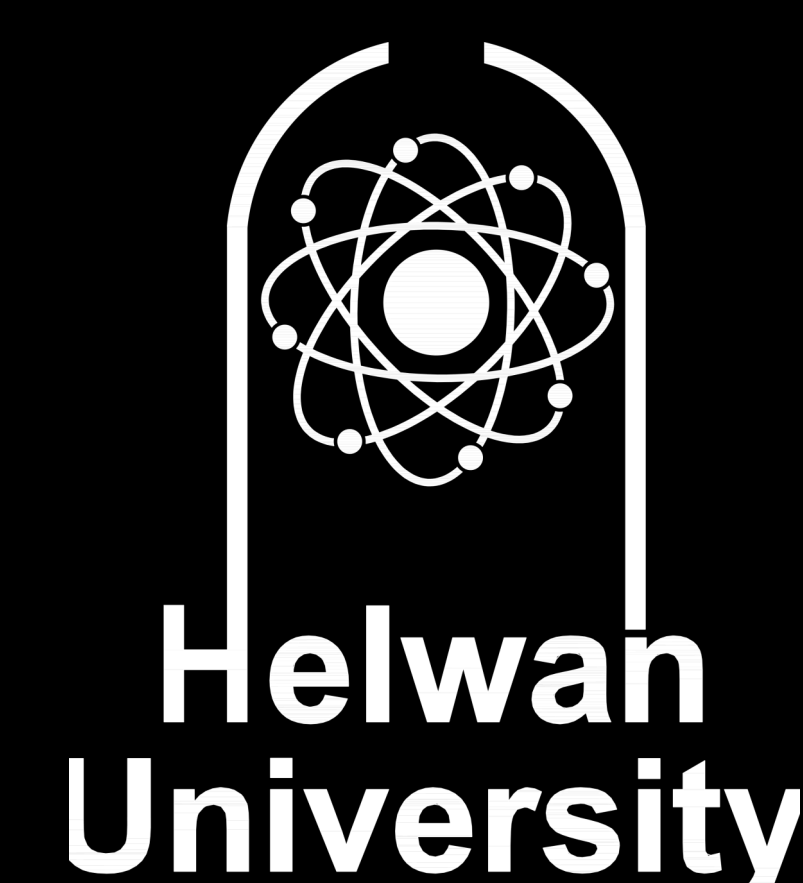




# Arsinoe II as an Image of Goddess Isis

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Although Ptolemy I Soter fostered the cult of 'Sarapis' and Isis, it is reported that, Alexander the great dedicated a temple to Isis in the city of his dreams, Alexandria. Meanwhile, Ptolemy I built many temples for Sarapis. Moreover, he funded the burial of Sarapis bull and erected statues for his Greek representation in Alexandria. Hence, Sarapis, Isis, and their son Harpocrates, became the divine triad of the Ptolemaic kingdom. Accordingly, the Ptolemaic kings and queens associated themselves with Sarapis and Isis.

Arsinoe II was the first Ptolemaic queen to assimilate to goddess Isis. How and why did this assimilation happen? What was the outcome of it? To address these questions, it is essential to start with reviewing Arsinoe's family background, life, and cult, then, examining the records (stelae, temples scenes, inscriptions, and sculpture) which relate to the interactions between Isis and Arsinoe II. Lastly, summarizing the outcome of this assimilation in the conclusions.

### Arsinoe's II family background and tragedy

- Arsinoe II is the daughter of king Ptolemy I and Berenice I, she was born between (318-314) B.C. . When she was sixteen years old, she married her father's friend Lysimachus, king of Thrace, who was the father in-law of her brother Ptolemy II (married his daughter Arsinoe I), and her half-sister Lysandra (married his son Agathocles). Arsinoe II gave birth to three sons.
- In 281 B.C., Lysimachus was killed in the battle of Corupedium.
- Arsinoe escaped to Ephesus, then, to Cassandrea.
- Eventually, her half brother Ptolemy Ceraunus defeated the Seleucus and controlled most of Macedonia.
- Moreover, he decided to include the lands of Lysimachus.
- Hence, he proposed to marry his sister Arsinoe II. After the wedding ceremony was over, Ceraunus killed her sons in front of her eyes. Furthermore, he did not allow her to bury them. Lastly, she was exiled to the island of Samothracia.
- Upon her return to Alexandria,

Arsinoe II married her full brother

Ptolemy II Philadelphus, their marriage was announced as a reflection of marriage of Isis and her brother Osiris .

### The Cult of Arsinoe II

Can be classified into :

A) In Alexandria among the Greeks.

B) In the rest of Egypt among the Egyptians.

• Arsinoe II was the first Ptolemaic queen to be deified on her own.

• According to 'Mendes Stela,' in 270 B.C., Ptolemy II Philadelphus, issued a decree to place the statues of Arsinoe II in all Egyptian temples. On this Stela, the king was represented with Arsinoe, and his son (Ptolemy III) offering to the ram-god Mendes, that is represented on the other side with goddess Hatmehit and Arsinoe who addressed him ,

#### Words spoken by Arsinoe

*" I pray for you to the master of the Gods, so that he gives you numerous years as a king . "*

• Ptolemy II built an Arsinoeion in Alexandria and dedicated a sanctuary in the temple of cape Zypherion .

• Philadelphus appointed a priestess, kanephoros for her cult who held the epithet, "bearer of the (golden) basket" (kanephoros) .

• the name of this priestess was mentioned in the royal documents after the name of "priest of Alexander and the Theoi Adelphoi"

• Furthermore, Arsinoe II was nominated a coronation name which reflects her remarkable religious status, *"hnm(t) lb n m3't mr(t) ntrw"*

• meaning: her heart is united or endowed with Maat, the beloved of the gods.



Figure 1 Mendes Stela

After, G. Roeder, *Die ägyptische Götterwelt*, Zurich, 1959, p.172

### Conclusions

- Via her deification, Arsinoe II, was introduced to the Egyptians, and the Greeks as a new goddess with a Greek name, and the most sacred Egyptian image, Isis.
- Arsinoe II, appeared with a new iconography and a crown, that was created just for her. So, she was both a female ruler and a goddess , who is the beloved sister-wife of Ptolemy Philadelphus, and a divine mother of the rest of the Ptolemaic kings.
- Arsinoe II, was also assigned the name and titles of Isis, she even carried out some of her tasks related to establishing kingship.
- Arsinoe's presence among the Egyptian gods and inside their sanctuaries, guaranteed her a prominent religious status that supported the Ptolemaic royal cult to live for centuries. On the other hand, it allowed the cult of Isis and Sarapis to spread across the Mediterranean and to outlive the Ptolemaic kingdom.
- Arsinoe's remarkable status was also reflected on her female successors, thus, they were able to play major political roles in the Ptolemaic kingdom.

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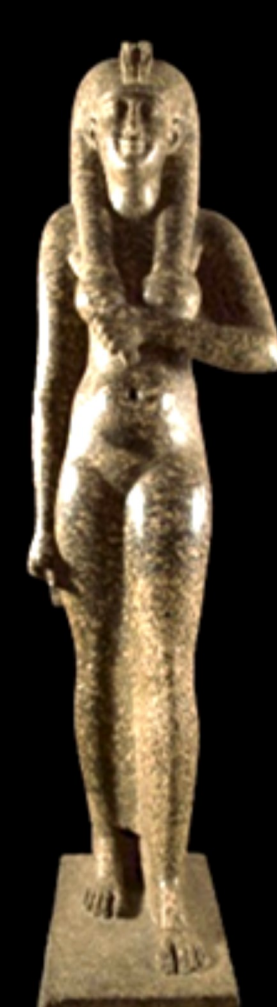


Figure 2 Arsinoe II, Vatican Museum Cat. 22681 After <http://www.museivaticani.va/content/>



Figure 3 Tell El Maskhuta Stela After G. HOLBL, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, New York, 2001, p. 82



Figure 4 Arsinoe and goddess Isis receiving offering from Philadelphus , Room VII. , Philae Temple After © Researcher



Figure 5 Arsinoe and Isis, eastern wall of the sanctuary, Philae temple . After © Researcher



Figure 6 Tanis block British Museum EA 1056 After K. VANDORPE, *Companion to Graeco Roman Egypt*, Hoboken, p.547.

### Arsinoe II as an Image of Isis

#### A) Stelae

##### 1) Tell El Maskhuta stela

• On this stela, Philadelphus is portrayed in the far-right, presenting Maat to the god Atum who is followed by Osiris, Horus, Isis, and Arsinoe. The queen is depicted with her cartouches above her head accompanied by the title, *Image of Isis "ht ist"*.

• While, on the left side Philadelphus is depicted offering the eye of Horus to Atum, in the presence of both Isis and Arsinoe. The titles of the queen are,

*snt nsw hmt hrt nbt t3wy,*

the sister and wife (of) the king, the female Horus, the lady of the two lands.

##### 2) Memphis stela

• Arsinoe's name and titles appeared on a stela (EA379) in the British museum which belongs to the priest of her cult, who referred to her as,

*"s3t nsw, snt nsw, hmt nsw, s3t 3mn, nbt t3wy, 3rsin3t, n3rt mr sn 3st."*

King's daughter, king's sister, king's wife, daughter of Amun, the lady of the two lands, Arsenat, the goddess, the beloved of her brother, Isis.

In this record, Arsinoe not only appeared with Isis' titles, but also, her name.

#### B) Temples scenes and inscriptions

##### 1) Khonsu temple

In this temple Arsinoe appeared in one scene standing behind god Khonsu with the papyrus staff in one hand, and the Ankh in the other. Ptolemy II was shown receiving the oar and Hepet.

#### Words spoken by the King's

*Daughter, King's Sister, Great King's Wife, Lady of the two Lands, Daughter of Amun, Arsinoe, the Goddess who loves her Brother: "I bequeath to you the Nine Bows together, while you are the Ruler on the Throne of Horus."*

• Furthermore, Goddess Isis appeared in one of the scenes on the western wall of the northern side of the hypostyle hall at Karnak temple shaking the sistrum in the presence of king Seti I.

#### Isis addressed god Amun saying,

*"I am your august daughter. Behold your son, Horus appearing in Thebes, that you might endow him with life, stability, and dominion, like (what is done ) for a son who is effective like him."*

##### 2) Philae temple

History and foundation

• It is one of the very first major temples built by the Ptolemaic kings. Although, there is evidence of an earlier structure in the island from the twenty fifth dynasty, but the oldest standing monument dates to king Nakhthnub I.

• Philadelphus the founder of the main temple, dedicated it to both goddess Isis, and his wife - sister Arsinoe II. The temple was enlarged by his successors and became the most important cult center of Isis. For many centuries, it was the focal point of pilgrimage until it was shut down in 550 A.D.

• In Philae, Ptolemy Philadelphus was depicted praising Isis and Arsinoe II while saying,

#### Words spoken by The king

*of Upper and Lower Egypt, Usikare-meramun, has come before you, that he may adore your beautiful face, Isis; give him Upper and Lower Egypt in peace, without any disturbance, forever."*

*" Son of the Sun, Ptolemy, has come before you, O Isis, the Great, God's Mother, kissing the ground before your beautiful face; give him your love forever."*

• These statements reveal an important aspect of the relation between the king and the goddess. It highlights the purpose of venerating Isis and even the reasons behind the construction of the temple.

• Moreover, it designates that the Ptolemaic kings followed the footsteps of their Egyptian counterparts in the process of their coronation.

• They were keen to be accepted by the gods who would assign to them the task of ruling, especially , the divine mother, Isis who addressed Philadelphus saying,

#### Words spoken by Isis

*" I have given you the life-span of Re in heaven; I have given you heaven (itself) with what is in it; I have given you victory over the south." She carried on in another text depicted behind her throne, " O my beloved son, son of the Sun, Ptolemy, I have given you the south as far as Kenset, Ta-Seti, bent down forever, belongs to you." " I have given you the north as far as heaven, the Great Green, bowing head forever, belongs to you."*

• In this temple, Arsinoe II was represented four times accompanying goddess Isis, and only one time with goddess Nephthys.

• On the sanctuary eastern wall, Arsinoe II is depicted standing behind Isis who is nursing Horus. The king is offering the nemest jars to both of them.

While, on the western wall the king is represented offering them desher jars.

• In these scenes the king refers to Arsinoe as,

*"The King's wife, the King's daughter, the King's sister, Daughter of Amun, Mistress of the Two Lands, the goddess who loves her brother,*

*Arsinoe, Princess, great of praises, Lady of charm, sweet of love, Mistress of Upper and Lower Egypt, great queen of Egypt, Mistress of the Two Lands, Arsinoe, living forever"*

• This text includes the same titles that were used in Ptolemy's hymns to Isis.

##### 3) Tanis relief

• In this relief Arsinoe is depicted on the gods side wearing her unique crown while holding the Ankh , and a papyrus staff .

#### C) Sculpture

• The Vatican museum colossal statue shows Arsinoe II wearing the Egyptian long fitted dress, and the tripartite wig, the two uraei.

• It is inscribed with a text that gives the name and titles of the queen, the daughter of Geb, and Image of Isis,

*" Princess, Daughter of Geb, Governess, Daughter of the Merhu bull, Great of Completion, Great of Praise, Daughter of the King of Lower Egypt, the Sister and Wife, Queen of Upper and Lower Egypt, Image of Isis, Beloved of Hathor, Lady of the Two Lands, Arsinoe Philadelphos, Beloved of Atum, the Lord of the Two Lands"*.