

THE CROWN OF ARSINOË II
THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN
IMAGERY OF AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT

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This study deals with a unique crown that was created for Queen Arsinoë II. The aim is to identify and understand the symbolism that is embedded in each pictorial detail that together form the crown and how this reflects the wearer's socio-political and religious positions. The study focuses on the crown and its details, while also including all contextual aspects of the relief scenes in order to understand the general meaning. This crown was later developed and usurped by other female figures; the material includes 158 Egyptian relief scenes dating from Arsinoë's lifetime to Emperor Trajan, c. 400 years. In order to show the development of the crown's symbolism, this work includes a large number of later scenes depicting the Egyptian goddess Hathor wearing a crown almost identical to Arsinoë's.

The results of this study suggest that the crown of Arsinoë was created for the living queen and reflected three main cultural positions: her royal position as King of Lower Egypt, her cultic role as high priestess, and her religious aspect as *thea Philadelphos*. It indicates that she was proclaimed female pharaoh during her lifetime, and that she was regarded the female founder of the Ptolemaic Dynasty. The results of the study of the later material suggest that the later Hathoric crown was created in a time of political instability, when Ptolemy IV needed to emphasise his ancestry – underlining his lineage from Arsinoë II and Ptolemy II. The comprehensive study of the contextual pictorial setting indicates that this is a plausible explanation: the crown of Arsinoë became a symbol of authority worthy of continuation.

Keywords: Arsinoë, crowns, Ptolemaic, reliefs, Egyptian art, Egyptian religion, symbolism, female pharaohs, Hathor, God's wife, Edfu, Philae, Dendera, relative scaling, relative placement, conceptions of time, post-colonial theory

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